Master Thesis Medical Anthropology & Sociology

Remembering through objects:

The loss of a parent in young adulthood in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This thesis has examined the impact of the death of a parent in young adulthood and the role objects have in coming to terms with this loss. It has been argued that, next to their symbolic meaning and ability to prompt emotions, objects have the quality to evoke feelings and emotions. The feeling most commonly described by young adults was 'closeness' and objects were used to continue their relationship with their deceased parent and to keep them near. Subsequently, this thesis has examined how young adults and their family together have to adapt to this loss. Furthermore, the importance of the parental home as a stable core for young adults has been emphasized.

Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was four, my cousin gave me and my brother a book called 'Ghost-train'. It was an ordinary children's book, telling the story of ghosts who do not fit in the world of the living. In 2004 my second cousin died of breast cancer. Years later, I was going through my old children's books because they were ready to be stored in the attic. However, I was hesitant to put away Ghost-train, as it brought back memories of my second cousin. Furthermore, the statement: *Kunnen jullie nog eens aan mij denken.* (To make you remember me) now had a completely different meaning. This book had been a Christmas gift, since we celebrated Christmas every year in my cousin's house. Therefore the book prompted the feeling of Christmas and an insignificant book had been transformed into an important object, symbolizing the relationship I had with my cousin. With the death of my cousin there came an end to the celebrations at her home. The house was sold and, both memories related to her and memories to Christmas' held there disappeared. To this day the book is still part of my book collection and when I read the story, it always feels like Christmas.

Scholars of grief and mourning in 'Western' countries often portray mourning as a process with distinctive phases or stages which a person has to experience in order to be 'at peace' with the loss. (e.g. van Gennep, 2004 [1908]; Turner, 1969; Kübler-Ross, 1970) However, it may be argued that while the funeral is a transitional ritual, in which the dead physically leave the world of the living, it is only the beginning of the bereavement. Walter (1996) has argued that people in 'Western' countries continue their bonds with the deceased by conversation with others who knew the deceased. This is an interesting theory as it explores the way in which the memory of deceased loved ones is kept alive between persons. Nonetheless, I would like to shift the focus on interpersonal relationships and remembering to the relationship between people and objects as it will be argued that objects especially have the ability to maintain a relationship with the dead. As my personal example shows, objects can be of great importance in keeping a loved one near.

In Britain and the United States anthropologists have explored how people keep ongoing relationships with the dead through objects (e.g. Layne, 2000; Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Franchis et al., 2005; Miller & Parrott, 2007; Parrott, 2008) however in the Netherlands few studies have been conducted on these practices, with the exception of a recent study by Heessels (2012), on the handling and disposal of ashes after cremation. Miller and Parrott (2007) offer an insight in the ways the dead are remembered in the home environment in

South London. Yet, what happens behind closed doors in the Netherlands? In what way do Dutch people remember their lost loved ones through certain objects? Which objects are chosen for commemorating and how does the significance and meaning of these mementoes change over time?

Another important neglected aspect of loss, grief and memory is the role that age place in this. Hockey and James (2003) argue that age is often taken for granted in social science. Yet, they argue, every social stage comes with distinctive obligations and expectations . It can be imagined that a life-stage affects remembrance practices, therefore it is fruitful to explore how a certain age-group deals with grief and loss. While there are studies both on children, adolescents and adults and how they deal with loss, young adults are rarely the topic of research. This may be explained by the fact that 'young adulthood' is has not been conceptualized or perceived as a 'real' life stage until recently.

Increasingly scholars portray 'young adulthood' as a distinctive life phase. There are new forms of dependencies in the parent-child relation in industrial societies. Swartz et al. (2009) illustrate that the transition from child to adulthood takes longer in some industrial societies because young adults are allowed to 'find their own way' through, for example, travelling. In this parents often offer financial support. Mulder (2009) argues that leaving the parental home is a major marker for independence and the move towards adulthood . Heath (2009), writing on young adulthood in Australia, argues that parallel to the occurrence of the social category of young adulthood there is the rise of independent living. Where marriage used to be the main reason to leave the parental home, living alone is more and more seen as a necessary step towards adulthood (Ibid, 2009). However, the concept of 'adulthood' is too broad and covers everyone over eighteen, so therefore it is fruitful to denote the concept of young adulthood for this transitional stage.

The move towards adulthood , as shown by Mulder (2009), can be measured by the extent to which young adults depend on their parents. Young adults rely on their parents both in material and immaterial ways and to a certain extent children will always remain dependent on their parents. Given this, it can be argued that the loss of a parent will have a major impact at any stage of life, but that this may apply particularly and specifically in the lives of young adults. As my research is small-scale, I find it useful to focus on a singular type of relationship, in this case the parent-child relation.

This thesis is based on a fieldwork period of three months in which 8 participants were interviewed, 7 female and 1 male, aged between 20 and 30 years. What the participants have in common is that they each lost a parent, respectively a mother or a father, in their late teens

or early twenties. This research focuses on the way young adults cope with the bereavement of a parent and the role objects pay in this. In my research I will explore the range of objects these young adults use to remember a deceased parent and the types of feelings these objects evoke. Therefore my research question is as follows: *Which types of emotions and meanings do young adults in the Netherlands attach to mementoes of their deceased parent?*

A range of theories have been used in this thesis as few studies have been conducted on this particular topic. The aim of this research is to gain insight in the meaning of the loss of a parent in young adulthood. It reveals some of the ways in which young adults in the Netherlands memorialize their parent in their homes. Since studies on emotions tend not to focus on objects and studies on young adulthood often do not discuss loss this thesis aims to consolidate and supplement the knowledge in those fields. The next chapter explores the theoretical framework that has been used in greater detail. Subsequently, chapter 3 offers both an overview of the research questions and the methods employed in this research.

From chapter 4 onwards the findings will be presented and analysed. Chapter 4 offers an introduction to the research participants, focusing on the most relevant characteristics including living arrangements and current level of education or work. Next, chapter 5 offers an overview of the mementoes used in commemoration of the deceased parents and explores their emotional and material qualities. The objects are divided into three categories: 1. things that are arranged in the living space, 2. things that are portable/ that can be worn, and 3. Sound and video, which are described as 'objects' that temporarily change the quality of the space. Through these key themes I will show that these objects help the participants in coming to terms with their loss. The quality most commonly desired from a single, important memento is the feeling of 'closeness' with the deceased parent. Subsequently it will be argued that the meaning of objects develops through time and that the changes in displays or creation of new mementoes gives renewed emphasis to remembrance. This chapter shows the vivid and varied life of objects of mourning, going beyond the idea of a static memory encased or attached to an object or image which has been attributed to Western memory practice (Forty et al.,2001).

Chapter six deals with larger transitions, namely changes in existing family relationships, for example how remembrance practices are affected when the remaining parent of the young adult remarries. The loss of a parent does not occur in isolation and has many ramifications for the entire family. Different ideas on the 'right' way of commemoration have the potential to further disrupt the household. This chapter examines the way young people feel about their family homes and family relationships in the process of coming to terms with

the loss. As the loss of a parent is a massive transition in the lives of young adults it will be argued that they cherish a stable idea of the parental home since they wish to maintain childhood memories and through that a connection with their deceased parent. However, it will be shown that the parental home also is a dynamic space in which the remaining parent tries to come to terms with the loss in his or her particular way.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework:

This research focuses on the way in which young adults cope with the bereavement of a deceased parent and the role objects play in this process. First, as this research is set out in the Netherlands contemporary works on death and dying in the Netherlands will be discussed briefly. Next, theories on emotions will be discussed, in order to give a better understanding of the way the concepts of feelings and emotions are used within this thesis. Limitations of this literature will be explored, specifically that studies on emotions tend to neglect the role objects have in the evocation of emotion. Studies on death and mourning also have a tendency to ignore the role of objects as they often portray grief through a model of stages. Next, studies on material culture and loss will be examined. Here a connection is made between bereavement and objects, yet these studies tend to see objects as containers of memory and less as things that can evoke feelings. Both in the work on emotions as well as in the works on material culture and loss 'age' is mostly taken for granted. This thesis argues that a theoretical perspective that focuses on the importance of age and life stages needs to be included. Therefore, in this thesis different literatures are brought together to shed light on loss in young adulthood.

2.1. Death and Dying in the Netherlands

As the focus of this study is the Netherlands, it is fruitful to look at the contemporary research on death and dying in the Netherlands. The focus of studies on death in the Netherlands is often on changes in funeral, cremation and burial practices (e.g. Enklaar, 1995; Heessels and Venbrux, 2009; Heessels, 2012). Contemporary Dutch people try to invent new rituals to commemorate their deceased loved ones in particular and personal ways (Venbrux et al., 2008). Furthermore, the emphasis of studies is often the public manifestation of grief, for example the shrines that are created alongside roads to remember people who died from car-accidents (Klaassens et al., 2008) or the collective mourning that occurs after the death of a famous person (Stengs, 2009). My research is less concerned with the public manifestation of grief but more with the private relationships people have with objects.

Perhaps the topic that receives the most attention in anthropological studies of the Netherlands is euthanasia (e.g. Pool, 2004; Van der Geest, 2009). As the Netherlands is one of the few countries in which this practice is legalised – although under strict conditions- this prompts highly controversial debates concerning 'good' and 'bad' deaths and to what extent

people should be able to intervene in the process of dying. Although this is an interesting theoretical perspective, the focus of my research will not be on issues concerning the end of life, but on endurance of relationships with the deceased after death.

With the exception of a study of Wojtkowiak and Venbrux (2009) which discusses 'home memorials' in the Netherlands, there are rarely any studies available on memorials or mementos inside the homes of people. Furthermore, the concern of their study is whether these memorials can be seen as new forms of religiosity in a secularizing country and they do not address important questions on the profound meaning of these memorials and which feelings they evoke. In all there is a deficiency of studies on the ways Dutch people remember deceased loved ones in their homes. To answer my research question I have to look at studies outside the Netherlands, starting with the current works on emotions, as they are a focal point in my research.

2.2. Emotions

In numerous studies of emotions scholars argue that emotions are not a natural given, but part of a discourse (e.g. Rosaldo, 1986; Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Hochschild, 2003; Lutz, 2003 [1988]). In order to understand emotions in a certain culture the historical, social, political and economic context needs to be taken into account. Hochschild (2003) argues that people do not only try to act the way that is appropriate in certain situations, but also try to feel the way that is socially and culturally accepted. There are –unwritten- rules on how to act and feel in certain situations. The feeling rules and norms of what is accepted and what not are culturally and context specific. Scheper-Hughes (1992) offers an example of the socially and culturally construction of emotion in a poor village in Brazil with a high prevalence of child mortality. Scheper-Hughes argues that the women in the village do not grieve or mourn for their deceased children, as there is a mandate to not show these emotions (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). Scheper-Hughes states that emotions are inherently cultural and that without our cultures 'we simply would not know how to feel' (Ibid., 1992:431). However, these studies only look at how emotions are experienced inter and intrapersonal and do not explore how emotions are experienced in relationship to objects. The current theories on emotions are therefore insufficient to fully grasp the feelings and emotions felt by young adults in this study. The next section explores whether contemporary works on loss and material culture do incorporate the feelings that are inspired or experienced in relationship to objects.

