

THE OVERTAKING OF UNDERTAKING: FEMINIZATION AND THE CHANGING
GENDER TYPE OF FUNERAL DIRECTING

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Department of Sociology, Anthropology, & Social Work
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Abstract

Despite the predictions that the influence of women into male-dominated fields would eventually eliminate women's disadvantaged positions in paid work, most research finds that feminization results in the reconfiguration of gender inequality. These studies tended to investigate the material consequences and conditions of feminization and how the "gendering" of the occupation develops to justify the reconfiguration of inequality. Scholarship has begun to examine how individuals in occupations negotiate the existing occupational gender-type and how this shapes gender inequality in feminizing occupations. My dissertation takes up this call by looking at the relationship between gender-typing (i.e., how occupations or jobs come to be understood as appropriate for men or women) and feminization (i.e., women in a formerly male-dominated occupation) in the funeral industry. The funeral industry has traditionally been a male-dominated and gender-typed masculine occupation; however, since the 1970s funeral directing has been experiencing feminization. In recent history, women were not seen as appropriate for funeral directing. They were considered too physically and emotionally "unfit;" however, the movement of women into the occupation complicates how funeral directing was traditionally gender-typed. Using text excerpts about gender (n=101) from 35 funerary trade journal articles ranging from 1995-2013, my dissertation explores competing cultural beliefs about gender at the occupational-level ("old boy," gender essential, gender blind, and gender-progressive) accompanying women's movement into funeral directing. Through semi-structured interviews with twenty (11 women, 9 men) mortuary science students who are studying to become funeral directors and twenty-two (13 women, 9 men) licensed funeral directors, I explore how these occupational scripts about gender affect workplaces in terms of the workplace

experiences (practices and hiring, the division of labor, relations between employees and supervisors) and educational experiences (occupational entry, structure and training); and how current and future funeral directors negotiate cultural gender beliefs about funeral directing to challenge existing explanations and create new explanations about women's suitability for funeral directing. My findings indicate that occupational cultural beliefs about gender are both reproduced and challenged in workplace and educational settings and in how students and funeral directors negotiate cultural gender beliefs.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Gender inequality remains an enduring feature of the contemporary United States' workforce. Women continue to make less money than men across occupations and within occupations (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2011). The movement of women into male-dominated occupations was expected to improve women's status in the workforce (Kanter 1977); however, research demonstrates that the feminization of occupations continues to recreate gender inequality (Reskin and Roos 1990; Enarson 1993; Nesbitt 1997; Rich 1995; Tienari 1999; Chiu and Leicht 1999; Irvine and Vermilya 2010). The reproduction of gender inequality in feminizing occupations happens through deskilling or reskilling of the job, departure of male workers, the retyping of the occupation as feminine, continued sex segregation and/or ghettoization, and/or declining working conditions (e.g. wages, occupational prestige, opportunities for mobility etc.) (Reskin and Roos 1990; Levanon et al. 2009).

The "cultural" side of work relations is also important for understanding gender inequality at work. Occupations and jobs within occupations are gender-typed, meaning that they are often understood in terms of being appropriate for men or women. Cultural gender beliefs (CGBs) are often used to legitimize the division of labor and the existing gender inequality in the occupation. For instance, for women, when gender is salient (mixed-sex workplaces) it becomes one of the main mechanisms through which people navigate the social relational context (work). Thus, women working in masculinized occupations are understood in "gendered" ways research finds that gender matters most for how they interact with others and vice versa. For instance, female lawyers working in masculinized-typed law firms were expected to be "therapists" by male trial lawyers (Pierce 1995); and women working in veterinary medicine see themselves and

are seen by clients as best-suited for working with companion pets because they are “better at emotions” (Irvine and Vermilya 2010). These job “features” are additional work and often exhausting to the women who are expected to perform emotional labor in addition to their normal job duties.

In addition, women working in male-dominated or masculinized-typed occupations are likely to experience what is known as a “contradictory status” where their gender status (woman) does not match their worker status (occupational) (Denissen 2010). This puts women in a no-win situation because they are held accountable to both statuses (Denissen 2010). If they are a good worker, evaluations point out that they are a bad woman. If they are perceived as a good woman, they are often evaluated as a bad worker. Despite this, workers negotiate with their gendered work environments to make meaning of their experiences and the contradictory location has been shown to be a potential site of resistance. People can negotiate CGBs and how they do can influence the existing gender-typing of the occupation

Some researchers have advocated for investigating how feminization can challenge the traditional or existing gender-typing of an occupation (Adams 2010; Le Feuvre 2009). Despite evidence to the contrary, scholars in the areas of gender and work have asked questions regarding feminization and its potential transformative properties: Is feminization always bad for women?; Does feminization ever create equality? (Chiu and Leicht 1990); Does feminization ever challenge the traditional gender-typing of an occupation? (Adams 2010; Le Feuvre 2009). Focusing specifically on the last question, scholars are looking for specific contexts where feminization is likely to challenge the traditional gendering of jobs (Adams 2010: 462). Le Feuvre (2009) contends that the elimination of gender barriers maybe more likely to happen in some contexts than others because gender-typing can be more or less flexible in certain

occupational contexts and how feminization unfolds is shaped by the occupational context. Thus, it becomes important to investigate feminization in different contexts to identify locations where feminization is more likely to challenge the gendering of occupations. Funeral directing provides a context where we can investigate this question because of the “shifting” or “changing” of gender-typing, as the occupation has become female-dominated to identify how funeral directors and students use explanations and negotiate gender in ways to influence gender inequality in terms of reproduction, challenging, and change.

My dissertation examines how current and future funeral directors negotiate and make sense of the gender-typing of the funeral directing occupation as they discuss their workplace and educational experiences. My research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the cultural gender beliefs (gender-typing) in the funeral directing occupation?
2. What are funeral directors’ and students’ beliefs about women in the funeral directing occupation?
3. How do current funeral directors and future funeral directors use CGBs to challenge or reproduce gender inequality in workplaces and educational settings?

To answer question one, I conducted a content analysis of 35 trade journal articles to identify the occupational cultural beliefs about gender. To answer questions two and three, I conducted semi-structured interviews with current funeral directors and students.

Outline of Chapters

I discuss the historical context of the funeral industry through its professionalization to contemporary feminization in chapter two. In chapter three, I discuss the theoretical framework and relevant literature on gender and work. In chapter four, I provide information about my

methods and data analysis. In chapters five, six, and seven, I discuss my findings. In chapter five, I identify the four competing gender explanations (“old boy,” gender essential, gender blind, and gender progressive) in trade journals about women in funeral directing; in chapter six, I discuss students’ (future funeral directors) beliefs about women in funeral directing, how CGBs shape their educational experiences, and how they negotiate CGBs; in chapter seven, I discuss current funeral directors’ beliefs about women in funeral directing, how CGBs shape their workplace experiences and opportunities, and how they negotiate CGBs. In the final chapter, I discuss major findings, my theoretical contribution, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 - Historical Background and Contemporary Feminization of the Funeral Industry

Early Care of the Dead: Civil War to 19th century

“Shrouding women” were primarily in charge of caring for the dead prior to the professionalization and commercialization of undertaking that took place around the turn of the 19th century (Trompette and Lemonnier 2009). “Shrouding women” possessed specialized knowledge and skills that placed them in relatively important communal caregiving positions in the United States. As neighborhood caregivers, women helped other families during times of childbirth, sickness, and death. When the community was stricken with death, these women were called upon to aid in the preparation of the body (Rundblad 1995). “Shrouding women” were primarily in charge of preparing the body for funerary display, while other members (primarily men) of the community built the coffin, dug the hole where the body was to be placed, and carried the coffin to the location of the funeral (Rundblad 1995). “Shrouding women’s” duties involved washing the body, clothing the body in the deceased’s best clothing, posing the body in a “comfortable” position, and making it appear “natural” (Rundblad 1995). This “pre-modern” or “pre-market” care of the dead remained the dominant funerary model in (mainly) rural communities until the commercialization of embalming. Other more “modern” techniques became popular during the US Civil War and took off at the turn of the 19th century.

Rise of Embalming

Lengthy transportation of bodies and new innovations in funerary practices including “viewing” of the deceased, specifically, decorated soldiers, spurred an increased need to delay decay of the deceased (Trompette and Lemonnier 2009; Williams 2003). The Civil War became

a turning point for “legitimization and democratization of embalming for body display” (Trompette and Lemonnier 2009: 15, Williams 2003) and “shrouding women” were replaced by (male) embalming physicians and undertakers. Around the turn of the 19th century, undertakers learned embalming techniques through workshops that lasted three to five days. These workshops were usually sponsored by companies who made embalming chemicals. Representatives from these companies traveled across the country offering workshops, teaching embalming techniques, and granting diplomas that certified the occupational expertise of embalmers (Trompette and Lemonnier 2009). These informal meetings and later more formal settings (mortuary schools) were set in two locations for which the knowledge about embalming could be regulated: standardized and controlled.

Professionalization of Modern Funeral Industry: 19th century-1950s

New funeral practices of displaying the body and transportation of the dead that popularized during the Civil War coupled with importance of embalming for sanitation purposes during the turn of the 19th century provided the rationale for the professionalization of embalming as “specialized knowledge” (Trompette and Lemonnier 2009, Torres 1983). The relationship between “specialized knowledge” and the professionalization of an occupation is best depicted by Torres:

“...expertise in any occupation is undeniable; however, the line separating occupational knowledge and knowledge held by other occupations is a thin one at times. Therefore, some amount of political participation in defining ‘occupational occupation’ is assumed to occur... ‘specialized knowledge’ is a rationale established for being able to participate in a occupational project” (1983, 68-69).

Torres (1983) and Runblad (1995) identifies three arenas underlying the occupational development of the funeral industry: trade journals and the development of mortuary schools and occupational associations. Embalming became the rationale for the professionalization of the funeral occupation, while trade journals, educational institutions, and occupational structures became the mechanisms involved in the regulation and control of embalming and funerary knowledge. Homogenization of institutions through professionalization made it easier to control the flow of information surrounding the industry.

Trade Journals

Occupational journals such as *The Casket*, *The Sunnyside*, and *The Western Undertakers*, in addition to propping up embalming as the most “appropriate” method of caring for the dead, distributed articles on embalming, news for local undertakers, and recommendations about chemicals, coffins, burial clothing and other funerary merchandise to occupation affiliates (Williams 2003). The journals allowed for communication between undertakers in the industry, served as a political battle field for competing funerary institutions, and situated the political discourse of the industry (Williams 2003; Torres 1983). Trade journals also provided a space where undertaking could be redefined as men’s work.

Redefining Undertaking as Men’s Work

Originally, the care of the dead fell predominantly in women’s hands; this changed, however, after the commercialization of embalming as an appropriate and more “modern” form of caring for the dead. For men to successfully overtake undertaking, women, who were formerly the experts in this realm of social life, needed to be removed. The early industry’s road to legitimacy was through presenting embalming as a necessary and better method of caring for the dead. During the early 1900s, trade journals served as the first site where the redefinition of

funeral work could begin. By using trade journals, early industry affiliates were able to seize the discourse surrounding proper methods of caring for the dead and present embalming and undertaking as a necessary and occupational occupation. Trade journals and their writers promoted new methods of caring for the dead instead of the “outdated” and “primitive” methods once performed by “shrouding women.” They argued that embalming was the more scientific and only acceptable alternative of caring for the deceased (Rundblad 1995). Additionally, the trade journals featured a “new” history of undertaking. These articles and stories praised the “important founding fathers that developed advanced methods for caring for the dead” (Rundblad 1995: 182). Unsurprisingly, “shrouding women” and their relationship to the early care of the dead remained absent from the trade journals’ explanation of the funeral industry’s history.

Rundblad (1995) demonstrates several mechanisms through which women were excluded during the early development of the modern funeral industry. The most common method was to tap into essentialist gender beliefs about women and then use them as a justification as to why women should be excluded or barred access to the undertaking occupation and mortuary science schools. Articles in trade journals presented women as delicate, fragile, and meek, qualities which were not an appropriate fit for undertaking (Rundblad 1995). Trade journals such as *Sunnyside* and the *Casket* printed articles discouraging women from seeking out employment in the funeral industry, often stating that the “handling the dead is too heavy a work for a lady” or that “women would faint at the side of blood” (Rundblad 1995: 181). Other trade journals’ advertisements depicted women’s bodies and emphasized their attractiveness to promote funeral homes’ goods and services. For instance, in the *Casket*, a woman’s youthfulness was used as an attestation to the life-like quality of embalming fluid: “Beauty survives even in death” (Rundblad

1995: 183). As embalming and funerary education became further institutionalized into mortuary colleges and funerary occupational associations, women were further disparaged from attending school as Victorian notions of women contended that school was not an “appropriate place for a lady” (Connors 2004). Through the exclusion of women, gatekeeping techniques, and the standardization of embalming techniques, care for the dead became “reskilled” as a masculine occupation during the early 1900s.

Funerary Education

For the professionalization of the funeral occupation, education served two purposes: (1) it allowed the funeral occupation to secure control of teaching embalming techniques used in caring for the dead, and (2) it allowed the occupation to self-regulate (Torres 1983). Prior to 1900, funerary schools were mostly non-commercial independent houses; the introduction of State Health Boards in 1896 led to the formalization of embalming schools (Habenstein and Lamers 1962). Two of the first embalming schools were established in the early 19th century: Hohenschuch-Carpenter College of Embalming in 1900 and Western College of Embalming in 1904 (Torres 1983). These early schools focused predominantly on lectures and demonstrations of anatomy, bacteriology, practical embalming, disinfectants, and infectious diseases, and opted out of teaching other funerary procedures, something characteristic of contemporary mortuary colleges (Habenstein and Lamers 1962). State governing boards oversaw their activity. The Joint Conference of Embalmers’ Examining Boards and State Health Boards, later known as the Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (CFSEB), was founded in 1904 and recommended curriculum and length of training and evaluated embalming schools (Williams 2003; Torres 1983). In the 1920s and 30s, embalming schools were integrated into larger university systems (Habenstein and Lamers 1962).

The Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards remained at the cornerstone of governing bodies overseeing embalming schools' curriculum. It later established an ad hoc committee, the National Conference Board, which took charge of establishing new educational standards for the funerary occupation (Torres 1983). Though the CFSEB was the leading political force surrounding the control of funerary education, there were also several competing bodies: the NFDA (National Funeral Directors Association) and propriety embalming schools, both of which were interested in being the leading voice in shaping funerary education (Torres 1983). Propriety schools were privately-owned, commercial schools with minimal educational requirements and standards. Propriety schools were interested in keeping educational standards to a minimum (Habenstein and Lamers 1962), while the NFDA was predominantly interested in professionalizing the funeral occupation.

Controversy surrounding licensing requirements, grading standards of schools, entry fees, and criticism of the ad-hoc committee, the National Conference Board, finally dissolved in the 1940s. In response, the three most powerful political actors in the funeral industry (the NFDA, the National Association of Embalming Schools, and the Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards) established a new body for regulating education: the National Mortuary Education Council (Torres 1983). This organization was responsible for grading schools, while the CFSEB retained its duties of coordinating activities of state boards and examination procedures (Torres 1983). In 1952, in an attempt to further standardize embalming education, industry leaders formed a National Board Exam for mortuary college graduates. Though it was a nationally recognized exam by mortuary schools, it was not a national qualifying standard. Instead, it served more as a representation of funerary knowledge and expertise in the field (Torres 1983).

Competing political interests by varying funerary organizations characterized the early development of the funerary educational system. This led to the haphazard growth and variation in state licensing laws, mortuary education, and embalming board exams; few states had identical standards (Habenstein and Lamers 1962). Accreditation power was finally given to The American Board of Funeral Service Education by the U.S. Department of Education in 1972 (Torres 1983, Mitford 1998). The Board remains the dominant political body in accrediting funerary service education programs today.

Occupational Associations

In the early industry, there were several competing funerary occupational associations. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) (founded in 1882) was the first and largest occupational association. The early focus of the NFDA was on the development of education, professionalization of the occupation, and establishment of financial security for its members (Mitford 1998). The NFDA served as the unifier in the occupation. It had national representation in matters related to policy formation and had a hand in regulating and standardizing funerary educational systems (Torres 1983). The NFDA established dominance in the industry by recruiting a large base through reducing membership costs and offering benefits (Torres 1983). The NFDA over the course of the professionalization has played a large role in shaping educational standards, laws and legislation, and the political discourse of the funeral industry. The NFDA remains the most powerful political actor and nationally represented organization of the funeral industry.

Among the other competing occupational associations were the National Selected Morticians Association (NSM) and the Order of the Golden Rule. The NSM was a rather prestigious organization and membership was only granted through invitation. The NSM only

invited the most successful funeral directors in the country (Torres 1983). The NSM differed from the NFDA in their participation in federal policy making, which largely instigated a competition between the two organizations (Torres 1983). The Order of the Golden Rule, unlike NSM, stayed out of the political realm of the funeral industry. This organization emerged in the late 1960's and predominantly focused its interests on the business side and future trends of the occupation (Torres 1983).

Funeral Directors' Changing "Specialized Knowledge"

Another major shift as depicted by Torres (1983) was the shift in focus of occupational knowledge. This was primarily taken on by the NFDA. As described earlier, during the turn of the century embalming as a "specialized knowledge" served as the motivation for attempting to establish professionalization in the funeral industry. The "specialized knowledge" of funeral directors shifted in the 1960s to center on counseling, dealing with grief, and bereaved families (Torres 1983). Prior to the 1960s, mortuary education had been strictly technical, focusing on the embalming and biological aspects involved in caring for the deceased (Connors 2004). This transition, however, was never fully recognized as new "specialized knowledge" because families and clientele could find these services in other, more legitimate arenas, e.g. from mental health providers (Torres 1983). After this failed attempt to shift the "specialized knowledge," funeral directors, from approximately 1980 (Mitford 1998) until the present began focusing on the dramaturgical approach and personalization of the funeral service: display of the coffin and body, ceremonial aspects of the funeral service, and decoration at the funeral wake, church service, and burial. Funeral directors focused on providing sympathy, concern, and proper direction throughout the entire process, to ensure customers return in the future (Torres 1983).

Funeral dramaturgy and personalization remains one of the central focuses of services that current funeral homes provide (Mitford 1998).

Declining Hegemony of the “Family-Owned” Model: 1950s-1970s

Professionalization of the funeral industry remained rather stable until the 1950s. During this decade, different forms of funeral business structures took shape and began competing with traditional funeral home models. The funeral industry moved from predominantly family-owned homes to include larger-scale and corporate operations. The three most prominent were chain organizations, cemetery/mortuary combinations, and direct depositions (Torres 1988).

Chain organizations appeared in the 1950s but took off during the 1960s. These funeral businesses purchased a cluster of funeral homes in close proximity and then added an administrative central office that centralized staff and coordinated equipment usage (Torres 1988). By centralizing their resources, chain organizations like Uniservice, Oakridge Holdings, and American Funeral Homes were able to significantly reduce their operation costs (Torres 1988). Cemetery/mortuary combinations – as their name indicates – involved funeral and burial services being available at one location. Forrest Lawn in Los Angeles became one of the largest firms in California (Torres 1988). Through this cemetery/mortuary combinations were able to cut costs by eliminating the need for transportation.

The final, and probably most used, “new” funeral business was direct-deposition. Again, as the name indicates, these businesses side-tracked the mortuary and cemetery and opted for more simplistic options such as cremation. Telophase, one of the first, rose during the 1960s and continues to be a prominent contemporary funeral service provider (Mitford 1998). They are primarily concerned with services “available to the public [that provide] an alternative to the complicated and costly formalized funeral system which is common in America today”

(Telophase Cremation Society 2011). These new “routinized” funeral services proved to be more economically viable than traditional funerary models.

New funerary models threatened the hegemony of traditional funeral homes. In the 1960s and 70s, traditional funeral homes began filing lawsuits against the alternative funerary business models (Torres 1988). Blackwell (1966) found that in response to the rise of chain organizations, state embalming boards, which included members from the NFDA, required these new funerary facilities to have a preparation room, display room, adequate stock of caskets, and other chapel requirements, despite these facilities not providing or utilizing all of these services. Additionally, other funerary affiliates lobbied to ban the use of multiple facilities for one service and instead required that burial and preparation of the body must be located in two different places (Blackwell 1966). In other instances, the establishments of these businesses were completely stopped by laws that banned corporate ownership and sharing of facilities (Blackwell 1966).

FTC and the “Funeral Rule”: 1970s-1990s

Texts such as Mitford’s *The American Way of Death* published in 1963 and Mulvey Harmer’s film *The High Cost of Dying* released in 1974 shed light on to the exploitative business tactics used by funeral directors, which were harmful to the overall public perception of the funeral industry. Continued criticism by media, the public, and complaints by consumer rights groups (Funeral Consumers Alliance) spurred an investigation into the business practices of funeral directors in 1975 by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) (Rosenblatt 1982, Mitford 1998). Through their investigation, the FTC uncovered some exploitative tactics used by funeral directors including: charging customers for services not performed; refusing to give prices over the phone; pressuring families into purchasing unwanted goods and services; and misrepresenting legal measures on embalming requirements, the necessity of a casket during

burial, and cemetery and crematory measures (Rosenblatt 1982). As a result of this investigation, the FTC established the “Funeral Rule” in 1984. The Funeral Rule set standards that regulated the business transaction between the customers and funeral directors. Some of the most notable measures included providing an itemized statement to the customer prior to any sale of goods or services, offering prices and descriptions of caskets to customers prior to their purchases, and no longer requiring the use of embalming or caskets during cremation in instances where it was not mandated by state law (Rosenblatt 1982; Mitford 1998).

Prior to the passing of the Rule, the NFDA lobbied against the FTC investigations. The investigation and The Rule were met with much political backlash from the funeral industry. *Mortuary Management*, a funerary trade journal, charged that the FTC was “trying to impose their agnostic and atheist ways on the God fearing traditional family-oriented American” (Mitford 1998: 178).

The Rule was poorly regulated and enforced by the federal government (Mitford 1998). In 1996, the NFDA and FTC in a joint effort established the Funeral Rule Offenders Program (FROP) (Mitford 1998). Through FROP, the NFDA became the watchdog of the funeral industry. Once again, it was regulating itself. The Offenders Program changed both the enforcement and punishment for funeral homes that violated the Funeral Rule. Funeral homes that violated the Rule would no longer to be fined and federally indicted by the FTC; instead, they could make a voluntary payment to the US Treasury (Mitford 1998). The program also reduced legal fees and tax deductibles for funeral homes and offered free training and educational programs about the Funeral Rule legislation to funeral home employees who violated the Rule (Mitford 1998). As part of this cooperation between the FTC and the NFDA, the FTC would no longer publicize the names of offending funeral homes (Mitford 1998). Despite the

efforts put forth by FROP, a study by the General Accounting Office (GAO) in 1999 found that the FTC was not effectively enforcing the Funeral Rule (GAO 1999). However, the GAO also concluded that because of the implementation of FROP, funeral homes are more cooperative with the Funeral Rule because laws are now remedial instead of punitive (1999).

