Grieving Online:

Street-Involved Youths' Use of Social Media After a Death

By

Marion Selfridge
B.A., University of Alberta, 1993
B.S.W., University of Victoria, 1996
M.S.W., University of Washington, USA, 2006

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Lisa Mitchell, Supervisor
Department of Anthropology

Dr. Anne Marshall, Co-Supervisor
Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Dr. Bernie Pauly, Outside Member
School of Nursing

Abstract

Grieving Online: Street-Involved Youths' Use of Social Media After a Death conveys the context and lived experiences of 20 street-involved youth in Victoria BC, who live both on the streets and on line simultaneously (boyd, 2008a). Using a narrative methodology, including poetry, I explore how these realities affect the grief experiences after a death. Youth strategize to find access to computers and cell phones, using free wifi, sharing minutes, or buying or trading devices in the street economy in order to communicate through texting and viewing and posting to Facebook. Dire financial and unstable living situations, the complex and difficult relationships they have with both family and friends and the traumatic circumstances they have endured directly contributes to stress and anxiety and the ways they grieve the losses of people in their lives. This vulnerability, violence and instability is entangled both in their face to face interactions and in private and public communications online. It is also directly connected to the concept of precarity: "that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2009, p.ii).

There are several key findings from youths' narratives. First, although youth often see themselves as outsiders from "regular society", they have taken up a normative discourse of a "grieving subject" in their language and stories. This is a discourse of progress that includes stages and tasks and the understanding that to grieve is to do work. I argue that for many youth, this discourse is heightened because the stakes are high: their lives are surveilled by police and child protective services. Sometimes shunned by family of the deceased, or without private spaces to mourn, their expressions of grief are exposed and sometimes criminalized.

Second, I argue that throughout their narratives, youth position themselves as moral beings and actors talking about and making sense of death through hierarchies of values and decisions, and framing the death as an opportunity to explore how they want to be in the world or how the world should be. This vision of street-involved youth actively experimenting in the *moral laboratory* (Mattingly, 2013) of the street and the moral predicaments they faced when grieving challenges the social stereotypes of street-involved youth as delinquent, loners, dysfunctional, refusing to 'grow up' and 'be responsible.'

Third, youth spoke about negotiating and managing relationships both in person and within the affordances of social networking sites (boyd 2009) such as the visibility and persistence of online discussions. My findings demonstrate that these affordances have implications after a death. For example, youth were wrestling with the performances of grief online, trying to make sense "to what extent these declarations of grief are public posturing and to what extent they are genuine, personal expressions of deep feeling" (Dobler, 2006, p.180). Youth caution about posting too quickly about the death online, so that family or close friends would not have to find out online. They value communication that is private, face-to-face, or by phone that is intentional and acknowledges the importance of relationship with the deceased.

Their thoughtful expertise can help all of us as we try to navigate the experiences of grieving online. Although they shared a great deal of ambivalence for the place of social media in their lives, for many it is a powerful tool to tell themselves and others about who they are and how they want to be remembered.

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Dedication

To my mother, who taught me about grief.

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end.

Michel Foucault, 1988, p.9

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1.0 Introduction and Statement of the Problem

In late March 2006, I was finishing my Masters in Social Work in Seattle, with a practicum at Providence Hospice. My boyfriend and I were driving back to Seattle from Canada when we stopped at a rest stop. I saw a newspaper that pronounced in big headlines, killings in a home on Capitol Hill, 8 blocks from my apartment. Kyle Huff, who had been invited to a house party after a small "rave" at a venue I frequented, left the house at 7am to get a shot gun from his truck, and opened fire on the 20 or so young people left inside. Six people were confirmed dead, including four young men and two young women and another critically injured. The shooter killed himself when he was confronted by police on the steps outside.

In the days that followed, mourners gathered outside the house, holding candle-light vigils, camping out, hugging strangers and friends, and sharing stories about the youth, several who had been very active in the Seattle rave scene. When I visited a few days later, hundreds of flowers and beads, a rainbow wig, notes, a memorial board from a 4th grade class, Awake magazines, and many candles were stretched in a sea of tribute on the sidewalk. A young girl came up and asked to use my cell phone to call home for a ride. She said thanks, gave me a hug and then stayed and talked. She'd been at the party that night, had left at 4am to go home, and knew all of them. She shared little bits of her story, happy for another ear. Finally, the media were gone. The intrusive cameras had been so difficult.

A nurse at hospice approached me at my desk a week or two later. She shared with me

that she had been up to the house and had taken part in the first vigil. She lived close to the house and walked by regularly. She was saddened as the number of people visiting and holding space dwindled. "Where are the young people?" she asked. "Don't they care? In my day, in the '60's we would have been on the street, protesting."

"MySpace." I replied. "They are on MySpace." An online article described how youth who had attended the event quickly started posting on The Seattle Ravers community board, checking in with each other that they were OK. As the names were released or confirmed, the comments started filling page after page on the youth's MySpace profiles. I spent hours looking through the MySpace profiles of the youth who had been killed and reading the comments left for the deceased by their peers.

This was my first experience of witnessing public grief and mourning on-line, where a "secret" world of mostly youth were speaking to the dead, wishing them well, expressing shock and sadness, remembering the last time they saw them, sending messages to friends and their community of raver friends. It was also my first experience of interpreting this memorializing in an online space to someone who had no idea it existed – that, in fact, youth were reaching out to each other, and processing the experience in the virtual spaces they inhabited together.

Years later, Facebook, with over 2 billion monthly users, has replaced MySpace (Facebook, 2017). Between 2008 and 2012, while I worked at the Victoria Youth Clinic, I used a Facebook profile, Marion Atwork, to connect with youth in my outreach work. I sent messages reminding them I would be picking them up in the morning for a specialist appointment, or telling them their results had come in and "we needed to see them right away". Often they would burst in within an hour, eager to deal with a chlamydia scare. I reveled in this new way of

communicating, when cell phone numbers were often out of service and there was no other contact information on file.

In the last 2 years of my clinical practice at the clinic, the youth I worked with lost at least 4 peers. One after another, youth whom I had known for years died of overdose, or complications due to their drinking. They had been homeless and living on the street, travelling across country with dogs and banjos, or making their way couch surfing and drinking with their cousins. They were my Facebook friends so I watched as their friends found out about the deaths, said their good-byes online, dealt with media, memorials, cautioned each other about using alone, and posted videos and photos of their friends. Youth, I didn't realize knew each other, wrote to one other, commenting with kind words and support when they saw their peers struggling to cope. Street-involved youth (SIY), those young people 12- 24, who live on or near the street and may access homeless services and social worlds, have mortality rates that are 8-11 times higher than among their housed peers (Boivin, Roy & Haley, 2005). In Canada, street-involved youth face high risks of physical and mental health problems including depression, suicide attempts and problematic substance use (Hadland, Marshall, Kerr, Qi, Montaner, & Wood, 2012). Pushed prematurely into adulthood (Benoit, Jannson, Hallgrimsdotter, & Roth, 2008) their lives tend to be marked by poverty, instability and traumatic violence and sometimes death. While there is substantial research investigating the risks faced by youth on the street, how these youth cope with deaths in their lives has not been systematically studied.

Youth describe feeling overwhelmed following the death of a peer (Balk & Corr, 2001). For street-involved youth in particular, their feelings of loss, anger and despair may lead to increased substance use and suicide ideation. Research has shown that the Internet is a vital

resource for bereaved families (Finlay & Krueger, 2011) and for domiciled youth (Williams & Merten, 2009) to express their grief and to find bereavement support. Street-involved youth regularly access the Internet including social networking sites, challenging notions of the 'digital divide' (Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013, Rice et al., 2011, Woelfer & Hendry, 2012). The term 'digital divide' describes the disparity regarding access to information and communication technologies (Warschauer 2002). To my knowledge, there are no studies investigating the significance and meanings that social networking sites holds for street-involved youth following the death of a peer or others in their lives.

1.2.0 Research Questions

In this research project, I address the following question: How do street-involved youth

SIY) use on-line social networks following the death of a peer? Specifically, I had three related

questions: How do the conversations and images youth share on line enable them to express

grief, create and enact forms of mourning and help traumatized friends? Do street-involved

youth search out mental health support on-line beyond their social networks of friends? In

what ways do they perceive their use of social media as a strategy enabling them to cope with

their grief and loss? During the analysis and writing of the dissertation, these related questions

were replaced with questions that are found on page 32 in the theoretical framework. These

new questions were based on what youth wanted to discuss and a deeper reflection into the

theories used in the analysis of the research.

1.3.0 Organization of Dissertation

In this first chapter I introduced my connections and interest in this research and outlined my research questions. In Chapter 2, I review the relevant cross-disciplinary literature, and discuss key theories and concepts that I bring to bear in understanding how SIY use social media following a death. Chapter 3 presents a discussion of narrative methodology in the ways it has been taken up in this project, including the use of poetry in the analysis of data. I outline my recruitment criteria and strategies, data collection and the collaborative efforts made with a youth advisory group. The chapter ends with a reflection on ethical issues related to the research project.

In Chapter 4, I convey the context and lived experiences of my participants, street-involved youth in Victoria BC, who live on the streets and on line simultaneously (boyd, 2008a). I discuss their experiences of stigma and separateness, and the interwoven experiences of substance use throughout their lives. I next discuss the ways my participants strategize to find access to computers and cell phones. The second half discusses their relationships with families, friends and street families, including the dangerous and violent aspects of these relationships and the strategies they use to keep themselves safe.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the youths' experiences and understandings of grief and loss, highlighting themes such as finding out about the death, blame and regret about their own or others' actions and the need to stay strong for others. I explore the idea of youth as moral beings and youth perspectives on grief. I argue that although youth often see themselves as outsiders from "regular society" they have taken up a normative discourse of a "grieving subject" in their language and stories. I describe how youth are making meaning from

experiences of loss and how their rituals and strategies of coping are exposed and sometimes criminalized.

In Chapter 6, I move to theorizing about the grieving experience online that prioritizes friendships and support. Next, I talk about the experiences of finding out online, posting, following and managing online memorials on Facebook and how they used social media as a strategy to cope with grief and loss. Using boyd's (2008) affordances of social media to discuss the specific impacts on youth and their communities to grieving online, I share the concerns they have about these methods of communication and suggestions they have to flesh out the rules of grieving online. Finally, the chapter finishes with how youth find support from social workers and other professionals.

The final chapter offers a summary of the key findings of my research. I offer some recommendations for incorporating online communication into the work of professional support workers and conclude with reflections of limitations of this project and possible directions for future research. I then discuss more fully my own experiences of this very difficult subject material and how I used creative methods like poetry and performance to maintain my own wellbeing.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1.0. Literature Review

2.1.1 Street-involved Youth in Canada

For this dissertation, street-involved youth (SIY) are defined as young people 12- 24 who live on or near the street and may access homeless services and social worlds. They are often precariously housed; moving between families, foster homes, friends, shelters and sleeping outside. Gaetz (2013) describes three broad categories of factors that often work together to lead youth to the street: individual/relational, structural and systemic. Individual and relational factors include difficult and challenging family dynamics such as abuse and neglect. Structural factors such as poverty and an inadequate supply of affordable housing mean youth leave families that cannot accommodate them with access to few housing options when attempting to support themselves through entry-level jobs, income assistance or other moneymaking efforts. Street involved youth are framed by the factors that led to their entry onto the street (Gaetz, 2013, Winland, 2013, Worthington & McLauren, 2013) as well as those factors that then move them away from the street towards stable housing such as getting pregnant or gaining an intimate partner (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013). Discrimination such as racism and homophobia create situations where both black and Indigenous youth (Baskin, 2013) and GBLTQ youth (Abramovich, 2013) are over represented among street-involved youth populations in Canadian cities. Finally, Gaetz (2013) implicates institutional and system (such as child welfare, mental health and addictions and corrections) failures, which mean youth are released from care without a supportive plan.

In a review of Canadian research literature, Worthington & McLaurin (2013) categorized health risks for youth on Canadian streets. These include: *environmental risks* (inadequate shelter, poor diet and violence), *sexual activity* (STI's including HIV and high-risk pregnancies), *substance use* (drug overdose, hepatitis B, C and HIV from sharing needles) and *isolation and lack of social support* (depression and suicide attempts). While acknowledging the risks faced by street youth, some recent research (Kennedy et al, 2017, Kidd & Evans, 2011) centres on youths' own views of their world including the nature and parameters of their coping and how their context impacted their mental health (Kidd, 2013). Like this previous research, my goal, in this dissertation, is to bring to light the heterogeneity of street-involved youth's stories, experiences, and coping strategies as well as exposing uncomfortable and difficult societal issues such as the overwhelming burden of dangerous and traumatic experiences.

2.1.2 Population: Street-involved Youth in Victoria, British Columbia

For this project, I interviewed a sample of 20 street-involved youth in Victoria, the capital city of British Columbia. According to the 2011 census, Victoria has a population of 80,017 persons (Statistics Canada, 2012) but the 13 municipalities and 3 electoral districts which make up the Capital Regional District or CRD (CRD, 2013) has a population of 363,100 (Statistics Canada, 2012).

Victoria is located on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples. The urban core of Victoria occupies the ancestral home of the *Lekwungen*, now legally known as the Esquimalt and Songhees bands, while Tseycum, Pauquachin, Tsarlip, Tsawout, and Malahat First Nations make up the bands that constitute the WSÁNEĆ or Saanich Nation on the Saanich peninsula, north of the Victoria core. T'souke, Beecher Bay, Pacheedaht and Penelakut Nations

each have reserves west of the Victoria core. Coercive land acquisition (Alfred, 2000), racist

labour practices (Lutz, 2006), residential schools (de Leeuw, 2009), and massive

overrepresentation in MCFD care (Cedar Project Partnership, 2008) help explain why

Indigenous people represent 20% of shelter users but just 3.4% of Greater Victoria's population

(GVCEH, 2015, 2011). In the 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count 32.6% of homeless

participants identified as Aboriginal (Albert, Penna, Pagan, & Pauly, 2016).

It is difficult to know how many street-involved youth live in Victoria. The most recent

data from the Community Social Planning Council (2008) found 220 adolescent children (aged

13-18) and 323 emerging adults (aged 19-24) and 75 young adults (aged 25-30) to be without

safe stable housing in the Capital Region District (n = 618). In February 2016, the Greater

Victoria Point in Time Count found there were at least 1,387 people experiencing homelessness

in Victoria, 120 or 12.2% were 24 and under.

Victoria has one of the highest costs of living in Canada, with a living wage (the

necessary income to meet basic needs) estimated to be $20.05 (GVCEH, 2015). The living wage

is much higher than the provincial minimum wage or income assistance rates (Herman, 2012).

High market rental prices and low vacancy rates make finding housing difficult for youth,

especially those living on limited income. Although the average rent for a bachelor's suite is

$731/month, basic income assistance is just $663/month (GVCEH, 2015). The youth

unemployment rate is 10.9%, versus 5.5% for adults and most jobs available to them pay

minimum wage $9.50-$10.25 (Youth Vital Signs, 2013). Unable to afford market housing, and

with few subsidized options available, Victoria youth end up in shelters, such as Out of the Rain,

couch surfing, sharing cramped substandard accommodation or sleeping outdoors.

2.1.3 Mental health

A key issue for this research project is the consistent evidence that street-involved youth have much higher rates of poor mental health and psychiatric disorders, including problematic substance use, than do their housed peers (Kulik, Gaetz, Crowe, & Ford-Jones, 2011, Boivin et al, 2005). Although Edidin et al. (2012) critique the inconsistent methods used to collect data on psychiatric disorders, they highlight in a recent review of the literature a lifetime prevalence of psychiatric disorders as almost twice as high for homeless youth compared with their housed peers. Specifically, street-involved youth exhibit profoundly high levels of depression, anxiety (obsessive/ compulsive and phobic), hostility, paranoia, psychoticism, and interpersonal sensitivity compared with healthy young adults. The Vancouver At-Risk Youth Study (ARYS) of 447 14-26 year-old street-recruited youth found high levels of depression with over 40% scoring over 22 on the CES-D score, especially those who use heroin and crystal meth (Hadland et al., 2011). Thirty seven percent reported a lifetime history of suicide ideation, while 9.3% reported an actual suicide attempt in the preceding six months (Hadland et al. 2012). In contrast, about 11% of Canadians aged 15-25 had experienced depression in their lifetime; 7% in the past year. Approximately 14% reported having had suicidal thoughts in their lifetime; 6% in the past year (Findlay, 2017). Forty-two percent of street-involved youth recruited for the Youth Pathways Project (YPP) longitudinal study in Toronto reported having receiving a mental health diagnosis in their lifetime. Over a quarter of participants also reported high rates of suicidal contemplation and 15% reported suicide attempts within the last 12 months. "Forty-five percent reported self-harming behaviour, such as cutting or hurting oneself without the intent to kill oneself, in the last year" (Kirst & Erickson,

2013, p.190-91). The high numbers of suicide completions combined with fatal overdose result

in mortality rates that are 8-11 times higher than among street-involved youths' housed peers

(Boivin, Roy & Haley, 2005). The loss of peers, considered by some youth, as their 'street

family,' can be devastating and compounds their poor mental health with grief.

2.1.4 Grief

> I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one's own deliberate plan, ones' own project, one's own knowing and choosing. (Butler, 2006, p.21)

> Powerful visceral emotional states swept over me, at times separately and at other times together. I experienced the deep cutting pain of sorrow almost beyond endurance, the cadaverous cold of realizing the finality of death, the trembling beginning in my abdomen and spreading through my body, the mournful keening that started without my willing, and frequent tearful sobbing. (Rosaldo, 1989, p.9)

> And can it be that in a world so full and busy the loss of one weak creature makes a void so wide and deep that nothing but the width and depth of eternity can fill it up! (Dickens, 1848, Dombey and Son)

Grief, "the pain and suffering experienced after loss" (Small, 2001, p. 20), especially

after a death, is a nearly universal human experience. Differentiated from grief, mourning

refers to "the social expressions or acts expressive of grief that are shaped by the practices of a

given society or cultural group" (Stroebe & Schut, 2001, p.6). In this research project, I address

both the acts of mourning and the visceral phenomenon of grief that occur with death.

Psychology informs much of the understanding and management of grief. Although

research literature describes grief as the "diverse psychological (cognitive, social-behavioral)

and physical (physiological-somatic) manifestations" (Stroebe et al. 2001, p.6), the quotes

above demonstrate the broad range of disciplines and writers that shape our understandings of the phenomenon.

Valentine (2006) argues that narrowing our views of grief into psychology focuses grief on the internal private worlds of individuals in isolation from their social world. Generalizations, models, and prescriptions have been developed, reducing the variety of human experience to measurable data, based on an assumption of a "controllable and calculable universe that can be mastered through human praxis" (Prior, 1997, p.189, cited in Valentine, p.59). Scientific knowledge about humans, according to Ian Hacking (1998), changes how we think of ourselves, the possibilities that are open to us, the kinds of people that we take ourselves and other humans to be. "Knowledge interacts with us and with a larger body of practice and ordinary life. This generates socially permissible combinations of symptoms and disease entities" (p.10).

These "permissible combinations," of grief that travel through a series of predictable stages created by grief theorists such as Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, brought a new popular awareness of death and dying to the public sphere. Kubler-Ross and others' theorization of the stages of grief as disbelief, yearning, anger, depression and acceptance of a loss (Parkes, 1983, Rando, 1984) are now pervasive in public thinking and health care curriculum (Holland and Neimeyer, 2010). In contrast to stages, Worden's (2009) tasks are undertaken without a specific sequence, providing the mourner: "some sense of leverage and hope that there is something that he or she can actively do to adapt to the death of a loved one" (p.38). These tasks include accepting the reality of the loss, processing the pain of grief, adjusting to a world without the deceased and finding an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life.

The Dual Process model rejects tasks or stages and conceives of grief as a process of oscillation between two contrasting modes of functioning (*loss orientation* -emotion-focused coping and *restoration orientation* - problem-focused coping) to deal with the stressors caused by death (Stroebe & Schut, 2001). In his model of grief, Walter (1996) proposes that the griever creates "a durable biography that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives" (p.7) by talking with others who knew the deceased and discovering writings and other artefacts left behind by the deceased. Neimeyer's (2001, 2006) meaning-oriented perspective conceptualizes grief as a highly individualized process that is largely influenced by the personal meanings people ascribe to a loss. Reconstruction after loss requires "transforming our identities so as to redefine our symbolic connection to the deceased while maintaining our relationship with the living" (Neimeyer, 1998, p.98).

Each of these theories or models provides a structure to understand and contain grief. "They can and do help people feel as though their grief is manageable, controllable, and shared. The idea of being able to manage something so difficult and complicated is seductive" (Ord, 2009, p.201). Yet, it is not clear that these theories, rooted in assumptions about a Western, individual, housed griever, (Valentine, 2006) capture the distinct social and material experience of grieving for youth on the streets.

2.1.5 Trauma

Youths' mental health in relation to the street is often directly linked to trauma which overlaps and is profoundly connected to grief related to death or other losses. Trauma is a term originally applied to physical injury and some of its immediate effects but increasingly came to refer to "a range of psychological impacts of the experience or threat of violence, injury and

loss" (Kirmeyer, Kienzler, Afana, & Pedersen, 2010, p.156). In this dissertation, I examine the

ways street-involved youth experience death and the grief that follows where trauma is ever-

present:

> Homelessness deprives individuals of…basic needs, exposing them to risky, unpredictable
> environments. In short, homelessness is more than the absence of physical shelter, it is a
> stress-filled, dehumanizing, dangerous circumstance in which individuals are at high risk
> of being witness to or victims of a wide range of violent events (Fitzpatrick, LaGory &
> Ritchey (1999) cited in Hopper, Bassuk & Oliver, 2010, p.80).

The majority of street-involved youth have histories of childhood trauma (Bender et al.,

2010, Hadland et al., 2011). Kidd (2013) reminds us that homelessness itself is, for many, a

process of repeated exposure to traumatic circumstances and chronic stress. While one-quarter

of Canadians report being a victim of a crime, a majority of street-involved youth (81.9%) in

Toronto reported being the target of criminal offences, with women facing a greater risk than

men (Gaetz, 2004). Offences included assault, theft, robbery, sexual assault, and vandalism.

Nearly 32% of the street-involved youth in the same study had been sexually assaulted in the

past year (Gaetz, 2004). The premature deaths of young males, often in violent circumstances

witnessed by others, made many British youth in a social housing project "feel personally

unsafe, fearful for themselves and/or male friends and family, and stirred powerful emotions of

isolation and exclusion" (Goldsmith, 2012, p. 658). Risk-filled worlds are understood to create

and reinforce trauma.

When the threat of danger is chronic, the brain's alarm, the amygdala, goes off too

frequently, and the brain becomes conditioned to treat all potential threats as actual threats.

Past and present danger may become confused, the brain is hyper-aroused and reactive to

triggers, unable to differentiate between real and perceived threats. Easily triggered to fight or

flight, the prefrontal thinking brain automatically shuts down, leaving people unable to reflect

or cognitively assess their reactions and instead experience anxiety, panic or dissociation. In *The*

Body Keeps Score, Bessel Van de Kolk (2015) describes the impacts of trauma on the body:

> Long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of
> danger and mobilize disturbed brain circuits and secrete massive amounts of stress
> hormones. This precipitates unpleasant emotions, intense physical sensations, and
> impulsive and aggressive actions. These posttraumatic reactions feel incomprehensible
> and overwhelming. Feeling out of control, survivors of trauma often begin to fear that
> they are damaged to the core and beyond redemption. (p. 2)

Trauma can interfere with a person's sense of safety, ability to self-regulate, sense of self,

perception of control and self-efficacy, and interpersonal relationships.

2.1.6 Medicalization of Grief and Trauma

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) has shaped how

counsellors, health care staff and the public view and treat grief and trauma (Dyregrov &

Dyregrov, 2013, Boelen & Prigerson, 2013). In 1980 the DSM III included a new clinical entry,

post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD from a convergence of social movements of Vietnam

veterans suffering from "chronic distress, severe feelings of malaise, marital problems,

alcoholism, and social instability after discharge from the army" (van den Bout & Kleber, 2013,

p.116) and women who had experienced domestic and child abuse. Anthropologists, Fassin and

Rechtman (2007) argue that PTSD is the keystone in the construction of a new truth, one that

has created psychiatric victimology and humanitarian psychiatry. More broadly, it has created a

"generalized and global idea of trauma, designating an irrefutable reality liked to a feeling of

empathy, [that] has spread throughout the moral space of contemporary societies" (p.6). As a

result, suffering is, at times, no longer contested, and often excites sympathy and merits compensation.

Diagnoses related to trauma and grief were greatly contested leading up to the current DSM-V (Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001, Stroebe, Schut and Finkenauer, 2001, Worden, 2009, Rando, 2013). As a billable diagnostic code, such diagnoses are vital for individuals to get funding for counselling support or medical leaves from work (van den Bout & Kleber, 2013). Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder - bereavement due to homicide or suicide with persistent distressing preoccupations regarding the traumatic nature of the death was the compromise in the 2013 DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Youth are caught up in this contestation of trauma and grief as they are often labelled with PTSD, in order to receive support or funding for school based programming, disability benefits or medications.

2.1.7 Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief occurs when a person experiences a significant loss and their grief is "not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned [because there is] no social recognition that the person has a right to grieve or a claim for social sympathy or support" (Doka, 2008, p.224). The grief of partners of gay men who died of AIDs is a common example as their grief has been found to remain unacknowledged by heterosexual friends and the deceased's immediate family (Valentine, 2006). Disenfranchisement may occur because of the way grief is expressed or that the type of death is punitive, anxiety provoking, or embarrassing (Doka, 2008).

Disenfranchised grief is directly associated with racism or other forms of

marginalization. Henry Giroux (2006) describes the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as the *new biopolitics of disposability* in that poor and racialized groups "not only have to fend for themselves in the face of life's tragedies but are also supposed to do it without being seen by the dominant society" (p. 175). Histories of violence and oppression infiltrate, mute and complicate the grieving experiences of individuals and their communities. Jenny Lawson's (2013) research with friends and family of murdered African Canadians in Ontario foregrounds racism as disenfranchising their grief experience: negative police encounters, representations of the deceased person in the media, and "daily interactions that denied or questioned their right to be acknowledged as credible co-victims of homicide" (p.5) made grieving a difficult and complicated process. The view of Indigenous people as "the colonized, the alienated, the dispossessed, the displaced, the disenfranchised, the oppressed and the marginalized inhabitants of Canadian society" (United Native Nations Society, 2007, p.14) means grieving is bounded and entangled to historical trauma, or social injustices like the 1,181 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (RCMP, 2014).

Other factors can create disenfranchised grief within street-involved communities. Deaths from violence or drug overdose may expose blaming or shaming behaviours. Stereotypes such as those that portray drug users as dangerous, different or weaker than others, obscures personal attributes and identities through stigmatizing processes in which people are labeled as *junkie* or *drug addict* (Smye et al., 2011). Death by drug overdose further stigmatizes both street-involved friends and the family of the deceased, in some cases bringing about feelings of anger, guilt, helplessness, indignation, and shame. In Da Silva's (2007) study, a sister describes how "death by drug overdose is brutal, sudden, my family lost it, we felt angry,

ashamed, guilty, cheated" (p.305).

Attentive to various theoretical understandings of trauma and grief, including the notion of disenfranchised grief, in this dissertation I focus on grief in the context of the "complex and multi-directional relationship between trauma, substance abuse, mental illness, and homelessness" (Hopper, Bassuk & Oliver, 2010, p.97). I highlight youth agency and the intense work of surviving that is often overshadowed by research foci on risk, self-destruction and despair. My perspective follows work such as Jones et al. (2007) who expose the constant, grinding experiences of violence and death, entangled in substance use and suicide for a Mexican street-involved group as they "struggle with visions and attitudes towards life that jump between feelings of valuelessness and a search for pleasure and significance" (p.477). I do this by never losing sight of the moments of caring, laughter, and search for meaning within difficult circumstances.

2.1.8 Coping

Literature aimed at psychology and other helping professions on grief and on the experiences of youth living on the street use the concept of coping. Coping refers to "processes, strategies, or styles... of managing (reducing, mastering, tolerating) the situation" (Stroebe et al. 2001, p.9) that is taxing or exceeding the resources of the individual. Kidd's (2007) research with street-involved youth in Toronto and New York draws on Unger et al. (1998) and his own 2003 qualitative work to identify coping domains. Some examples include: ''Concentrated on what to do and how to solve the problem'', "Sleep", ''Go to someone I trust for support'', ''Use my anger to get me through it'', ''Use drugs or alcohol'', ''Do a hobby (e.g. read, draw)'' or ''Use my spiritual beliefs/belief in a higher power'' (p.286). Coping is explored in this research project

within the narratives of street-involved youth to understand their personal processing of a death, and what enables coping following the death of a peer.

2.1.9 Continuing bonds

The need for letting go of or severing ties with the deceased has been fundamental to the literature since Freud's (1917) *Mourning and Melancholia* described this as the notion of *decathexis.* Theories based on data obtained from white, middle-class, and predominantly female populations divorced from their social context (Parkes, 1972) are overemphasized in earlier research. This involves processes of ''letting go'' and ''moving on'' in order to return to ''normal'' functioning" (Valentine, 2006, p.59).

Although sensing the presence of and continued communication with the deceased was once considered "illusory and pathological, part of the futile ''searching'' stage of early grief" (Littlewood, 2001, p.85), Klass et al.'s (1996) theory of continuing bonds has been taken up to explain how communicating directly with the dead online is a therapeutic process (Getty et al., 2011). Reminiscing about past, shared experiences, providing updates on their current situations, discussing the death and their bereavement process, and sharing various emotional statements are seen as indications of active coping (Williams and Merten, 2009). On line, the deceased are engaged as social actors (Walter et al., 2011) where their virtual memorials "blur the boundaries between the living and the dead" (Mitchell et al., 2012), placing them, according to Gibson (2006) as "neither here nor there but somehow everywhere yet nowhere in particular" (p.72). Visiting online memorials is much like visiting profiles so people "envision that they are in the physical presence of their friends, conversing with them and maintaining

their relationships" (Degroot, 2009, p52). Kasket concisely summarizes how this process works

on Facebook:

> If you visit your dead friend's Facebook profile, you can click on 'See friendship' and
> see a snapshot of all your interactions with that person. You can scroll down the wall
> to see all their visible posts and conversations with yourself, right back to the inception
> of the profile. You can immerse yourself in potentially years of photographs, videos,
> records of events, private jokes, likes, dislikes, arguments, breakups and make-ups.
> You can partake in the post-death ritual of changing your own profile picture to a
> photograph of the dead person, or of yourself together with the person, as a testimony
> to and an honouring of the relationship. You can review the dead person's old postings
> on your own profile. Finally, you can see many of these same kinds of interactions with
> many other people, some of whom you may know as well, but many of whom may be
> drawn from all realms of that person's life, people to which you might not have access
> if it were not for social networking. This community makes sense of this person's death
> and life together (2012, p.67).

Klass & Walter (2001) theorize this common experience of conversations with the dead

(both on or offline) has replaced ritual as the normative way in which the bond with the dead is

maintained and may be more satisfying with more of a feeling of connectedness than visiting a

grave or a physical memorial (Kasket, 2012). This bond can be especially helpful in providing

guidance in the moral lives of the living as they consider the deceased as a role model, or

somehow still available to provide advice or solace through reminisces. What meaning street-

involved youth give to these exchanges with the dead online has not yet been examined.

2.1.10 Street-Involved Youth's Use of Social Networking Sites

This dissertation pays close attention to the ways grief is expressed in online settings,

including how youth communicate to both the living and the dead. Ellison and boyd (2013)

describe social networking sites (SNSs) as networked communication platforms with uniquely

identifiable profiles. Publicly articulated connections can be viewed by others, and users

consume, produce, and/or interact with the content provided by their connections on the site.

SNSs enable users to stay in touch with nearby and distant friends (Van House 2011, boyd and

Ellison, 2007). Facebook, with over 2.01 billion monthly users, over half of whom log on any

given day (Facebook, 2017) has been studied in terms of the creation of profiles and activities

such as photo sharing and "tagging" and commenting. Existing research suggests that the

"visibility and persistence of activity on SNSs makes actions and practices of other people

apparent, [enhancing] social comparison" (Van House, 2011) and encouraging users to craft a

profile of the "hoped-for possible self" (Zhao et al., 2008), and perhaps even a neoliberal one as

they "manage themselves as flexible collections of skills, usable traits, and tastes that need to

be constantly maintained and enhanced" (Gershon, 2011, p.867).

Ninety-five percent of American teens ages 12-17 use the Internet, 81% of teens use

SNSs and 94% of those users have a Facebook profile. In Canada, 88% of youth who use the

Internet go on daily (Statistics Canada, 2017). Even among street and homeless populations,

use of digital technology and social media (Redpath, 2006) is widespread (Rice et al, 2011; Rice

& Barman-Adhikari, 2013; Pollio, 2013; Guadagno et al., 2013), especially among younger and

less street-entrenched users (Eyrich-Garg, 2011).

However, data on the specifics of street-involved youth's use of social media is limited.

Some work indicates that street-involved youth are connecting to friends, both on or off the

street, or immediate family members most often (Pollio, 2013) as well as to support workers or

employers (Rice et al., 2011). Guadagno et al., (2013) found that in comparison to housed

youth, homeless young adults in New York City sent more private messages, and were less likely

to use social networking sites to search for other users or to play games.

These differences may reflect the fact that street-involved youths' access to SNSs is often dependent upon their access to public libraries and social service agencies, such as drop-ins and shelters (Rice, 2009, Pollio et al., 2013, Eyrich-Garg, 2011). Access is limited by hours of operation, long waits, and surveillance (Karabanow & Naylor, 2010, Woelfer & Hendry, 2011b). Some youth feel that their experience online is monitored and they are expected to be productive online; searching for work or places to live, rather than casually watching videos or chatting (Woelfer, 2012). Although many street-involved youth may own cell phones (Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2013) the chaotic and risky nature of street life and the need for immediate funds for food, shelter and substances mean these devices are traded, lost, broken, sold or pawned. The only place youth may have photos saved of friends, themselves or important life events is on Facebook. A moral economy of sharing (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009) is evident among some studies with street-involved youth who shared their phones and minutes to create and reciprocate good will.

Street-involved youth in many Canadian contexts are *digital natives*; familiar with digital technologies (Karabanow & Naylor, 2010) and adept at overcoming economic and technological barriers to obtain access (Woelfer et al, 2011). Their uses of digital technologies may be influenced by their social background, their experiences with their families (North, 2008) and through experimentation and learning from peers. These factors help shape how they ask for and help support others and how they grieve online.

2.1.11 The Tethered Child

Digital technology, specifically the cell phone, is described as having both a communicative function-- a tool and channel for the exchange of information, and a social meaning-- a medium through which we communicate, create and maintain social contact (Stald, 2008). Relationships between parents and youth are re-imagined through this technology. Turkle (2011) explores the concept of *the tethered child,* critiquing how youths' breaking away from parent's support and control and finding independence is mediated by always-available technology: "…parents can be brought along in an intermediate space…The tethered child does not have the experience of being alone with only him- or herself to count on" (p.173).

One of the key markers of street-involved youth is their ruptured and fragmented relationship with parents. Parental psychiatric disorders and addictions, parental neglect and exposure to domestic violence create dynamics of pushing youth out of a dependent environment with adult caregivers and into repeated episodes of leaving home (Gaetz, 2013, Winland, 2013). However fractured, many street-involved youth continue to have relationships with their parents (Winland, 2013), and many youth are using digital technology to keep in touch with them (Rice et al., 2011, Woelfer & Hendry, 2011); checking in, catching up and letting family know they are alive (Eyrich-Garg, 2010). Street-involved youth's relationships with family can also be viewed as *tethered* but these connections and communications are potentially disjointed and may reflect difficult and even dangerous face-to-face family dynamics. Asynchronous communication, enabled by digital technology, may provide agency for youth to choose how and when they stay in touch with family, stepping back from risky conversations and responding when they feel able. Although street-involved youth

communicate with family on-line, no research to this point has explored whether and how they

may access advice and guidance from family through digital technology, especially when

devastating experiences such as the death of a peer or other occurs.

2.1.12 Mental Health Support through Social Networking Sites

Street involved youth's use of social networking sites to find mental support has not

been well studied. In a recent overview of current research, Best, Manktelow & Taylor (2014)

found contradictory results about the impact of social media on mental wellbeing among youth.

Reported benefits of using online technologies include increased self-esteem, perceived social

support, increased social capital, safe identity experimentation and increased opportunity for

self-disclosure. Harmful effects included increased exposure to harm, social isolation,

depression and cyber-bullying (Best et al, 2014). Davis (2013) found a positive association

between online peer communication and friendship quality. Increased social ties have been

reported for youth with low self-esteem using Facebook (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008).

Manago, Taylor and Greenfield (2012) found that even though Facebook facilitates large

impersonal social networks, college students derive satisfaction and social support through self-

disclosures via status update to their entire network.

Negative aspects of SNS include *social overload* – users feeling burdened by and

obligated to provide support to others in their online social networks (Maier et al., 2014).

Social overload includes "feelings of SNS exhaustion by users, low levels of user satisfaction,

and a high intention to reduce or even stop using SNS" (Maier et al., 2014, p.1). In one study,

youth defined problematic mobile phone use as "the preference for cyber communication as

opposed to face-to face interaction; a salient, but purposeless preoccupation with their device; and experiencing feelings of anxiety or emptiness when unable to engage in mobile phone use" (Vacaru et al., 2014, p.2). Smart-phone involvement - thinking about the phone, the desire to check if something has happened and feelings that can occur if the user is not able to access their phone - predicted higher levels of depression and stress (Harwood et al., 2014).

Although a variety of on-line sources of information and support exist, many youth do not access them. There is some indication that when youth seek online mental health information using Google, they do not investigate beyond the first page of search results (Neal et al., 2011). Youth lack knowledge about mental illnesses and are highly concerned about stigma associated with seeking mental health information online (Rassmussen & Pennington, 2013) while college students screened on-line for depression showed little interest in accessing online support and education (Youn et al., 2013).