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2.3. Mourning and material culture

In studies on material culture the ongoing relationships people sustain with the deceased through objects is often researched. This supplements and may even contradict theorists who see grief and mourning as series of stages and phases with a clear beginning and end (e.g. van Gennep, 2004 [1908]; Turner, 1969; Kübler-Ross,1970). A distinction can be made between studies that focus on public remembrance objects, for example the graveyard and studies that explore the remembrance practices in the privacy of people's home. This section will first explore the public objects and then move on to the private, less visible mementos

One of the most obvious connections between death and material culture are cemeteries. The graveyard can be a place that the bereaved enjoy visiting to remember their lost loved one. While anthropologists have given a lot of attention to non Western mortuary behaviour, relatively little is written on the use of these places in contemporary Western countries. Franchis et al. (2005) discuss the relationship that people have with cemeteries in London. They argue that the cemetery is both a place and a process, as the meaning of a graveyard and the grave change in significance over a life time. However, here again the feelings that are evoked in the presence of the grave are neglected. In his work on Danish graveyards Sørensen (2010) sees cemeteries as a place where people continue their bonds with the deceased. Sørensen views cemeteries as highly complicated places which represent both the presence and absence of a deceased loved one. Here we begin to see the incorporation of feelings relationship to objects as the visitors of graveyards both experience a sense of presence and absence. However, as will be discussed in more detail later on, the young adults in my thesis did not have a good relationship with the grave and put a greater value in their relationships with objects inside their homes.

In the Netherlands there is a general absence of permanent burial rights, as these rights can be bought in ten-year periods. This shapes the relationship that people have with graves. Although cemeteries and graves are interesting sites to explore the relationship that people have with the dead, it is really important to look at the relationships that people have with objects inside their homes because of the value people place upon such models of commemoration. As graves in the Netherlands are of a temporal nature this can help explain why people prefer to have home memorials or mementoes, as they may have a more enduring character. The focus of my study will be on the ordinary everyday domestic objects that can transform into powerful mementos.

Both in contemporary Britain as in the Netherlands the majority of people are

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cremated instead of buried. Kellaher et al. (2005) argue that the way in which the ashes are handled in Britain mostly resembles traditional burial practices. Heessels (2012) offers an example of the Netherlands which shows that there is a variety of creative ways in which the ashes are used in remembrance practices and that these practices are not, as Kellaher et al. (2005) argue, ' in the shadow of the grave'. My thesis will show that ashes have the ability to evoke a sense of 'closeness' with the parent and therefore have a special quality as memento, particularly when they are incorporated into novel new art objects or tattoos for example.

Hallam and Hockey (2001) argue that people in Western societies historically have made use of objects to remember deceased loved ones. The objects that are used for these memorial practices shift throughout the ages. In their work Hallam and Hockey discuss 'Western' practices, whereas their material mostly represents British examples. Therefore my thesis will explore the particularities in a Dutch context. There is a tendency to discuss loss and death in a 'Western' context, however this thesis shows that there are differences between the Netherlands and Britain, both 'Western', even European countries. Furthermore, even in a single country various ways of commemorating are present (e.g. Parrott, 2008).

Miller and Parrott (2007) offer a contemporary insight in the importance of home memorials in South London and they argue that material objects help to separate the living from the dead. However, their concern is more with the rituals attached to certain objects and less with the feelings attached to them. Furthermore in Miller & Parrott (2009) the emphasis on the divestment of objects. They argue that by parting with things, people part with certain aspects of the relationship. As people do not have control over the parting with their deceased loved ones, they can have control over this process by longer term relationships with objects.

However, as the research of Layne (2000) has shown objects are not merely used as a medium to control the parting with loved ones, they can also be used as a medium to sustain and renew or even create this relationship. In her research on mothers who miscarry or lose a baby shortly after giving birth, Layne has investigated the relation between mourning and material culture. She argues that through objects these mothers continue the bond with their baby. Moreover, the objects are used to create an identity and personhood around a baby that never was alive. Different types of goods are used in order to cope with the loss. An important theme in this loss is the lack of recognition by society that they were mothers. Therefore these objects help shape and justify the identity of a 'real' mother and that they lost a 'real' baby. Here we see the continuation, even the creation, of a bond with a deceased baby. It also shows that mementos do not have to be belongings of the deceased loved one, or objects with a shared memory but that entirely new things have the potential to become a memento which

shapes both the identity of the deceased and the identity of the living.

Hallam and Hockey (2001) argue that objects have the power to sustain and store memories. However objects do not only have the power to prompt memories they are also part of everyday life and therefore their meaning and significance may develop through time. I can illustrate this point more clearly by turning to a study of Marcoux (2001a; 2001b) that does not focus on material culture and loss, but on material culture and transitions. In a study on moving houses Marcoux argues that a reshuffling of relationships and memories takes place. By deciding which objects to keep and which to divest, people hold on to certain memories and relationships and let go of others.

Emotions have only recently begun to be theorised in relation to material culture. Svasek et al. (in press), for example, explore the significance that objects hold in the lives of migrants and the specific feelings they may evoke. Therefore, to understand the feelings attached to objects insights from the literature on material culture and from emotions need to be combined in new ways. Furthermore, the studies discussed so far mostly take age for granted. This is relevant for my topic of research, therefore theories on this topic will be discussed in the next section.

2.4. Young adulthood & Self-Identity

In my research I will take a life course approach and thereby follow the earlier mentioned theorists (e.g. Hockey & James, 2003; Heath, 2009; Mulder, 2009) who argue that age and life stages are significant when conducting a social research project. However, it should be noted that I will explore how such a putative 'life stage' is experienced and perceived without assuming that life stages, such as young adulthood, are a 'real' stage nor that people in this particular age group feel part of this group. Nevertheless, as the role of age is often neglected it is fruitful to focus on a particular age group and bring age explicitly into the analysis.

My thesis will explore what the commonalities and differences in remembering by a particular age-group. It is important to explore how these young adults reflect on their remembrance practices and how they construct their identity. According to Giddens (1991) self-identity is not a trait, but it is a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. This reflexivity is a continuous process and therefore a person's self-identity is subject to change. This theoretical framework is useful when discussing the remembrance practices of the young adults. In this thesis it will be explored how reflexive and conscious the young adults are of these practices and to what extent the mementos are part of their identity.

2.5. Conclusion

In order to answer my research question novel connections between different literatures need to be made. As mentioned earlier, the current studies on emotions do not explore the relationship between objects and feelings. At the same time studies on material culture and loss tend not to explore emotions, but focus more on memories and meanings. Importantly, bereavement in young adulthood has rarely been researched and never in relation to loss and objects. Furthermore, as most of the scholars cited tend to take age for granted it is difficult to conclude whether certain expressions of grief are particular to this life stage. As 'young adulthood' is characterized by transitions, for example moving out of the parental home, the works in material culture that are most relevant for my research are those focussing on the relationships between objects and transitions in the lives of people , for example the study of moving houses by Marcoux (2001).

This thesis combines a wide spectrum of theories to grasp the significance of a loss of a parent in young adulthood. My research and sub-questions relate to the theories described in this chapter and will be outlined in the next chapter. Furthermore, the research methods employed and the tools for analysing the data will be explained.

Chapter 3: Research Questions and Methods

3. 1. Research Question and Sub Questions

In this chapter my research questions are described. Thereafter the operationalization and methodology will be explained. The focal point of this research is the importance of objects in maintaining an ongoing relationship with a deceased parent. Subsequently, as young adulthood is signified by transitions, the impact of a loss on life-changing decisions, is important to address. This includes decisions ranging from the choice of study or living arrangements. Following my theoretical framework, outlined in chapter 2, my main research question is as follows:

Which types of emotions and meanings do young adults in the Netherlands attach to mementoes for their deceased parent?

My sub questions are:

1. What role do objects play in coming to terms with a loss?
2. Does the meaning or significance of these objects change over time?
3. Which types of feelings are ascribed to the young adults mementos?
4. How does the loss affect their ideas of identity? What role do objects play in this?
5. In what way does the loss of a parent affect relationships within the household and how is this reflected in remembrance practices?

3.2. Description of Research Methods

In this section the methods used during this research and the data that came out of these methods will be discussed. In my research question lies the assumption that objects play an important role in coming to terms with a loss. The focus of this research is the personal experiences of young adults, therefore in-depth interviews have been chosen as the main method for gathering data. In order to find out to what extent objects are part commemorating practices the space in which the interviews were conducted was the homes of the participants.

3.2.1. Anthropology at home and in the home

This fieldwork was conducted in the Netherlands and as I was born and raised in this country, conducting fieldwork 'at home' has it consequences. On the one hand, this may blind me from certain themes or issues raised during the interviews. For example, it was only through conversation with my British supervisor that I discovered that sending out a *rouwkaart*, or an announcement card by mail to inform all the people who knew the deceased of the death, did not occur in Britain, whereas I thought that this was a normal event. On the other hand, being a native Dutch may also be an advantage, as it provides knowledge of the language and its nuances that a non-native might not pick up. Therefore, anthropology at home can offer a more in-depth analysis of the research. A reflexive approach is thus most important in order to reduce a biased stance.

The ideal situation would be that the interviews are conducted in the home environment. Nevertheless, young adults may still live with their parents, live alone, cohabite, or be in-between houses. In this, the home environment was a flexible notion. The participants were free to choose the environment of their interviews, but the importance of objects was emphasised. Furthermore, as the topics discussed were sensitive and private, most participants found it comforting that they were in their own 'safe' environment. During the fieldwork period interviews were conducted with the participants. With six of the eight participants follow up interviews were conducted, with the remaining two I failed to set up a second meeting in the given time-frame. With the exception of one follow-up interview, which was held in a park, all the interviews were conducted at home.

3.2.2. In-depth Interviews and Follow-Up Interview

The main source of data were in-depth interviews. These interviews were semi-structured, as a topic list was followed. However, the interviews were flexible as the stories of the participants affected the direction of the interview. The first interview served mostly as an introduction and offered a chance to get acquainted with the participants. Some participants questioned my motives during the first interview. One participant could not imagine that I was interested in this research topic and although she had agreed to talk with me was very nervous about the nature of the questions. Yet during the conversation I was able to build rapport and gained a sense of trust.

