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# An exploration into the lived experience of the Jazz Funeral

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AN EXPLORATION INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE JAZZ FUNERAL

A dissertation presented to the faculty of

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY SANTA BARBARA

in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY  
in  
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

By

CARYN WHITACRE, MA  
February 2017

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE JAZZ FUNERAL

This dissertation, by Caryn Whitacre, has been approved by the committee members signed below who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of Antioch University Santa Barbara in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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2017

## Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study set out to explore and understand the subjective lived experience of the Jazz Funeral ritual of New Orleans, Louisiana. This dissertation was guided by two principal research questions: 1) What is the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral ritual? and 2) What elements of the Jazz Funeral are beneficial to bereavement as reported by the subjects? Research data were collected and arranged through the utilization of phenomenological research protocol. By recognizing that people are the experts of their own lived experience and listening to participants describe their lived experiences of this ritual, this researcher was able to construct knowledge as to what it means to participate in the Jazz Funeral ritual. For the participants, the ritual's significance could change within and throughout the funeral procession and the meaning of the Jazz Funeral continued to change over time. Participants reported that collective grieving added to their experience of the Jazz Funeral, as it provided a sense of dignity and respect within the community and between community members. Participants said that the Jazz Funeral ritual, framed in tradition and meaning, has changed with the passage of time, but the healing aspect provided by the music has nevertheless remained consistent. Participants also reported that ritual participation allowed them to maintain a sense of hope in the midst of loss, while providing a feeling of togetherness that strengthened the community. Finally, through listening to the words and experiences of participants, this researcher was able to understand the experience of grieving as an active process that can be contained and processed through ritual. The meaningful experience of ritual participation and its celebratory and communal elements come together in the service of facilitating grief.

The electronic version of this dissertation is available free at Ohiolink ETD Center,  
[www.ohiolink.edu/etd](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd).

## Acknowledgments

This body of work is dedicated to my family and friends—you have supported me as I worked to achieve this goal, and I am forever grateful. In particular, this work is dedicated to my husband, Ted, who has stood by me through thick and thin. Thank you for believing in me and for your unconditional love. You have cheered me on and lifted me up when life became overwhelming, and I thank you for that. To my daughter, Miranda, who is my everything, I thank you for your patience and your love. This work is also dedicated to my aunt, Terry Anderson. Dearest Aunt Terry, your wisdom, your faith, and your love kept me moving forward, even when I thought I could go no further. You mean more to me than words could ever say. I would also like to thank my committee, Drs. Trevino, Bishop, and Hale. Thank you for guiding me through this wonderful learning experience. To the people of New Orleans, Louisiana, I am so incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you and learn from you. Thank you for welcoming me into your community and for sharing your experiences with me. I am eternally grateful to you.

Finally, this body of work is dedicated to my father. Dad, I love you and I miss you every day. I struggle to find the words to describe what you mean to me. I have learned so much from you—the importance of a strong work ethic, tenacity, honesty, and, above all, how truly powerful music can be. Thank you for sharing music with me; I hold these memories very close to my heart. I am so blessed to be your daughter, and I wish you were here to witness the completion of this journey. I love you!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The death of a loved one can be experienced in many different ways, often through the lens of cultural or spiritual beliefs. These convictions lay the foundation for funeral ceremonies, which consist of very specific actions performed in a precise order: namely, a ritual. Funeral rituals are considered those events that directly surround the loss and typically encompass notification of the death, a funeral ceremony and gatherings involving food and social exchanges (Bolton & Camp, 1987). After the final disposition, funeral rituals can continue with other symbolic events, such as responding to sympathy cards or recognizing the receipt of flowers, and even disposing of the personal belongings of the deceased (Bolton & Camp, 1987). Such post-funeral rituals can occur for many months following the final disposition.

Bolton and Camp (1987) considered bereavement rituals to be an important element of the process of saying goodbye to the departed, with the funeral tradition being a principal ritual in this respect. Research on the impact of funeral rituals on the process of grief has overall indicated that funeral customs can, in fact, facilitate grief management. In particular, not holding a conventional ritual after bereavement can lead to maladaptive behaviors following the loss, which suggests that acknowledgment of a death facilitates grief processes (Bolton & Camp, 1987, Gorer, 1965) - that is, if the death is denied and feelings of grief are suppressed, arrested progress in recovery from grief can occur, which in turn can lead to withdrawal, isolation, and depressive symptoms (Bolton & Camp, 1987).

All cultures have rituals composed of metaphors and symbols that address the intricate process of mourning (Imber-Black, 1991). These rituals avow the life lived by

the deceased and facilitate the articulation of grief in ways consistent with cultural values; in other words, rituals guide the bereaved in the direction of making sense of the loss, while facilitating balance and constancy for loved ones (Imber-Black, 1991). Bolton and Camp (1987) have focused specifically on the potential value of uninhibited ritualized grieving that often occurs in African American funeral ceremonies. Of particular interest is Barrett's (1977) finding, which suggested that bereavement is potentially less upsetting in cultures that endorse an ornate public exhibition of grief.

Indeed, many rituals are social events that utilize dance and music as part of their expression. Individuals identify with music's movement, and the empathic experience of music's structure may be derived from these social events (Koopman & Davies, 2001). When people are engaged in music expression as a group, it can promote a sense of belonging, as well as a belief in the group's aptitude for operational collective action (DeNora, 2000; Koopman & Davies, 2001). Specifically, music facilitates connections between people and that connection can influence expressed behaviors and attitudes, particularly in social settings.

Parallels have been perceived to exist between music and the social processes associated with life events, and music might influence how people manage themselves, how they feel, and even how they experience the motion of time (DeNora, 2000). This implies that music can provoke associated styles of conduct and provide a structure as to how other people comprehend prospective paths of behavior (DeNora, 2000). Music's influence on conduct, behaviors, and feelings may be significant not only in how one interacts and communicates with other people but also in the way one expresses emotions.

Music is said to allow access to the experience of emotions that have yet to be fully dealt with or processed (Sloboda, 2005), and this could be why music has a rather integral part in some funeral rituals. In particular, the Jazz Funeral has a rich historical tradition of using music and movement for the purpose of processing one's experience of loss and grief (Bordere, 2008; Touchet & Bagneris, 1998). This ritual is a shared experience that brings members of the community together to facilitate grief. At the same time, the purpose of the Jazz Funeral ritual is to celebrate one's final rite of passage. Nevertheless, there is perhaps something more that can be learned from this ritual.

Romanoff and Terenzio (1998) found that bereavement resolution is facilitated through ritual. Rituals provide a sense of stability and order at a time that is otherwise marked by chaos (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). The intention of this research was to examine and understand the subjective lived experience of participation in a Jazz Funeral ritual in the present day by gathering the accounts of ritual participants. Participants offered vivid reflections and descriptions of their subjective experiences. The depictions of the lived experiences and the information provided adds to the understanding of the Jazz Funeral and the multiple meanings that arise from participation in ritual. Ritual has the ability to contain and facilitate the grieving process and this occurs through music, movement, and the ritual's connection to tradition and culture.

### **Researcher's Predisposition to this Topic**

This researcher has a very significant relationship with music; it has been a vital tool in personal healing for as long as the researcher can remember. In particular, music is something this researcher has turned to whenever she was experiencing pain or

sadness. The passing of her father was the moment this researcher identified the healing power of music.

As a small child, this researcher recalls her father using music to soothe wounds and mend hearts. He took this researcher to see live music regularly and taught her how to appreciate the art and science of music. Music often took the place of spoken words, as it became a way for him to communicate and connect with others. This researcher's father meant everything to her and, as an adult, her relationship with him strengthened and matured into one of the best friendships this researcher has ever known. As their relationship grew, her love and appreciation for music as a tool for communication grew as well. His death was this researcher's first experience of a significant loss; he was in a foreign country when he died, and she did not have the chance to say goodbye. The loss was sudden, and the circumstances did not allow for proper leave-taking to occur. Unexpectedly, this researcher found herself forced to experience the emotion of grief, and she had to struggle through her grieving process. This researcher had to find a new way of existing in a world without her father. His absence would be difficult to rectify, and she found it quite difficult to make sense of the loss. With this sadness and overwhelming grief in full swing, this researcher turned to music for peace, comfort, and answers.

This researcher identified the experience of healing through music and soon began to wonder how others used music as a tool for processing the loss of someone significant. It was about that time this researcher learned of the Jazz Funeral tradition. She spent hours watching footage of processions and observing the emotions expressed by participants. During this exploration, this researcher identified several biases related

to this ritual. The first bias was that music and ritual facilitate the process of bereavement. This researcher noted the celebratory nature of the procession and took this to mean that the ritual relieved one's experience of grief.

The second identified bias was that rituals have the ability to facilitate the grieving process for individuals. Video footage depicted community members singing and dancing as they followed the Brass Band through the streets of their community. The gathering of the community was comforting to the researcher, as she reflected on her journey and the role friends and loved ones played within her grieving process. Perhaps the active process of grieving and doing so in a social setting facilitated one's own resolution of grief.

The rhythm of the drums and blasts of horns and whistles signals to the community to come and take part. The passing procession draws people out to the streets where they become a part of the second line. It is a call to join in the celebration, to dance, sing, and pray; it is a call to memorialize the deceased community member and to offer support and comfort to the family and friends that feel left behind. The celebration is a powerful sight to witness, and this enhanced this researcher's curiosity and desire to learn, not only about the tradition itself but also about the subjective lived experiences of those who have participated in this elaborate and historical ritual.

### **Relevance of this topic for Clinical Psychology**

Clinicians are likely to encounter bereaved individuals at some point in their career. Coping with death is not a simple process, and the management of the resulting grief cannot be generalized. The way that an individual chooses to grieve will depend greatly on his or her personality and relationship with the deceased (National Cancer

Institute, 2011). Grief is not a chosen emotion: rather, it is the aftermath of bereavement, and those affected must somehow find their way through this state of temporary darkness and despair. Grieving requires an individual to develop new ways of being in a world without his or her loved one, and to find ways to continue to love someone who is now absent from his or her life (Attig, 1991). Ritual provides a container for grief and a mechanism for the facilitation of meaning making after the loss of a loved one. Grief is a relatively subjective emotion, with an inception and sequence that is best understood within cultural and social contexts (Cowles, 1996). Researchers have stated that grieving is an active process of recovery that can lead the bereaved back to a place of homeostasis; there is a return to the original healthy state that existed prior to the loss (Attig, 1991) and rituals seem to facilitate this return.

Grieving is an essential part of adjusting to the loss of a loved one, and Bolton and Camp (1987), as well as Romanoff and Terenzio (1998), have noted that ritual is an important component in saying a final goodbye to those we have lost. Bolton and Camp (1987) refer to this final goodbye as part of the leave-taking process, of which ritual is a significant component. As an example, the participants in the current research spoke of the symbolic gestures embedded within the Jazz Funeral ritual. Participants stressed the significance of the slow dirges, “cutting the body loose” (Personal Communication, 2016), and the “repass” (Personal Communication, 2016) as moments that facilitate the leave-taking process.

Researchers such as Katherine Cowles (1996), Evan Imber-Black (1991) and Bolton and Camp (1987) have explored how ritual gives meaning to the lived experiences of those who take part. This is consistent with this researcher’s bias that

all rituals, in particular funeral rituals, are meaningful in all aspects of grieving, saying goodbye, and bringing resolution to the bereaved. This phenomenological research may or may not support this assumption. If not, a greater understanding of this phenomenon will have been achieved.