The reaction to the Funeral Rule and establishment of FROP has been twofold. On one hand, FROP has been greatly welcomed by the industry and occupational associations (Mitford 1998). On the other, it is greatly criticized by customers as not being regulated properly or fairly since regulatory control has been put back into the hands of the industry (Mitford 1998). Additionally, consumer activist groups charged that the establishment of programs such as FROP has completely undermined what the FTC did with the original implementation of the Funeral Rule (Mitford 1998). In response to these complaints by customers, advocate groups such as the Funeral Consumer Alliance have established themselves with the intent of “protecting the rights (and the wallets) of bereaved customers nationwide” (Funeral Consumer Alliance A).

Feminization and Women in the Contemporary Funeral Industry

Women have had a rather unique history in the funeral industry. Women once controlled the industry as the primary caregivers and experts for funerary preparation. They were displaced by men through gatekeeping techniques and professionalization. As with many formerly male-dominated occupations that feminize, the occupational structure is reorganized. Similar to Reskin and Roos (1990), the feminization of the funeral industry corresponds with the “corporatization” of funerary business models: the rise of routinized labor in funerary techniques (direct deposition), more “corporate” funeral home models (SCI, Stewarts Enterprises, and cemetery/mortuary combinations) which centralized operations and specialized the division of labor, and the changing “expertise” of funeral directors shifting from embalming to specializing

in the “dramaturgy” (celebrations of life, personalization of funeral ceremonies) of the funeral service.

Why did Women Return to the Funeral Industry?

So why did women return to the funeral industry? Media coverage demonstrates the main reason underlying women’s resurgence into the funeral industry hearkens back to stereotypes that were once used to exclude them (Rontondaro 2011, Stein 2011). In this conception women inherently possess certain characteristics that make them uniquely qualified for a job as a funeral director. Media accounts of women moving into the industry tap in to traditional cultural gender beliefs about women as naturally more empathetic, possessing better abilities of breaking down physical and emotional boundaries, and as more understanding and compassionate (Stelloh 2011; Stein 2011; Rontondaro 2011). Even powerful political bodies in the funeral industry—the NFDA—make similar observations about women’s viability in the industry:

“Many women might be particularly drawn to the occupation because they are attracted to the skills and traits needed to be a funeral director including communication skills, compassion, a desire to comfort those coping with a death, as well as organizational and event-planning skills” (NFDA 2012).

Ironically, the essentialistic notions about women’s skills and abilities that once saw women as unfit for work within the funeral industry a century earlier are now considered essential qualities which make women particularly good funeral directors. Even female funeral directors tap into this same logic, as one funeral director notes: “women are more patient and more willing to explain things,” which may make them more qualified than their male counterparts (Stein 2011).

Female-Dominated Mortuary Science Education

The most “feminized” area of the funeral industry is women in mortuary science education programs. Since 1971, the demographics of mortuary colleges in the United States have dramatically shifted from being exclusively male to dominated by women. The following graph depicts the general trends in enrollment for mortuary colleges from 1971 until 2011.

Figure 2.1: New Student Enrollment in Mortuary Science Education in the United States, by Sex



As indicated by the graph, since 1971 there has been a gradual but consistent increase of female students. Similar to Reskin and Roos’ study on occupational feminization, as women moved into mortuary science the number of new male students has decreased simultaneously. Data from the American Board of Funerary Service Education demonstrates that since 2000, women have represented over half of all new enrollees in mortuary colleges. This number continues to rise as

females make up about 60% of new enrollments in mortuary colleges in 2011. The same data is used for Figure 2.1 and Table 2.1.¹

Table 2.1: Percentage of New Student Enrollment in Mortuary Science Education in the United States, by Sex

Year	Male	% Male	Female	% Female	Total
1971	1762	94%	103	6%	1865
1976	2210	87%	343	13%	2553
1981	1753	81%	417	19%	2170
1986	1577	75%	538	25%	2115
1991	1873	70%	785	30%	2658
1996	1936	60%	1277	40%	3213
1999	1481	53%	1309	47%	2790
2000	1169	49%	1199	51%	2368
2001	1106	49%	1141	51%	2247
2002	1255	49%	1290	51%	2545
2003	1299	48%	1380	52%	2679
2004	1321	47%	1515	53%	2836
2005	1154	43%	1506	57%	2660
2006	1138	43%	1500	57%	2638
2007	1041	41%	1473	59%	2514
2008	1033	44%	1328	56%	2361
2009	1273	45%	1584	55%	2857
2010	1219	43%	1605	57%	2824
2011	1206	41%	1711	59%	2917

Table 2.2 looks at the sex composition of graduates from mortuary colleges in the United States. Though this data includes a shorter span of time, it shows the same trends. In general, the number of female graduates slowly increased to finally surpass the number of male graduates in 2007. Both of these tables demonstrate that as women move into the occupation the numerical representation of men begins to decline. As Reskin and Roos (1990) demonstrate, this is a common result of feminization; as the working conditions of the occupation decline

¹ This data comes from the American Board of Funerary Education. Yearly data was not available until 1999, hence why the data is presented in 5 year increments prior to 1999 in Table 2.1. Demographic data on enrollment is only available from 1971 \.

(corporatization of funeral directing), it is no longer attractive to men and they move on to other occupations.

Table 2.2: Graduates of Mortuary Science Programs, by Sex²

Year	Male	% Male	Female	% Female	Total
2000	968	55.3%	782	44.7%	1750
2001	884	54.4%	741	45.6%	1625
2002	820	52.4%	745	47.6%	1565
2003	850	52.9%	758	47.1%	1608
2004	739	53.1%	654	46.9%	1393
2005	762	52.9%	678	47.1%	1440
2006	707	50.3%	698	49.7%	1405
2007	634	47.3%	706	52.7%	1340
2008	614	45.8%	728	54.2%	1342
2009	598	46.8%	680	53.2%	1278
2010	660	48.0%	714	52.0%	1374
2011	697	46.7%	797	53.3%	1494

Mortuary science programs are more “feminized” than the funeral directing occupation. For the occupation, men are still more likely to be funeral directors than women. As of 2008 approximately 26% of all funeral directors are women (Cathles et al. 2010). Funeral home ownership gives more insight into the status of women in the funeral industry. In general, most funeral homes continue to be owned by men (58%); however, female funeral home ownership has increased (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). In 1998, women only owned approximately 5% of funeral homes in the United States (Stelloh 2011); by 2007, ownership increased to 23% (US Census Bureau 2007). The remaining funeral homes (19%) are owned by families (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

² The sex composition of graduation rates for mortuary colleges is only available from 2000. The data source comes from the American Boards of Funeral Service Education 2012.

Women Funerary Occupational Associations

Women have also established occupational associations for women, most notably *Funeral Divas* and *Association of Women Funeral Professionals*. These organizations focus on providing support, mentorship, and awareness and bringing consciousness to women's status within the funeral industry.

Funeral Divas

The organization's main goals became particularly clear in their "Who is a Funeral Diva?" statement:

A Funeral Diva is a strong, confident and successful woman who works in the funeral industry. She is not ashamed of her career! She is proud to serve hurting families! She is an Embalmer, Funeral Director or Employee at a funeral home! She is a grief counselor, a casket sales woman or Mortuary Science Student! She is a woman who supports all women in Funeral Service! She simply loves her career! (Funeral Divas 2012).

The previous statement emphasizes the multiple roles that women take on when providing funeral services to families. Above all else, the *Divas* emphasized their commitment to serving grieving families. Their organization's mission statement indicated similar things:

Our purpose is to encourage and uplift every woman in the funeral service industry and provide comfort to grieving families! We are not your traditional woman's group. We exist for Funeral Divas & families all over the world! We provide camaraderie among funeral industry women and we provide families a safe and comforting atmosphere for funerals (Funeral Divas 2012).

The organization's mission statement indicated the role that the organization played for women in the funeral industry: support and development of a sort of 'collectivity' between women in the

funeral industry. In addition, it is interesting that they included “we are not your typical women’s group” in their mission statement. They might have attempted to subvert the cultural stigma that gets attached to women’s groups or groups perceived as “feminist.” This could be an instance where they were intentionally attempting to detach themselves from the negative cultural views often associated with feminism.

Funeral Divas was established in October 2010 by Munreenah Warner, the current editor of *Funerals Today* magazine, a licensed funeral director, and former owner of a funeral home. As of June 2012, *Funeral Divas* had 763 members represented in all states except Montana, Wyoming, and Vermont. Its membership also extended internationally with members in South Africa, the UK, Ireland, Mexico, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Bermuda, and the Netherlands.

Funeral Divas provided an extensive mentorship program to its members. Funeral directors who have been in the business for a number of years mentored women who were in the process of getting their funeral directing license. The mentorship program ended once the individual being mentored received their license. As a part of this mentorship program, the *Divas* also provided academic scholarships to young women who planned to start mortuary school.

The *Funeral Divas* were also big on social networking and connecting female funeral directors across the country. They did this in several ways. *Funeral Divas* had a Facebook and Twitter account and updated both on a daily basis with information regarding employment opportunities, interesting articles regarding the funeral industry, opportunities for television shows, and information about *Funeral Diva* events across the country. The Twitter and Facebook accounts also provided a space where *Divas* could give words of encouragement and support to one another and as a forum where members could ask and answer questions. About once a

month, the *Divas* planned social events through their local chapters so members could meet in person. Finally, the main *Funeral Divas* webpage had both written and video blogs, where members shared the day-to-day trials and tribulations of working in the funeral industry.

Funeral Divas was a short-lived organization. In November 2012, during an educational conference in Chicago, the founder of *Funeral Divas* was accused of fraud by one of the *Funeral Divas*' members and arrested at the conference hotel. Shortly thereafter, *Funeral Divas* released a statement saying that there had been a mistake and that in fact, the founder had not committed fraud and no charges had been filed. A few days after the release of the statement, *Funeral Divas*' Facebook and Twitter accounts and their official website were removed from the internet. *Funeral Divas* has remained inactive since November 17, 2012.

Association of Women Funeral Professionals

Kim Stacey, a licensed funeral director and freelance writer for funerary publications, started the *Association of Women Funeral Professionals* (AWFP) in January 2009 in Las Angeles, CA. Stacey often features op-ed pieces in issues of *Mortuary Management*, a well-known funeral industry trade journal. She writes mostly on the status of women in the funeral industry. Like *Funeral Divas*, AFWP was established with similar goals: dealing with the issues and barriers specific to women working in the funeral industry: "The Association of Women Funeral Professionals exists to provide mentoring, occupational and personal support for women in the funeral service field. Our goal is to strengthen the presence of women in funeral service."

For women in the funeral industry, the AFWP serves as a site where women connect, network, and share their stories and experiences with others. The AFWP website features blogs on a multitude of different topics including issues of work/family balance, business tips, new industry trends, etc. Many of the blogs are articles by founder Kim Stacey, but often times many

other prominent women in the industry are featured. In addition to their website, AAFP has a Facebook page which was used to keep members connected and to share information about employment opportunities, articles regarding the industry, and AAFP events. As of June 2013 AAFP's website and Facebook have disbanded. According to Stacey, the website is down temporarily for updates.

The Overtaking of Undertaking?

At first glance it appears that the numerical feminization of the funeral industry may be destabilizing the occupation's traditional masculinized orientation. Upon deeper analysis there are more complex processes at work. In general, men continue to occupy the positions of power atop the occupational hierarchy. To date there has only been one female president of the NFDA since its implementation in 1882 (NFDA 2012b). At the level of state funeral director associations, women are present however, men are more likely to be presidents or executive directors of state funeral director associations (Stelloh 2011). In addition to men remaining in the occupational structure, women still experience discrimination when seeking employment or schooling.

Despite their increased presence in the funeral industry, many women still face barriers when pursuing their occupational goals. The archetype of "funeral director" continues to be seen as a man's job and (family-owned) funeral homes looking to hire new employees are likely to continue to harbor doubts about a women's physicality in a profession that often calls for the heavy lifting of coffins and dead bodies (Rontondaro 2011). Following their graduation, women have a harder time getting placement into funeral homes because they are often small family-owned businesses that are passed down through the (male) family line (Rontondaro 2011). These funeral homes are more likely to hold on to traditional beliefs about who is most suited to be a

funeral director (e.g., white men). Additionally, as recently as 2011, the New York Attorney General filed a law suit against Simmons Institute of Funeral Services and its CEO, claiming instances of sexual harassment and discrimination against pregnant women, both of which are violations of Title IX (Sharp 2011). Despite these obstacles, prominent women in the funeral industry such as Kim Stacey challenge archaic gender stereotypes surrounding the funeral directing occupation. On an occupational level, some women are calling for more “gender neutral” approaches to understanding the funeral directing occupation.

Organizations such as the *Funeral Divas* and *AWFP* offer a space where the masculinized-type of the occupation can be contested; they can provide support for women located in similar positions and advocate for women in the funeral industry. However, trade journals and these groups (*Funeral Divas* in particular) draw on essentialist notions of gender to justify why women would be naturally good at the job. In this line of thinking, *Funeral Divas* assumes that women make good funeral directors because they are caring and compassionate and possess good interpersonal communication skills. Instead of contesting these essentialist beliefs about gender and funeral directing, it appears they reify it. Specifically, we must investigate what this means for women in the funeral industry.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

Introduction

In this literature review I explore two bodies of research in the study of gender of work: feminization and cultural gender beliefs. Feminization is typically understood as the numerical movement of women into formerly male-dominated occupations (Reskin and Roos 1990), which is also referred to as sex-typing. Cultural gender beliefs (CGBs) are widespread, pervasive ideas about gender that are institutionalized in media, law, and organizational practices and structure interaction in social relational contexts (in the case of my study, occupations and workplaces) (Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). This is also referred to as gender-typing.

Feminization involves the restructuring of an occupation – in terms of the reorganization of the division of labor and redistribution of material rewards – that typically happens as women move into an occupation (Reskin and Roos 1990), whereas CGBs are the explanations that develop to explain occupational sex segregation and job segregation. CGBs are often discussed as societal-level explanations of differences between men and women, but these belief systems also shape the occupation-level and workplace-level. In particular, CGBs shape the gender-typing of occupations and jobs, or how work comes to be understood as appropriate for men or women. CGBs are often then used to justify the division of labor and existing inequality in the occupation or workplace. The synthesis of these two previous disparate literature—feminization and CGBs—can be beneficial to scholars of gender and work because it may provide opportunities to identify contexts where gender inequality is challenged.

Though prior research finds that feminization typically results in the reproduction of gender inequality and CGBs are used to justify this inequality, more recent scholars have begun

to advocate for “feminization” of an occupation as being potentially “transformative” and providing an opportunity to challenge the traditional gender-typing of an occupation (Adams 2010; Le Feuvre 2009; Denissen 2010). There is also a feedback loop at work here. People negotiate CGBs and how they do this can influence gender inequality. Workers’ negotiation becomes particularly important when talking about how funeral directing was once understood as “appropriate” for men, and has come to be understood, contemporarily, as “appropriate” for women.

My study shows how funeral directors and students use gender explanations and negotiate gender in ways to influence gender inequality. Thus, over time, we can assess which explanations are associated with challenges to gender inequality, which with reproduction, and in which contexts (family-owned vs. corporate). My study investigates how contemporary feminization of the funeral industry shapes the cultural gender beliefs about funeral directing and the workplace and educational experiences and opportunities of students and funeral directors, and how students and funeral directors negotiate CGBs in these contexts.

I begin this chapter by reviewing literature on feminization and how feminization tends to recreate gender inequality; I then look at how cultural gender beliefs shape work, how workers negotiate cultural gender beliefs at work, and finally, I highlight the importance of how a convergence of these two perspectives can lead to research which investigates contexts and conditions where feminization can challenge the gender-typing of an occupation.

Feminization

The American workforce has long been characterized by a division of labor by sex. Put simply, occupational sex segregation involves men primarily working in occupations dominated by men, and women in occupations dominated by women. Men are more likely to be found in

managerial and technical fields and fields involving manual labor (the better jobs and higher paying jobs); while women tend to work in temporary employment and in the service industry (Reskin and Roos 1990). This division of labor remained rather stable throughout the 20th century; however, from 1970 to 1980 there was an influx of women into male-dominated occupations.

Much of early thought about how to mitigate gender inequality at work was to integrate women into male-dominated occupations (Kanter 1977; Reskin and Roos 1990). Men's occupations have traditionally been the higher paid, more valued, and most prestigious jobs in American society (Reskin and Roos 1990). The underlying assumption was that if women could gain access to these "better" jobs, benefits, pay, and job ladders, women would be better off economically, and gender inequality would decline. In this line of reasoning, sex-integrated workplaces would positively benefit women. For Kanter (1977), this was exemplified in creating more "balanced" (50/50, 60/40) workplaces where sex-ratios between males and females were more numerically equal. She postulated that when this happened, dominate/subordinate relationships practiced between majority and minority groups would dissipate and work relations and experiences across the board would be more equal, regardless of a worker's minority group membership.

However this approach was largely critiqued because Kanter failed to take into account the power dynamics associated with gender: men are privileged in terms of their gender status, which benefits them in workplace settings. This is consistent for research across differently sex-typed occupations. For instance, research has demonstrated that when men enter female-dominated occupations they take their gender status privilege with them (Williams 1992). Men's "token" status in feminized occupations was an advantage in hiring and promotions. These men

were not only encouraged to seek higher structural positions within occupations, they were essentially “tracked” or “kicked upstairs” into administrative and supervisory positions (Williams 1992: 256). Supervisory jobs were mostly dominated by men, and new male hires, because of their status as male, received preferential treatment and opportunities to build social bonds with their bosses. This later facilitated their entry into administrative positions. Williams refers to this effect as the “glass escalator” to illustrate how the privilege of being a man facilitated men’s advantage in climbing the occupational hierarchy in a female-dominated occupation.

The opposite is held true for women who move into male-dominated occupations. During the 1970s and 1980s firms, through technological advances and the routinization of work, successfully lowered the amount of skill and labor required for the job. These jobs became less appealing for men (and employers were less interested in “high-skilled” male workers), and men began moving onto better jobs. As these jobs became more and more de-skilled, they lost many of the economic opportunities they once provided to their male workers: upward mobility and greater autonomy, occupational prestige, wages, and job security (Chiu and Leicht 1999, Reskin and Roos 1990). These jobs became less appealing to male workers and employers were unable to retain male workers due to the unfavorable working conditions. As these jobs lost their occupational prestige and economic standing, men began to move out into “better” jobs, opening up space for others (women), who were less preferred by employers (Reskin and Roos 1990). Firms began to heavily recruit female workers because they were seen as “cheaper” labor, as compatible with de-skilled labor, and as willing to take the jobs (Reskin and Roos 1990; Levanon et al. 2009).

Feminization rarely results in real sex-integration, in which women and men's pay, division of labor, and jobs resembled each other. Instead, women's movement into male-dominated occupations results in the reproduction of gender inequality. Unsurprisingly, other research on feminization confirms that gender inequality is continually reproduced as occupations feminize.

Consequences of Feminization: The Reproduction of Gender Inequality

Notable research on feminization in a multitude of different occupations including book keeping, bank telling, real estate sales, insurance adjusters and sales, bartending, baking (Reskin and Roos 1990), casino card dealers (Enarson 1993), clergy (Nesbitt 1997), banking (Rich 1995, Tienari 1999), law firms (Chiu and Leicht 1999), veterinary medicine (Irvine and Vermilya 2010) and healthcare (Adams 2010; Lindsay 2005) all point to the mechanisms that reproduce gender inequality. Despite variation across occupation, context, and time, these studies provide insight into common mechanisms that accompany the movement of women into an occupation, including de-skilling or re-skilling of the job, departure of male workers, retyping of the occupation as feminine, continued sex segregation and/or ghettoization, and declining working conditions (e.g., wages, occupational prestige, opportunities for mobility, etc).

One of the major consequences of feminization is ghettoization. Ghettoization refers to "the segregation of women and men into different jobs or specializations within the same occupation" (Reskin and Roos 1990: 71). These jobs are routinely given lower pay and involve less desirable tasks. For example, given the shortage of medical doctors during the 80s, the healthcare industry developed and expanded the Physician Assistant's program, a historically male-dominated occupation, and encouraged individuals to apply (Lindsay 2005). Women began applying and as of 1980, the occupation was 60% female in the United States. The field, despite

its feminization, remains highly ghettoized. Women tend to work in women's and children's health, while men are employed in the more valued and rewarded emergency medicine, surgical specialties, and industrial/occupational medicine (Lindsay 2005). This division of specialty tends to be the case across the entire medical occupation regardless of the particular occupation (Adams 2010). Specialties dominated by men continue to be the more economically rewarded medical specialties. This trend is also consistent among law firms as well; women are more likely to be paralegals or in less prestigious lawyer jobs than men (Pierce 1995; Chiu and Leicht 1999).

Because ghettoization leads to women occupying the least valued jobs within the occupation, women in these jobs often have limited mobility or a glass ceiling. For Physician's Assistants, men were concentrated in the higher paying, higher status specialties and were more involved in the decision making and administrative duties (Lindsay 2005). Similar patterns of employment are found in veterinary medicine, where men own their own practices and women work for practices (Irvine and Vermilya 2010). Self-employment allowed for better economic mobility because they made more money and had more autonomy. In their study of lawyers, an occupation that is over 50% female, Chiu and Leicht (1999) found that there is less sex segregation in the lower levels of law firms (paralegal), but that the higher levels are more stratified by sex and income. Women consistently made less money and were more likely to be paralegals than law firm partners. Women's minimal representation in leadership positions and thus their lower wages and limited autonomy and mobility underscores the persistence of gender inequality despite shifting sex composition.

The research so far indicates that the movement of women into male-dominated occupations does not reduce gender inequality for women, but instead reduces occupational sex

segregation. There is more equality between the sexes in terms of numbers, but not in the work structure or the division of labor within the occupation. In general, when occupations become female-dominated, or when women enter occupations in large numbers, working conditions deteriorate, wage inequality persists, and jobs are further segregated through processes like ghettoization. Though segregation has decreased somewhat since Reskin and Roos' study, women are still more likely than men to be located in jobs at the lower rungs of the firm's hierarchy, i.e., jobs that are more unstable, lower paid, and lacking in occupational growth and advancement opportunities (Padavic and Reskin 2002; Reskin et al. 1999; Reskin and Roos 1990; Adams 2010; Lindsay 2005; Enarson 1993; Chiu and Leicht 1990).