In the follow-up interview the first interview served as the outline for asking questions. Things that were unclear in the first interview or topics that were discussed to brief could be further explored. As a consequence the second interview was more focused than the

first, and it often offered another layer to the answers provided in the first interview. Furthermore, the first set of interviews was transcribed and analysed before the follow-up interview. Therefore themes that were discussed with one participant could also be explored with others. Subsequently, the follow-up interview offered the participants a chance to be reflexive on their answers from the first interview. More importantly, it offered a change to see whether displays had changed after the first interview and if participants reflected differently on their practices.

As the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants they were in their own safe environment. It made discussing items easier, as they were present at the interview. Some participants picked things up, or invited me to come look at certain things. Others were more hesitant in revealing what they found important. It also revealed that the participants are not always conscious of the objects that have a relation with their deceased parent, as they are part of everyday life. My presence made some participants realise that their lives were very intertwined with objects of their lost parent. At the time of the second interview some of the participants had parted with certain belongings, however I am hesitant to conclude that this was because of my intervention in their lives.

During the interviews I did not only tried to get answers out of my participants, but I focused on the interviews being like a conversation. Therefore I sometimes used personal examples with certain topics, but was cautious to discuss my own bereavements as I found it incorrect to compare the loss of a parent with the loss of, for example, a grand-parent. Some participants also emphasized that they saw a hierarchy in various losses and for them losing a parent was the peak. Furthermore, I feared that my own examples would intervene with the experiences of the participants as they reflect my perspective on loss and not theirs.

The interviews sometimes felt as a discussion between friends. As Tillman-Healy (2003) argues, friendship can be a method for research but comes with both strengths and weaknesses. One downside is that researchers can get too close to the participants and this was reflected in my interviews as they moved me more than expected. After the first interview I ended up having a migraine and this taught me that I needed to distance myself more from the stories. Therefore I often discussed the interview with a friend, or my mother, to relieve some of the tensions. During the transcription the stories sometimes moved me again, mostly with a feeling of injustice that these young adults had to go through this at such a young age. This research therefore showed the discrepancies of 'going native' and at the same time keeping an analytical, more objective stance as I was often drawn into their stories.

3.2.3. Snowball sampling

In this research snowball sampling was used to find participants. This method has both advantages and disadvantages. The problem of generalization is often used as an argument against the use of snowball sampling. However, as the fieldwork period was short, the intention was to explore a small sample and to compare within this artificial 'group'.

As is argued by Browne (2005) certain populations are difficult to reach due to the sensitivity of the topic. She uses the example of finding non-heterosexual women who might be hard to find as there is no database containing such information. Therefore she argues it is fruitful to use one's own social network to find participants. This method was used in this research and has led to the situation that most participants were friends of friends. The method was beneficial, as it gave a basic level of trust that was helpful in discussing personal topics.

One of the participants was a childhood friend, with whom I renewed contact after the death of her parent. The interviews conducted with her were harder, because I personally new the parent. Her emotions touched me more than with the others. Also, the questions were asked differently, as I knew the answers to some of the questions. This shows the bias that can occur when a researcher is too close to their participants. However, as she argued, she would have never told me her story if we were not acquainted.

3.3. Types of Data

Various types of data were collected during the fieldwork period. There were two sets of interviews, the first interview and the follow-up interview. All these interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Out of the transcripts of the first set of interviews the outline for the follow-up interview emerged. Throughout the research a field diary was kept, containing notes on the interviews, ideas for useful theories and connections between different participants. After every interview observations made during the interviews were recorded, or written in the field-dairy. Furthermore, every memento was photographed. Every participant received his own file, in which the transcriptions of the interviews, the observations, notes and photographs were combined. Every interview was coded, in order to compare the different cases and to discover themes. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.3.1. Narrative and Thematic Content Analysis

In my analysis both commonalities and differences between the participants were explored. A narrative analysis was used in order to understand 'the ways in which we make sense of the world through stories'(Green & Thorogood, 2011: 213). The loss of a parent is part of the

biography of young adults and in the analysis the focus was not only on what the participants said, but which words they used in describing their situation. An important theme that came out of this was a sense of 'closeness' that the participants tried to achieve through objects and this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. In their stories participants found it important to have the dates right and often they took their time whether special days had, for example, occurred on a Monday or Tuesday. Such details were important in the answers of the participants and for my thesis I needed to take a step back, distilling the message behind all these details.

A thematic content analysis was conducted as various themes were collected with the data. Of course, every object was coded under the main code of 'objects' with sub-codes as 'photographs' or 'display', but next to the material quality of objects, feelings attached to them as 'closeness' were labelled. Furthermore the mementos were not static things, but part of everyday life, this dynamic was captured with labels as 'changes in displays' or 'the parting with things'. Another important theme was 'family relationships'. Participants discussed changes in relationships with their remaining parent or quarrels that occurred with respect to certain belongings. Therefore transitions within the families were also labelled with codes like 'rebalancing the family' and 'merging of households'. Through the thematic content analysis the loss of a parent revealed a micro and a macro level. Various transitions take place in the lives of the young adults , on a micro level in the relationship they have with their objects and on a macro level with the relationships with their families. These themes will be outlined and analyzed in greater detail in chapters 5 and 6.

3.3.2. Photographs

The focus of this study lies on the mementos that the participants find important to commemorate their lost parent. Therefore all the objects that were discussed during the interviews – with the exception of a tattoo on a too personal place- were photographed. The function of this was dual: on the one hand it gave me an opportunity to go back to the material during the analysis as it gave a visual impression of what was being discussed. On the other hand the act of photographing gave me new data as it gave insight in how the participants treated the objects when they were being photographed. For example, one participant started to ask a lot of questions on how the photo's would be used and who would see them. For her the issue of privacy was very important. Some participants handed me the objects that were being photographed, while others rearranged them and did not let me touch them.

Most participants did not mind that there mementos were being photographed. It took

me a couple of interviews to get over the feeling that I was intruding in the participants lives with the camera. As the mementos were very personal things it did not feel right to handle them that way. It felt as an intrusion of privacy, taking photos of people in their everyday environment. Already I had asked them to discusses very personal things and now I was taking photo's like a tourist. It felt disrespectful. However, most participants did not mind that I was taking photographs, some even to move things around so I would be able to get a good shot of their things, so quickly I had to get over these feeling as intruder.

Pink (2004) discusses the roles photography can play in visual ethnography as one can have a realist or a reflexive stance. In the first, the image is taken as a fact, from which you can read 'reality'. In the latter the context in which the photo was taken and the instability of the meaning attached to it are taken into account. Pink (2004) draws attention to the importance of reflexivity when using visual images in research. As I have photographed the mementos and displays there is the danger that these images turn them into static things. However, as my thesis will show, these images are by no means facts, but a temporary account of the displays and objects.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter the research question and sub-questions are outlined. Furthermore, the methods employed in answering these questions has been discussed emphasizing both the advantages and disadvantages of these methods. Subsequently, the ways in which the data has been analyzed has been explained. From the next chapter onwards the findings and the analysis of the data will be discussed in great detail. Chapter 4 starts with an introduction of the participants , to get a sense of the 'group' that was part of this research.

Chapter 4 Characteristics of Research Participants

4.1. Introduction Participants

In this section I will introduce the young people who participated in this study and consider some of the commonalities and differences in their backgrounds and bereavements. All the names used in this study are pseudonyms to ensure the participants privacy. I will be using names that are similar but not their real names to refer to them in the text.

Table 1 Demographics Participants

Name Participant	Current age	Lost parent at age	Lost Father/ Mother	Siblings	Living condition	Death parent due to
Jolien	23	22	Mother	Brother and sister	Above Parental Home	Illness: Cancer
Saskia	22	17	Mother	None	Cohabitation with friend	Illness: Severe Diabetes
Sjors	22	17	Father	Sister	Parental Home	Car Accident
Jan	25	22	Mother	Two Brothers	Living in lodgings	Illness: Cancer
Sanne	22	17	Father	Brother	Living in lodgings	Illness: Cancer
Esther	22	17	Father	None	Parental Home	Illness: Heart-failure
Dorien	30	28	Mother	Sister	1. Girlfriend 2. Cohabitation with boyfriend	Illness: Cancer
Tess	27	17	Mother	Sister	Own Apartment	Illness: cancer

As is visible in table 1 eight young people participated in this study 7 of which were female and 1 was male. All of the participants are from Dutch decent, only the father of Esther was born in Germany.

My participants each lost a parent, either a father or a mother, between the age of 17 and 28. Sometimes the loss came unexpected, for example in the case of Sjors who lost her father due to a car accident. In other situations the parents suffered from illnesses and their health deteriorated over time. In the case of Dorien the doctors expected that her mother would only live for three more months, which turned out to be three years. Therefore, Dorien was very aware of her mother's mortality and the detachment from her mother was a very conscious process. Yet whether the loss was expected or not was independent of the impact it had on the participants as for all participants it influenced particular decisions in their lives.

I interviewed the participants between 8 months and 10 years following the

bereavement. The participants offer a variety of experiences. For example, Jolien is a 23 year old woman who lost her mother only recently. At the time of the first interview it had been eight months since her mother had passed away, so the loss was still 'fresh'. At the other end of the spectrum is Tess, a 27 year old woman, who lost her mother at the age of 17. Although it had been ten years since her mother passed away, this loss still plays an important role in her life. The interviews show that on the one hand time 'heals' some of the wounds of the bereavement, yet on the other hand the loss will always play a part in the participants lives.

4.1.1 Living Arrangements

Two of the participants still lived in the parental home, the others have other living arrangements varying from living in lodges, cohabitation, to living alone in an apartment. The participants in this research also showed the temporality and changing nature of living conditions. For example, Dorien had moved three times in a short period of time. During the first interview she lived in a spare room of a friend's house temporarily as she had ended the relationship with her boyfriend. At the time of the second interview she had moved in with her new boyfriend. Jolien has moved out of the parental home, yet she did not go far as she still lives above it. Her parents own the entire building and she rents a floor. Most of the living arrangements of the participants are temporarily and this affects the ways in which the parents are commemorated. However, this will be discussed in more detail later on.

4.1.2 Relationships: Siblings & New Relationships Remaining Parent

Three of the participants have lost a father, the other five have lost their mother. With the exception of Sanne's mother, whose parents got divorced when she was nine years old and who remarried four years ago, the mothers remained single. Three of the fathers (Jan's, Saskia's and Tess's) have remarried and in all these cases this new relationship occurred shortly after the loss of the mother. In the case of Jolien the loss was too fresh to even discus hypothetical new relationships of her father. As will be discussed later, the relationships of the remaining parent have an effect on ways of commemorating the lost parent within the parental home and sometimes causes discrepancies between the way in which the child wishes to commemorate the lost parent and the way in which the remaining parent wishes to do so. However, not only 'new' relationships have their effect on remembrance practices. Siblings too, can have other ideas on commemoration the division of belongings of the deceased parent. Two of the participants were an only child, all the others had one or more siblings. In

my thesis I will explore to what extent all these relationships shape the way in which the deceased parent is remembered.