This researcher believes that grief is an oscillating process, moving back and forth between the pain of the loss and restoring the bereaved's life; ritual facilitates this experience. The concept of oscillation aligns with the work of Helen Strobe and Henk Schut (1999) and their Dual Process Model of Grief. Specifically, an individual's experience of loss ebbs and flows and this motion is guided by experiences, memories, and his or her willingness to accept that his or her life must move forward without the deceased. Rituals can be quite valuable and symbolic to the leave-taking experience, and therefore quite beneficial to the facilitation of grief work (Bolton & Camp, 1987).

Rituals provide the container, venue, script, and tradition that help individuals transform their meaningful relationship with the deceased into a new relationship based on memories and reinforced by community or family ties, which can aid in the bereavement process. Intuitively, the Jazz Funeral ritual not only provides the containment, but also the healing agent of change that transforms grief and loss into something more meaningful. The connections made within and between community members, as the Jazz Funeral procession weaves throughout the neighborhood of the deceased, offers comfort and hope to the bereaved. The ritual's ties to tradition and culture create an atmosphere of dignity and strength that contributes to the development of meaning making for the bereaved, while the music soothes the souls of participants, allowing the healing to begin.

This researcher hopes that this study will add to the field of clinical psychology by enhancing the reader's understanding of the phenomenological experience of the Jazz Funeral ritual and the impact that community, music, culture, and tradition can have on the grieving process. The occurrence of rituals after the passing of a loved one are thought to facilitate the grief work of the bereaved. It is possible that the experiences identified can cross into the clinical setting and assist clinicians working with the bereaved. More specifically, by understanding the value of symbolism and ritual, it is possible for clinicians to assist bereaved clients with the processing of grief and the oscillating emotions that accompany it.

This researcher also hopes that this research will further the conversation on the relevance of ritual in the processing of grief and contribute to the body of literature on this topic. It is this researcher's intention to add information to a database for other researchers to utilize the findings. This researcher welcomes others' thoughts on this topic and understands that not all will agree with the opinions or analysis herein. Disagreement is welcomed, as the comparing and contrasting of information will offer additional perspectives on this research and will benefit future studies in this specific area. Lastly, this research also demonstrates the furthering of personal and national conversations on the importance of cultural competence within the field of clinical psychology.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review will briefly explore the bereavement rituals within African culture, which will lead to an exploration of the history of New Orleans and an inquiry into the development of the New Orleans Jazz Funeral, guided by the research of Kemi Adamolekun (2001) and Marian Gray Secundy (1989). The traditional Jazz Funeral will be discussed, which will guide the reader into an examination of current Jazz Funeral rituals within New Orleans communities and the work of Mark Sakakeeny (2010), William G. Hoy (2013), and Tashel C. Bordere (2008) will be explored. Cultural perspectives in bereavement rituals and the processing of grief will be considered, guided by the work of Kathleen Cowles (1996), and this will then lead to discussion of bereavement resolution facilitated through ritual and the work of Christopher Bolton (1987), Delpha Camp (1987), and Evan Imber-Black (1991). Music will be discussed throughout, this researcher believes that music is what truly facilitates the process of bereavement resolution and one's reconnections to the community after experiencing the loss of a significant other.

### **Brief Examination of Bereavement Rituals within the African Culture**

In reviewing the work of Tashel C. Bordere (2008), Kemi Adamolekun (2001), and Marian Gray Secundy (1989), it becomes evident that the roots of the Jazz Funeral reach back to West Africa, and that these roots remain visible even today. To the Yoruba of Nigeria, the funeral ceremony is an extremely important and somewhat elaborate celebration (Adamolekun, 2001; Secundy, 1989). If a Yoruba died a "*good death*" (Adamolekun, 2001, p. 610), meaning they lived to an old age, everything is done to assure that a suitable funeral is provided, and it is believed that the deceased will not get

to their afterlife unless a proper funeral is conducted (Adamolekun, 2001). The elaborate celebration can be extremely expensive; however, there is an understanding among the Yorubas that funeral monies must be exhausted on “death-related activities” (Adamolekun, 2001, p. 612). This action is seen as an expression of the belief one holds in the support system found within the community (Adamolekun, 2001). The respect in which one is held, “along with the quality of life planned for them in the other world,” is echoed in the funeral ritual (Adamolekun, 2001, p. 611). The ritual affirms the deceased’s relationship with the community and this concept seemed to be consistent with that of the social-aid clubs and benevolent societies of the South.

Initially established after the Civil War, the purpose of social aid clubs and benevolent societies was to assist with finances and provide other types of social support for individuals who might have found it challenging to obtain such support during that period (Marsalis, 1998). For instance, the clubs would hire doctors to provide health care to members and their families. These organizations functioned like insurance companies, which was incredibly important because, at the time, most white-owned insurance companies would not insure African Americans (Regis, 2009). The organizations provided not only health care to members, but they also offered members burial insurance—with this, individuals were given the comfort of knowing they would receive a proper and dignified burial after their death. Each organization represented its own community, in fact, funeral processions followed a route specific to each organization. Routes would wind through the organization’s neighborhoods, providing each individual who lived therein with an opportunity to be a part of the community. It seems that brass bands, too, had a vital role within the community.

Brass bands played an important role in community celebrations such as parties and weddings. They also played an important role in funerals, and many of the social clubs offered support to the brass band members (Secundy, 1989). Although social-aid clubs existed in cities other than New Orleans, only in New Orleans was the musical style of jazz so interwoven into both life and death that the music lent itself to the unique Jazz Funeral ritual. One is left to ponder the question: Why New Orleans?

### **Brief History of New Orleans**

The history of this brilliant and seductive city is quite expansive and an extensive look at New Orleans' history would be outside of the scope of this research. However, to examine the beginning of Jazz, and the New Orleans Jazz Funeral ritual, there are certain points that one must be aware of.

Located at the mouth of the Mississippi, New Orleans was the southernmost major city on the river, which ensured its commercial importance. In 1718, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, founded the city of New Orleans ("New Orleans," 2010). Ownership of New Orleans seemed to fluctuate between France and Spain, which contributed to the ever-expanding culture of this city; in fact, in one year, New Orleans was under the Spanish, French, and American flags, in that order (Garvey & Widmer, 2015).

At the turn of the nineteenth century, New Orleans changed from a remote port to a tactically sited port city within "an ascendant New World nation" (Campanella, 2008, p. 704). The city was a trade center, with a population comprising Creoles, whites, Germans, Indians, black slaves, and free people of color (Garvey & Widmer, 2015). In 1803, the Louisiana territory was purchased from Napoleon Bonaparte by the United

States (Campanella, 2008), and after the Louisiana Purchase, settlement patterns within the city began to change. In 1809, refugees from Saint Dominuge arrived in New Orleans, doubling the city's population (Campanella, 2008). From 1810 until the Civil War, New Orleans was one of the largest cities, with its population tripling within its first seven years of being an American city (Garvey & Widmer, 2015). With the development of the steamboat, the Mississippi River became a passageway for the import and export of products to and from Europe and South America. The city would begin to see many changes. Plantations, architecture, railroads, streetcars, and specifically jazz music would continue to alter and shape this great city.

Rice, sugar, tobacco and cotton were the cash crops, which led New Orleans to become one of the more active slave markets in the South (Campanella, 2008; Garvey & Widmer, 2015). As slaves were brought to this country, they carried with them memories of traditions and rituals that had long been a part of their culture. Music seemed to be of particular importance. Slaves made their own musical instruments and were often heard chanting as they worked. The use of music allowed an opportunity to switch focus away from the despair in which they existed and Thomas Barker (2015) suggested that music provided insinuations of freedom for slaves. Barker (2015) stated,

“In providing a forum [ritual] for the venting of political frustrations, slave music, in particular spirituals, introduced into the sphere of everyday life a crucial experience of freedom. If the slaves were forced to adapt to the linguistic space of their masters, it would be in a form responsive to the demands of their own condition. This lived experience of freedom (“le vecu”) directly informed the ability of slaves to think of freedom” (p. 373). [The ritual provided the lived experience of freedom]

The religious ideals of the antebellum South were fused into the activities of everyday life, and in some way, this protected “Black religion from White colonization”

(Barker, 2015, p. 372). Spirituals were sung as work and social songs, as opposed to being sung solely within the church. Songs in rituals were a form of expression, and through music, slaves could celebrate their spirituality and communicate their feelings and emotions. Through the use of “metonymy” (p. 372), slaves were able to use songs as mechanisms for religious education by changing the semantic content of songs via word substitution (Barker, 2015). In this way, slaves could also communicate their thoughts of freedom (Barker, 2015). We see traces of this tradition in contemporary funeral rituals. The Jazz Funeral ritual provides the semantic content of songs as a way of communicating freedom of thought, worship, and expression. Indeed, it is almost as if you can hear the echo of former slaves in the reverberation of every note. One only needs to listen carefully to the songs and the music of the Jazz Funeral in order to feel the historical connection.

At one time, New Orleans’ French and Spanish governors allowed the enslaved to congregate, which provided individuals with the chance to come together to sing, dance and be with one another. This was an opportunity not provided to slaves in other parts of the country. They gathered weekly in an area called Place des Negres, which would later be referred to as Congo Square (Branley, 2012). With instruments in hand, individuals would gather to sing and dance; it was an opportunity to express emotional experiences in an acceptable manner. As time passed, the concept of weekly meetings began to take the form of parades or second-line processions, and, eventually, these parades and celebrations became a focal point of the city (Garvey & Widmer, 2015). However, even before festivities such as these, musicians were a necessity—especially in *Storyville* (Garvey & Widmer, 2015).

Storyville was the red-light district of New Orleans. With its numerous bordellos, bars, and dance halls, it provided employment for many musicians within New Orleans (Garvey & Widmer, 2015). The city, largely consisting of Roman Catholics, was said to have been fairly liberal in its acceptance of brothels and saloons. In 1928, Lyle Saxon noted the existence of an “insidious chemical in the atmosphere which tends to destroy Puritanism” (as cited in Garvey & Widmer, 2015, p. 80). However, there was a racial divide that existed between the uptown and downtown portions of the city. With time, “the pattern of an Anglo-dominant uptown verses a Creole downtown” would have a significant impact on the cultural topography of the city (Campanella, 2008, p.705), as well as on its music. Furthermore, as time passed, the technically trained black Creole musicians from downtown and the uptown black American musicians began to blend, and Storyville provided the venues and customers eager for the joining of the two musical styles. This combination of improvisation and technical training eventually led to the birth of jazz. Jazz came to play a role in the development of a mutual respect amongst racially diverse musicians (Garvey & Widmer, 2015).

The history of jazz is rich and extensive, with many New Orleans born musicians achieving great success. However, this brief historical perspective on the development of this city lays the groundwork for this research and provides us with a glimpse into the historic role music played within the cultural landscape that is New Orleans. This literature review will now shift its focus onto the development of the Jazz Funeral.

### **New Orleans Jazz Funeral**

In the 1930s, the funeral procession, with the accompanying brass band, would come to be known as the Jazz Funeral, and this ritual seemed to have had a significant

role in the New Orleans African American community (Touchet & Bagneris, 1998). As previously discussed, similar practices of celebrating death through music existed within the traditions of West African cultures and, with time, this tradition found its way into the funerals of New Orleans. Although funerals might not seem like an appropriate venue for a brass band, the purpose of the tradition was “to provide a space for the expression of individual and communal grief” (Regis, 2001, p. 770). In other words, the ritual celebrated life at the time of death. The bands played somber music as they marched to the gravesite of the deceased and then would quickly shift to a happier, upbeat tempo upon their return from the grave (Sakakeeny, 2010).