Evidence from other stigmatized and/or marginalized populations may be relevant for understanding how street-involved youth may search and find support on line when it is not available elsewhere. For example, cancer survivors, who were dissatisfied with the support they received from their current offline contacts were more likely to prefer social interaction in online settings and invested in their on-line communities (Chung, 2013). Sexual minority youth, overrepresented in street populations (Abramovich, 2013), are known to struggle in off line settings with higher rates of suicidality and depression (Marshal, 2011), isolation, lower social status (Hatzenbuehler, 2012) and victimization (Ybarra, 2015). Ybarra (2015) found that LGBT youth were more likely than non-LGBT youth to have online friends and to appraise these friends as better than their in-person friends at providing emotional support. Unfortunately,

"perceived quality of social support, either online or in-person, did little to attenuate the relative odds of victimization for LGBT youth" (Ybarra, 2015). My research project responds to the gap in knowledge about how street-involved youth are finding social support on-line, specifically when experiencing the death of a peer.

2.1.13 Grieving Online

Grief researchers, intrigued by how new technologies change grief and mourning practices (Walter et al., 2011) and researchers in internet and new media studies (Marwick & Ellison, 2012, Brubaker & Hayes, 2011) have focused on teens and young adults' responses to deaths on MySpace or Facebook profiles. They have consistently found that comments on deceased on-line profiles increase dramatically just after the person has died (Brubaker & Hayes, 2011) (Carrol & Landry, 2010). Furthermore, commenters often write directly to the deceased as well as sharing funeral arrangements or organize events (Williams & Merten, 2009, Brubaker & Hayes, 2011). Degroot (2012) found that posters avoided negative aspects of the deceased and concentrated on thanking them for "being a good person or tell[ing] the deceased how blessed they are for knowing them" (p.206).

Activity on memorial profiles drops off and becomes less emotionally intense over time (Williams & Merten, 2009) so that only a few individuals continue to write regularly (Carrol & Landry, 2010) except on special days such as death anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays. While earlier research describes the eerie practice of grieving alone on abandoned MySpace profiles (Dobler, 2009), newer Facebook policies mean that profile pages can be memorialized at the request of close friends or family (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). These pages have become a place of solace and coping - a community not bounded by location or time for those experiencing the

loss (Carrol & Landry, 2010). Images, poems, and song lyrics are posted "signifying emotional turmoil, coping, humor, or optimism" (Williams & Merten, 2009, p.77). Getty et al.'s (2011) analysis of 11 deceased Facebook walls found posts after a death contained more words related to grief and sorrow and references to other people while post-death posts contained more emotionally positive narratives about the past, indicating personal processing of the death. Degroot (2012) noted that posters commented how they were coming to terms with places and things that "meant something to their relationship with the deceased, indicative of cognitively and emotionally acknowledging the loss" (p.205). The online space of Facebook may free some from inhibitions they experience talking about their loss (Bailey, Bell & Kennedy, 2015), bridging public and private mourning as people can revisit memorials beyond a set amount of time (Bouc, Han, & Pennington, 2016). It can even enable interactions to continue "with the same co-constructed representation of self, created during that person's life, rather than with a new, eulogised representation of the person created by someone else in a virtual cemetery" (Kasket, 2012, p.63). This concept of *continuing bonds* will be discussed further in this chapter.

While most research to date is a textual analysis of memorials, when asked, grievers said they posted to online memorials to find closure, to revisit old memories, and to monitor how much other people wrote of missing or grieving over the deceased in order to "identify [their] own grief with the grief of others" (Carroll & Landry, 2010, p.348). Although Facebook has been seen as a great resource for grief and mourning, perhaps even taking the place of "death mediums" - funeral celebrants, priests, spiritualist mediums, and obituary writers (Kasket, 2012), it can also cause intense discomfort and pain (Wilmot, 2016). Bailey, Bell, &

Kennedy's (2015) research with suicide survivors identified these negative experiences with online memorials: tailing off interest due to time lapse, feeling responsible for the thoughts and actions of others, censorship, unwanted interest from strangers, and changes to the site or removal of the page without their consent.

Following her sister's death, Claire Wilmot (2016) writes how online public messages to the deceased "reproduces the worst cultural failings surrounding death, namely platitudes that help those on the periphery of a tragedy rationalize what has happened, but obscure the uncomfortable, messy reality of loss" (web). No research has yet asked posters about what it means to write a private message to the deceased in a public space easily seen by others. Dobler (2006) wonders how "to determine to what extent these declarations of grief are public posturing and to what extent they are genuine, personal expressions of deep feeling" (p.180). Research on trolls' RIP activities, Phillips (2011) noted that they were directed at so–called "grief tourists," users who have no real–life connection to the victim and who, according to the trolls, could not possibly be in mourning but rather had a "pathological need for attention masquerading as grief" (web).

Marwick & Ellison's (2012) research found careful crafting of messages to establish the legitimacy of the poster by "mentioning particular memories, sharing how much the person meant to them, or referencing information that only the deceased and the poster would know" (p.389). As posters come from various facets of the deceaseds' lives, "increasing the probability that survivors will encounter multiple parallel depictions of the deceased" (Brubaker and Hayes, 2011, p.2), context collapse is created where strategies to protect privacy and manage impressions (boyd & Marwick, 2011) cannot be carried out by the deceased. Roberts (2012)

argues that comments left by "individuals who had few ties to the dead, 'just Facebook friends'" (p.58) dilutes the narrative of close mourners. Marwick & Ellison (2012) found that when a conflict in values arose between posters, a hierarchy of relationships prevailed such that those with a close relationship to the deceased had more legitimate claims to how the deceased should be remembered. "In this hierarchy, being a family member trumped all" (p.389). Martin (2010) has commented that when friends and gang members show up at funerals and put drugs or gang paraphernalia in the coffin, parents and others may be outraged at this version of their child being exposed. Similarly, conflicts in the narrative of the deceased's life that highlight illegal or stigmatized behaviours shared online may be shut down or cause drama. This may impact the freedom in expressing grief that street-involved youth have in on-line settings when sharing memories. No research has explored the thought and consideration street-involved youth put into their expressions of grief on line, especially in relation to their marginalized and risky lives and the values they may hold that push against the status quo.

2.2.0 Theoretical Framework

Grief has been conceptualized within psychology and the helping professions as either normal or abnormal, complicated, traumatic, or prolonged (Rando, 2013). There are certain prescribed ways of grieving properly and many ways to do it wrong, either denying or repressing the loss or holding on and refusing to let go (Rando, 2003). Fundamental to these judgements is the assumption that "on the regrettable death of a loved one [grief] is not only expected, or rationally appropriated, it is *morally required…*a virtuous person will feel grief, and one who does not grieve is condemned as callous" (Cooper, 2013, p.17). Family members are the most likely to police and scapegoat those who refuse to grieve in a certain way (Walter, 2005). Grieving is labeled abnormal when it challenges power structures, or gets in the way of individuals being productive workers, able to step back into economic roles quickly after someone dies. In fact, grief itself is seen as work: "grieving is a task to be mastered and finally accomplished, that such accomplishment is productive, and that grief work has a continuity with other socially acceptable work" (Foote & Frank, 2001, p.168).

Some critical analyses of dominant approaches to grief have employed a Foucauldian perspective to view grief work or counselling as a form of disciplinary power "through which 'the grievers' are produced as an object of professional knowledge *and* as a subject for themselves" (Foote & Frank, 2001, p.163). Using Foucault's concept of *technology of the self,* the therapeutic process creates and produces subjects who are colonized from within, disciplined to be a certain kind of griever. Grief counselling and self-help are one of the *technologies of the self* where individuals effect by their own means or with the "help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of

being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality" (1988, p.18). Grief is a "multidimensional phenomenon that exists within and is negotiated through the power relationships that link researchers, clinicians, reimbursers, clients and families" (Walter, 2005, p.77). Commercial and market interests, particularly around pharmaceuticals, also influences grief as a social construct (Marshall, 2009). When grief is demarcated between "self-evident" normal and abnormal responses to loss, and counselling is prescribed for those who are responding abnormally, it can medicalize, totalize and individualize grief experiences. By refusing to act out certain prescribed emotions or actions, certain grievers may feel alienated within a medicalized therapy based on the premise that resolution can be achieved without challenging the social context in which the person lives. For example, some research indicates that many street-involved youth avoid traditional mental health supports (McCay & Aiello, 2013) and cope through drug and alcohol use and suicide contemplation - ways that are not socially sanctioned (Kirst & Erickson, 2013). How society views the ways street-involved youth grieve may mirror attitudes that they are lazy and don't want to work, rather than recognizing their considerable barriers to employment (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013). Youth are framed as if they do not want to do any work, including the work it takes to 'get over' grief, so that they are seen as failures even at mourning the dead.

Foucault's work provides ways to explore what he calls the history of the present, excavating the bedrock of our contemporary conceptualizations. In my research, I employed two aspects of Foucault's work to explore how street-involved youth's uses of social media may resist, reproduce and complicate conventional therapeutic approaches to grief and loss. The first, *technologies of the self*, enables me to explore the ways street-involved youth speak about

their grieving process, framing how they, their friends or family are living up to the ideal or normative grieving subject, or how they interact on-line, either resisting or reproducing "how one must grieve." The second, *governmentality* (Foucault, 2007), the marginalization/exclusion, surveillance and policing of street-involved youth through ideas about "normal" or socially acceptable bereavement, means paying close attention to how behaviours to cope with loss are complicated, criminalized or vilified by their positioning in society. An example is a bonfire beach wake celebrating and memorializing the deceased by street-involved youth who have no private space to mourn with community being shut down by police due to public intoxication.

Exploring the grief experiences of street-involved youth brings attention to the marginalized worlds they inhabit, and foregrounds Judith Butler's (2006) question "Whose lives count as lives?... what makes for a grievable life?" (p.20). The social inequities that bring youth to the diverse and risk-filled world of the street segregate their experiences as different and outside the norm. Studying street-involved youth's experience of grief after the loss of a peer and the meaning they make from that loss illuminates how closely they follow the scripts generated by the conceptualization of grief in Western models of mental health. In this project, I examine the extent and ways in which street-involved youth use social media to push against dominant discourses of grief. Do their uses of social media indicate resistance to normative grieving patterns? Do they use social media to critique dominant mental health models of grief and engage less socially sanctioned ways to deal with loss? Alternatively, do they reproduce dominant ideas of grieving thereby using social media as a forum to express widely held and sanctioned ideas about loss and grief? Social media provides an excellent site to explore how street-involved youth position themselves as grieving subjects as they present their

relationships with the deceased for the on-line world to see, and find ways to make the

deceased count in a world that has marginalized them.

In this dissertation, I argue that through their talk about grief and their social media

practices related to death the youth I interviewed position themselves as moral beings. To be

moral is to work through and embody what we understand as right and wrong. As Kleinman

suggests,

> coming to terms with the dangers and uncertainties of our lives, however painful and
> troubling it is to confront what matters…[this is] not easy, never fully accomplished,
> always caught up in the limits of politics, social life, and our own genetically and
> psychologically based passions, but, at the end, what moral life is for (2006 p.122).

I draw from Kleinman's work to highlight how youth were working to understand moral issues,

attempting to sort out right from wrong, pointing out moral transgressions, highlighting when

they made decisions they were proud of, especially in the charged experiences surrounding a

death, both on and offline.

Drawing from her research among African-American families caring for children with

significant illnesses and disabilities, Mattingly (2013) argues "the moral is located in the

exercise of practical reason as required by the conduct of everyday life, and in the question of

''What is the good I want to pursue'' (Kuan & Grøn, 2017, p.188). Changing life situations,

contexts, histories, and the competitions between goods all factor into what counts as ''the

good''. Mattingly describes several "inaugural scenes" or possible methods in which moral

selves are created. The first scene is a Nietzschean inspired space as a kind of courtroom where

we stand accused, blamed for the suffering of others. "We are brought to trial, so to speak, and

asked to justify our actions" (2012, p.302). The moral self is born by our efforts to defend our

actions. The second scene is inspired by Foucault's late works and his introduction of

premodern virtue ethics. In this scene, the moral self is created in an artisan workshop "from the voluntary disciplining and monitoring of thoughts, acts and especially bodies in line with the stylistic norms of the 'guild' to which one has pledged oneself" (2012, p.304). Kuan and Grøn (2017) argue that in both of these scenes, power is the main protagonist. In the artisan's workshop, the subject is formed by the force of authority rather than the courtroom's force of fear. "The pledging of oneself to a particular regime of self-improvement may be voluntary, but the important point is that there are norms and guides to follow in the practice of virtue" (p.189).

Mattingly rejects both these scenes as lacking the capacity to explain how people face changing worlds or situations where it is unclear what kind of self one ought to become. Further, they "miss the many ways people experiment with, critique and modify the very traditions they have inherited or in which they have 'schooled' themselves as part of their self-making projects" (2012, p.304). Instead she takes up an Aristotelian position where "the essence of human existence is not so much in a quality or set of qualities of 'being' but rather in a process, the process of becoming" (p.307). Thus, she argues for the concept of *moral laboratories* in which people become researchers and experimenters of their own lives, where "everyday spaces can become spaces of possibility, ones that create experiences that are also experiments in how life might or should be lived". Many similarities exist between the worlds inhabited by street-involved youth and the African-American families caring for children with significant illnesses and disabilities Mattingly studies as she examines people's "attempts to transform not only themselves but also the social and material spaces in which they live" (p.310). In both projects there are attempts to highlight that "while everyday life is fraught with

the potential of danger . . . it is in the institutions of everyday life itself that we find the making

of hope" (Das & Kleinman, 2000, p.10). The social and material spaces of both the street and of

online spaces are obvious locations for *moral laboratories.* In these spaces, youth experiment

with grief expressions and mourning practices, navigating fractured and complicated

relationships, trying to gather information about a death cautiously, assessing performances of

mental health and wellness, and making decisions of how to best support themselves and their

friends.

The spaces of Facebook, and of other social networking sites, are described by danah

boyd (2008) as a *networked public:* "a linked set of social, cultural, and technological

developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked

media" (p.125). She identifies four properties that differentiate networked publics from other

unmediated publics: *persistence, replicability, searchability and invisible audiences*. Marwick

and Ellison (2012) demonstrate how these properties bring specific affordances to grieving on

Facebook, including searching for and finding support on line that may not be found in face-to-

face or other methods of communication. For example, the *persistence* of content in Facebook

memorial pages brings consideration of future audiences, including the children of the

deceased and power to the page creator to prune negative comments, creating a specific role

in identity management. The ease of creating perfect copies of digital material or *replicability*

creates a need for the practice of sharing "authentic" memories to establish legitimacy in

connections to the deceased. *Scalability* or potentially large *invisible audiences* can bring

greater awareness of the deceased, "validating their importance in the eyes of friends and

family, aiding in fundraising efforts, or increasing funeral attendance" (Marwick & Ellison, 2012,

p.397). It can also create context collapse, where "survivors will encounter multiple parallel depictions of the deceased" (Brubaker & Hayes, 2011, p.124) which may contradict or challenge values and beliefs held by grievers. Finally, *searchability* creates public/private concerns for grievers including how family members or close friends find out about a death or the phenomena of "grief tourists" or "trolls".

For street-involved youth, with their fragmented access to digital technology, scrutinized by the workers in the public spaces they use to go online (Woelfer & Hendry, 2011), these affordances provide a structure to examine their experiences of online expression and communication. These experiences include fractured relationships with family, stigmatized or sensationalized deaths, gaining and giving emotional support, expressing grief and memorializing peers who have died.

Examining street-involved youth's SNS use reveals digital technology as "a social practice involving access to physical artifacts, content, skills and social support;…[finding] access is a matter not only of education, but also of power" (Warschauer, 2002, p.12). Buckingham (2008) argues that digital technology is not a neutral entity but is shaped by complex social, economic and political forces, and by social actors and institutions that determine "where, when, and how it will be used and by whom" (p.12). danah boyd (2008) describes the *networked public* as a place that youth can connect with others and take risks even while being in adult-regulated spaces.

Street-involved youth spend time in the increasingly regulated public spaces of shopping malls, street corners and public parks (Sommers, 2013) on a routinized or repetitive path between shelters and social service agencies, places to earn money through panhandling or

hide away from heavy foot traffic (Buccieri, 2013). Their activities are targeted - actively policed and fined for engaging in activities that result directly from being homeless and having no private space for hanging out, drinking with friends or sleeping (O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2013). SNSs as networked publics may provide opportunities for street-involved youth to socialize with friends, make connections, and take risks that are not possible in the heavily criminalized and surveilled world of the street. My research explored how street involved youth are using this *networked public* in a variety of ways including expressing grief, gathering for support or memorializing the deceased. In this dissertation, I examine if the *networked public* offers any relief from the experiences of exclusion of the street, or if it is simply another space where they are regulated and marginalized.

The idea of a *collaborative self* helps to understand the impact of social networking sites on identity formation in youth. In this regard, the multiple acts of "friends" viewing your SNS page or feed and making comments, posting and tagging photos, and sharing or liking your posts and links collaboratively create your identity (McNeill, 2012, van Doorn, 2011, Van House, 2011). Negotiations of both identity and sociality encourage users to create more activity to "continuously produce their own and others' lives" (McNeill, 2012, p.72), in what Zhao et al., (2008) calls a "triangular relationship of desire or interest between the user, displayed friends/mates, and the audience" (p.1831). These interactions take place within the *networked public*, the spaces street-involved youth inhabit on-line, providing opportunities to create collaborative selves beyond local communities and possibly involving friends and connections from both on and off the street. Thinking beyond identity formation with this concept, the *collaborative self* mediates the experiences of youth, including the grieving and

memorialization of their peers where "authorship [is] an ongoing social process in which many individuals can contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a psychic space" (Bailey, Bell, & Kennedy, 2015, p.83). The grieving subject, desired and produced through *technologies of the self*, may be created through these collaborative activities on line.

This research project explores whether street-involved youth's use of social media after a death of a peer constitutes a "collaborative" grief experience, or, is primarily a site for individual expression. For street-involved youth, with their much higher rates of experiences of death and trauma (Hopper, Bassuk & Olivet, 2010), social networking sites provide not just opportunities to share their grief or to "coauthor biographies or narratives of the deceased's life" (Carroll & Landry, 2010, p. 345) by having a "seat at the table" (Roberts, 2012, p.57) but posting and viewing online enables them to create meaningful interpretations of events on which to base their actions. For youth engaging in risky activities, the decisions they make based on the support and interpretations found through social networking sites may influence their wellbeing.

2.3.0 Summary

In this research, I use the theories and concepts explored above in order to determine meaning of street-involved youth's experiences on-line after the death of a peer or someone else in their life. These include: Foucault's concept of *technologies of the self* to explore the grieving subject, boyd's concepts of the *networked public* and the affordances of social networking sites and conceptualization of the *collaborative self*. This chapter provided the key concepts within relevant research literature to build my analysis and argument about the ways in which youth are grieving through social media.

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CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

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3.1.0 Narrative Methodology

In this qualitative research project, I primarily used a narrative methodology, asking for

and examining stories from participants about their lived and told experiences (Creswell, 2013).

These included the explicit stories of the death of a peer or family member and how they access

social media and other digital technologies. Participants told many other stories; relationships

that saved their lives or almost killed them, harrowing travelling tales, concerts and canoes

trips, arguments and smear campaigns that played out on Facebook walls, the mundane and

everyday experiences of their lives. Narrative theorists define narrative as a distinct form of

discourse:

> meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding
> one's own or others' actions, or organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of
> connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (Chase, 2011,
> p.421).

In the literature on narrative methodology, narrative and stories or story telling are

often used interchangeably, entangled in meaning: "In recent years, narrative researchers have

described *storytelling* as an ontological condition of human life." (Phoenix & Sparks, 2009,

p.219) or "Storytelling, to put the argument simply, is what we do with research and clinical

materials, and what informants do with us." (Kohler & Riessman, 2000, p.169). In order to make

sense of this intertwining of meaning, I have reflected on these terms and come to understand,

as Mills (2015) describes it, that the story is the events that occur, while the narrative is the *way*

these events are told. In narrative inquiry, I am paying special mind to the why and the way stories are told and which stories participants choose to tell.

Stories are viewed as the way humans make sense of and understand their own lives (Ellis,1993, Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Stories are how I make sense of my world. They are what I remember from conversations with clients, true confessions with friends, how I debrief difficult days in a clinic or classroom. Paying attention to the gestures made, the emotions that emerge, the larger tropes in our society played out gives me a sense of the narratives that exist within them. Narrative methodology, with its specific focus on viewing the world through stories, made sense to me and fit well with SIY worlds. So, I decided to move forward with the research in this way, using an interview format to elicit participant stories.

Through narrative interviews, researchers "come in contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves" (Josselson, 2011, p.34). Telling stories may provide a cathartic function by helping to clarify and explain events, relieve emotional tension or connect different people's experiences of the events (Bosticco and Thompson, 2005). Narrative methodology's ability to show how individuals make meaning from "ambivalent and seemingly nonsensical feelings that are often felt in traumatic experiences such as grief" (Pearce, 2011, p.35) is well suited in research that explores difficult life circumstances such as the experience of homelessness (George & O'Neill, 2011, Berman, 2000, Boydell, 2000) or deaths in one's lives (Dennis, 2008, Gilbert, 2002, Pearce, 2011).

Although differences exist among various forms of methods and analysis in narrative research, Elliot (2005) captures some of the common themes found in the literature:

1. An interest in people's lived experiences and an appreciation of the temporal nature of that experience.

2. A desire to empower research participants and allow them to contribute to determining what are the most salient themes in an area of research.
3. An interest in process and change over time.
4. An interest in the self and representations of the self
5. An awareness that the researcher him or herself is also a narrator (p.6).

Consistent with theories of social constructionism (Gergen, 2009), the selves of both the participants and researchers in narrative interviews are multi-layered and multi-vocal (Josselson, 2011), "contemporary (re)constructions," formed and performed in the process of narrating, limited, enabled by the available linguistic resources, and co-created in the interview context (Wolgemuth, 2014). While interviewing the youth, the accounts were produced interactively, shaped by the questions I asked and how I asked them, the location of our interview, the youths' responses as well as their social locations of class, family and educational experiences, gender and ethnicity (Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995). One way that I tried to honour the participant-directed narrative methodology was to ask an interview question and let youth speak for as long as they wanted to about the topic. What that looked like varied considerably, depending on the youth, their capacities as a storyteller, their experiences with the topic, how distracted they were, and their level of trust and comfort with me. Certain participants were extremely gratifying to interview as they shared one story after another, inspiring me to laugh or cry, conjuring up images that still return to me. Others gave shorter answers and required lots of interaction and encouragement or reframing to latch on to a way of thinking about a topic that they responded to with energy.

Similar to Bakhtin (1981), Josselson (2011) notes that research participants may not recognize themselves in research about them as "being human includes the dynamics of inconsistency and tension, people no longer coincide with themselves and cannot be entirely

captured by the plots that contain them" (p. 41). In several cases, at a second interview the youths' life experience had changed dramatically. They had stopped smoking marijuana, they had travelled extensively or had broken up with a partner who had been seen before as a vital resource for mental health support. Even a few weeks or months later, some participants seemed to feel differently about things they said or did not say. An interview can capture only a small amount of the experiences that make up their lives including their feelings and experiences of grief or the ways they use social media. Further, the youth and I were both changed in some way by the process of doing the research. I have been enriched by hearing stories of their lives and some youth told me they felt relief or comfort in talking to someone about their grief. Others appreciated the chance to reflect and think about the role technology was playing in their lives.

3.2.0 Collaboration with Youth: Working with an Advisory Group

This narrative research project was enhanced by efforts to collaborate with participants,

using a youth participatory approach within a qualitative, community engaged design

(Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Street-involved youth have often been excluded from the research

process except as research subjects. However, marginalized groups, especially ''those who have

experienced historic oppression…hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences"

(Torre & Fine, 2006, p. 458). In collaborative research, the research process is shifted so that

the 'subjects' take some version of control over what questions are asked and who asks them.

This can take many forms, from simply including community members in data collection and

reporting back to them to having community coming to researchers with a topic and leading all

steps in the research process, including how it will be communicated to the public.

An advisory group of seven older and former street-involved youth 24- 30 years of age

met several times throughout the research process. These youth already had a broad level of

skills, knowledge and abilities from a variety of work, life and previous research experiences.

My goal in working with the advisory group was to push forward these possible outcomes in

collaborative research with youth:

> [E]ngaging young people in research helps challenge social exclusion, democratizes the
> research process, and builds the capacity of young people to analyze and transform their
> own lives and communities. Including young people as partners in research reveals an
> understanding of young people not only as assets but as ''agents of change'' (Cahill et al.,
> 2010, p.408).

After I had thought through my main research questions, together we worked to

develop sensitive, respectful and productive interview questions and had discussions of

anonymized thematic findings from participant interviews, identifying additional issues of social

media use and grief for further investigation and considering dissemination strategies. The decision to limit the collaborative nature of youth participation to an advisory group was primarily based on funding. Without a substantial research grant, I was unable to pay for ongoing meetings or other sessions with street-involved youth.

Some of the advisory group members were recruited in person from a group of youth researchers from More Than One Street (MTOS), a SSHRC-funded youth participatory project led by my supervisor, Lisa M. Mitchell, entitled "Street Youth's Perceptions of Risk and Body" that I helped coordinate. That research resulted in a book of artwork and writings from formerly street-involved youth. Other Advisory Group members were recruited by an information poster and invitation on Facebook and in person. Before each advisory group meeting for Grieving Online, I met with potential new members to describe the project and give them an opportunity to ask questions. I made sure to clarify that there was no requirement to take part in the advisory group just because I had invited them or in order to remain in MTOS. We spent time considering how the meetings would address their experiences of the death of peers and would most likely bring up emotions, such as sadness, anger or feeling overwhelmed. Each advisory group member signed the informed consent before their first meeting in order to minimize group pressure to participate.

To facilitate scheduling and communication, the advisory group members were invited to join a Facebook page open only to the advisory group and myself. Updates of the research project and group communication were posted regularly. The group met twice: once before data collection started and then a second time when analysis had begun. Each meeting started with introductions, an outline of the research project and a discussion of expectations for

communication during meetings and then moved on to discussions of the research topic. These meetings were audiotaped, transcribed and used in analysis. The advisory group members received $20 in Canadian currency for each meeting they attended.

Efforts were made to acknowledge and explore the location of power within the research relationships, especially within the advisory group. Grant, Nelson & Mitchell (2008) define power as "a potential which is created within the interaction of relationships and which can be used *over* others as domination, or *with* others to make positive change" (p.592). They suggest that power is not limited, but can be shared and that this sharing can generate more power. Street-involved youth may be more aware of certain forms of power as they examine their own histories, thinking where they have found power and where it was taken away from them. Collaborative research provides opportunities for marginalized experts to voice their deep understanding of "the power and politics of privilege, privacy, vulnerability, and surveillance" (Fine et al., 2004, p.107).

Some members of the advisory group were deeply involved in our Knowledge Translation and Exchange efforts with this project. heART space - Community Conversations and Compassion-building around Overdose, is a collaborative project involving current and former street-involved youth, front-line workers and others affected by the current overdose crisis and the structural forces that have contributed to it. Granted $7500 from the Centre for Addictions Research of BC -supported funds from the Ministry of Safety and Solicitor General Dialogues on Opioid Use (https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/), we created an art show to honour those we know who have died of overdose and provide a space for deep and respectful dialogue and creative expression around drug use in our community. heART space

was an invitation by youth/young people who intimately know about drugs, death and grief to

the community to come together. https://www.facebook.com/groups/Heartspacevic/

3.3.0 Participant Recruitment Strategies

Youth 16-24 years of age, who self-identified as street-involved and had experienced the death of a peer or family member in last two years were recruited in person at agencies offering services to street-involved youth and in locations where street-involved youth hang out. These included the Victoria Youth Clinic, the Out of the Rain Shelter and AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI). After speaking to managerial staff and describing the goals of the research project, I started to spend time during open hours hanging out in the agencies. Some of the time a staff member would introduce me to youth, telling them why I was there, but often they would get busy and I would be left to my own devices to introduce myself and tell them what I was looking for. This tension of requiring third party recruitment that was stated in my ethics application is sometimes difficult to navigate in the 'real world' of agencies where staff are busy and not as invested in the research process. The time spent at agencies was not long in terms of the time required for an immersion described by Clifford Geertz's (1998) term for participant observation, 'deep hanging out.' However, these experiences pulled me right back into the years when I was deeply immersed in the lived experiences of street-involved youth. I spent six years running the drop in at the Victoria Youth Clinic, volunteered at the AVI needle exchange in the early 1990's and wandered around downtown Victoria in the early 2000's as an outreach worker searching for MCFD-involved youth.

When a youth seemed interested, a staff member or myself described the project, telling youth there were up to two interviews focusing on their use of social media, how they use it to get support when they are having a hard time and their experience of how social media gets used when someone they know well dies. Potential participants were told that the

interviews were confidential, and would last between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours. The interview would be recorded using a digital recorder. They received a $10 London Drugs gift card and $15 in Canadian currency to acknowledge their time and expertise at each interview. I made it clear I did not work at the agency I recruited them at and that they didn't have to complete an interview in order to access services.

At the Youth Clinic, I spent time behind the kitchen counter, handing out snacks or sitting at the table drawing, working on my computer and chatting with youth who came in. Some of them were youth I had met in the past when I worked there and I caught up with many on the stories of lives I had lost track of or confirmed what I had learned on my "professional" Facebook profile "Marion Atschool". Many of the youth were new to me as three years had passed since I had worked at the clinic and I watched youth wait to see a doctor or nurse, often checking in with staff to see if they thought the youth may be a good fit for my study. In the close quarters, with other youth nearby, this sometimes was with body language or coded messages, to protect privacy.

AIDS Vancouver Island was chosen as a recruitment site because their harm reduction services serve a niche of street-involved youth who access services, such as food, support, harm reduction supplies and may or may not be living with HIV. I sat in the lunch room in the late afternoons as people came in to exchange or get clean needles or pipes. They would hang out for a while, having a cup of coffee, meeting up with friends or other people they used drugs with, waiting out the rain, charging a phone or sorting through a bag of belongings. The bathroom in the lunch room was a constant diversion. Staff knock on the door every 5 minutes to keep watch for people who have decided to take advantage of the private and mostly clean

space to use and have either nodded off or, more and more frequently, were experiencing an

overdose. As Fentanyl overdoses started to multiply in the community, the knocks on the door

came with such regularity that people would complain they were being interrupted constantly.

A private counselling room was available if participants wanted to be interviewed at AVI. We

could hear the louder conversations from the front desk, distracting most youth from their

stories as they listened for the latest happenings on the street.

> *Hunted around for Out of the Rain – went the wrong direction and so circled the church*
> *twice looking for the door. Asked random people who didn't know and thought what it*
> *might be like for a youth looking for it. When I found the sign and headed down the stairs*
> *I found a couple of long tables set up for eating, a small table at the bottom of the stairs*
> *for staff and to sign in and mats set out around the edges of the room. At least 15 youth*
> *were there, mostly hanging out on their mats and some already covered up in sleeping*
> *bags or blankets and dozing or crashed, even though it was just 9:30. – research journal*
> Oct 29th, 2015

Each Monday night I would head to Out of the Rain just after supper had been served at

9pm. Volunteers and staff would hand out stew or shepherd's pie, a meal created by a wide

range of church volunteers and others who coordinated this travelling shelter, each night in a

different church basement or gymnasium. This is where the research pieces seemed to come

together, where I would see youth I had met at the Youth Clinic or AVI or downtown hanging

out. This year there was a large group of travelers, both French-Canadian and others who were

on the well-beaten path of picking fruit in the interior of BC and had arrived here, taking off to

go sleep in a teepee in Sooke for the night or hitch a ride on a sailboat to Salt Spring Island.

Other local youth came and went, rotating through other shelters, camping, couch surfing or

jail.

> *Several of the youth I've already interviewed were there tonight– Jazmin with the*
> *long…hair and meth use and Marta, who I thought was off to school in the interior. Good*
> *to connect with both of them and reassuring I'll be able to find the youth again. Jazmin*

had settled in, sorting her bag and charging her phone on the Out of the Rain cable (covered with tape to ID it) when a cop showed up and said there was a missing person's on her and took her away. – research journal Oct 29, 2015

Afternoons at AVI seemed a bit of a bust after the first few sessions recruiting. The same folks were there, many too old, some too high or not in a space to participate each time I went so I asked if Heather, the youth worker from AVI, wanted to go out for a journey to recruit youth outside. I set myself up with a bag of candy from the Bulk Barn and we wandered, looking for youth.

The sequoia tree in Centennial Square is blocked off so Heather and I found youth down by the stairs. I asked sheepishly if they'd like candy – rockets, caramel kisses, and suckers – and told them I'm feeling like I'm driving around in my flat black van, kind of creepy-like. They laughed. After sharing what I was up to – one asked if I could interview him today. – research journal October 29, 2015

That interview supported my way in to connecting with and recruiting other youth. Youth who knew me, had spent time with me or had done an interview would tell their friends that an interview would actually be ok. The bag of candy was very helpful and something that I continued to carry as a way to start conversations, to mingle at Out of the Rain with a purpose.

Steve came and found me in the library today to bring me Crystal. She is somewhat disheveled – hair hasn't been dealt with in a while and her hands and nails are grubby – living outside. She sits down and he shuttles back and forth and leaves his stuff with us. He wanders off to give us some time together. Before he goes he tells me about her diary she has with her and how she had been finally telling him about the stuff inside. She shows me her notes to prepare her friend's Facebook memorial. Crystal is so profound in her interview – she describes a street dad as well as the huge number of people in her life caught up in addiction including mom, dad, and grandpa. She sits and fiddles with the rockets, eating chocolate and pure sugar as she describes her life trajectory. – research journal Tuesday Nov 17th 2015

3.4.0 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Potential participants were screened by asking them their age and whether they considered themselves to be street-involved, giving examples of what this might mean; that they were homeless now or had been in the past year, were spending time at agencies that serve street-involved youth or made money in the street economy. Sometimes this seemed redundant, especially when I had met them in places like Out of the Rain, or had seen them hanging out downtown several times.

I also asked if they had experienced the death of a friend, or someone they knew well within the last two years. My initial plan was to interview only youth who had experienced the death of a peer specifically. Although almost all of the youth had lost at least one peer, for 6 out of 21 youth it was a parent they wanted to talk about first and for three more a grandparent. I did not have a strict time frame for the time that had passed since the death. The nature of grief and bereavement varies between individuals and so excluding them based on recentness of death did not seem helpful. In recruitment and informed consent my main concern was to assess if discussing the death and their experiences afterwards might put youth at risk of a mental health crisis or other undesired results. Several times staff suggested someone who might be interested in participating but the circumstances of the death seemed so fresh or the way they described their reaction made me hesitate. In the middle of recruitment, a young street-involved woman died of suicide and I steered clear of directly recruiting from people who were seeking support for her death at the time.

I also had to consider whether the youths' current substance use or mental health state made them unable to give consent. Although some of the participants appeared to have used

that day, I tried in my casual conversations to see if they were "too high" or chaotic. This was to

protect them from sharing things they would not share if they were sober and to save myself

from trying to rouse participants on the nod, or being so tangential and scattered that the

interview wouldn't be very productive.

> *Warren, the tall … marked young man I've seen outside Johnson Street is there and asks to do an interview. I ask some questions and find a way out- he seems so unstable and gets really visibly upset in public that I would be concerned to see what happened in an interview. I also assess I just don't have it in me to hear the story that has led him to this place. Taking care of me.* – research journal Monday Nov 2nd 2015

Warren took it in stride when I told him I was done for the night. Potential participants

were asked if, after hearing about the project, they would like to proceed with an interview. I

was clear to let them know that at least one of the interviews would ask about their experience

of a death and that this might bring up emotions, such as sadness, anger or feeling

overwhelmed. I asked if the youth felt like they were "in a good space" emotionally to talk

about their experience. I let them know that I would be available for several weeks for an

interview and they could work to schedule a time and place that worked for them. If the youth

were interested but not immediately available, I would give them my contact information or

exchange contact information to set up another time for an interview. I chose not to do any

interviews at Out of the Rain. The space was open with no real privacy and it was late when I

got there each night. I wanted to protect both the youth and myself from opening up difficult

experiences in such a public place and with little to do but toss and turn afterwards, dwelling on

the conversations and memories it had stirred up.

If youth were interested in the project and were screened we met in a private space to

go over the informed consent document. Parental consent was not required for youth under 19

because they were considered emancipated minors, where searching for parents may compromise their safety and jeopardize their opportunity to take part in the study.

As the weeks went on I continued to bump into youth who told their friends what I was up to, and either encouraged them to do an interview… or not.

After telling the group in Centennial Square about my research project Larry commented "sell your soul for 25 cents- oh wait - $25" -not into doing interviews obviously. It is hard to know what to say to that. I think I said something like "I've done some interviews and sometimes they are helpful and other times they suck." - research journal Oct 29th, 2015

I started to spend time each week the day after I had been at Out of the Rain at the downtown public library, booking myself into a private room at the back, working on projects and being available to youth who I had met along the way to come find me there. As I made my rounds around Victoria, checking in at the agencies I was working with, cruising through Centennial Square, along Douglas Street, through the courtyard of the library and the computer banks inside where youth sat checking out Facebook, watching videos, I'd run into youth I'd met and casually say hi. Youth would come and find me at the library, either from plans made the night before at the shelter, texting or Facebook conversations, or would just show up, hoping I was there.