4.1.3 Education & Work

In some of the cases the loss affected the study and work of the young adults. Dorien postponed graduating as a psychologist because of the enduring illness of her mother. As the dying process took longer than anticipated, at some point she picked up her studies again. She now works as a psychologist. After the loss of her mother she struggled between different jobs and took a year off to explore what she wanted from life. During his mothers sickness Jan started up his own business and after his mother's death he developed another two. He devoted all his energy to these businesses. At the moment, he is investing less time in the businesses and is trying to finally graduate from college. After graduating Jolien entered the working life. However, due to her mother's death she was absent too much at her first job and she did not meet the 'targets' and therefore her employer did not continue her contract. She is now in search of a new job and she is afraid she has to life on welfare for some months.

In some of the cases the loss in combination with health problems caused participants to drop out of college. Tess has tried several studies but got diagnosed with ADHD shortly after her mother's death. Furthermore, she got diagnosed with 'postponed grieving'. All this made her drop out of college. Thereafter she stayed home for a couple of years. At the moment she has an administrative job at a secondary school. Sanne got diagnosed with depression and was on antidepressants for some time. She has tried several studies and claims that she now has found the one that she really sees herself finishing. Due to her chronic illness Saskia has dropped out of secondary school and is living on welfare. This also explains the cohabitation with a friend, as she cannot afford the rent by herself.

As is shown by the examples, in all the cases the loss of a parent has affected study and work conditions. The effect the loss has had on the lives of the participants concerning hopes and dreams about the future will be discussed in more detail later on.

4.2 Conclusion

In this chapter the young adults have briefly been introduced by offering some of the most relevant demographics. In order to understand the impact of the loss of a parent in young adulthood, the entire context which includes the family, living arrangements and work conditions needs to be taken into consideration. The following chapter focuses on the mementos that the young adults have in remembrance of their parent. The chapter starts with

an overview of the range of objects that are used as mementos. These objects are used by the young adults to come to terms with their loss. They should not be seen as 'static' as they can move in different spaces. Furthermore, the meaning and feelings ascribed to the mementos are dynamic, as they change over time.

Chapter 5 Objects as mementos

5.0. Introduction

Tabel 2 Overview of Objects

Participant	Things arranged in living Space	Things that can be worn/ are portable	Sound/ Film
Jolien	Photographs	Tattoo, Jewellery	Music, e.g. Bruce Springsteen
Saskia	Shelf in closet filled with small items: e.g. photos, cards, piece of art with part of ashes. Clothes	Chapter in Book	Music
Sjors	Photograph with small objects of father behind it; lighter, watch. Self-made paintings	Tattoo	Music, Pink Floyd
Jan	Jukebox, photographs In progress: painting portraying his mother and him.		All sorts of music related to childhood.
Sanne	Painting	Necklace with ring	
Esther	Living room: Side table with picture, Buddha containing ashes and flowers. Bed room: small Buddha with ashes, valentines card	Tattoo Necklace with fathers wedding ring and small heart containing part of ashes	-Music played at funeral - Home videos of childhood
Dorien	'Practical' everyday objects: cutlery, clothes etc.	Variety of jewellery. Her mother's old car	-Music played at funeral especially one song they performed a sacral dance on. -Video Funeral
Tess	Small table with objects; photograph, figurines and other small items.	'Box filled with sentiments' Ashes	Music in general, and music that was her mother's taste.

Walter (1996) argues that the purpose of grief is to create a durable biography with the deceased. Through conversation with people who knew the deceased, people can integrate the memory of their lost loved one into their ongoing lives. However, as my research will show it is not merely by talk that people try to come to terms with a bereavement. The young adults also make use of objects to keep their relationship with their parent 'alive'. Walters describes the process of grief as a relationship between people, however the relationship between people and objects may even be of greater importance. With objects the person is in greater control of parting with objects and memories. As argued by Miller and Parrott (2007), objects create time to part with the deceased, perhaps more time than when one has to rely on conversation with others to keep the memory alive.

In the previous chapter the participants have been introduced briefly. In the following sections I will continue this introduction by exploring the range of mementos that were

discussed during the interviews. All the participants have personal and particular ways in commemorating their deceased parent, yet there are also some commonalities. Some participants have reserved a special place in their living room to put certain items up for display. Others carry important items, such as jewellery, around and some even have a permanent memento, a tattoo, on their body.

A commonality in all these material ways of commemorating is that most of them are ordinary mementos in the domestic sphere. Most objects that are chosen to remember the parent are, at least for outsiders, ordinary objects, but that have a special meaning for the participants. For example, Saskia's mother suffered from diabetes and to control her blood sugar levels she always carried around a small package of glucose. Saskia still owns the last half empty package that her mother owned. For outsiders this is just a container of sweets, but for Saskia it is one of the last things her mother touched and used and therefore it has a profound meaning.

Roughly the objects can be arranged in three categories. These categories are created to get a grip on the data, yet the boundaries of these categories are by no means strict as some objects can belong to different categories or move between the different categories. The first category is 'objects arranged in the living space'. In this category belong the things that are displayed in the home of the participant, often a space in the living room reserved for items that are connected to the deceased parent. Secondly, there are things that can be worn or that are portable. In this category are things such as clothes, jewellery and tattoos. The items in these category move in and out of different spaces, as the participants carry them wherever they go. Lastly, there is the category of sound and film. This is a broad category which contains music and videos that can be listened to and watched in any space. An example of this category is the music that was played during the funeral which continues to evoke strong memories for the participants. These categories will now be discussed in more detail.

Picture 2 Side Table at Esther's house. Photo made by author.

5.1.Things arranged in living space

In the category 'things arranged in living space' belong displays that are a collection of things to remember the deceased parent. Three of the participants had such a display. For example, in the living room Esther's mother created a side-table (see picture 2) with a picture of her father and a large Buddha, containing the larger part of the ashes of the father. The medication of his heart condition made him gain a lot of weight so they always joked that he looked like Buddha. Esther's mother used to get flowers ,almost always red, from her father, therefore the side table is always covered in pink or red flowers.

Jolien did not reserve a special place in her room to remember her mother, but throughout the entire room there are things that are connected to her mother. What stands out is the massive collection of photographs. She has always had a room full of photographs, portraying her friends and family and this collection only increased after her mothers death. She gets comforted by the photographs surrounding her, yet sometimes they evoke a wave of emotions which makes looking at the photo's unbearable. When this happens she turns them around so she only sees the backside of the photo's or the frames. At other times, she gets strength out of looking at them, for example when she went to her new job for the first time. She looked at one of the photographs of her mother and could hear the pep-talk her mother would have given her, if she was still alive.

Jan does not have any photographs or memorabilia in his home that remind him of his mother. In his parental home there is a jukebox (visible in picture 5 below), which he describes as the *rode draad* or a constant factor in his live. In his childhood his family moved homes a couple of times, but the jukebox has always been there. Both the jukebox and music are things that evoke a lot of emotions and memories to his mother. At the time of the first interview Jan described the arguments the jukebox had caused and that he would do anything to prevent it from going. Yet during the second interview he had less difficulties parting with the jukebox. This could be due to the event at the end of the first interview in which his father came home and announced that he and his new wife were planning to move to France and sell the house. Whereas in the first interview there was only a hypothetical discussion of the parting with the jukebox the conversation with his father at the end of the first interview had made this divestment real. Therefore Jan was forced to reflect on the importance of the jukebox in his life, and he decided that the memories in his head were more important than the physical presence of the jukebox.

It may be connected to another event that had taken place. During the first interview

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he discussed his desire to let an artist create a painting of his mother and him. At the time of the second interview he had found an artist and he argued that the hypothetical painting would be 'invaluable' compared the value of the jukebox and when finished it would get a prominent place in his home. However, he still had to discuss this place with his roommate, as he could understand that he would be less pleased with a huge painting of him and his mother in the living room. Shortly after his mother's death, Jan had envisioned a painting of him and his mother and now this desire was about to become real. For him this was more important than anything else, as it symbolized his relationship with his mother and was 'timeless' compared to other things.

Sanne does not have any mementos or photos in her house and also in the parental home there are no pictures or objects. The absence of photographs of her father in her parental home can be explained by the divorce of her parents at the age of nine. Furthermore, Sanne argued that she did not want to be confronted with photos or other things as they show what she is missing. Sanne suffered from depression after the death of her father and the mementoes would make it to visible that her father is gone.

This section has explored the things that are arranged in the living space. The way in which displays develop over time will be discussed in detail later on. Not every participant felt comfortable displaying items or photo's in remembrance of their parent. However, these participants often did wear something, for example a necklace, in remembrance of their parent. In the next section these things that are portable or that can be worn will be discussed.


Picture 3. Sanne wearing her necklace with her father's ring. This achieves a sense of 'closeness'. Photo made by author.

5.2. Things that can be worn/ that are portable

In the previous section things that are arranged in the living space were discussed. In this section objects will be discussed that are not confined to one space, but that move in and out of different spaces as the young adults carry them with them. The most obvious example of this is jewellery. Jewellery was a common theme among the female participants. Kirkham et al. (1996) have argued that objects can reflect certain gender norms, jewellery can be seen as mostly a 'female' object. In this section the way participants treat their jewellery will be discussed.

5.2.1 Jewellery

Some participants wore jewellery that had belonged to their parent as a memento others were hesitant to do so. Esther wears a necklace with her father's wedding ring and a silver heart-shaped charm filled with a small part of the ashes. Sanne as well wears her father's wedding ring on a necklace as a memento for her father (Visible in picture 3). Jolien was more hesitant to wear jewellery that belonged to her mother. One ring had also belong to her great-grandmother and she wears this on special occasions. The idea of losing the ring frightens her as she would lose something that her mother touched and worn.
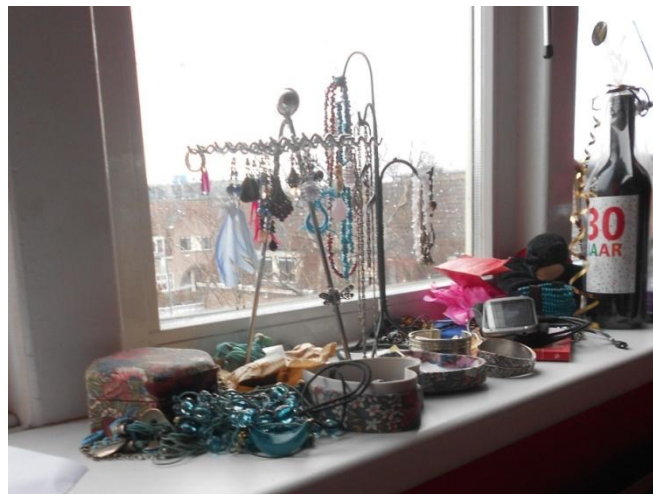
Picture 4 Small sample of Dorien's jewellery collection. Photo made by author.