Traditionally, the Jazz Funeral was practiced with the passing of renowned male African-American community members, most often musicians (Sakakeeny, 2010). At the time of passing, the benevolent societies or social-aid clubs would arrange the funeral. These clubs remained active throughout the year, and historically, have played an important role in the organization of parties, fundraisers, dances, funerals, and anniversary parades, which are also referred to as *second lines* (Regis, 2001). Social-aid clubs would use the dues collected throughout the year to pay outstanding health care and burial costs; sponsoring a burial was considered a meaningful commitment (Secundy, 1989). The social aid club would also hire the brass band for the procession, and the band had specific details and procedures that were followed (Secundy, 1989). The brass band would escort the family and the deceased from the family’s home to the church, and after the service, would lead a procession through the neighborhood of the deceased towards the burial site (Bordere, 2008; Secundy, 1989). Consistency and formation were vital components to the Jazz Funeral procession, as the uniformity and organization of the

band symbolized the dignity and respect they would bring to the family and friends of the deceased.

The funeral procession consisted of two main facets: the solemn walk to the gravesite followed by the high-spirited and exciting return (Marsalis, 1998). The procession was often broken into two sections. The *first line* of the procession consisted of musicians, loved ones, funeral directors, and friends of the deceased; the crowd marching behind the loved ones were referred to as the *second line*. The second line consisted of community members who, upon hearing the music, gravitated toward the procession (Regis, 2001). The term *second line* refers to various facets of the same phenomenological experience (Regis, 2001). It denotes the dance steps and the accented rhythms that seem to be specific to the streets of New Orleans (Regis, 2001; Riley, Vidacovich & Thress, 1995) and *second liners* are usually an incredibly diverse group of individuals (Regis, 2001).

It is important to differentiate second lines from Jazz Funerals for the purpose of this research. To *second line* is to participate; there is no specific distinction between the performer and the audience (Regis, 2001). However, when a Jazz Funeral elicits mass participation, it is also referred to as a *second line* (Regis, 2001). This would be important for this researcher to remember during data collection. Whenever a second line was a part of a funeral, the procession would wind its way through the neighborhood to the burial site, and the first and second lines would march at a measured pace to the melancholic spirituals played by the brass band, while ceremonial stops were made along the way (Regis, 2001).

Essential to this funeral ritual was the tangible leave-taking that occurred at the gravesite (Hoy, 2013). Referred to as “cutting the body loose,” this symbolic gesture was thought to refer to the deceased being freed from the constraints of his previous existence (Atkins, 2012; Hoy, 2013; Personal Communication, 2016). The deceased was now free to leave his physical body behind and move on to the next dimension. When the body was laid to rest, the procession moved quietly away from the burial site without playing. Once a respectful distance was reached, the trumpet player would alert his fellow musicians and the band would begin playing songs of celebration as the members of the second line began to dance; the procession turned into celebration; a celebration of both life and death (Sakakeeney, 2010; Touchet & Bagneris, 1998).

According to the research of Helen Regis (2001), this ritual symbolizes respect and provides a space to experience “communal grief” (p. 770). People came together and supported one another through this time of sadness and suffering. The social support received is an important concept to identify, as the African American population has been found to use psychological services less than other populations (Snowden, 2001). Thompson, Bazile, and Akbar (2004) found stigma of mental illness and lack of cultural sensitivity to be some of the key barriers to African Americans’ utilization of mental health services. Additional factors such as a lack of trust towards health care professionals and institutions may also play a role in this underutilization (Barrett & Heller, 2002; Thompson et al., 2004). Thus, instead of reaching out for services, it seems that the bereaved might have relied on ritual, music, and fellow community members to guide them through the grieving process.

As such, participation in rituals such as the Jazz Funeral could provide a cathartic experience for those left to grieve. The procession provides a social setting in which the community can come together to celebrate the passing of another community member. This type of unity is important as it can symbolize respect for the deceased as well as for surviving family and friends (Hines, 1991). It seems as though the community benefitted a great deal from this tradition, as neighbors could come together through music and dance in order to celebrate the life of the deceased. Although the shape of the ritual has changed, the symbolic actions of the ritual can still facilitate the process of grief (Bolton & Camp, 1987).

### **The Jazz Funeral Today**

The Jazz Funeral of today is slightly different from that of the past. There could be two reasons for this change. First, there is the role of tourism in a city such as New Orleans. To expand on this concept would be outside of the scope of this research, but, briefly, the fact that so many people flock to New Orleans to experience the city's unique traditions requires the city to provide "minstrel" type shows performed for people who are unfamiliar with or have no awareness of the significance of black traditions such as the Jazz Funeral (Regis, 2001).

Second, the Jazz Funeral ritual once memorialized the passing of jazz musicians and affluent members of the New Orleans community, and this tradition seems to be shifting. Those who uphold the tradition of the Jazz Funeral speak of changes to the levels of dignity and respect, which were once the cornerstones of this ritual (Personal Communication, 2016). Historically, those memorialized with a Jazz Funeral received that privilege because of the role held within their community. It was a dignified and

respectful procession that was symbolic of the admiration and worthiness of the deceased, a visual essay “on the values that guided an individual in life” (Regis, 2001, p.759). Members of the community have noted that the Jazz Funeral traditions are changing, as symbolic Jazz Funerals and second lines are being adapted to memorialize the loss of various community members (Personal Communication, 2016). In particular, there has been an increase in Jazz Funerals for younger generations, and this seems to align with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) statistics showing that the African American community is experiencing loss at an earlier age.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), homicide was the number one cause of death of African American men between the ages of 15 and 34 in 2011. This statistic is important to note because according to the Bureau of Justice and FBI’s Uniform Crime Report (2013), New Orleans had one of the highest murder rates of any U.S. city with a population of 100,000 or more. Many African Americans are dying violent and sudden death, and with this sudden loss, comes the need to facilitate the grief of those impacted.

Tashel C. Bordere (2008) focused on African American adolescent males and the impact Jazz Funerals have on their experience of grief, and this research showed that participation in Jazz Funeral rituals has some benefit. Participants in one study reported that the Jazz Funeral experience provided them with a way of looking at death differently and some participants even emphasized that the emotional ambiance and behaviors within the *second line* were different from those experienced at a traditional funeral (Bordere, 2008). Additionally, a degree of catharsis was experienced at the Jazz Funeral (Bordere, 2008).

The adolescent males in Bordere's study found that they felt freer to express themselves through the use of music and dance in the context of the Jazz Funeral. Furthermore, the second line portion of the Jazz Funeral was identified as a way for a community to unify survivors after the passing of a fellow community member. Participants in the study also reported that even those unfamiliar with the deceased participated in the *second line* of the procession as a way of paying tribute to the deceased, and the *second lines* were also stated to have brought people together who once did not get along (Bordere, 2008).

The adolescents involved in Bordere's 2008 study also found that the second line experience caused them to reflect on the ways in which they wanted their own deaths to be remembered and ritualized. Many of the participants reported wanting both a traditional funeral and a second line march to commemorate their own passing, while also stressing their desire for the accompanying ambiance to be affirmative and celebratory (Bordere, 2008). Creating a sense of happiness seemed to be important to the adolescents involved in the study. These participants reported that it was important for them that those celebrating death experienced happiness. It was understood that if one were happy in the moment, they would reflect back on the deceased with the same happiness (Bordere, 2008). This researcher took this to mean that one's experience of happiness at the time of the mortuary ritual can impact the way they remember the deceased.

Although cathartic, funerals for younger generations have been said to lack the order and dignity of traditional processions (Personal Communication, 2016). When speaking of a witnessed funeral, Regis (2001) reported that the event reflected the hardships faced by the neighborhood in which it was held. As most Jazz Funerals occur

within working-class black neighborhoods, away from the areas frequented by tourists, the researcher spoke of how the funeral evoked, “both the destructive forces that promote community disintegration and the agency of ordinary people in the face of these structural inequities” (Regis, 2001, pg. 762). Increased juvenile crime, arrests, police brutality and imprisonment are challenges faced in many of these neighborhoods and these challenges have significant influence on the manner in which communities process their experience of loss.

### **Bereavement Rituals and the Grieving Process**

While the focus of this dissertation is not specific to the concept of grief or grieving, the structural function of rituals facilitates grief by providing a mechanism for the expression of not only grief, but of sorrow and joy connected to the loss of a loved one. This section will explore several bereavement theories as a means of understanding the connection between grief and rituals. However, to examine the concept of grief from a deeper and more meaningful perspective, the reader is encouraged to review the works of grief researchers, including Erich Lindemann (1944), Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), and William Worden (2008).

Several key studies explain that rituals such as the Jazz Funeral provide a medium for the expression of strong emotions and the repetition utilized within rituals has the ability to relieve feelings of anxiety (Myerhoff, 1982; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998; Scheff, 1979). The order or uniformity required of this tradition also can provide a sense of organization at a time that can be overshadowed by disarray and confusion for loved ones. These characteristics may provide a sense of balance that can facilitate the healing process for the bereaved (Imber-Black, 1991; Rando, 1985; Romanoff & Terenzio,

1998). Bereavement rituals, in order to be effective, “should deal with the experience of the mourner” (p. 699) and should include the intrapsychic, psychosocial, and communal levels of the bereavement process (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998).

The first level of successful bereavement resolution is the intrapsychic level. At this level, the bereaved is said to experience an alteration in their meaning of self as the result of the experienced loss and rituals are said to facilitate this transformation (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). At the psychosocial level, there is a transition between the “pre-death and post-death social status” (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998, p. 699). For the bereaved, a change in societal status can occur as a result of their loss, and they must often find a new way of engaging in a society that no longer includes the deceased. Rituals mediate this transition, while also assisting in the “continuation of the intrapsychic connection with the deceased.” (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998, p. 699). This continuation occurs within the collective dimension, and this dimension represents the third level of the bereavement process: the communal level (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). This researcher understands this to mean that at this level, one must attempt to identify mechanisms that will allow him or her to remain connected to the deceased. A relationship remains, but the shape of the relationship has now been altered, as the deceased individual is no longer able to actively participate. There is a period of adjustment necessary for survivors and these transitions must be considered in relation to the coping process (Strobe & Schut, 1999). This researcher understands this to mean that the resolution of grief, if it is to occur at all, occurs at different levels, with each level being impacted by a variety of factors. Identity, culture, and cultural heritage are just a

few of these factors that can affect one's experience of grief, and ritual can facilitate one's connection to one's culture and tradition.

The dual process model of coping with bereavement (Strobe & Schut, 1999) provides another perspective on bereavement and coping with loss, and its core concepts can be connected to the lived experience of participants of the Jazz Funeral. The model examines bereavement in terms of two orientations: a *loss orientation* and a *restoration orientation*. The orientation that an individual adopts has a direct impact on their processing of grief. The *loss orientation* refers to a focus on the loss experience itself (Strobe & Schut, 1999), wherein one concentrates on one's relationship with and ties to the deceased person (Strobe & Schut, 1999). The *loss orientation* involves ruminating on the life shared with the deceased and the circumstances surrounding the death, and a longing for the deceased (Strobe & Schut, 1999). The amount of time spent on *loss orientation* becomes irrelevant within this model, as orientation is oscillating - there is an ebb and flow involved in the experience of grief (Strobe & Schut, 1999). Participants of the present study spoke of the manner in which their grief waxed and waned and how ritual provided a container for their experience of grief (Personal Communication, 2016).