What these studies suggest is that feminization recreates gender inequality. Studies on feminization, however, do not tell us much about how individuals working in an occupation come to understand which gender is a more appropriate "fit" for certain professions or for jobs within that occupation. In doing this, it is important to make a conceptual distinction between sex composition and gender-typing.

Differentiating Between the "Sex" and "Gender" of an Occupation

Early approaches to research on gender and occupations (especially feminization) have tended to treat the process of feminization as synonymous with being feminized (Britton 2000). These previous approaches to studying gender and work have tended to conflate sex composition with gender-type, meaning that if a workplace was numerically dominated by one sex, it was assumed that the occupation is gendered in the same way e.g., a female-dominated occupation is considered gender-typed as feminine (e.g., as appropriate for women with feminine attributes) (Britton 2000). Instead, researchers advocate for differentiating between the two: sex composition, meaning the numerical representation of men and women in a particular occupation

(male or female-dominated), and gender-typing, which refers to a process through which occupations come to be seen as appropriate for workers with masculine or feminine characteristics (masculinized or feminized) (Roos and McDaniel 1996; Britton 2000). By conceptually distinguishing between sex composition and gender-typing we can understand the historical processes through which a certain occupation comes to be understood as appropriate for men or women (Britton 2000).

Taking this conceptual distinction further, we can actually have “transgendered” occupations where the “sex” of the occupation differs from the “gender” of the occupation. Veterinary medicine and lawyers exemplify two occupations which are “transgendered,” in part because women numerically dominate each occupation. However, the occupation is masculinized in terms of wages, division of labor, and positions of power in favor of men (Pierce 1995; Chiu and Leicht 1999; Irvine and Vermilya 2010). For veterinary medicine, men earned more than women because they work with the more valued farm animals and women engage in less valuable emotional labor because most of their work involves caring for companion pets. Women attributed the wage gap to women’s nature of not being as good at negotiating skills as men. In addition, given the typical heterosexual arrangements that involve women being respondent for more household labor than men, male veterinarians had more time to dedicate to developing their occupation and were more likely to own their own practices (Irvine and Vermilya 2010).

Cultural Gender Beliefs at Work

“Gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference” (Ridgeway and Corell 2004: 510; [Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999;

Lorber 1994; Nakano Glenn 1999; Ridgeway 1997; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Risman 1998]). Cultural gender beliefs are “widely shared, hegemonic...beliefs... [which function] in ‘social relational contexts’ and are among the core component that maintain and change the gender system” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004: 510). Hegemonic beliefs about gender in American society usually describe women as more communal, nurturing, and caring, as “nicer” but less competent; men on the other hand are seen as more agentic, rational, instrumental, and more competent than women—attributes that are valued in our society (Eagly, Wood, Diekmann 2000; Correll 2001, 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Reskin and Roos 1990). These hegemonic cultural gender beliefs function as “universals” to the effect that everyone knows what they are and even hold those who do not believe them expect to be held accountable to them by others (Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann 2000; Fiske et al. 2002). Thus, these hegemonic beliefs act as rules that govern gendered interaction in social relational contexts; of particular interest here is how cultural gender beliefs shape interaction at the workplace level (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

In workplace settings, how gender cultural beliefs work depends on the saliency of gender in a given workplace context; it can range from barely non-existent to the central focus (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway 2011). Research indicates that gender becomes effectively salient in contexts where actors differ in sex category (mixed-sex settings) and in contexts that are gender-typed in stereotypical ways (nursing is explained as numerically dominated by women and gender-typed feminine because it involves caring) (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; [Deaux and LaFrance 1998; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Wagner and Berger 1997]). “Given the basis of automatic sex categorization in interactional contrasts, it is likely that whatever specific content (gender stereotypes) is attached to a sex category, it will be organized around polarized traits that differentiate men from women” (Ridgeway 1997: 221). Thus, when

gender is effectively salient in specific contexts, men and women workers implicitly expect each other to act and hold each other accountable according to context-specific gender stereotypes (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). These gender cultural beliefs typically frame/inform which gender is naturally suited for a particular job and what it means to be a “good” worker in a particular occupation or job.

Workplace Context, Positions of Power, and the “Flexibility” of Gender

The consequences of cultural gender beliefs about who is more naturally suited for a particular job and how they interact with workplace contexts become apparent when investigating their manifestations across different occupations and jobs. In her study of a law firm, Pierce (1995) found that male and female paralegals who occupied similar structural locations were assigned gender-specific tasks and treated very differently by their bosses, (i.e., trial lawyers). Female paralegals were expected to provide the bulk of emotional support and stability for the male trial lawyers. Female paralegals were often referred to as “therapists” to whom attorneys would confide their personal problems. Men were seen as “real lawyers” preparing for law school, invited out for social gatherings, and were granted privileges based just on their statuses of being men. Pierce (1995) demonstrates that paralegals’ jobs and treatment in one law firm were informed by a gendered belief system held by those located in positions of power (trial lawyers) that saw men as better-suited for doing the “real work” of the job.

In a similar vein, Leidner’s (1991) study on two routinized jobs (a fast food chain and insurance sales) demonstrates how very similar job tasks can be interpreted differently in different workplace contexts. The job tasks involved in these two workplaces—dealing with customers, smiling, deference, adjusting their mood and demeanors to the demands of their jobs—are culturally seen as feminine. At McDonalds, women were viewed as more suited for

working with customers because women were perceived of as more presentable for the front, better able to take orders and deal with insults, and more trustworthy by customers; job traits that were seen as inconsistent for men working there. On the other hand, at Combined Insurance, women were generally considered unfit to handle such work. These similar feminine tasks of dealing with customers, deference, etc., at Combined Insurance were redefined by highlighting aspects of work that required “manly” traits, including being aggressive and controlling interactions with customers, and being able to self-direct, and deemphasizing degrading traits seen as feminine. Thus, job characteristics that are typically defined as feminine can be redefined the fit masculine scripts at work. Liedner, through the juxtaposition of these two jobs, demonstrates that:

“The actual features of the jobs do not themselves determine whether the work will be defined as most appropriate for men or women. Rather, these job features are resources for interpretation that can be drawn on by workers, their supervisors, and other audiences” (Liedner 1991: 174).

This suggests four things. First, that cultural gendered beliefs about who should do what type of work are not wholly deterministic, but that they are flexible and can be used to justify (almost) any task as appropriate for one gender or the other. Second, that the assignment of different job features are used to recreate horizontal and vertical difference between men and women, thus reproducing traditional gender stereotypes. Third, that job tasks in themselves are not gendered; it is in the way they are used and defined by people in positions of power that make them gendered. And given this, CGBs frame our understanding of how jobs come to be understood as appropriate for men or women, whereas earlier studies (Reskin and Roos 1990; Levanon et al. 2009) implied that CGBs followed feminization and legitimized the redistribution of job tasks.

Finally, how specific job features become gendered, or gender-appropriate for men or women, is shaped by the context in which the work occurs, by the beliefs of those in positions of power (bosses, supervisors), and how workers interact within this belief system. Cultural gender beliefs at work serve as a template that then interacts and is influenced by the context in which work is done.

Workers' Negotiation of Gendered Work Contexts: Contradictory Status of Women Working in Masculinized Occupations

By examining instances where there is a break between the gendered understanding of the job and the actual gender identity of the worker—where gender becomes most salient (Ridgeway and Corell 2004; Ridgeway 1997)—we can gain greater insight into the processes that facilitate change or maintain the gendering of work (Risman 2009, Kelan 2010). Gender is most salient in occupations where workers' gender status (woman) does not match their worker identity (in a male-dominated/masculinized job) (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway 2011); it is in these instances where we can determine how workers negotiate cultural gender beliefs at work. This position is often referred to as a contradictory status or “double bind” (Denissen 2010). Women are deemed unsuccessful at their jobs because they either fail at being a “good woman” or being a “good worker.” If women do not adhere to the “good women” stereotype, regardless of their intentions, they are held to that standard by coworkers. For instance, “unfeminine” women in the marines were seen as “undignified, ‘like men,’ and not meriting special treatment” and vice versa (Williams 1991: 78). The main point here is that given this double bind women face working in masculinized occupations, women are always evaluated in negative terms. Either they behave in ways that show they are appropriately feminine and are evaluated negatively for not being good at the job, or if they behave in ways to be good at the job

(masculine), then they are evaluated negatively for not being appropriately feminine. Either way the evaluation of their work is negative.

Men typically do not feel this contradiction because definitions of “good worker” and “good man” are complimentary (Irvine and Vermilya 2010, Denissen 2010, Pierce 1995). Even when White men are in a contradictory status (when they work in female-dominated occupations), they are often pushed “upward” on a “glass escalator” rather than held down by a “glass ceiling.” (Williams 1995). This gender boost does not help all men. Black men in female-dominated occupations are often marginalized and mistreated (Harvey-Wingfield 2009).

Despite many of the constraints placed on workers by workplace contexts, the contradictory status can be a site of resistance in which workers can disrupt (at least temporarily) the masculinized character of the job, allowing for the possibility of varying (less oppressive) gender constructions (Britton 2000). Research identifies three ways women negotiated gender-typed masculine work environments: using femininity at work (Irvine and Vermilya 2010; Denissen 2010), de-emphasizing gender differentiation between masculinity and femininity (Rabe-Hemp 2009; Denissen 2010), or obscuring the gender-type of an occupation (Kelan 2010), where “the essentialism of binary distinctions between people based on sex category is challenged” (Risman 2009: 83).

Using Essential Femininity as a Strategy in Masculinized Occupations

The first strategy used to negotiate the contradictory status/double bind is using essential femininity either by explaining why women are good at this particular occupation, or enacting essential femininity in interactions with male coworkers. In the first case, female veterinarians used explanations of essential femininity to explain how their inherent attributes of nurturance and caring aided them in their occupation (Irvine and Vermilya 2010); whereas women working

in the trade industry enacted essential femininity to protect themselves from hostile interactions with male coworkers (Denissen 2010).

For the former, female veterinarians used essential explanations to justify why they saw themselves as a “good fit” for the job. In particular, women explicitly drew attention to the emotional labor elements of the job stating that they were suited for the job because of the caring and nurturing elements involved. They felt themselves as particularly suited for the job because as women “[the job] kind of feeds that nurturing side” and they possessed a “gentler, kinder element” (Irvine and Vermilya 2010: 64-65). Clientele held similar essential beliefs about male and female veterinarians.

Clientele viewed women veterinarians as more suitable for the emotional labor elements of the job (caring for sick or dying animals), which also informed the division of labor between the types of animals male and female veterinarians worked with. Women, more often than not (67% of the time), cared for small companion pets. This involved a much higher degree of emotional labor and interpersonal communication, which their clientele expected from them, than working with large, farm animals (a specialty normally dominated by men). In instances where women did work on large farm animals, their clientele also held them accountable to the gendered beliefs about veterinary medicine. Clientele acted surprised when they saw women working on large farm animals, and in doing so, questioned their abilities as a veterinarian or refused services from female veterinarians.

Similarly, female veterinarians also used CGBs of essential femininity to justify the wage gap between men and women veterinarians. Female veterinarians noted that they did not possess aggressiveness and negotiating skills relative to their male counterparts. Female veterinarians then used this belief to justify their lesser salaries (compared to their male counterparts).

Veterinary medicine was a ghettoized occupation given the sex segregation and value attached to animal specialties. Women were more likely to (and were seen by clients as better at) take care of smaller, companion pets (cats and dogs), whereas men were more likely to take care of large farm animals (horses and cows). These animal specialties were differentially rewarded. Larger, farm animals generate more money compared to smaller companion pets and thus women veterinarians made less money than their male counterparts. In veterinarian medicine, women are located in the least-compensated and valued jobs of the occupation. In this sense, CGBs are used to justify the division of labor *and* the material inequality in the occupation.

In a similar vein, Denissen's (2010) study of tradeswomen found that female workers enacted essential femininity as a protective tool for those who found themselves in potentially harmful interactions with their male colleagues. Women felt more vulnerable in interactions with men that involved sexual banter or swearing. They were fearful that these interactions could lead to instances of sexual harassment or being disadvantaged by coworkers. In response to this, tradeswoman demanded to be treated like a "lady" in an effort to protect themselves from harassment. Here, being treated like a "lady" shielded women from experiences of sexual discrimination or harassment in highly masculinized work environments. Katie's experience best depicts how gender worked as a shielding mechanism:

They acknowledge you're a lady, but you gotta expect that they're going to say it (swear words) and not realize that you're there. 'Cause that's what happens. You know, it is the guy's place, so they respect you, and you can be respected as a female. [Later] they respect me. 'Katie's like one of the boys,' they said, 'She'll take the crap.' But you got to respect her. There'll be a line drawn. 'Ok, let's joke, let's push each other around, let's talk a little cussin' and stuff.' But then it's like ok, 'Let's stop now. Do not say it to me

anymore.’ And that’s what I told this guy, ‘You better stop what you’re saying ’cause I do not appreciate it’ (Denissen 2010: 1063).

Though femininity can be protective in some instances (shielding women from uncomfortable interactions with men, as in the previous example), in other instances it is seen as something that hinder women’s worker status in masculinized occupations. In this instance, Jenny was being held accountable to traditional gender expectations by her coworkers.

Because I’m a girl, they do not want to see me lifting that heavy stuff. The guys will come, ‘Oh, let me get it.’ And it’s stuff that I know I can pick up, but they do not want me to pick it up. Or digging, they will come and take my shovel away from me. They just do not want me to do the work because they’re afraid I’m going to get hurt. Which is kind of nice in a way but sometimes it’s pretty frustrating because I’m not out here to look cute on the corner (Denissen 2010: 1057).

The paternalistic attitudes of tradework have led male coworkers to take on protective roles for women. The way in which CGBs are used in this context can have three potential negative side effects for women. Women are not learning how to do the work themselves when men are doing the labor for them because they are “ladies.” Because they do not do certain jobs, or men will not let them do certain jobs, they might appear incompetent to their coworkers. And finally, women may underestimate their own abilities on the job if they are not allowed to perform certain duties because of coworkers’ understandings of what they can and cannot do because of their gender (Denissen 2010).

De-emphasizing Femininity in Masculinized Work Contexts

The second way in which this contradiction—between being held accountable to femininity and working in masculinized organizational contexts—is reconciled involves the de-

emphasizing of femininity and taking on more masculine attributes “required” for the job. In the terms of reconciling the contradictory status or double bind, these women are actively attempting to adhere to the “good worker” image by distancing themselves from femininity. Women in the trade industry enacted these strategies by emphasizing their strength and physicality by actively constructing muscular bodies and doing the more difficult and undesirable task on the job to mitigate the idea that they get “special treatment” because they are women (Denissen 2010). In a similar vein, women engineers in Ranson’s study perform gender by working as “conceptual men” where they did the same kinds of work, worked under the same conditions, same hours, and with the same general expectations about the quality of work as their male colleagues (2005). Women engineers who did not have children typically worked as “conceptual men” they worked the same hours and did the same kinds of work and identified themselves as one of the “boys.” Even in instances where they experienced overt sexism, they disregarded it as not very common because they did not want to stick out as “the kind of woman who makes a statement” (152). When women had children it became harder for them to work as “conceptual men” because they often had to change their work schedule to accommodate parenting. Thus, “motherhood” becomes a gendered marker for women engineers and which makes it harder for them to de-emphasize femininity in the engineering work context. So in this regard, de-emphasizing femininity worked when workers purposefully did not stick out in noticeable gendered way—but this strategy no longer worked once engineers had children.

Women police officers enacted similar strategies to de-emphasize femininity in masculinized working contexts. In their research on women police officers, Rabe-Hemp (2009) demonstrate how women distance themselves from feminine things and overly feminine gender displays and instead align themselves with men (as opposed to women) to maintain a

occupational (or masculine) image while on the job. For instance, they do not wear jewelry, makeup, or paint their nails, and they attempt to be one of the “boys” by participating in sexual banter or shows of physical toughness with their male colleagues.

Despite women’s rejection of essential feminine gender scripts, female police officers were excluded from men’s social gatherings and conversations, especially when male police officers were “war-storying.” Police “war-storying” involved glorifying stories about dangerous experiences on the job to both confirm their legitimacy as a police officer and a man. Females were discouraged from participating in “war-storying.” They were laughed at if they tried to participate, and their “war-stories” were heavily discredited by male coworkers—emphasizing the idea that women cannot partake in the masculinized elements of policework because they are not “real” police officers.

Job features were also ghettoized and segregated by sex. Female police officers were pushed to work with specific types of crime (rape, domestic violence, and child abuse) because they were seen as possessing the necessary skills (greater empathy and communication skills) for these types of cases. Again, because police work involving “women’s issues” requires greater empathy and communication skills and fewer forceful behaviors, it was not seen as “real” police work and therefore devalued and rewarded with less pay (Rabe-Hemp 2009). Despite police officers’ attempts to de-emphasize gender (appearing less feminine), gender was reinscribed by coworkers and the public about the expectations of a women police officer via the division of labor and exclusion in police socializing.

Obscuring the Gender of a Masculinized Occupation

The final mechanism involves obscuring the gender of masculinized occupations. Kelan identifies two ways to do this: first, by not referring to or ignoring the gender binary, and second,

by destabilizing the gender binary. Kelan also conceptualizes these methods as “undoing gender” which involves “the essentialism of binary distinctions between people based on sex category is challenged” (Risman 2009: 83). For Kelan (2010), workers in ICT (Information Communications Technology) can “ignore” gender by presenting themselves as gender neutral workers, as Waultraud did:

From the beginning when I was at work...I was never there as a woman. Only as a person. You have to be careful not to invoke this difference all the time. You have to feel like a worker, when at work....One is accepted as a colleague, not as a woman (184).

Waultraud presents herself as a gender neutral worker; she is a person as opposed to a woman. This strategy can be problematic given the assumption of the omnipresence of gender in social life (that gender is present even when we do not realize it). Though Waultraud presents herself as gender neutral, coworkers and supervisors still held her accountable to normative gender. Thus, the person’s negotiation is undermined when others hold them accountable to normative gender despite wanting to be understood or treated in gender neutral terms.

Second, Kelan states that the gender binary can be undone by destabilizing or obscuring the gender binary. To demonstrate how this is done, Kelan references the example of how women’s presence in nontraditional fields can serve as a way to destabilize gender because it challenges the very basis of the gender binary:

“One way in which gender is undone, for example, is through women’s very presence in ICT work. The sector is strongly dominated in the west by men, and in Switzerland 75–86 per cent of the ICT labor force are men. ICT work in Switzerland is largely perceived as work that men do”... “Women in ICT work are thus a minority, working in what are termed non-traditional occupations and challenging the assumption that ICT workers are

men. Gender norms, operating as one of the mechanisms through which the gender segregation at work is maintained, are therefore cast into doubt...Women in ICT work trouble the gender binary in so far as they work in an area that is normally not associated with women” (186-187).

Kelan’s assessment of women in male-dominated trade work is akin to Kanter’s earlier idea that sex integration in male-dominated workplaces eliminates inequality. Her argument is different in that she focuses on the gendered elements of the occupation, instead of just women’s numerical representation like Kanter does. Kelan asserts that women’s presence can translate into a challenging of gender norms associated with tradework’s masculine gender-type, e.g., as a man’s job. Here is where the gender-typing of an occupation is obscured. It is temporary, which does not necessarily lead to sustainable change (Britton 2000). The obscuring of gender norms of men’s work by the presence of women does however provide an opportunity for the development of new gender norms or the reconfiguration of gender in this occupational context. Thus, the obscuring of gender through the presence of women, coupled with shifting CGBs surrounding masculine work, could potentially lead to more sustainable change.

Men “Undoing Gender” in Masculinized Contexts

In a study of men working on the oil rig—a masculinized occupation—Ely and Meyerson (2010) demonstrates how men “undo” hegemonic masculinity. Given the dangerousness of working on an oil rig, being accountable to hegemonic masculinity gets "stopped." Men enact non-stereotypical masculine behaviors to promote safety while on the job, i.e., readily acknowledging their physical limitations, publicly admitting their mistakes, and openly attending to their own and others’ feelings. Men “stopped” doing hegemonic masculinity and they did not use components of it to modify the new masculinity they were doing or to "man-up" the

femininity they were doing instead. Though this example is men “undoing” gender in masculinized contexts and not women, it does provide empirical evidence into successful cases of how this process can happen. In this context gender is “undone” or destabilized when men take on feminine job characteristics at work, and are not negatively evaluated or held accountable to hegemonic masculinity by others in doing so. However, it raises the question: is the reason gender is successfully undone in this context precisely because women are not there? And because women are not present, gender is not heightened because it is an all-male work setting. Though this example does not exactly demonstrate how women can “undo” gender, it does raise important questions for addressing the successfulness of “undoing” gender in differently sex-typed workplaces.

Successfulness of the Gender Negotiating Strategies?

Context matters for shaping how CGBs are used to structure work. Workers actively use gender negotiation as a strategy to navigate working in these gendered working contexts. Typically, the gender scripts in these work contexts followed normative understandings of gender for men and women and women. Workers negotiated these scripts through three different gender negotiations: using essential femininity, deemphasizing gender differences, or obscuring the occupation’s gender. Police work, veterinarian medicine, tradework, oil rigs, information communication technology, and engineering demonstrate that context matters for shaping the successfulness of workers’ gender negotiations.

In terms of successfulness of these approaches, they varied depending on how their responses interacted with the workplace context. For veterinary medicine, emphasizing essential femininity was an asset because they (and the clients) saw themselves as good at the job due to the feminized nature of their job duties and their ability to provide caring capacities for

companion pets. For police work and engineering, women were more successful when they de-emphasized femininity by modifying their dress or demonstrating their physical capabilities. Engineers' use of being a "conceptual man" was successful to the point they denied gendered aspects of themselves; however, this strategy was no longer effective for engineers once they became mothers. Similarly, ICT workers presented themselves as gender neutral in an attempt to prevent themselves from being perceived in gendered ways. Probably the most successful strategies that challenged the gendered work contexts was through women's presence in ICT. This success was determined by the obscured cultural construction of ICT, thus creating a place for the creation of new gender scripts.

On the other hand, despite some of the success of their negotiations, women were still held accountable by others to traditional gender scripts. As a counterexample, the use of essential femininity was a successful strategy for protecting women from hostile interactions; however, this also adversely affected their potential conception as "good workers" because they might be perceived by coworkers as not being competent if men performed some of their job duties for them. For women in veterinarian medicine, their role as women was incompatible with caring for large farm animals—and clientele were sure to make women aware of this. In police work, women were pushed into what is considered "women's side" of police work, i.e., sexual assault, domestic violence, and sexual assault, and sanctioned in interactions with men in which they tried to "war-story" or banter with them.