The display of Dorien's jewellery collection was just a small sample of her collection. The collection as shown in the photograph (visible in picture 4) is a mix of her jewellery, jewellery that belonged to her mother and jewellery she received as a gift from her mother. Most of the items in the display she wore, yet some she did not. The ones that she did not wear were outdated or simply not her taste. There was also a particular necklace that her

mother had worn at the second time she married her father – Her parents got divorced but married again when Dorien's mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer- which both she and her sister wanted. This necklace was not yet distributed. In the second interview she stated that she did not mind who got the necklace as long it was either her sister or she, and no other family member. As this necklace was part of many memories she shared with her mother it was important for her that the necklace remained in a reachable distance.

While the participants had different ideas on wearing the jewellery, a commonality in these cases is the value that is attached to these objects. Rings and necklaces have a special quality as they were worn by the deceased parent and the jewellery therefore offers a tangible link with the deceased parent. If they would lose the object, they would connection would also disappear. The participants that got a tattoo in remembrance of their parent did not have this fear, as it is a memento that cannot be lost.

5.2.2. Tattoos

In my small sample of participants tattoos were highly represented, since three out of eight participants has a tattoo in commemoration of their deceased parent. The participants were very reflexive of the symbolic and the place where they desired the tattoo. While they all choose a different part of their body, they gave a similar reason why they chose this particular part: it could be covered up. Sjors has a tattoo in her neck, shaped like a star and a moon, which is connected to a shared memory of her and her father. The tattoo has become part of her everyday life, and she often forgets that it is there. During the interview she denied having any mementos for her father and only when I spotted the tattoo she remembered it again. The meaning of the tattoo is twofold. It is symbolic for her relationship with her father but at the same time it is a rebellious statement against parental authority as her parents both disliked tattoos. Sjors wanted tattoos even before her father died and she has several, in contrast to Esther and Jolien who only have a single one for their parent. The meaning of the tattoos will be discussed more in depth in a section below. For now it is sufficient to note that an important quality of a tattoo is to have a permanent link with the deceased parent.

5.2.3 Photographs

Photographs were a common significant object among the participants. This is not surprisingly as family photographs are widely used to Western countries to portray ceremonial occasions such as birthdays (Scott, 1990). Photographs are both part of the

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displays, but are sometimes also carried around for example in wallets and mobile phones, therefore they can be placed in more than one category. They can evoke different kinds of emotions, they can cause sadness as photographs make participants aware of what they are missing, yet at the same time they can evoke positive emotions, for example make the young adults proud that they have known their parent for as long as they did.

Tess had picked out the current photograph on her side table because of the physical resemblance between her and her mother. Interestingly, Tess made a distinction between photographs showing her 'healthy' mother and her 'sick' mother. The photo's that portray her mother during her illness are not representing her 'real' mother. She argues that her mother does not look like herself, as Tess can see that she is in pain and that she is sick. When I asked her if she had a picture that depicted her mother 'as she was' she showed me a photograph on which her mother was very young, before she was struck by cancer. Scott (1990) argues that idealization is an important quality of home photographs. This is visible in the distinction Tess made between her 'sick' and her 'healthy' mother. The picture of her 'healthy' mother portrayed the ideal version of her mother whereas the other photo's revealed the reality of her mothers illness. Most participants had photographs of the 'ideal' version of their deceased parent. Interestingly Dorien also took a photo with her mobile phone after her mother died. She used to look at this photo often in the period following her mother's death to show herself the that her mother was really gone.

5.3. Sound/ Video

The last category of objects that will be discussed is 'sound'. The most obvious item that falls into this category is 'music'. In general, this category is more abstract than the other two. One can think of a voice on which the voice of the deceased parent is recorded or home videos on which the deceased parent is still alive. These things are not conveyed to a single space and can be listened to or watched in a place of choice. However, when these sounds or videos are played they have the ability to temporarily change the space as they often prompt childhood memories or emotions.

In all the cases music was a powerful medium for the arousal of emotions and memories. The music that was played at the funeral especially had a powerful effect. Music can be listened to in any space, but the participants preferred to listen to music related to their deceased parent in the privacy of their home where emotions can run freely.

Sometimes it is unbearable to listen to certain songs. Esther gave the example of a night at work when the radio played one of the funeral songs. She panicked as she was not

prepared to hear that song at work. This shows that these songs create a sense of vulnerability and explains why the young adults prefer to listen to these songs in the privacy of their own homes. Especially things that bring the parent back to life are difficult to confront. This is the case for videos or records from the funeral, or home videos. As Jolien says ' Her handwriting and her voice, those are the things that I find the most difficult to come across, as they clearly show what I'm missing'.

Although music can be listened to in every place, sometimes it does not feel 'right' in a certain space. Sjors offered a great example of this. For her the music of Pink Floyd is connected to memories of her father. He used to listen to this music on Saturday mornings and she can still picture him on the couch, listening to 'his' music. For a long time she could not bear to listen to the music yet some time ago Sjors and her mother gave it a chance. The music felt strange to listen to and did it not 'fit' into the house anymore. Although her father listened to the music in the same space, it does not have the same quality anymore. Since the environment has changed, both her father and the furniture related to her memories are physically absent, as a consequence the music now seems unfit in this space.

In the previous sections the categories of objects have been introduced. This section has focused on the power of sound and its ability to evoke emotions in any space. Every theme of objects has particular characteristics and the power to evoke certain feelings and emotions. The next section focuses on the way mementos can achieve a feeling of 'closeness' with the deceased parent.

Picture 5 Jukebox in the parental home of Jan. Photo made by author.

5.4. "Closeness" as a feeling.

This section explores how objects have the ability to release and sustain certain emotions and feelings. While the participants have a variety of ways to remember their parent a common feeling that was evoked by the objects was 'closeness'. A memento has the ability to achieve a sense of nearness or presence of the deceased parent. This 'closeness' can occur in various ways and some objects are more suitable than others. Or, to put it the other way around, some things fail to achieve a sense of closeness. An important aspect in commemorating the parent was to store and preserve memories and thereby create a feeling of attachment with the parent. It is often proposed that objects in 'Western' cultures (e.g. Kwint et al., 2001; Forty et al., 2001) have the ability to 'hold' memories, but how things can evoke 'feelings' as well as hold 'meanings' is less well understood (Edwards, 2001). Certain mementos can give the impression that a deceased parent is still near or that through certain objects the young adults can connect with their lost parent. In this section, I will discuss the significance of the feeling of 'closeness' evoked by things, and how some objects allow participants to experience this nearness, as well as how certain things serve better at achieving this than others.

In four of the cases the parent was cremated, in the other four cases the parent was buried. The graveyard did not provide the young adults with a sense of closeness. On the contrary, it mostly created a feeling of absence. The graveyard is strongly associated with death and most participants felt compelled to visit. Jolien associates the graveyard with detachment and absence. Jolien argues: 'So many people lay there, and my mother never came there when she was alive. It is merely the body and the [tomb]stone that is there. Here [in the house] she is alive. There [on the graveyard] she is dead and [that place] is connected to death'. Here we see that the graveyard fails to provide a feeling of proximity, although it is the place where the body is present. Jolien misses the 'tangible' things like the touch of her mother's embrace. The graveyard makes her feel that her mother is not around anymore, as she can never hold her again. This could also explain why she does not feel comfortable at her mother's grave, because it signifies that she will never be able to hold her mother again.

In contrast, ashes do have the quality to provide a sense of closeness, as they can be intertwined in everyday objects and can be placed within the home. This contradicts the findings of Kellaher et al. (2005) who argue that the way the ashes are handled, for example their disposal or the burial in personal places, often resemble the traditional burial practices although my data show various original ways of handling the ashes. For example, the ink of Esther's heart shaped tattoo was mixed with some of her father's ashes. Therefore she is

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literally carrying part of her father with her. She cherishes the idea of always having her father close to her. She values her earlier mentioned necklace even more than the tattoo. The tattoo is fixed, but the necklace is also never removed and she says feels 'naked' without it. She is horrified by the thought of losing it but she said that if this happened she will always have her tattoo. It is obvious that both these physical symbols are very dear to her, with the tattoo the permanent marker.

Jolien also feels that she is connected to her mother through her tattoo. It is important to her to have a concrete and visible link. The symbolism of her tattoo is a conscious and considered choice. The tattoo represents the initials of her mother 'AA' and written in her mother's handwriting (see picture 6). Furthermore, the letters are adorned with a wave shape, as her mother used to love the sea. For outsiders this can be seen as a nice decoration and she enjoys the idea that only 'insiders' know that it is symbolic for the sea. The tattoo keeps her mother near and can evoke a lot of memories, for examples the times they spend as a family on the beach. She sometimes talks to her mother while touching her tattoo and by doing so she feels linked to her mother. As is argued by Miller & Parrott (2007) objects create time for the living to separate from the dead, the tattoos create a permanent link between the young adults and the deceased parent , therefore they never have to part with them completely.

Picture 6. Tattoo on the wrist of Jolien.
Photo made by participant.

The comforting effect of having objects close by is illustrated by Tess. She describes a sense of 'closeness' through the mementos: the make her feel that her mother is with her. The presence of the objects give the impression that her mother is still around. As her mother stayed at home for the first eleven years of her life and her father was away for work most of the time she feels that many of her childhood memories have disappeared along with her mother's death, as she can no longer ask her mother about them. She is afraid that when the objects disappear, the memories that she has of herself with her mother will also be gone. As in remembering her mother even the smallest item is important, she is reluctant to dispose any of these objects.

Juliet Ash (1996) discusses the presence of her deceased husband's tie collection. She argued that the presence of the ties can evoke memories and thereby creating a sense of presence of her husband, yet at the same time they prompt absence as the ties signify that they will never be worn by him again. However, Ash only focused on the power of clothes worn by the deceased in creating ,what I have described as, a sense of closeness and the examples above show that any object has the potential to evoke this feeling, particularly when physically near or when worn or marked on the body.

These examples all show how the participants try to obtain a sense of closeness through objects. They try to mediate between presence and absence, for example, by putting items up for display or by wearing jewellery. There is no singular way of experiencing closeness as this section shows a variety of very personal ways of dealing with the notion of closeness. A common aspect in achieving closeness through tangible objects may be their quality to provide a sense of warmth or intimacy. The graveyard is perceived as a 'cold' place by this younger group of people and a tombstone is not very inviting to stroke, hug or touch.