The other side of the dual process model is the *restoration orientation*, which focuses on the secondary consequences of loss. It identifies the tasks that must be addressed as a result of the loss (Strobe & Schut, 1999). These tasks can include mastering duties once handled by the deceased such as housework or finances (Strobe & Schut, 1999). It can also include the complicated task of the reorganization of a life without a loved one (Strobe & Schut, 1999). Ritual can begin to facilitate this reorganization by providing the forum for community members to gather in support of

the bereaved. Researchers stress the innumerable emotions that can be involved in *restoration orientation*, and how ritual can allow an opportunity to process these emotions openly while surrounded by family and community. One could experience pride in the thought of mastering new tasks, while also fearing that one will not succeed (Strobe & Schut, 1999). One of the most important points to note in this model is that there is an oscillation between the two orientations, which is essential to ideal adjustment (Strobe & Schut, 1999).

The above theories emphasize that grief occurs at different levels and is influenced by multiple concepts such as culture and one's own identity in relation to the deceased. However, Thomas Attig (1991) stated that the emotion of grief should be examined as an active process. In order to do so, grief and the grieving process must first be distinguished from one another. Grief is an emotion that is often represented by helplessness and indifference (Attig, 1991). It is an emotion forced upon an individual as a result of death or loss; it is a pervasive and individualized experience, with a normative element (Cowles, 1996). At one point in life, most individuals experience grief on some level. Grief tells one that a major loss has occurred, and that loss cannot be undone or changed in any manner. In most situations, emotions are motivators, but this is not the case for grief. Grief does not motivate one to engage actively because it is impossible for the bereaved to identify a means to their coveted end: for the deceased to rejoin them in life (Attig, 1991). The meaning making that occurs as a result of participation in the Jazz Funeral can facilitate one's expression of grief.

In contrast, grieving is also an active coping process that challenges the bereaved to make choices that will change the way they live in a world altered by their loss (Attig,

1991). Grieving as a process requires the bereaved to relearn their surroundings, how to be in relationships with others (including the deceased), and themselves (Attig, 1991). Thus, grieving as an active process consists of choice, which grief lacks—one does not choose to experience the emotion of grief.

Within the grieving process, one is able to choose the pacing required for handling specific tasks related to the loss. They can choose to approach the challenges ahead eagerly or slowly and cautiously (Attig, 1991). In other words, one can choose when to address decisions about what is to be done with the personal effects and objects that have significant relations to the deceased (Attig, 1991). They can also choose to withdraw from others, and conversely, can choose to reach out for support. Viewing grieving as an active process addresses the complex experience of bereavement (Attig, 1991), and provides a beneficial framework for the facilitation of grief work while promoting individuals' own power and understanding of their experience of loss (Attig, 1991). Of course, one must be aware of the crucial role that culture plays in one's grieving process, and cultural implications are evidenced within the Jazz funeral ritual.

This ritual embraces the importance of community and tradition, and research has found bereavement to be less distressing within cultures that sanction elaborate or public displays of grief (Barrett, 1977; Bolton & Camp, 1987). This research will explore the role of ritual by examining the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral. Such an examination will help researchers to understand the ways in which ritual contains and facilitates the grieving process through music, movement, traditions, and community.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Historical Background of Qualitative Research

This research utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the examination of consciousness as experienced from the first-person perspective; the emphasis is on how phenomena are lived by each individual (Smith, 2013). It focuses on people's lived experience of phenomena, and by definition, this makes phenomenology the most appropriate research method for this study. This dissertation set out to explore and understand the lived experience of participation in a Jazz Funeral (the phenomenon), and the information gathered from members of the community who have actually participated in this tradition was crucial to the authenticity of this study.

Phenomenology is related to various key principles of philosophy and has its roots in hermeneutics, which is referred to as the art of interpretation (Palmer, 1969). Hermeneutics, from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, loosely translated into "to interpret," emerged as a vital branch of biblical studies, and later, came to incorporate the examination of ancient and classic cultures (Palmer, 1969; Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2014). Interpretation was considered essential to the process of understanding. Indeed, Martin Heidegger, a great influence upon hermeneutics, believed that every encounter with other human beings involved an interpretation that was influenced by each individual's understanding of his or her background and experiences (Lavery, 2003). He saw understanding as a mode of being and believed that one's understanding of the world assumes a practical type of know-how that reveals itself by the way in which one orients oneself in the world (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2014).

This interplay between one's understanding of self and one's understanding of the world is what Heidegger referred to as the *hermeneutic circle* (Koch, 1995; Palmer, 1969; Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2014). Although this term has been used to describe the relationship between text and tradition, for Heidegger, it seemed more relevant to human actions (Koch, 1995; Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2014). In other words, an individual cannot understand one's self without having an understanding of the world, and the world cannot be understood without cognizing one's way of life. In this research, participants were asked to explain their lived experience of the Jazz Funeral ritual, and in return, they offered an explanation of this phenomenon. Specifically, participants were offered the meaning this researcher extracted from their explanation, which was then considered by participants. This technique ensured that participants obtained a deeper meaning of the phenomenon, which was then explored in continued conversation.

The understanding that occurs between two people should be circular, and together, these individuals work to build meaning (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2014). The emergence of patterns, the discussion of how interpretations result from the data, and the interpretive process itself are equally critical to a hermeneutic phenomenological study (Koch, 1995). As this researcher examined this method in relation to her study, she appreciated the critical nature of understanding and interpretation in the context of building meaning from individuals' experience of the Jazz Funeral. However, it is necessary to continue to review the history of this method in order to truly understand its purpose in relation to collecting the lived experiences of Jazz Funerals.

Edmund Husserl, considered the father of phenomenology, initially focused his work on mathematics; however, researchers noted that his interest in philosophy led him

to shift his focus and complete his education in that field (Jones, 1975; Lavery, 2003). Husserl trained Heidegger in the processes of “phenomenological intentionality,” with the hope that Heidegger would eventually carry on Husserl’s work (Lavery, 2003, p. 23). Instead, Heidegger chose a different path, and eventually separated himself from Husserl (Lavery, 2003).

Husserl was said to have criticized psychology as a science and reported that it was wrong to attempt to apply scientific methods to issues that were specific to humans (Lavery, 2003). He believed that psychology dealt with living subjects who were responding to their own view of experienced stimuli, as opposed to responding automatically to external stimuli (Husserl, 1962; Lavery, 2003). As such, Husserl (1962) believed that phenomenologists must emphasize the essential meanings of experience and said meanings need to be obtained through discussing the phenomena with individuals who have actually experienced it. He viewed this method as a way of accessing true meaning by deeper exploration of reality (Lavery, 2003). Where Heidegger focused on the meaning of being a human in the world, Husserl worked to understand phenomena. He was interested in acts of perceiving and thinking about the world, and humans were generally seen as “knowers” (Lavery, 2003, p. 24).

Husserl’s views on the use of phenomenology are also consistent with the goal of this research, which is to gather information on the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral ritual. Rituals such as the Jazz Funeral have been found to increase self-acceptance, acceptance of others, and acceptance of nature, and the music used has been said to allow for catharsis and coping (Secundy, 1989). The Jazz Funeral is said to be a symbol of life, a symbol of death, and a symbol of rebirth; it salutes “a life well lived and

the passage of a departed soul into a better world” (“New Orleans Jazz Funeral Service Rituals,” n.d.). With these thoughts in mind, this researcher explored the individuals’ subjective lived experience of the Jazz Funeral and its impact on the grieving process.

The tool used to explore these lived experiences was the qualitative research interview. The purpose of this type of interview was to understand the themes of the lived world from the subjects’ own perspectives (Kvale, 1996). The interview was structured to resemble everyday conversation, but used a specific technique of questioning. Interviews such as this are semi-structured and their purpose is to obtain descriptions of the lived experiences of interviewees—in particular, their specific interpretations of the meanings of certain phenomena (Kvale, 1996). Thus, the purpose of this research, the interview strived to interpret the meaning derived from participation in the Jazz Funeral ritual.

This qualitative study allowed for an in-depth analysis of the stories of those who have participated in the Jazz Funeral ritual as the result of a significant loss. The narratives offered information on how this ritual affects participants and how participation has assisted in alleviating symptoms related to grief, while also identifying the role tradition has in participants’ processing of grief. By shining a light on the lived experience, this analysis will provide an opportunity to identify potential themes or similarities that could assist others dealing with loss.

### **The Research Question**

This research was guided by the following two research questions: 1) What is the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral Ritual? 2) What elements of the Jazz

Funeral are beneficial to bereavement as reported by the subjects? The interview questions (see Appendix B for research and interview questions) are as follows:

Interview Questions related to Research Question 1:

- How would you describe your experiences of participating in a Jazz Funeral ritual?
- In your own words, what are the most meaningful aspects (elements) of the ritual?

Interview Questions related to Research Question 2:

- In your own words, how would you describe (if any) particular elements of the ritual that facilitated the grieving process?
- How would mourners describe the celebratory element of the funeral ritual?

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This research was limited to the subjective lived experiences of 6 participants. As such, it does not intend to develop new theories surrounding music, grief, or bereavement. It is possible that other researchers will interpret my collected data in a different manner. This researcher looks forward to these discussions and to learning from the interpretations of others. The hope is that this research adds diversity of thought, which will in turn add richness to this topic.

### **Participants**

Eleven participants volunteered to participate in this study. Ultimately, five chose to withdraw, leaving a total of six participants for the analysis. Of the six participants, five were male and one was female, all ranging from 50 to 83 years of age. The six male

participants were African American and the female participant was Caucasian. This researcher did not obtain formal measures of cognitive ability, but at the time of the interviews, the participants were found to be at least of average intelligence as evidenced by their language fluency, comprehension of written consent forms, and their capacity and ability to engage in self-reflection and to give informed consent to participate in this research. The participants reported an understanding of the nature of this study and all were able to communicate using the English language. Participants appeared relatively free of mental illness, as determined by this researcher's utilization of clinical skills and observation during the phenomenological interview. During the time of the interviews this researcher observed no evidence of the presence of thought disorders, and at no time did participants appear to be responding to internal stimuli. Individuals were able to speak about their experienced loss and the emotions attached to said loss, without becoming overly upset. In other words, at no time were participants too upset to communicate coherently.

Participants were to have participated in the Jazz Funeral ritual to mark the passing of a significant person in their lives. Participants had the ability to recall past experiences, and based on this researcher's clinical skills and observation, all seemed to have the capability to understand, comprehend, and process their experiences, which is necessary for phenomenological research. All participants met minimum benchmark criteria and no clinical concerns were raised. Therefore, upon approval of the IRB application, and with the consent of this researcher's chair, data collection began.

All participants had participated in the Jazz Funeral/second line march as a way to mark the passing of a significant person in their lives. It has been stated that "in

mourning rituals people come together to grieve in a time-limited manner that is mutually supportive and allows for the initial expression of pain and loss in a context designed to promote interpersonal connectedness” (Imber-Black, 1991, p. 341). The length of time that has passed since the experienced loss will be an important factor in this study.

Two participants were chosen through a social-aid club in the city of New Orleans and snowball sampling was utilized from that point on. All six participants were active members of the New Orleans community. Their occupations included a cemetery tour guide, two musicians, one funeral director, a CEO, and a museum curator/author. All had been born and raised in New Orleans, with the exception of one. Each participant reported on their experience of participating in a Jazz Funeral after the loss of someone who had played a significant role in their lives. Participants spoke of the loss of their parents, a nephew, a brother-in-law, and longtime friends. Most participants reported having participated in multiple Jazz Funerals through the years.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The gathering of data was consistent with phenomenological research protocols. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, which were anchored by the research questions previously mentioned. Using the interview questions as an anchor allowed for the exchange of dialogue, the clarification of information obtained, and for the identification of emergent data. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded to ensure that the researcher did not distract participants by note taking during the interview process.