Context largely shapes the strategies women use and their consequences. Women make sense of the contradictory status with their work environment by negotiating gender. Gender then becomes a tool through which women can manage their contradictory locations where they , "instead of accepting or rejecting the gender rules of the job, ... find ways to manipulate the rules

for their own advantage. This shows how gender is both a liability and an asset as structure, agency, and identity come together in women's struggle for inclusion in male-dominated work" (Denissen 2010: 1065). Thus there is a feedback loop for women in masculinized settings. How people negotiate these contexts can influence gender inequality in these work settings.

Is Feminization always bad for Women?

Much of the previous research on feminization and women working in masculinized contexts demonstrates the negative consequences women experience in terms of material inequality and as work culture misfits. Despite evidence to the contrary, scholars in the areas of gender and work have asked questions regarding feminization and its potential transformative properties: Is feminization always bad for women?; Does feminization ever create equality? (Chiu and Leicht 1990); Does feminization ever challenge the traditional gender-typing of an occupation? (Adams 2010, Le Feuvre 2009). Focusing specifically on the last question, scholars are looking for conditions or contexts in which feminization is more or less likely to challenge the traditional gendering of jobs (Adams 2010: 462). Le Feuvre (2009) contends that the elimination of gender barriers is more likely to happen in some contexts than others; thus, it becomes important to investigate feminization in different times and spaces to identify the contexts in which feminization is more likely to challenge the gendering of occupations.

My study answers this question by investigating the context of the funeral directing occupation and how recent feminization of the occupations shapes cultural gender beliefs about funeral directing, directors' and students' workplaces, and educational opportunities and experiences. My study asks the following research questions:

Chapter Five: What are the cultural gender beliefs (gender-typing) in the funeral directing occupation? To answer question one I conducted a content analysis of thirty-five trade journal

articles from six different funerary publications and identified four occupational explanations about gender: “old boy,” gender essential, gender blind, and gender progressive.

Chapter Six: (1) What are students’ beliefs about women in the funeral directing occupation? (2) How do future funeral directors use CGBs to challenge or reproduce gender inequality in educational settings? To answer these questions, I interviewed twenty-two students about their occupational entry, socialization, and experiences in occupational training.

Chapter Seven: (1) What are funeral directors’ beliefs about women in the funeral directing occupation? (2) How do current funeral directors use CGBs to challenge or reproduce gender inequality in workplaces settings? To answer these questions, I interviewed twenty-three funeral directors about why they became a funeral director, how their workplaces are set up, and what they experienced in the workplace. In the next chapter I explain my methodology and research design in more detail.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

Trade Journals

To answer research question one, I conducted a content analysis of articles from funerary trade journal publications. Rundblad (1995) identifies funeral trade journals as a particularly fruitful avenue to investigate the culture of the funeral industry. Rundblad demonstrates that during the establishment of undertaking as an occupation, the dialogue in trade journals was used to shape the explanations about the history of the profession and its members—a story that largely neglected women. In addition, trade journals function as a location where funeral directors, students, and other associated funeral industry employees can get the latest information surrounding new business practices and techniques, industry trends and technologies, legislative and regulatory developments, and publications from funeral industry leaders (Rundblad 1995).

My study pulls articles from six different funeral publications: *The Director*, *The American Funeral Director (AFD)*, *Mortuary Management*, *Funeral Monitor*, *Death Care Business Advisor*, and *Funeral Service Insider*. In 2008, *Mortuary Management* and *Funeral Monitor* were combined into one publication. *The Director*, *AFD* and *Mortuary Management* are published monthly. *The Director* has been published by the NFDA since 1933, *Mortuary Management* since 1917, and *AFD* since 1896. *The Director*, *AFD*, and *Mortuary Management/Funeral Monitor* take the form of a traditional trade journal magazine, providing op-ed pieces from prominent members in the funeral industry, news releases, industry trends, information regarding legislation and regulations of the funeral industry, and trends in education. The remaining two publications, *Death Care Business Advisor* and *Funeral Service Insider*, are monthly newsletters that feature short, often anonymous articles offering advisement or opinions

on business practices or industry trends. In total, I analyzed 35 articles/advertisements/op-ed pieces dating from 1995-2013. In general, articles ranged from 1-6 pages and covered an array of topics regarding women's movement into the industry. Typically these topics spanned from the reception of women, how women would contribute positively to funeral directing, the barriers faced by women, and personal stories from women funeral directors. Table 4.1 identifies the authors, article title, source, and year of publication.

Table 4.1: Trade Journal Articles, 1995-2013

Author	Title	Journal	Year
Tanya Kenevich	Just for Us Girls	<i>AFD</i>	2011
Renee Gryzkewicz	From the NFL to the NFDA: Why a Cheerleader chose funeral serve as a career	<i>Director</i>	1998
Renee Gryzkewicz	The Golden Ages of Success: A 92 year-old funeral director sees no need for retirement	<i>Director</i>	2000
Kim Stacey	Women in Funeral Service	<i>AFD</i>	2010
Xavier A. Cronin	Acceptance is growing as more and more women enter the field: But the "Old Boy Network" Still resists female funeral directors	<i>AFD</i>	1995
Alexandra Mosca	Women in the Funeral Service: Her Story	<i>AFD</i>	1998
Marc O'Reilly	Women in the Funeral Service: A Woman's Prerogative	<i>AFD</i>	1998
James Shoemake	Are there still opportunities for women in Funeral Service?	<i>AFD</i>	2004
Xavier A. Cronin	Women in the Funeral Service: Reaching Parity with Men in the 21st Century	<i>AFD</i>	2000
Edward J. Defort	You've come a long way: It seems today that Women's place is in the (funeral) home	<i>AFD</i>	1997
James Shoemake	Expanded Opportunities for Women in the Funeral Service	<i>AFD</i>	1998
Patrick E. Lynch	President's Perspective	<i>Director</i>	2011
Carol Milano	Women in Funeral Service	<i>Director</i>	2013
Laura Zabel	Trends of Women in Funeral Service	<i>Director</i>	1998
Celine Clark Haga	Supporting Women: The Funeral Service Foundation's Women in Funeral Service Fund supports scholarships, programs and research to advance women in funeral service	<i>Director</i>	2010
Linda Darby-Sempsrott	A Passion for Women in the Funeral Service: An FSF trustee comments the foundation's commitment to be a strong advocate for	<i>Director</i>	2011

	the growing number of women in the occupation		
Anon	Ensure that safety awareness crosses gender lines	<i>Death Care Business Advisor</i>	2000
Kim Stacey	Women in Funeral Service: The association of women funeral directors comes into its own	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2009
Douglas O Meyer	Employment Discrimination	<i>Mortuary Management</i>	2003
Kim Stacey	Women in the Funeral Service: The Perils of Gender Bias in the Workplace	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2011
Kim Stacey	Women in the Funeral Service: Tuning in to women's wisdom...again	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2010
Kim Stacey	Women in the Funeral Service: The lessons we learn	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2010
Anon	Do you pay men and women evenly for the same work?	<i>Death Care Business Advisor</i>	2000
Anon	More women enter mortuary programs	<i>Death Care Business Advisor</i>	2003
Anon	Your organizational culture must blend with employee personalities	<i>Death Care Business Advisor</i>	2005
Anon	Women's ranks growing in FH industry	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2008
Anon	Is Funeral Service a Man's World? How Female Funeral directors are being denied entry	<i>Funeral Service Insider</i>	2006
Kim Stacey	Women in the Funeral Service: Do not ignore the value of a Women's touch	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2010
Nancy Burban	Women's Role in Funeral Service with Kim Stacey	<i>Mortuary Management</i>	2012
Cornelia Blair	The changing face of the Funeral Service Industry: The Future for Women in the Occupation	<i>Mortuary Management</i>	2010
Anon	Studies show embalming fluids pose danger to pregnant women	<i>Death Care Business Advisor</i>	2002
Angela Allen	Learning - the differences between men and women	<i>Funeral Director Monthly</i>	2009
Anon	Washington funeral home offers women-only service	<i>Death Care Business Advisor</i>	2002
Kim Stacey	Women in the Funeral Service: Never Give up	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2010
Kim Stacey	Women in the Funeral Service: Striking A Balance	<i>Funeral Monitor</i>	2010

Sampling and Analysis of Trade Journals

I gained access to the trade journals through the library at a Midwestern community college which carries a mortuary science section for its mortuary science program. My sample is limited from only 1995-2013 because those were the only publications available; despite this, the collection of funerary trade journal publications is considered to be one of the top in the nation at the Midwestern community college. With the permission of the librarian, I photocopied each article that I selected for my analysis. Articles were selected based on a broad criterion that the article was about women in the industry (see Table 4.1).

My analysis involved reading each article and identifying pieces of text within the article that refers to gender or women in the funeral industry. The unit of analysis for this portion of the research includes sentences, paragraphs, or quotations that make reference to how or why gender matters in the funeral industry (Berg 2006). For purposes of consistency, from here on out I refer to these text selections from articles as explanations because they explain gender in the funeral industry. After identifying the explanations that specifically talked about women and/or gender, I highlighted the explanations and organized them to according to four gender typologies (“old boy,” gender essential, gender blind, and gender progressive) that emerged prior to and during my analysis of the articles (Berg 2006). “Old boy” emphasizes that women do not belong in the funeral industry. Gender essential suggests that women make good funeral directors because their inherent caring and nurturing natures. Gender progressive and gender blind both state that gender should not matter in funeral directing workplaces practices; however, the ways in which gender is executed in each are different. Gender blind states that men and women are equal or the same, and in effect denies gender inequality, whereas gender progressive acknowledges that gender should not be a proxy to evaluation or determine job assignment.

However, gender progressive acknowledges how gender shapes workplace experiences in the funeral home.

“Old boy” and gender essential were coding typologies I imposed, while gender blind and gender progressive explanations emerged during the analysis of the trade journal articles. Over the course of my research on the funeral industry, including reading articles and books on the funeral industry, investigating the main occupational associations within the industry (NFDA, *Funeral Divas*, and AAFP), and through interviews with respondents in this study, two consistent explanations—“old boy” and gender essential—began to emerge from these sources about women in the funeral industry. The latter two, gender progressive and gender blind, emerged during my analysis of the trade journals. Originally, I had conceptualized three gender explanations: “old boy,” gender essential, and gender progressive. However, as I continued my analysis, I ended up breaking up gender progressive into two separate categories: gender blind and gender progressive. After the initial round of coding, the explanations were further organized into sub-themes of each gender typology (see Appendix F) (Berg 2006). The final sample consists of 101 gender explanations pulled from 35 trade journal articles.

Interviews

Sampling

The second part of my research methodology involved interviews with mortuary science students and funeral directors. I constructed my research design with several thoughts in mind. The funeral industry, like other occupations that feminize, tends to be more female-dominated at the lower ranks (students) and less female-dominated as one moves up the occupational ladder (Irvine and Vermilya 2011; Chiu and Leicht 1999). This informs my rationale to interview both students and funeral directors. By interviewing individuals at different stages of employment in

the funeral industry, I can see how cultural beliefs about gender are negotiated by those located in different occupational positions (future funeral directors, new funeral directors, and veteran funeral directors). My sample also includes male mortuary science students and funeral directors because men's accounts are often missing from studies on occupational feminization (Irvine and Vermilya 2010; Chiu and Leicht 1999; Reskin and Roos 1990). Men's framing matters because they are typically located in positions which allow them to shape the beliefs systems about gender that justify the material conditions in feminizing occupations.

I used purposive sampling to find respondents because I was looking for members of a specific occupational group (Berg 2006; Esterberg 2002). Funeral directors and mortuary science students are not a hidden or marginalized population; thus, their recruitment was relatively achievable. However, funeral directing is a very close-knit occupation. This became very apparent when interviewing respondents; they would often ask who else I had interviewed or would give recommendations on other funeral directors to interview.

Sample recruitment occurred in several stages. First, I sent an email to a women's funerary organization to see if they had any members that might be interested in participating in a research study. I constructed a research statement (see Appendix A) that the media specialist at the organization posted to their Facebook and Twitter accounts and placed in a monthly newsletter that was sent to all of the organization's members. If respondents were interested, they then emailed me, volunteering to participate in the research study. The second stage involved in contacting local funeral homes (through telephone) to see if their workers would be interested in participating in a research study. When I made initial contact, I introduced who I was, provided information on the project, and inquired if they would be interested in participating. To recruit mortuary science students, I contacted the program coordinator of a mortuary science program of

a Midwestern community college. The program coordinator put me into contact with students who were interested in participating. The final sample consists of 22 funeral directors (9 men and 13 women) who are employed in funeral homes in the U.S. and 20 mortuary science students (9 men and 11 women) who were currently attending a mortuary science program at Midwestern community college. For purposes of confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all respondents, locations, and places.

Sampling Contexts and Demographics

Funeral Homes: Family-Owned and Corporate Contexts³

The difference between family-owned and corporate funeral homes was an important distinction that respondents emphasized during interviews. For the purpose of this study family-owned funeral homes, implies not corporate owned. However, ownership arrangements of family-owned funeral homes vary. In my sample, I found three different types of ownership arrangements. The first represents our traditional understanding of what a family funeral home is: the funeral home is owned by a family and the children have or will eventually take over the family business (Mitford 2003). For instance, only three funeral homes in my sample fit the understanding of a traditional funeral home who continued to pass their funeral home down generations. The second type of arrangement involves ownership by the main funeral director who employs several funeral directors on their staff. The final ownership arrangement is

³ The funeral homes where the funeral directors worked in this sample represent funeral homes that provide services to white, middle class customers and practice Judeo-Christian funeral rights. In addition, that majority of the funeral homes are located within the Midwest, thus the funeral home arrangements and practices described here are not representative of all funeral home services in the United States; instead, they are representative of a very specific demographic. The following description of the context of which these funeral homes operated best represents what I observed and also in what respondents described to me about their work experiences.

represented by a partnership between multiple funeral directors who base ownership on seniority. The remainder of the family-owned funeral homes (11) in this sample fell under the latter two ownership arrangements (for full break down of ownership, see Table 4.2). In each of the aforementioned ownership arrangements, respondents referred to the funeral home they worked at as family-owned despite it not necessarily being owned by a family.

In general, the majority of funeral homes in the United States are still owned and operated by families or independent firms: approximately 85% (Economist 2007); however, only 19% of these are owned by families (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). The remaining 15% are operated by corporations such as Service Corporation International and Stewart Enterprises (Economist 2007). By corporate funeral homes I mean any funeral home that has been bought out by either Stewart Enterprises or Service Corporation International (SCI). Seven funeral homes in this sample were corporate. Service Corporation International and Stewart Enterprises are probably the most well-known corporate operations within the funeral industry. Founded in Houston in 1962, SCI owns and operates more than 1500 funeral homes and 400 cemeteries in 43 states. Stewart Enterprises, founded in 1910, owns and operates 218 funeral homes and 140 cemeteries in 24 states. On a larger scale, corporations such as SCI buy up businesses that are successful and have already established a name of themselves in the community. Typically, SCI retains the home's original name, often along with former owners who are kept on as management. A typical funeral home that is owned by SCI will not contain advertisements or logos for the corporation; therefore, many consumers do not realize this family-owned establishment is actually owned by a corporation.

Funeral Directors

The funeral director sample consists of entirely Whites with the exception of two Black women. The respondents' ages ranged from 26-66. All of the funeral directors were located in the continental United States (14% in the Northeast, 64% in the Midwest, 9% in the West, and 14% in the South), with a larger concentration of the sample coming from the Midwest, specifically Kansas. All of the respondents had a minimum of an Associate's Degree in mortuary science; two respondents had Bachelor's degrees in mortuary science. Almost all were currently employed as a funeral director at either a family-owned funeral home or corporate funeral home (50% were employed or had been employed at family-owned funeral homes; the remaining 32% were employed in corporate settings) and had varying years of experience working in the funeral industry which ranged from 3-31 years. Four women were currently not employed as funeral directors. Two were currently unemployed: Sarah recently left her job a family-owned funeral home where she had worked ten years prior and Michelle, despite completing school in 2008, had been unable to find employment and has never been employed as a funeral director even after many years of searching for a position. The other two were employed in other funeral related occupations: Charlotte was the CEO of a women's funeral organization and Tracy was the director of a mortuary science school and worked for a corporate funeral home on the side. Both Charlotte and Tracy had worked as funeral directors prior to finding employment in their current occupations. It is often common to come to funeral directing as a second career; this was true for 5 of the 13 female funeral directors and 2 of the 9 male funeral directors. The majority of the funeral directors were first generation (all women) with the exception of Josephine and Eric, who were both third generation funeral directors.

Table 4.2: Funeral Directors

Name	Sex	Age	State	Type of Funeral Home	Generation	Years
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Josephine	Female	62	NY	Family-owned, owner	third	15
Aubrey	Female	45	TX	Family-owned, owner	first	21
Tracy	Female	40	GA	Director of Funeral Science Program, Corporate	first	16
Joan	female	64	OH	Family-owned, owner	first, husband also director	22
Heather	Female	28	CA	Corporate	first	3
Lisa	Female	34	KS	Family-owned, partner	first	12
Charlotte	Female	45	PA	CEO of Funeral Association, Corporate	first	20
Sarah	Female	34	MI	Unemployed, Family-owned	first	10
Kate	Female	26	KY	Corporate	first	4
Trisha	Female	44	PA	Family-owned, partner	first	20
Allison	Female	30	NJ	Family-owned, employee	first	8
Rebekah	Female	33	CA	Family-owned, employee	first	7
Michelle	Female	34	KY	Unemployed	first	4
Rob	Male	66	KS	Family-owned, owner	first	20
Dustin	Male	40	KS	Family-owned, owner	first	14
Weylin	Male	39	KS	Family-owned, partner	first	17
Wiley	Male	57	KS	Corporate	first	31
Eric	Male	50	KS	Family-owned, partner	third	29
Stan	Male	45	MO	Family-owned, employee	first	20
Will	Male	29	NE	Family-owned, employee	first	5
Brian	Male	36	NE	Corporate	first	11
Joseph	Male	54	NE	Corporate	first	30

The Mortuary Science Program

All of the students in my sample attended the same mortuary science program at a Midwestern community college. In the United States, there are 57 mortuary science programs which are all accredited by the American Board of Funerary Service Education. Most mortuary science programs are a two-year Associate's degree at a community college. In some instances, there are programs that are four-year where students will receive a Bachelor's degree. Bachelor degree programs tend to be the exception, rather than the rule.

For the students at the Midwestern community college, their program involves taking 75 hours of courses. Students are required to complete general education and more program-specific courses including: anatomy and pathology classes (the living body, mortuary chemistry), funeral business/law classes (mortuary management, funeral service merchandizing, mortuary law), embalming classes (restorative art), and grief counseling classes (funeral service counseling, the grieving process).

In addition to their course work, students must also complete two practicums at funeral homes. The practicums are typically a semester-long internship where students work for local funeral homes. For the first practicum (Funeral Rites Practicum I), students learn about the day-to-day workings of the funeral home and services. They are required to facilitate funeral services and acquire at least 200 hours working in the funeral home. Typically, their duties involve handing out memorial folders, helping dress the body for the funeral, ushering funeral attendees to their seats, or taking care of other arrangements. Additional duties for Practicum I included day-to-day upkeep of the funeral home, including mowing the lawn, vacuuming the floors, and washing the hearses. As one student described it: “They have a very gradual scale of how things are run so the students are peons. It’s...definitely paying your dues” (Chris, white, 44).

Embalming Practicum II was a bit more hands on. For this practicum, students were required to view 10 embalmings. Occasionally, students would be asked to assist with embalming; however, this was rare practice considering that to handle a dead body in the state the Midwestern community college resides, one must have a funeral directing license.

Following the completion of their coursework and practicums, students take a National Board Exam in funeral service and mortuary science. If students pass the National Board Exam, they are considered licensed funeral directors and embalmers. Following the passing of the

National Board Exam, students move on to complete a one-year apprenticeship at a funeral home. Typically they then go on to be employed at that funeral home.

Mortuary Science Students

The student sample consisted of entirely whites, with the exception of one Hispanic male. The respondents’ ages ranged from 19-50; all were currently attending a mortuary science program at the time of the interview. All female respondents were first generation funeral directors, while three out of the nine male students were either second or third generation funeral directors, with the remaining six being first generation funeral directors. Similar to funeral directors, many of the students were coming to funeral directing from a second career. For females, six of the eleven came to funeral directing after spending time in another occupation; six of the nine male respondents came to funeral directing as their second career.

Table 4.3: Mortuary Science Students

Name	Sex	Age	Education	Generation
Shelbi	Female	20	Earning Associates Degree	First
Macey	Female	21	Earning Associates Degree	First
Raina	Female	34	Earning Associates Degree	First
Deanna	Female	48	Earning Associates Degree	First
Anna	Female	27	Earning Associates Degree	First
Rita	Female	36	Earning Associates Degree	First
Stephanie	Female	22	Earning Associates Degree	First
Jill	Female	34	Earning Associates Degree	First, husband family owns funeral home
Sarah	Female	28	Earning Associates Degree	First
Tiffany	Female	28	Earning Associates Degree	First
Amanda	Female	28	Associates Degree	First
Eric	Male	28	Earning Associates Degree	First Generation
Steven	Male	19	Earning Associates Degree	Second
Brock	Male	23	Bachelors & Associates	Third
Emilio	Male	40	Earning Associates Degree	First Generation

Jeff	Male	50	Earning Associates Degree	Second
John	Male	25	Bachelors & Associates	First, but fiancée's parents own funeral home
Chandler	Male	20	Earning Associates Degree	First
Chris	Male	44	Earning Associates Degree	Third
Jeremy	Male	36	Earning Associates Degree	First
Walter	Male	30	Earning Associates Degree	First

Interview Methodology

To best examine how funeral directors and students negotiate the occupational cultural gender beliefs about funeral directing and how this shapes and structures their everyday working and educational experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews with funeral directors and mortuary science students. The interview schedule for funeral directors was structured around three categories: (1) background information, (2) workplace structure and culture, and (3) occupational culture and changes. The first section asked funeral directors about their educational and employment backgrounds. The second, because I am interested at seeing how gender works at the organizational level, I asked respondents about how the workplaces were structured (typically, their relationships with colleagues, the division of labor, and how/why labor was divided up in particular ways). The third section of the interview touched on occupational culture and changes: here, I asked funeral directors about the movement of women into the funeral industry and the implications that had for women and the occupation as a whole (for the full funeral director interview schedule, see Appendix B and C).