Scheper-Hughes states that emotions are inherently cultural and that without our cultures 'we simply would not know how to feel' (Scheper-Hughes, 1992:431) This is in line with the argument of Hochschild (2003) that every society has certain 'feeling rules'. However, the general experience of the young adults in this research is that they have no concept of the appropriate way to feel after the loss of their parent. During the second interview Dorien even saw me in the role of the expert on the matter. She asked if it was normal to still grieve for her mother two years after her death, contrary to her belief that she had come to terms with her loss. In order to explore whether her emotions were 'normal' she began asking questions about the other participants. Clearly, however, all these young people seek ways in which they can use their mementos to release and sustain certain feelings of attachment to their lost parent and feel close to them . This in itself is inherently cultural; in

other settings it might be important to separate oneself from a personal relationship to the dead, e.g. when there is a belief that their spirit could harm the living. But these feelings cannot necessarily be put into words, which shows the limitations of seeing emotions as a discourse.

When grieving, people naturally go through emotions which may be described as 'sadness' and 'anger' yet the relationship with objects show that their feelings are more complex than these basic types of emotion(s) categories would suggest. A different and more extensive vocabulary is necessary to begin to grasp the feelings and the experience of the young adults, one in which 'closeness' should be distinctly included.

In the next section I will explore another aspect of the relationship participants have with objects, namely the way displays are treated. Displays are not merely a static group of things in remembrance of a parent whose significance or symbolism we can interpret; equally important is the way they may be rearranged and moved to a different space. I will suggest that relocation or dynamics help people find small ways to renew their attachment to the deceased parent, continuing their bond with the deceased through objects.

5.5.Renewing of memories: Dynamics of Displays

In the previous section I have argued that objects have the ability to evoke feelings. As is argued by others (e.g. Barthes, 1981; Kwint et al. 2001; Hallam & Hockey, 2001) objects can 'hold' certain memories. In an essay on a photograph of his deceased mother, Barthes (1981) argues that his memory of the picture has been reduced to the image portrayed in the photograph. For Barthes, the photograph only contains a single memory, whereas I will argue that objects can hold multiple memories and these can change over time. In this section I will argue that not only memories ascribed to objects may change, the feelings attached to them may also develop over time. This is reflected in the way participants deal with their displays. Some of the participants have created a space in their living room to display items that they consider important in remembering their parent. However, these displays are not necessarily permanent and the objects that are present in these spaces can vary. There is a so-called dynamics in the displays as participants continue to negotiate what they find important in displaying and what not.

In her living room, Tess reserved space to remember her mother. She has a small table, next to the couch on which small objects are displayed (see picture 7). In the centre there is a frame containing a picture of her and her mother when she was little. The picture in the frame changes from time to time. Surrounding the picture are various small objects that either

belonged to her mother or that are somehow connected to her mother, for example a glass to put candles in which is green, her mother's favourite colour.

In another room she has a *kistje vol sentimenten* or a 'box filled with sentiments'. This plain wooden box contains objects that belonged to her mother, for example make-up, as she was a make-up artist, diaries, key chains, a small stuffed animal and photographs. Sometimes objects from the box are placed on the side table and in exchange objects at the table are placed in the box. Subsequently she sometimes adds entirely new things to the display, for instance a pin cushion she recently found in a shop, similar to the one they had when she was growing up, which got destroyed by the dog. Tess also wrote birthday and mother's day cards to her mother after she passed away. These cards have been added to the table and afterwards placed in the box. Here it is visible that displays are dynamic and that 'old' things, namely objects that have a connection with the deceased parent merge with new things such as the birthday cards Tess continued writing to her mother after her death.parent, and 'new' things for example birthday cards

By selecting these objects Tess does not only rearrange them, she also selects and rearranges her memories. Every objects is attached to certain memories and by adapting her display Tess brings certain memories to the surface, like the childhood memories attached to the pin cushion, other memories are put on hold and placed in the box. This process is closely resembles what Marcoux(2001a) has termed *casser maison*, or the breaking of the house. In his study on elderly people in Montreal who move into a residential home and thereby become separated from their old home, Marcoux explores how people part with their old environment through the divestment of things. ''*Casser maison*' is a rite aimed at putting an end to the mourning entailed by the separation with a known environment, with the belongings constituting it and with an aspect of the self left behind' (Marcoux, 2001: 230). As the residential homes are smaller than the old homes, these elderly have to part with certain belongins because there simply is no space to take it all. For Tess the items in the display are also a part of her identity and the last link to her deceased mother. However, in the case of Tess the objects are moved to another space and not parted with completely, as she is not ready to let that part of her life go.

Picture 7 Side table in Tess's house. Objects move between this table and the 'box filled with sentiments'.

Noticeably this practice may be related to the age of my participant. The elderly represented in the study of Marcoux prepare to move in to their final homes. With the moving into a residential home they are confronted with their own mortality they often give their belongings to relatives, knowing that they will not be using them for much longer. In contrast, Tess is still young and may envision a long life. She may part with these objects in the future, but for now she needs them as essential keepsakes closely related to the memory of their deceased parent.

Not only do the items within a display change, but also the space in which the display is placed may differ as participants change homes. For example, Dorien has moved house several times due to the ending of relationships and the entering of a new one. She has recently moved in with her new boyfriend and at the time of the second interview she was still in the progress of settling in and thinking about how she wished to remember her mother in her new environment. Here, again, we see the process of *casser maison* which Marcoux (2001 a) describes. Changing her home environment gave Dorien the opportunity to go through all her belongings and made her reflect on all the items that she owned. As a consequence, she was able to part with some of the objects, for example twenty pairs of shoes that belonged to her mother. Displays do not simply move from one home to the next, but are reassessed emotionally whenever such changes occur.

In Esther's case we see a similar situation. At the time of the interviews Esther still lived in the parental home with her mother, yet she was in the progress of purchasing her first house. When asked if she would put up a display like the one in her mother's house (see photo 1) she stated that she did not intend to simply copy the display but would create a similar special place. In a research on student homes in the Netherlands Cieraad (2010) concluded that most students recreate elements of their parental home to create a feeling of ' being home' in their new place. Esther insisted on having something of her father in the living room to emphasize his 'still part of the family' but would settle for a less conspicuous display, such as a table with a smaller Buddha and a smaller photograph than those at her mother's. Since the death of her father, the table has both been a part of the 'home' and part of her memories connected to her father.

In this section the dynamics in displays have been discussed. Adaptations in displays reflect a change in feelings towards a certain object. In some of the cases the object has become insignificant and can be disposed of. In other cases an object has to make space for other memories so a different object is temporarily displayed.

An interesting element emerges in Esther's desire to have a less conspicuous display in her new home. The desire not to impose on other people was a significant factor in the

creations of displays. While wishing to remember their parent, the participants did not want to force their things on others. This dialectic of exhibiting or not exhibiting will be discussed in the next section.

5.6. Public and private : to show or not to show.

Most participants see commemorating as a private affair. However, some of the participants carry or wear a permanent memento with them which can be spotted and commented on when they leave the privacy of their own homes. Yet even in their homes, this hypothetical confrontation with others affects the display which they wish to not impose on other people. In this, the self-reflexivity Giddens (1991) discusses is present, as the young adults explore which they do find appropriate and which they do not. Goffman (1959) argues, that the self is performed. He uses an analogy with the theatre to explain how people play different roles in everyday life. Although Giddens and Goffman see the reflexive nature of people this section shows that my participants do not 'perform' continuously. Sometimes their mementoes are taken for granted and it is because of interaction with others that they become aware of them again.

The items which are portable move in and out of the public and private sphere. This is of course especially the case for the jewellery and the tattoos which are worn permanently. Esther and Sanne who wear their necklaces with their father's wedding ring all the time, were ambivalent; on the one hand they liked having them with them, on the other hand were reluctant to discuss the story attached to them with strangers. This largely depended on their moods. For both of them it has been 5 years since their father's death and both were reluctant to talk about their father when amongst friends. Therefore, sometimes they were happy enough to discuss the story with other people, they might at other times simply acknowledge that they are wearing a ring.

Jolien had an unpleasant experience at her new job when a colleague spotted her tattoo. She was got off guard and found the topic too heavy to discuss in depth with her colleague. At the same time she felt obliged to say something. Therefore she briefly discussed the meaning of the tattoo. She had not discussed her mother's death at her new job yet and she had wished to disclose this on her own terms. Here we see the presentation of the self at work as Jolien was aware of the way she presented herself at work, always cautious to cover the tattoo. She wanted to get to know her colleagues better before imposing such a heavy story on them. All the examples shown above show that the participants are not constant reflecting on how it may affect others.

The idea that visitors are able to see the mementoes inside the homes affect what is put up for display. After the death of her father, the mother of Sjors redecorated the house drastically. Not a single piece of furniture reminds her of her father. Sjors argues that it has always been "her mother's house", as her father was often absent for his work. The only thing that reminds of her father is photograph of her father in the corner of the living room. Behind the frame lay some items that belong to her father, for example the watch he wore during the fatal car- accident. The objects are not visible for visitors as they did not wish to create a shrine. It is interesting that they found these objects important enough to keep, yet consciously placed them for no-one to see.

Picture 8Saskia's shelf with mementos for her mother. Photo made by author

Due to her low income Saskia cannot afford to live by herself, and a friend offered to cohabitate a flat. They each have a separate closet in the living room. In Saskia's closet she dedicated a shelf to her mother (see picture 8). On the shelf various small items are placed, all connected to her mother; a necklace portraying Saskia as a baby, her mother had worn permanently, cards she received from her mother, a piece of art made out of glass which contains a bit of the ashes, a small urn, a mug containing the earlier mentioned package of glucose sweets. In the case of Saskia it is understandable that the display is small since she has to share the space with her roommate. The shelf with the objects does not stand out, as the shelf below draws more attention to it. Saskia created the display for herself, she enjoys looking at it every day, however she does not feel it is necessary that it jumps out at visitors.

Interestingly, Jan's desire to have a grand painting , portraying him and his mother, in the living room is an exception to this. He wants people to know his mother and he does not

mind if the painting is conspicuous or not. As Jan is the only male in this research it may be argued that trying to have a inconspicuous display is perhaps a female desire. Yet the side table Esther's mother created, does draw attention to it, therefore it also could be argued that it is perhaps a characteristic of women in young adulthood.

The social network site Facebook is another space in which the boundaries between public and private are blurred. Some participants post messages on important dates, others are more hesitant as they do not find it the right medium to draw attention to their loss. The posting of a message is a reflexive process as the young adults think about what they wish to show and what they want to hide.

Tess enjoyed posting a message in honour of her mother's birthday since it had been ten years since they last could celebrate her birthday. On this special day it was a meaningful gesture for her to put her mother in the spotlight. She does not find Facebook the right medium to ventilate messages to her mother but is happy to post videos there that remind her of her mother. On such anniversaries she feels it is right to discuss her mother whereas on other occasions she feels hesitant to discuss her mother.