Each participant reported having participated in multiple Jazz Funerals, which allowed for deeper exploration into the experiences of the Jazz Funeral ritual. Interviews

lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and this fluctuation in time was related to participants' desire to expand on the data provided. Interviews occurred in locations chosen by participant, which ensured that the setting was natural for them. Additional data were collected through the researcher's observations and participation in a Jazz Funeral procession.

Analysis of the meanings of the interviews reflected the six steps of qualitative analysis as explained by Kvale (1996):

- Subjects' description of their lived experience is noted
- Subjects themselves discover new relationships or see new meanings in their experience
- During the interview, the interviewer condenses and interprets the meaning of what the interviewee describes and sends it back to him/her, which leads to a self-correcting interview.
- The interviewer interprets the transcribed interview. This includes structuring the material for analysis, the clarification of the material and lastly, the analysis proper, which involves: condensation, categorization, narrative structuring, interpretation, and ad hoc methods.
- Re-interviewing is performed, as a means of continuing the self-correcting interview.
- Interpretations are extended to include action, which means interviewees begin to act from new insights they have gained as a result of the interview process.

Analysis of the data was approached from an idiographic perspective. Before this could occur, it is important to understand the implications of nomothetic and idiographic data analysis in psychological research. Nomothetic research seeks to establish generalizations or general laws through the use of quantitative methods (Runyan, 1983). Through experiments and observations, group averages are analyzed in order to create predictions about people in a more general sense.

In the past, psychology seemed to have been defined as a nomothetic discipline; however, Gordon Allport (1937) thought this created an imbalance within the field. He viewed the nomothetic methods as attempting to force all individuals into the same frame, which, he believed, would break down the veracity of a person's individual structure (Conner, Tennen, Fleeson, & Feldman-Barrett, 2009). Indeed, he believed a greater emphasis needed to be placed on individuality and the individual processes within a person (Allport, 1937; Conner et al., 2009; Runyan, 1983).

In contrast, with the utilization of idiographic methods, a researcher has the opportunity to focus on the identifying patterns of emotions, behaviors, or thoughts within a person both over time and across various milieus (Conner et al, 2009). This particular method requires multiple data points for each individual, which are then analyzed to establish the relationship between variables for each participant (Conner et al., 2009). Using this method, a researcher would be able to determine how a change in one particular variable correlates with a change in another variable within the same individual over time (Conner et al., 2009). Responses are examined for variation around the mean for each participant, as opposed to a group mean, which provides the researcher

with “within-person patterns” that are distinctive to each individual participant (Conner et al., 2009, p. 293).

This method allows the researcher to test whether each individual has similar relations between their individual variables. Therefore, the idiographic sampling method was appropriate for this phenomenological study. Participants for this study shared their personal experiences of loss and the Jazz Funeral ritual. Although there were similarities in some responses, what was most important to this study was the exploration of individuals’ experiences and the distinct patterns illuminated in their stories.

### **Acquiring Context**

In order to expand the researcher’s understanding of the Jazz Funeral ritual and to obtain a sense of context, before conducting any interviews, this researcher acculturated herself by visiting historic cemeteries and reviewing historic records that exist within the public domain, as well as incorporated her experiences within the community. Consistent with the phenomenological approach, immersion with the participants and the data was important to this research (Sousa, 2013).

The interviewing relationship consisted of respect, interest, attention, and good manners, and as the interviewer, this researcher remained alert to what was appropriate to the interviewing situation (Seidman, 2013). It was important to be aware of the potential for exploiting the participant, and maintaining a formal interview relationship protected the participants from being negatively affected by the interview process (Seidman, 2013).

### **Strengths of Qualitative Phenomenological Research**

Studying the conscious lived experiences of others can lead to the development of knowledge (van Manen, 1990). Moreover, the collected data are the participants’ lived

experience as told by participants—such direct interaction allows researchers to engage in immediate follow up questions during the interviewing process. Phenomenological research captures subjectivity as its primary value, compared to quantitative research's emphasis on facts and a single universal truth. In this way, phenomenological research allows for the study of the human experience, which is not easily captured by the methods of the hard sciences. Finally, one of the most significant strengths of phenomenological research is that it allows for the meanings to unfold over time as the interview questions are asked and examined.

### **Weaknesses of Qualitative Phenomenological Research**

The findings of phenomenological research are not as generalizable as the findings of quantitative research, which is a weakness of this particular method. Phenomenological research accepts that meaning changes over time, and because of this, multiple truths emerge and this is in opposition of the single truth necessary for quantitative research. The sample sizes in phenomenological research are small and focused specifically on those individuals that have experienced the phenomenon. Finally, there are no specific standards for verification. In other words, one cannot verify the collected data.

### **Ethical Considerations in Bereavement Research**

Consistent with the APA Code of Ethics, participants' responses were de-identified to protect privacy (APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, Standard 4.01). Participants were informed their responses would be anonymous and any identifying information would be disguised for their protection (see Appendix A). The intent of this research was clearly stated in order to safeguard

participants. The researcher's biases were identified and separated from the phenomenon being studied

#### **Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis**

This researcher traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana, to be in this beautiful environment with its rich history and culture. This researcher walked the streets as an observer and a participant within a community derived of people who have encountered extensive spans of cultural discovery and endured historical brutality. There is a sense of cultural dignity that hovers in the air, which can be felt as you wind through the streets of this city. It is reflected in the parks, in the beautiful shops, in the museums, and in the food. It is reflected in the music, and in the people that call this city home. All of these represent this diverse community. There is a beauty present that does not seem to exist in other cities; this city represents resilience, grace, strength, and, above all, cultural diversity.

The architecture reflects the city's multicultural heritage; from the creole cottages sprinkled throughout the city to the iconic townhouses that line the French Quarter and other neighboring areas. Homes rebuilt by the Spanish after the great New Orleans fire of 1788 (Waltham, 2005) and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century were eventually replaced with brick structures consisting of cast-iron balconies and arched openings. The facades of the buildings seem to reflect the French and Spanish influences found throughout this stunning city. The trees rise astoundingly tall and have stood for decades reminding passersby of the strength and tenacity that exists within this city. Vibrant colors symbolize the energy and freshness that seems to linger in the air. The streets seem romantic and captivating, yet one cannot take all of this in without thinking of the historical trauma that has been experienced on these same beautifully landscaped streets.

Although home to a thriving free black community, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of slaves were sold in the markets of New Orleans, with the city becoming one of the more active slave markets in the South (Campanella, 2008). Being aware of the city's rich and traumatic history, this researcher walked through the streets experiencing both awe and wonder. Reflection became a pivotal part of this journey, as each location researched was sought out and explored.

Upon reaching the first stop, Congo Square, this researcher experienced a visceral reaction. There was a sense of sadness mixed with a feeling of immense respect and gratitude. So much had occurred in that place, and it was as if one could literally feel the history under one's feet. With her eyes closed, the researcher stood on that special ground and reflected on the people that had congregated there, the music that was created in that space, and the emotions that were likely felt each week as the enslaved were forced to return to their owners. One could almost hear the rhythms and feel the vibrations coming up from below the surface of the square. This researcher saw Congo Square as a sacred place symbolizing the men, women, and children enslaved in this country. Early African contributions to this country can be felt when visiting this place. Although their use of music were mere coping mechanisms at the time, the contribution of this music to the future development of this city and music in the present day cannot go unnoticed.

As this researcher continued walking through the city, time was spent visiting majestic churches, exploring its many cemeteries, and listening to some of the traditional jazz music that makes New Orleans such an enchanting city. The rhythm and tone of the music was meant to elicit feelings of warmth and comfort within the listener, each note

and chord contributing to the stories being told by the musicians. There were stories of historical oppression; of love and loss; and of ideals deeply embedded in custom, culture, and community. These ideals seemed to align with those reflected in the stories gathered from participants.

The six participants who chose to share their stories left a lasting impression on this researcher. These stories were stories of love and loss, customs, and celebration. They were stories depicting the ways in which concepts such as community, tradition, music, and ritual affect one's experience of grief and life moving forward from loss. The dialogue exchanged was rich in content and the stories were filled with symbolism and metaphors that painted a picture genuine to each participant. This research was guided by two specific research questions, each anchored by two interview questions. Participants provided vivid narratives that not only responded to the questions but also offered historical and cultural data that added richness to the stories being collected.

At times, some participants seemed nervous or resistant to sharing their stories. This was understandable, as stories of love and loss have the potential to open one up to vulnerability, sadness, and anxiety. This researcher reflected on her own experiences of loss, and thought about the feelings that arose in her when others asked about her emotional state. This reflection allowed for this researcher to understand some participants' decisions to be removed from this study, leaving six participants willing to explore their lived experiences. The interviews were transcribed and reviewed carefully. Attention was paid to the responses to each interview question, and information not pertaining to the two main research questions was discarded. Participants reviewed the transcripts, confirming their validity and accuracy.

Information that was found to be irrelevant to the research was noted, but eventually discarded. Relevant responses were identified and the information in those responses was categorized as 1) relevant responses to the research questions; and 2) main themes. The researcher's familiarity with the Jazz Funeral as a participant-researcher helped in encapsulating the participants' lived experiences of this ritual.

### ***Data from the Research Interviews***

*Research Question #1:* What is the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral ritual?

Participant #1:

Participant #1 discussed his family's decision to celebrate a family member's life through the Jazz Funeral ritual. He reported, "That's what Jazz funerals are...that's where family members celebrate a person's life through dance and music." He also stated, "Here's a people that celebrate life and death. You have a birthday party, you have a brass band...you have a christening, you got a brass band...somebody pass on, you have a brass band...it's a celebration on both ends...The spirit arises in a lively way."

Participant #2:

When speaking of the Jazz Funeral, Participant #2 stated, "Well, what happens is that you're very somber up until a point...and then you get to the point when they're going to cut the body loose and the band turns around takes the group the other way, then it's in a very jolly way...a very happy way." Participant #2 also expressed that "Music is medicinal because you get to change moods from being somber to being happy." Participant #2 was quick to remind this researcher that the sadness does not dissipate

immediately. He reported, “You’re still sad, but you’ve got a happy spin on your sadness.” As he spoke, he reflected on the spiritual aspects of death, as well as on what it meant for someone deeply rooted in this traditional ritual to utilize the Jazz Funeral. He stated, “He’s happy...wherever’s he’s going, he’s happy. Because this is what he did and this is what he loved to do, and you made certain it happened for him the last time it could happen.”

Participant #3:

Participant #3 spoke of his Jazz Funeral experiences, while at the same time reflecting on changes in the traditional ritual. He commented, “I’ve seen a tremendous transformation in the Jazz Funeral in terms of the procession itself... and I think that’s just reflective of the times, changing times, as well changes in music.” He continued, “When I was a kid, the Jazz Funeral was an extremely reverent kind of procession. I mean it was extremely reverent...it was all a very solemn, respectful kind of event.” He stated, “The grandeur and the presentation of the Grand Marshall was an extremely important part of the funeral procession.”

Participant #4:

As Participant #4 spoke of many Jazz Funeral experiences, he stated, “It’s a celebration of that person’s life.” He spoke of spiritual aspects and commented, “In a way it’s like in a way, a religion...you know, you’re going home and celebrate that the person is going to meet Jesus and go to heaven, so that’s not a bad thing.” He reflected on the manner in which participation impacted his experience of sadness and grief by stating, “...I guess temporarily going home happy...but there’s still a pain, you have a pain, uh, a pain...an intangible pain.”