Xavier shows up just after 3 at the library with his rolling suitcase, a can of stew sticking out of the top outside pocket. He's from Ontario – this is a different youth with the flavour of communities of black, multi race, heavy violence and retribution and his stories reflect that. He doesn't want to go but Bruce is lurking, waiting for his turn and takes his time in leaving, forgetting gloves and wants to show me his file at the youth clinic, to prove or elaborate on his story. They plan to meet up later – "I'll be around Bruce" and he wheels his suitcase away. He spent most of the time fiddling with the slinky and it was really tied up in a knot for a part of the interview. He loves Rockets, the sugar pills I have. – research journal Tues Nov 10th, 2015

3.5.0 Data Collection

Data collection was primarily semi-structured interviews that took between 45 and 90 minutes. Early on I told the youth that one interview would focus on the exploration of social media use and homelessness and another would focus on the experience of death of a peer. I realized that I might not see participants again or that we were able to discuss most topics within the first interview. The second interview became an opportunity to clarify participant experiences and understandings shared in the first interview as well as ask questions about themes that had been identified in preliminary analysis. For example, participants' discussion of their drug use took up a large part of the conversations, framing different sections of their life, how they spent their time and hung out with friends and family and how they were dealing with the deaths as well as the other overwhelming experiences in their daily lives. I decided I needed to be more explicit in my questions around drug use and started to ask "which drugs have been helpful for you and which ones are not helpful?" In keeping with narrative inquiry, participants were asked to tell their story by responding to interview questions, conversation or artifacts (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The story of the death of a peer, their current housing situation and/or their most recent cell phone or other device were possible jumping off points to trigger narratives. I made an effort to allow them to tell the story without interruption. The interviews combined these narratives with short and longer answers to my questions. Frank (2012) reminds us of sociolinguist William Labov's (1972) classic example of how small and simple a narrative can be, incorporating the complicating action (the core of the story) and the resolution: "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up". There were multiple and overlapping narratives of varying lengths throughout our conversations worthy of analysis.

In practice, I invited participants to share their Facebook page with me to show how they use social networking sites, especially in relationship to the death of a peer or family member. danah boyd (2015) describes how combining both face-to-face and on-line ethnographic methods enriches the data, getting to hear directly from youth about their intentions and understanding of their on-line activity. I asked participants to show me how they use Facebook to communicate with others, especially to give and receive support, and any examples of interactions around the death of a peer that demonstrated relevant theoretical concepts such as context collapse or the collaborative self. With their permission, I asked to screen capture a page to be able to analyze interactions, being clear that all material would be kept confidential. Between the first and second interview some of the participants friended my research Facebook account 'Marion AtSchool' and I followed their Facebook posts in my feed. In some second interviews, I brought examples of their feeds to ask them about what was happening or what they were thinking about when they wrote the posts or posted images. They were asked if they wished to make images, drawings, photographs or other visual materials I collected available to myself for use in data analysis and publications. A discussion of confidentiality and anonymity and the implications of using their visual materials occurred at the time.

I found several conversations on youths' Facebook feeds that were very compelling because of the comments and reactions of their friends and family, including other grieving individuals. In order to access this third-party data, identities of individuals in the participant's Facebook network and comments and posts by those individuals, I followed a protocol created by D'Arcy and Young (2012) for using images, social media comments/posts, or other materials

containing third party data. This involved: (a) contacting the third party via private Facebook message with a message that included my full name and contact information, a brief description of the project, the exact passage(s) and/or image for which permission was sought, how the data would be used, the level of confidentiality/anonymity, and the statement, "If you agree to share this image/post(s) for this project, please reply to this message stating 'I agree.' If you do not wish to share the image/post(s), please reply to this message stating, 'I do not agree'" or (b) in cases where the third party did not wish to share the post or image or if the third party cannot be contacted, the protocol would be to not record the post or image. Given the delicate nature of the research topic, careful conversation with the research participant preceded these messages to ensure they were comfortable with requesting permission from third parties. So much rich data was available directly from participants that it was rarely required to ask for third party data.

I had hoped to use an elicitation technique developed by Ito in 2007 in which participants mapped their "Full Time Intimate Community". A Full Time Intimate Community is:

> the close group of friends (usually around 8-10 people) with whom you share presence. Most mobile youths know whether members of their FTIC are awake, at school, happy, sick, finished with their homework, etc. They use their mobile phones to keep in touch with their FTIC usually sending state changes by text message" (Ito, 2007, web)

Horst (personal communication, 2014), suggests visualizing this community by inviting participants to draw on a large paper the people they interact with most regularly and what forms of technology they use to communicate with them. My goal was to use this diagram to explore concepts related to social media, including Turkle's (2011) concept of the *tethered child* and the affordances of social media (boyd, 2008), enabling youth to share visually the

connections they have with people in their lives and the ways they find support in these connections.

Although the technique worked well in a practice interview of a youth advisory group member where there was a high level of trust, other youth participants did not take up the mapping technique easily, often saying they were not "good artists." My sense was that the technique brought up concerns about illicit activities as they were communicating with drug dealers and highlighted uncertain social connections where some of the first youth interviewed had very ambivalent experiences around friendships and family contacts. I quickly abandoned the technique because a substantial amount of data was collected without it.

Twenty-one youth signed informed consents and 20 of those completed initial interviews. Half of the youth completed a second interview for a total of 30 interviews for analysis. Some of the youth were not available for a second interview, either not responding to texts, Facebook messages or calls or not showing up for a scheduled appointment. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed by me and several undergraduate students (who signed a confidentiality contract) in the months following the interviews.

To briefly summarize my participants: 10 identified as female, 10 as male and 1 as gender neutral. Their ages ranged from 15-18 (7), 19-22 (11) and 23-26 (3). Five identified as Indigenous or mixed while 16 identified as white. Nine were currently homeless while the others were living with family (5), foster home (1) or with room-mates (2). During our interviews youth described 33 separate and distinct deaths. They understood them to be caused by overdose (9), various forms of cancer (6), suicide (5), stabbing (3), car accidents (3), heart issues (2), complications from HIV/AIDS (1), shooting (1), seizure (1), drowning (1) and

unknown (1). The people who died were their grandparents (4), mother (1), fathers (3), foster

siblings (1), close friends or partners (10), and various peers or people they knew from present

or past communities. To protect their identities, I have not created a table to more clearly

articulate these experiences and relate them to identifying demographic information.

3.6.0 Analysis

Narrative analysis guided the process after the interviews were transcribed. Josselson describes this process:

> We work with what is said and what is not said, within the context in which life is lived and the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life. We then must decode, reorganize, recontextualize, or abstract that life in the interest of reaching a new interpretation of the raw data of experience before us. (2011, p.33-34).

I used Riessman's (2008) four narrative approaches (thematic, structural, dialogic/performance and visual narrative analysis) to making sense of interview and visual data, always keeping the notion of the "extended account" (Riessman & Quinney, 2005) as the primary focus. I used all four of these approaches but differed in the amount of time and intensity I spent on each. The first approach, a thematic analysis, explored content as the exclusive focus. This form of analysis attempts to keep the stories intact.

I used prior theoretical concepts (such as the affordances of social networking sites or continuing bonds) to first look through and listen to the interviews. However, as I spent time with youth and reflected on what they told me I noticed key words and concepts that were repeated between participants or simply resonated strongly with my own experiences with street-involved youth that I needed to explore in more detail. For example, participants talked about how they took care of their friends, dropping everything to come find them after receiving a text or Facebook message, and listen to, distract, comfort, or drink with them. They took a lot of pride in this role, and it was one of the ways they described finding self worth, especially if they were young. As Crystal (f, 16) says: "It makes me feel good, it makes me feel better about myself".

To support thematic analysis, all transcriptions were loaded into NVIVO for Mac 11.2.2 and coded by selecting related sections of transcripts. These coded segments both captured sections of text that discussed certain topics: communicating with family, continuing relationships with the deceased and specific narratives: the story of finding out about the death, the story of quitting drugs. Coding helped contain the data, giving me an idea of which participants talked about which topics, who had had similar experiences and where they differed. It also then gave me starting points to go back in to the data, to ensure that I paid attention to the temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) within key moments in the participant's story to honor the narrative methodology.

The second of Reissman's approaches, structural analysis, pays attention to narrative form, such as the sequencing of speech and attempts to draw out the underlying meanings inherent in communicative acts. Although some readings of interviews require a detailed understanding of linguistic structures (Berman, 2000) following Labov's style, my structural analysis focused how the language used may "reflect, counter, and perpetuate often oppressive social identities" (Wolgemuth, 2014, p.599), looking for both resistance and complicity to grieving and embodiment of marginalization within the text. This approach exposed how street-involved youth framed themselves within the Foucault's *technology of the self* as grieving subjects or their judgments of other street-involved people. The nature of the stories as traumatic or difficult required paying special attention to the unsaid or unsayable (Josselson, 2011), "exposing dichotomies, examining silences, and attending to disruptions and contractions" (Creswell, 2013, p.75) to discern other layers of meaning. The levels of self-blame and regret, how one is supposed to grieve both on and offline, or expectations of what a family

should be both appeared at the surface of narratives but also within the silences.

The third narrative approach, a dialogic/performance analysis (Riessman, 2008), questions who narrates, when and why. A reflective research journal was used to take notes after each interview in order to capture parts of what Chase (2005) calls the "social situated interactive performance" (p.657) that may be lost in transcription. In my journal, I explored the role of myself as researcher within the process. This excerpt takes me back to the gestures; the physicality of our interactions:

> We move outside to the porch where they(gn) ask to do the interview as they have already spent a bunch of time at the library and welfare office and is overwhelmed by the inside. Cuddled under a blanket and a pillow they roll smokes and take a few drags and then they go out and they talk, thinking and talking and making sense. They are taking a stand on sobriety and that this means they are actually processing things that they didn't before. Over 10 close friends – black out drunk. – research journal Friday, Nov 13, 2015

The research journal gave me a place to wonder about the truthfulness of participant stories in the interviews:

> I really had a hard time with the notion of truth during this interview. Told me his hands have been registered as weapons. What the fuck does this mean? Martial arts background. How did I make sense of stories when it feels like what he is saying is not true? - research journal Sept 3, 2015

> Alex came and met me at the library today. She seems to exaggerate so sometimes it is hard to know what she tells me is larger than life or not. 27 friends that have died. She does know many street-involved folk and so it is most likely true – either way she's experienced a lot. – research journal Jan 11, 2016

It was helpful to read Arthur Frank's perspective that wild tales have value in the hearing and seeing:

> Placing too much emphasis on verification relegates the storyteller to being a mere source and holds the story hostage to its mimetic value. When verification arbitrates reception, the story cannot act but can only report actions that have already taken place; the interest is in those actions. (2010, p.99)

I tried not to get caught up in what I saw as my social worker perspective, that I needed

truthfulness from participants and instead focused on the performance, the possible desire of

youth to appear powerful, to have their experiences take up space, to share with me the

unfathomable and overwhelming losses.

Finally, a visual narrative analysis was used to integrate the words and images (photos,

paintings, video, collage, etc.) depicted on Facebook. I examined such themes as how individual

and collaborative selves are composed and performed visually, how youth performed their

mental health and expressions of support, connection and loss after a death. For example,

Mark (m) posted this image on his Facebook feed, shared between people from Grace

Kiemens's emo stylish world open Facebook profile. Mark was one of the participants who

regularly posted images that I viewed as the performance of his mental health; visions of

depression, addiction, affirmations of wellness and connection.

In his second interview, I asked him what this image meant to him and why he had

decided to share it on his Facebook profile:

"I was stuck at home and I- the only things I could think about was the times I've been ditched...And remembering that I'm not with family, knowing ...if I'm in foster care, they never actually had me as part of their family, why would it make me part of their family now? So I think that's why I brought this...it spoke to me on a personal level of just this, like, you've always got that depression or anxiety looming over you that nobody sees it...And...it's unfortunate that people- that people don't take it seriously. They go, "Oh, you have anxiety disorder? That's bullshit, just learn how to have fun", or "Oh you have depression? Just cheer up for once in your life". It's not that simple. Living with depression, I don't have it as bad as a lot of other people do, and for that I am lucky."

Mark demonstrates how visual depictions of his experience are sent out through his networks, giving people he knows an opportunity to see how Mark is viewing his current situation of a new foster home, finding others who seem to understand and validate his mental health. Images were screen captured from Facebook feeds of participants (with permission) and reviewed during analysis.

Visual narrative analysis also took place in a series of photographs that I produced to think through metaphors that attempted to understand the grief experiences of street-involved youth and how they often differ from mainstream concepts of the grief process. While these photos do not appear in this dissertation, it is important here to consider the visual methodology behind the analysis as they helped inform my writing. In order to portray ideas related to a central metaphor I worked with a friend, Nicole Paquette, to create a series of photographs to visually represent grief and trauma experiences, using drugs and alcohol in that process, and the ways street-involved youth survive while experiencing multiple and devastating losses. Rather than a photovoice methodology where the researcher asks participants to take photographic images that reflect on their experiences or identities (Wang et al., 2000, Griffin, 2012), Nicole and I worked together to think through metaphors of grief used by hospice workers of balls and jars and physically set up visual representations, including

action shots, photographing multiple images. I created a power point slide show of the images,

creating my own narrative of what I was attempting to articulate through the photos. I have

had the opportunity to sit with other graduate students, committee members, the youth

advisory group and others to talk through the ideas in a version of photo elicitation (Degen &

Rose, 2012, Griffin, 2012). These images (see appendix 3 for examples) and accompanying essay

appeared in my KTE art show heART space and will be presented in conferences before

becoming a journal article. Each time I have shown them the images generate powerful

conversations, new metaphors and other ways to think through the experiences of grief.

3.6.1 Using Poetry in Narrative Analysis

Using creative methods became a way for me to stay connected and engaged to the

analysis and writing process. Throughout this dissertation I include poetry that I created both

from my own words and the words of my participants. Laurel Richardson (2008) challenges

researchers, asking us how we can put ourselves into our texts. Poetry is a powerful way to

express the self, supporting reflexivity in research (Fitzpatrick, 2012); writing and performing

poetry and prose pieces has been helpful in my process of digesting the bodily experiences of

this research project. Poetry is one strategy to attempt to make sense, to express discomfort

and to honor the harsh realities that have been exposed. As Penelope Carroll et al. (2011,

p.627) write:

> *Poetry captures the essence*
> *of the how, the why, the what.*
> *Captures the essence of dreams.*
> *Speaks*
> *to the heart of the matter.*

One of the goals of using poetry through this research project was to present the data in ways that were differently accessible to readers. When Carroll writes of creating poems about the experiences of her participants in New Zealand who are homeless or very marginally housed, she paraphrases Bruner (2003), arguing that poetry challenges the "tyranny of the single story" and "let[s] many stories bloom." Her goal is to broaden existing discourses around housing and health and unsettle the prescriptive public health reading of the relationship between the two (Carroll et al., 2011, p. 628).

Poetry can open up the ways we share our data. It unsettles, creating ambiguity, uncertainty, possibility. Fitzpatrick (2012) writes that inserting a poem into an academic argument can make the argument itself less perfect, open the text to interpretation, and destabilize the "coherent" narrative. It introduces cracks and alternative perspectives. It acknowledges the other voices of doubt, contradiction, and uncertainty. The voices we usually edit out, concealing what Richardson (2001) calls the sweaty "hand print" (p.10) of the researcher who produced the final written text. Artistic forms challenge and disrupt prevailing regimes of truth by raising new questions without obvious answers.

Some of the poems I've created are what Monica Prendergast (2009) calls *Vox Participare* - participant-voiced poems that are created from interview transcripts in a found poetry style. I took sections of a transcript and broke it up into lines, making decisions to pare down the words into provocative imagery and the experiences I wanted to highlight. These poems not only reflect the actual expressions and experiences of the youth participants but bring up specific themes that I have found in the transcripts, in the stories shared by youth. Reworking their words into poetic form gave me different versions of their words to think with,

and I noticed repetitions of phrases, metaphors, connections, intentions, discourses in new

ways, simply by placing breaks and changing form. I created this poem below, Dinosaur Dance,

inspired by Yana (f, 18) who reflected on the death of her friend and the ways she made

meaning around his death.

Dinosaur Dance

I have his old Macdonald's hat that he let me borrow
He would go behind the drive-thru window and do this dinosaur dance
He had this orange jacket,
it was bright orange,
He was always walking through town and had the goofiest smile on his face and never talked
a bad word about anybody

He was an amazing person
He taught me you got to do what your heart wants you to do,
where your heart feels you need to be, and not where other people want you to be.
He is just such a big part of who I am today
I don't think I would be travelling today if it wasn't for him.
I think I would be conforming to what other people want me to be, instead of me.

The town that we lived in was so closed minded
two thousand people and twenty-five churches
if you don't go to church every Sunday you are not allowed into heaven.
And I said "man this is not what life is".
Jesus would not say to a little Jewish boy you can't come into heaven.

He just taught me to never judge anyone
to just live with happiness and do what you feel is real.
It is okay to question anything and everything
I thought I was open minded until I met him
Even if our opinions disagreed, you still need to be open minded to that person's opinion
That's how they perceive life.

We would always sing this one song "Hey there Delilah"
I just randomly started singing it and it was like I felt him singing with me.
He had this one of a kind smile,
sometimes I see that on somebody and I just feel him.

I remember having a dream
I got into the back of the car and he was just sitting there

he said "don't worry
everything is okay and I am okay"
and he hugged me but when he hugged me I felt this feeling,
I felt vibrations of just love and I know that that was not just a dream
that was him
"I am okay, you will see me again where ever it is, I am okay"

I had the chance to perform this piece and several others created out of my Grieving Online research at the Narrative Matters Conference in June 2016. Hearing participants' words aloud lets us reflect how poetry comes to us as an oral art form deeply rooted in the sense of voice. I hoped that with these performances the conference members came into my research, into the voices of the youth I have met. Pelias (2005) considers performative writing to evoke identification and empathic responses. It creates a space where others might see themselves. It features lived experience, telling, iconic moments that call forth the complexities of human life. With lived experience, there is no separation between mind and body, objective and subjective, cognitive and affective.

Reading aloud my own work has allowed me to reflect on my words, to find different versions of the truth within them, to situate myself as both a researcher and a writer, a feeling body and a performer, where the words become more when they are spoken. Prendergast (2009) reminds us that a performative act reveals researcher/participants as "both masked and unmasked, costumed and bared, liars and truth-tellers, actors and audience, offstage and onstage in the creation of research" (p.xxiii). This vulnerability, I believe, makes the work stronger, not only by providing creative outlets for meaning making for both participants and researchers, but by strengthening connections to the reader, to the viewer of the performances.

To conclude with Philip Booth (1989) in Pelias (2005, p.421):

"I strongly feel that every poem, every work of art, everything that is well done, well made, well said, genuinely given, adds to our chances of survival by making the world and our lives more habitable."

3.7.0 Reflecting on Ethical Issues in the Research Project

I have years of relationships with youth, staff and volunteers in youth serving agencies that were possible places to recruit youth, especially in my former workplace at the Victoria Youth Clinic and so I was very thoughtful about the concern of dual roles. I chose to conduct research with participants who did not have a previous significant counselling history with me (supported youth through major medical or mental health issues etc.) to decrease issues of dual roles, however, just my obvious close relationships with staff and youth may have affected how participants saw me. In order to acknowledge and potentially resolve ethical conflicts I used Yassour-Borochowitz's (2004) process of *reciprocal dialogue*, clarifying the nature and duration of our relationship, what the participant and myself could expect from the research and both the benefits and potential harms in the study. I made clear that whether they participated or not did not affect their relationship with the agency from which I recruited them.

Street-involved youth have been seen by researchers and others as a vulnerable population because they typically have few material possessions, use drugs or alcohol that impair their judgment, and may be deprived of affection and attention so that they may find minor incentives highly motivating (Koller, 2012). Honoraria honor the time and expertise of the participants but may be seen by some as coercing desperate people to discuss potentially private or triggering experiences in exchange for a meal, 20 dollars or a gift card. When using phrases such as "vulnerable population," it can be easy to forget the autonomy and power that street-involved youth have; they make important and informed decisions about their lives multiple times a day. Participants may withhold information, use the time of the researcher for their benefit (D'Cruz, 2000) or choose not to participate by not showing up for appointments or

answering letters or phone calls (Helgeland, 2005). Although structural inequalities overlay the researcher/participant dynamic, power is fluid and dynamic. As discussed above, my recruiting strategies and the informed consent process acknowledged that consent could shift depending on intoxication and mental health status and disclosures that required reporting. A Youth Rights in Research document (Chabot, Shoveller, Spencer & Johnson, 2012) was shown with the informed consent document. The honorarium of a gift card to London Drugs and cash demonstrated the value and expertise of the participant's time. How they used the compensation was just one decision they had in that day. Even the most vulnerable of youth made very specific choices of what to tell me and what to withhold:

> *Found Dawn sitting at clinic foyer in elevator lobby to AVI. She's got short … hair right now and was quietly sitting. She didn't remember doing the interview before and was short on her answers, trying to decide if she wanted to come in for an interview. Asked for an Ensure and cleared with staff to give her one as she is on a 2 a week limit. After I gave her one she came in to be interviewed – we were in the treatment room which is not a super great space but I think it wasn't just that – short, yes and no answers with just a few things that lit her up…I tried all kinds of ways in to asking questions but she was having none of it. So I gave up after 14 minutes and gave her the $$ and thanked her. Disappointing but kind of amazing it hasn't happened until now. The awkwardness was unbelievable. And it was this strange push and pull of power – definitely the way to watch how someone can use their power to not do what you hope the research is going to be like. Later she returned to her spot, sitting on the floor in the lobby with a bag of snacks, and ate some Reece's peanut butter cups.* –research journal January 19, 2016

Talking about the loss of a peer to death was difficult for some participants. I attempted to be clear in discussions before the interviews about the sensitive nature of these topics and to allow youth time to think through if they really wanted to "go there". The interview process was adjusted for several participants to minimize harm, changing topics or acknowledging and sitting with their tears or anger. When youth became emotional or overwhelmed during an interview, I offered to stop or take a break, and checked in with them when we were finished,

taking a moment to prepare themselves, (to blow their nose or put back on their 'game face')

to leave the interview room afterwards. I reminded them about available support such as

outreach workers and counsellors who work at the Youth Clinic or at other resources.

> *Tanner was collected from the guys in Bastion square. The older guy with dreads*
> *encouraged him to come as Tanner was planning on leaving town and didn't have money*
> *for the ferry. He had never been in the Youth Clinic it seemed. I was so conscious of his*
> *body language as he talked of the losses in his life. They were so multiple and ongoing -*
> *relentless, you could see when he just needed to step away from talking about them. I*
> *switched gears in the interview a couple times just because you could see how harrowing*
> *it was to think about them all from grandma to many friends.* - research journal October
> 29, 2015

At some points, it felt like the interviews helped youth, in some small way, to deal with

the loss of a peer and spend time with their grief, but it was not the focus of the project.

Neither was this project's primary goal to help me, the researcher, work through any grief

issues related to former clients or others. Many of the youth described feeling relieved or

better for the conversation about deceased friends and family, enabling them to talk about

someone no one in their local friend circle knew. I also made sure to have support for myself

during the research process, and used a variety of techniques including some discussed in the

final chapter to deal with any distressing experiences that the interviews brought out.

Reflexivity has been a vital part of my work as a social worker, and I frequently reflect on

my privilege as a white, able-bodied, educated professional with a safe and secure home to

retreat to after the work is completed for the day. Creating new collaborative relationships has

provided more opportunities to examine that privilege and find ways of shifting the power

dynamic. For example, recently I answered a call to be a reference for an advisory group

member in the same week she wrote a letter of reference for me. Our work roles continue to

shift as youth who were former clients take on co-worker roles in agencies in town. I also have

my own experiences of grief, both within the street-involved youth population and my personal life; I continue to reflect and examine when this seemed to be impacting the research and my interactions with participants. Some of these reflections appear through the next chapters as I insert myself within the text, where it seems appropriate, to share how my own reactions and actions were important to include in my analysis.

Careful thought and discussion with participants is required to create innovative ways to share what we have discovered in ways that they feel proud and confident of immediately afterwards as well as in five or ten years time, when their lives might look remarkably different. Privacy and disclosure continue to be tensions that I explore as I begin to disseminate information in order to find the right balance between providing colourful and descriptive details that "tell a good story," and protecting the anonymity of the youth that were involved, especially in the small community of service providers and the street in Victoria. In this dissertation I have changed all names to pseudonyms and sometimes changed or kept out identifying details, including longer narrative pieces that would expose too much of stories not mine to tell.

CHAPTER FOUR

Living Close to the Streets in Victoria

4.1.0 Introduction

I had food poisoning
it was causing so much pain
on the floor screaming in pain
and she took me to the hospital
I was waiting for a doctor
went out for a cigarette
talking with these two old ladies
and this person walked by and they were talking to me
the way that the conversation ended up going
I realized that they thought that I was
in the psych ward
and that I was just out for a break

I smiled
"no I'm in the emergency
I have stomach pain"
And she was like
"Oh you are just so uniquely yourself
I would have assumed that you were crazy"
cause that's where she,
she was also in the psych ward and
she was just trying to,
like she was like
"oh you are also, like this is cool"
"you are so authentically yourself
that I would have thought that is where you were"

I really appreciate that
I reflected on being in certain places
realizing that in some places
I am completely normal
and in other places
I'm considered crazy
I think that that is something about homelessness
we don't really create space for it
(Rooster, gender neutral, 26)

Street-involved youths' life experiences and the ways that they exist in the world do not easily fit into Canadian society. Rooster asks us to consider what it would mean to create space for the way Rooster lives in the world, to challenge the preconceived notions by which the expressions of self are labeled as mental illness, as being crazy. Through this research project I ask what it means to grieve when you feel like you don't fit in, when your experiences are either invisible to "regular" society or exposed as stigmatized bodies, where you are found wanting, unstable, and potentially dangerous because you are not "normal".

In this chapter I discuss the spaces youth occupy, including the social spaces of friendship and family, social media and social services, substance use and money-making amidst this larger pattern of stigma and marginalization. While I share stories of how youth make the spaces they have been offered, forced into or carved out, work to meet their needs, I also address the violent and dangerous aspects of these spaces. My goal is to convey something of the context and experiences of being a street involved youth in Victoria, highlighting the precarity of their lives. In the last part of the chapter, I draw attention to how youth negotiate and manage relationships to create comfort and companionship despite the structural forces and personal biographies that make such connections difficult.

I use the term precarity to describe "that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2009, p.ii) and contend, along with others, that it is a condition of millennial or neoliberal capitalism. Shaw & Byler (2016) argue that neoliberalism which privileges radical individuality, self-responsibility, and independence

places blame for poverty, conflict, and difference directly on migrants, the elderly, racial

minorities and homeless people.

> [Neoliberalism] asks us to see precarity as a result of moral failures of individuals, masking
> the power relations and structural violence embedded in our global political economy. At
> times this logic produces apathy toward the suffering of others, as if they somehow
> deserve it, and dislodges responsibilities to care from broader social, political, and
> economic institutions (Shaw & Byler, 2016, web).

Mark Dolson's (2014) ethnographic research with street-involved youth in Ontario

pinpoints several forms of precarity:

1) traumatic memories of abandonment and abuse, which has led to an inability to work;
   and
2) the inadvertent structural violence facilitated by the disconnect between provincial
   social services such as social assistance…[and the] mandate that all ''participants''…
   seek employment or face termination of their monthly social assistance check (p.136).

The family patterns of abuse and social control of welfare he pinpoints are compounded in

Victoria by an extremely tight rental market: 0.5% vacancy rate (Canada Mortgage and Housing

Corporation, 2016), one of the highest poverty rates in the country: 13.2% according to the

Market Basket Measure (MBM), and single welfare rates that have not changed from $610

since April 2007 (Klein, Ivanova & Leyland, 2017). Butler explains that precarity also

"characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for

populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not

enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection (Butler, 2009, p.ii).

Thus, street-involved youth must defend themselves against both street violence and police

harassment. Many aspects of their life contribute in interconnected and entangled ways to

their being criminalized, stigmatized and uncertain of what may happen next, including where

they will find money or housing.

While all the youth in this project experienced precarious and vulnerable lives, the way they lived them was varied and dynamic. A few of the youth I met were travellers from other provinces, while many had deeper roots in Victoria. Some of them were camping outside or staying in shelters while others were once again living with parents. Some youth favoured meth or heroin while most smoked pot and drank. Some had been to treatment or had stopped using certain drugs. Many of them were white while 5 out of the 21 identified as Indigenous or a combination. Some sat around in groups on the street downtown while others stayed in their homes, only coming out to access services and go shopping. Some had strong ties with older homeless people while others avoided them as much as possible. Some always wore makeup and new clothing while others revelled a bit in dirty patched clothes and wild hair. At least three had children and two of those children had been adopted out. Only a handful had graduated from high school and just a few were going to school while one had finished a post-secondary diploma.

4.2.0 Stigma, Outcasts, Being on the Outside, Separate

In my interviews youth often portrayed themselves as outsiders experiencing various and often daily forms of stigma and discrimination. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" and that reduces the bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p.3). It happens when "elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold" (Link and Phelan, 2001, p.367). Many of the youth recognized or saw themselves as living separate lives. In the midst of living in the downtown space they were segregated from society: "It is like a family of outcasts, downtown kids are like outcasts that sort of just come together for better, exclude you from everywhere else" (Phoenix, f, 17).

They felt this exclusion through the ways they were looked at, talked to, and treated by security, family, police, social service workers and passersby:

> people that are perceived to be homeless it's like [silence] we've created this, this intense
> segregation, when it's like these people interact all the time, it's like, it's not like it's a
> weird thing to see a homeless person, it's like you see it all the time…You know, it's
> like…we don't give a lot of credit to our ability to read people and trust our own instincts
> and interact with people and like, it's like what is the harm that is going to come from
> interacting with that homeless person? And it's like you don't have the confidence to be
> like "oh actually I don't have any change" you can't do that? Like you can't give that
> person that couple of seconds? (Rooster, gn, 26)

This separation was also, to some degree, intentional, a way of shifting away from society or "the system" in order to question it. Some youth saw the street as a place to step back from and wonder about how society is working, whether they are trapped within the "so called 'fit in' organization, 'fit in' society" (Steve, m, 22) or if they are able to step away:

I'm trying to understand that right now…maybe that is what kind of led me to try to understand homelessness or like, or I don't know, just be like, understand where I want to even fit in with society because like, there is just so many different communities and social structures in the world. (Bruce, m, 24)

I go camping a lot…Quite frankly I think that's where we should all live cause that's where we're supposed to be…however, society now says you have to be practical. (Michael, m, 18)

Youth narratives were not only about being separate or seeing themselves as different but sometimes pointed to the constraints of hard financial situations, feeling trapped and without a clear path to get out of it.

So I have no money and I have about 540 dollars to pay on the fucking storage locker and to get my stuff out or they're gonna throw it out…I'm trying to get stuff organized but it's really not working, so...nothing's gonna help me. I've tried everything…Even when I want to do something good, it doesn't work out. Happens all the time. (Ida, f, 21)

Sean Kidd (2004) writes that perceived stigma is significantly related to low self-esteem, loneliness, suicidal ideation, and feeling trapped among homeless youth. He identifies the multiple and overlapping ways that they have been stigmatized; how experiences of abusive and disrupted childhoods and mental health challenges are confounded by poverty, and for some, drug and alcohol use, panhandling and sex trade (2007). The neoliberal framing of these activities, as personal choices, increase youth's guilt and self-blame (Kidd, 2007). Youth, in this research project, framed their lives with very different ways of speaking of their own actions and agency. Ida, above, who is about to lose her possessions to debt, feels trapped in a cycle without options or help, while Rooster sees the possibility of living a "real life" while homeless, challenging us to consider whether we see being homeless as being in limbo:

…some like make it a real life…you don't need to feel like you are in limbo just because you are homeless. And I think that that is something that people consider it, this state in

between and it is not. You are still living a life, like you don't need to just keep yourself numb, it's like "No I'm fucking, I'm homeless, I've got a tent in, like the park over there, it's great, you know there's, [laugh] it's a good family neighborhood! You know. Like it doesn't have to be something creepy and weird and shit you know. (gn, 26)

Youths' perception that they were being judged and stigmatized was internalized into their language. They wrestled with being called "meth whore" or "mutt" by others and, yet, in speaking of friends as "punk assholes", "home bums", "hobos," took back these labels as a project of resistance, of politicized identities (Orchard *et al*. 2013). Some of their labelling is also what Copes et al. (2008) call creating "identity boundaries" differentiating between "crackheads" and others in the drug community in order to shape how youth should be viewed and treated, and "the extent to which they self-identify as respectable and noteworthy characters" (p.255).

For some, they saw their life on the street as exposing truth, exposing themselves and who they are. Living close to the streets means not hiding, finding a space where you may be considered normal, even with the life experiences of loss, of family breakdown, of expressing traumatic experiences through the body. Crystal explains the freeing experience she has on the streets:

So, like when I became homeless it was like, I don't have to hold it all in because I don't have to paint a pretty picture for anybody, but life is obviously not pretty so, but why, I don't have to lie to people and be like "oh yeah it's great, everything is fine"…it is like because people already assume like, "oh well something must have happened", so it helps me like not have to like feel like I have to pretend to be like an acceptable member of society as much [laugh]. (f, 16)

4.2.1 Relationships with the Street Itself

Youth had diverse relationships with the street itself. The street as well as homelessness have been theorized as social constructs: a contestation of private lives being lived in public space (Kawash, 1998), where homelessness works with the street in "conflict between social definition and self-definition, social control and personal meaning" (Kidd and Evans, 2011, p.756). All youth in some sense walked the pavement downtown. Downtown fast food outlets provided cheap food, spaces to stay inside, to socialize. Youth traversed the streets between places they hung out, shelters and services that offered someone to talk to, harm reduction supplies, computers or WIFI or free food at designated times. Some youth had social experiences of physically sitting on the street asking people for spare change on the downtown sidewalks that have been sanctioned by security or the public in which to pan:

> there is a good spot that me and [bf] were panning that…It's on the way to the bars and
> the liquor store's back there …So you don't get bugged by security and all that stuff, and
> not a lot of families are in that area. (Crystal, f, 16)

There are numerous places in the downtown core where youth tend to congregate. They've inherited social spaces from older youth and adults, continuing a tradition of hanging out and visiting, talking or smoking pot in spaces such as under the large Sequoia tree and covered cement areas in Centennial Square, beside the City Hall. Youth told me names for spaces I had travelled such as the "dead zone" space of park/cemetery by a large Anglican church or the "whale wall", a small grassy park near the water, overshadowed by a large painted mural depicting whales.

For some, life on the street is framed as an adventure. I ran into Steve (m, 22) and Tanner (m, 22) a few months after their first interviews, tired but thrilled from travelling kilometers underground in the Bowker Creek tunnels. In his next interview, Steve showed me his Facebook group of "skateboard/longboard enthusiasts that meet on Sundays at 3pm [that] cruise through Victoria's downtown core towards Dallas Road and other routes. Anyone is welcome to join us." We watched videos of he and his friends skateboarding in the parkade of the Empress hotel and he shared rumours of drawings found in the city archives of a secret tunnel from the Empress Hotel to City Hall.

For Vincent (m, 22) the streets contain many places to avoid where he used to deal and use drugs. He talked about transitioning from jail, sharing his sobriety with pride with police officers who know him by name, trying to fit himself back into family and his pre-street relationships with school friends.

While a few of the youth have strong connections to people they call their "street family" and have long standing relationships with individuals who use drugs like meth or crack regularly, many youth said they avoided using services for older street-entrenched populations. "I will not go to Our Place! [laughs]…It's everyone else's place. Not my place…It's gross and full of heads. [laughs]. I don't want to go and be around a bunch of gross heads." (Alex, f, 20). She laments aging out of services for youth, and strategizes about how to continue to use services for younger people.

4.2.2 Living Situations – Unstable Housing

At the time of the interviews, youth were staying in a variety of places: with new foster parents, living with room-mates, staying at shelters, crashing at houses, camping outside or living back with parents and siblings. Consistent with other research in Victoria (Community Social Planning Council, 2008) and Canada (Gaetz et al, 2016) youth stayed in multiple places, often changing from day to day, week to week.

Camping bylaws in Victoria, although contested, currently allow individuals to camp overnight in most parks and many green spaces, but must pack up by 7am (City of Victoria, 2016). Other open spaces for camping in Victoria have been systematically reduced where youth have witnessed: "all the doors and like spots to hide when it is raining are all gated up," (Tanner, m, 22) changing visibly within a few years: "We had all our alleys taken away, like no we are not allowed to be downtown. We are not allowed to hide even…or to get out of the rain…" (Rooster, gn, 26).

Camping and sleeping outside within the city is not far enough to be outside society as the "rules" still apply:

> It was like, this was the trippy thing…police waking you up when you are sleeping on the side of the road…I had my mattress sitting there and they took it and they are like, "you know you can't have a mattress," like you can't own a mattress, unless you have a house. Was their ruling. Which is, I mean, there is no law that says that…you've go to the mattress store and "where is your mortgage payment?" [laugh] and like, you know what I mean? …that's never happened! (Bruce, m, 24)

For some, youth saw the clear benefits of living outside to support their physical and mental health while for others, the romance of being homeless had worn thin:

> I had a place for six months and having a house really helps you, like, do what you want to do. Because you're sleeping at night. You're not running around wasting all your energy

on like, you know, just mundane things like just eating and sleeping and finding places to go chill out where you're not getting kicked out and being treated like shit. (Marta, f, 20)

Many had stayed in a shelter, ending up there after uncertain housing shifted and changed:

"...this guy is going to stay at his girlfriend's house for a little while so um, he's got the place for a little bit cause his friend's letting him stay with him, so he's letting me stay there too" (Jazmin, f, 18).

Substance use and relationships bound up and entangled in use added to their instability. When Oriel's (f, 21) boyfriend ran out of heroin: "...as soon as he ran out of dope, they kicked us out pretty much, which is really harsh".

Youth described getting ripped off by room-mates or landlords, making mistakes, burning bridges, wrecking things, and getting themselves into tight squeezes as they learned lessons, often the hard way.