Jolien has decided to post a little poem or a song in remembrance of her mother on momentous days. Therefore, on her mother's birthday the song 'You're Missing' by Bruce Springsteen was displayed on her wall. Her mother was a huge fan of Bruce Springsteen and this song was also played at her mother's funeral. On these dates she likes to show that she thinks about her mother, and she sees this as a tribute, although she ambivalently wonders if it is not seen as attention seeking behaviour. She argued that the people who know her situation understand what the poem stands for, and for others, it is just a nice poem or song. Yet, she is not willing to explain this online when people ask about it. This shows that, although the participants are aware of what they wish to tell or show, they are still not in full control of the situation as again outsiders can comment on these remembrance practices.

The messages on Facebook are an example of the dialectic between public and private expressions of coping with the loss. It is also a new medium through which grief can be channelled and therefore some of the participants experiment with messages to find out what they wish to show and what not. On Facebook the participants are especially cautious and reflexive in the way they present themselves. However, in general participants are reflexive and conscious in the ways they remembering their parent as they try to do this in non conspicuous ways.

5.7. Important dates

The messages on Facebook reveal that certain dates are important in the remembrance practices of these young adults. The importance of these dates will be discussed in this next section. The grief that participants feel after the loss of a parent will decrease but it will never disappear completely. This shows the shortcomings of theorists who explain grief through a model of phases or stages (e.g. van Gennep, 2004 [1908]; Turner, 1969; Kübler-Ross,1970) in which people go through various emotions and at the end of it are 'at peace' with the loss. While there are days that the participants feel they have come to terms with the loss, there are other days on which they are again filled with deeply felt emotions. This often occurs at important dates such as the dates of birth and death of the deceased parent. Therefore the grieving process can be seen as a wave, with highs and lows, which is forever present.

In the fieldwork period significant dates of death and birth occurred for many participants. Sanne found it silly that she felt more sad on those days, as after all her father was absent every day. She did not understand why it mattered more on those days. Also for Dorien the second interview was much more emotional as in between the interviews the second anniversary of her mother's death had taken place. Whereas she had claimed to be at peace with her loss during the first interview, she was sadder and angrier during the second interview.

Most participants were conscious of these dates and found it important to have some kind of ritual on these days. Tess bought birthday cards and presents for her mother even after she had died. She found it important to honour these days. Saskia bought a cake on her mother's birthday. Jan and his family visited the grave on his mother's birthday and he intends to make a tradition out of visiting the grave and going out to dinner with his family to celebrate his mother's life. Jolien took a few days off of work in the days before her mother's birthday and wore the ring her mother gave her as a special tribute.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter started out by exploring the range of mementos that young adults have in remembrance of their deceased parent. There is a great diversity in the objects that are used as a memento The relationships these young adults have with their mementos show that grief is not something that gradually decreases but rather moves in waves and gathers force on significant days. I have argued that these objects have the ability to evoke 'feelings'. The feeling most commonly described by the participants was 'closeness' as they used their

objects as a medium to keep their parent close. Also, I have argued that the meaning of mementoes and the feelings attached to them are not static and develop through time. This is especially noticeable in the dynamics of displays as the young adults continue to decide which items are important to hold on to the memory of their parent.

Where this chapter focussed on the personal transitions in feelings attached to the objects and the adaptations in displays on a micro level the next chapter will look at these issues on a larger level. The loss of a parent affects the entire family and relationships and dynamics within a family need to be taken into account to begin to understand some of the transitions that occur in the lives of young adults.

Chapter 6 Transitions: Rebalancing relationships and the parental home.

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter issues on a micro level were discussed concerning the relationship between emerging adults and objects or mementos remembering the loss of a parent. Next to the investment in and the parting with objects, changes on a larger scale take place, for example within the family. In all cases the loss of a parent causes an imbalance within the household. The deceased parent had a certain role in the family, and his or her death has left a gap. Therefore the participants and their families have to adapt to the new situation and I argue, this leads to the rebalancing and re-identifying of relationships within the household. In all the cases the relationship with the remaining parent has changed, for better or worse. Also among siblings the division of roles is renewed. For example, in the first months after her mother's death Jolien tried to achieve the same relationship she had with her mother with her older sister. Soon she realised that this was not right as she should not expect her sister to fulfil that role. Furthermore, in some of the cases the remaining parent entered a new relationship, this complicates the rebalancing as on the one hand the deceased parent needs to be commemorated in a good way, and on the other hand there needs to be space for this new relationship.

In this chapter these transitions will be discussed on the basis of two case studies. Differences between the grieving process of participants and their parent were highlighted perhaps most strongly in cases where the surviving parent entered into a new relationship. This was the case with four participants. These dynamics are explored through detailed case studies examining what happens to remembrance practices when different households merge.

An important element in both case studies is the role of the parental home. Since the participants have to go through many transitions already, the idea of the parental home as a stable core is helpful in coming to terms with the loss. Cieraad (2010) discusses how Dutch students try to create a 'home away from home' when they move out to go to college. She argued that 'home' is a multilayered concept as these students both refer to their parental home and their new place as 'home'. Furthermore, she found that, when discussing the future homes of these students that they often wished to decorate their house similar to their parental home to recreate the atmosphere of their childhood (Cieraad, 2010). Next will be examined how the merging of households adapts this idea of 'home' and to what extent the idea of the parental home as stable core is relevant for my participants.

Case Study Tess: The scattering of Ashes

On the ten year anniversary of the death of Tess' mother the ashes were scattered. Her mother had written in her will that she wished to be scattered only if the entire family (Tess, her father and sister) was ready for this and that the ashes should go as a whole, meaning that they could not displace a bit of the ashes in, for example, a medallion. The scattering took place in France, at the spot her mother had spent her last holiday. They scattered the ashes into a river, protected by a ruin located on the riverbank. Her father had brought silver spoons which were part of their special cutlery and they scattered her spoon by spoon into the river. Afterwards they all cast one rose into the water, which were taken by the current of the river. Tess also threw in a stone egg inscribed with the words :Maman est morte. Vive maman. (Mum is dead. Long live mum; see picture 9) in honour of her mother, as this is what used to be said when royals die. At the end of the scattering Tess filled a plastic bottle with some of the sand of the riverbank, as a memento.

Her father also used this ritual to conclude his time with Tess' mother. Therefore, after the scattering of the ashes, he decided to also burn his wedding suit. Her mother was cremated in her wedding dress, therefore it was symbolic to also burn the wedding suit. Yet in this act the difference between her father and her and her sister became painfully clear: he was ending this part of his life, moving on with a new wife, while Tess and her sister would never 'close of' this part of their life. Tess understood that her father desired to do this, but felt that this was not the place, nor the time. As she recalls 'at first we had invited my grandparents and aunt and uncle …. And for a moment my father's girlfriend wished to come….[in the end they all did not attend] … And it was nice – because shortly after my mother passed away my father had a new girlfriend. Although she was not always physically there, in the background we knew she was there. Now I had the feeling that for a moment it was just the three of us again'. However, the burning of the suit made it clear that this perhaps would be the last time they would be together as a unit of three.

6.2. Rebalancing the family

The case study above describes the rituals surrounding the scattering of the ashes of Tess's mother. After ten years they were finally ready as a family to dispose of the ashes. However, the case study reveals that family members can have different ideas on how to commemorate in the 'right' way. The burning of the wedding suit made Tess feel uncomfortable and she found it complicated to cope with the fact that her father was closing of a period of his life that would never end for her. Of course, she knew her father experienced the bereavement differently as he now lived with his new wife. Yet, the burning of the suit made it too visible. They had discussed the place where the scattering would take place, yet did not converse their wishes of how to do this. For Tess's father it was natural that the suit would be burned as well and that his daughters should be part of that ritual.

In the account it also shines through that Tess would have liked it if they would have coped with the loss more as a family. Shortly after the death of her mother, her father had gotten into a new relationship. The transition to another woman came to quickly and at the time she did not understand how her father could move on that fast. For years he had taken care of her mother as the various types of cancer deteriorated her body. Furthermore, her parents had been together for 21 years and she had wondered whether he had forgotten this or that it did not mean anything to him at all.

During the interviews she argued that it perhaps was male-specific. She had seen it in other cases were had men had lost their wives. In her experience they all entered new relationship shortly after the loss had occured. Interestingly, in my research three of the fathers entered a new relationship soon after the loss of their partner, whereas all the remaining mothers remained single – with the exception of the mother of Sanne, yet her parents divorced when she was young-. Tess argued that perhaps he needed the support of a woman, as suddenly he was a single father with two teenage daughters. It is interesting to explore whether certain aspects of grief are gender-specific. My data would suggest that father's have the tendency to 'move on' quicker than mother's who lose their partner. However, as this is just a small sample I am hesitant to draw such a conclusion. For Tess, arguing that the pace in which her father came to terms with the loss was 'a male thing' shifts away the attention from the relationship her parents had. This now appears to be something inherent of her father, and is independent of the relationship with her mother. If it was a conscious choice of her father to move on so quickly this could spoil the ideas she has of her parent's marriage. Therefore her current explanation helps sustaining her childhood memories of them as a happy family.

The case study reveals that parents and children do not only have different ideas on the way a lost parent should be remembered, it also shows that they can have a different pace in coming to terms with the loss. Furthermore, Tess wished to cope with the loss as a family, whereas her father searched for support elsewhere. New relationships of the remaining parent do not only have the potential to alter commemoration rituals, they can also have an effect on memorial rituals inside the parental home. Tess's father started to redecorate the parental home after her mother's death. She found this challenging as she wished things to remain the same when she went back to her parental home to visit her father. The next section will discuss issues that occur when the parental home changes.

6.3. The parental home as stable core

The case study of Saskia examines the difficulties she has with disposing of her mother's belongings as the parental home is rearranged to create space for her father's new wife.

Case Study Saskia: Postponing to part with things

Many times Saskia's father had asked her to sort out the belongings of her mother, yet she kept postponing it. She liked the idea that when she visited her father she knew her mother's closet was just the way it always was, filled with her mother's clothes and belongings. She liked to go through her mother's things and be surrounded by her mother's smell. She did not want that to change. However, her father was remarried and there needed to be more space for his new wife, who did not like to live in a house that had the mark of another woman. He did not care much for Saskia's mothers old things, so therefore she was the one to sort out what was important for her.

 After three years she finally went through all her mother's things. 'In the beginning it was still too 'fresh' and I couldn't deal with it [sorting out things]... One time I just put on some music and then it went all right. It is not that you get over it [the loss]but you go through a barrier and then it is easier to let go of stuff'.

 In both case studies there were struggles between them and their remaining parent in the pace of the grieving process. Not only did they have to cope with the rebalancing of their family, a complete new person entered the scene ,which had an effect on the way the deceased parent was remembered. Furthermore, the entire interior of the house would change and therefore little would remind them of the childhood home of their memories.