The students' interview schedule was structured slightly differently because of their different location in the funeral industry as aspiring funeral directors and current students. Its sections included: (1) background information, (2) educational experiences and future goals, and (3) occupational culture and changes. The first section detailed the students' education and employment background including what brought them to funeral directing. The second section

addressed their experiences with the mortuary science program including what was required of them in their courses and practicums and what was their relationship like with their colleagues and classmates. The third section addressed the movement of women into the funeral industry and the implications that had for women and the occupational as a whole (for the full student interview schedule, see Appendix D).

The majority of the interviews were conducted face to face (n=29), with the exception of respondents who lived far away; these interviews were either conducted over the phone or via Skype (n=13). In person funeral director interviews were conducted at their place of employment, typically in the family meeting room of the funeral home. In person student interviews were conducted in a classroom at the Midwestern community college. Interview length ranged from as short as 22 minutes to as long as 2 and a half hours. Most respondents were excited to be interviewed about their occupation. Many of them noted the stigmatized nature of their occupation, as many people in the general public see funeral directing, or those studying to be funeral directors as “weird,” “creepy,” or “gross.”

My position as a young, White, female shaped my interactions with respondents during interviews. Typically, male respondents saw me as ignorant, in part because I took on this role as a researcher wanting to discover information about the funeral industry and also because men were more likely to ask me if I knew about certain practices, processes, and organization in funeral homes to gauge my knowledge on the subject . The particular positionality of me as a researcher was beneficial because respondents felt comfortable in sharing knowledge and experience given their status as expert and mine as outsider. In addition, interactions with female respondents were slightly different. Typically they saw me as a comrade because we were the same gender. I think this commonality allowed women to speak much freer with me when

sharing their experiences and knowledge about the funeral industry. With the permission of respondents, interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim in text format.

Analysis

I used inductive analysis to analyze the transcripts of my interviews. Using NVIVO, a software program that facilitates the analysis of qualitative data, I first open coded my data to identify and label themes that might be significant to understanding respondents' experiences, perceptions, and observations of working in the funeral industry (Berg 2006; Esterberg 2002). After coding all of the interviews, during which codes were refined, combined, and ordered categorically, I began to organize my free codes into a coding tree that conceptually fit with the main themes of my research questions (for coding tree, see Appendix E) (Berg 2006; Esterberg 2002). Following open coding, I continued to look for emerging themes in my coding tree and organized the data accordingly.

Chapter 5 - Occupational Cultural Gender Beliefs: Funeral Trade Journals

This chapter answers the following research question: What are the dominant occupational explanations about gender over time and how do they vary as an occupation feminizes? To answer this question I analyzed trade journal articles from funerary publications about women in the funeral industry. My findings indicate four different explanations that explain women in the funeral industry, which I have conceptualized as follows: “old boys,” gender essentialist, gender blind, and gender progressive. As Rundblad’s (1995) study demonstrates, funeral trade journals provide a particularly fruitful avenue to investigate the occupational culture of the funeral industry.

Trade Journals

Rundblad demonstrates that during the establishment of undertaking as an occupation, the dialogue in trade journals was used to shape the occupational explanations about the industry’s history and who were part of the profession (a story that largely neglected women). In addition, trade journals functioned as a location where funeral directors, students, and other associated funeral industry employees could get the latest information surrounding new business practices and techniques, industry trends and technologies, legislative and regulatory developments, and publications from funeral industry leaders (Rundblad 1995).

Even early trade journals also had things to say about women’s roles in undertaking. Women were framed as too emotional, fragile, and weak to perform the duties of undertaking. These essential notions of women were then used as justification to why women should be excluded or barred access to the occupation and entrance into schools. Much of this early rhetoric is still pervasive in current explanations of women and funeral directing.

My study pulls articles from six different leading funeral publications: *The Director*, *The American Funeral Director (AFD)*, *Mortuary Management*, *Funeral Monitor*, *Death Care Business Advisor*, and *Funeral Service Insider*. In 2008, *Mortuary Management* and *Funeral Monitor* were combined into one publication. *The Director*, *AFD*, and *Mortuary Management* are published monthly and are probably the most prominent and established funerary publications. *The Director*, *AFD*, and *Mortuary Management/Funeral Monitor* take the form of a traditional trade journal magazine, providing op-ed pieces from prominent members in the funeral industry, news releases, industry trends, information regarding legislation and regulations of the funeral industry, and trends in education. The remaining two publications, *Death Care Business Advisor* and *Funeral Service Insider*, are monthly newsletters that feature short, often anonymous articles offering advisement or opinions on business practices or industry trends. See Table 4.1 for a complete list of article titles, authors, date of publication, and source.

“Old Boys,” Veterans, and Traditionalists

I label the “old boys” as such because this is how many of the authors of the trade journal articles often referred to this cohort of the funeral directors. In total of the 101 explanations I surveyed from the trade journal articles, 25 fit the criteria to be considered “old boy” explanations. In general, the criteria to be considered an “old boy” explanation described women in negative and stereotypical ways (weak, emotional, sex objects). There was no overt sexist language or descriptions throughout the trade journal articles that I surveyed. Instead, these explanations discussed a cohort of the funeral industry that still sees women as unfit to be funeral directors. The authors or individuals interviewed provided anecdotal stories or personal experiences of being treated poorly when looking for a job or while working for a particular funeral director.

In general, this subgroup in the funeral industry were referred to as the “old boys,” “veterans,” or “traditionalists.” In the articles, they were often described as being White older males born during the WWII era. The articles identified small family funeral homes as the location of being less accepting of women funeral directors; though acceptance of women in the funeral home was also described on a more individual basis, depending on the funeral director. Corporate funeral homes or funeral homes located on the east or west coast were seen as more progressive. The “old boys” were often described as a dying breed, i.e., “that kind of dinosaur is becoming extinct” (Defort 1997) or a minority within in the industry, i.e., “that attitude today is an exception, not the norm” (Defort 1997). Despite a general consensus about the decline of the “old boy” network and the funeral industry becoming more accepting of women, several of the articles did indicate a larger overarching belief system about women’s relationship to the funeral industry. Four main themes emerged when coding for the “old boy” explanation: (1) rationale about why women do not belong in the funeral industry, (2) commonly held stereotypes about why women are unfit to be funeral directors, (3) the barriers faced by women in pursuit of jobs, and (4) the unfitness of women’s ability to perform embalming.

“Old Boys”: “Numbers do not tell the entire story”

Like Kanter (1977) demonstrates in her study of sex composition in corporations, numerical changes in the sex of workers does not always equal more gender-friendly environments. This points to the importance of separating sex composition from the gender-typing of an occupation. Many of the funeral trade journal articles also demonstrate that it is more complicated than the numerical makeup:

Numbers do not tell the entire story. Women, according to instructors, students and funeral directors interviewed for this article, find themselves confronted with traditional

male attitudes that consider them ill-equipped and ill-suited for the funeral service, at least in some areas of the field. Taylor believes there are funeral home managers looking for reasons not to hire a woman (Cronin 2000).

Despite the numbers, traditionalists have been slow in coming around to accept women in what has been traditionally been a man's industry (Defort 1997).

It's been 65 years since Rosie the Riveter broke down the doors for working women, but women in the funeral service are still being treated like second-class citizens, according to recent surveys and loads of first hand observations (Funeral Service Insider 2006).

Though these are just anecdotal accounts, they are representative of the "old boy" explanations pulled from the articles. In addition, they indicate that there is a general cultural belief within the funeral industry that "women do not belong" and are treated differently, seen as unfit for the job, and not as qualified for the job as their male counterparts. More specifically, the gender-typing of the occupation typically plays out into beliefs about why women are either unfit or should not be funeral directors.

"Three reasons women do not make good funeral directors"

Gender-typing refers to beliefs about why men and women are (or not) considered more appropriate to work in certain occupations (Roos and McDaniel 1996; Britton 2000). These beliefs are often representative of larger CGBs about men and women (Ridgeway 2005). This holds true for the funeral industry. The typical rhetoric in the funeral industry regarding women and funeral directing is as follows:

Women can't live, move bodies out of homes, go into 'bad' neighborhoods, will not be able to stand the pressure, are too sensitive...Also, my wife or girlfriend would not like you around because you would be a distraction to the male workers (Mosca 1998).

These essential understandings are used as a justification as to why women cannot do funeral work. Despite the general inaccuracies of many of these beliefs, they reinforce traditional cultural gender beliefs about women as fragile, sex objects who are in need of protection. These gender ideologies are embedded in the culture of the funeral industry and are powerful enough to shape employers' perceptions about who (male or female) is seen as appropriate fit for funeral directing and effect workers' experiences in the industry.

Jobs and Hiring

Probably the most reified consequence of how CGBs shape women's opportunities and experiences comes into play when talking about the hiring process. Accounts in the funeral trade journals indicate that it is common practice for funeral homes to call mortuary science programs when they are looking to hire a new funeral director. The accounts recalled that many funeral homes specifically request men. As Cronin, an author of an article entitled "Acceptance is Growing as more Women enter the Field: But the 'Old Boy' Network still resists Female Funeral Directors," states, "As recently as eight years ago, he had firms that called and said, 'do not send women, minorities, or gays; we need a good young man'" (1995). The trade journals consistently cite women being turned away from jobs based on this idea that they do not belong in the funeral industry. For instance, what many women face when they venture into the job market is best described by a Graduate Coordinator of a mortuary science program in an article entitled "Women's Roles in the Funeral Service with Kim Stacey":

...just recently I've encountered a number of young women who came to me extremely distressed with the fact that they had graduated from Mortuary College, completed their apprenticeships and were finding it difficult to get a job in funeral homes in their area, because honestly the administrators did not want women in the funeral home. And they felt that they had been under-advised by their academic instructors as to the difficulties of getting and holding a job as a woman in funeral service (Burban 2012).

Not only do women face hiring discrimination, it is indicated that the mortuary science programs where they get their degrees do not adequately inform them about or prepare them for the obstacles that they will face when on the job market in the funeral industry.

Covert "Old Boys"

As research has demonstrated, it is less socially acceptable to be overtly sexist or racist (Glick and Fiske 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2006). Not to say this does not occur anymore; instead, scholars have pointed out that many of these beliefs still pervade culture and media, though they are now more covert. This held true in my study of trade journals. There was no overt expression of not wanting women in the funeral industry in the trade journal articles I surveyed from 1995-2013; however, during my analysis, I did find evidence of how the unfitness of women as funeral directors may now be conveyed in covertly non-sexist language. Of the 36 articles that I looked at, there were a handful of articles (6) that did not fit easily within my coding typology of the gender explanations: "old boy," gender essentialist, and gender neutral. In particular, two articles I found on pregnancy and embalming were reminiscent of earlier textual descriptions of women not being able to embalm bodies as per a study by Rundblad (1995). These two articles were anonymous and came from the *Death Care Business Advisor*. One article, entitled "Embalming: Studies show embalming fluids pose danger to pregnant women"

(DCBA 2002), stated that “research now suggests that formaldehyde and chemical solvents could pose a risk to women who are, or plan to become, pregnant” (1). Additionally, they warn that “In general, if you are pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant, you should not embalm” (DCBA 2002: 6). Some of the “documented” risks include “Reduced fertility rates and adverse pregnancy results such as spontaneous abortions, early term births and fetal difficulties...” The article continues on to discuss the studies in more detail, how women can avoid exposure to formaldehyde by using proper protection (gloves, shields, gowns, etc.).

These two trade journal articles are reminiscent of research done on trade journals from the 1890-1920s which documented similar sentiments about women in the funeral industry (Rundblad 1995). These articles of course were printed at a time when overt forms of sexism were everyday occurrences. Generally, Victorian belief systems about women were used in trade journals to portray women as too emotionally and physically weak to handle caring for or embalming a dead body (Rundblad 1995). These were used to discourage women from participating in the funeral industry; similarly, I find that articles like this demonstrate similar sentiment towards women and embalming. What is probably most ironic about these articles is that the article’s title and main purpose is to demonstrate the dangers to pregnant women from exposure to formaldehyde and glutaraldehyde; however, in reading the article in its entirety, it concludes that “by using proper techniques of exposure control, the exposure to glutaraldehyde [and formaldehyde] fumes is negligible and the use of [these] products in embalming rooms with proper technique is well within accepted safety standards” (DCBA 2002: 6). Thus, with the use of proper safety standards, (which is funeral law) the side effects are null-and-void and the sex/gender of funeral directors does not really matter in terms of their chances of being

negatively affected by the consequences of being exposed to these chemicals. In addition, this article excludes any reference to how exposure to these chemicals would affect men's fertility.

Gender Essentialist: "You just can't teach that"

According to Fuss (1989), essentialism "is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity (*xi*)." In terms of gender, this means that there are inherent differences between men and women that go beyond basic biology (sex chromosomes, genitalia) and these differences are explained in terms of behavior and demeanor. In American society, this directly links women to domesticity and nurturance and men to industry and rationality.

The "old boy" and gender essential explanations both used essentialist understandings of women; however, the explanations differed in effect. "Old boy" used essentialist understandings to discourage women's participation and deem them unfit for funeral directing. Gender essential explanations of women, on the other hand, were used to justify why they would be valuable to the industry and what skills/characteristics they would add which were previously nonexistent. Of the 101 explanations surveyed from the trade journal articles, 49 fit the criteria for gender essential explanations of women in funeral directing. In general, essential understandings of women were complimentary of each other: (1) biological essentialism, or that the skills women possess are inherent and biologically based; (2) justification of this natural difference through direct comparison of the essential natures of men and women funeral directors; and (3) benevolent sexism, or seeing women as assets to the industry because of their natural abilities.

Biological Essentialism

The biological essentialism argument regarding women in the funeral industry is fairly simple: women make good funeral directors because the characteristics required of funeral

directors can be attributed to women's essential nature. These explanations often have descriptors that imply a direct link to biology. Phrases such as "can be attributed to basic biology" (Stacey 2010), "natural tendency" (Darby 2011), "innate sense" (FSI 2006), "intuitive sensitivity" (FSI 2006), "natural empathy" (Mosca 1998), and "We're [women] almost hardwired to take care of children, the elderly, birthing, dying..." (Kenerich 2011) tended to dominate many of these descriptions of women's inherent skills. These descriptors all emphasize that these are not skills that have been taught or acquired through training; instead, they are something that women are born with. The explanation pulled from the trade journals which best exemplifies this relationship between the biological essence of women and job skills comes from an interview quote on an article asking if "funeral service is a man's world?":

'A woman can serve families in a little different way [than a man],' says Kurz. 'Look at the difference between a mother and a father. It's the same when you look at a woman FD. It's an intuitive sensitivity that a woman just has. You can't teach that. And you can't take it away from someone who has it' (FSI 2006).

Not only are these skills not learnable, the way men's and women's brains are structured also shapes their behavior and demeanor. The direct comparison between the natural differences between men and women was used to justify why women make good funeral directors. As Kim Stacey states:

So, why should you bring women in and foster their talents? The answer is your biology. Experts have discovered there are actually differences in how men's and women's brains are structured in the way they react to events and stimuli - and these differences make gender valuable to any funeral establishment for example (Stacey 2011).

What is interesting about this explanation is that it comes from an author who is a longtime advocate of women in the funeral industry. Kim Stacey is the founder of Association of Women Funeral Professionals, an organization created to mentor and provide social support to women in the funeral industry. In the previous explanation, she advocates that gender is an asset or value in the funeral home setting because it provides a new set of talents or skills that may have not previously existed in the male-dominated funeral industry. However, in later articles, Stacey actually argues for the opposite, to not use gender as a rationale or justification for women in the funeral industry and instead supports stripping genderedness from the occupational category of funeral director.

Inherent differences between the sexes

As indicated earlier, the theme of comparing men and women's skills was another way to justify the essential difference between male and female funeral directors. This was expressed in the direct comparison of the skills and attributes of men and women.

Masculine energy, of course, is connected to our rationality, logic and linear thinking, while female energy is connected to feelings, nurturing, caring, compassion and love. It's my firm belief that a funeral home that is energetically balanced will be better suited to meet the needs of their community - it's just that simple (Stacey 2010b).

The direct comparisons between men and women were used to justify how women moving into the funeral industry was beneficial, because they were bringing in new skills that their male counterparts lacked. For instance, "Women overall seem to be able to multitask, sometimes better than men – as mother, wife, caregiver, worker – and it enjoy it too" (Milano 2013) or "They have flourished as caregivers and in preneed [sales], have been recognized by many in society as innately more emphatic and emotionally aware and sensitive than most men" (Cronin

2000). The pre-feminized funeral industry was seen as lacking degrees of emotionalism and compassion for families; it is with the advent of women into the funeral industry that brings improvement and more complimented workplace energies between the sexes.

Benevolent Sexism: “You’ve come a long way, it seems today, a woman’s place is in the (funeral) home”

Essentialist beliefs are also connected to sexism. Generally, the word sexism is automatically associated with hostile sexism, or overt hatred of women (Glick and Fiske 2001). There is however a more covert, albeit a friendlier, version of sexism referred to as benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is known as the “women are wonderful” effect, or that women who exhibit traditional feminine characteristics such as nurturing, caring, domesticity, etc., are favored positively by others (Glick and Fiske 2001, 108). In the explanations which exemplified elements of benevolent sexism of women in the funeral industry, women are relegated as assets to the business as they possess unique skills which will greatly enhance the funeral home experience for families. For instance, women are seen as positive additions to the funeral industry because of the unique skills or “gifts” they bring with them:

Women bring a unique compassion to their interactions with families. These women bring a much needed passion to our occupation (Darby 2011).

The industry needs the gifts that women possess (Blair 2010).

‘Women bring special gifts to caregiving,’ agrees Biggins. ‘It’s all the tender touches they can bring to the job’ (FSI 2006).

So we're putting it on the record: more women are entering the funeral service every year, and they will excel in the field. Why? Because, as another survey respondent said, women bring "compassion; sincerity; genuineness; passion; and the ability to make the dead people look good and make living people feel special, important and cared for; patience; and the ability to multi-task; and the ability to comfort and put people at ease (Stacey 2009).

Furthermore, their special "gifts"—enhanced empathy, compassion, caregiving, tenderness, multi-tasking, hair and makeup skills, etc.—are seen as assets that will benefit funeral businesses and their customers.

Dombroski said women have always been drawn to the care-taking field. 'Now that the field has been "opened up" for us, women are jumping in. The industry has also started to realize that we are an asset because of what many call our "maternal" side or our empathy' (Defort 1997).

The compassionate temperament of women makes them excellent candidates for all areas of the funeral service, from funeral directors and embalmers to grief counseling and aftercare (Zabel 1998).

A woman is full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture, and transform. What funeral home in the country wouldn't want to tap into power like that? (Stacey 2010).

Like hostile sexism, benevolent sexism is about maintaining power and privilege: men as dominant, women as subordinates. The positive associations of women with "communal attributes are also traits of deference that when enacted in daily interaction place a person in a

subordinate, less powerful position” (Glick and Fiske 2001, 108). These characteristics (emotionality, carework, and nurturance are typically devalued within society and receive lesser wages (Levanon et al. 2009). Despite the pervasiveness of gender essentialism and benevolent sexism in the occupational explanations, my analysis of the final two occupational explanations gives some insight into the changing gender-type of the funeral industry.

Gender Blindness, Equality, and the “Sameness” of Men and Women Funeral Directors

The explanation that tends to dominate the more recent trade journal articles I refer to as gender blind. Of the 101 explanations surveyed from the trade journal articles, 12 fit the criteria of gender blind. Unlike “old boy” and gender essential, gender blind de-emphasized using gender as either a justification for why women should be in the funereal industry, as an asset to the business, or as a belief that they were naturally good at funeral directing specifically because they were women. Instead, gender blind consistently states that gender is not an important factor for determining or shaping women’s work experiences in the funeral industry, thereby denying gender inequality. Thus, this explanation is “blind” to the inequality within funeral directing as a result of CGBs about women and funeral directing. My analysis found two consistent themes across the gender blind explanation: (1) equality in hiring, pay procedures, workplace settings and (2) emphasis of no gender differences between men and women in terms of abilities and skills.

Gender equality in hiring

Gender is not completely missing from the gender blind explanations. Instead, it was used in a very different way compared with the other two explanations. “Old boy” focused on using traditional stereotypes of women to justify why they were unfit to be funeral directors and

do not belong in the industry; gender essential used traditional understandings as justification why women are naturally good at funeral directors and why they do belong in the industry. Gender blind, however, argues that gender has nothing to do with who is a good funeral director and does not affect hiring practices, wage compensation, or working environments.

Under no circumstance should any workplace stereotype be used with either men or women because many of the same characteristics that we might attribute to women apply to some men and vice versa (Cronin 2004).

Wages urges funeral directors to hire for skill and attitude, not gender. The occupation, she declares, 'has to focus on characterizing a person not as male, female, black, white, straight, gay, Hispanic, Asian. Instead concentrate on the reality of today's work force and what funeral services need: an individual who wants to serve in the community to help a family at a most difficult time in their lives' (Milano 2013).

'With regard to hiring and promotional of staff, we interview and hire the best people, with no regard for gender,' said Susan L. Henderson, chief operating officer. Bradshaw has physical requirements that apply to men and women, and they are not designed to limit the number of women. 'Our pay ranges are the same for any individual within a given category of employment' (Defort 1997).

The above explanations emphasize that gender (and race) should not be used for determining who is hired or how they are compensated. Instead, they advocate for skills or the type of person as being the main determining factor for who gets hired. In addition, these explanations indicate that race and gender do not affect hiring practices, which implies gender (and racial) equality.

Sameness between the sexes

The second major theme of the gender blind approach emphasizes that there are no differences between men and women in terms of ability, and that they are treated equally during the hiring practices.

There are things that some women may not be able to do. What we have to realize is that there are just as many physical tasks men are not able to do (Defort 1997).

When we hire funeral directors, we interview for the best position for the position. We have physical requirements that apply to men and women. There are not stricter requirements that fence women out. We treat everyone equally (Cronin 1995).

The first account emphasizes that physical strength is not a just a limitation for women, but can also be a limitation for men. The second account alleges that funeral homes' hiring practices are equal regardless of gender, despite much evidence to the contrary. In emphasizing equality and sameness, this explanation of gender, in effect, denies the existence of gender inequality in funeral homes. This gender blind approach toward women in the funeral industry is similar to the color blind approach to racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2006): basically, that it does not exist and people do not see gender or race, respectively. The final gender explanation explicitly identifies inequalities created by the gendered understanding of who should be a funeral director.