I was renting the couch and then the other one I actually had a bedroom...I wanted to leave for the longest time, but I just put up with it for the longest time...And I finally got sick of it and left...Oh yeah, they shattered my TV, my 52 inch, or 50 inch TV into a million pieces...Like it is broken, I owe $3200 or $2800...Yeah, and now it is broken. (Xavier, m, 22)

Although several of the youth had been in MCFD care when they were younger, only one youth was currently living with foster parents, his third set within the year. Five of the youth were living with family, again, after living on their own or in foster care. Returning to or continuing to live with family resulted from a combination of obligation, money, and gaining some form of mutual support. Youth recognized that living with family again sometimes brought up unhealthy family dynamics:

I was living in a one-bedroom apartment with my sister and her boyfriend and it was, uh, I don't know. It was interesting. They do not have a very healthy dynamic and I mean they've broken up now which I think is good because he's frankly kind of an asshole and she's frankly kind of too damaged to be with an asshole…It's amazing how cycles repeat themselves. Looks a lot like my mom and my dad's relationship I'd imagine…Yeah, so I stayed there and uh tried to – tried to tolerate their fucked up dynamic as long as I could until words failed me and I put a hole in the wall and was like, "well, I'm gonna leave before I actually hit someone because I don't wanna hurt people. I don't like the fact that I have that capacity. (Star, m, 23)

Very few of the youth felt particularly stable with their current living situation. They were uncertain what would happen next, and lived with a certain amount of stress and anxiety related to the vulnerability and instability of shifting situations and relationships.

4.2.3 (Not) Having and Making Money

Youth's financial situations were generally dire. They talked about owing money to phone plans, landlords, credit companies, friends or dealers. Most of them had uncertain incomes. A quarter of the youth had income from government sources – either income assistance, disability, or a post majority agreement with MCFD. Many of them supplemented these monies with panning, busking (playing guitar and singing either alone or in a group) or bottle picking (collecting empty bottles for deposit). Those that panned talked strategy, debating what kinds of signs work the best to gain positive attention and cash:

…you'd be surprised by what happens when you pan…I, I, I used to sign, "Smile if you masturbate, donate if you enjoy it"…You'd be surprised at how, if, if it's so raunchy that people can't help but…The creepy thing is is it's always the really really old, old, old ladies that come up and give you money and you're just like… (Alex, f, 20)

Several had part-time or casual work, picking up jobs moving, cleaning or other manual labour when they needed cash. A number of them had worked entry-level service jobs and some identified exploitation in these jobs:

> …applied for a job at Mac's and the guy was like "no I'm not hiring and I was like "okay, this is my situation. I'm trying to get my life up, could you like – if anything comes up could you give me a call?" and then he's like "oh you know, I'm not um – let me just write up this quick handwritten illegal contract and have you sign it under duress here" which I didn't understand or recognize at the time, that said that I wouldn't take stat pay or holiday or overtime. (Star, m, 23)

Several had also made significant money in the past selling or muling (transporting) drugs but had quit because of violence, of deals gone bad, too much attention from police, their own escalating drug use or concern from family.

Cautious about being judged or stigmatized, a few female youth shared their experiences of working in the sex trade. Some had strong opinions about not crossing a specific line: "I would rather have to go kill somebody for cash than to ever have to whore myself out." (Alex, f, 20) while others were involved in the sex trade in other strategic and possibly supportive ways.

> I ended up being in Rock Bay for a bit. I never sold myself, that was a huge thing for me, but I, was selling people, cause they came to me for protection and offered me a cut and I was like "you are going to do this anyways, and I am happy to make sure you are safe"…"And I know you are not going to listen to me, but you are bribing me with drugs which is also killing my view of this is really wrong, so lets go". [laugh]…I, sort of was in the shadows with a knife ready and I was carrying all their shit…and then one time, the only time that really, someone came over asked how much, she said "how much?" and then pointed at me, I am like, I am not doing shit like this and I am like I walked up to the car leaned in like, sorry I am her pimp. (Phoenix, f, 17)

Again, I make sense of these separations in terms of Copes et al.'s (2008) 'identity boundaries', creating specific "us and them" negotiations where they situate themselves within stigmatized locations of the "sexual, moral and economic boundaries [that are] erected within

various types of sex work hierarchies" (Orchard et al., 2013, p.191). They were making sense of their relationships with stigmatized activities and discrimination, comparing themselves to others in the ways they made money and used substances.

It was only young women who spoke about the sex trade, one of several differences I noted in gender. I have chosen to identify the gender of each participant quotation, as well as age, to demonstrate some of the differences in the interviews. Gender was a fluid construct for some of my participants. Rooster identifies as gender neutral, while two other advisory group members identify as gender queer/trans. Both research from Abramovich (2013) and my own 2014 research in Nuancing the Digital Divide (6% trans/other, 36% GLBTQ, Selfridge, 2016) link the significance of 'outlaw' gender identities and sexuality to the street. In my analysis of gender, I draw from the work of Bourgois, Prince and Moss (2004) that a "sexual objectification and a patriarchal romantic discourse of love and moral worth lead to the misrecognition of gender-power inequities by both the men and women who are embroiled in them" (p.253).

4.2.4 Substance Use

Rabbit hole
I blame myself a lot
Trying to replace the fucking feeling of not having love
Embracing you
Rabbit hole
fucking flailing around like, making a damn fool out of yourself

I had two habits that I had to fucking contribute to now
I tried to not think about her
Just one bowl
I'm trying to quit too so this will be like our little fucking 'that's it', our last bowl
Rabbit hole
if I get out and you're fucking getting high I'm going to kick your ass
Just one bowl

Don't fucking do this anymore dude, it's just gonna get worse

I knew I was high, and they knew I was high, and I didn't want them to see me like that
Rabbit hole
Haggard
when was the last time I ate? Holy fuck, I haven't eaten for a week
Just one bowl
Drugs can be the dumbest thing to do to cope with things, but then sometimes it could be like a life-saver
Rabbit hole
if you do things in moderation you can't really fuck yourself up.
Just one bowl

People that are addicts, like, addiction is a disease, it cripples you
you need to sometimes
Just one bowl
you don't want to do it but you just like end up fucking getting high for some stupid reason.
Rabbit hole
You don't you don't even have a reason for it, you just did it.
It's like a disease dude,
you just can't fight it sometimes
you have to have your mind set to it
Rabbit hole

It's either you fuck up and you can't control yourself and you do the drugs or you control yourself and you don't allow yourself to do the drugs.
Just one bowl
I was angry at myself that I couldn't even figure out why
I tried to not think about her
Rabbit hole

I was trying to cope, angry at myself
Just one bowl
numb yourself from feeling anything.
Even like, fucking responsible for my own actions
Just one bowl
"Oh well I was high I don't know what you're talking about"
I tried to not think about her
Rabbit hole
Embracing you
Just one bowl
(Vincent, m, 22)

Drug and alcohol use was ubiquitous among the youth. They spoke about drugs as they

made sense of their relationships with families and friends. Most of them used marijuana and

many drank regularly: to hang out with friends, pass the time, enjoy themselves or deal with their uncomfortable circumstances. "It's difficult sometimes especially because like I'm, when it's so cold, travellers are like "What are we going to do? We're going to drink to stay warm" or whatever." (Yanna, f, 18)

At the time of the research two youth were heroin users and two were meth users. Others had used meth, crack or heroin regularly in the past. Many of them described using a variety of drugs at different times, going through various phases with them. Marijuana smokers framed themselves as different from youth and others who used "harder drugs" such as crack or meth.

> When I moved here I was just, I was just smoking weed, I was just fucking, a simple hippy and farm kid and then, like nine months later I was, I was just about at the point where I was starting to really smash meth and I was lucky one of my hippy friends saved me. (Tanner, m, 22)

Sometimes connected to the use was the good money that could come from selling it:

> By the time I was 10 years old I was running away from home to go to Vancouver to sell dope and like cocaine…No one expects the cute little girl in pigtails and who, who's gonna suspect that at all? You're walking up and down the block, no one's gonna rob you because you're a little girl…And if you walk up and down there supplying the dope, I just kind of carry it back and forth and hand it out. You make lots of money. (Alex, f, 20)

Or the complicated combinations of relationships, money and grief:

> I was like, living on the street and I bumped into like an old girlfriend of mine and then we like kind of got back together and then like I started like selling drugs and then I started using drugs, she was already using the drugs and then um, she ended up overdosing and dying, um, and then I started smoking heroin because I thought for some stupid reason that I could smoke heroin and not overdose. (Vincent, m, 22)

For those who were no longer using meth, crack or heroin, each had a story of falling, family conflict, or struggles to quit and redemption:

So I think I rebelled quite a bit against that and the people I found myself with, were people that were bitter and angry with whatever reasons they had, and they used quite a bit of drugs. And um, yeah, I found myself down a pretty bad path…Like, it got to the point of meth…Yeah, and uh, yeah it was bad, like I have gone to detox a few times and caused quite a bit of stress on my family…And yeah. I ended up going to a two-month treatment centre twice…Uh I've been, I don't know, I found myself. And I don't know you can't, I am just blessed to be out of it I guess. (Yanna, f, 18)

Substance use surrounds and infiltrates the spaces youth inhabit and they spoke thoughtfully about the "…bad decisions and influences" (Steve, m, 22) in the trajectories of their own and other's use: "If a friend's got something, I'm not, you know, I won't do a lot of it, but I won't be rude and shit like that." (Bruce, m, 24)

Youth described the role of peers, family and others in their circles that influenced them to start using certain drugs and then others who supported their desires to quit or change their patterns of use.

I went to jail and got out and was just like "K I'm not doing dope" and like the whole time I was telling everybody I wasn't gonna come out and do dope and like my big foster brother was in there too and he was like "Good, cause like if I find out you're getting high" he's like "I'm gonna break your arm and that's just cause I love you"…he was like, he's like "good" he's like "I'm gonna be in here for a little bit" he's like "and if I get out and you're fucking getting high I'm going to kick your ass" "K well it won't happen" so, and I haven't gotten high so. (Vincent, m, 22)

They described their friends getting "pulled in," getting skinny and chaotic, and had multiple strategies to stop and support friends from using. Youth described a variety of reasons why people were using substances, thinking within the discourse of addiction as a disease:

Yeah, I don't know, especially being in Victoria seeing the people, uh, that are addicted to meth and heroin and crack. They are not bad people, they are broken people, ya know, and I truly believe that addiction is a disease and it is just something different in your brain. (Yanna, f, 18)

Or in a broader context of relief or respite from trauma and violence they have experienced:

…it was also really good for me because I like to help people and the people you deal with in the middle of the night at Douglas and Yates in a Mac's are people who really need relief – they're in a traumatic state, they're there for one of like 5 reasons. They need something to eat, they need something to drink, their blood sugar's low, they need a smoke, or they're addicted to gambling. So – or coffee. Stimulants too. Sugar, whatever. (Star, m, 23)

Youth paid close attention to people's current mental health and substance use. This vigilance is constant as their lived spaces are filled with reminders of death, of the risks associated with illicit drug use, of mental health crises. As Yanna's (f, 18) narrative shows us, even the mundane tasks of hanging out exposed her to the dangers associated with substance use.

A good reminder

I've been like reading
in the newspaper
all the fentanyl going around
all the deaths
I was eating a hot dog at Cen-ten the other day
they had a candle light service
for the people that had passed
that's a good reminder
and it's scary.

I mean, even this morning at McDonald's
we were having coffee
there was a man
sitting right next to me
had just snorted some fentanyl
falling out of his chair
his friends were asking if he was okay
it's scary stuff
it's a good reminder
to stay away from it
it's sad to see.

These scenarios are reminders, good or bad, to youth about the vulnerability and precarity of their situations, influencing their decisions around substance use. Youth and other street-involved people in Victoria feel targeted and criminalized by police. They report seeing and experiencing unfair and discriminatory policing practices, including abuses of authority based on homelessness or drug use (Herman, 2012). These and other structural violences that enforce unsafe and unknown substance use through the criminalization of people who use substances users adds to their difficult and overwhelming experiences of loss.

4.3.0 Living Online - Accessing Digital Technology While on the Street

Youth live on the streets and on line simultaneously (boyd, 2008a). During our interviews youth would stop talking, interrupted by the vibrations or sounds their cell phones made in order to answer texts or messages. I asked the participants about their cell phones and other digital devices and discovered that for some, their access changed constantly and often chaotically, much like their living situations or relationships with family and friends. Similar to the research literature (Eyrich-Garg, 2011, Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2013, Woelfer & Hendry, 2011), youth described two streams of use. In one stream, youth were finding access to computers at a friend's house or going to places that have computers available to clients or the public. In Victoria, there are computer drop-in spaces including Our Place, Rock Bay Landing, the Alliance Club at Youth Empowerment Society and the public library (GVPL). I saw many of the youth who were sleeping at Out of the Rain at the GVPL regularly and several of them stayed there for hours each day, reading, playing online games, browsing Facebook, and watching videos.

In the second stream youth owned a cell phone, although phones were often misplaced or lost, broken or stolen: "I don't have a phone. I had one when I was homeless but it got stolen." (Star, m, 23). Cell phones and phone technology were traded, gifted and adapted to make it work:

> Yeah I have a cell phone…And I have a SIM card, I just need the adapter…Cause I had a big SIM card, but umm the ex-girlfriend had an iPhone, and my iPhone broke so, I ended up punching my SIM card into the small iPhone with the apple so it could fit into there, but now this one is a bigger one so I need to get the adapter again, so I can put it in that one. (Steve, m, 22).

A steady flow of used technology is available in the unofficial marketplace of Used

Victoria or Craigslist online or traded on street corners:

> People don't realize there's a 'flail sale' all over town and we utilize it. We have better technology than most people that have houses…more or less it means like a head that wants drugs…You give a point of meth he'll give you a laptop. (Alex, f, 20).

Sometimes, there wasn't enough money to pay for the cell phone plans they had bought: "I

don't know cause my phone is going to get cut off soon 'cause I spent all of my food money, or

my phone money on food." (Phoenix, f, 17).

Youth shared their minutes on phones, just as they shared the last drag of a cigarette or

joint, or pooled their panning money to buy pizza, all part of a widespread moral economy of

sharing (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009).

> I have friends who have phones or I'll go to like, I go to Our Place that has computers but I don't, well I used to go on those but, the library…I have a couple friends who have ID so I will be like, I will smoke a joint with you or I will give you a cigarette if you come to the computer lab with me, and just let me use your thing. (Tanner, m, 22)

Youth also shared their strategies for accessing electricity to charge their devices:

"There's one place right in front of 7-11 that's hanging in a tree. So you have to…plug in there

and then you have to stand by the tree and hold your phone up like this" (Steve, m, 22).

While low-barrier, unmonitored, 24-hour electricity may be hard to find, the GVPL has

recently invested in a charging station with at least 8 different kinds of chargers that seems to

be attracting homeless youth. I could consistently find youth there, either on the computers or

napping or reading in the comfortable chairs.

Many youth described using WIFI on their phones to access the Internet as a strategic

way to communicate: "98 percent of the time if I have to talk to someone I'm gonna use

Facebook or I'm gonna use my free texting app." (Michael, m, 18). Although there are some

free WIFI sites in coffee shops like Tim Horton's or at service agencies, many had found a way

onto a secured network:

> Victoria thankfully has Shaw Open everywhere. But, I know a lot of other cities don't have
> that. Shaw's starting to slowly make it like that…And, to use your phone when you have
> no phoning, it's hard to pay for it and all that. It's hard sometimes. Sometimes you have
> to travel to the edge of town and you'll be like "oh hey look, I found WIFI." And then
> message someone and then walk all the way back over. Then you got to find a new spot
> for WIFI. Sometimes it's just a big hassle. (Steve, m, 22)

Although accessing WIFI could be difficult, the benefits of this new capacity to

communicate to friends and family was obvious to Hannah (f, 25), who has a network of old

and new friends across the country:

> Oh yeah it is so different because when people, you can get Internet access anywhere,
> and then you can find out where your buddies are. You know, whether they are just
> hopped out of a train, or on the side of the road with their data plan [laugh] and their
> iPhone, they can still, like, "K here!"…there is a younger generation of travellers and that
> have been, um, in the Internet… they haven't traveled without it, and I think…it allows
> them to do that and meet up with everybody. Yeah, cause we right now have this stream
> of 8-10 people, of people we were just traveling together just a few months ago in the
> Okanagan. And someone made a group message and a whole whack of us, because we all
> parted ways so this way it allows us to, like, wherever we are be like: "Oh I'm over here!
> Or I'm here, OK let's meet up here!"…it is pretty cool.

When people were in closer proximity they often used a variety of modes,

communicating both in online and offline worlds. Alex (f, 20) describes the way she keeps tabs

on her 'street kids:' "I do text them, and I do message them on Facebook to come

hangout…Um, either that or I run into them when I'm out and about."

Several of the youth commented on the small-town quality of communicating in

Victoria: "if you come here you are going to go downtown and eventually within that same day

you are going to run into each other. It just always happens. You don't need like any cellular

device or anything" (Steve, m, 22). Youth appreciated the simplicity of word of mouth to find

others that were spending a lot of time outside in public spaces: "It's pretty easy to find where everyone is downtown though…Just got to walk down the street and be like "See that hobo? You seen this hobo?" "Ya, he's over there." (Alex, f, 20). It privileges a 'live in the moment' attitude, stepping outside of societal expectations to focus on talking and being with friends:

> I felt really free too, there's a lot of freedom in, in being in that state after, especially when you, you think that you have to be part of a system and realizing that I don't have to do fucking anything. I can wake up under a bush and I can go, go get my morning beer and just chill and chat with my friends all fucking day in these bushes, just to do nothing but leave and to grab more beer, so we can talk more." (Rooster, gn, 26)

Bruce regards this need to connect as something larger than access to new technologies:

> I mean, it's trippy because that sort of connection I'm sure has existed for thousands if not millions of years and it almost seems like, the, the newness of Facebook makes it seem like, like this is a new idea, but in reality it's probably been a very human thing for people to be constantly connected to each other. (m, 24)

What new technologies do provide are ways to keep connected to people when those relationships are difficult, fractured, exhausting, even dangerous:

> Social media is great because you can keep in contact with people without actually having to ever have a relationship with them right. I mean it sounds really bad to say but you know. Sometimes it's just like you care about someone but you can't stand them and or you care about someone but you have emotions right…or…you need to keep up to date with current events and you want to stay active. (Marta, f, 20)

It also potentially provides a larger network of people to reach out to, especially when no one locally is available:

> …it is a good source of contact cause when people get on it's like you always know someone is on Facebook to talk to…There is always someone it doesn't matter if it's like five in the morning, two in the morning, twelve in the afternoon there is always someone on Facebook sadly enough. (Tanner, m, 22)

Youth consistently used social networking sites like Facebook and texting to communicate with people around them. They strategically found ways to access, even while homeless and

with very little money or other resources. These strategies directly relate to the quality of

context of relationships in their lives.

4.4.0 Nurturing and Managing Relationships: "Sometimes you have to burn bridges to stop yourself from crossing them again"

4.4.1 Relationships with Family

Research with street-involved youth indicates that most have difficult relationships with family (Gaetz, 2013, Winland, 2013). "Youth are thrown out of or run from abusive and chaotic family backgrounds to a life away from family characterized by poor mental and physical health, substance use, victimization, and criminality" (Kidd, 2011, p.757). I have chosen to represent this aspect of my research findings in a series of found poems that describe various and deeply profound ways youth make sense of their relationships with their parents. By using their own words, I capture how youth recognized the complexity of parenting in challenging circumstances, sometimes seeing similarities between themselves and their parents.

He calls me a con artist.
I don't think I was
he's just…
you know about interferon treatment
Hepatitis C right…
there was no serotonin left in his brain
So he was angry
erratic
I was there
I got kicked out
really angry and hurt
you know
I've been kicked out
everywhere I've ever been
my entire life.

She must have hated me
just a little bit, right
I was smoking pot
I'm just gonna put you in there.
But
I think it wasn't her intention,

I don't think she's that cruel
she might be kind of fucking flaky
always running away
giving up
throwing people away

Maybe I taught them something
Maybe I had a purpose, you know…
I wasn't just
an accident
that made their life shitty.
(Marta, f, 20)

My family has always been there for me
they've helped me survive
my friends have not had that
that place to go to
those open arms
my mum has never kicked me out
no matter
the horrible shit I've done to her
she's never disowned me
I don't think I would be here
if I didn't have that.

Things get in the way
under the influence
it's really hard
with your parents
and stuff
There's been times
I didn't come home for a long time
I didn't need to
I found other ways
to make amends
(Hannah, f, 25)

this is the thing
my mom is dating a guy
an alright dude
but
a bit of an alcoholic
a coke head

um
it's definitely a thing
it feels to me
his own insecurities
cause my mom
to pressure me
she knows that I'm capable
of handling immaturity
he says some things
I kind of have to abide
she wants to be in a relationship
he treats her
like
well enough   (Bruce, m, 24)

I honestly hate living with my mom
We're totally fine when I don't live there
But when I live there
it's just not okay
she's always been a bit bonkers
She's had a
very very very
rough life
me and her
we're a lot alike
We butt heads
I can't say
I haven't instigated
some of the problems
Like, granted
when I was younger
there were times
I had to defend myself
but
there were definitely times
she had to defend herself
because
puberty, bipolar and drugs don't mix

It was kind of hard with my dad
cause he wasn't really around
when I was little
But when I became a teenager
after my parents
divorced

he was more of a friend
I could go and hang out with him
we'd spend hours just playing
video games
talking to each other
smokin' weed
And it really helped me
get through a lot
when I was young.
He always had a lot of
problems
like me and him,
we're a lot alike
We both
uh,
have manic bipolar,
um,
and paranoid schizophrenia
He fought with his
demons
for a really long time
he always felt like a
loser
I watched him injure himself
when I was eight years old
He put his
head
through a wall

And
something in me told me
I need to call my mom.
I went to the library
made them let me in
It was closed
Luckily the security guard
at the time
was really nice
he let me in
let me use his cell phone
I called home
my Nana answered
"Your mom's not here
She's been out looking for you"

she hadn't heard from me
in months
So course she's worried
as fuck
I call her cell phone and
she answers
"I'm by the bar right now"
I caught a cab
I paid for it
luckily
At the time
I had a bit of money
she ended up giving me
the money
back
She sat there
cried
frickin' held each other
in the smoke pit
looking like retards
We hadn't talked
since the funeral
seven months before
So, it was good
"I don't care. Come home
Just come home
I want you to be okay
Just come home"
And I was like
"Fuck
Fine"
I honestly hate living with my mom
We're totally fine when I don't live there
(Alex, f, 20)

My grades started slipping
I couldn't take notes in class.
When you're a kid
near the teacher,
kinda sit by the board
she's like
"why don't you get glasses"
and I'm like
"what am I supposed to tell you?

My dad's
fucking
ashamed
of being poor
he has the emotional intelligence
of a two-year-old."
You don't have
the skills or knowledge
to say that
as a kid
so you just
internalize it all.
(Star, m, 23)

I used to be
in my mom's eye
a wonderful little angel child
couldn't do anything wrong
Then I turned six and
that all changed.
My mom got a lot stricter
A lot quicker

I was a
destructive
little kid
there was one point
my mom actually thought
I went clinically
bonkers
I was about four

My mom doesn't mind
if we stay up all night
eat junk food and
watch movies or something

I literally said
"I was messing around
with a piece of mirror
I found
And I was tossing it
and it cut me
then I decided to keep tossing it

and it cut me again"
But my mom didn't exactly buy it
she knew I wasn't going to
tell her

my mom came
looked at me
just said
"Look, I understand
what's going on for you.
I don't know the
exact
circumstances
it's been a long time
since this has happened to me,
but I do understand
how you're feeling right now"

it was a lot to handle
my mom ended up
finding out and
instantly put a stop to it
tried
she was
wanting
a restraining order
at one point because
he and I would hangout
he would get sick
or in trouble
or something
she'd always worry
"My kid can't be doing this"

sometimes I'll have a song
that makes me
remember my mom
because
my mom is
always there to help me

often times
I look to my mom for guidance
it can be in

many different ways.
it can be simply projecting it out
Just saying
"Look mom
I could really
talk to you
right now"
you can literally feel them
noticing that
trying to send you
some kind of
confirmation.

Recently I tried
texting her.
She hasn't answered back.
(Mark, m, 15)

4.4.2 Tethered - Relationships with Family through Technology

The interactions that youth described with their parents and other family are

significantly mediated through social media and digital technology, in what Sherri Turkle (2011)

calls 'tethered' relationships. Turkle is concerned that by always having digital access to

parents, youth do not learn to count on themselves. However, the tethered nature of street-

involved youths' connections to their parents was often frayed or even disconnected. Most of

the youth I interviewed regularly faced incredibly stressful and difficult decisions alone, without

help or guidance from family. When they did connect with parents for support it had mixed

results. Willow (f, 16) appreciates the regular Facebook messages she gets from her nana that

help her navigate the toxic relationship she has with her dad and step mum. Jazmin (f, 18) sees

her mother as her strongest support in her life, although she isn't sure how to tell her about

how she is making money these days, afraid her mum might tell others. Although they chat

through Facebook regularly, I wonder how much of what Jazmin shared with me of recent

deaths in her community at AVI, getting picked up by police and trying to navigate safety in

escort agencies versus street-based sex work she actually tells her mum. Crystal (f, 16) rolls her

eyes at her estranged father's public messages of support on her Facebook wall posts. "I told

him I don't want him in my life" she says, questioning his motives of complimenting her looks,

telling her he loves her "to the moon and back." She shakes her head and says: "he came to

Victoria once and he overdosed and was like- they found him blue in the street. He didn't even

come and see me first."

Some parents have played a very active role in teaching about privacy and security or

etiquette online, sometimes heavily policing youth's online presence:

> She didn't allow me to have it until I was like 16 I think. I remember her showing me the
> ropes…Oh ya she had my password and everything, like ya, ya. She was like "any swears
> and you lose Facebook for the rest of your life" blah blah blah. So ya…Uh, I think it was
> honestly up until like, 17, or 17 and a half that she like knew my, my passwords, um, ya I
> remember making like a fake Facebook and like blocking all family and family and friends
> so I could just like have my messages and have like that safety but I think it was actually at
> like detox oddly enough that somebody said like "You know she's older, you need to,
> she's just gonna rebel more if you have all her passwords" like "you shouldn't be reading
> through her messages and stuff". (Yanna, f, 18)

Other youth were actively teaching their parents, foster parents and grandparents to

use digital technologies and witnessing what it looked like when parents were exploring online

worlds:

> Yeah my dad just started using Facebook this year and it is the funniest thing ever. Like,
> it's like the year of my dad leaving the "80's. He cut off his mullet and he joined
> Facebook…Yeah, I couldn't believe that he was. So, he goes. He like phones me up to tell
> me that he is going to join Facebook and I'm like, "ok that is cool! Have fun joining
> Facebook!" and now he sends me cat memes and shit. Could you catch up with the rest
> on the Internet already? (Gretchen, f, 26)

Many of the youth now interacted with parents on Facebook and had to navigate their relationships through this space as well. Yanna (f, 18) attempts to present a healthy, fun version of herself to her mum:

> …she worries quite a bit, so…basically I try to tell her and show her like what I have been up to. And just be like, I mean it has been difficult, since being in Victoria because there is really not a whole lot to do. Umm but, I usually just, you know, show her pictures of the hikes that I have been on and tell her about the people that I meet. Um, just yeah there are always stories to tell.

Although Yanna describes her efforts to create a version of herself for her mother's view, Bruce understood how his family's comments were informing a co-creation of identity, a collaborative self (McNeill, 2012, van Doorn, 2011, Van House, 2011) that did not match with the cool and edgy version he wanted to portray:

> …my grandma does. She's on Facebook like all the time [laughs]…Ya, uh actually I might have blocked her since cause her, k, she and my aunt, every single time I post something on Facebook, they like it [laughs]…that's why I don't do creative things on Facebook anymore, cause I try to be like edgy creative and they'll just be like, they'll just be like "Love you sweetie" and it's like, huh, like, like I, "I love you too", but I'm trying to do some…you know what I mean [laughs]…and I love her. I think about her all the time and everything, but it's like…I have an image to keep [laughs]. (Bruce, m, 24)

Although this representation can be monitored, tweaked and deleted it still may feel as if a social networking site user's representation is not entirely under his or her control. The collaborative self imagined by boyd (2008b) is created in the networked world where images taken and comments made four years ago are still available to potentially invisible audiences. Gershon (2011) highlights the ambiguity of many interactions. Is this intended as a dyadic exchange or to be widely disseminated? A conversation between two users may be posted in a way where many can view the exchange and contribute, even months or years later.

Willow (f, 16) shrugs her shoulders when I ask about a series of public messages I found from her mom and aunt after she posted song lyrics last year: "reaching out but no one's there. Falling fast like they don't care." I asked her:

And your mom says "reaching out to who? Your family is all here to help your when you ask for it and need it. We are just waiting on you. You have to want it too. Love you." And your grandma also reached out: "I asked you to reach out every day to me"…[aunt] said "get your head out of your ass and make a change. Also, the street is your choice. You had lots of other options. You choose to screw up what we offered you."

She isn't really interested in discussing it, and simply says she rarely talks to some parts of her family now, "I don't know. I just don't really like to talk to people anymore. I kind of pushed people out of my life completely." Digital parenting in the form of online public forums, like Facebook walls may further isolate youth like Willow (f, 16), rather than create opportunities for support. The visibility of difficult relationships online may further stigmatize youth as their family dramas are on display for the audience of their online community, complicating what Turkle (2011) imagined within tethered relationships.

4.4.3 Relationships with Friends

Ida (f, 21) looks through her photos with me that she has saved on her Facebook profile and pauses on an image taken six years earlier of feet placed in a circle. Friends, out one night at Beacon Hill Park on an adventure had decided to capture that moment of comradery. "That's like everybody downtown" she says, as we read the comments of people reminiscing about that night years later. She no longer hangs out downtown regularly and has just described an old friend's attempt to stir up trouble through texts:

Ya, she's like "So you're dating [I] again?" and it's like "What the f*? It's not your business bitch. Like it's really none of your business"…she's a f*ing creep…it's just like "Leave me the f* alone" like we had this massive fight, she accused me of stealing and I f*ing lost it on her, I was like "Go the f* away" so, she we haven't talked for like f*ing, I don't know,

since like for like a year maybe….And now she's like f*ing trying to get into my business and shit.

Youths' relationships with friends and lovers are one more aspect of the fractured and stressful nature of their lives. As Ida's (f, 21) quote describes, these relationships are complex and extreme, both difficult and supportive, passionate, heart-breaking, mercurial, loaded, deeply felt and diverse. Some youth described multiple groups of people they hung out with regularly, going on adventures, hanging out downtown, meeting up while travelling. Others had fewer friends and struggled to trust those around them: "And I've always had a problem making friends and getting close to people due to my issues. So, there's a, there're a few people I actually closely connect to and I'm able to open up completely" (Alex, f, 20).

Youths' relationships with friends regularly took up space in both online and offline worlds. Three friends decided to meet with me one after the other and they sent multiple messages back and forth as they planned where to find each other once the interviews were finished. They spend time together in an alcove by the water, occasionally smoking pot if they have it, just hanging out. They described sending up to 50 texts a day to one another when they are apart.

When we spent time looking through Yanna's (f, 18) more than 600 Facebook friends she described the group as a combination of close and extended family, most of her high school class mates in her small hometown, work mates, friends met travelling on the road, youth from treatment, and new friends made since she'd been in Victoria. She regularly spoke to only a few of these friends through Facebook messenger and preferred to play music and talk in person with those around her.

About a third of the participants were currently in an intimate/sexual relationship and several of those relationships changed between our first and second interviews. Their courtships took place within the context of being homeless:

> She was with this guy. They were together for like two months, three months, but apparently he was beating her and stuff. That's why she just wanted to hang out because she wanted someone to talk with. And, we were hanging out and hanging out and hanging out, and then, "let's go on a date, let's watch a movie." "Okay." Couple more dates, then she moved all her stuff out and I grabbed a tent. "Well, if anything you can tent it with me." She's like "done." So, she put her stuff in storage and she's been tenting with me for like 3 months. (Steve, m, 22)

Relationships can accelerate quickly when homeless:

> I think we're like together and are gonna travel together until we don't want to travel together [laughs] but um, ya I don't know. It's tough when uh, you do travel because it's not like when you start dating somebody you can just see them a little bit and you get to know them slowly, it's like, you're living with them…and that's the person you're waking up to every morning and they're the last person you're seeing at night, so, ya, it's tough you like, you really get to know them quite quickly. (Yanna, f, 18)

Relationships provide safety in the risky and precarious situations in which youth found themselves:

> I know he has my back like, we've talked about it before, like I always sit in the front seat, uh, when a car picks us up, just in case like he did try something he could be in the back to do something about it. (Yanna, f, 18).

Relationships also supported new beginnings and new ways of being in community:

> His energy is like really good, like I am used to being around a lot of like drug addicts and like people that aren't like very positive, they are kinda down in their life…Before I was like by myself every day, kinda just weaving through everything, like floating around from people to people. Just like, kinda just like not really finding like steady people, or like not necessarily healthy people to surround myself with. But now that I am with [bf], like I am also meeting a lot of positive people and like some really cool travellers, like people that have been like everywhere, like have done all these amazing things, with all these really cool stories. (Crystal, f, 16)

4.4.4 Street Family

Youth described various versions of street families in our discussions. Older

members provided an initiation to street life:

> Him and [name] were the first bums that I ever, or yeah, the first home bums that I ever
> hung out with…and that is who I got my initiation on the street with was like sleeping
> outside with them and them being like, really kind and loving to me. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Multi-generational street families that included birth parents often added to the stress

of their lives, as complicated histories, money and business mixed with the desire for

connection and love. Vincent (m, 22) shook his head in disgust at the shady business practices

of his girlfriend's dad:

> [GF] was trying to replace that feeling of like not getting love from her father cause like
> she would talk about him like crazy. When he was in jail…she would talk about him like he
> was a super hero.

Some youth felt love and connection in their chosen street family that took care of them:

> But, yet a lot of these people down here on Victoria's streets actually were the people
> that raised me…And I believe they did a beautiful job…they all protected me. They all put
> me through school, just like the crack – crack dealer did. Um, I remember being in
> grade…8, I remember coming down Pandora and I was so paranoid. I was like, "Oh my
> god, I'm gonna fail my test. I'm gonna fail my math test!" And my friends would be like,
> "Give me that book! Let's sit down. Teach me!" They totally knew the answers to the
> questions, right? Like, themselves, but they'd still like quiz me on it. Right? So it was so
> funny, cause like, um, all these regular people would be walking past all like the addicts,
> right, giving us all dirty looks, but also looking at us like, "Are they doing math? On the
> side of the corner? Are they really – are they doing math? What?" (Dawn, f, 21)

Dawn points out how everyday family life is being lived out in the visible and exposed

spaces of the street, that the stigmatized experiences of "dirty looks" are contrasted with the

care and attention they receive from others who live on the streets. These street families

change as youth themselves are taking on caretaking roles:

I have what I call my children…Um, they're various like 14,15,16 year olds…That have been homeless, I've gotten them clean off meth. …I knew their older siblings when I was home schooled with them so now that they've all had their various shitty situations to go through…And now, I take care of them as much as I can because they've all been tossed through foster care and now they're out on the streets so it's like, my family wasn't always able to be there for me but if I can do anything I want to be there for the kids I care about, like, these were kids that I, I held them as babies…And now they're teenagers and, I can't let them do that…Cause, it just doesn't seem right. (Alex, f, 20)

Alex signals how she tries to support and encourage her 'children,' attempting to create connection and protect them from the difficulties they have endured, making links to her own experiences of growing up.

4.5.0 It's Dangerous Out There: Strategies to Keep Safe

Part of the precarious and vulnerable aspect of their lives on the street is the level of

danger they experienced and violence they witnessed. "He got beat up at Tent City...Some guy

took a hammer to his face a couple times and beat up his buddy too" (Steve, m, 22). "...It's like I

always think someone is going to just grab a knife and just stab me...It could be because I have

seen a lot of people get stabbed in my life" (Xavier, m, 22). Youth understood part of this

violence as related to substance use:

> I decided to try meth and next thing you know...I was like totally flailed out, and then
> some tweaker followed me out of the apartment that I was in, and like, "Oh, can you cash
> this cheque for me?", "Yeah" so went to the bank...Well my card doesn't work. And she
> just steals my backpack, which had all of my ID, my laptop, all of my equipment" (Marta,
> f, 20).

Stories of violence circulated through their communities making them feel unsafe:

> There's some really stupid stuff. There's a lot of people out here, like, there's already
> been like what, seven stabbings in front of AVI in the past like three months. ...Like I
> honestly think people are just going straight up crazy...It's just the past little while I've
> noticed that people are tripped out, like there's been way more stabbings. (Alex, f, 20)

Whether all of the acts of violence had actually occurred, street gossip helped spread stories

that further inflated risk and stress.

Several participants had already experienced violence in their intimate relationships in

the past:

> My ex-boyfriend beat the shit out of me...I got my head caught in between the door when
> he was trying to, like, hold me inside. It was really bad...It was awful. So then...I had to call
> the cops on him. And...give them my statement. And then after I did that, I didn't want to.
> And I wanted to take it back because I didn't want to get him in trouble because I felt
> really bad and it was too late. They said that they were already charging him because it's
> not up to me anymore...So I feel really bad for him, but he shouldn't have done that to
> me. (Oriel, f, 21)

Destructive actions happened through messages online as well as in person. Ida (f, 21)

spent much of her time with me scrutinizing her boyfriend's Facebook profile and messages,

trying to determine if he might be lying about where he was or describing dramas that erupted

on their feeds:

> I don't know, I say random stuff on Facebook...my son's cousin says "Good morning beautiful". Fucking blown up, [BF] just fucking lost it. He was like, ya fucking guy's telling you that you're beautiful and shit and I'm just like "Ya, that's my son's cousin" but like no, [laughs]."