Participant #5:

Participant #5 responded by stating, “I grew up here in New Orleans so, it’s kind of like I grew up within the culture of this happening.” As he spoke of the procession, he commented, “The band starts playing...the body is laid out and as the body comes out of the church, there is a slow funeral procession like we play these dirge type tunes...these slower real sorrow hymns...all the way to the cemetery.” He then reported, “The body is buried...the band strikes up with some rejoiceful songs and this helps the healing process for families...It’s a way...it’s a good healing process because, you know, in our life, death is the finality of our existence, as we know each other.” Participant #5 followed up this comment by stating, “The band strikes up, everybody is in a happy mood, so it’s not so much of a funeral anymore...its more of a party now...we turn a funeral into a party real fast...”

Participant #6 said:

Participant shared their experience of the Jazz Funeral by speaking of the music and songs that characterize it. She reported, “The main part is just about the songs...when you listen to many of our, our...from St. James Infirmary on down, of course...Dancing at a party is always good for anything. They don’t always just dance out... that’s the more extreme version, sometimes you see changes, and they all just walk out and go home...”

*Research Question #2:* What elements of the Jazz Funeral are beneficial to bereavement as reported by the subjects?

Participant #1:

In speaking of bereavement, Participant #1 stated, “You’re waiting for that moment for them to bring that body out of the church and the band starts playing some type of gospel sounding thing...for me, that would be that emotional point where I would shed a tear.” He continued by stating that this ritual was a way of “saying farewell to that person...when the band changes that tune to upbeat and you want to move, then you know, it’s like with the jazz funeral that they tell a history...a release of the spirit.” He continued, “You’re gonna hold on to the memory of that person, because like I say, when they’re celebrating and you feel the feeling of rejoicing and everything...yeah...we really celebrated that person’s life... yeah, and New Orleans have a fabric of family...you see?”

Participant #2:

Participant #2 reflected on the beneficial aspects of the Jazz funeral ritual, stating, “It’s the importance of it, yeah, the importance of it...the sustainability of it, the substance of it...” He spoke of the experience of oppression and reported, “It served as a tool in many ways to help people survive through conditions that they would not otherwise have survived because music is medicinal.” He continued, “It’s an experience that is hard to describe, but it allows you to open up and to reflect and in some ways...it also helps you to remember certain things about that person that, that person shared with you, or exposed you to, or taught you...uh, yeah...it has a very wide range effect, if you’re in tune to it”

Participant #3:

As Participant #3 spoke of his experience of grief, he lowered his head and commented, “...I have experienced grief on a lot of different levels. I can’t...there’s not enough chairs right here for the guys that sat next to me playing right in there that I’ve

had to bury...and I'll get to crying now if I start thinking about some of them." He reported, "You could feel the grief because everybody had its place...everything was in order...there was a certain order to everything." He continued by stating, "You felt the grief because you could see who the family was...they came out together separate from the rest of the congregation. There was...you know, there's a line from the bible that says everything should be done in decency and in order...and it was."

Participant #4:

Participant #4 reported, "The music helps...it makes you feel good for that moment...". He commented, "You say, Okay, my daddy, my brother had a good send-off, so it gives you a good feeling. How much of a percentage? I don't know...". He continued his thoughts related to grief by stating, "It's like a good thought...a good feeling. But then, how long does it take the next day to realize, okay, yeah, my husband, my brother had a good funeral last week, but then the thought comes in...but he's gone, he's not here." He smiled slightly and said, "It gives a good feeling...it's temporary relief...like Tums, and all that...temporary relief (Laughs) everything is temporary...." In speaking of the music, Participant #4 stated, "Certain Baptist hymns that they would sing, play, sort of eases your mind for the moment...but, it's so early, early stages...it makes you feel good and makes the family feel good to see all of the friends out, it's a temporary release or relief for the moment."

Participant #5:

Participant #5 responded by stating, "Well, the mourners they actually look forward to the rejoicing part...I think because it helps they know this is the part they can release and you have all of your family members behind you to help you with this time of real,

you know, difficulty that you go through in your life.” He further stated, “I think the mourners actually look forward to the rejoice part because after the rejoice part is the repass...it turns into a party.” In reflecting on the concept of grief, he commented, “Its never really gone...but it’s a way...an avenue to help release the discomfort that you’re going through with your emotions...it’s the community and the family helping you through the grieving process....”

Participant #6:

Participant #6 reflected on the benefits of this ritual for grief, stating, “Well, I think any time you have other people with you...sharing...sharing divides grief. And I think that’s why we have all of these public things.” The participant continued by stating, “You’re going through this, telling them goodbye, with community support...with family support.”

Participant #6 continued to reflect on the role the community plays within this tradition: “I think that having all the mourners realize that that person’s suffering is over and in a sense he’s gone to a better place...so, don’t cry for him.” Furthermore, the participant touched on the concept of oscillation, stating, “So, they do go through the normal stages of grief...the coming and going of grief, but I think if anything, it helps it along and then all of her friends are there...I think it’s a heck of a lot better than the usual ‘let’s go to the church or the funeral home and say kind things, and weep a lot and go home...’ I think this is...it just...it lets the sun shine in.”

### ***Main Themes Index***

*Main Theme: Most Meaningful Experience*

Participants identified the celebratory nature of the Jazz Funeral and reported that the collective grieving contained by the ritual adds to the experience of the Jazz Funeral. The lived experience of the Jazz Funeral lead participants to feeling a sense of dignity and respect within the community, while providing the music and traditions that facilitate healing. Participants spoke of the manner in which the Jazz Funeral, framed in tradition and meaning that dates back to the times of slavery, is shifting with the passage of time. This shift was reflected in the political and social events that affect the soul of the African American community. However, regardless of the shift, a number of elements of the ritual remain the same: the sense of loss, the spirituality, and the connection to community, all being elements that give life meaning.

*Main Theme: Spiritual Awareness*

Participants noted that this ritual allows one to maintain a sense of hope in the wake of loss, while facilitating a feeling of kinship that strengthens the community. Participants spoke of experiencing feelings of peace as they reflected on their loved one crossing over to join a higher power, and this concept provided them with a sense of celebration.

*Main Theme: Expression of Grief*

Participants expressed changes in grief patterns, which was consistent with research indicating that grief has an oscillating capacity. Consistent between participants was the idea that grieving is an active process and that the emotional expression of grief can change in relation to music.

Based on the responses provided, each participant seemed to perceive that their experience of the Jazz Funeral was meaningful to their loss. Participants spoke of

celebrating the life of the deceased, and this seems to be aligned with this researcher's experience of this ritual. From a cultural perspective, the themes identified spoke to the stories of family and tradition shared with the researcher along the journey of this study. As individuals continue to progress through the active process of grieving, it is possible that the meaning of the Jazz Funeral ritual could be altered, either by memory or emotion. It is also possible that, as participants reflect on their own individual experiences of loss, new meanings could begin to form.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The Jazz Funeral is a mortuary ritual steeped in symbolism and meaning, and has existed for hundreds of years. As the data were reviewed and analyzed, specific themes were identified, and these themes seemed concurrent within and between participants. Participants reported that their experience of the Jazz Funeral ritual gave them the opportunity to celebrate the deceased's life. The community comes together to offer support and comfort to those in mourning, and this coming together facilitates one's healing process. This seems to be consistent with research that examines the celebratory mortuary ritual.

Mortuary rituals represent a time in which multiple transitions occur (Hertz, 1907; Long & Buehring 2014). There is the transition of the corpse, the transition of the soul of the deceased, and the transition occurring within mourners (Hertz, 1907; Long & Buehring 2014). Often culturally specific, these transitions within mortuary ritual serve multiple purposes. The ritual allows for the body of the deceased to be cleansed, while also providing an opportunity for the deceased's spirit to be honored by placing said "spirit to rest" (Long & Buehring, 2014, p. 82). At the same time, mortuary ritual offers comfort and support to the mourners who, somehow, must find a way to go on living (Long & Buehring, 2014).

Long and Buehring (2014) also found that mortuary ritual provides the means for a community to recover after the death of another community member. Community cohesiveness in times of loss allows members to symbolically create both personal and social memories of the deceased (Bloch & Parry, 1982; Long & Buehring, 2014). This concept was reflected in participants' narratives. Participants reported the Jazz Funeral

procession was not only an opportunity to come together and reflect on the loss of a community member, but also a platform on which new memories were able to be created and shared.

The concept of celebrating the life of a deceased loved one seems to resonate with many people, in North America and beyond (Hoy, 2013). Participants in this study seemed to concur that the Jazz Funeral ritual provided them with an opportunity to gather with other members of their community to celebrate the life lived by the deceased. Indeed, many chose to utilize the word “celebration” due to its positive connotations. This is not to say that the “celebratory” aspect alleviates one’s grief. On the contrary, this researcher found that participants grieved long after the ritual was over, and demonstrated the oscillating grief orientation mentioned in past literature. Specifically, participants spoke of their grief as always present but fluctuating as they moved through life, re-orienting themselves to a life without the deceased. Having the opportunity to celebrate the deceased by way of coming together with the community allowed for new memories to be made, which was beneficial to their own facilitation of grief.

According to Long and Buehring (2014), the idea of celebrating a life is rooted in both the Latin origin of the term and in Christian theology. Theology stresses the return of the deceased to his or her God, and the concept of eternal life is the core of this reintegration (Long & Buehring, 2014). One participant, Participant #4, spoke specifically of this concept: “...you know, you’re going home and celebrate that the person is going to meet Jesus and go to heaven, so that’s not a bad thing” (Personal Communication, 2016).

Throughout the researcher's exchanges with New Orleans community members and participants in this study, there was a great deal of discussion concerning the tradition of the Jazz Funeral and the ways in which the tradition is changing. The changes were said to be related to a lack of respect for the original concept of the Jazz Funeral and the youth of today being less inclined to place effort on practicing and developing an understanding for the importance of the music, in particular the dirges considered crucial to an authentic Jazz Funeral.

The crux of the Jazz Funeral seems to lie in the respect and dignity it symbolizes, and when the time came for this researcher to observe and participate in a Jazz Funeral, she reflected on the words of those who had held on to the tradition, understanding that what she would observe would not look the same as it did in decades past. The researcher also paid close attention to the presence or absence of respect and tradition. She listened to the music carefully and observed the presentation of band members as well as mourners.

When asked what was thought to be most important concept for this researcher to remember about the Jazz Funeral, Participant #2 explained that both the "sustainability" (enduring throughout time; i.e., there is a sense of timelessness] and the "substance" (i.e., meaning] of the ritual are crucial components (Personal Communication, 2016). This participant spoke of the historical oppression experienced by the African people and stressed that rituals such as this served as a tool to help individuals survive conditions they would otherwise have been unable to survive by providing them with a means with which to express emotions under otherwise oppressive conditions. Music was found to be medicinal in this way, and this seems to align with the research of Thomas Barker

(2015), who spoke of the power of the spirituals and the manner in which this music “reconceptualized conventional notions of time in order to transcend the oppressive regime of the external world” (p. 374). Music provided many with a temporary release from oppression. Music has often been considered a useful coping mechanism and components of the music experience such as cognitive stimulation, singing, and music listening have been said to provide a framework for the release of tension (Bailey, 1984). This resonates with the participant’s thoughts related to the healing power of music.

This participant also reflected on the experience of hearing a brass band, stating, “When you hear a traditional brass band out of New Orleans...you haven’t heard nothing like that...the make-up of the band...the make-up of the instruments, the time, you know what I mean, that the music is played in...unbelievable.” (Personal Communication, 2016). This researcher found this to be true in her own experience of brass bands. Specifically, the music elicits a feeling that is quite difficult to describe; it seems to have the ability to transport one through time and space. Indeed, the researcher believes that if one were to close one’s eyes while listening to the sounds of the traditional brass bands, one could visualize a place unlike any in existence today. This resonates with the use of music as a means to regulate one’s emotional states. Overall, there seems to be both a sense of sadness and a sense of pride within this ritual and the music that encapsulates it.