Gender Progressive: The “Ambigender” of Funeral Directing and Gender Awareness

I label gender progressive as such because it was the first explanation to deal with gender inequality in the workplace explicitly. I found two consistent themes across the gender progressive explanations: (1) advocating for the de-emphasis of gender from the occupational

category of funeral director and (2) acknowledging how gender structured workplaces experiences and opportunities for women (and men) differ in terms of inequality.

Deemphasizing Gender

Where the gender blind approach denies the influence of gender, gender progressive identifies funeral directing as inherently gendered and that gender should be de-emphasized from our understanding of the occupational category of funeral director. For instance, instead of emphasizing sameness/differences between men and women in regards to being funeral directors, authors advocate for the complete separation of gender from funeral directing. Though scholars have often critiqued the idea of undoing gender (Connell 2010; Deutsch 2007; Butler 2004), it is a useful concept to apply in analysis of explanations in the funeral industry. Very much of what is emphasized in the later gender progressive explanations is this idea of completely de-gendering the occupation of funeral director. For instance:

Other women are looking forward to the day when the words “male” or “female” do not precede the term “funeral director” (Defort 1997).

In more complex terms, Stacey (2011) talks about what this would look like:

I’d like to see a conscious effort on the part of everyone in the funeral home setting to release old ways of thinking and adopt the attitude of androgyny or ambigender. Or, to keep it simple, toss ‘gender’ out on its ear, and focus on skill sets and unique potential.

Stacey asks her colleagues to think of funeral directors in terms of “ambigender,” or funeral director as a gender ambiguous occupational category. Granted, this may not actually translate into a change in belief systems and employers may not remove the gender from funeral directing within the day-to-day workings of the funeral home; however, it can represent a powerful ideological move. In this explanation, Stacey is challenging the basic premise of funeral

directing being an inherently gendered occupational category; many of these cultural beliefs of funeral directing have dominated the industries' understanding of who is a good/bad funeral director for the better part of the last century. Beyond de-emphasizing gender from funeral directing, the gender progressive approach makes it apparent how gender shapes the funeral directing occupation and workplace experiences.

Gender Awareness

Gender progressive also dealt with being gender aware, or how gender shapes inequality for women: (1) women experience a double bind in funeral directing and (2) women are often held to higher evaluative standards. Of the 101 explanations surveyed from the trade journal articles, fifteen fit the criteria of gender progressive. Though gender blind emphasized saying that gender should not be used as a justification for why either men or women make good funeral directors, it often denied that gender shapes women's working experiences and opportunities. Gender progressive, on the other hand, acknowledges the three types of barriers/obstacles that women face in the not always women-friendly funeral industry. Research has documented that women in male-dominated industries occupy a contradictory status because their gender identity (woman) does not match their worker identity (funeral director). Trade journals identified similar issues women face in the funeral directing occupation. First, women and worker are not seen as compatible identities:

Women are perceived to never quite get it right. There is always something amiss with their performance. Those who act stereotypical women are considered too soft, too touchy-feely, too emotional. And those who are harder—they go against gender roles – are considered too tough (Burban 2012).

Women first and foremost tend to be evaluated in terms of their gender as opposed to their skills as a funeral director. This is consistent with many other studies of women working in male-dominated industries, e.g., lawyers (Pierce 1995) and fast-food workers (Liedner 1991). Similarly, gender is often seen as something that is incompatible with other male-typed jobs. For instance, women must negotiate this contradictory status when stepping outside their traditionally gender-typed work attributes.

Women who assume leadership are seen as competent, yes, but not very well liked. If they were liked, they are usually more stereotypically female, taking care of those behind-the-scene roles, printing the memorial folders, tending to the paperwork, pick up the used Kleenexes and tidying up the funeral home. Those women are seen as more personable and more fun to work with than women who try and step up to the leadership plate. They are considered competent yet not very personable (Burban 2012).

A second barrier/obstacle that was identified in the gender progressive explanation more specifically addressed how women's work is evaluated in terms of their job. Similar to Kanter's (1977) idea of a token, women generally occupy a minority status within the funeral home. Women who occupy minority statuses in male-dominated occupations were regarded differently by their coworkers, were more visible, and were often treated with hostility and harassment from their coworkers. The heightened visibility actually works against women's token status because often they are held to higher standards than their male counterparts. As one gender progressive explanation pointed out:

Women face higher performance standards than their male counterparts, and the perception is that they never quite achieve those high standards. Women are never quite

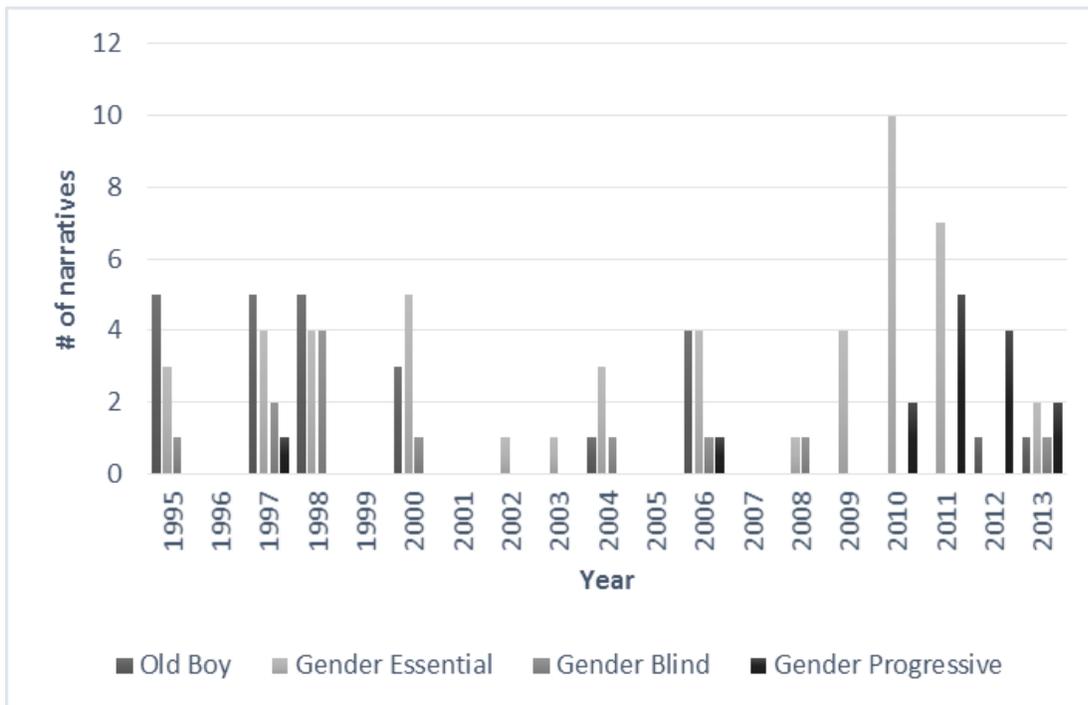
right because their standards are set higher than their male counterparts. Often they have the double amount of work to get half of the attention and notice (Burban 2012).

Though our knowledge about how gender shapes experiences of women workers compliments previous research, the explanations surveyed in my analysis demonstrate the changing explanations surrounding the cultural gender believes of women in the funeral industry.

Gender Explanations Overtime

Figure 5.1 shows in sheer percentages of the 101 explanations I pulled from the 36 trade journal articles dated from 1995-2013: gender essential is the most numerically dominant with 49 percent of the total explanations, “old boy” comes in second with 24% of the total number of explanations, gender progressive comes in third with 15% of the total explanations, and gender blind comes in fourth with 12% of the total explanations. Below is a graph which depicts the percentage of trade journal explanations per year:

Figure 5.1: Frequency of Gender Explanations, by Year



The four explanations are represented in the above graph across publication year. The dominance of explanations changes over time. The “old boy” explanation is highest in frequency from 1995-2000 and then slowly drops off to emerge briefly again in 2004, 2006, 2012, and 2013. Gender essentialism and gender blind are present across the entire range of years. Overall, gender essential is the most prominent of the four explanations and gender blind is the least prominent explanation. Finally, gender progressive emerges first in 1997; however, it increases in frequency from 2010 on, becoming the most numerically represented explanation in the most recent trade journal articles. This depiction of the gender explanations of trade journals over time indicates that the gender explanation regarding the way women are talked about in relation to the funeral directing occupation is constantly changing. Gender essential continues to be the most dominant explanation; however, it also indicates several other competing belief systems which attempt to explain women’s position in the funeral industry. Next, I highlight these competing explanations.

Competing Explanations

These four gender explanations about women in the funeral industry do not stand in isolation of each other. Many of the 36 articles analyzed often presented conflicting explanations about women in the funeral industry. For instance, they would argue for women and men being treated equally (gender blind), and not being evaluated in terms of their gender (gender progressive), yet they would go on to indicate that women are naturally suited for being a funeral director, or make better funeral directors because of their innate caregiving abilities (gender essential). For instance:

As she watched the next generation of women coming along in the occupation, she asks herself, "Why would a manager now want to hire a woman embalmer or funeral

director?” Because they're wonderful listeners, they're ready to implement innovative ideas and techniques, they're great organizers, are willing to shift and adjust where needed and will be no different than their male colleagues (Milano 2013).

For a long time we've not been allowed into it. And now we're coming on strong. We're coming no matter what people want or think. We can do the same kind of physical work and, emotionally, I think sometimes we can do a better job (Cronin 1995).

And that's a shame, not only because “it shouldn't matter whether it's a man or woman,” according to Kurz, but also because in many ways women actually have an advantage over men in serving families (FSI 2006).

These excerpts from the trade journals have aspects of gender essentialism, gender blind, and gender progressive. In the first explanation, the author draws on essentialist understandings of women's attributes (good listeners, organizers, etc.), then at the end re-emphasizes that they are no different than men. In the second and third examples, the opposite is stated. The second emphasizes gender similarity in terms of physical work that men and women can do, then goes on to imply that women can emotionally do a better job. Finally, the third example first claims no gender differences; however, it argues that women actually have an advantage over men in serving families. Why? It can be inferred that because families are associated with women and caregiving, that women are naturally going to have an advantage over and be better at it than men. The above examples indicate the flexibility of gender and how it can be used as either a mechanism to recreate gender inequality (gender essential) or challenge inequality (gender progressive) all within the same occupational context.

Conclusion

I find four competing explanations about women in funeral directing: “old boy,” gender essential, gender blind, and gender progressive. The 35 trade journal articles surveyed in this study were published during and after the largest influx of women into the funeral industry, when enrollment of women in mortuary sciences increased 21% from 1991 to 2001. In 1991, it was 30%, and in 2001, it was 51%. The trade journals surveyed in this sample were published from 1995-2013. Currently, women comprise 60% of the students in mortuary science programs.

In the earlier years, women were seen as too emotional, fragile, or weak to effectively care for the deceased (Rundblad 1995). Despite this general notion of the unfitness of women fading from the industry, there are still pockets in the industry (e.g., “old boys” who are typically placed in family-owned funeral homes) that continue to harbor these prejudices toward women: that they cannot lift, would be a distraction to other men on the job, or just generally do not belong in the funeral industry. The hostile sexism of “old boy” funeral directors continues to fade as indicated by the frequencies of the explanations found over time in the trade journal articles. Gender essentialism offers less hostile accounts of women in the funeral industry and continues to recreate the status quo. Both essentialism and benevolent sexism hold that there are natural tendencies of women, which are used to evaluate women as funeral directors. Gender essential cultural beliefs about funeral directing reify the gender status quo: women care for the family and men perform embalming and go on removals. Gender blind steps outside the box of both of these by arguing that gender should not matter in determining who should be a funeral director and that men and women are the same. However, in doing so, it is “blind” to the ways in which funeral directing is in fact shaped by gender and, by being “blind” to gender inequality, acts as a mechanism to recreate it. The final gender progressive approach identifies the obstacles/barriers women face when an occupation is gender and actively advocates for the de-gendering of the

funeral directing occupational category. Kim Stacey points out similar logic in her idea of “ambigender.” instead of using gender as an asset, gift, business tactic, or justification for men or women in the funeral industry, we should instead approach it from the viewpoint of certain skill sets that can be learned instead of attributes innately belonging to men or women.

In the following two chapters I interviewed individuals, future funeral directors and funeral directors who currently are either attending school or working in this context of contradictory/competing gender explanations about funeral directing. Veteran funeral directors, new funeral directors, and mortuary science students who are familiar with the industry are aware of the gendered nature of their occupation; first generation students are the “cleanest” in terms of their experience of the contradictions of the cultural gender beliefs surrounding funeral directing. This is the context in which I interviewed people and how they understand and negotiate and explain their experiences.

Chapter 6 - Mortuary Science Students

Introduction

This chapter answers the following research questions: 1) What are students' beliefs about women in the funeral directing occupation? 2) How do future funeral directors use CGBs to challenge or reproduce gender inequality in educational settings?

First, to answer the above research questions, I identify the gender explanations male and female students⁴ use to talk about women as funeral directors. Both gender essential and gender blind explanations of women in the funeral industry were prominent in students' accounts. Though the majority of the explanations offered by students reproduced traditional understandings of gender, there were some instances where students directly challenged the typical gender stereotypes about women and funeral directing via interaction.

The second part of this chapter looks at how gender inequality is reproduced in students' pathways to the occupation, the occupational structure, and how cultural gender beliefs shape women's training. In terms of occupational entry, women are more likely to see funeral directing as their "calling" and often cite the want to help people as their motivation for becoming a funeral director. Men on the other hand reference either an existing connection to the industry through a family business or seeing funeral directing as a "steady job" as the reasons for choosing funeral directing. In terms of the occupational structure, men are more likely to be connected to a family business, ensuring better chances for securing a job after graduation. Women are more likely to be first generation mortuary science students and do not have connections to family businesses; only in instances where they had an occupational mentor were women more likely to have job security after graduation. And finally, in terms of their training,

⁴ Pseudonyms are used for all locations, organizations, and respondents' names.

women were treated in ways consistent with dominant cultural gender beliefs during their practicums. These experiences often involved female students being second-guessed by their male colleagues or denied employment. I also examine how women responded to these experiences.

Beliefs about Women in Funeral Directing: Students

Gender Essential

The dominant CGB that both men and women students used to explain women's movement in the funeral industry reflects understanding women in essentialist notions. Similar to the justifications used in the trade journals, explanations emerged when students were questioned on their thoughts about women in the industry: that women possess inherent skills that make them good funeral directors, that they possess things that men do not have or are better at certain things than men, and finally, that their addition to the funeral industry is an asset. Of the 21 students interviewed for this project, 52% used gender essential explanations when talking about women in the funeral industry. Further breaking this down by sex, 5 men (55%) and 6 women (50%) used essential explanations.

Biological Essentialism: "You have it or you do not"

Similar to the trade journals, women were seen as naturally possessing compassion, nurturance, and caring skills. In the following example, when directly asked what types of qualities a good funeral director possesses, Walter attributes these qualities as being possessed by women (inherently):

I look at really good qualities of funeral directors as being mostly qualities that women have: like they're usually good with people, and they can organize stuff and are good with planning, and they're good with lots of stuff like that. Planning and being flexible

too with what the family wants and doing a couple things at one time because you're dealing with four or five families. They're multitasking, organized, and proficient. Those skills are good to have. A lot of stuff like that is hard to teach; you have it or you do not (Walter, 30).

He begins by listing some qualities that are stereotypically associated with women – planning, being a people person, and being flexible. He then directly draws on biological essentialism by stating these qualities are “hard to teach” and “you have it or you do not,” insinuating a natural occurrence of these qualities.

Men's vs. Women's Skills

Direct comparisons between men's and women's skills were also used to talk about the skills and qualities a good funeral director possesses.

I think, when it comes to death, people think that men are stronger emotionally in that situation, and so maybe that's why. Women are more compassionate, but men can emotionally handle that stuff better, so maybe that's one of the reasons why people look at me and think that I'm not emotionally strong enough for it. That's why it comes from my friends. They know me, and they know that I'm a mother of four and I want to help (Raina, 34).

As far as being able to deal with grieving families and to be able to sympathize with them, women just tend to be able to deal with those feelings easier, as to where a man might not know the right words to say or how to sympathize with them or show that they sympathize with them as far as body language and things of that nature too. They just have a little bit more difficult time with that (Amanda, 28).

It's easier to talk to women. They care more. They have more empathy. They're easier to talk to. Their voices are just calmer, so it's just easier to talk to them. They're realizing that funeral directing isn't scary (Jeff, 50).

In the first excerpt, Raina highlights how culturally men are seen as emotionally “stronger” than women; however, Raina counters this claim by stating her friends know she is emotionally strong because she has been the mother of four. What is interesting about the following two examples from Amanda and Jeff is that they claim the exact opposite: that women make good funeral directors because they are *more* compassionate and empathetic. In these explanations emotionality is used in two different ways. First emotional strength – being able to handle tough situations – is deemed the masculine “attribute” whereas emotionality, or ability to display emotions in times of grief is a “feminine” attribute. These competing explanations of how emotions are used in terms of funeral directing illustrate how CGBs can be flexible in use and justification. On one hand, women are seen as too emotionally unstable/fragile to handle death; but on the other, it is this innate emotionality that people use to explain why women would make good funeral directors. This also demonstrates that it's not the job task that is gendered, but it is how it is explained or used in the workplace context that makes it gendered a particular way.

Benevolent Sexism: Women are an asset to the funeral industry

Typically, when students were talking about women in the funeral industry, they talked about their inherent natures “as a good fit for funeral directing.” This belief in women's inherent nurturance, caring, and compassion is what leads women to be seen as assets to the funeral industry. This is similar to seeing women as “better” at being funeral directors.

I think it's great, we as women are taking back what we were originally doing before all of this came about anyway. I think funeral business is a great place for women – the

compassion, the empathy, we are the nurturers, and I feel that, in my opinion, I feel that more people would be comfortable sitting and talking in front of a woman about some of these things, rather than to sit and talk to a man about them (Tiffany, 28).

I know why we're an asset to the funeral industry, but as far as why it would be, I guess just the kind of change in independence. It has always been a male dominant field and we're coming in and taking over I guess. We had, at one point, an all-female funeral home. It was me, a female director, and a female administrative assistant, and we really turned out some good services. I think women are able to get by with a more caring side than guys can. It's nothing to give somebody a hug or anything like that whereas it might be looked at differently from a male director's standpoint. Guys just are kind of tougher, more stoic I guess. I know that women are kind of more approachable. As far as why we are, I do not know. I have no idea (Sarah, 28).

One of the main things both Tiffany and Sarah cite is that women are more approachable than men and that many families would actually prefer to work with a female funeral director. Sarah and Tiffany attribute this to women's more "approachable" nature. This "approachable" nature of women also sets them up to be privileged in funeral home settings where a good portion of the job involves interacting with families. In these terms, families may prefer a female funeral director over a male. Though this may advantage women in some funeral homes and employment, it simultaneously reproduces essential understandings of women and why they make good funeral directors.

Gender Blind

Many students when questioned about their thoughts on women in the industry gave ambivalent answers (6 students, 21%). For instance, some stated “I do not know” (Eric) or “I do not really have any thoughts on that” (Chandler). Students’ lack of an answer in these instances is probably due to their inexperience in the industry. This also gives insight into the saliency of gender and funeral directing for students. Given that they do not have experience working in the industry, gender is not salient for them, and thus they do not interpret funeral directing from a stereotypical gendered understanding.

Three (14%) other students (Emilio, Jeremy, Anna) provided more detailed answers but placed the existence of women as funeral directors in the context of larger social changes regarding women’s status within society. What students emphasized here is talking about how, in general, workplaces are more accepting of women, and thus it must translate into women being more accepted in the funeral industry.

I think this has a lot to do with the women’s movement altogether. I think we’re living in a day and age where there’s no more Suzy Homemaker. There’s no stigmatism such as that anymore whereas back in the 50s, 60s, and 70s it was kind of the common standard for women, if you will, to be the homemaker and the men be the guys who put the bread on the table. I think we’re seeing more of a transition of that in general. I do not think it’s necessarily just in funeral service itself. I think it’s in every job, where you’re seeing more and more women get out there and actually become career-oriented, career-driven. I do not think that has anything to do with women wanting to become funeral directors. I think all in all it’s just the stipulations of women wanting to come out here and work for themselves. I do not think it has anything to do with women wanting to come into this industry. Maybe there’s a reason for it, sure. There’s a reason why everybody pursues a

degree. There's got to be some sort of reason, but I think a lot of it is typically you're starting to see more and more women work (Jeremy, 28).

Nowadays, they [women] change the way they work, the way they dress, music, anything. I believe that before some of those changes a lot of parents were like "Since you're women you're not supposed to do this because this is a man's job." That was a part of their thinking. Now, since there have been some changes, if you have a daughter they can do anything they want. It's your choice. You have more freedom; you can do anything you want. If you want to accomplish something, it's going to be good, and it looks better because that's the way the evolution of change has happened, little by little. I think it's good for everyone (Emilio, 28).

In both of the above explanations, Jeremy and Emilio juxtapose "then" and "now." "Then" referring to more rigid gender expectations akin to the 1950s, whereas "now" represents how society has transitioned and gender is more flexible in terms of women working. I refer to these excerpts that talk about equality as gender blind because students conclude that because progress has been made in society at large for women, this must translate into equality for women in the funeral industry. Given their structural positions as students and general inexperience in the industry, it makes sense that they would frame their responses in this way. In addition, this is a common method, or socially acceptable way to talk about gender inequality because it reflects societal-level CGBs.

Similarly, Anna talks more specifically about women in the funeral industry. She frames her explanation in terms of the changes that have occurred within the industry that makes it more accepting of women.

I do not really see it going backwards. I think women are just as capable as men. I'm not too terribly familiar with the history of the ups and downs of the funeral business, whether it has succeeded or it has crashed and burned, but I think women could probably only just take it up from here. I'm met a lot of women in different aspects of the funeral industry, whether they're directors, whether they're preneed, whether they're just a secretary, or an administrative assistant, but they're all very skilled from what I can tell. They're willing and eager to see the business succeed, and they're eager to help move that along. I think that women can only propel it forward. I think we have the drive just like men do, and I think we have the wherewithal to see a business grow and help the community and help our fellow people, I guess (Anna, 28).

It was typical for students to talk about gender in relation to women in the funeral industry in a vague way. I attribute this to two things. First, fifteen of the students (71%) were first generation, and their first time being exposed to the industry was through school. Their inexperience with the industry may lead them to talk about gender in vague ways because they are truly unaware and actually have not heard about any negative experiences women have faced in the industry or have not faced negative experiences themselves. In addition, it might not be seen as socially appropriate to talk about gender inequality, sexism, or discrimination in the funeral industry. This fits with the gender blind ideology. Students negotiate this by saying that in general, women's standing in society has improved, and for them, this translates into women's general standing in the funeral industry improving as well. These accounts of course are not wrong, but current inequality within in the industry (and to an extent, society at large) gets dismissed and students are blind to it under this rhetoric of "equality between the sexes."