Her boyfriend's jealousy about compliments from a relative is just one example of online drama

in relationships that was consistent with many of the youth:

> Because I would be posting stuff to my buddies. "Oh yeah, blah blah blah, why haven't you been out?" "Because the woman's starting drama with me." I'm like "I'd love to come up but I'm getting my head chewed off right now. I'll talk to you in a little bit." And then she'd post on that "blah blah blah blah. Maybe you should hear both sides of the story." And then I'd go underneath, "look, now she's chewing your head out too. LOL." Just stuff like this. Like, I'm talking to my friend you don't need to come put your two cents in, and blow up on our page. Just stuff like that. Very controlling. If I put something on, she'd have to put something else on there too. (Steve, m, 22)

Drama that circulated from conversations starting online could have serious consequences face

to face:

> Oh ya, people, people are dumb and rude...over Facebook because they seem to think that you can talk all this smack over Facebook and you're not gonna to see the person in real life, you are going to see the person in real life, then you're fucked. (Alex, f, 20)

Or moved back and forth between online and offline worlds, making both spheres uncertain

and full of harms:

> ...people verbally abusing each other, people hitting on each other, I have had people tag me in pretty awful shit. I have had people message me over Facebook calling me mutt, on my birthday actually a couple years ago. My ex on my sixteenth birthday he messaged me calling me mutt, whore, res rat, and trailer trash, on my birthday...And then his younger brother raped me the next day...Shit happens, everything happens for a reason, to either

destroy us or make us stronger, usually make us stronger cause things that feel like they are destroying us, make us stronger in the end. (Phoenix, f, 17)

The dangers sometimes became stories of wild adventure and risk that showed some foolhardy

bravery and spirit:

I just got a really sketchy ride from this drunk driver that I thought was going to Abbotsford, but then he decided, "Oh I have to sleep. I'm going to take some pain pills" so he starts passing out on the road. And…and so I'm trying to talk to him, like keep him going and stuff, but he's like creeping on me, "You should be my girlfriend" all this stuff. "Oh, I could force you to do all this stuff with me, but then I don't think you'd respect me very much after", I was like, "Yeah, well obviously. Keep going man, get to freaking Edmonton." But he pops pain pills, so he starts falling asleep at the wheel. And, you know, he pulls over on the side and he hits black ice and there's a semi in front of us, and we start skidding and we literally come inches away from freaking hitting the semi in front of us. But then he grabs the wheel and jerks it off to the side and we literally just made it…I got out, in Edmonton. I was like, "Drive me to West Edmonton mall, man". Well it was seven a.m. in the morning by the time that I got into Edmonton. I mean, I left at nine and got there at seven and it was pretty crazy. It was definitely pretty crazy. I ended up knowing a whole bunch of people there, ironically. Got a tattoo, learned how to play Nirvana. Freaking…rode a roller coaster. (Marta, f, 20)

The women I interviewed signal that they have grown more powerful from their experiences

with violence. Phoenix tells me proudly of her masculinized physical strength:

Don't underestimate looks, I can take on, I have wrestled guys in the military and won…Cause I have a friend that is in the military and he came back for the winter break…And we met up and I fuck'n beat him but I am like, "hah, what do you guys fuck'n do all day, play dolls"…Especially if I have my doc martens on, they are a nice kick. One kick I can make a dent in those big garbage cans, you know those big bins downtown the green ones…I did a kick and I made a dent this big. (Phoenix, f, 17)

Creating a persona of tough-guy was one of several strategies youth, especially the

women, talked about to stay safe. Women carried weapons such as knives, and kept alert to

the situations around them. They strategically hung out and travelled with men or dogs, and

avoided being alone. Youth camped together and hung out in groups so someone was always

there to watch their stuff and to reduce the risks of being robbed. Sometimes they just held on

tight for the ride, using their wits and intuition to get through.

Youth also had a variety of strategies to deal with online dangers, such as changing

privacy settings, blocking people: "I have at least 50-100 people blocked on my Facebook"

(Willow, f, 16) or screening new friend requests: "I don't normally add anybody that I don't

know" (Gary, m, 20). When drama starts to erupt online they delete messages to shut down

bullies and get rid of recorded evidence:

> ...at one point she's like, "You're just a slimy downtown kid". I'm like, "Correct. I am a
> downtown kid. Slimy? Pretty sure I have skin that doesn't produce slime. And also, could
> you just stop with the bullshit?" goes on and on...It was publicly. And then I deleted all of
> her stuff....I don't need people seeing this kind of drama and I don't need to see it every
> time I open up this thing. So you know what? Bye-bye. (Mark, m, 15)

Phoenix (f, 17) hides the drama by posting and sharing multiple times a day so that

negative comments are lost in a sea of other images and ideas while others simply ignore it:

> One bad thing like it can lead to people talking shit about other people and rumors and,
> like bullying...It happens...I just um, ignore it or just try and like figure out why they're
> talking shit about me or like you know what it mean...But usually I just try and ignore it
> and like move on with your life and...I don't know. There's nothing like you can really do
> about it. (Jazmin, f, 18)

4.6.0 Summary

This chapter has explored the spaces of homelessness, the precarious and stigmatized lived experiences of the street-involved youth I met in my research, both on and offline. It has identified the normal, everyday, routine aspects of living close to the streets; getting things done, finding food and eating, sleeping, brushing teeth, hanging out with friends and killing time, doing creative projects within these unstable and sometimes negative and violent realities. Youth have developed a wide variety of strategies to live in the spaces they have been given or forced into when they haven't fit in. This includes accessing digital technologies and social media wherever and whenever they can: to relieve boredom, search out information, to communicate and meet up with local friends and stay connected with people far away. The ways that they negotiate the deaths of friends and others is profoundly affected by the precarious, unstable and stigmatized spaces they find themselves inhabiting. In this chapter I have demonstrated that youth maintain a high level of stress and vigilance from the complex and difficult relationships they have and the traumatic circumstances they have endured. These relationships both provide support when people die, and/or further complicate their grieving, taking up time in conflict, blaming, shame. Everyday violence can shrink the time and energy that grieving a death takes up, overwhelmed by attempting to stay safe or flourish a sense of insecurity into all aspects of life. For some, the street seems like the best place to be in grief, surrounded by others who somehow understand, who will distract and entertain, to simply be present as they navigate the difficult realities of loss and pain.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Experiences and Understandings of Grief and Loss for Street-involved Youth

5.1.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe how I used several strategies to think about the experiences and understandings of grief and loss for the participants. First, I explore the stories of the deaths, the narratives of what youth chose to share when I asked them about a death in their life. Found poems, created from their transcripts into concise and evocative narratives of deaths support the exploration of themes. These themes include the ruptures of finding out (mediated through technology), learning about how death and grief works, the loss of future possible realities, blame and regret of self and others, and youth's perception that they had to be strong to protect and take care of others. I argue that throughout their narratives, youth position themselves as moral beings and actors talking about and making sense of death through hierarchies of values and decisions, and framing the death as an opportunity to explore how they want to be in the world or how the world should be. This vision of street-involved youth actively experimenting in the *moral laboratory* (Mattingly, 2013) of the street and the moral predicaments they faced when grieving challenges the social stereotypes of street-involved youth as delinquent, loners, dysfunctional, refusing to 'grow up' and 'be responsible.' Through my interviews and interactions, the messages about how to live emerged in youths' stories about how one dies.

Second, I review and reflect on youths' answers to specific questions about grief to explore key findings of their understandings of grief, including the bodily experience of grief. I argue that even though youth often see themselves as outsiders from "regular society" they

have taken up a normative discourse of a "grieving subject" in their language and stories. This is a discourse of progress that includes stages and tasks and the understanding that to grieve is to do work.

Third, I discuss how youth attempt to make sense of loss, to make meaning of the deaths they had experienced. In this chapter the term "making meaning" is used in several ways. In a broader sense, by using a narrative methodology in this research, it is understood that youths' narratives are "meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, or organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (Chase, 2011, p.421). In addition, grief theorists pay special attention to the concept of making meaning, where grieving individuals are viewed to either assimilate the loss experience in to their pre-loss beliefs or "attempt to accommodate to the loss by reorganizing, deepening, or expanding their beliefs and self-narrative to embrace the reality of the loss" (Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay, & van Dyke Stringer, 2010, p.73). While I hesitate to use the term 'embrace' to describe the ways youth spoke about the realities of the loss, several youth spoke in ways that demonstrated an attempt to resolve "the incongruence between the reality of the loss and one's sense of meaning" (Neimeyer et al., 2010, 73).

Youth were searching for answers to larger existential questions that many people face in difficult circumstances: is this really what life is? Why did this person die? Why now? How can I understand how so much has been heaped upon me? How does one respond in this situation? How can I live without this person?

Fourth, this chapter discusses the practices and strategies in which youth are taking care

of themselves and others; the ways they cope, including the use of drugs and alcohol and how

they use ritual and mourning practices. The ways street-involved youth make sense of death

brings to the fore trauma and pain in their lives. At the same time this sense-making highlights

the intensity of their relationships and desire to care and be cared for, and to honour those that

have died. This discussion is extended in chapter 6 when I turn to the ways social media and

digital technology are used in these efforts.

The previous chapter employed the term "precarity" to understand the reality of life on

the street and youths' access to technologies. I argue that the circumstances of many of the

deaths youth experienced, including the senseless violence and trauma associated with some

deaths adds to and works to enforce precarity in their lives. Precarity is not only the fall out of

"failing social and economic supports" in the neoliberal agenda that heightens "risk of disease,

poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection" (Butler,

2009, ii) but the "instability, ambiguity, uncertainty, and the social suffering that follows suit"

(Dolson, 2015, p.117). Precarity is closely related to instability, vulnerability and uncertainty in

that street-involved youth are particularly "subject to limits to what we can control, outcomes

we cannot predict, and deep dangers that are ever present" **(**Kleinman, 2006, p.121). This

vulnerability is expressed in the places and spaces they choose to grieve and the rituals that

they use to mark the passing and passage of time. Sometimes shunned from family of the

deceased, or without private spaces to mourn, their expressions of grief are exposed and

sometimes criminalized. When I asked how grieving while living close to the streets was

different than when housed youth made direct connections to witnessing the risks associated

with substance use:

> I think that the way that you perceive life and death is very different if you've experienced
> [homelessness]. Number one, just like if you live on the street you've seen people OD,
> you've seen people…that is something a guarantee. Within a couple of years if you
> haven't, if you haven't [laughing] watched someone OD you ain't doin' it right! (Rooster,
> gn, 26)

The current influx of Fentanyl into street drugs resulted in an overwhelming 978

overdose deaths in BC in 2016 (BC Coroner's Service, 2017). Situations like overdoses and

violent deaths have a huge impact on the street community, adding to an already stress-filled

environment:

> Yeah, it started a really big thing, like down here, and like everybody was upset.
> Everybody was on edge. Everybody was depressed, hysterical, fucking…it's almost
> like all the crazy people swapped sides with all the normal-minded people. And all
> the normal-minded people went crazy for a while. (Dawn, f, 19)

Youth recognized that death and the associated grief affected almost all of those who

lived on the streets: "Especially with um, traveling and homeless people too, um, they are

people with sad stories usually, even travelers, everybody's got their little bit of brokenness

inside them…And ya, most of them have lost somebody pretty damn close to them" (Yanna, f,

18).

My hope is to make clear how normal it is to grieve in a variety of ways and that street-

involved youth have normal reactions to grief: feeling angry, unable to focus, reaching out to

people around them for connection and comfort. I argue that the ongoing precarity of their

lives both prepare and compromise their capacities to endure, celebrate and mourn the deaths.

Their own life circumstances at the time of the deaths make for dangerous, confusing grieving

practices or provide little time or space to grieve in the midst of their day to day lives. Drugs

and alcohol take up a huge place in this grief, both in strategies for making it through the day to day, in celebrations, in finding connection and camaraderie, and in numbing the pain of loss or dampening down anxiety and panic that are legacies of traumatizing experiences. For many, the stakes are high: their lives are surveilled by police and child protective services, there is violence in their daily lives and in their relationships and the substance use around them is risky and relentless.

> Grief means, it's just such a hard, a difficult thing to navigate with people because people have such a huge fear over death that [silence] and like, especially in like, the street community it is weird because we just, we do expect it to a certain degree which is kind of unfortunate [laugh] but it's like, it is an expectation and I notice that a lot of people that I know, it's like there is a very realistic, if you will, view of what death is, you know it's like. There are some people that I talk to that I, it's hard for me to talk to them about death because I have a lot of respect for it and shit, but they are just like "fuck it happens" you know, it's like "it's nothing I even register" it's like "that happened, now it didn't happen" you know. There is such a disconnect from it. (Rooster, gn, 26)

The relentless nature and number of deaths for some in the street community mean that they have learned to shut down completely when faced with numerous deaths. As Rooster explains above, the sheer volume of deaths and the precarious and vulnerable circumstances youth inhabit mean there may be no space left for them to grieve, both physically or attempting to access the resources they have within.

5.2.0 Exploring the Narratives of Death

In this section and throughout the chapter I highlight three dimensions that I identified in many of the interviews that informed this chapter. These are Ruptures (breaks and disruptions), Transformations (radical changes) and Resignations/Revelations (new accommodations or understandings of the world) related to the experiences of death.

Briefly, a death first represents a rupture in even the most chaotic kind of life. Whether it is captured in the moment of finding out, or the changes in relationships, home or sense of safety and routine in the world, death is a rupture in how we know the world. It is a moment where the unexpected can happen, where the people we thought were "going to make it" or be there to support us are no longer here to shore up a certain way of seeing the future, and how we see our place in the world dramatically changes.

Second, death represents a transformation. For some youth, the deaths have led to meaning making of transformation and change, where they are profoundly shifted in the way they think about, interact with, and understand the world as a result of a death. For some, this transformation has continued as more and more deaths are layered on. For others, the reasons for transformations may be more squarely placed on other experiences of loss or other situations.

Third, youth had a variety of profound and revelatory things to say about why death happens, why the world works as it does, and how they were making their way through it. Sometimes their comments seemed like a resignation, an awareness that the ways humans act in the world are sometimes spiteful or ignorant, that there doesn't seem to be a larger picture that ties it all together. Other times, youth identified inspiring ways that loss connects humans

closer together, and brings deeper meaning to our lives, a revelation that sees the entwining of deep sorrow and beauty.

These three dimensions, Ruptures, Transformations and Resignations/Revelations provide ways to explore what is it that death enables for youth, for myself and for my readers. To sit with some of the most difficult experiences humans can have allows us to think about, as Kleinman (2006) writes, what really matters. In the next section, I introduce the people who died that youth talked about and then move in to exploring the themes around grief that were found within youths' narratives.

5.2.1 The People Who Died:

Michael (m,18) and I settle ourselves in the private phone room next to the busy front desk at AVI where people arrive to get harm reduction supplies. He rifles through his bag and plugs his phone in to charge. After the paperwork and telling him about the project I ask if he could share a story of someone in his life who died. He looks up at the ceiling and starts to consider: "Hmm, which person, which person, which person, which person… Umm, there is one on my mind. I forget…Oh come'on [whispers], brain, brain is working, just taking time to compute." I reassure him to take his time and he replies: "It's not thinking, it's the problem is trying to remember the memories that you don't want to."

Some youth, like Michael, were hesitant to dig into these painful or difficult memories. Some were eager to talk. Some youth moved back and forth across several deaths; others wanted to talk only about one particular death. During our interviews youth described 33 separate and distinct deaths. They understood them to be caused by overdose (9), various forms of cancer (6), suicide (5), stabbing (3), car accidents (3), heart issues (2), complications

from HIV/AIDS (1), shooting (1), seizure (1), drowning (1) and unknown (1). The people who died were their grandparents (4), mother (1), fathers (3), foster siblings (1), close friends or partners (10), and various peers or people they knew from present or past communities.

In a few cases, I heard multiple, overlapping and sometimes contradictory stories of deceased individuals known by several of the participants. At other times, I would wonder if I was hearing about the same person but then realized that tropes were emerging about the death of particular kinds of individuals. These included:

- "We'd spend hours just playing video games and talking to each other." The dad who was like a friend, playful and fun at times, dark and possibly dangerous at other times, no longer here to share experiences and protect the youth.

- The beloved grandparent who held the family together, nurturing and supporting the youth when their parents were not there for them, teaching them essential skills.

- "The really good ones are always the ones that go." A sweet young woman, small, friendly and young that the street community loved and were devastated by her tragic death.

- "He wouldn't take care of himself." The absent, fuck up father who caused chaos and violence in childhood and was now so ill or deceased from his incapacity to stop smoking cigarettes or using crack, destroying any last chance for a better family narrative to happen now.

These tropes started an exploration of my reflections on meaning and making sense of grief, exploring how the youth made sense of the deaths. They showed youths' values around relationships, family and how deaths are "supposed to" happen. They point to larger societal

messages of who is valued, how people decide who is deserving, and how powerful the

narratives of a traditional family continue to be.

5.3.0 Themes from Youths' Narratives

Youths' narratives were rarely long and involved, with great detail about decline or hints of things to come, viewing a road into deeper addiction or multiple hospital trips. Instead, I was surprised that in many of the narratives participants spent little time talking about the person who died and more about their own reaction to the death and how their life altered afterwards. Rather than dwelling on the deceased, youth returned to pressing concerns; the day to day living close to the street, getting kicked out of home, the traumas they experienced, close calls or dramas with friends and family. Below are some of the key themes I identified.

5.3.1 The Finding Out- Disclosure, Shock and Technology

For some, a key part of their story of the death was about the circumstances and the way they found out about the death. It was a moment that signaled a new reality, a rupture in who they were and how they viewed the world. Janoff-Bullman (1992) theorizes that the loss of a loved one can challenge the validity of core beliefs and undermine the coherence of the self-narrative. Violent, sudden, or seemingly meaningless deaths can make the world appear dangerous, unpredictable, or unjust.

Finding out was sometimes hampered or mediated through technology where their cell phone was dead, they were out of range or didn't have access to wifi. These ruptures that were both about this breakdown in technology of the material object of the phone and the metaphor, the breakdown of relationships, of both who is in your world and how you are in the world.

And my phone rings
my mom's calling me
I had literally just plugged my phone in
it ended up being dead for the longest time

"What is it? I don't want to frickin' hear any yelling"
"Your dad's dead"
"click"
Hung up

I was downtown that day
Cen Ten getting stoned
I told my foster parents
I wasn't going to be downtown getting baked
I figured that I was getting
all these phone calls from a private number
it was them like trying to call me
"we've seen you on TV"

I turned my phone off
getting you know, paranoid
went back to my buddy's house
"Oh ya, I forgot, I turned my phone off"
went to turn it back on
it started ringing
that private number again
"what the fuck"?
All stoned and tripped out

it was my mom and she was like
"Where the hell have you been,
I've been trying to get a hold of you for hours"
she was like freaking out
"It's your dad"
"what? Did he go back to jail"?
"No, he, he passed away, he's dead"
"What? Like, I just seen him. Like I thought he was doing better like."
"K I gotta go" like
 just fucked up my whole mood right.

We were camping out
I guess my sister had her number still saved in her phone
and she called
we were sipping that night
so it was pretty rough to hear

everybody was trying to get ahold of me
they didn't have a way
no Wi-Fi for Facebook.

just out of the blue
my sister called
was telling me to sit down
"why do you want me to sit down?"
I was curious
wondering what she was gonna say to me
she told me that my dad's gone
I started crying from there
Pretty much it
Kinda lost it.

Technologies hampered the capacity to find out and became a focus in the rupture as youth grappled with the news of a death. At the same time, technology enabled particular forms of agency: youth used cell phones and social media to distance themselves, to take time away from people. Ruptures occurred as youths' choices to stay distant conflicted with family expectations, when family dysfunction and connection couldn't be avoided and youth were swept up in larger social networks of grief. In Chapter 6 I return to the issue of finding out, specifically in the context of social media and youths' mixed feelings of using Facebook to gather information about the circumstances of the death.

5.3.2 Learning to Do Death and Grief "Properly"

My friend Brent
we were like
more or less
best friends in the hospital
It's weird how
I can remember a couple things
he showed me a doll
like a Barbie doll
he's like "oh do you want to play Barbie's?"
I was like "play Barbie's? Like you are a boy?
You aren't supposed to play with Barbie's!"

I remember also when
Trevor Linden,

the hockey player
showed up
He played hockey with all of us
Brent was really
much better at the hockey game
than I was [laugh]
so he got to play at lot more [laugh] and
I was like "fuck!" [laugh]

But [laugh] um
then I remember
seeing, unfortunately his hospital room
when he passed away,
it's like he was playing lego
we went to his room
his parents there
there was me and my mum
there's like Brent passed away
she was kind of crying
I just remember kinda standing there
being a little bit rude
asking "can I have his lego?"
I thought it was, like
completely proper
My mum told me not to say it,
they kinda laughed
my mum was like "no, no"

that has kinda been something that
my mum's said
a lot in my life, actually
my mum has done,
where I've been like
"I want this thing. I think I should have this thing"
my mum will say "no"
the other people will be like, "why not?"
so I don't know.
(Bruce, m, 24)

In this poem, Bruce is working out what is allowed, or "proper" when death happens. In this

powerful *moral laboratory* (Mattingly, 2013) of the pediatric hospital, Bruce's mother teaches

one version what is and is not allowed, of how one is to act after a death, and Bruce begins to

understand a whole new set of rules. When this learning happens is very dependent on the

death, their relationship to the deceased and the meanings those relationships have:

> Yeah, before that the only other close death experience was my grandma, but I was
> six, so I didn't really know what it felt like to lose somebody so close to you, when
> you grasp it more and you understand and comprehend what is happening. (Yanna, f,
> 18)

5.3.3 The Loss of Future Possibilities

> Here and there [father]'d be asking for if I want a beer and then he and his buddies
> would be, "oh yeah, you're [father]'s son?" I'd be like, "yeah." "You look like your
> dad" and things like that and then we would all be talking. Getting to know each
> other. And they'd be saying that, like, "oh maybe you can work for me" and then
> everybody joking around and my dad being like "no, he works for me. One day we're
> gonna have a boat and then he's gonna be working for me and he can be even driving
> the boat." Things like that. (Fred, m, 20)

The room got very quiet as Fred and I sat there reflecting on the reality that he would

never work with his father on a boat, that the possibility of owning a business together,

teaching him his trade were gone. Losing people when they are young has many implications of

lost potential, especially for those that are framed as doing well, were 'supposed to make it':

I met her, like downtown, before
I didn't really know her that well then
I met her when I went to school
she was an active meth user for a long time
a little bit of heroin but not sure
But she got clean
she had a year clean
over a year clean and sober
I think she was going on like a year and a half maybe two years
she had just like graduated high school
she got her grade twelve
she had a job
a chef like she worked in kitchens
the day she died

she was supposed to move into her friend's apartment with her
be her roommate
So they could both pay rent
it was supposed to be really good for her

she was also dealing with a lot of problems
she didn't really want to talk to anybody about
it was just so unexpected
cause she was one of them
she was supposed to make it
Like she got off the drugs
she went back to school
graduated
had a job
Like everybody thought she was like gonna make it
be one of those
really good success stories that you hear about.
(Crystal, f, 16)

Crystal seems to be reflecting on her own hoped-for possible self, projecting her own desires

for change and transformation onto her friend. Not only is her friend gone but the vision that

she had for herself has also been swept away.

5.3.4 Blame and Regret

In many of the youths' narratives there was a desire to find someone or something to

blame or hold responsible for the death, to locate who is at fault. I first explore how the blame

often was turned towards themselves and then discuss when youth implicated others in the

deaths.

5.3.4.1 "I felt that it was kinda my fault"

I blame myself a lot

Two days before
he invited me up to his party,
cause he said things weren't going too well
wanted to see me

I didn't make it
so that, that hurt
blamed myself for it
I could have gone and done something about it

everybody always says
"It's not, it's not, it's not, it's not.
Don't worry.
Don't think like that"

He hadn't slept in like two days
he came into work
I asked him to come party with me
he didn't want to come
I was like "come on man just come"
I talked him into it and he ended up coming
I talked him into that one too
he didn't want to come party
but I was so set on getting him to come drink".
I was just screaming to my mom
"I killed him, I killed him"

everybody always says
"It's not, it's not, it's not, it's not.
Don't worry.
Don't think like that"

I blame myself a lot
For not being there
I don't know
I had a feeling that she was gonna start
I was really fucking pissed off
she was lying to me about it
I wasn't happy about her using at all
Because she was better than that
I didn't want what happened to her to happen to her

everybody always says
"It's not, it's not, it's not, it's not.
Don't worry.
Don't think like that"

It was really
heavy into like self-destruction

self-harm
cause I felt
kinda my fault cause in a way
I made the decision to pull her off life support

everybody always says
"It's not, it's not, it's not, it's not.
Don't worry.
Don't think like that"

I totally think it's my fault that he died
I really do
I think I worried him a lot
By living on the streets and stuff
He just wanted me to
show him that I can do good
he always said
he's happy that his little girl's still alive
that's more or less
the only thing that he cares about
I feel like an idiot because
I didn't even get to say goodbye to him
I was so fixed about the drugs
that's just what I kept going back to and saying
all he wanted me to do was come home.

everybody always says
"It's not, it's not, it's not, it's not.
Don't worry.
Don't think like that"

Feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame figured prominently in the stories of the deaths. This blame was often situated around substance use in a cyclic nature of a bad thing happening, use, self-blame and recrimination, more use, more bad things happening. As in the poem, youth tended to situate themselves at the centre of the death story, even overshadowing the story of the person who died. Many narratives continued with their own escalating drug use, chaos or anger.

But she had cancer

a week before she died
they found out
she had a brain tumour
they did the scans of her head
I visited her
she was very out of it
but she recognized me
she didn't recognize anyone else

I promised her
I would see her the next day
because of drugs
I didn't
I was going to see her the day she died
but my step mom told me not to
just to go see her the next day
cause she was not going to go yet

That is why people told me to go to grief counselling
cause it really messed with my head
made me really hateful
very hateful
Everything
Everything and everyone
I hated myself
I hated everyone
I blamed everyone
Angry
despondent and just alcoholic.
(Phoenix, f, 17)

Youth tried to make sense of self blame and talked themselves through letting go of this blame,

either on their own or with the help of others.

> For the first two weeks it's…a lot of just…crying. Or…trying to have a good time and realizing that you're not spending that time with someone that you were friends with. After that…I'd get pissed off. "Why didn't I help him more? I could've helped". Punch a couple of walls. "I did nothing to help". That's not entirely true. Because I was there. I was being his friend. And for a lot of people, just having a friend is enough help. But I always felt like I could've done so much more, and I could've. But, I didn't. (Mark, m, 15)

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It's just like more of a mental state…Just like, bugs me that like I dunno, like sometimes like [name], there wasn't much that like I could have done…But like, talking to like a couple of other buddies, they're like, "He, he just messaged me on Facebook like right before it happened and asked if he could come over"…So they felt like they could have saved him possibly if he wouldn't have been at that bus stop…Which is like, kind of fucked up for them, like, and I feel bad for them cause like you know, just cause, you have shit going on in your life too you know, like, you shouldn't really think like that cause then it just like fucks with you that much more. (Vincent, m, 22)

The ways they counselled their friends gave insight into the strategies youth attempted to use to forgive themselves within the blame and regret. Next I explore when youth turned this blame outward to others.

5.3.4.2 I Blame the Ministry

Some of the narratives about people who died were about someone who was to be blamed for the death. In several cases this was the person who encouraged or facilitated drug use that resulted in an overdose.

He allowed her to get high too. Like, I was just like, like how the fuck do you give your daughter dope? And tell everybody that you're, you don't like to give her dope and nah, nah, nah, nah, nah. It's just stupid, like couldn't even fucking be fucking a man about like anything. (Vincent, m, 22)

The decision to take someone off life support came up in several scenarios, where either youth felt guilty for their own part in the decision to do this, or angry at others who made the decision without consulting them.

The youth who shared about a police shooting of an erratic and suicidal youth put the blame for this tragic event squarely on the police, linking it to larger issues of police corruption and institutionalized violence.

And then everybody gets suspended with pay or whatever. Fuck, people, like cops looking at kiddie porn get suspended with pay. It's like, that makes a whole lot of

fucking sense, people. Keeping people safe. All those kids that he's fucking looking at, that's not safe. You know? Shooting kids is not safe. Especially in a fucking neighbourhood of kids. (Ida, f, 21)

Decisions made by MCFD that thwarted a youth from seeing her father before his death flavor her entire experience of the death, leaving her feeling angry, disempowered and bitter.

Youth also turned their blame on a god, questioning their faith: "K well fuck you too God, like obviously you don't exist, like you're a dick if you do" (Vincent, m, 22).

It seemed as if someone had to take responsibility for the death, including the person who died:

I was really angry about it for a long time because, like. "You just watched, fucking [our friend] die of the same thing. How could you?"…Yeah. I fight with it a lot because, it's like, you watched [friend] do it, you watched [another friend] do it, you watched you know how many other people do it. And like it's you fucking killed yourself, that's really how I look at it some days. And it's, I hate feeling that because it wasn't his fault but in a lot of ways it was. (Gretchen, f, 26)

Quinn tries to make sense of the anger and blame, recognizing it comes from a variety of reasons:

I think, anger, you know, well, it is one of the steps of grieving, but it's there, in every situation. It goes back to knowing how the person died. Like am I angry at this person because they did this to themselves? Or am I angry at the universe, because, why this person? Am I angry at the medical system because they failed this person? Who am I angry at? Am I angry at myself because I didn't see something? (Quinn, f, 24)

She, like others, looks for the connections between the blame and anger and where these come from, searching for meaning in the sensations of grief, and in the reasons the death occurred.

5.3.5 I Have to be Strong

Several youth talked about taking care of their friends and families so that they prioritized other people's grief before their own, or simply that no one was there who could take care of them.

...every time it happens now, it's like, it takes me longer to process it, because it's like, ok, "oh yeah, here we go again" and then, it's like, you know, I'm one of those people who, like, when it immediately happens you know I have to be strong for everybody else, um, and then, when that is over, and everybody has started to heal, I can go through that process. (Gretchen, f, 26)

"I was thinking about when I was 10 my aunt hung herself. And having everybody at my house, and taking care of everybody, yeah…That was fucked up" (Nan, f, 26). Youth learned that sometimes there was no space for them to be vulnerable in the instable worlds they occupied.

5.3.6 Moral Beings

I run into Steve walking to the Y a year after our first interviews. He's celebrating with a group of 15 or so young people in the "dead zone" next to the church by the Y. He says hi, offering me a big hug and tells me they've just come from his brother's court date. As I walk away I can hear him yelling at one of the guys who has decided to urinate on a grave stone, telling him he'll kick the shit out of him if he is so disrespectful again. I am reminded once again that the youth I met with shared stories about being moral beings. To be moral is to work through and embody what we understand as right and wrong. Kleinman (2006) expands:

> We can imagine a certain way of conducting our lives that seems right: we can feel responsibility for others, and act on those feelings; and we can respond to trouble and those in trouble in a way that makes us feel we are doing good in the world… and even if we do not receive approbation from others, we feel ashamed if we act in a way that goes against this core impulse to do the right thing. (p.2)

The usual narratives of these youth are that they are criminal, deviant, developmental, a being "defined as "becoming", as nascent, unfinished, in peril- in today's terms, "at risk" (Lesko, 2001, p.41). Instead, I argue that youth made clear that they are working hard to understand moral issues, attempting to sort out right from wrong, flagging decisions they were proud of,

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referencing the code of the street, contrasting transgressions of these codes with their own

responses.

I was talking to him over the phone
I was like "Yo, do you want to like come over
have a sleep over
I've got video games
my mom doesn't mind if we stay up all night
eat junk food and watch movies or something"
He was like "I don't know,
how do I know they're not going to judge me"?
"Like for what"?
"Well I mean like, the stuff I told you before"
One of the things that I have to always
reassure people
I'm never actually going to reveal anything like that without their permission.
Because, first of all that's not my call to make
And second of all, whether or not that's a safe thing for them is completely unknown
So, I said like "No, like, I mean I talk to my mom a lot
but I don't mention things like that"
So he came over
(Mark, m, 15)

Mark takes time to articulate his strong stance on confidentiality, privileging his

relationship with his friend and his respect for their privacy. He frames himself as someone to

be trusted, someone who can keep a secret, who can hold your difficult situation. Taking care

of friends, keeping promises and responding to friends when they need help is part of youths'

critical reflection of what it means to be a friend and a good human being.

I am probably gonna get in trouble
I am the kinda person that will put their feelings before my feelings
Just kinda used to that.
(Steve, m, 22)

This sense of selflessness is contrasted as Star contemplates how societal values of

commercialism contributed to his cousin's suicide, asking us to consider the ways we care for

and comfort each other. In his making sense of his cousin's death he critiques his family's

materialistic and empty lifestyle as a considerable factor in her death:

it's pretty obvious from my perspective
if you're a human being with a human being's body
caught in a place like
fucking super-commercial Cali-land
if your mom is someone who won't give a kid a hug
but will leave them alone to go buy them a
materialistic toy that projects a toxic image
whose idea of fun is
buying and selling jaguars when she's bored
no wonder you're gonna grow up with a twisted perception of life.
(Star, m, 23)

Kleinman argues that to live a moral life amidst dangers and uncertainty "connects the

public domain of contested meanings and power to the innermost world of sensibility" (2006,

p.118). In Chapter 4, I described the lived world of street-involved youth as often risky and

uncertain. Because the stakes are high, the codes of moral behaviour under examination are

charged, with extreme consequences for challenging them. Here Dawn defends and valorizes

her father who had once been accused of molesting her. She highlights a moment where he

defended her, rising up as "papa bear" to keep her safe from harm's way.

He was the world's best dad
Like, as much as government tried to deny that
they couldn't even do it
they couldn't bring their hearts to say it
I think they tried so many times
to say that my dad wasn't a good man
they tried to listen to my biological mom
this is one thing that made it
so that for the rest of my life and her life that
I'll never be able to forgive her for
because um it was proven not true
but she tried to say that my dad touched me as a child.

When my dad ever caught anybody

even remotely touching me in *any* harmful way
he literally would
would badly hurt them
Oh, he wouldn't try
He would
Oh yeah
like one time I was dating this guy that was 19 and over
dad watched this guy backhand me
that guy was not in any remote safe
My dad chased him up the road
It was kinda funny to watch my dad
he was this older guy, that's like bald
kinda walking- half walking with a cane
he shouldn't have been able to run that fast
he had this guy [SOUND EFFECT] down the road
"You fucking get back here. You motherfucker
rawr rawr rawr! Hit you with my cane, man!"
Oh yeah, here comes papa bear! Right?

I loved my dad so much
when you fucked with his kids he was a grizzly
when you were just having fun sitting around with someone
he was like Winnie the Pooh.
(Dawn, f, 21)

Dawn wrestles with the larger societal understandings of violence, forgiveness and

incest to stake out her own moral view: protect those around you and use any means necessary

to keep them safe. Kuan et al. (2017) argue that to use Mattingly's trope of a *moral laboratory*,

a moral experimentation "occurs in relation to the suffering of something or someone, or in

response to some kind of moral predicament that tests cultural and historically shaped ''human

values.'' (p.187). Dawn has been forced into this moral predicament, one of a series in her life,

where she has had to face what it means to be a good parent and a loyal child. It is because

these youth have been thrust "into troubling circumstances and confounding conditions that

threaten to undo our thin mastery over those deeper things that matter most" (Kleinman,

2006, p.4), youth are challenged over and over again to decide how they want to live in the world as a moral being: "I don't ever want to feel, I don't ever want to be like that towards people that I've known" (Rooster, gn, 26). This is not to say they are more moral than other youth, but that they must think about it and work through complex and high-stakes moral predicaments on a daily basis.

5.4.0 Youth Talking About Grief

In my interviews, I asked youth to tell me what grief meant to them, what it was, where they felt it in their bodies, how it affected how they functioned and coped. Xavier, a 22 year old male described it this way:

Sometimes I just feel, sometimes I feel like when I look around, I just don't know where to go anymore. I just look up and it feels like I am in one of those movies, like Silent Hill, where everything is nothing around you and you are just stuck in the middle of nowhere. Have you seen the movie Silent Hill, like the fog or whatever, I don't even know what it was, like everything is just fog everything is just you can't see anything clear anymore. Sometimes I get those little phases where I just I sit there and I zone off for two hours sometimes, not knowing why I am sitting or not knowing what I am doing or anything. Just cause uh, I think I am losing my mind, not going crazy but I think I am losing some of my mind power, like you know what I mean, like everyone can use so much of their brain, but it feels like it is starting to get like all of these past people, people passing away, people depressing me, getting me angry and all of this is all just building me up, and it is building me up until one day I just snap and… I just lose my memory or something.

Many youth had similar experiences to Xavier, where they felt drained: "It sucks, it just sucks everything out of you. It leaves you with nothing, if you want it to." (Tanner, m, 22)). They had withdrawn:

What happens is that when something big happens our head shuts down, we normally shut down and we can't, like we are not coherent at all, we don't, we can't hear anybody else we are just in our heads and want to sleep…And get very depressed…Hiding out, doing our own thing, I don't know, being quiet. (Gary, m, 20)

There was a sense that grief doesn't ever leave completely, that it continues to be a part of their lives:

It's like a monster that follows you around. And sometimes you think it's not there but it is, hiding in the shadows. And sometimes the monster will hold you down [laughter]. But its alwaaaays there. (Gretchen, f, 26)

I noticed differences in youths' grieving based on factors like culture, relational support and previous deaths. One of the differences noted was around gendered experiences of

grieving. Several males who were interviewed were concerned their responses to grief would

show them as weak, emotional, less masculine, reflective of the larger narrative of hyper-

masculinity and the need to be tough within the street community discussed in chapter 4.