However, refocusing on bereavement, this researcher notes that few studies have chosen to concentrate specifically on the use of music therapy with bereaved adults. Although the Jazz Funeral is not considered music therapy in and of itself, it is clear that music was a significant part of the participants’ experience of the Jazz Funeral. Yasmin A. Iliya (2015) found that the articulation of feelings of sadness through the mechanism

of improvisational voice exercises lead to shifts in emotional expression for a small sample of individuals using music therapy to process grief. Although more research is necessary to better understand this phenomenon, in reflecting on participants' comments, this researcher is reminded that the impact of the Jazz Funeral on one's grief and the emotional expression of said grief is also dependent upon their own personal connection to the music and culture.

Participants also spoke of the manner in which they remembered the deceased. They spoke of remembering the life lived, and in particular, Participant #5 reflected on his own experiences and his thoughts as related to the comfort this celebratory ritual offered. He spoke of reflecting on happier times spent with the individual and spoke of the Jazz Funeral as a way of holding on to those happier times. He reported this ritual as being "the last thing you remember when they're gone" (Personal Communication, 2016). As he spoke, he reminisced of the impact of seeing a corpse of a loved one and seemed to have a visceral reaction to the thought of seeing it again. He shook his head and gazed downward, stating, "I don't want to remember nobody laying down looking up at you... I don't want to remember nobody like that" (Personal Communication, 2016).

In continuing to address the theme of celebration, one should explore the "repass" as well. This is another symbol of the celebratory aspect of the Jazz Funeral ritual. Although this concept is seen in many mortuary rituals, one participant spoke of the importance of celebration in relation to the repass by reminding this researcher that the people of New Orleans choose to celebrate both life and death. He reported:

"Here's a people that celebrate life and death. You have a birthday party, you have a brass band...you have a christening, you got a brass band...somebody pass on, you have a brass band...it's a celebration on both ends...The repass is after the service where friends and family come and gather with food and everything

and like I say, you really gather to celebrate that person's life. They sit down; they eat, and tell stories and everything about that person's life. As you speak about the grieving process, that'd be like the next phase after the burial. Then everything just picks up from there. The spirit arises in a lively way" (Personal Communication, 2016).

*Repass* activities or customs are culturally specific, and although expanding on specific differences would be outside of the scope of this research, the concept of cultural specificity must at least be identified.

Culture and tradition play an intricate role in the Jazz Funeral, and as such, can define individuals' lived experience of this bereavement ritual, thus impacting the grieving process. This theme is consistent with research that has explored grief from cultural perspectives. Indeed, cultural heritage is a key element within which humans "live their lives" (Cowles, 1996, p. 287). As such, it is also echoed in the way individuals respond to grief (Cowles, 1996).

Grief is experienced in a personal and individual manner, but with that, the onset and course of grief is better understood within cultural and social milieus (Cowles, 1996; Kamerman, 1988). This resonated within and between participants. Participants described their experience of this ritual in relation to the community as well as to their own individual feelings of loss and sadness. Some participants did reflect on the changes observed within the ritual today, of which some seemed reflective of social climate as well as changes experienced within these small neighborhoods and communities.

Participant #3 reported on the reverence of the tradition, and how this reverence influenced both family and community. His tone fluctuated as he spoke of the respect and reverence that could be felt in the streets during funerals of the past. He explained that, in the past, this tradition was not viewed as a party or as an excuse to dance and

drink in the streets. Instead, every step had a purpose and every dance move symbolized the cohesiveness between the community and family, as they moved together towards the deceased's final disposition. He continued by explaining the Jazz Funeral had a reverence acknowledged throughout the community, which was noticed by all those participating.

He was careful to specify that this does not mean that there is a complete lack of reverence or respect in the present day funeral ritual. Instead, he noted the large transformation that has occurred within the practice of this ritual. He spoke of younger generations and his own struggles with the lack of focus placed on the importance of tradition. The participant spoke of the impact that respect and dignity had on his own processing of grief, and how it reminded him that tradition mattered and that being true to the traditions and rituals of the past created both dignity and reverence. Historically, the role of benevolent societies and social-aid and pleasure clubs was to ensure that members of their community were given a proper and dignified burial. However, according to this participant, present day changes to the tradition had influenced the dignity this ritual once held. He reported, "I do need to say that in this transformation and the loss, I got to say, there is a loss of the respect for and solemnness for the Jazz Funeral as an event now" (Personal Communication, 2016).

Another participant had similar thoughts related to the changes in tradition. He spoke of how many within the younger generations are eager to break away from traditions and create their own experiences. He further spoke of how they have chosen to refrain from utilizing the appropriate attire, or playing the music in the way that it was traditionally meant to be played. He stated, "What they don't understand is the more they

do their thing, the more they are getting away from a process that is steeped in substance that they won't ever get to know" (Personal Communication, 2016). He found this to be an unfortunate consequence, but stated that it seemed to be happening with many of the cultural traditions that make New Orleans special. In particular, he reflected on the how younger Mardi Gras Indians are now making changes to the traditional practices of older Indians. He also reflected on the changes in brass band traditions, in particular how younger generations are changing the musical styles and wardrobes once considered a uniform for brass bands. He continued by expanding on other cultural changes such as the manner in which second liners have become integrated into the Mardi Gras parade float practices. He saw these changes as spinning vigorously out of control, and symbolically, as shunning the historic value of these practices and traditions. He commented,

"What the young people don't understand is that it is those very traditions that set New Orleans apart from the rest of the cities and states that make up the United States. The other places didn't have a Louis Armstrong, they didn't have a Sweet Emma, they didn't have a Sidney Bechet. Because they don't know history, and because they are not in an environment where history is taught, they do not understand the connection" (Personal Communication, 2016).

Researchers also identified the impact of changes on the Jazz Funeral tradition.

After attending a Jazz Funeral for a young community member, one researcher (Regis, 2001) noted the absence of prominent social club leaders at the funeral. Regis (2001) explained this as an indicator suggesting that honors such the Jazz Funeral should be reserved for upstanding members of the community. As previously noted, this idea resonated with several participants in this study. For those who hold tightly to the Jazz Funeral and its original intentions, the Jazz Funeral ritual is a powerful tribute to the achievements of the deceased (Regis, 2001). However, for those of the younger

generations, the Jazz Funeral can furnish a shared expression of mourning, while providing a medium for the experienced grief (Regis, 2001), which is often displayed in manners that appear incongruent with the traditional expression of grief provided in the Jazz Funeral. Kathleen Cowles (1996) noted that, although grief is an extremely personal experience, one's culture and cultural heritage has a significant influence on both the individual and intrapersonal grief experience. The current climate in these working-class neighborhoods has triggered changes that in return have affected the community's experience of loss, in particular sudden and violent loss, within their neighborhoods. Expansion of this topic will be important for future research, but for the purpose of this phenomenological study, the focus will remain on the lived experience of participants.

As participants reflected on the changes to this ritual, they also spoke of grief and the manner in which it seemed to change in relation to the Jazz Funeral. One participant spoke of his own experience, expressing that the ritual allowed for new memories of the deceased to be created, and that those new memories offered a momentary release from sadness. He also reminded this researcher that the sadness does not just go away as a result of the celebration. He and other participants spoke of the manner in which their memories of the deceased impact them, and although the form of their grief changes, the experience of the loss remains. This speaks to the oscillating manner in which grief is experienced. In reflecting on the role of music in the lives of the enslaved, one can imagine their experience of oscillating between the loss and restoration orientations. Enslaved individuals were left to process their own losses. These losses took the form of separation from family, home, and cultural heritage. This researcher wonders about the role that rumination played in the aftermath of these great losses. No doubt enslaved

individuals also had to fight to restore some sense of themselves, of who they were and where they had come from. Although the losses they experienced were great, they used music, among other tools, to rise above their oppression, to use their voice and to hold on to the hope of experiencing freedom on both the material and spiritual levels (Barker, 2015).

As stated above, the dual process model of grief identifies both loss and restoration orientations as crucial to the processing of grief, and that people will move between the two orientations within their own time frame (Strobe & Schut, 1999). Participants reported that ritual provided them with a mechanism that assisted their movement through the ebb and flow of their experience of grief. The experiences shared by participants identified adaptive coping mechanisms and evidenced that oscillation between loss and restorative orientations occurred. This was demonstrated in the discussion with one participant who spoke of participation in the Jazz Funeral and the manner in which his grief rebounded between processing the experienced loss and finding a way to recover from said loss (Personal Communication, 2016). Grieving is necessary for the bereaved and processing grief will assist with the reorganization necessary for the bereaved to move forward and adjust over time (Strobe & Schut, 1999). Ritual provides a container for this grief.

Participation in this ritual seems as though it provides the opportunity for the bereaved to confront their loss, while surrounded by family and community, but it does not necessarily change one's oscillation between loss-oriented and restorative oriented processes. Although a seemingly restorative process in and of itself, it should not be

taken as an experience that removes or heals one's feelings of loss. One participant stated,

“At that night, early morning, whatever, that immediate are still going to feel that pain...early stages of grief. It's a plus, not a minus...I just don't know...it makes you feel good and makes the family feel good to see all of the friends out, it's a temporary release or relief for the moment” (Personal Communication, 2016).

As clinicians, this is powerful information. It reminds us that we must approach a client's experience of grief from his or her individual perspective, which will be largely based upon the person's socialization and cultural heritage. Again, grief is a very personal experience, and when working with bereaved individuals, one must be sure to meet the client where he or she is in relation to their loss or grief. Some individuals will choose to suppress, others will choose to confront their loss. Some people will look to the rituals as comforting activities providing them with focus and allowing them to begin to restructure their own identity in the wake of their loss.

### **Researcher's Experience of the Jazz Funeral**

This researcher will now share her own experience of participation in a Jazz Funeral. As this researcher arrived at the church, she was overcome by a plethora of feelings. Reflecting on her own loss, which was void of ritual or closure, she identified feelings of sadness and anxiety within herself as she observed the environment. The sadness seemed to be related to the loss. In viewing pictures of the deceased displayed on t-shirts, fans, and banners, the researcher began to think of the deceased's family. It would be a difficult day for them, but it would be remembered and respected.

This researcher then reflected on the symptoms of anxiety. She related these feelings of anxiety to her presence in this neighborhood. Initially, there were feelings of worry, wondering if someone would inquire as to the presence of this unknown

Caucasian female. Despite the fact that this researcher had been an invited guest, and had spent considerable time on the research and understanding the role that the community plays in the Jazz Funeral by that point, she still experienced these feelings of anxiety. This researcher was in an unfamiliar neighborhood, and was about to witness what would become one of the most emotional days of her life thus far.

The “celebration” began in front of a small, stucco church located on a corner in the Treme neighborhood of New Orleans. The band played as people began to organize behind a large black hearse, flanked by members of the New Orleans police department. Slowly, family members and loved ones exited the church, only to be followed by the coffin containing the body of their loved one. The band continued to play as the body was gently placed in the back of the hearse. Loved ones held signs, banners, and fans bearing a photograph of their son, brother, father, and friend. A tear streamed down this researcher’s face, as she pondered the historical importance of this ritual, while also considering the voluminous amount of information obtained during this journey. Immediately, it was noticed the band was not playing the “dirges” that are traditionally played during this stage of the ritual. This researcher reflected on the conversations with participants, who stressed the importance of these dirges. They spoke of the younger generations and their lack of attention to learning these complicated pieces of music. The brass band that was present appeared to be younger in age. Additionally, they were not dressed in uniform or the attire that had been described to me during my conversations with participants. This was noted as the observations continued.