Challenges to the “Old Boy” Gender-typing of the Funeral Industry

Students who were more likely to critique either gender essential understandings of women in the funeral industry or this “equality” for women in the funeral industry were typically those who were more informed (i.e. had more experience/knowledge) about the industry or had experienced the typical negative experiences women can face in the industry. Three (14%) of the female students articulated these kinds of beliefs.

In particular, Jill saw herself as a contradiction of the general assumption that women funeral directors will be emotional, nurturing, and compassionate. As Jill illustrates below, she is not particularly emotional and/or emphatic. She, however, highlights that, regardless of her own personal attributes, she is held accountable to these gendered standards of women as funeral directors.

Yeah. They’re the ones [women] who are supposed to give empathy and sympathy to the family, and they’re the ones that you want interacting with the family because they have a bigger heart or they’re more caring. I’ve noticed that. I told Chris (her husband who is the son of a funeral director) I’m the furthest from caring, really, my personality...so it’s been a test to see whether or not I could handle families because most of the time when I came into it I was just like “Stop crying, they’re already dead;” you know you can’t change it. Chris is like “Jill, you can’t say that to people.” I’m like well, you know, it’s true, but I have noticed that there’s starting to become a change, and I hope that the change is good. I do not want to waste all my time trying to prove myself because I’ve had to prove myself in the federal government. It’s the same thing (34).

Similarly, Shelby is aware of the stereotypes about women’s ability to lift and enjoys disproving these myths on a daily basis.

That I can do all the stuff that the guys can do. All of the lifting and meeting with families and stuff like that. I do not know. A lot of funeral directors have this idea that women belong in the kitchen still, and I just love disproving that every day (20).

Jill and Shelby, who are both second year students, are anomalies among their peers. Both are aware of the stereotypes women face in the industry: that they are expected to be more emotionally supportive etc. and/or that women do not fit in the industry. Both actively critique these stereotypes as saying they do not fit with them; and in an attempt to further challenge these assumptions about women in the funeral industry, they reference how they have to prove themselves.

Occupational Entry: Why Funeral Directing?

In American society, funeral directors have a long history of being stereotyped as peculiar because of their direct connection working with death and the deceased (Cahill 1991). This social stigma associated with the funeral directing occupation falls similarly on students who attend mortuary science programs. Many of the students in this sample reported that when acquaintances found out what they were going to school for their reactions ranged from complete disgust (people were afraid to touch them) to genuine curiosity. Despite this, thousands of students flock to mortuary science programs each year.

Research documents that career paths look different for men and women (Blossfeld and Drobic 2004). Men typically follow a linear or standardized pattern, which is stable, continuous, and upwardly mobile. Women, on the other hand, may take multiple pathways to their career, which typically involve delayed, intermittent, or steady part-time entry.

My findings demonstrate the complexities of how gender shapes the routes in which men and women enter the funeral industry. About half of the respondents in this sample started out in

another occupation and eventually entered funeral directing. Fifty percent of women and 66% of men started out in another occupation prior to coming to funeral directing. Despite this similar trend between men and women – of funeral directing as a second career – the pathways that brought men and women were different. Britton (2003), in her study of prison guard work, found that the underlying labor market facilitates men’s movement into prison work more than women’s. Men were more likely to come from more similar backgrounds to prison work than women; i.e. most men came from the military. A similar trend is found with funeral directing, albeit the opposite. Women’s previous occupations facilitated easy transitions into the funeral directing occupation. Many students who came to funeral directing as a second career including Raina, Deanna, and Rita all came from nursing and hospice work. Many of the women cited the “transferable skills” that these prior careers had afforded them and that they were already familiar with handling death, grief associated with death, and fulfilling a “caregiving” role.

Gendered reasoning also existed as to why women and men chose to enter the occupation in the first place or return to it later on. Women typically referenced a “lifelong” interest in the occupation after experiencing the death of someone close to them at a young age; four of the eleven women recalled experiences with funerals and/or deaths from an early age. Linked to this lifelong curiosity was a view that being a funeral director was their calling. The idea of the calling emphasizes seeing funeral directing as a way to help/care for people. Of the women interviewed, 3 out of the 11 cited funeral directing as a calling. The main reason for men, on the other hand, emphasized the business elements of the job: the steadiness, job security, and potentiality to make money. Six of the nine men identified business-related reasons for their interest in funeral directing, and the majority who came back for a second career did so out of convenience because they had direct access to the funeral industry through a family-owned

business. The remaining reasons included experience of the death of a family member or friend which drew them to funeral directing, while most other routes varied. Typically they came to funeral directing through the recommendation of funeral directing by friends, family, or coworkers in other occupations or exposure to it through school (at Midwestern Community College). The following table depicts the reason for choosing funeral directing by category, and the remainder of this section explores the gendered pathways to funeral directing for men and women.

Table 6.1: Difference in Occupational Entry

Lifelong interest/ Death of someone close	“Calling”	Business-related reasons	Other
Stephanie Sarah Tiffany Rita Emilio	Shelby Deanna Eric Raina	Steven John Brock Jill Jeremy Chris Jeff	Anna Walter Macy Chandler Amanda

Death of Someone Close

One of the reasons women came to the funeral industry was a lifelong desire of wanting to be a funeral director, typically connected to experiencing the death of someone close to them at a young age. They described this initial exposure to the funeral service as something that stuck with them, and they recalled being fascinated with the process of how the funeral happened, always being comfortable in the funeral home and being fascinated with how funeral directors were able to make the deceased appear life-like. This explanation was most common for women:

I think it’s always something that I’ve wanted to do. I think the turning point was when my grandma died in 1997. I was still in high school, and for some reason, it just kind

of...I was telling my family you're going to have to do this; you're going to have to do this, and I do not really know where all of this was coming from, and this was kind of a turning point when I thought, oh gosh this is what I want to do. So it's been something that I've been pursuing this whole time, and it just hasn't been easy (Tiffany, 28).

I've been interested in it for almost a decade I guess. A couple of high school friends of mine died by suicide and stuff like that, and I was just really comfortable in the funeral home. That got me interested in it and then I have a couple close friends who are already in the business, and so I got to go in and tour around—that perked my interest even more (Rita, 36).

I was exposed to a lot of loss throughout my youth. I lost a best friend at age 10, and then we lost a classmate every year of my high school years, so I think there was just a curiosity as to how things got to the point of being ready for a service that intrigued me. That's probably why I got into it (Sarah, 28).

Sarah, Rita, and Tiffany all highlight how they became fascinated with the processes involved in preparing the body for display. When further questioned, students often stated they're interest in funeral directing was connected to wanting to help people and be there for the family in a time of need. The caring orientation of funeral directing further solidified this occupational choice for respondents. For instance, Stephanie states, "The part that sticks out is being able to help the family from beginning to end and walk them through the difficult process that they do not know and just being able to help them, educate them on stuff... that's kind of my motivation." Similarly, Shelby states "When I was 11 years old I told my mother that I wanted to be a

mortician or funeral director because I wanted to help people.” And finally, Sarah reflects on the moment when she knew mortuary science was the career for her:

Wow, I’ve found a career in life. I think it was just the exposure to it and knowing that I could still be compassionate enough to do what I needed to do for the families but distance myself to where I did not have that strong emotional breakdown that some instances and deaths can cause. I was able to keep the professionalism and help people (29).

Sarah emphasizes both the compassion that is needed to be a funeral director but also the professionalism (emotional management) that is required of the job. It was in that moment where she discovered she could successfully do both (i.e. be occupational and help people), that she was cut out to be a funeral director. Individual’s initial curiosity into the occupation stemmed from an early fascination with funeral directing after attending a funeral. What kept them interested in the occupation was the service orientation of funeral directing. This caring orientation was also articulated in seeing funeral directing as a “calling.”

A “Calling”

Both men (Eric) and women students (Raina and Shelby) referenced funeral directing as a calling; however, women referenced it more frequently. One idea linked to women’s “calling” to the funeral industry was that they knew from a very young age that funeral directing was the occupation for them. As Shelby’s story demonstrates, she knew from a young age funeral directing was meant for her:

When I was 11 years old, I told my mother that I wanted to be a mortician or funeral director because I wanted to help people. No one in my family does it. I just woke up one day and decided that was what I wanted to do, so when I got to middle school and

high school, I started job shadowing at funeral homes. I do not know. It was kind of like this feeling inside that I was supposed to be doing that. This is my calling. I do not have family in it or anything like that. I just woke up one day and decided that's what I was going to do (Shelby, 20).

Shelby highlights she always has “known” that she wanted to be a funeral director and that it was some inherent knowledge she possessed from an early age. In addition, she emphasizes that she came to funeral directing “because [she] wanted to help people.” Shelby taps into the service and/or caring orientation that is often associated with women’s “calling” explanations. Shelby’s explanations of funeral directing as a “calling” recreated essentialist beliefs about women funeral directors as inherently nurturing and caregiving.

The “Business” of Funeral Directing

Men’s entry into the funeral industry was different than women’s. For men, their explanation for choosing to enter the funeral industry revolved around the business elements of funeral directing work. Typically, students remained in the funeral industry because they had parents or other family members who were in the business. Students saw funeral directing as a way to make “good money” and perceived funeral directing as an occupation that required relatively low levels of schooling but with a decent salary. Finally, they also saw funeral directing as a “steady” occupation, as Chris reiterates: “When you finally come to the reality that it’s not a horrible thing and it’s a good [being a funeral director], [the benefits are that it’s a] steady job and you’re providing a family something [funeral service] they very much need.” Below Jeremy, a first generation funeral director, talks about how he came back to funeral directing because he saw it as a secure occupation:

I was in my 30's when I came back to school, so I was looking for something that would be practical. I wanted to get a degree I could go places on. I do not know of anybody in the industry. It's not like I got into it because I come from a family of morticians. It was just basically kind of that most of my work experience has been in manufacturing and warehousing and we're transitioning from a manufacturing-based economy into a service-based economy, and those jobs are still there but there's not quite as few of them as there was 10 or 15 years ago. Basically the idea was to get a degree that I could provide a decent income for myself on and I could go places with. I was just looking for a good two year degree field. If I was somewhat younger, maybe I would have been more education driven, but I was just looking for a two year degree where I could kind of get in, get the degree, and get out. There weren't that many two year degree options either that you could really do something with. Nowadays most people want you to at least have a bachelor's in something. This is just one of those fields that kind of fell under that umbrella of things I was looking to do. That's pretty much it (30).

Jeremy, as a first generation funeral director does not have the "ties" to the funeral industry. He, however, does emphasize the importance that finding steady employment was an important reason for why Jeremy chose to "come back" to funeral directing. These types of explanations were typical for men's entry into the occupation along with the explanation that familial connection were important were for men students.

Family Ties

Of the 21 students I interviewed, five men (55%) and one woman (8%) had direct familial connections to the funeral industry. Steven and Jeff were second generation mortuary students; Chris and Brock were third generation students, and Jill and John were first generation

students but had direct connections to funeral homes through their spouses. Jill is married to Chris, who also participated in this study, and whose father owns a funeral home. John's fiancée's parents own a funeral home.

Steven knew in high school that he wanted to be a funeral director. At first apprehensive, he considered pursuing a degree to become a pharmacist. He later decided to enter the family business:

My parents said not to go into funeral service just because they're in funeral service. Find out for yourself what you want to do...I thought I was going to go to pharmacy school and realized that wasn't for me. Towards my senior year [of high school] or maybe freshman year of college, I decided I wanted to go into funeral service and started pursuing and figuring out different things. What it takes to get a degree and things like that and helping my dad on a more serious basis, helping him more with the funerals and the preparation work than I had been (Steven, 19).

Following graduation Steven plans to join his father's business and work at one of the satellite funeral homes that his father owns in a nearby town. Brock had a similar experience to Steven. He attained a bachelor's degree in business with the intention of pursuing a different occupation but actually decided to come back to the family business.

It's a family business on my side. When I first started college I just went in as undecided and just kind of left my options open. By my second year of college, I decided I wanted to go into the family business. It was already there, and it was something that kind of drew my attention. Then I just went on from there (Brock, 23).

Brock originally never worked for his father as a child; however, when he was attending college, he began working for a local funeral director in the town. He actually enjoyed the work and found it interesting. This segued his choice into deciding to go work for his father.

Chris and Jeff are actually second-career funeral directors. Jeff started out in managing fast-food restaurant drive-ins in Florida. Following the collapse of the economy and his father wanting to retire, he decided to return to the Midwest to take over the business.

Taking over my dad's business, [he's a] funeral director. He's had a funeral home for over 40 years. He wants to retire, and I'd moved away from it. We grew up in the funeral home. I got tired of what I'd been doing for the last 20 years, so I decided to come home (Jeff, 50).

Chris, like Jeff, actually started out in another occupation prior to coming back to funeral directing. He worked for a long time as a consultant for golf courses who specialized in designing the greens for golf courses. When the economy crashed, he decided to return to funeral directing.

I would be a third generation. My grandfather and grandmother owned a funeral home, so I basically grew up, from my first memory, in a very small town funeral home. My dad was a teacher and a football coach. He tried to get away from the business, and I guess, when I was in seventh grade, he went back to school and got his mortuary license, worked close to a year-long apprenticeship, and then bought his own funeral home, and I guess that took us from being at grandpa and grandma's house and being around the funeral home all the time to now always there. I basically did the same thing. I went to Midwestern State University and got a degree in horticulture, worked in the golf industry

for 20 plus years, and when it tanked it was like, “I’ve grown up enough that I’m willing to go into that line of work,” so that’s how I ended up here (44).

Jill is married to Chris. She had worked as an auditor prior to deciding to join her husband in enrolling in the mortuary science program at Midwestern community college. She stated that many of the skills from being a government contractor transferred over into funeral directing; she states: “It’s very similar to what I do as a career as far as the business aspect of a funeral home, doing the accounting and marketing and all of that stuff, but it wasn’t until I actually started working services that I was like ‘Wow, I could actually do this’” (Jill, 34). The transferable skills peaked Jill’s interest in becoming a funeral director, and she has since picked up more hours at her father-in-law’s funeral home.

Like Jill, John is also associated with a funeral home through his future partner. Similarly to Steven and Brock, John had actually started out in a non-funeral directing field; however, he decided after graduating that he wanted to pursue a degree in mortuary science.

I kind of backed into it actually. I went to Midwestern University. I graduated from there with a degree in criminal justice, but I figured out pretty quickly that I did not want to do that as far as a career. My fiancé’s family does it, funeral directing, and it just kind of happened. I do not know if there was really one thing that made me say, “Oh, I want to do that.” I just kind of backed into it (John, 25).

He does not have any current plans to work for his fiancé’s family in the near future though, since he currently has a job at another funeral home, the option is available.

The majority of the students in this sample were entering funeral directing as a second career: six of the eleven female students and six of the nine male students entered funeral directing as a second career. Despite the similarity of funeral directing as a second career, the

occupational pathways for men differed for women. Women were more likely to see funeral directing as a “calling” and “life-long” curiosity. This life-long curiosity was often attached to something “they always knew they wanted to do” and a death of someone close. The “calling” in particular emphasized their desire to help people in a time of need. Men, on the other hand, emphasized the business elements of what drew them back to the funeral industry. For instance, they cited the security of the funeral directing job, “backed into it” like John, because of the convenience of it being a family business after having lost their job during the recession.

Men in the funeral industry tend to find themselves in better structural positions than women in the funeral industry because they are often tied to family-owned businesses making an easy transition into landing a job. This sets men up in more promising positions after they graduate. They are more likely than women to have direct connections to funeral homes, whereas many of the women entered without a direct connection to the funeral industry. Given this, it becomes important to talk about how people stay in the funeral industry. Getting in is one thing, staying in and finding employment is an entirely different obstacle.

Occupational Socialization: Getting in and Staying in

Students and research often cite that you have “to be a certain kind of person” or “have the stomach” to be a funeral director (Cahill 1991). This is what Cahill (1991) referred to as “emotional capital” – an added advantage that some mortuary science students possessed over others. Students who were successful in mortuary science were better prepared to handle embalming, the emotional stress of dealing with grieving families during the death of a loved one, and had prior socialization into the funeral industry (typically through family business). In Cahill’s study, students who possessed “emotional capital” were more likely to be successful, graduating from the mortuary science program and finding jobs as funeral directors. Many of

these successful students were second generation funeral directors and thus had some socialization via their family business into the occupation. Though there are nuances between my research and Cahill's in terms of the importance of occupational socialization in shaping students' anticipated successes, my research gives insight into the gendered aspects which shape student's opportunities for being successful in the funeral industry. Typically, male students are more likely to be in positions that provide them with direct connections to employment in the industry than female students.

The Importance of Generation

Through my research on the funeral industry, something that students consistently expressed concern about is finding a job. Referral and getting a job are highly based on having connections in the funeral industry, and across the board it is harder for first generation funeral directors who have no direct links via friends or families to find jobs in the funeral industry. Decades ago, the majority of people entering and graduating from mortuary science programs were children of families with long histories of funeral home ownership. This has steadily changed, and now first generation funeral directors make up the majority of the students enrolled in mortuary science programs, as was described to me by the mortuary science program director at Midwestern Community College.

A student's familial experience in the funeral home is important for shaping their job opportunities. "Generation" as a funeral director works as a form of social currency in both the business side and acquiring a job. It is common for students, funeral directors, and funeral business websites to emphasize "generation" in their explanations about their businesses and experience. Multiple generations emphasizes legitimacy; families are more likely to go to a funeral home that has been in business for multiple generations than to a funeral home that has

just opened up. The emphasis of many generations also demonstrates that the funeral home is committed to the “traditional values” of a family-owned business which emphasizes orientation toward families, religiosity, and personable connections to communities.

The “Extras”

Not only does it work as social currency, but students who are connected to family businesses are socialized into funeral directing prior to ever entering school. These advantages put the occupational trajectory of second and third generation funeral directors above that of first generation funeral directors. John indicates the “extras” that multiple generation students have when entering the mortuary science program:

John: For someone that isn't in the business or doesn't have family in the business.... You can definitely tell the kids that grew up in a family that ran a funeral home and the ones that did not.

Interviewer: What are the tell-tale differences?

John: They just seem to know a little bit more right off the bat. They just know what it's like. The scheduling stuff like being called out at three a.m. They just talk about it differently, I guess.

Interviewer: Than somebody who is first generation?

John: Yes (25).

John indicates that students can distinguish who among their colleagues are first generation vs. multiple generation. This is the “capital” to which Cahill refers. Students who are connected to the industry through family businesses are advantaged because they come into mortuary science programs already knowing how the industry works, are more knowledgeable about the processes, and know the occupational “lingo” that goes along with working in the funeral industry. All of

which indicate the advantages of coming from a family who owns a funeral business. Raina, a first generation funeral director, best highlights the advantage she observes that second and third, etc. generation funeral directors experience in comparison with herself:

I feel kind of at a disadvantage. For me, personally, there are a lot of people that have been raised in the funeral industry, like there's a young man that works at the funeral home where I'm at. He was raised in it; his father owns several, and he's going to go back, once he graduates, and work for his father. I think he was offered a job from the place where I'm at. Instantly, they liked him because he went into it already knowing all these things, so they have to spend a little bit more time with me, teaching me stuff. He already knows how he's supposed to conduct himself, how he's supposed to be. I do not know how long he was working in services before he finally went to school, but I've noticed that a lot of people that are here have that advantage where they've already been in that kind of atmosphere, and I'm going into it brand new. The most I'd ever done was going to funerals of my friends and family and stuff. I think that is going to be one of my disadvantages when it comes to looking for work, that they want someone like him. It's going to be hard (Raina, 34).

As Raina says, she is at a disadvantage because students who have been socialized into the occupation because of familial business have many of the necessary skills that employers prefer. This is not to say that first generation funeral directors can't learn this; however, when we couple the structural set-up of the funeral industry (male students are more likely to be connected to funeral industry through family businesses) with the CGB's about women in the funeral industry (that they do not fit), women's opportunities become constrained. Women, however, were able to find occupational socialization in the form of mentors.

Women's Mentors

One of the major barriers that female students mentioned when discussing their future job prospects was that women often had a harder time finding jobs 1) because smaller funeral homes typically preferred to hire men and 2) because they were first generation funeral directors and had no direct ties to funeral homes beyond where they worked at their practicums, except Jill who had a direct connection through her father-in-law's funeral home. The remainder of the female students in this sample were first generation students, whereas five of the twenty-one (24%) male students were either second or more generation students, indicating the better and more direct connections male students had to the industry. Instead what emerged for female students who were interested in funeral directing is that they often developed a mentorship relationship with a local funeral home owner. Typically, given their interest in funeral directing from a young age, they would begin working for that funeral home helping with services, washing cars, doing yard work, etc. in high school or after they came back to funeral directing. Below, some of the respondents highlight the role that their mentor played in introducing them to the industry, helping them get their foot in the door, and teaching them about some of the barriers that women might face in the industry.

The lady [funeral director mentor] from Franklin that taught me how to do stuff in high school, I owe a lot to her for helping me (Shelby, 20).

I've kind of always been close with him [1st funeral director mentor] and when my brother died in '07 the funeral director said well if you want to pursue this, I will help you. So when I was finishing up my Criminal Justice we had to do an externship, well they allowed me to do it at a funeral home. That's where I did my paper; I had to write it as how does this pertain to Criminal Justice. I did a 10 week externship with the funeral

home in Red Oak, and then he hired me on part time. I started up in June with the externship, then I started part-time and was there until the end of up October [of 2007]. That was really my only job or employment I ever had. Now I have assisted with embalmings with a funeral director in Council Bluffs, he [2nd funeral director mentor] was going to help me while I went to school, and so I have helped with embalmings, helped with a couple cremations (Tiffany, 28).

Larry [funeral director mentor] is not like a lot of people. He's not anti-feminist at all. That's the owner. He's really good. He told me that he wanted to get me into the prep room more this summer because, he's not trying to be sexist, but as a woman that having more experience in the prep room is going to help me in the future to get employment. Obviously because men are still considered [the norm] (Raina, 34).