> So then I just go, me I go for a jog or go skate it off. And I try not to show emotions cause the ex used to be "oh emotions are for pussies". So, I just learnt to suck it up...Yeah, if I am by myself then it is different. (Steve, m, 22)

> Don't tell anybody that I cried please...I just I don't like people thinking that, I don't want them to think I am a pussy, but uh, sometimes people gotta let their self out...Like I think that just when, but they are thinking, but no everybody cries, that's the thing everybody cries, so then what are you guys pussies for crying if they are thinking I am a pussy, then that's the way I think of it, if someone think, if I think a time like no like that person, I don't know my mind tells me things sometimes (Xavier, m, 22)

> For many participants, grief did not seem entirely controllable:

> Time went by, I started having, not knowing what to do. Not knowing how I felt; not knowing what to say. I, occasionally, didn't eat; occasionally I ate a lot. It all depended on what mood I was in. Whether I was overly sad or if I was just confused. (Mark, m, 15)

Bruce describes the role of time and its relationship to controlling grief:

> Like but it's like, it's like, ya it's just on the side of sadness, um, but more or less just uncomfortability that I, I can't deal with, other than letting time pass. Like, I can't just...I can't think about it and be like "Oh put it in this perspective" or it's just like this thing or, you know, well this thing also happens. It's like, grief is something like you can't, like you just kind of have to let it pass by. (m, 24)

However, Hannah, who had lost many friends, suggested grief was not always a negative

experience:

> ...grief is, has been constant over the past years, like 7 years now. And sometimes its subtle, sometimes it is mellow and its nice but other times it's like obnoxious and its heavy and loud and yeah, I guess that's how I feel about grief sometimes too, like it can be healthy, right, and, but sometimes it can be pretty destructive. (f, 26)

> Youth told me where they felt grief in their bodies, describing headaches and stomach-

aches, pain radiating from their chest or head:

I get a feeling right here [solar plexus]…It's similar to the way they describe like an anxiety attack when you get it here, um…It's like chewing a piece of minty gum…You get that iciness down your throat and uh, get a tightness in your chest…And it feels like your heart's beating so fast like, the actual pain in your chest, but at the same time it's almost like it's not even there…It's kind of weird to describe. (Alex, f, 20)

I feel my cheeks go flushed and just my teeth start locking, it feels like my teeth start gritting. And that's going to happen…No, it is too much to think about, it sucks. (Tanner, m, 22)

They recognized how clichés of loss come about: "You know how people say that they're like their stomach's in knots. I could have sworn my stomach tied itself up" (Mark, m, 15).

The deaths were one of many reasons that youth had struggled in school, finding themselves distracted and having difficulty focusing:

I just uh
I always
I don't even know how to explain about
I just uh
It's, it's hard
I stopped going to school for a little bit
started smoking pot when I went to school
all through days missing classes
then I would fall asleep in class
not realizing some of my work would be just
I just don't give a fuck kinda thing
so I just wrote whatever
they could tell that those answers
weren't from me physically
they were just all check check whatever
it took a lot out of me
it changed who I was
It made me a very angry person
I think that's still to this day
it makes me an angry person.
(Xavier, m, 22)

Here Alex describes how she understands where the distraction has come from:

I know my attention span's a lot shorter now [laughs]…Ya. It's like, it's like when you get so angry and so upset for so long this little thing ticks off in your brain and your brain just

kind of goes like 'whaaaooop'…And you have no focus. Cause there's always just that little piece or your brain that's constantly thinking about them, it takes a little extra brainpower…to power that, so your brain just kind of skips every now and then. (f, 22)

5.4.1 Stages and Tasks within Discourse of Grief

The concepts/notion of grief as a series of stages or tasks appeared within the language and stories of the deaths. As discussed in Chapter 2, several grief theorists have conceptualized that grief travels through a series of predictable stages. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's work brought a new popular awareness of death and dying to the public sphere which led to the concept of stages. These stages have some variations but generally follow a pattern of disbelief, yearning, anger, depression and acceptance of a loss (Parkes, 1983, Rando, 1984). These have been ingrained in western cultural beliefs about loss and are often part of health care curriculum and self-help groups (Holland and Neimeyer, 2010).

Valentine (2006) argues that mis-readings of Kubler-Ross' and Parkes' works have fused their ideas to become a fixed sequence through which every bereaved individual must pass in order to recover. Walter elaborates on how this misreading may happen:

> "Mourners such as this may have been sold a bowdlerised, overly linear version
> of stage theory by an intermediary (an article in a woman' s magazine, a doctor,
> a college tutor, or another bereaved person) or they may themselves have read
> an account of stage theory which does highlight the lack of any simple progression, but at
> the time the reader was so desperate for clear guidelines that they read simple
> progression into the text when none was there. The map they thus created in their minds
> was subsequently disconfirmed by their own experience." (Walter, 2000, p.101)

This has produced variations on a universalized model that constructs grief "as a 'goal-directed activity' rather than a ''state of being.'' This involves processes of ''letting go'' and ''moving on'' in order to return to ''normal'' functioning" (Valentine, 2006, p.59).

Grief as a series of stages or tasks was evident in some of the interviews, however, youth often emphasized that everyone grieves differently:

> Grieving is a – is a process with a lot of stages and it's usually pretty discreet and insidious. Like, I think a lot of times – like in my case I didn't even realize that I was grieving at first. It took me a while for it to hit me and grieving I think is a process going from recognition – or, I guess it would start with shock, then you would recognize, then there's usually denial for a little bit and then you would accept that it is what it is, and then you let it go. And then you can move on. (Star, m, 23)

> I think it is different for everybody, everybody deals with grief in their own way, but I think everybody has the same basis of like, like sadness and like mourn…Everybody takes their own time to mourn though…It could be a day for somebody, it could be years for somebody like. (Crystal, f, 16)

However, within the notion of difference, they use the language of stages and process:

> I don't honestly believe that there's a wrong way to grieve…Like, ya, okay some things can be unhealthy, but a lot of the times it's all about a process. If, if, you need to let it out, you're gonna let it out in whatever kind of way you're comfortable with…Like, when, when we first started grieving when it came to my dad just before the funeral, me and my family would be totally fine and then just scream like all of us would just literally start screaming at each other… And then we'd be good and we'd be like "Okay, no that, that's just the grieving. We need to let out those emotions"…Um, and like I said, it, it, it's all really just a very long process that eventually you get to the acceptance part [laughs] and it gets better, but…" (Alex, f, 20)

As Walter (2000) described above, youth had been provided with information about grief as a series of stages and appeared to both take that in and struggle against it:

> …when my dad passed away we, we uh, were told the various stages of grief when it comes to a suicide death…I think it was the mortician, or one of the people that worked at the…They gave us like pamphlets and stuff…Um, we also had social workers come in, um, cause apparently when someone commits suicide they need to come check your kids are okay, even though they're just looking for an excuse to take your children. (Alex, f, 20)

Alex flags an important point. There is a lot at stake. Her family has been scrutinized in their grief and she feels the possibility of MCFD taking away her little brother because of the way

they responded to her father's death. "Grief, like death itself, is undisciplined, risky, wild".

(Foote & Frank, 1999, p.170) and for some the risks are at a higher stake.

Part of this risk is the connection to mental health. Youth recognized that they have

mental health issues that may be exacerbating or complicating their grief: "cause I'm born with

manic depression, um, it's bringing out the more manic part of it....me being so edgy and

irritable...um, I know is part of going through that." (Dawn, f, 22). This connection to mental

health further medicalizes their grief, through which "ordinary unhappiness and normal

bereavement have been transformed into clinical depression, existential angst turned into

anxiety disorders, and the moral consequences of political violence recast as post-traumatic

stress disorder" (Kleinman, 2006, p.9). Thus, suffering is redefined as mental illness and treated

by clinicians, often with medication.

Foote and Frank (1999) argue that grief itself is seen as work: "grieving is a task to be

mastered and finally accomplished, that such accomplishment is productive, and that grief work

has a continuity with other socially acceptable work" (2001, p.168). Some youth describe grief

as work: "Yeah the thoughts you just want to escape it, and I guess getting messed

up was really just the easy way to do it, instead of work through it right." (Yanna, f, 18) or "But

grieving is just breaking down and building back up more or less" (Alex, f, 20).

These good working citizens can be understood through Foucault's theory of the

technology of the self: an individual acting upon him or herself, searching for self-knowledge

and truth of the self is a form of disciplinary power. Technologies of the self allows individuals

to effect by their own means or with the "help of others a certain number of operations on

their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves

in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality" (1988, p.18). Current examples of these technologies include on-line diet trackers, cosmetic surgery, self-help websites, books and counselling. Youth who have experienced a loss and the people around them, including support workers, examine the grief, dividing it between "normal" and "abnormal" responses to loss, and advocate for counselling, medication, even MCFD intervention for those who are responding "abnormally". Foote & Frank argue that normalization of grieving works as a strategy of power by defining abnormal in contrast to this notion of "self-evident" normal and expanding the clinical criteria of abnormal until very few people would be seen to be grieving normally and "grief becomes the privatized, subjectivized experience of individuals" (2001, p.167).

Taking on an understanding that grief is a process or work to be done is not necessarily a negative thing. Here Rooster pushes this notion of work to a beautiful place of ritual, of care and attention:

> I know that I'm going to have to get to a place where I'm going have to re go over all of the deaths that I've had and like give them ceremony and give them love and give them appreciation from a place that's like really clear and has. I can actually feel it because I know that they are still back there. I know that those feelings are still back there. I think that just for me, it's something that I've been, it's like my little egg I'm holding on to until I get to a place where I can like "ok, I can sit it down and I can look at it and let it crack open and oh hey!" and give it love. Of like give it as much love as I possibly can. (gn, 26)

For those who have experienced multiple deaths this work can seem to pile up to an overwhelming amount:

> …when it happens, you are like "Ok it's this feeling again" and you kinda go through the same stages, but you know, I've almost become numb from it that now when someone dies, I'm like "Oh yeah, yeah" You know I don't even process it sometimes, but I feel like everyone deals with it differently with grief in their own way, completely their own way and when. I don't know when [3 friends] all died within a few months of each other, that was super fucked up. Huh. And it was like we were just getting over the loss of one

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person and then it happened again, so it was just like, that was super hard. (Hannah, f, 25)

5.4.2 Making Meaning from Experiences of Loss

Although a narrative methodology views all narratives as an attempt to find meaning through the stories we tell, I focus here on youth expressing the meanings they make within their experience of loss. Neimeyer views meaning making as a reconstruction that requires "transforming our identities so as to redefine our symbolic connection to the deceased while maintaining our relationship with the living" (1998, p.98). Making meaning is generally thought to combine both making sense of the loss where the death was predictable in some way or consistent with the griever's perspective on life or perhaps their religious or spiritual beliefs provide meaning; and finding benefits from the loss in which they experienced a growth in character, a gain in perspective and/or strengthening of relationships (Hall, 2011). Here Hannah follows this more traditional course:

> He's gone, so and he passed away in his sleep, so you can't get much better than that. Right? And he's not in pain anymore and he's out there somewhere, like, I can you know, so as much as it is sad and it is hard sometimes, but, I know he would want me to be strong and so I've made a vow that when I go to school for like medicinal and herbal plants and healing and stuff and so I'm looking in to that really recently so I'm going to hopefully do that in the next couple months. (f, 26)

The connection to the deceased and how they would expect the youth to carry on appears central for Hannah, as well as for Alex:

> The process of losing someone that, that takes a piece of you with them…And you'll never get that back, you will always feel sad about it…But that's exactly what acceptance is, is knowing that "Ya, it sucks and it hurts"…But, why let that hurt bring me down? When I'm still alive…And that person wouldn't want me to lose myself because they're no longer there. (f, 20)

Here Mark identifies how his friend's death has given him skills in recognizing distress in

his friends, and in finding ways that work to support them:

> It has changed me for the better I think because…I've gone from, you know, care free, being like "oh whatever" and you know, "if things happen they happen", to reading people. Like I read everybody now. With my best friends if somebody's not in a good mood I'm not like "what's got you", like "what's got you so angry"? I'm like "okay, so what did they say"? Or "alright what did you do this morning"? Or "Okay, I need you to talk to me cause I know damn well that something's on your arm that you don't want to show me". And that's one of the things I learned from him because he's the one who started me, started getting me to do that. (m, 15)

Mark suggests that the death has enabled a transformation in himself of becoming more

perceptive and conscious of suffering. Several youth recognized transformations as they

attempted to find a benefit in the death by making a connection to quitting drugs:

> I, it was good, but bad. It helped me get clean off of meth. Um cause my dad really hated that stuff and I was a really bad meth head at the time. And after he died I just, I smoked it one more time and then, I was like "Why the fuck am I doing this? My dad would hate me right now" and I, I quit. (Alex, f, 20)

> Well it made me a better person because I quit doing drugs and all that stuff. So, I guess it did. (Willow, f, 16)

> Janoff-Bulman (1992) theorized that there were three fundamental assumptions

threatened by grief and trauma: the world is a benevolent place, the world is meaningful (i.e., it

"makes sense"), and the self is worthy. An abrupt, terrifying disillusionment may be

experienced by those confronted with significant trauma or loss:

the first person I hear about dying in my life
and it's my dad
I was planning on going to see him this year
it fucked me up a little bit too
I was praying for some reason
I prayed that I would see him
then that happened
I was like "what the fuck"?
Kind of like a kick in the nuts

"K well fuck you too God, like obviously you don't exist
like you're a dick if you do"
And then I like, stopped like praying
talking, whatever, to God
when I was raised, I was always taught to like pray everyday
like multiple times a day
I stopped like the whole religion thing for a while
I would still talk to Him or pray
after that happened I just stopped.
(Vincent, m, 22)

A rebuilding process of finding a way of perceiving the world and self in positive terms may be difficult when the world seems malevolent and meaningless (Fleming & Robinson, 2001).

Crystal has been struggling to feel anything positive, profoundly affected by the deaths she's experienced:

> When I first kind of ghosting along with it, just because I lived my life...kind of consumed by the idea of death and death surrounding me. The thought of living scared me to death, and...like- and in a way I stopped myself from living and being happy because when you're happy you're scared that everything will be torn away from you. Like your life. And it can be. And it's harder to enjoy the good moments while you have them because you're so scared to lose them; you never know when they're going to end. So, I've been very ghosty as of lately. (f, 16)

> Finding meaning, especially benefits from the loss may be very challenging given the extreme levels of violence, discrimination and stigma the youth have experienced. Sometimes the meanings were quite fatalistic. Here Star tries to find a reason why his neighbor killed himself: "So it's quite possible that it got to be too much for him and he couldn't take it and decided, you know what? Fuck it. Done my time. Moving on" (m, 23).

Kleinman says that:

> To understand how our world can change so radically that many of the things most at stake for us are altered fundamentally such as life becoming cheap, decency and honor abandoned, anything becoming permissible in a gray zone that tolerates cunning and brute force on behalf of survival can be a disorienting experience. Such a troubling experience can alienate and depress us. (2006, p.40)

In their narratives youth struggled against this disorientation and alienation. They understood

that death is simply what happens, sooner or later:

> I guess the reason why I don't cry about death is because I accept it. I accept that
> we're all going to live to die. We're all born with nothing, we all leave with nothing.
> So I've accepted that fact. I'm not scared to die. (Michael, m, 18)

> …everyone kinda started passing away. At a certain point it was like why does
> everyone? People have been passing away for a really long time, it was just my
> generation came up and it was like "your turn!" [laugh] here's all the deaths for you.
> (Rooster, gn, 26)

In contrast to those who held on to blame and centered themselves in the death story,

some youth understood that their own role within the death was limited, and were attempting

to accept their small role in a much larger world:

> If you try to protect yourself, and you try to brace for that, then you are bracing for
> something that is going to happen, if you just don't think about it, nothing like that is
> going to happen…Life happens in mysterious ways, so you can't brace for something
> that you're preparing yourself and then all of a sudden you go off this way…I just try
> to learn a little bit from everything, and that way, whenever I do take the path to go,
> the one path I have I already have all the knowledge from it, and I can start that path.
> (Steve, m, 22)

Some attempted to find the positive in the situation:

> I would just think positively about the fact that they're not in pain or they're not
> really in anything or in any trouble or sorrow or anything. They're fine. We're the
> ones that aren't fine, but that's for us to have problems with. (Ida, f, 21)

Youth considered their own mortality, making connections between the perspectives of

the people who died in their life and their own vulnerability, negotiating suicidal thoughts and

attempts, using drugs with risk, choosing to live even with the hardships of grief and other life

challenges:

> It's almost like a sick joke at the same time. It's like…something that you've wanted
> so many times to escape from and now you're changing your comfortability to

continue doing something that you never really enjoyed doing. It's weird. It's just…it's a tedious question about where does the will to live come from when you've lost everything that gave you the strength to carry on. (Crystal, f, 16)

Some youth shared revelations, insisting on changing the negativity of their narrative,

making powerful decisions about how they will be in the world:

I don't like dwelling on things that don't resonate with me, you know, on things being [raspberry] you know its' like…I just can't [laugh] prescribe to that idea. Like I, it's very necessary for me to be able to see the beauty in things. [laugh] I already saw the shit in things for too long! You know it took a lot to get here. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Within the ruptures caused by the death and other tragedies or losses in their lives,

youth positioned themselves as experiencing transformation or acknowledging resignations and

revelations in their attempts to make meaning from these ruptures. For some, this was key to

survival.

5.5.0 Coping – Figuring Out How to Continue to Live and Survive

Searching for beauty, rather than focusing on "the shit" is one example of how the youth I interviewed are finding ways to live through the difficult experiences in their lives. They tried to articulate how their grief experiences were situated within the high stakes of the street and how this influenced the ways they navigated their losses:

> It's like the distractions, same with drugs it's, it's the way of keeping your mind off of it cause your...emotions affect you very much physically...And that sort of grief, mentally you start to prepare yourself. That's why you, you surround yourself with friends or do drugs or whatever your coping mechanism is, until you mentally know like "Okay, it's, it's time to let this out"...And sometimes you don't even fully realize it that "Okay it's time to let it out", it's just sometimes your body is just like "Oh you're gonna start crying right now and it's not gonna stop for a while"..."You're gonna feel better when you're done, but you're gonna feel like shit for now"...And then you just get it all out. (Alex, f, 20)

Coping refers to "processes, strategies, or styles... of managing (reducing, mastering, tolerating) the situation" (Stroebe et al. 2001, p.9) that is taxing or exceeding the resources of the individual. Like Alex above, youth described a variety of coping strategies that enabled them to manage reminders of their experiences of loss. Those who had lost many people in their lives spoke of lessons learned to survive the next death:

> It's almost like you learn, you know, the more you, the more people you lose, it's not that it gets easier every time, almost like you've learned how you coped last time and did that work for you, and alters how you react to it almost. (Hannah, f, 26)

Sometimes that lesson was to let go of friends and networks:

> But I think at this point I'm actually distancing myself from people who are dying, whereas when I was younger I used to be attracted to people who were dying because I liked to help people, makes them feel good, right. Yeah, now I'm just like, I don't want anyone else to die. (Marta, f, 20)

Coping was the phrase I used to think of how youth dealt with the deaths. However, the youth I

interviewed used the phrase themselves only rarely or in unconventional ways: "I don't like to

cope with some people. Some people I just choose not to cope with, some people I choose to

cope with…Win and lose no matter what" (Xavier, m, 21).

No matter whether they used the word or not, I quickly recognized how central

substance use was to how they managed their precarious and overwhelming situations. I

started to ask youth about their drug use, what it did for them and if there was a specific drug

that was helping them to endure, to escape and recalibrate:

> Meth has definitely been the best, the most helpful to me…Well, to me it is like you
> know the shitty terrible stuff is still there like, all the pain and emotion, that you feel
> are still there, but it makes you not care as much you kinda just makes you numb in a
> way, like I wouldn't say numb, but I would say just makes you not really care…It
> makes the emotional attachment kinda go away. (Crystal, f, 16)

and how drugs and alcohol helped them to cope with their life circumstances:

> I just go, like I go, I like smoking weed so I will go sit in the park and just smoke a joint
> and then, just forget about it and then go back and find somebody who is not in that
> area so they are not talking about it and then I can just eventually push it away and I
> don't think about it anymore. (Tanner, m, 22)

They recognized how using substances to manage and sustain themselves was deeply grounded

in their lived experiences of the street, without the privileges of a private room, constantly

searching to meet their basic needs:

> I was thinking about it: If my mom died and I was sitting on the street, I don't ever do
> drugs, but I was thinking that that'd be one of the days where I'd go try drugs for the
> first time and I'd go overdose myself. Because it'd be . . . If I had a place and all that,
> I'd have stability where I could keep my head calm and collect and all that. "okay,
> what am I doing." Sit in the shower. Figure things out. When you're on the street
> you're just figuring out what you're doing for that day. And, then, not long you're
> trying to get somewhere else. Trying to make plans with this and that. Because it's so
> easy to use here too, especially if you get in that big of a depressed state. (Steve, m,
> 22)

In the next section I focus on other coping strategies youth had beyond substance use, including ritual practices and creative expression:

> …when I was homeless when I was younger I wasn't able to process anything and I think that is what creativity is, is the, is some people's way of processing the world around them and the way that I, I couldn't, it was very hard for me, I was so numbed out that I didn't really process anything so I'd do a drawing every so often that would be my whole focus for a little while and I would curl into a ball and do that. But now as I'm like, I'm feeling less [silence] I don't know I'm feeling a lot more connected to who I am as a person and being accepting these parts of myself that I never accepted before and all I want to do is be creative is because I'm processing everything in a different way. (Rooster, gn, 26)

5.5.1 Ritual

When asked about whether counselling had helped him deal with his brutal and traumatic experience of being held hostage for weeks Xavier instead talked about tattooing his body, covering up the scars of burns and cuts, reclaiming his skin:

> I don't know. I don't know, I just got a lot of marks on me that are covered up because of them, I got tattoos all over me for that reason… tattoos cover all the marks and everything… From burns, yeah, and cuts 'n everything…It's just that I don't like the look of the scars. (m, 21)

Getting tattoos was a way to proclaim their own power, to honour the choices they made and lived through:

> Beautiful disaster tattooed on my arm. Beautiful disaster. Yeah, I mean, like I was sixteen…I always wanted to get that tattooed and I had been through a lot of shit by the time I was sixteen, man, and like, hitch hiked, been a hooker, and like…you know, had crazy stalkers, fucking boyfriends, and I was just like, "You know what? I've been through a lot of shit right now. I'm going to get this tattoo to commemorate the fact that those are all good things if you look at them like I'm going to get better from them, not worse" you know, they might not have been good things, but good things can come from them. (Marta, f, 20)

The act of getting the tattoo itself was a ritual, a way to understand and explore grief:

So. I understand that grief is really painful but when you allow space for that pain, it it's like anything. Like if you are getting, if you are getting a tattoo you can focus that repeating pulsating pain into anywhere else in your body, you can perceive it any way you want. It's just a feeling. So if you have this huge overwhelming grief. If you just try and look at it in a different way, like wow I'm really happy I had this time with this person and all the stuff I learned…but whatever is next after, like when I die and go on I don't fucking care what it is. Because it is just fearing something that you, that doesn't need to be feared. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Kleinman (2006) sees tattoos as one of the ways to embody pain in a collective or

individual memory. It can unite "emotions, values, and ritual" (p.135) to memorialize a person,

or simply the pain the youth has experienced. Youth recognized the value of ritual and

mourning practices while grieving the deceased. They saw this as one of the ways they took

care of themselves, taking time to create a space to honour their friends and relatives:

We wanted to go and we bought some wine for [name] and um, we camped beside this lake and this lake was like emerald green. It was gorgeous. The weather was so nice and we just like, drank wine and sang songs underneath the stars for him. That was also a really, really good healing part for me. Yeah. So, in some ways I do feel like I did do a lot of the right things. Whereas other people I've lost I've just self-destructed and I haven't really. I still think to this day I haven't properly mourned some people. [silence] yeah…It just takes certain things to bring that out I think, and then to recognize it. And then to just embrace it and, yeah, either to have a good cry or write a song or about it. (Hannah, f, 26)

They privileged the times when mourning rituals could represent values held by themselves or

the deceased, when their activities, substance use, ways of enjoying life and finding pleasure

were celebrated to honour the deceased:

We got to have a viewing
It was kind of weird because when you first walk in
you see them laying there
they still kind of look alive
until I got to see the other side
cause when you hang yourself you swell

it was kind of cool to get to say good-bye to him
they brought in tea

that was like his favourite thing in the entire world
and it was his kind of tea
Red Rose Orange Pekoe

so we sat there and we had tea with him
we shoved a donut in his pocket
put his pot pipe in his pocket
they hadn't sewn his mouth up yet
so I stuck roaches in his mouth

when he was cremated
he was a big fan of X-Box
one of the number one Call of Duty players
I actually opened his hand
stuck his controller in his hands
[laughs], he's in a gold brick
It's awesome
they stuck him in the wall that actually says
"Mission Complete".
(Alex, f, 20)

Michael tells a fantastical tale of the memorial he created to honour the death of his

girlfriend. His "own way" of almost superhuman powers to fight police, of getting away with it,

showing off his masculine prowess, adventures with buddies – how his version of "good"

mourning ritual is very different from the norm.

> I had a celebration of life with me and a couple friends. And, well cause I never had
> the chance to say good-bye so I did it in my own way. I don't drink so I went and
> grabbed a bottle of vodka, and drank…I almost got arrested that night…We were like
> toe to toe with two cops, they uh, went to pull their bear mace but we knocked that
> out of their hands, took their batons and beat them with them, and uh, they finally
> got the upper hand by pulling their guns…they uh finally uh get us all in cuffs throw
> us in the back of the paddy and then drop us off at my friend's grandma's house,
> cause we told the cops that's where he lived. And uh, they pulled us out, take our
> handcuffs off and say, "If we see you three again you're being arrested", and they let
> us go. Well cause my other friend who didn't get arrested…told them what was going
> on and why we were all drunk and all that, cause uh, we stole candy from a store
> while eating on the way out and the security guard…he pushed me and I pushed him
> back... Ya. But we got a little bit too drunk than I thought we did…It was still a good
> day; I didn't end up in jail cells, no one else ended up arrested. It was good. (m,18)

Michael tells us that he and his friends must be seen and heard, acknowledged by the larger

society. Youth understood that ritual was important to grieving homeless communities who are

viewed as disposable:

> The whole community will come together when someone passes…We've had uh, candle lightings, full funerals, like we, we've had friends that have passed that have put in their wills that they want to be buried by their friends…Cause a lot of people don't realize that because homeless people are disposable people…They don't pay attention to a lot of us when we die unless they find our bodies. So a lot of the time when, when homeless people have passed away that people know don't really have families or anything like that, we have our own funerals. (Alex, f, 20)

These mourning rituals are created in street-involved communities as a way of reclaiming the

connection to the deceased where their relationships have been stigmatized or de-legitimated:

> So when one of us passes, all of us come together, like um, we had a friend a few years back, older fellow, uh pass away in his sleep, he had been an alcoholic for many years. And his favourite place in the whole entire world was the dead zone [graveyard by church], he always slept beside, against the one tomb stone and drank his cider and sat there for hours just being a jolly old man playing his guitar…And uh, when, when he had passed his family had come together and had their funeral at a funeral home and all that kind of stuff…But all his homeless friends were his family…And we all got together and we all went and uh, we put his picture in front of the tomb stone, we had flowers all arranged there, we bought him a bottle of cider, dug it deep down into the ground so it stuck out, stuck it in the ground…And uh, we stuck his guitar with him and we sat there for three days drinking cider. (Alex, f, 20)

Alex identifies how these rituals actively work against the structural forces that disenfranchise

their grief (Doka, 2008, Lawson, 2013) to find spaces and activities that enable grief and

mourning to occur.

5.6.0 Conclusion

Judith Butler argues that a precarious life "characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable" (2009, xii). The instability, isolation, and chaos in their day to day lives impacts the way street-involved youth grieve and cope with the losses. Youth spoke to me of the stigma and invisibility they have experienced. They are actively fighting against this in the ways they understand grief, the ways they make sense of the deaths of those around them and the ways they mourn and memorialize those who have died. These actions can be seen as efforts to become "a recognizable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth sheltering and whose life, when lost, would be worthy of mourning" (Butler, 2009, xiii). My goal throughout this chapter has been to demonstrate how in the *moral laboratory* of the street, youth are struggling with life's big questions, as we all do: is this really what life is? Why did this person die? Why now? How can I understand how so much has been heaped upon me? How does one respond in this situation? How can I help others around me? How can I honour and remember this person by myself and with others? Youth have said they prioritize friendship, loyalty, trustworthiness, that they honour their deceased friends and families with ritual and remembering. Street-involved youth require our care and attention, respect and compassion. Youth, their friends and their family who have died are worthy of mourning.

CHAPTER SIX

Grieving Online – Finding and Giving Support After a Death

6.1.0 Introduction

In this chapter I consider the ways street-involved youth find and give support following the death of a peer or family member. Although I write about youth and offline forms of support, the focus in this chapter are youths' use of social networking sites like Facebook or texting on cell phones or other devices. Street-involved youths' experiences of death are profoundly impacted by their online experiences and connections. In 2014 in my survey study Nuancing the Digital Divide I asked youth about this impact. Almost two thirds of the 135 youth had found out about a death online and half had posted on the Facebook wall of someone who had died (Selfridge, 2016). My doctoral research narrowed in on their use of digital technologies to connect and find support, especially after difficult circumstances.

> …so it's kinda like Facebook holds us all together as this web, and it is unfortunate, like a lot of deaths, that we found out about, like are going to be on Facebook. You open it up one day and you are like "oh that person died, or that person died" and yet so many… It's like an obituary, sometimes. It's also helpful because it can bring people together to arrange, either wakes or you know, to get people together. (Nan, f, 25)

Nan and Hannah (below) speak to the benefits of using Facebook for grieving; a web of people holding them together, collectively sharing photos and experiences, arranging events and other connections. They also speak to the idea of getting more than you bargained for; in the day-to-day explorations and passing the time on social media they were exposed to shared photographs and memories of the deceased and to the shock of finding out about deaths online.

Facebook is an interesting thing though, right? It will maybe make me mourn these people a lot more than I thought I would because there is still pictures of them that pop up all the time, and um, like there is this one photo of, that somebody found from back in the day and posted up on Facebook, and, it's always eerie when it is a picture of your friends and more than one person is no longer alive in them. And when they are sitting beside each other too. (Hannah, f, 25).

This suggests that grieving online is distinctive, not simply about a convenient way to communicate. I suggest that grieving online requires ongoing reflection, positioning, and a negotiation of self in relation to the deceased and other mourners in order to navigate the affordances of these specific technologies.

I have demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5 that street-involved youth are living precarious and marginalized lives. Criminalized and stigmatized, youth in this project are attempting to make sense of their lives and find their way through difficult and often dangerous circumstances. I have framed their experiences with death as ruptures (breaks and disruptions), a fault-line in the path they thought they were on, a rent in the care they receive and of the world as they knew it. Some of the youth make sense of these ruptures as opportunities for transformations (radical changes): a distinct shift is how they exist in the world. Youth also make sense of the deaths with revelations or resignations (new accommodations or understandings of the world) and, as I have shown, youth have profound insights to share about existential questions around sorrow, surviving devastation, and finding purpose.

In Chapter 5, I argued that youth attempted in their narratives to frame themselves as moral beings, to show themselves as trustworthy, selfless, protecting privacy and the code of the street. To be moral is to work through and embody what we understand as right and wrong, to decide what is the good we want to pursue (Mattingly, 2013). A key part of being a

moral being is providing and getting support, communicating with each other and to the deceased about their pain, their hope, the ways in which they want to be seen in the world.

As I have discussed, youths' lives are lived entangled both in the online and offline world. Researchers and others are just learning to understand what it means to grieve online, to memorialize and communicate with each other in ways that remember the deceased while attending to the many diverse people who see postings on memorial sites. Street-involved youth, especially those who have lost friends and have found out or communicated about these losses online have powerful things to say regarding how to go about grieving online. The online world of Facebook and other forms of digital communication are also moral laboratories (Mattingly, 2013) where youth are experimenting and gaining capacity as moral beings. They are working out how to speak to and care for each other, how to stand up for what you believe in, how to defend your friends and the particular ways they live their lives on the street. Amidst their experiences of displacement, violence and marginalization, street-involved youth have been placed in a unique role to teach us about these new forms of communication and memorialization.

In this chapter I first discuss how youth are finding and giving support. Second, using the idea of performativity (Goffman,1995, Butler,1993), I explore how youth perform mental health online. Third, I move specifically to discuss the phenomenon of grieving online, including finding out online, online memorials and how youth use these to cope with loss. Fourth, I apply boyd's (2009) analysis of the affordances of social networking sites to understand more fully the implications of communicating around a death online, including the difficulties that arise from context collapse. I then share some of my participants' experiences and opinions on how to

manage memorializing the deceased, as well as asking for and giving information and support

online, especially in the early hours and days of a death. Finally, I discuss the role of

professionals in the lives of my participants, and the ways they viewed and imagined support.

6.2.0 Prioritizing Friendships and Support

I've had friends that have passed away
I've been friends with these people for years
they're homeless friends
And as soon as they croak
their family's like
"You're not coming to the funeral
You cannot have any contact"
nothing
And that's why we do our own things
because a lot of the time the family
will shut out the street family
not caring that in that person's life
their real family shut them out
their street family took care of them
It doesn't matter at that point
all they care about is that it's their family
I, I don't think it's fair though
Because we're just as much family
the thing is
blood does not make you family
Loyalty does
It's the family you choose
I've had a gun put to my head
I'm more than willing to die for a friend
But not many family members would do the same
(Alex, f, 20)

As discussed in Chapter 4, street-involved youth are, at times, disenfranchised (Doka, 2008, Lawson, 2013), excluded from or feel uncomfortable going to funerals, memorials and other grieving experiences controlled by the non-street families of the deceased. I argue that youth find their own ways of grieving, both alone and together, reaching out to their friends (and sometimes family) for support. They fiercely prioritize their friendships with dramatic statements: "I'm more than willing to die for a friend" (Alex, f, 20). Some of their experiences are dangerous and transformative events, such as a gun put to the head or other close calls with death. These events solidify powerful bonds: "…me and my step dad were fighting and I

got tired of it and tied myself to a bike and tried to put myself into a lake, but my buddy came

and dug me out cause he was watching, I didn't know he was watching but he was right there"

(Steve, m, 22). As Alex puts it succinctly: "These are people that have had to experience loss

and, and a bad situation and for the most part homeless people take care of each other better

than their own families" (Alex, f, 20).

Many youth with whom I spoke describe how their experiences of loss make them

expert helpers, the "Dr. Phil's" of their friend group, perceptive to shifts in mood, there to

support breakdowns, distract and cajole, sit and talk or simply be together.

> But, generally I, I tell by eyes. If they suddenly blank off into something that's when I start asking them, "Hey are you okay"? Like, "Do you want to talk? If not that's fine. Do you need a hug"? Like, "Do you need some sleep, do you need a shoulder to cry on, do you need something"? (Mark, m, 15)

This experience of witnessing each other, of recognizing pain, regret, memories,

isolation and rejection does not only happen in person. It is communicated both publicly in the

online worlds of social media such as Facebook as well as the intimate worlds many of us now

inhabit of texting and private messages. For example, youth may witness someone discussing

an issue online and reach out by text to meet up in person or youth could experience a crisis

together face to face and continue to discuss later by text or online chat.

> I have one friend…she messages me anytime that she's not feeling okay… And she'll be straight up with me cause she knows that I'm gonna find out anyways….She messages me and says, "Look I'm not feeling well right now. I need you to talk to me"…I've literally become a therapist for my peers. (Mark, m, 15)

For some, this role as a support is a powerful way they situate themselves within a

stigmatized world: "It makes me feel good, it makes me feel better about myself" (Crystal, f,

16).

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Youth described specifically what they thought support looked like; sometimes simple acts that can help people hold on in hard times:

> Out in Tent City right now they, there's a girl there that overdosed a few nights ago and had to have Narcan…And uh, one of my friends has been sitting with her for the past few days just keeping her company, keeping her calm and just being a friend…And she, she purposefully tried to overdose cause one of her friends died…So it's just nice to…. Ya, it's, it's just nice to have the company, not the reminder. (Alex, f, 20)

Knowing that people were keeping watch and paying attention meant a great deal to participants. Sometimes finding ways to support through their street networks was a tricky dance:

> Well like my mom….My brother and shit, like, they would always like come down here and try and find me whenever I was like, you know, fucked up…But like, I would always try and dodge them…Cause like, and I knew I was high, and they knew I was high, and I didn't want them to see me like that…Um, my sister would like have her friends like try and like keep an eye out on me and shit too. Just like keep tabs. Um, a couple of like, this guy that I used to like buy weed off of, like and used to hangout with and shit, he would, he would like, let me know that my mom and like sister and shit are all like tripping out, I should really just call them and let them know that I'm alive and, like "no, fuck, they don't care". He's like "No dude, they really do though. (Vincent, m, 21)

Youth described how the powerful rupture of a death requires support that is thoughtful and honest. Often this support was about just listening and being there, without trying to fix or reassure the person.

> And I just lost it and he's just like "Well what's going on"? And I told him "My dad died" and he like, lifted me up and carried me to the smoking section and I sat there for three hours just crying my eyes out and there was a certain peace to the fact that he didn't say anything. He just sat there and rubbed my head and let me cry…And then when I was done crying that's when he talked to me. He didn't try and tell me it was gonna be okay or the whole condolences thing and all that, or "I'm sorry for your loss". People don't realize, when you lose somebody you don't want to hear that…And it just, it always made me feel worse… I, I, I would much rather someone kind of just ignore it for the first bit and just be like, talk to me like I'm still just normal. I don't want to talk about that kind of stuff, like when the wound was still really fresh. Cause it, it just, upset me and I couldn't talk, I would start stuttering really bad, my hands would start shaking and I would be like "Okay I'm done. (Alex, f, 20)

They remembered how important it felt when someone came to help them express

their grief in ways that were meaningful to them:

I was just a mess and [he] ended up showing up, and he had convinced the people he was living with who he was not on good terms with to come drive out and find me [3 hrs away]. To come and console me because he knew that I'd be so fucked up about it. And he came and he sat with me while, he was sober while I was, blacked out, I don't remember him even coming but I know that that happened and like I - we screamed at the sky and that's all we did, we just fucking cursed him for being such an asshole and leaving. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Especially valued was someone who "gets it", who showed deep empathy for the

experiences of losing people in difficult ways:

…cause then a lot of times, not that much needs to be said, it's just like "fuck", [laugh] you know I like that, like just being able to like "fuck" and have someone be yeah like "fuck I know" yeah and that is nice too. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Uh, there, like, a couple people that like I know that that knew her that like knew um, [name]…Just like talking about them mostly like talking about the good times, like I don't know, that helps a lot. (Vincent, m, 21)

This sense of empathy comes from similar experiences of traumatic events, of understanding

the specific precarity and vulnerability of life on the streets:

I have my friend…Who, I've known him for about eight years now…he's always been there for me, like he, he, has severe PTSD…He's um, ex military…Um, and nowadays it's like, if I text him, doesn't matter what side of town he's on. If I'm like "I need you". It's either, it's either, I have to go to him because sometimes he dog sits for his buddy…I either go there, or, he's trekked across town to come get me…Cause I'm just not being okay…Um, well, actually for the most part, we're both homeless [laughs]. I get up out of the shelter and I walk towards McDonald's. He'll be sitting out front…And we usually go hang out at Centen [Centennial Square] for a bit…Like a routine…He's really understanding about my issues and, I don't know, it's always been really easy to talk to him about a lot of the stuff I'm going through. (Alex, f, 20)

Youth recognized that sometimes support was also about timing, waiting until they

could be together in the right moment:

I think that the times that for me, when it comes to support, I will wait out the right situation, like even after [name] passing, and like, you know having some interactions with [name's bf], you know, uh, just like sending him messages like "Holy Shit! I hope you are OK" yadayadayada. And..I hadn't seen him for a while and we had never really had time to sit down and talk about it, and then…we were…just off in a hotel…and he was by himself feeling shitty and so was I, and so it was one of those things where I had waited like a couple of months to talk to him and then you know, we had sat down and we got to just cry and like, do that. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Rooster signals here that while both online and offline support are helpful, being together in person created an opportunity for a deeper level of grieving, mutual support and connection.