People cried and hugged, they laughed and yelled. One woman was heard saying, “come on, let’s walk it out” as she spoke to another bystander. Participants sang as the

Grand Marshall blew his whistle, indicating the beginning of the procession. As the procession moved from the front of the church, it continued to wind through the streets of the deceased's neighborhood. People sat on their porches on this hot Sunday morning, waving at those in the procession. Some neighbors were observed leaving their porch to join the second line. As the large group of mourners continued to grow, they worked their way towards the cemetery. The band played while the deceased's family, friends, and community marched and danced together in the streets. As the group continued toward the cemetery, they made stops along the route. Each stop was meaningful and symbolic to the family and friends of the deceased. Family homes, favorite bars, and local hang-outs were just some of the places the procession paused.

During each stop, family and friends would surround the hearse and place one hand on the vehicle holding the remains of their loved ones. People were heard shouting, "We'll see you soon...we'll all be home with our savior in heaven! Save a place for us at the table with Jesus!" They cried, laughed, and sang as they shouted to the heavens about how they looked forward to when they would "all be together in heaven." It is important to note that this concept is culturally specific and would not apply to everyone. However, within this community, it seemed that this concept brought a sense of peace and contentment to those who were mourning.

This was quite moving to observe, as people would drop to the ground and roll around only to bounce back up and begin to dance again. The symbolism of this movement was identified. The loss of this loved one left these people feeling as though they were left behind, floundering and feeling that all was lost. However, with time, they would rise up and find a way to reorganize their lives around the loss, only to continue to

move forward. It was striking and filled with metaphor, and reminded this researcher of discussions with participants that focused on reverence and dignity.

Helen Regis (2001) stated that performance traditions such as this become controversial amongst those who hold true to the tradition of the Jazz Funeral; with the fundamental message being that of the respectability of blackness. Within the traditional Jazz Funeral, the accomplishments of older generations are celebrated as a way of keeping the memory of dignity and freedom alive, and it is important that younger generations attempt to maintain these qualities (Regis, 2001). The music played and the procession continued on to the cemetery. The crowd grew, and as the group continued to wind through the neighborhood, this researcher continued reflecting on what was being learned from this lived experience; the lessons were innumerable.

This experience evidenced the power of ritual within the grieving experience and the vital role it has in coping with bereavement. As stated throughout this research, ritual provides the bereaved with a way in which to organize the events occurring immediately following the loss of a loved one. Not only are rituals beneficial immediately following a loss, they can continue to guide the bereaved by way of post-funeral events which can continue for months following the loss. This speaks to this researcher, as she was unable to participate in a ritual after the loss of her father. This research gave her the opportunity to process her loss. However, as established above, this will be an ongoing process as she continues to move between loss-oriented grief and restorative grief.

### **Limitations of this study and Implications for Future Research**

There are many limitations to this research. Nevertheless, identifying said limitations will guide further study throughout this researcher's career. First, the small

sample size and limited contact with the New Orleans community made this study quite challenging. This researcher hopes to continue this study to incorporate additional participants' stories, and expand on the historical importance of this ritual. Second, this study would have benefitted from examining other cultural bereavement rituals in contrast to the Jazz Funeral. Future research will aim to do this, as it would be helpful to clinicians working with grief and loss. Specifically, this study examined the cultural perspective of grief and identified the importance of understanding the cultural heritage and social context in which clients are experiencing grief.

Finally, this research evidenced a void in research on music therapy for bereaved adults. Music has been found to be a powerful tool, with its connections to both memory and emotions. Further examination of the use of music interventions in grief therapy will benefit clinicians that choose to explore this area. Music moves people and has been used as an adaptive coping mechanism throughout history. This researcher believes her connections to music aided her as she moved through the experience of losing her father. Music offered comfort from the sadness, and at times, brought memories to the forefront of her brain that provided her with feelings of support and peace. Music and its power cannot be taken lightly, and will be explored in greater detail in future projects.

This researcher also learned first-hand of the power of community, and is forever changed as a result of this experience. This researcher feels fortunate and blessed to have had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people in this city. They were patient, kind, and incredibly welcoming. Their stories allowed her an opportunity to revisit historical events and to explore the struggles faced within many communities within the United States. They welcomed this researcher into their homes, and into their lives. The

stories were not easy to share, and their willingness to participate in this study is appreciated more than they will ever truly know. It is likely that the Jazz Funeral ritual will continue to be revised by those within the community who are looking to make a claim to their beloved city, and taking hold of this forum allows them to communicate their individual biases (Regis, 2001). These funerals provide an opportunity for the expression of grief on an individual and a collective level, as well as a continued connection to one's cultural history.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation was guided by two principal research questions: 1) What is the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral ritual? and 2) "What elements of the Jazz Funeral are beneficial to bereavement as reported by the subjects?" In order to answer these questions, a phenomenological approach was taken. Phenomenology focuses on a person's subjective lived experience of the phenomena. In recognizing that people are the experts of their own lived experience and listening to participants describe their lived experiences of the Jazz Funeral ritual, this researcher constructed knowledge around what it means to participate in the Jazz Funeral ritual. The participants noted that the ritual's significance changes within and throughout the funeral procession, as well as that their meaning of the Jazz Funeral changes over time. The collective grieving experienced in his ritual adds to the understanding of the lived experience of the Jazz Funeral, as the level of support and connection that collective grieving provided was said to create an atmosphere of dignity and respect within the community and between community members. The Jazz Funeral, framed in tradition and meaning that dates back to the times of slavery, is shifting with the passage of time, and this shift is reflected in

the political and social events that impact the soul of the African American community. Regardless of this shift, several aspects of the Jazz Funeral ritual remain constant: the sense of loss experienced, the impact of spirituality, and connection to community and tradition that this ritual provides. These elements are what give meaning to life.

This researcher learned that ritual participation allows one to maintain a sense of hope in the midst of loss, while feeling the sensation of kinship and togetherness that strengthens a community. Simultaneously celebrating the life and death of a community member allows one to experience peaceful feelings as they visualize their loved one crossing over to join their higher power. Through the words and experiences of participants, this researcher has come to understand that the experience of grieving is an active process that can be contained and processed through ritual. Furthermore, music can facilitate the emotional expression of grief, especially through ritual. People are the experts of their own lived experiences and knowledge can be constructed by listening to people describe these experiences. The meaningful experience of ritual participation and its celebratory and communal elements come together in service of facilitating grief. Ultimately, ritual can assist in the re-constructing of the bereaved's identity while developing new memories and experiences that allow them to form a new relationship with the deceased.

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## APPENDIX A

### Consent to Participate

You have been invited to participate in a research project conducted by Caryn Whitacre, M.A., and Doctoral Candidate at Antioch University, in Santa Barbara, California. This project will ask you to share your lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral Ritual. The following criteria are required in order to be eligible for this study:

- 1) You are between 18 and 80 years of age
- 2) Within the past five (5) years, you have participated in a Jazz Funeral as a way to mark the passing of a significant person in your life.

Participation in this research project will involve one face-to-face interview that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, with an additional follow up interview occurring via face-to-face, or Skype, if this method is accessible to you. You will be asked a series of questions based on your experiences of the phenomenon that is the topic of this research. The interview will be recorded and transcribed, and in order to protect your privacy, you will receive a number code that will replace your name. The researcher will be happy to provide you with a copy of your recording upon request. When the transcription is completed, you will receive a copy of the finished transcript so that you can review and verify the accuracy of the transcription. If you chose, you can request to be notified if you will be quoted in the final report. This can be done in order to confirm that I have quoted you correctly and that I understood the meaning of your comments.

Although the information you provide will be completely confidential, the Institutional Review Board of Antioch University will have access to all signed informed consent forms. An assigned code number will replace your name on all paperwork to assure your confidentiality. Informed consent forms and other documentation will be kept in a locked file cabinet and destroyed after a five-year period. All recordings will be destroyed upon completion of this research project. If you are quoted, you will have an opportunity to choose a fictitious name to be used in place of your name. This research may be published in a journal or book for professions in the social sciences or other professional journals that may be related to music, grief, or bereavement.

There is no financial compensation for participating in this study. The benefits gained are in your ability to share your experiences in a meaningful way and to perhaps offer comfort to others struggling with loss or grief. The risks to you are minimal. In the unlikely event that you experience any emotional discomfort as a result of participation in this project, you will be provided with a list of local resources that can help you process the discomfort.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. If you chose to withdraw, your data will be destroyed immediately. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please direct them to the researcher at xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu. Questions or concerns can also be directed to Salvador Trevino, PhD. at xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu.

Dr. Trevino is a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Marriage and Family Therapist, and will be overseeing this research as the Chair of this Researcher's dissertation committee.

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Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date

**APPENDIX B**Research Questions

What is the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral ritual?

What elements of the Jazz Funeral ritual are beneficial to bereavement?

Interview Questions

- How would you describe your experiences of participating in a Jazz Funeral Ritual?
- In your own words, what are the most meaningful aspects (elements) of the ritual?
- In your own words, how would you describe (if any) particular elements of the ritual that facilitated your grieving process?
- How would mourners describe the celebratory element of the funeral ritual?
- Can you describe how (if at all) this ritual helped you heal from your loss?

## APPENDIX C

### Participation Flyer

My name is Caryn Whitacre and I am a doctoral candidate at Antioch University in Santa Barbara, California. I am conducting research on the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral Ritual after the loss of a loved one and am seeking 10 individuals who would be willing to share their experiences. This purpose of this study is to explore the roles of music, community, and rituals in the processing of grief and to examine how individuals gather meaning from this experience.

Participation in this study will require one 60-90 minute interview, with one follow up interview to be conducted at a date yet to be determined. Your information will remain confidential and your participation in this study is voluntary; you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you would be interested in participating in this study or you have any questions, please contact me at [xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu](mailto:xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu). Any additional questions or concerns can also be directed to Salvador Trevino, PhD. at [xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu](mailto:xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu). Dr. Trevino is a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Marriage and Family Therapist, and will be overseeing this research as the Chair of this Researcher's dissertation committee. I look forward to speaking with you and thank you for your time.

With Sincere Thanks,

Caryn Whitacre, M.A.  
Doctoral Candidate, Clinical Psychology  
Antioch University Santa Barbara

## APPENDIX D

### Permission for Recruitment Letter

Hello:

My name is Caryn Whitacre and I am a doctoral candidate at Antioch University in Santa Barbara, California. I am conducting research on the lived experience of participation in the Jazz Funeral Ritual after the loss of a loved one and am seeking 10 individuals who would be willing to share their experiences. I am writing this letter to request permission to recruit participants for research from \_\_\_\_\_.

This purpose of this study is to explore the roles of music, community, and rituals in the processing of grief and to examine how individuals gather meaning from this experience.

Please contact the researcher at [xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu](mailto:xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu) with any further questions or concerns. Your signature below signifies that you have granted permission for this recruitment process to take place. Any additional questions can also be directed to Salvador Trevino, PhD. at [xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu](mailto:xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu). Dr. Trevino is a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Marriage and Family Therapist, and will be overseeing this research as the Chair of this Researcher's dissertation committee. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Caryn Whitacre, MA  
 Doctoral Candidate, Clinical Psychology  
 Antioch University Santa Barbara

\*My signature below grants you permission to recruit participants for research through

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Facility Name

X \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name and title