 After the death of her mother the house was filled with photographs of her mother. With the arrival of a new girlfriend this collection decreased. Saskia understood that her father's new wife did not want to life in a shrine for another woman. Her father was ready to dispose of her mother's belongings, whereas Saskia found it difficult to start this process of parting with things. Making space was challenging on many levels; not only did she have to make space for another woman, she had to part with things that were connected to many childhood memories. The parting with things can be seen as a 'refurbishment of memory' (Marcoux, 2001b). Through the sorting out of belongings, certain memories are brought back to consciousness therefore it is a process of refiguring which relationships and objects are important and which not (Ibid, 2001b). For Saskia there was a distinction between objects emotionally charged, and objects that she did not care about. It was easier to part with those

objects that had no meaning to her, yet still it was a burden as they were her last tangible connections to her mother.

Marcoux describes the situation of older people in Canada who move by choice, whereas the examples of Saskia is a forced process of parting with things. The earlier mentioned *casser maison* ritual (Marcoux,2001a) trough which elderly people 'break up their house' as they move in a residential home, Saskia had to perform for her mother. This was hard as she was breaking up her childhood home, containing many memories, by herself. Marcoux (2001b) also sees therapeutically qualities in the parting with things and to a certain extent the case of Saskia exemplifies this as, in the end, she experienced the sorting as a pleasant, healing process. More importantly, Saskia did not want to part with these things as she did not want to end the relationship she had with her mother and therefore the sorting out of belongings was a very complicated event.

The loss of a parent is a massive event in the lives of these young adults and perhaps the idea that 'back home' everything is still the same comforts them. As there are many transitions happening at once the idea of a stable core in which nothing has changed is soothing. This relates to the earlier mentioned study on students homes (Cieraad, 2010). Cieraad emphasises the importance of the 'atmosphere' of childhood in creating a new home. The idea of 'home' can also explain why Saskia postponed parting with her mother's belongings and why she disliked the idea of refurbishing the parental home. It is not simply the divestment of old furniture, but the way the rooms where divided and the items that they hold was symbolic for their childhood. As is argued by Hecht (2001) 'To lose a childhood home, our first secure corner of the world, is to lose a fundamental part of ourselves' (Hecht, 2001: 123). The loss of a parent, already, is a loss in a sense of security, a stable parental home may restore this sense of safety. Tess argues that with the death of her mother a lot of memories have 'disappeared' as there were many things that only her mother knew. She holds on to as many objects as possible to prevent 'loosing' even more memories. With the refurbishment of the parental home childhood memories and associations disappear.

It can also be a reason to postpone moving out of the parental home. Mulder (2009) even sees moving out of the parental home as a major marker for independence. For some of the participants this major transition was put on hold, due to the loss of a parent.

For example in the case of Jan. He decided to stay at home as he thought 'the family would break apart' if he moved out. As Hecht(2001) argued, with the loss of a childhood home, a fundamental part of the self is lost. Although he was ready to move out of the parental home Jan decided to stay. However it can be argued that Jan did not stay for the

family, but for the idea of "the family" that he had. He feared that the family would 'break apart', but it may also be the case that with the death of his mother his idea of 'the stable family' disappeared. His mother always had the meddling role in his family and with her gone it was only a matter of time before his entire idea of 'a family' would disappear. Therefore he took on the role as "the peacemaker" and decided to only move out, when the family was ready. His father had moved in with his new wife and she had mostly taken over the role Jan's mother used to have. Shortly after this happened, Jan decided that it was time to live on his own. Yet, her we could argue that his father's new wife was the new 'stable core' in the family. Jan argued that her role in the family was similar to that of her mother, as he stated that his father was always led by a woman. For a long time his parental house had been symbolic for 'home'. However, during the second interview when we discussed the feeling of 'being at home' he argued that now his apartment felt more like home. His parental home had transformed into 'the place he went when visiting his father'.

This section has explored the idea of the parental home as a 'stable core' and how young adults are comforted by this idea in the process of coming to terms with the loss of a parent. However, as is shown by the examples, parents and children can differ on the way the parental house should be treated.

Picture 9 Stone egg Tess divested when scattering the ashes inscribed Maman est mort. Vive Maman. Photo made by participant.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the discrepancies between different ways of commemorating within a single household. Parents and children can have different ideas on the way the deceased parent should be remembered. As the case studies above show, the merging of households sometimes painfully reveals these differences. The loss of a parent shifts the division of roles in a family and, as the family is coming to terms with the loss, the roles need to be divided and relationships need to be re-identified in order to restore the balance in a family.

The parental home is an important space in coming to terms with the loss. For the participants the parental home is an important element of their childhood. After the experience of bereavement of a parent the participants cherish the idea of their parental home as it symbolises their childhood. With the death of their parent a huge part of their childhood has disappeared and changes in the parental home only increase this feeling.

Chapter 7 Discussion and Conclusion

My thesis has examined the impact of a loss of a parent in young adulthood. Young adults use their mementos to sustain a sense of attachment with their deceased parent through the relationship with objects. My findings show that works on mourning as a process with a beginning and a clear end are insufficient in explaining the relationships bereaved have with their deceased loved ones through objects (Van Gennep, 2004 [1909]; Turner, 1969; Kübler-Ross, 1970) My thesis has examined how different categories of objects have particular characteristics as mementos and it has been emphasized that these mementos have the power to evoke certain feelings and emotions.

The participants in my research offer a wide range of objects which can be used as mementos. Mementos are not mere objects with symbolic qualities and the power to prompt or 'contain' memories as is often argued (e.g. Kwint et al. 2001; Forty, 2001; Hallam & Hockey, 2001) they can also evoke feelings. I have argued that through objects young adults maintain their relationship with their lost parent, as they achieve a sense of closeness. Every object has the potential to evoke this feeling, yet my research shows that the objects that were most successful in achieving this were those that could be kissed, hugged, touched or worn.

Furthermore, I have argued that the meaning and significance of objects is not static and develops through time. My examples show that displays are rearranged and that objects are not confined to one space, as they are often carried around by the participant. This goes beyond findings in studies that see objects as static containers of memory (Forty, 2001) and offers an insight that displays are dynamic spaces. The displays in the houses of participants are not a permanent collection or exhibition but are adapted as feelings towards a certain object change. In some of the cases the object has become insignificant and can be disposed of. In other cases an object temporarily has to make space for other memories so a different object is displayed. Sometimes this process is forced, for example as parents wish to make space in their parental home for a new relationship.

The dynamics in displays and the continuous process of deciding to part with certain objects or not, show that the 'refurbishment of memory' Marcoux (2001b) discusses is not confined to moving houses or transitions but part of everyday life. The young adults in my research reflexively negotiate which objects- and which memories-, related to their deceased parent they wish to sustain. Some have chosen to permanently wear a memento as they wish to remain connected to their parent throughout their lives. Other participants fear that they will forget the shared memories with their deceased parent and therefore they try to hold on to

as many objects as possible.

The internet offers many new display spaces for people to channel and discuss their loss. What may be particular for this age group is the use of social media in coming to terms with their loss. However, the use of social media is becoming increasingly popular and it can be imagined that the use of those sites is independent of one's generation. Still, it can be argued that these young adults are the first generation to make use of these sites in remembering their parent and it would be interesting to examine how these online aspects of loss will develop in the future.

Since most research in social sciences tend to ignore the role of age and life stages it is difficult to conclude to what extent all the aspects of losing and remembering are particular for being a young adult. Subsequently, as young adulthood has rarely been researched in general this makes it even more difficult to compare my findings with others. Elements that stood out in my research was the desire to have an inconspicuous display. Participants preferred small mementos or displays with small items. Examples of other studies hint that this can also be a 'Dutch' desire, as for example displays in Britain (Miller & Parrott, 2007) tend to be more obvious.

Furthermore, the only male participant deviated from the desire to have a inconspicuous display and it may be argued that there is a gender aspect to remembering a deceased parent, both in young adulthood as in general. For example, it can be perceived as more 'feminine' to wear jewellery as memento. However, as my sample only contained one male participant, more research is necessary to explore the gendered aspects of commemorating.

In my research a variety of literatures has been used in order to contextualize my research question. Current studies on emotions do not explore the relationship between objects and feelings. At the same time studies on material culture and loss tend not to explore emotions, but focus more on memories and meanings. In order to explain some of the aspects of the adaption to the loss, scholars outside the field of grief and loss were most helpful. Especially those works on transitions in living arrangements (Marcoux, 2001a; Marcoux, 2001b) and works on the concept of home (e.g. Hecht, 2001;Cieraad, 2010;) were insightful when discussing transitions in the lives of young adults. Perhaps what can be learned from this is that loss and death should not be seen as a separate niche of studies, but that they are part of everyday life and therefore also part of everyday decisions.

For young adults the parental home is an important space in coming to terms with the loss as it symbolizes an important element of their childhood. After the experience of

bereavement of a parent the participants cherish the idea of their parental home as a stable core in which nothing has changed. This is another new finding that has come out of my research. Not only are mementos important in sustaining the relationship with a deceased parent, the idea of 'home' also serves as a medium through which certain memories are preserved. The death of a parent threatens the sense of self of the young adults, as with the loss of their parent a huge part of their childhood has disappeared and changes in the parental home only increase this feeling.

As a final point of discussion I would like to briefly discuss the common use of describing certain practices as 'Western'(e.g. Walter, 1996; Forty, 2001; Hallam & Hockey, 2001). When describing memorial rituals in a 'Western' country, mostly the United Kingdom, these scholars tend to generalize these practices to a 'Western' standard, implying there is a consensus on these practices in the 'Western' world. However, my thesis has given examples of differences within this 'Western', or even European context , for example when discussing differences between the disposal of ashes in the Netherlands and in the United Kingdom. Therefore, in future research, more emphasis should be on the particularities within this 'European' context. More comparative research is necessary to do justice to the various ways in which Europeans from varied countries continue their relationships with the dead through objects .

This thesis examined the loss of a parent in the entire context of a family and has outlined that parents and children often have different ideas on the right way of commemoration and the importance of belongings of the deceased parent. This was especially visible in the cases in which different households merged, and space needed to be created for the new relationship of the remaining parent. Here again we see that a loss is a dynamic process which affect young adults in many levels of their lives. Their possessions, living arrangements and relationships both with family members as well as with objects all are part of a complicated process of coming to terms with a loss. However, as explained throughout this thesis, this process will be a life-long journey.I would like to end this thesis with a poem that was posted by Jolien on her Facebook wall. This poem, consisting of a single verse, adequately captures the enduring nature of the relationship young adults have with their deceased parent as love too can be seen as another feeling that is channelled and sustained through objects: *Omdat er liefde is bestaat er geen voorbij. In alle eeuwigheid ben jij.* (Because there is love, there is no goodbye, you are in all eternity. Loose translation by author)

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