6.2.1 Managing Relationships: When Supporting is Too Much

In Chapter 4, I discussed that youth sometimes prioritize the need to stay strong and put the physical and emotional needs of others before themselves. Crystal has begun to recognize that always being that support and striving to make people happy can sometimes bring more harm than good, leaving her vulnerable and exposed:

Everybody that knew me on the streets, was like "you need to get out of that relationship like he is leaving you alone, like you are fifteen" and he is leaving his fifteen year old girlfriend by herself on the streets to wander around all night, waiting for him like, leaves you alone on Pandora by yourself and I was like "oh it is fine I don't care, like I just want to make people happy or whatever", people were like "no you need to get out of that." (Crystal, f, 16)

In particular, the youngest people interviewed talked about how they were working to change how they managed their relationships:

I stopped. I broke down and I started telling them, I was like, "From now on, unless I say I'm going to help, do not come to me with your issues. I'm going to need time to myself to figure out my own things now" and I started, in a sense, counseling myself. (Mark, m, 15)

Older participants described the implications of setting boundaries, making decisions about when and how they try to support friends:

[Sigh] yeah, I've lost contact with some people too and, some people I just had to let, like move away, like cause I couldn't be involved anymore…which I feel bad, cause I might have been people's rocks, like, yeah. I always have a lot of people telling me about their lives and what is going on. (Hannah, f, 25)

They have come to understand that trying to support people in their community may or may not accomplish anything.

Well and that's the thing, not having a fear of it, you know, just always be there, like you know, if you feel like you want to support someone, like try, always try. If that person doesn't receive your support that is OK. You know that is not the end of the world either, like if you are putting out love and shit like that, it's like, it will navigate itself. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Sometimes these decisions are based on the level of connection and friendship or the differences between online and offline relationships.

If it is one of my buddies and a stranger there is two totally different responses. if it is one of my buddies I will tell him to cheer up or something if he is near me, I will tell him to come over and blaze one usually because most of my buddies are pot heads…If it is a stranger, and I don't know them and I hear them on my news feed, always complaining over and over and over. First I will say something to them, I will be like "dude you gotta suck it up" I am like, I will tell them my situation. I will be like "I am in this boat you don't hear me complaining all over my Facebook all the time. (Steve, m, 22)

Steve highlights a key experience of participants: viewing friends' comments that describe difficult circumstances or poor mental health on social media, "complaining all over my Facebook all the time." These viewings may add to the stresses on their well-being, and enforce the sense of vulnerability they experience. For some, it may create empathy or a normalization of their feelings of distrust, isolation, anxiety.

6.3.0 Performing Online: Identity, Attention, Mental Health

Demonstrating mental health and specifically, grieving, in online comments can be examined in light of a larger theoretical conversation around performance and performativity on Facebook. Goffman's (1995) work on performance has been used to theorize identity on-line as it takes a dramaturgical approach that grants considerable agency to the individual and their profile. Goffman's subject is a stable, pre-existing self, making conscious choices about "what to reveal and how to present himself or herself depending on the audience, and the subject's relationship to them…the frames of reference in which they are operating; and…expectations of the audience's responses" (Van House, 2011, p.426). These self-presentations are not just for others, but support how one develops a sense of self by the impressions they create for others. Youth in this project and beyond, update their Facebook pages, often multiple times a day, choosing music and books, posting and commenting on photos and videos to create desirable social impressions; incarnating who one wants to be (Van House, 2011). Goffman delineates between backstage and front-stage behaviour, and is critiqued for suggesting that the back-stage is somehow more authentic or closer to the truth (Buckingham, 2008). The front-stage behaviour of what Zhao et al. (2008) describe as a carefully crafted and cultivated profile of the "hoped-for possible self" is challenged in some ways as youth perform many aspects of their lives, including depression, anxiety, isolation, anger as well as more positive emotions and events.

Unlike Goffman's *performance*, Judith Butler's "performativity" is not the intentional act of the aware, thinking, planning subject. "[P]erformativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act' but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse

produces the effects it names" (Butler, 1993. p.2, cited in Van House, 2011, p.427). The design,

norms and practices of social networking sites not only shape how people present themselves,

but also discursively produce the subject by the unconscious citations or repetition of norms

guided by our cultural experiences. For example, many young women on my Facebook feed

post photos of themselves in full make-up, the camera held above, for most flattering angles,

demonstrating the gendered norms of submission, and femininity and desirability bound to

hours of careful primping and styling. Mother's Day floods the feed with images of families

together, going for brunch, honouring that relationship and all of our cultural expectations

around family. Gender and sexuality can be seen as partly virtual phenomena: "they are not

concrete, materially existing entities but rather constitute a variety of events, affects, ideals and

regulatory norms that are repeatedly actualized in material-discursive practices" (van Doorn,

2011, p.534). The subject positions created through discourse can sometimes be negotiated

and may be changeable over time (Willet, 2008).

Although the worlds in which many youth *hang out* online connect closely to offline

worlds, there are still many places and opportunities online to explore facets of identity that

are denied or stigmatized in their offline lives. Buckingham (2008) suggests that social

networking sites provide "powerful opportunities for identity play, for parody and subversion of

the kind promoted by queer theory" (p.9). The subject positions that street-involved youth

inhabit are often loaded with words such as *delinquent, homeless, bad, junkie, worthless,*

sourced from media, family, passers-by. Street-involved youth are actively exploring these

identities as well as others related to mental health online: *crazy, psycho, depressed*, and as

Mark (m, 15) showed us in Chapter 3, using images found on the Internet to describe the

feelings that come with living the identities of *foster kid, displaced, unwanted* and performing these for an audience online.

The messages Mark shares on Facebook are sometimes positive, describing his capacity to withstand difficult times and speaks to his resiliency:

6 Things to Tell Yourself Today

1. I matter.
2. I'll get through this.
3. I am a beautiful.
4. I deserve to be loved.
5. I can find peace, happiness and contentment.
6. I have the power and the will to survive.

Obvious Magazine
November 18, 2015 · 🌐   👍 Like Page

6 Things To Tell Yourself Today (everyday)

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➡ Share

3 people like this.

Several youth shared on their Facebook feeds images and self-reflective comments that spoke to difficult experiences: "What have I become? I don't know the little girl in the mirror staring back at me. I hate her. She's what I've been forced and pushed to become and she scares me" (Crystal, f,16). I asked Crystal what was going on when she wrote that message attached to a selfie. She said: "Yeah. I remember that time…I was just looking at myself and I didn't recognize myself in the mirror, which happens a lot because I have body dismorphyia. But I just didn't like who I was seeing."

I asked her if it had made any difference that a number of people had responded with reassuring comments. She wasn't sure: "This support was nice, but at the same time, I always

kind of used Facebook just to post, like, as my, like, venting" (Crystal, f,16). There was a tension

within some participants as they talked about the role of posting and whether or not they

required attention or comments when they shared how they were feeling.

I don't know
I mean
I think it's a thing where
when anybody goes on Facebook
there's always
an immaturity towards communication
people say
"everybody's so mean to me,
somebody hang out with me"
you're almost like
typing into a journal
expecting a response
from all these people
some people write that way
think that
eventually
somebody's going to read this
(Bruce, m, 24)

When viewing posts online, youth had to made decisions about how seriously to take

posts that attempted to gather attention as the stakes are often quite high, with many youth

having experiences with suicide:

There was...a guy that I remember this past year in high school. Uh, he is a year younger than me, and he quite often would post stuff to Facebook, and nobody did anything about it for a very long time, and uh finally, I said to one other guy that was in his grade, I was like "man I am kinda getting worried that he is going to try something dangerous". And we went and talked to the guidance counsellor at school and sure enough later that night he tried committing suicide, tried to hang himself, and they took him to...some mental health place. Um, um I know people that's, that's a tricky thing because it's a fine line, people, you know they will say oh, they, they are just looking for attention, but at the same time maybe they are looking for attention because they are actually broken" (Yanna, f, 18)

Youth questioned the narcissistic quality of performances online, including the expressions of

mental health, as attention-seeking behavior. However, as Yanna concludes, their expressions

often legitimately reflect deep feelings of depression and anxiety, including dangerous states of

suicide ideation that she took very seriously. Theorizing around performativity will continue

throughout this chapter as I examine youths' experiences of grieving online and their

reflections on providing support both privately through text and message and publicly on

memorial pages.

6.4.0 Grieving Online - Using Online Social Networking Sites Following a Death

I found out on social media
ironically
my best friend who I probably shouldn't have been friends with
who was probably not the best influence on me
at the same time we were going through
the same stuff, right
she messaged me right and was like
D died, and I was like, what?
Like is this some like shitty fucking joke

And so yeah that happened, you know…

I felt like we were pretty close, so.
It was my first friend who died.

I sat there
smoked a lot of weed
I freaking looked through all of our pictures together
Over, and over. And over again
then I went into my bedroom
I was living at my dad's
he let me back in
I locked myself in my room for two months
I didn't want to leave
That was the way that I coped
everyone was like, you know, like downgraded
"Oh you guys weren't that good friends", blah blah blah
"Oh you should get over it already
go face the world, go live your life"
I was like, "Yeah, of course I'm going to live my life"
But, when someone that you're so connected with dies
a part of you just…you know, you lose that
then you feel like a freaking cunt for not being there for that person
while you had that opportunity
now you can't even now that they're dead

more people are going to show up at your funeral than your birthday

I think I probably look at her Facebook profile everyday
just like, I don't know, creeping, memories
you get bored and you look through pictures and old pictures
You know…a lot of people say that

they'd rather not have people post on their pages and stuff
but I can't help myself
You know, when she died I messaged her about ten times
I knew she wasn't getting the messages and
it wasn't really getting anywhere
but I didn't really care
Just nice to be able to talk to someone
Who understands
Even if she wasn't really sitting there
I don't care. I would talk to myself
"Hey, I miss you and I love you"
Most people liked it
Because we're all liking it together
Like her sister read it eventually
Oops
(Marta, f, 20)

In this section of Chapter 5, I focus on the experience of grieving online. This includes the

specific experience that Marta and others described of finding out on social media, reaching out

to others online for information and solace, visiting and revisiting the traces of the deceased in

conversations, written posts, photos and videos, memorializing and honouring the dead and

navigating new rules and roles, exposed through the expectations of strangers and friends.

6.4.1 Finding Out

Many of the narratives of the deceased started with a finding out, the moment when

the youth discovered their deceased friend or family had died. In chapter 6 I discussed how

technology was often implicated in the finding out, and cell phones mediated their experiences

of learning about the death of a peer or family member. For other youth, their first knowledge

of the death came through opening up their Facebook news feed and putting together the

pieces that various friends had written:

> …it was, everywhere on Facebook, everybody was writing like rest in peace, and stuff like
> saying goodbyes, like they always like to call news reports out and stuff…cause people

thought it was fake at first like all these people writing rest in peace, so they thought it was a sick joke…Like because also, cause [she] was such like a positive like bubbly person, like it just didn't seem right like, everybody was like no this can't be true… (Crystal, f, 16)

Youth spoke about the need to learn more, to verify that the deceased was actually dead:

I think I saw his request box…where's it's like, "oh, you've met this person." I think I saw that and I just clicked on it and then I noticed everybody kept posting on his wall, saying R.I.P, that didn't - shouldn't have happened to you, blah,blah, blah and I'm like "What the fuck is going on?" and then I grabbed the newspaper, so that I could see what happened, I just read it and I - well, I went online to figure out what happened, but yeah. I guess he got shot… (Ida, f, 20)

Sometimes this was a frustrating process, where regular sources of information were no longer

available and what people were writing was not clear:

…cause it's all vague – vague-booking, like it's… You get these cryptic messages and like, it's like what happened, how come? You are trying to get ahold of all these other people that are like probably off of Facebook now because they've seen it and hiding. Yeah so it's, you are trying to find out and how, and you know, it's just... (Gretchen, f, 26)

The need to know some details was very powerful, and as Hannah clearly tells us, necessary for

how they conceptualize their grieving: "…I don't know what it is but it's always like, it eats me

alive, I need to know how it happened or else I just can't grieve it" (Hannah, f, 25).

Participants wrestled with their desire to know what happened, and how to ask in the

semi-public forum of Facebook. As Rooster describes, this is sometimes related to limited

access to resources like a private phone:

I just felt like such an asshole even asking…I wanted to ask how he passed away…not that it meant, that's the thing, it doesn't matter how they passed away but when you've been close to someone…that is a question that comes in to your head, but nobody ever wants to act like they want to ask that question…because they know so many people jump down people's throats about it and "how dare you put this on Facebook?!?" Then other people are like "well how are our friends supposed to know?" and it's like we travel around, we don't have lots of phones, and so it's… I think there is like, it's so hard to navigate, especially with the social media, it's not like a bunch of people are getting phone calls that, you know, are private. (Rooster, gn, 26)

When access is fractured, or mourners are not able to speak in person, youth search for information on news media, and send messages to specific people publicly or privately.

6.4.2 Online Memorials

The social networking sites of the deceased quickly become sites for friends and family, or their larger community to visit to express disbelief, shock, to share memories and view others' expressions of coming to terms with the death. The street-involved youth I interviewed are part of a broader phenomenon of online memorials that have become a place of solace and coping - a community not bounded by location or time for those experiencing the loss (Carrol & Landry, 2010). Images, poems, and song lyrics are posted "signifying emotional turmoil, coping, humor, or optimism" (Williams & Merten, 2009, p.77). Youth not only viewed or posted in online memorials – several had actually created them. Crystal was worried about her friends who had little information or ways of connecting between them after their friend died:

> …then it was confirmed, and…nobody would answer my messages, nobody would answer anything like everybody was ignoring everybody cause everybody was just like in shock…her family wouldn't even answer their door, wouldn't answer the phone like, her poor mother. So, I was thinking well what can I do, to kinda…help everybody get through the initial shock of this alive, cause you know sometimes one suicide can trigger mass suicides, like it can trigger people to kill themselves. (Crystal, f, 16)

So she decided to step up to help:

> …so I made the memorial page, just like had a picture of her and like said my own goodbyes, and like wrote in it this is for people to say goodbye, post pictures, you know like a way to remember [her]… and the good parts like, not the bad, so it was there, just there, there to bring the community together cause my mom had a memorial page and um, I know…it was a good way for everybody to cope with her death so I was like I will make one for [her] cause I know it helps like bring people together, like pictures and there was stuff there that people, like some people have supports like, they can reach out to other people who are mourning over the same person. (Crystal, f, 16)

For youth whose relationships are spread across the country or who have fractured access to phones and the Internet, these online memorials on social networking sites offer opportunities as Crystal puts it to "bring the community together." Hannah who identifies as a traveler, a modern-day hobo who has hitch-hiked or hopped trains says:

> …that's what I like Facebook for, that is one of the positive things is that, it gives you a chance to connect with these people, you might not know where the fuck they are, across this country, but you can at least send them, make that connection and send them your love, or be like "thinking about you" or "stay strong or be safe" and yeah. Like without it, I don't know. (Hannah, f, 25)

Youth are able to communicate with people they would otherwise not have the resources to connect with to get information and provide, receive and simply view supportive comments. Some youth had reached out privately to friends, family or acquaintances of the deceased to offer condolences or share memories, even if they do not know them or have not been in touch for some time. They had appreciated when people had reached out to them when they had experienced a loss in their life, especially when it felt authentic in some way, perhaps because they were also grieving or they referenced a common connection.

Although Hannah and others describe the online messages of support and information between mourners, researchers like Williams & Merten (2009) and Brubaker & Hayes (2011) were surprised at how consistently commenters write directly to the deceased. On the memorial sites I had access to through Facebook, I witnessed youths' messages on the wall of the person who died saying such things as RIP, disbelief: "can't believe" or honouring their memories and the qualities of the deceased:

> We had some rough times, but also some wicked awesome ones as well. You were a very kind, caring individual. You had mad heart, and no matter how fucked things were you managed to crack a smile or a joke. I'm going to miss you big time. To everyone reading this, lots of love to you all. Take care of yourselves. (Gretchen, f, 26)

Youth write texts and send messages directly to the deceased even though they know they are no longer alive to receive these messages. As Marta (f, 20) shared in the poem at the beginning of this section she did not care if the message didn't actually get to her friend, it just helped her to write it as an outlet for her grief. *Continuing bonds* (Klass et al.,1996), the continued direct communication with the dead is theorized to be a therapeutic process (Getty et al., 2011) and appears to be that for many of the youth in this research project. It provides a way to continue to feel connected to the deceased, both by writing directly to them and also viewing and interacting with the virtual remains of the deceased in their posts, comments, images, videos and music. Klass & Walter (2001) theorize this common experience of conversations with the dead has replaced ritual as the normative way in which the bond with the dead is maintained. This bond can be especially helpful in providing guidance in the moral lives of the living as they consider the deceased as a role model, or somehow still available to provide advice or solace through reminisces.

> When you were talking about living your life the way that, you are seeing yourself in that person, in a way, that person seeing you, like how would they want me to deal with this? Do they think, like if they were alive right now, would they kick me in the face? Like smarten up! (Hannah, f, 26)

Similar to what has been observed in other research, activity on the memorial profiles I have followed has dropped off and become less emotionally intense over time (Williams & Merten, 2009) so that only a few continue to write regularly (Carrol & Landry, 2010) except at special days such as anniversaries of the death, birthdays, and holidays.

> Happy birthday [name]! Miss you bundles. As much as I hate that you aren't here to celebrate with us, I hope on this day (and this weekend) that we can celebrate the awesomeness you brought to the world, and your life, rather than be saddened by your absence. Big hugs brother. And all the love. Best wishes to everyone. (Gretchen, f, 26).

Some youth continue to write publicly to or about the deceased especially when they are reminded of their friend/family member and their followers on Facebook see these and some respond or reach out.

6.4.3 Social Media as a Strategy to Cope with Grief and Loss

In their interviews, youth told me why they visited the memorial pages of deceased friends or family. It gave them an opportunity to reconnect, to memorialize or to spend time thinking of the deceased person. For example, Tanner listens to the music recorded by his foster brother before his death, Yanna goes back over old posts and videos of her deceased friend and Alex (f, 20) looks at photos of her father:

> It's kind of like an Internet tomb stone…They can [access it forever] if they want to, even if it, it's just a simple needing to go and look through their photos…Cause sometimes, like even I have down days and I'll go into my dad's Facebook and I'll look at what few photos…he has just cause it makes me feel a little better. It's like looking at his face again when I know I can't see it.…myself…It's just a nice little reminder.

Viewing other people's comments about the deceased has provided a specific satisfaction and emotional connection for myself, an opportunity to sit with my own grief, seeing how others are expressing their loss. This viewing provides an outlet to release emotions for youth: "I was looking through all of the Facebook pages of groups of people who are gone and had this really brutal ugly cry…[laughter]…and had a smoke" (Gretchen, f, 26).

Youth described how posting comments online about their feelings can be cathartic or therapeutic, just to publicly talk about how they are feeling and the thoughts they were having. They posted photos or images they found online that described their experiences or how they were feeling or just to flag to others what was going on. "Sometimes you just need to put that

picture up on the Internet, you know? First of all, so that people know who you're talking about, second of all so that, like, people can see who they were" (Ida, f, 21).

Creating a Facebook memorial page of her friend helped Crystal with the experience of loss by giving her something to do. She checks back in on these pages and manages the requests, comments and discussions that arise.

> Almost every time I check my Facebook there is a new notification about the page…I mean there is usually a notification about the page, or somebody is like messaging me about asking me about stuff, like oh you know can, like "do you wanna talk about", like people need somebody to talk to and I have already put it out on Facebook that I am here for anybody that needs support even if I don't know them. If they want to talk I am here, so I get a lot of people reaching out be like oh, I can't believe this happened and they just need somebody to vent to so…[laugh] That is usually what I do, if they need to vent. (Crystal, f, 16)

Social media or social networking sites provide a constant stream of information including intimate photos and thoughts and conversations from people youth know. This flow can provide social connections for youth who are feeling isolated. Social networking sites also provide a distraction from difficult situations and feelings. They can put on makeup, try a new outfit or change their hair and take selfies, watch cat videos, learn to cook meals, watch snippets of TV shows, gifs, curated by people to whom they have a connection. Having access to technologies such as a cell phone can seem like "a friend in your pocket." Being able to text or send a message can provide private connections and conversations when youth are feeling upset, overwhelmed, anxious or bored.

While youth used social networking sites to deal with a variety of feelings after a death and find support, sometimes it did not satisfy or help with their feelings of loss:

> But on one of my old accounts I did post saying, "I lost a very dear friend and I might not talk very much when I'm around you guys but just know that these are the things that I have to deal with right now". And everyone was very supportive. But none of them really

knew him…And it was nice to have the support, but I kind of wish that that support was given to him. (Mark, m, 15)

The complications in youths' relationships with posters (both online and offline) mediate how much they feel supported by the posters. While many comments from other viewers are supportive, some messages are blaming or finger-wagging. Willow (f, 16) posted regularly after the death of her grandmother and her escalating drug use such things as "is it possible to hate yourself so extremely that you wish you could just lied down in the rain and never get up till everything gets better." Comments on her wall ranged from simple statements of encouragement and love to telling her to stop hanging out "with the gross people I've seen you with" to "stop posting this shit on Facebook and get help" or to get her "head out of her ass" and come home. As described in chapter 4, Willow simply shrugged her shoulders when I asked her about the comments from family, either uncertain or unwilling to talk about these complicated relationships. She did, however, create a video of photos of her grandmother that brought much positive attention from other mourners, especially family members.

Witnessing the expressions of grief from others can also be incredibly overwhelming, and repeats the notion of "getting more than you bargained for" where simply opening up Facebook can mean revisiting the death:

> My nana and my mom was posting slide shows, and pictures and when it first, every time I saw it I just broke down crying and I like threw my phone, I am shocked my phone is not broken to shit to be honest…Cause I whipped it so many fuck'n times against cement, every time I saw something, and I had to have someone to open it up for me and scroll away…Cause my mom she kept posting, and posting and posting and posting, and everyone was sharing it and I am like "no. I just can't deal with this. (Phoenix, f, 17)

Ida (f, 21) gets stirred up when she and I look at Facebook and see the limited photos other people have posted about her father. She articulates her anger is partly about the lack of

photos she has of her and her father together. The only one we can find is just one of her with

his casket. She looks over and over again at the photos, ruminating while viewing Facebook

over this limited collective identity of her father. She is unable to frame or create an image-

based relationship with her father that would fulfill some identity of her as a good grieving

daughter, or even simply as daughter of this estranged father, based on her social media news

feed. Youths' experiences of finding support online reflect their relationships in person:

complicated, sometimes fractured and difficult, life affirming and caring. The precarity and

vulnerability in their social worlds continually presents itself within the online spaces they

grieve in.

6.4.4 Affordances of Social Media – Impact on Grieving Online

danah boyd (2008) describes Facebook and other social networking sites as a *networked*

public: "a linked set of social, cultural, and technological developments that have accompanied

the growing engagement with digitally networked media" (p.125). Marwick and Ellison in their

2012 article "There isn't WIFI in Heaven" use boyd's affordances of a networked public and how

they can be used to examine grieving on Facebook. Marwick and Ellison (2012) demonstrate

how these properties bring specific affordances to grieving on Facebook, including searching for

and finding support on line that may not be found in face-to-face or other methods of

communication.

Persistence, the durability of online expressions and content, means that what is posted

or messaged stays around and can be viewed later. This means that youth can review images,

songs and texts, that have been left by others, including the deceased.

> Oh yeah, I always go and look, my brother used to make music, so I go on his Facebook and I listen to his music all the time. And it's like when you see those things, like for a little bit, it's like you forget that they are not there, you see their face like "oh those were good times. (Tanner, m, 22)

Persistence supports communicating asynchronously, where youth can decide when they want to engage in a conversation to reach out to others to offer support or respond to posts. For some youth being around family after the death was too much and they used a variety of strategies to keep some emotional distance, including technologies:

> I, I found myself it was easier [to be homeless and grieving]…I actually had a place to stay before my dad died and I, I dropped it like the day I found out. I spent one last night in my bed and then the next morning I packed my shit and I went downtown and I like, did, I was homeless for the next seven months…Not only was it for me, um, a fresh start, I wanted to start at the bottom to be able to work my way back up…Um, I also, I had this overwhelming sense of not wanting to be around my family…Like, even now it's still kind of difficult to spend time around them. (Alex, f, 20)

Persistence also creates a record of conversation which can help spread gossip, where a few hours away from your Facebook feed may result in arguments breaking out for all your viewers to see. Marwick and Ellison (2012) highlight that the persistence of content in Facebook memorial pages also brings consideration of future audiences. Youth imagined the children of the deceased or others years from now visiting with the dead in a variety of ways.

The archival quality of social media provides previous posts (words, images, photographs, videos, music recordings, conversations between people) that were created by or involve the deceased in order for youth to revisit; to spend time being with the deceased without physically going somewhere. This may be especially helpful for street-involved youth who have lost many physical objects related to their relationship because of the chaotic and unstable nature of their life. Several youth were struggling with technology in order to create and maintain these archives:

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The only real pictures of my dad we have are on this little, uh, Blackberry tablet thingy. And it's locked and my little brother tried putting in the password and he did it twice and with three times, if he does it one more time it's locked for good and it'll erase everything on it…and we haven't found anyone so far that can unlock it without erasing the stuff. (Alex, f, 20)

They had had to make difficult decisions about what do with the online remains of the deceased, to honour their privacy:

But he had a few phones he lost and everything, that I guess people found and we got them so we had phones that where – he was still signed on Facebook, but we didn't know what to do so we just logged him out 'cause it was his personal stuff….Things like that. (Fred, m, 20)

The second of boyd's (2008) affordances, *visibility*, means that interactions on social networking sites are often public by default, private through effort. As discussed in chapter 4, youth described many techniques they had to create privacy, triage drama including blocking and deleting friends or simply blocking single posts, stopping family members from seeing a night of drinking. Marwick & Ellison (2012) envision large *invisible audiences* that bring a greater awareness of the deceased, "validating their importance in the eyes of friends and family, aiding in fundraising efforts, or increasing funeral attendance" (p.397).

I looked back over screen captures of Facebook the day that yet another youth I have known from the Victoria Youth Clinic died of a fentanyl overdose. Many of the young people in the Grieving Online advisory group were his close friends and posted photos, condolences, efforts to get together at the beach to mourn him together in person. Others commented under their posts, reaching out in bewilderment, asking for details, complimenting well phrased eulogies, sending hearts and messages of love, asking if others needed to be called, cautioning each other to take care, to support safe consumption sites, practice harm reduction, don't use alone, let some know where you are and reach out. I am one of the *invisible audience*, viewing

these exchanges months later and was again affected, seeing the care and compassion of

community, of people attempting to support and reach out to others.

For youth who are seeking connections in their fractured and often stigmatized lives,

this opportunity to dwell for some time in the past, to review not only the posts of the

deceased but the visible expressions of comments and cautions from multiple people, some

known, some unknown, has the potential to offer solace.

The third of boyd's affordances, *spreadability*, the unrivaled ease with which people can

share media online, can be both powerful and problematic.

It is so fucking stupid
I had a brother that died
three years ago now
foster brother that I was close to
his friends posted shit on Facebook
by the time that it got around is
I heard a story
that wasn't even close to what had happened
(Tanner, m, 22)

Misinformation or hurtful information about the deceased can be easily and quickly spread

between people on social network sites. One of the major issues youth had was the viral-like

speed of news of the death, which I will speak about in the next section.

The final affordance, *searchability,* the ease of a simple Google search to find the social

media presence of the deceased, creates public/private concerns for grievers including the

phenomena of "grief tourists" or "trolls". Youth are wary of media and others who want to

learn more about the deceased because of public interest in fentanyl overdoses or other deaths

that may be sensationalized.

I think if you're gonna have a memorial page then it should be a strict invite-only…Um and
it should…place administration of at least one blood family member and one street or just

really good friend of family member…Because then everyone gets to hear about what's going on but it's still a private matter where strangers can't access it…Cause you don't want some stranger crashing a funeral…Or just writing nasty stuff on the page…Cause that's not, that's not fair at all…Um, even if it's just turning the person's Facebook page um, making it private and turning their actual page into the memorial. (Alex, f, 20)

They create private memorial pages that require an administrator to enroll a user in an effort to keep media, strangers or trolls out. Given the stigma surrounding many of the deaths, youth have learned they have to protect these memorial spaces from negative comments and judgement.

6.4.5 Context Collapse

The affordances of social networking sites also create the phenomenon of *context collapse*. In the co-created identity where friends view your social networking sites' page or feed and make comments, post and tag photos, and share or like your posts and links (McNeill, 2012, van Doorn, 2011, Van House, 2011), youth regularly make decisions about how to manage these collaborative presentations:

I remember one photo posted and there was a, like my one friend…she was smoking weed in the photo and I was sitting there and I was like "man I don't want that on Facebook" so she took it off and um, actually that same girl she uh posted on my wall once uh and I really, I don't know I think I was like a little bit younger and she just like used the F word quite a bit and I was like "man, I don't want that on my wall. (Yanna, f, 18)

Context collapse is created when the deceased can no longer carry out strategies to protect privacy and manage impressions (boyd & Marwick, 2011). Viewers and posters may come from various facets of the deceased's lives; extended family, friends from childhood, co-workers, support workers, street family and other friends from the street, "increasing the probability that survivors will encounter multiple parallel depictions of the deceased" (Brubaker

and Hayes, 2011, p.2). Previous research shows that when a conflict in values arises between

posters, a hierarchy of relationships was witnessed and a close relationship with the deceased

had more legitimate claims to how the deceased should be remembered. "In this hierarchy,

being a family member trumped all" (Marwick & Ellison, 2012, p.389). Gretchen regularly has to

make decisions for her deceased friend around what to share about his life and the way he

died:

> I administer [name]'s memorial page. [Girlfriend] asked me to create it…I get messages
> from people who are like "Hey I knew [name] in kindergarten" or something. "Blah blah
> blah. How did he pass away?" And stuff like that. And I do it because [girlfriend] doesn't
> want to have to deal with it. And like that is fair, but. Like random people messaging me
> and I have to decide how I'm going to tell them…Like how do you tell them that that what
> happened. Who do you tell that [name] OD'd or who do I say it was a "coronary failure"?
> (Gretchen, f, 26)

Conflicts occur in the narrative of the deceased's life when youth highlight illegal or

stigmatized behaviours, like friends and gang members showing up at funerals and putting

drugs or gang paraphernalia in the coffin, upsetting family members (Martin, 2010).

Rooster questions if after a death is really the time that parents have to be exposed to certain

realities of their child's life:

> …but fuck, that's kind of rude you guys, like his parents could see this, like I don't even
> know they knew really what was going on. That's the thing too, like, sensitivity to that
> kind of shit cause some, like, some stuff you don't need people to know about you. And
> that's like, like your whole community might know you do heroin but your parents don't.
> You know, they don't need to, they just sometimes don't need to know certain things.
> (Rooster, gn, 26)

These conflicts impact the freedom in expressing grief that street-involved youth have in on-

line settings. Here a mother weighs in online:

> This may or may not be my place to say this, but as a parent and a mother I feel
> compelled. If … were my daughter and I came to this page to read what her friends loved
> about her I would want to read great things. Not stuff about getting drunk, wasted, or

stoned. Just please be mindful that her parents may come here for some solace and reminders of how their daughter touched so many lives. Please, try and keep that in mind is all I ask. Also for you struggling or needing a shoulder to cry on, or feeling desperate or alone or just in need of a hug I would absolutely be there for any of you. I get it.

Crystal, who created the Facebook memorial I pulled this cautionary tale from had this to say about the comment:

I understand it from a parental, sort of, view. And like respecting the parents. But honestly, people are allowed to vent, people are allowed to be upset…Like, you want- you can't glamorize- say it- and like, no one's out to be someone who they're not, like cutting out parts of their life. I find it respectful bringing up the fact that she drank a lot and people still had fun with her. And that's what- part of who she was. I don't like people cutting it out to make them seem perfect. Just because they're dead doesn't mean they're perfect. (Crystal, f, 16)

Although Crystal makes a case to represent her friend as she was, someone who drank and had fun, Rooster has witnessed some hurtful comments after a death in their community:

There was a person who passed away, I'd only met them a couple of times, um, and they were not a super nice person…kinda one of the asshole punks…But one of the guys was like "I really genuinely give no fucks" and there was a lot of mean stuff out there, it was like people talking about how it was almost good riddance and like, just the stuff that his parents could see and shit like that. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Youth talked about how their grief experience sometimes was affected by their own families or the family of the deceased who were grieving. This complicated to whom they could talk about the death. Dynamics that had already established in relationships continued and sometimes were even more complicated by the death.

6.5.0 "Is that how you want their family to find out?" The Rules of Grieving Online

Claire Wilmot (2016) argues that although social media may have opened space for

public mourning, the "etiquette for ensuring that outpouring supports the bereaved (or at the

very least doesn't make their situation more painful) has yet to develop" (web). Many youth

had strong opinions about what they have witnessed and participated in the *moral laboratory*

(Mattingly, 2013) of online memorialization. As moral beings they wanted to share their

experiences about what worked and where they had seen online communication hurt and

anger other mourners. Several of my conversations with older youth who had lost multiple

friends and acquaintances focused on the process of finding out about deaths online. Youth

were especially concerned when family members had not yet been informed and the deceased

was tagged in posts of people sharing shock, bewilderment, asking what happened. Nan (f, 25)

shares when a close friend drowned:

> I was just thinking about when … died, before we even found his body, people were like,
> already posting, like… already RIP. People knew he was missing, but you can't, I didn't
> think it was cool to go around, like he's dead. You can't really do that until you actually
> have a body to place it to. So… that's fucked.

Participants cautioned about posting too quickly about the death online, so that family

or close friends would not have to find out online. They valued communication that is private,

face-to-face, or by phone that is intentional and acknowledges the importance of relationship

with the deceased, especially family.

> You know, like you've known this person for so long and you know…you are really good
> friends with them…you consider them family and stuff like that, and it's like you go on
> Facebook thinking you'll check in to how things are going…and go log on to say hi to
> somebody and all of sudden, here is this fucking… "Why didn't anybody tell me? Why
> didn't anybody take 2 seconds out of their fucking day to call me"? (Gretchen, f, 26)

Gretchen's comment reflects that common experience; of getting more than they bargained

for, the unexpected, unwanted announcement of yet another friend dying when checking their

news feed.

The rapid *spreadability* (boyd, 2008) of information online means that news of a death

can happen very quickly, especially within a network of peers, where others, including old

friends or the family are not "in the loop". Yanna (f, 18) describes how this can happen:

> It started off with one of his good friends…he was talking to the police about it…getting
> information from them…in our society these days when someone dies they write
> something or talk about their friendship or relationship and say rest in peace, and he said
> "nobody go to Facebook, like the family has not been notified and they need to find out
> through different ways"…it was just the friends that were talking about it texting about it
> and figuring out that it was [name] And uh, eventually the one girl posted his status and
> then from then on it was a ripple effect, everybody started posting statuses and statuses,
> and saying rest in peace.

Yanna questioned the motives of some of the early posters, in their performances of grieving to

their online audiences: "I think also a huge thing about it is so many people that really didn't

know him that well but played it up. I don't know if it was an attention thing, but."

Marwick & Ellison's (2012) research found careful crafting of messages to establish the

legitimacy of the poster by "mentioning particular memories, sharing how much the person

meant to them, or referencing information that only the deceased and the poster would know"

(p.389). As a close friend, who had been with him the night of his death, Yanna (f, 18) was

especially sensitive to comments of others: "Uh. "We did this and this and this, I am so sad I

have been crying all night". I mean it's not about you, I don't know. Maybe that is hurtful to say

but I mean, I just remember seeing a lot of that by people that didn't know him very well."

Yanna and other youth I interviewed were wrestling with the performances of grief

online, trying to make sense "to what extent these declarations of grief are public posturing

and to what extent they are genuine, personal expressions of deep feeling" (Dobler, 2006, p.180). Dobler's work on Myspace pages reflects how these performances get read by viewers, that people's attempts to share information or say something about the loss gets in the way of actually helping others. Rooster reflects on this:

> People find out on Facebook. That's hurtful too. There are so many ways that people find out... Like when you come to that information you are like "do I share this information? Do I tell anyone else? Is this just for me to sit with? Is it my responsibility to tell that person who I know really cared about that person or do they already know and it might just be adding to their aggravation?"...and it's like "or do I just take time to myself to grieve about this" and... But there is also such a responsibility to the community at large because we are a group of sensitive fucking people that, you know, it's hard to navigate. You know? (gn, 26).

Mattingly's research offers "a portrait of moral transformation and the moral striving surrounding it that is at once experimental, even perilous, and also deeply embedded in the routines of everyday life" (2013, p.322). For youth like Rooster, finding out about a death online has become an ordinary practice, sadly happening with heart-breaking regularity. They and other participants are navigating the *moral laboratory* of social media with the thoughtfulness they articulate above.

6.5.1 Prioritizing Calling or Letting People Know Privately

Learning to navigate this difficult issue has resulted in youth making efforts to reach out to tell other people about the death, privileging phone calls or private message strategies: "Yeah, I made about 10 phone calls just because I saw it going on Facebook and I wanted to make sure that people that were really close with him knew, and didn't find out all on Facebook." (Nan, f, 25)

It's more of a personal matter, I'd rather send personal messages when that kind of stuff happens…Cause I don't believe the whole world should be able to see these things and broadcast it because then you end up with a whole bunch of rowdies just being like "Woo! Drinking at a funeral. (Alex, f, 20)

Private messages potentially contain the broadcasting around the death. As helpful as viewing online posts and comments can be, some wanted to be with people in person to find and give support:

Facebook is used so much it is like, within an hour you look at their comments and there is like twenty posts on it of people trying to give them encouraging words but it is like, they are just words when you are looking at it on the screen, it's not like someone being there saying "hey it's okay". (Hannah, f, 25)

The physical connection provides much more: "it was so much more personal than just a simple, "Oh no, they're gone". Like you don't hear the grieving in their voice; you don't see the look on their face." (Mark, m, 15).

Without the physical cues and immediate feedback, online grieving can be confusing and hurtful. Although she continues to stay in touch with and support friends on line Hannah is ambivalent, burned by past experiences:

I don't really want to be too involved, like, cause I don't know, a lot of um, cause communication can get so mixed up because people…can't hear sarcasm, and they can't hear your tone of your voice so you don't really know how people, what their meanings sometimes a lot of people take things really personally and get things, um. You can say something and they will take it completely wrong way and then they'll just like, bite your head off over it. (f, 25)

While Rooster can't seem to make the memorializing online feel as authentic:

I think that is why I don't really like the memorial things because I… Again I feel like it's such a personal thing that like, it perverses it for me … I like the idea of sharing… I just can't picture myself doing that.. I've tried to share things on memorial pages because I was like "Ok I'll just see how it feels cause I'm being rejecting of it that it's all these other people are on here and… I want to show that you know I'm thinking about them and I don't even know… But I just never felt right. (Rooster, gn, 26)

Yanna questions the public display of continuing bonds as a way of communicating with the deceased and offers other suggestions:

> I think there are different ways to get the message, if you're wanting to somehow communicate with a person that passed away. There are different ways to do it than social media. I just, I don't think that is the right way. Uh, write a letter, burn it in a fire, let the smoke go up to the sky, I don't know, put it in a balloon, there is just, write it in your journal. There is…different ways… (f, 18)

The youth I interviewed offer some excellent perspectives for anyone who is spending time online after a death. These include being cautious in posting, waiting until family has been notified, and considering the *invisible audiences*, especially those from other social spheres of the deceased, may reduce conflict and hurt. Support from friends was vital to youth while they were grieving and having access to friends both on and offline in meaningful and authentic ways was powerful.

6.6.0 Finding Support Beyond Social Networks: Support from Social Workers and Other Professionals

Generally, the youth I interviewed did not discuss searching for support online from websites devoted to mental health or grief or chat programs with a notable exception of Star (m, 23) who was deeply embedded in an online support website around difficult drug trips. Some youth described looking up information related to mental health diagnoses or characteristics or drug information, especially illicit drugs to understand what they are using and the side effects, harms and benefits of the drugs.

> I've looked online for that before, um just like I remember when I was using more I'd sometimes wonder like "am I bi-polar"? Like, "what's wrong with me?" And I'd Google symptoms and stuff...I don't have a phone now, but when I did Google was my best friend. Like, I didn't like much of the social media but uh, and I sucked at texting. All my friends would always get mad at me for that but I love Google, just researching random things, it's nice to be able to...find facts...It's pretty awesome. (Yanna, f, 18)

After my interviews were complete I questioned why youth rarely reached out to mental health support available online. I wondered if youth felt isolated from adults or other possible professional support in that the issues going on seem difficult to share, are private or illegal, are shameful or beyond the scope of expectation for someone their age? Is it that the online mental health available does not seem relevant or fit into the kinds of questions they can imagine asking? Do they imagine their questions and concerns are "unsayable" in more clinical support settings? Or is it that the youth's fractured access to digital technology does not allow as much opportunity to access online resources in private and consistent ways. It might be very difficult to ask for crisis support, breaking down at a computer terminal at the library.

As a social worker and someone who had worked to support street-involved youth along with others I was curious about youth's experiences with various professionals that had

been involved in their lives, especially during the times when they were grieving. I had a

profound experience as a researcher during the meetings with my supervisor, Lisa Mitchell's

project "More Than One Street" when each youth shared, drawing and telling the story of their

lives that had circled through homelessness. In each of the five stories professional support

rarely appeared: social workers, school counsellors, mental health workers, street outreach

workers were hardly mentioned. In my interviews, I expected that I might have to explicitly ask

about professional supports and what youth had felt had worked, what had not and what they

would like to see in the future, and this was generally the case.

Some youth had access to their outreach workers or teachers through cell phones,

enabling texting. No youth spoke about connecting with professionals through social

networking sites like Facebook. Youths' perception of professional support was very mixed and

rarely came up as part of the story of grief unless asked. A few had deep and long term

relationships with alcohol and drug or school counsellors or outreach workers that had been

there with them "not going anywhere anytime soon" (Crystal, f, 16) supporting them through

difficult times:

> I have called him, like, at least once a week for three years and he knows everything
> about me. The deepest darkest things more than anybody else knows. And he is just
> [name], I called him all the time at detox, and he is my biggest support. (Yanna, f, 18)

Small gestures like bringing the same art supplies to each meeting, taking them to Tim Hortons

to eat donuts when they were craving meth or making their life just a little bit easier went a

long way:

> Biking in from Beacon Hill every morning, getting there at 8:45 in the morning and uh, one
> of the teachers would let me stash my bag so I didn't have to walk around, cause the first
> couple days I carried my bag around and kids were calling me a dirty-skinned… (Alex, f,
> 20)

Vincent (m, 20), who was well known to police, recognized how his time spent in jail had probably saved him from his bodily neglect during extreme drug use. Since his release, police he knew had commended him for staying clean and not hanging out dealing drugs downtown. He appreciated that they noticed his health and took the time to acknowledge him. These connections and small gestures of support are remembered and can help youth deal with the difficult experiences they have, both around death and other traumatic or difficult circumstances.

An investment in the long term was important to Phoenix as a quick fix approach didn't sit well: "…they had a grief room for four days at the school…And then they never brought him up again." (Phoenix, f, 17). Building relationships takes time:

> Honestly. I had to get told to go talk to a shrink before when I was younger and all that. I didn't know the person. It took me like 5 years to find the whole positivity and just be able to talk to anybody and everybody. Not anybody. Pretty much though. You just learn who they are first and then you can talk to them. (Steve, m, 22)

For some, youths' experiences were mediated with their forced involvement with law enforcement and social workers, including their experiences of grief and loss.

> I don't really go to counselling cause I don't, well I am starting D&A counselling Tuesday cause I was told, or required in my youth agreement to get counselling. It did not specify really for what they wanted it for, mental health, I am like "drug and alcohol is close enough. (Phoenix, f, 17)

Several youth had spent time at Ledger house, a secured children and youth's psychiatric facility when professionals were extremely concerned about their mental health. These experiences were difficult and isolating:

> At that point I just didn't really care. I was just like, you know, "You want to label with all these things, go ahead, I'm going to give you a really good story and all of this, and

entertain you because I'm bored and I'm stuck in a mental institution, what the hell else am I supposed to do? (Marta, f, 20)

Alex (f, 20), whose extended family has had multiple encounters with child protection services describes a social worker coming to her home after her father's death to discuss her younger brother's reaction with the family:

Um, we also had social workers come in, um, cause apparently when someone commits suicide they need to come check your kids are okay, even though they're just looking for an excuse to take your children.

In the moments of hearing about youths' interactions with social workers and police and sitting with their experiences I was reminded of the multiple points of view that can come from any interaction. I realized that I was hearing youths' points of view that usually did not reflect the difficult decisions social workers and police must make constantly. What I did hear was that youth felt they had been let down again and again by professionals: "They just wouldn't- they just kept saying, 'Oh, your workers are going to come' but nobody came and saw me for four days. I was alone after being in septic shock and kidney infection for four days" (Crystal, f, 16) or "I've tried to get an outreach worker and they don't fucking call you back. So I'm pretty screwed" (Ida, f, 21).

By the way
All of the fucking self-help places
they just wanna know
if you're gonna fucking kill yourself
They don't actually wanna help you
with your problems
They just will say "oh my god that sucks"
They'll just say "are you going to kill yourself?"
And if you say you're not gonna kill yourself
they say "I don't have time for this"
So you know what"

Fuck you fucking social fucking help self-help fucking lines
Fucking a bunch of bullshit
All you have is yourself.
(Marta, f, 20)

Youth did see that having professional supports may be helpful for them to gather skills

and tools to live the chaotic and sometimes violent lives they were presently experiencing:

Ya it's like, good to have somebody to talk to like…give you advice on like k well like "I don't think that this is working for me, do you have any other suggestions or tips on how I could possibly not punch somebody or feel like wanting to hurt somebody? (Vincent, m, 21).

Youth knew that there were resources available, from phone lines, support online and in

person but many of them had not reached out after people in their lives died, even if they

thought it might be a good idea. They were hesitant to talk to strangers, or to feel judged

around the ways they were coping with the death. Alex (f, 20) described the experience of

seeing a grief counsellor and being told she was "doing it all wrong," a failing grieving subject.

Her response:

I don't believe there's a wrong way to grieve, maybe not healthy ways of grieving…But even my ways of grieving were a lot better. I was smoking weed and hanging out with my friends while I had a job and I still went to work…I think I did pretty damn good for someone that was grieving…compared to most people.

Instead of judgement, youth particularly wanted caring, empathetic support that

provided what they needed in the moment, different for each person, from distraction to deep

listening, to opportunities to explore the existential understandings of life and death.

I think there should be services
More-or-less 'dial-a-friend'
Just someone that can sit there
talk to you about stuff
that has nothing to do with it
Just to distract you

or if you need to talk about it
just someone to talk to
that will sit there
at least pretend to be your friend for a good hour
Like, not try and be all shrinky or anything like it
Just, someone to talk to
make you feel like a human being again
Cause I think out of all things that helps the most
is having that one person there
That just kind of makes you feel better about it
It, it could be [someone you know]
but at the same time
just really someone to talk to
as long as the person's friendly.
(Alex, f, 20)

So it's really, really difficult to say what would even help
It's like you could have people walking around
a counsellor that was available
but that doesn't work for a lot of people

it is almost a defensive thing
you live on the streets
you don't know what fucking family is
you don't know what it is like
to sleep with people
eat with people
shit with people
every day
and then lose them

it's like a really weird thing
a hard thing
just thinking of providing space
an environment where people can gather
talk about their lost friend
an option
if people want to do that
"you guys can utilize this space
for a memorial or whatever"
that might be a good thing
however many times they need it afterwards
get together

be able to talk

But I don't know if that you know,
dwelling on things is really difficult too.
I think that having workshops available for people
on different ways of dealing with grief
Different perspectives on grief
That is what's really hard for me
talking about death
so many people it is like [fake soft voice]
"oh that's so sad"
"oh you poor thing"

I don't want to feel, like
I'm not a victim of people dying
they are not a victim of themselves dying
it doesn't matter if everything happens
cause it is supposed to happen
It just happens
And then [laughing] once it happens
there ain't nothin' you can do about it

But I think that that would be valuable
just being able to explore
like the philosophy of death
having someone who can facilitate
people discussing death
people on the street discussing death
it's a topic they know a lot about
having people discuss it
be able to explore it in a safe space
with people who facilitate different views on these things
NOT religious, but just different

that is what really hard is
we get so wrapped up in these stories
like "the gender story, the grief story, the all these fear stories"
that we tell each other
and we tell ourselves.
(Rooster, gn, 26)

6.6.0 Conclusion

As discussed in chapter 5 and in this chapter, many of the youth I interviewed have had profound experiences of loss in their lives and that grief has been played out and exposed, entangled between the online and offline worlds. Youths' relationships are vital to how they cope with the losses and they prioritize friendships in both providing and receiving support. Their stories have helped me to understand my own experiences of witnessing and performing grief and memorialization on line and in face-to-face interactions with friends, colleagues and clients. The affordances of social networks mean news of a death can spread like wildfire. Youths' thoughtful expertise, as moral beings trying to negotiate this new and difficult terrain, can help all of us as we try to navigate the experiences of grieving online. Although they were often ambivalent about the place of social media in their lives, for many it is a powerful and helpful tool to tell themselves and others about who they are and how they want to be remembered.

> I don't really care. The stuff I write on Facebook, I write just because it's for me. And it's my…it's…my mark on the world. I don't care if it's negative or positive, it's how I felt and I felt the need to put it out there. (Crystal, f, 18)

To conclude, although it would be easy to try to frame the online worlds of Facebook memorial pages, and the texts and private messages youth send and receive as a refuge away from the precarity youth experience in their lives on the streets, the reality is that these worlds are so entangled that both spaces can be dangerous and damaging. However, the youth I interviewed were both resilient and strategic: they found ways to comfort themselves and others and reflect on and continue their relationships with the deceased online. These street-involved youth have generously shared a variety of opinions and ideas of how service providers,

friends and family and communities can support them and others who are struggling with the

deaths they have experienced in their lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

7.1.0 Summary of Research Findings

One of my Facebook profile pictures…my like banner picture at the top page, there was this one day…it was kind of a shitty day and I was walking along…Dallas road, the breakwater…and all of a sudden, as I'm having this shit time, on the ground, somebody had spray-painted "keep your chin up!" and it was like, because it was one of the things that [he] would always say, was "keep your chin up!" and it was like, OK, so I fucking stopped and took a picture of it, and that was like my reminder of keep your fucking chin up, keep going. (Gretchen, f, 26)

I always said I was broken. And- on one, like…group I was learning how to do somatic therapy, but, it ended up just like fucking smashing me right open. And I'm sitting and I was like weeping and I was like, "I'm so broken, I'm so broken, I'm so broken" that I was just like [groan]. And this woman came up to me and she goes, "Yeah, but if you were never broken, then we wouldn't be able to make such a beautiful mosaic" and I was like, "Oh". Like, "I like that. Yeah. Fucking beautiful mosaic"… I think breaking is important. I trust in the process and I don't mind- I don't mind the broken image because I think sometimes that we…can become so much greater than we were in the first place if it wasn't for that breaking…I don't mind it. (Dev, f)

The youth interviewed in this project search for ways to find meaning within the circumstances of their life where death infiltrates their daily worlds. They express this meaning making and their grief, communicating in the entangled worlds of on and offline. The ways youth experience grief and loss are shaped by their lived experiences. For example, the ubiquitous use of illicit drugs and alcohol by youth in this study is directly related to the consistent stigma and discrimination they experience and in the rituals and coping strategies they grieve. Drugs and alcohol are regularly used as a strategy for making it through the day to day, in memorializing the deceased, in finding connection and camaraderie, and in numbing the pain of loss or dampening down anxiety and panic that are legacies of traumatizing

experiences. This use also fills their lived spaces with reminders of death, and the risks associated with it, adding to their vulnerability and instability.

I do not argue that alcohol and drugs are either beneficial or detrimental to grief and loss or attempts to readjust the body and mind after traumatic experiences but simply question in what circumstances sobriety is required and when substances may be desired or expected. Our views on substance use are often based on class, race or other forms of privilege. For some, substance use is sanctioned and even encouraged and for others it is vilified and criminalized. The differences between a grieving widow sipping sherry, a whiskey-filled wake, smoking a joint with friends at the grave site of your friend who loved to get high and play videogames, or injecting heroin in the same cubby outside you used to use with your deceased partner-in-crime is far more complex than the risk involved in the substance. The social context and stigma connected to substance use is reflected in how we view the use of substances in coping and we further push street-involved youth away from support.

There are several key findings from youths' narratives. Although youth participants often see themselves as outsiders from "regular society" they have taken up a normative discourse of a "grieving subject" in their language and stories. This is a discourse of progress that includes stages and tasks and the understanding that to grieve is to do work. For many, this discourse is heightened as the stakes are high: their lives are surveilled by police and child protective services. Sometimes shunned from family of the deceased, or without private spaces to mourn, their expressions of grief are disenfranchised by being exposed and sometimes criminalized.

The youths' relationships are complex and extreme, both difficult and supportive, passionate, heart-breaking, mercurial, loaded, deeply felt and diverse. Youth spoke about negotiating and managing relationships both in person and within the affordances of social networking sites (boyd, 2009) such as the *visibility* and *persistence* of online discussions. These affordances have implications after a death. For example, these youth are wrestling with the performances of grief online, trying to make sense "to what extent these declarations of grief are public posturing and to what extent they are genuine, personal expressions of deep feeling" (Dobler, 2006, p.180). They cautioned about posting too quickly about the death online, so that family or close friends would not have to find out online. They valued communication that is private, face-to-face, or by phone that is intentional and acknowledges the importance of relationship with the deceased.

Youth position themselves as moral beings: they talked about and made sense of death through hierarchies of values, positioning themselves as moral actors, making decisions and framing the death as an opportunity to explore how they want to be in the world or how the world should be. Within the ruptures caused by the death and other tragedies or losses in their lives and the everyday ordinary carrying on, youth were experimenting within the *moral laboratories* (Mattingly, 2012) of the street and online memorialization. They were experiencing transformation or acknowledging resignations and revelations in their attempts to make meaning from these ruptures. For some, this was key to survival. Their thoughtful expertise can help all of us as we try to navigate the experiences of grieving online. Although these youth expressed considerable ambivalence about the place of social media in their lives, for many it is a powerful tool to narrate who they are and how they want to be remembered.

7.2.0 Limitations, Further Research and Recommendations for the Front Line

Youths' perspectives were rich and informative; though focused on the local

community, their experiences and ideas will likely have relevance to other communities and

street-involved youth populations. Other interview questions might have yielded helpful data.

For example, one topic that needed more in-depth investigation is what kind of online support

would be helpful. However, beyond having someone to listen to them, the present youth

participants weren't sure what else would help. Exploring specific examples of what was

available may have elicited more detailed responses.

It was also difficult to know how deeply or thoroughly to examine conflict, especially

with family, that I witnessed in youths' Facebook feeds. In several instances as we reviewed

their Facebook page, some posts caught my attention including those when family members

would publicly comment negatively about the youth on line. I was unable to elicit a clear sense

of how these posts affected youth. The silences and shoulder shrugs spoke to discomfort and

protection.

Research related to active use of social media and digital technologies between front-

line workers and street-involved or other youth is needed to help inform policy makers within

organizations and individual worker's decisions around boundary setting, confidentiality and

protection of privacy. Using these technologies is vital to reaching youth. Checking in on

Facebook posts, communicating in the immediacy of texting and using chat functions that

require few resources by youth can be very effective in supporting youths' lived experiences.

Sharing and learning about privacy settings and other techniques to reduce harm to youth is

important for any front-line worker or clinician. In terms of online memorialization, keeping on

top of current features is vital. For example, in 2015, Facebook (Facebook Newsroom, 2015) introduced what they called the "legacy contact" as an update to memorialization. Now users of Facebook can select a friend or family member to be the manager of their page when they pass away. This means users can create special posts that go to the top of the timeline, allow for new connections to the page or change the profile and cover photos. Sharing information like this can help support an individual in managing their online presence, especially regarding the *context collapse* that can expand after death.

Creating policies on social media and digital technology use requires organizations and agencies to talk through worst case scenarios of social media. Strategies of use include how to support staff to be clear about times they are available, having separate accounts for personal and private life, using settings to limit youth or staff from exposing personal information to the public online. AIDS Vancouver Island has created a powerful graphic logic model to help staff navigate this work (see Appendix 3); other visual logic models of policy could be created for more one-on-one communication with clients. Further research examining and sharing polices created by youth agencies would be especially valuable for organizations just starting to address these issues.

Learning to support youth who have experienced the loss of a peer or other in their lives is not a simple task. One way is to question the diagnoses youth have been given such as ADD/ADHD. How many of these symptoms may be grief responses? Are there ways we remember both the histories of trauma and their losses in our interactions with them? Starting with respect and reflexivity, acknowledging youths' capacity and the burdens they carry can begin the process:

"I think we expect people to not be able to handle it. Or, we expect people not to deal with it…I don't think we are necessarily given all of the tools that- different perspectives at least just for us to explore that aren't religious, you know. It doesn't have to be, like you know there is a different end or a different you know whatever, it's just like. You could look at it like "it ain't that bad" you know it is not a bad thing, it's not a bad thing that happens, it's like we all just die, it's just a thing, you know we all just go…that's it." (Rooster, gn, 26)

Creating heART space, an art show and series of events with youth and young people collaboratively with front line workers and others affected in the overdose crisis provided creative, spontaneous, de-stigmatizing ways to express and embody grief. Youth could come in and out of the space, find connection and solidarity in their experiences and express their sadness, feelings of being overwhelmed or numb both privately and publicly. Doing things like creating ritual installations, making posters, helping facilitate naloxone trainings, discussing boundaries and policies to keep people safe, working together productively within a space created in the ways we wanted it to be was powerful medicine. Using arts-based practices like drawing, painting, collage and performance gave both youth and others a platform to share their experiences. It also provided support workers, parents, friends, and the general public a place to listen, to read, to absorb to witness how youth and others may be experiencing the losses in their lives. This was a powerful experience for many in our community.

7.3.0 Poetry and Performance to Maintain Researcher Wellbeing

The toll of this kind of research can be powerful and heavy. I have searched for creative

strategies to help process the bodily sensations and emotions that have come from this project

to mitigate the difficulties of hearing these stories. I created this next piece using my own

words, reflecting on bodily experiences in doing this research, rather than using the words of

my participants.

He came in to cuddle
Warm and bleary from the ritual nap
Naked and open
I was tucked in
The laptop open
The coded stories bleeding out
Filling my arteries
Spreading into my extremities
In that moment a horrifying
experience
A furrowed brow
"How can humans be so fucking stupid?"
A wash of the devastation
Duct tape
And corpses
Indignation
Sorrow
Our soft naked flesh
Is not prepared
No armour
Our skin too fragile to witness the shit

Our skin too fragile. Is there an armor I must put on to prepare to attend to the worlds I have been privileged enough to explore? Worlds that from my place of privilege, where violence has rarely entered. No dramatic adrenal-fueled knife fights to attend, the familial moments of rage witnessed stand out as solitary peaks, not endless ranges.

Don't get me wrong. I've lived in the work worlds, attending courts filled with baggie-bottomed boys swaggering as their exploits are divulged and shamed, the clinic room where the visceral wounds of girls harmed by their own hands or those they trusted too soon, too late… I have been the collateral damage, the pick up the pieces, the go home and sit at the side

of the bed with my coat and shoes still on, uncertain of my next move to shake it off, picking out enough of the grit and gravel in the scrapes on my knees and hands from tripping and falling, tripping and falling in the middle of other people's lives. And I've made it out the other side with scars closed and shiny.

Don't get me wrong. I can do it. I can hold it. Without falter, without mis-stepping too badly that I can't get up.

But this is new. I am asking myself, I am imposing a regime where I must revisit the stories of specific people who entered into some strange ritual of an informed consent. Pen and paper, a small black recorder, candy, cash and a gift certificate. Some strange ritual where we have traded - traded stories for me to hold in ways neither of us had any clue, traded words and images, connections and beliefs, truth bombs that resonate, detonate in the room around us, resounding, pounding realities of how the world is truly not fair. That sometimes it makes no sense at all, that the good do not win, and both the good and the bad die young. That black and white get muddled into the murky grey of the paint water, sediments of brilliant colours sinking to the bottom.

I am asking myself, I am imposing this ritual of revisit, rework, rethink, resonate with the images and stories they share. The duct tape, the corpses, the words said in haste that have lingered in a festered wound they peeled back the skin to show me, the arms sliced in ritual precision, the nests they have lined with old blankets and stuffies. To store, to create with, to come up with larger than life grand ideas that somehow are supposed to serve me, us, this process that ends with a black cloak and strange little hat.

I am asking myself to expose my soft skin. What kind of armour is possible to do this work and yet find my way through the stories, gathering them up, woven into some semi-coherent net. A cape? A smart little vest? A hair shirt prickling and stinging all the while?

Sara suggests lighting a candle when entering their worlds again, burning sweet grass or sage, the smoke swirling around my pores, the smell lingering in my hair. But it never happens. I dive off the deep end, I slip in the mud, I attempt the cartwheel I never mastered as a 10-year old. I walk along the edge of the cliff, distracted by the eagles soaring above and the roaring surf below, following the path I see ahead.

Laurel Richardson (2008) challenges researchers, asking us how we can put ourselves into our texts. Poetry is a powerful way to express the self, supporting reflexivity in research (Fitzpatrick, 2012); writing and performing poetry and prose pieces has been helpful in my process of digesting the bodily experiences of this research project. Even while foregrounding

narratives of resiliency and their strategies of coping and mutual support, witnessing and

absorbing the harsh realities of the lives of street-involved youth has been unavoidable.

Absorbing difficult stories can affect the wellbeing of any researcher. These can manifest in

gastrointestinal problems, insomnia and nightmares, exhaustion and depression, going home

after interviews emotionally and physically drained (Dickson-Swift et al. 2006). Innovative

strategies may help to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Poetry is one strategy to attempt to

make sense, to express discomfort and to honor the harsh realities that have been exposed:

> It is through the risk of being profoundly affected by another, their *alterity* that is the
> purpose of qualitative research. Learning from the Other, especially the traumatized
> person is an ethical experience that carries with it the possibility for transformation of
> perspective. Creating a perspective transformation is a shift away from one *encultured*
> and colonized perspective about a topic, person or thing toward a new and unique
> understanding of something we already thought we knew well. (Hovey, 2014, p.166)

Consistent with theories of social constructionism (Gergen, 2009), narratives are not

only socially shaped, they are embodied. The beloved Arthur Frank (1991) says that, in making

sense of our experiences, we not only tell stories *about* our bodies, but we tell stories *out of*

and *through* our bodies. "The body is simultaneously the cause, the topic, and the instrument

of whatever story is told. This bodily expression intertwines with the words, made and remade

in multiple subjectivities" (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2009, p.220).

So how has this body responded to the work? My shoulder aches, my stomach swells as

it gestates a dissertation, made up of coffees and ginger scones. What has helped in this work is

writing about it in a narrative form, to embed myself in it, to experience creativity in the

process provides a way to digest, to show, to play with, to take up their experiences in a way of

integration, of coming to my senses. I have been using poetry and dance to incorporate the

bodily experiences of witnessing youth's stories, to recognize on a cellular level some

understanding of their losses.

Josselson (2011) clarifies some of the complications of sharing and performing the stories of participants. She has guilt, knowing that:

> I have taken myself out of relationship with my participants (with whom, during the interview, I was in intimate relationship) in order to be in relationship with my readers… My shame is the most painful of my responses. I suspect this shame is about my exhibitionism, shame that I am using these people's lives to exhibit myself, my analytical prowess, my cleverness. I am using them to advance my own career, as extensions of my own narcissism and fear to be caught, seen in this process. Narrative research is narcissistically unsettling both for us *and* our participants. (p.45)

Tamas (2009) elaborates:

> This is what I am afraid that I am seeing when I read tidy stories of loss used instrumentally as the basis of an academic career. This is how I am afraid of writing myself. I am quite likely to intellectualize my dirty secrets, dishing them out as thrillingly abject pseudo-intimacies supporting a pseudo-recovery and pseudo insights, performed cleverly on the page for my scholarly audience. I am that vain, that desperate to make some use of loss rather than just being with it. (p.9)

One strategy I have used to reduce the guilt and shame is to share the pieces I have written with my participants, showing them quotes I have chosen, even reading aloud the poetry I have created with the transcripts. However, this has been possible in only a handful of examples where I still have good connections with participants, and have had a chance to sit with them. For other youth, our connections were too fleeting and scattered with no opportunity to get feedback or share my interpretation of their stories. Josselson also reminds us that "our challenge as narrative researchers in relation to our participants is both to respect their subjectivity and to claim our interpretive authority, which always involves objectifying them in some ways" (Josselson, 2011, p.46). I take from this that there is an inevitable sense of objectification in any form of sharing I do.

7.4.0 Conclusion

The youth I interviewed had profound experiences of grief, often layered with many deaths and other kinds of loss. They had created a variety of narratives to understand and make meaning out of these deaths, and in many circumstances they recognized how transformed they were by these deaths. They had come up with a variety of strategies to cope that were meaningful and specific to their lived experiences of precarity, isolation and vulnerability.

Fundamental to this research has been Butler's (2004) questions: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally, what *makes for a grievable life?*" (p.20). For street-involved people, grief may be disenfranchised and framed instead as trauma. Although trauma provides a way to understand the intense social suffering experienced by street-involved people, it removes the agency that active expressions of grief and mourning can bring. Grief can expose the failures of society to protect our most vulnerable people, and the histories of these failures. It enables "stories to break through routine cultural codes to express a counter discourse that assaults and even perhaps undermines the taken-for-granted meaning of things as they are" (Das and Kleinman, 2001, p.21).

Butler (2009) imagines grief to expand our compassion: "from where might a principle emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered if not from an apprehension of a common human vulnerability" (p.30). Connecting to our own suffering, to those moments when we are "done and undone" may be the way to push change, to nurture compassion and embrace transformation, especially for those whose losses are so enormous as to be almost unimaginable. In this dissertation, I have worked to share the stories

from youth, in order for all of us to learn from their experimentation in the moral laboratories

they find themselves, as we attempt to make meaning:

> coming to terms with the dangers and uncertainties of our lives, however painful and
> troubling it is to confront what matters, is the existential responsibility we owe our
> humanity to craft a moral life that is not simply the mechanical reaction of a cog in the
> machine but reflects the human potential for self-knowledge and collective refashioning
> of who we are and where we are headed. This is the ethical requirement of human
> experience - not easy, never fully accomplished, always caught up in the limits of politics,
> social life, and our own genetically and psychologically based passions, but, at the end,
> what moral life is for. (Kleinman, 2012, p.122)

I have witnessed, over and over again, kindness, compassion, resiliency, and a great regard for

caring for one another. Their capacity to continue to examine these larger questions, in the

midst of difficulty, gives me hope.

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Research Vocabulary

Here are some common words that are often used by researchers that might help you better understand how a research study is being conducted.

Analyze: to examine something carefully and in detail so you can identify causes, key factors, or possible results of an event, behaviour, issue, or experience.

Anonymity: the personal identity of a research participant is not known to the researchers.

Confidentiality: researchers do not share any of the information provided during the study with anyone, except those working on the research project who need to know. Researchers also don't share the identities of people they may have met, seen or spoken with, with anyone outside of the project.

Ethics: the principles that describe how a research project should be conducted. Universities, health authorities, and school districts typically have a strict set of guidelines that a researcher must follow to make sure research is done in ways that do not harm participants. Universities also have ethics boards that review a researcher's project and must approve it before the researcher can begin their study.

Findings: information (or data) that is discovered because of research.

Focus Group: a small group of people specially chosen to represent a wider population who are asked to talk about and share their opinions about a particular subject.

Honorarium: money or a gift in kind (for example, gift certificate) given to research participants as a way to compensate them for sharing their time, knowledge, and opinions with the researchers.

Informed Consent: when a person agrees to participate in a study after having been told about and understood the risks and benefits of participating.

Interview: a meeting where a researcher asks questions in order to find out a study participant's views or experiences. Sometimes, interviews are audio or video recorded. Other times, only written notes are taken. The researcher should tell you about how the interview will be conducted before you agree to participate.

Pseudonym: a false name used by a participant instead of their real name to keep their identity a secret.

Research:

Academic: research done for educational purposes that is completed by schools, universities, colleges, health authorities, or government agencies.

   Market Research: the work of collecting information about what people buy and why.

Study Methods: the way that the study is being done. Common study methods include surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Survey: using questionnaires to investigate the opinions or behaviour of a particular group of people.

Transcript: a written word-for-word copy of what was said during an interview.

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Know Your Rights with Research

As a study participant it is important that you understand the full details of participating in a research study. The better you and the researcher understand each other and the details of the study, the more likely it is that you might have a positive research experience. Here are some things you should know before you participate in a research study.

<u>You are allowed at any time to:</u>

☐ **Refuse a question.** Whether it's an interview question or one in a background questionnaire.

☐ **Withdraw from the study.** With most studies you can stop participating at any time during the study and all of your information will be withdrawn as well. Make sure you check with the researcher, because some studies have a limited withdrawal period.

☐ **Speak with the researcher at any point during the study.** Make sure you are able to speak with them before, during, and after the study, if you wish.

☐ Ask the researcher questions about <u>anything</u> in the study that you don't understand or you are unsure of.
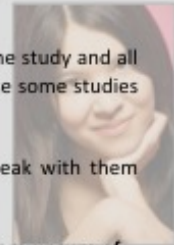
Has the researcher told you:

☐ **The benefits and risks of the study?** If not, ask.

☐ **The purpose of the study?** If you don't understand it, ask questions.

☐ **The study procedures and methods?** (For example, how the study will be conducted, the length of time it will take to complete the study.) If you think they left something out, ask them questions.

☐ **Where and how your information is going to be used?** Make sure this is clear to you.

☐ **That your participation is entirely voluntary?** You do not have to participate if you don't want to.

☐ **That you have time to decide whether or not you want to participate?** Make sure you have the time to think about participating.

☐ **The details of the incentive/honorarium?** (For example, how and when you will receive it.) Be sure you know beforehand when and how you will be recognized for your participation.

☐ **That you have the right to remain anonymous?** If they don't give you the option of using a fake name or ID number, tell them you want to. Make sure that when you receive your honorarium your identity is still kept confidential.

☐ **Who they work for and who is conducting the actual study?** It's important to know if the person distributing the study is the actual researcher conducting the study.

☐ **Where you can contact them if you have further questions?** If not, ask them for their contact information.
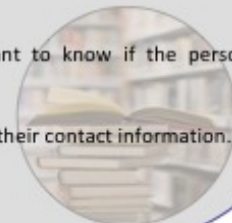
AIDS Vancouver Island Social Media Policy Flow Chart
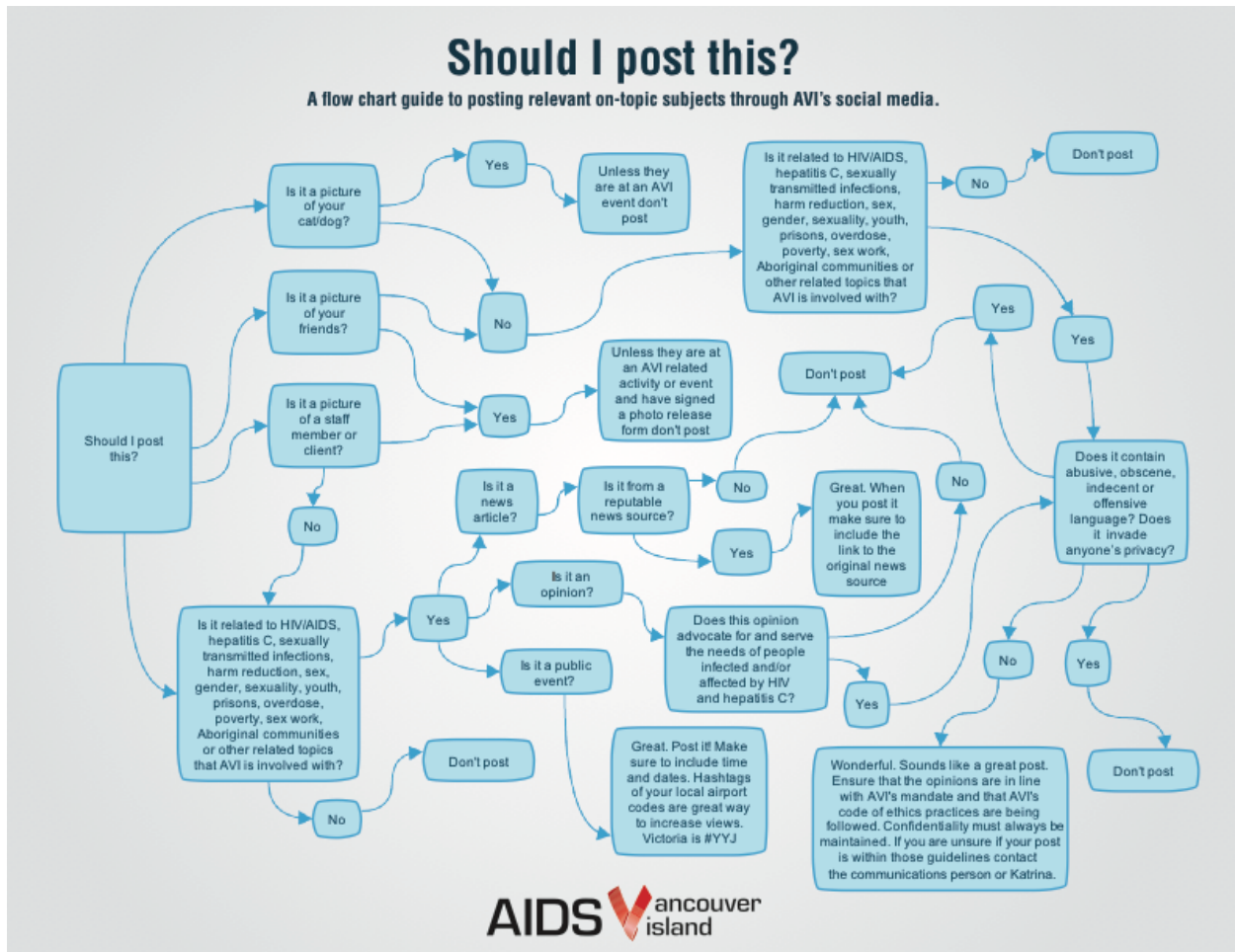
APPENDIX 3

Examples from Photo Essay