Mentors are not atypical in the funeral industry for men or women. However, the female students indicated that mentors play a particularly important role for them in the funeral industry. The mentor relationships that I am specifically discussing here are ones that happened for female students prior to their entrance into a mortuary science program. These mentors can be particularly helpful to female students because it provides them an opportunity to be introduced into the occupation and develop contacts in the industry which could help with employment. Students who had mentors prior to going to school, go back and work for their mentors after they finish school. In addition, Raina's mentor was aware of the double standard held toward women and made sure she was well-prepped in embalming (a skill that women are generally perceived as not as good as men). So not only are women socialized into the occupation, they must also be socialized into the gendered nature of the funeral directing occupation, and some mentors

prepare them to counter it. It is interesting to note that these mentors were men. Tiffany had two male mentors, and Raina had one male mentor, while Shelby had a female mentor. This is reflective of lingering occupational sex segregation, and women will likely get a male mentor. Despite the benefits that mentors provide in women's socialization into the industry prior to attending mortuary science school, there are many obstacles that female mortuary science students continue to face when pursuing employment in the funeral industry. These barriers emerged for women students when they were completing their practicums.

Occupational Training: Barriers Faced by Female Students

Many of the female students in this sample reported that they experienced barriers when participating in their practicums or trying to find jobs in the funeral industry. They all, however, indicated they did not experience any differential treatment based on gender in their educational programs. Their programs were actually the only locations in which they indicated that their gender did not adversely affect their experiences or opportunities. One female student (Macy) did comment on how educational programs do not adequately prepare women for the obstacles they may face in the industry such as the hostility toward women that lingers with the "old boy" culture in the funeral industry.

Most notably, students encountered or perceived environments in which they felt *employers* did not accept them because they were women. These experiences are very similar to the "old boy" understanding of women in the funeral industry. Typically the "old boy" rhetoric takes a hostile approach to women in the funeral industry and believe that women are not fit to be funeral directors because they are not physically strong enough and can't emotionally handle it. Macy recently was looking for a place where she could complete her one-year apprenticeship before receiving her funeral directing license. She wanted to return home, so she began looking

for positions at the funeral homes in her community. She had interviewed with one of the funeral homes and had the following response during her interview:

I wanted to do my apprenticeship there, and they said that they weren't really looking, but it wasn't really an occupation for females. They were like "What is so and so going to do when she gets married and she wants to be home with her husband or has kids? What are they going to do when she has to go on a three in the morning removal?" They pretty much said that, and so now when I see them when I come home, and they're like "How're you doing?" I'm like "It's great, I loved it at [funeral home]. I'm doing great in school. I can't wait to get back and start working," so I make sure I shove it in their face that I'm doing good and that women can do this (Macy, 21).

Macy demonstrates how she challenges the "old boy" cultural beliefs through interaction. When she interacts with employees of the funeral home which wouldn't hire her because she was a woman, she is sure to let them know that she is better off at the current funeral home she is working at and that she is doing great in school. By emphasizing her successes, she is challenging the rhetoric that women can't be funeral directors. Similarly, Anna describes the strong hold of "old boys" in funeral homes which are in smaller towns by implying differences in beliefs between family-owned and corporate funeral homes:

There is a lot of old white males in the manager or the owner aspect of a funeral home who would still be stuck in the 50's and say that women can't do that or can't do it as well as they could or the man that's right across from you competing for the same job. I can see where that would occur, especially for a very small town sort of setting. I think, from working at a corporate restaurant, that they also are obligated to encourage the equal opportunity employment, so they are hiring and keeping people: women, men, minorities,

those with disabilities, and things like that. If you were to go to just a small time place, I think I would probably have some sort of difficulty getting hired (21).

Anna highlights how there is still this looming perception that women will have a harder time getting hired in smaller establishments because they are owned by the “old boys” in the funeral industry. She states this, however, differs in corporate vs. family-owned settings. For instance, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) ensures that corporate settings provide equality opportunity to all potential employees. Smaller family-owned funeral homes might actually go under the radar regarding EEO because women who experience discrimination in these settings are less likely to report them. In addition, if someone attempts to file a lawsuit against one of these smaller establishments for gender discrimination, such as in Macy’s experience, the individual is liable to be ostracized from funeral directing entirely. This actually happened with some of the female funeral directors I interviewed (to be elaborated on in the next chapter).

I think Jill best summarizes the “big picture” of barriers that women face when trying to get a job in the funeral industry:

Yeah, so Chris and I were talking about that, and I told him “Do not be surprised if I go through all of this and I can’t get a job” because all of the funeral homes that I’m looking at are small funeral homes. Male funeral directors feel like the woman is a liability. Either it’s a male doesn’t want to be on call with a female all night long because their spouse is going to think they’re cheating or issues like that. It’s like really, that’s the excuse you’re going to give? Ninety-five percent of the time the only thing I know that I truly cannot handle in the prep room is if I have to move a three hundred pound person from a cot to a prep tomb table by myself. I could figure out how to do it, but it’s one of those why struggle with it when you have two people available things. I have noticed

doing my practicums and reading articles and stuff like that that there is an issue with women being viewed in the funeral services as an embalmer or in the prep room. They're usually preneed sales, aftercare counselors, or funeral directors that do not go in the embalming room, or dealing with families (34).

These belief systems fall in line with the "old boy" cultural explanation for women's role in the funeral industry: that they do not fit in, do not have the appropriate skills (embalming), would be a distraction, or are too emotionally and physical weak to handle working in the funeral industry. Given some of these female student's experiences, some of the young women do not see equality or even acceptance of essentialism, instead they see and expect to be treated in overtly sexist ways. Despite the general hostility toward women in some areas of the funeral industry, many women participated in rebellious activity in an effort to prove themselves as qualified to work in the funeral industry.

Contradictory Status: Proving Yourself as a Woman

Many of the female students actively sought to challenge the idea that they did not belong in the industry. In these instances, they attempted to prove themselves as a "woman" funeral director, prove that they belonged in the funeral industry, and were qualified to work there, something their male counterparts did not experience. Female students reported being picked on by their male colleagues. In Shelby's experiences she recalls how her male colleagues "dropped jokes" about her work attire:

I always wore dress pants or a skirt, and I always wore high heels. I got so much crap for that. "Why are you dressing up like that for? We do not dress like that. We wear flat shoes and suits." I'm like, "I'm a girl. I'm not going to dress like a guy because it bothers you that I'm a lady." There are always the jokes being dropped. I can go on

removals and pick up bodies, and one time one of the directors said he did not want to go with me because he said there was no way I'd be able to lift somebody, and I went and I did (20).

Though her male colleagues see this as harmless joking, by making fun of her high heels and skirts they make Shelby visible and criticize her because of her gender. In an effort to counter this claim, Shelby states how she went on removals, even when they did not want her to, to prove to other male directors that she could. In addition, Shelby's experience highlights her "contradictory" status of being a woman in the funeral industry. She was called out in terms of her femininity (dressing like "a lady") and her ability to perform the requirements of the job (going on removals and lifting). When specifically asked if women faced any specific barriers Shelby elaborated on these and what she does to combat them:

Interviewer: In terms of your training, and this could be here at school or even in the job where you're doing your practicum, do you think being a woman affected it at all? Have you been treated differently because of it?

Shelby: It always seems like it starts out like that at first with anything, but I can prove myself.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you had to prove yourself kind of?

Shelby: Yeah.

Interviewer: In what instances would you say?

Shelby: That I can do all the stuff that the guys can do. All of the lifting and meeting with families and stuff like that. I do not know. A lot of funeral directors have this idea that women belong in the kitchen still. and I just love disproving that every day (20).

One of the most typical areas of funeral work that women consistently have to “prove” themselves is in their physical abilities, specifically their ability to go on removals and to move bodies. And even in instances where women (and men too) may not be able to lift a particular body, there is equipment to help them.

My kids aren't like that though because I taught my daughters that they can do anything a guy can do, you just might have to use proper tools and equipment to get it done, but you can still do the same things they can. Maybe I can't lift. I have bad shoulders, but there's equipment for that. There are ways of getting things done (Deanna, 48).

Sarah adds a more positive spin on it:

I think it's like cremation was. I think they're resistant at first, but I think the more that it's happening and the more that they're seeing that women can do just as good of a job as what they've been used to with males in the industry, I think they're just becoming way more accepting of us. That's like cremation was unheard of, nobody did cremation, but now it's just kind of the thing. I think that people just adjust. I do just think it's going to just take us proving that we're the gal for the job (Sarah, 28).

She compares the movement of women into the funeral industry to the reception of cremation. In general, cremation was frowned upon in the funeral industry as a method of final deposition. It was seen as cheap and not appropriately honoring family members' memory. Since the 70s cremation has become more accepted and has lost some of the cultural stereotype of being a cheap, lower-class method of deposition. Like cremation, Sarah indicates, at first, women weren't accepted; however, through their ability to “prove” themselves while working in the funeral industry, they have gained acceptance. Thus, by proving themselves as funeral directors, women have opened up their opportunities and challenged negative stereotypes.

Conclusion

In general, the mechanisms at work at the level of students' belief systems and the micro-level processes in student's training and school experiences reproduce the gender status quo. Gender is reproduced at the level of belief because both male and female students were likely to hold gender essential understandings of women as funeral directors. The women expected to face "old boy" beliefs while the men seemed to have no idea about this and thought gender inequality was over. The women knew they challenged things in interactions by doing what the directors said women "couldn't do." Even in instances where female students were aware of the stereotypes of women in the funeral industry and they attempted to challenge or subvert them, on a larger scale they were still held accountable to these gendered expectations.

In terms of micro-level processes of occupational entry, occupational socialization, and occupational training, gender was emphasized at every point. Women used gendered reasons of the "calling" to explain why they chose to come to funeral directing; men on the other hand were more likely to associate their attraction to funeral directing with business and money. The occupational structure of the funeral industry also benefits men. Male students were more likely to come from a family business which means they have a direct family connection to the funeral industry and thus a job. Only one woman had a direct connection to a business; the remainder developed connections through mentors. Finally, in terms of occupational training, women experienced barriers in attempting to find employment and were often challenged on the basis of not fitting in the funeral industry because they were women. Women responded in ways attempting to challenge the restrictive stereotypes.

Chapter 7 - Funeral Directors

Introduction

This chapter addresses the following research questions: 1) What are funeral directors' beliefs about women in the funeral directing occupation? 2) How do current funeral directors use CGBs to challenge or reproduce gender inequality in workplaces settings?

To answer the above research question, I first identify the gender explanations that both men and women funeral directors⁵ use to talk about women in the funeral industry. Second, I identified how occupational explanations about gender in funeral directing shape workplace experiences and opportunities. In general, my findings indicate that cultural beliefs about gender reproduce and challenge the gender status quo in four ways. First, notions of seeing women as being unfit for the funeral industry actively create hostile environments in which women are openly discriminated against, questioned, and treated negatively by coworkers and employers. Second, when comparing the division of labor across corporate and family-owned funeral homes, essential notions of women (nurturing, caring, and compassionate) are used to shape what is understood as appropriate and not-appropriate work for female and male funeral directors. Typically, a gendered division of labor is reinforced with women taking on the “feminine” duties of the funeral home e.g. working with families, while men are more likely to perform removals and embalmings. Third, this gendered division of labor is also recreated when funeral directors talk about types of skills they have in gendered terms. Finally, gender is disassociated from the “masculinized” culture of the funeral industry through the increased numerical presence of women (Denissen 2010); however, it is reproduced when essentialist notions of women are used to justify their position and how they are changing the culture of the funeral industry.

⁵ Pseudonyms are used for all locations, organizations, and respondents' names.

Beliefs about Women in Funeral Directing: Funeral Directors

Gender Essential

Funeral directors consistently explain that women are positive for funeral directing because they bring in a more compassionate and caring element. Similar to the rhetoric in trade journals and explanations from students, this was seen as something that was previously missing in the male-dominated field. Of the twenty-two male and female funeral directors all, except one woman, (95%) referenced “gender essential” understandings of women in the funeral industry. The four explanations below illustrate how essential cultural beliefs about women are used to explain why they are good funeral directors, would make better funeral directors, or justify why they should be funeral directors.

Women bring you into this world, all right, and women should take you out. Women are much more compassionate, much easier to talk to than men. In my opinion, men should be behind the scenes, doing the trade embalming and the lifting and everything, and women should be making all of the arrangements and dealing with the family because women have that soft side to them (Josephine, 62).

Again, I’m sure if you polled a lot of people before if people would like to meet a male or a female funeral director, I’m sure that probably 65% would say that they would prefer a female for the simple fact that they’re nurturing, caring, compassionate, and detailed. Those would be the attributes that would be of a female that they would want whereas with a male they’re just the facts, jack, do not waste my time, let’s just get it over with, let’s do it, come on, and they wouldn’t show the compassion or the caring aspect that they would expect from a female (Wiley, 57).

Years of experience, sex, or age of the funeral director typically did not matter in funeral directors' interpretations of women in the funeral industry. Josephine and Wylie both represent more experienced funeral directors and explain women as funeral directors in very gender essential terms; Will and Heather are newer to the industry, but use very similar gender essential explanations to account for women in the funeral industry.

Women are often able to emotionally understand and sympathize with people better and they're often able to empathize with people better and look at it from an emotional standpoint rather than from a business standpoint which is kind of where the business has evolved into. I think a lot of people are drawn towards that emotional helping side of things and that's why a lot of women are trying to get into it now (Heather, 28).

Women seem to be more compassionate and emotional than men. I do not know if it's because they are born that way or because they're raised that way. But I think that is why my firm started hiring women, is because they bring a softer side when interacting with families, that sometimes men can't (Will, 29).

The four excerpts above consistently reference three things. First, women bring compassion and caring to the industry. Most women funeral directors saw women's movement into the industry as a good thing because it brought a much needed emotional, compassionate, and caring side that had previously been missing. Second, that women are better at being caring and compassionate than men. In these terms, this value judgment of women's inherent skills over men's acts to justify women's position within the industry. And finally, the women funeral directors make a distinction in the division of labor between men and women in the funeral home, typically citing the business side as more appropriate for men and the caring for the family as more appropriate

for women. These explanations of women in the funeral industry reproduce understandings of essential femininity. It is important to note here that women not only reinforced ideals of essential femininity, they also did this for masculinity as well. In particular this is seen with Josephine's explanation when she advocates for a complete gendered division of labor with women handling families and men handling embalming and removals.

Competing Explanations: Gender Essential and Gender Blind

Explanations were not always as clear cut as the aforementioned. It was common for both men and women funeral directors to talk about cultural gender beliefs and funeral directing in contradictory ways. Typically this involved tapping into very essential understandings of women as having special attributes, but during their explanations, they often caught themselves, not wanting to sound too sexist or ascribe a certain characteristic to only one sex. When this happened, they often accounted for contradiction by saying there was variation in what attributes men and women possess, that it was more about the person instead of their "gender" if they had a particular characteristics, but would often further contradict themselves by saying, "women generally have more of..."

We've had female students work for us and they can do anything that is needed. A lot of times, without being too sexist, but they're [women] deemed as more caring and maybe not as...I think that there is definitely, definitely a huge open space place that women can fit in the funeral service that would be to better funeral service with it being such a male-dominated world for such a long time, and actually the guy was a funeral director, but the wife was calling the shots (Eric, 50).

I think, as in any industry, you've got an entirely different perspective in a lot of situations from a female perspective. You've got a softer tone, a more compassionate tone, and that's not to suggest that.... I mean, the business is an equal part of it, but women particularly in a situation where you need to have a high level of empathy and sympathy, it comes much more naturally than it does to a man. They tend to kind of have to train for that and with a lot of women that's the easy part. It's the technological parts that are harder, so it's kind of a reversal of position. You have a whole different perspective of how to approach a family or a circumstance or whatever that's different from a male's point of view. Again, not to suggest that men aren't also good at it as in nursing or hospice care or many of those types of fields that have that higher level of need for empathy and concern. It just typically tends to come easier to a female than it does to a man, not always, but as a general assumption (Joan, 64).

I think that men are certainly capable of approaching it from an emotional standpoint, and I have worked with very many funeral directors who were male who were definitely able to empathize, but I think that there is more of an inherent focus on business with men oftentimes than with women. There's a focus on let's get things done, let's make sure that we make money while we're doing it, let's take care of the company, so I feel like I've seen that more with men than with women (Heather, 28).

Both gender essential and gender blind views are present throughout each of these explanations. In one instance, they deny the importance of gender in determining who is a good funeral director, yet during the explanation they reinforce a very gendered understanding of men and women as funeral directors. It is a formidable attempt by the respondents to use ability rather

than gender to allocate jobs, but what eventually happens is that each of these explanations reappropriates gender as being the central factor for determining who is a good funeral director. These beliefs typically emerged when gender essential beliefs conflicted with ideas of “equality” between the sexes. Respondents would start out by saying that there are no differences between men and women, but as their explanation progressed they would later rationalize that men or women were particularly suited for certain duties of funeral directing because of inherent skills they possessed.

Breaking the Saliency of Gender for Funeral Directing

The previous explanations are the beginnings of challenging funeral directing as a gendered occupation. As a negative case, Sarah challenges this inherent “genderedness” of funeral directing explicitly by saying that it’s not really about being a man or a woman, it’s more about the skills that you possess, regardless of gender.

Overall I’d say that men and women are equally good at the job. It’s not really about being a man or a women funeral director, more so about the type of person you are. You have to be compassionate and understanding. I think the only difference would be in the strength. For instance if you have to go for a removal, not everyone dies in their bed, they may die on the toilet or something. They may weigh 300 lbs. I think the only difference there is how much a women vs. a man can lift (34).

Sarah’s explanation of gender in funeral directing was in the minority. When essentialist beliefs contradicted beliefs about equality between sexes, the essentialism explanation started to break down. Typically, what emerged in these accounts is that gender does not matter in determining who is more appropriate for being a funeral director. As Sarah indicates, it doesn’t matter if the funeral director is a man or a woman, instead it matters if they possess skills – compassion and

understanding – that are necessary for the job. As Sarah describes male or female is not necessary for an employer’s assessment of their workers. Despite this, at the very end of the quote, she revisits essential understandings by highlighting difference in physical strength between men and women. In doing so, she provides insight into the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and funeral directing through the “lifting a 300 lb. man”; however, this is a challenging feat for anyone, regardless of their sex. In these terms, the construction of hegemonic masculinity is symbolic rather than real.

The Flexibility of Gender in Explaining Women in Funeral Directing

These explanations were not stable, and respondents often used multiple CGBs in a single explanation. What this suggests is that gender is flexible when talking in terms of women in funeral directing (Liedner 1991). For instance Weylin uses gender in four different ways during the following explanation:

I think what happened was when you were to hire somebody on to the funeral home it used to be that you started at the bottom with the removals, the embalmings, all of that stuff, and a big portion of that is going to be the manipulation of a dead body. Moving it, lifting it, putting it places, and I do not know this for a fact, but I always felt that there were a lot of people who thought that women couldn’t do this. I have straight up seen a woman, a small woman in high heels, move somebody that I never thought she could move, and I was like “I’m sold.” That’s the more physical aspect of it, so I could see where funeral homes would maybe be less likely to hire a woman. There are women out there that are probably way stronger than I am and vice versa, but I think what some places have gone to now that is that they’re having women do more of the funeral arrangement aspect of it and conducting services because, personally, I think that people

are maybe more comfortable speaking to a woman versus a man in certain situations. Someone told me once that men focus on the cost of things but women want the value of things. Because it's such a sensitive area, I think maybe people would feel more comfortable talking to women. I do not know what the exact reason is that there aren't more women in funeral service. I think what people are finding out is that the more diverse that your staff can be, the larger an audience, so to speak, of customers you can appeal to. Another challenge is being bilingual or speaking multiple languages. The Hispanic community is a huge potential market for a funeral home. Well, if you do not have anybody that can speak Spanish you're wasting your time. I also think that the dynamic that a lot of women bring to funeral service is that it's something that's a little bit different or shows a little bit more of a progressive side of your funeral service. The same thing goes for somebody being bilingual or something like that. Here we're all white males, not that there's anything wrong with it, but I think that as funeral homes grow and expand, depending upon their types of market, the fact that you do have a woman working as a funeral director shows a lot of progressiveness in your funeral home, or people of different races or however you wanted to do it. It shows that you're a little bit more diverse whereas however many years go, and obviously now it's the same, but it's always been men... (39).

Weylin begins his explanation by discussing how women have been viewed as inferior or as unfit for funeral directing in terms of their physicality regarding their ability to do removals, lifting, and "manipulation of the body." He then taps into a gender blind explanation by implying equality between the sexes because, according to Weylin, there isn't a difference in terms of men and women in strength because he has seen women lift heavy bodies. Following this he begins to

talk about women in more essentialist terms by referencing that clients may prefer women funeral directors because they are “more comfortable talking to a woman....because it’s [death] such a sensitive area” and talks about men as “more concerned with the cost of things.” Finally, he highlights how women bring diversity and progressiveness to an all-white, male-dominated occupation; and this progressiveness is actually seen as an asset to the funeral home business.

What has been demonstrated throughout this previous section is that that the four explanations are present throughout funeral directors’ explanations; however, gender essential is the most salient explanation, despite this, respondents accounts of gender remains contradictory and flexible. The remainder of this chapter will look at how cultural gender beliefs about funeral directing interact with workplaces in terms of women’s opportunities, the division of labor, and skills and how the emergence of women’s spaces shapes the relationship between gender and funeral directing.

Women’s Opportunities: Consequences of the “Old Boy” Belief System

My research has indicated that there is still a significant faction of the funeral industry that is not receptive to women. White, older, funeral directors who own family funeral homes, located in rural areas were often the main descriptors used to place the “old boy” culture within the funeral industry. The experiences below illustrate the consequences of this belief system on women’s opportunities in terms of being occupational “misfits,” denied employment, or openly discriminated against.

You Do Not Belong

The “Old Boy” cultural belief system posits women as unfit for being funeral directors because they are too emotionally or physically weak. In these instances, women are typically treated as if they were out of place or did not belong in the funeral industry. This resulted in

consistently being second guessed when they showed up for removals (e.g. going to pick up the deceased) or about being a funeral director. Aubry, Lisa, and Sarah, veteran funeral directors each with over ten years of experience, reiterate a story in which they were seen as not fitting the archetype of an elderly, white man as funeral director after being second-guessed by customers and clergy.

It's more of the everyday consumer that when you show up at the house to pick up the body and they say "Are you here by yourself?" "Yes, ma'am, I'm here by myself." "You're going to do this all by yourself? Women can't do that." "Yes, we can" (Aubry, 45).

A lot of times, even after an older person has passed, families come look at us [women] and they're kind of skeptical like "Why is this young lady coming in here to take care of... We're looking for the..." (Sarah, 34).

When we were at a church preparing for a funeral service, a pastor approached one of my male colleagues and started asking them about how the funeral procession was going to take place, about this and that and other things. My colleague said, "well the funeral director is actually over there" and pointed at me. "You should probably go talk to her." The pastor looked dumbfounded, came over, and started asking me the same questions. I essentially think he had that stereotypical view of a funeral director as an elderly man in a suit presiding over a funeral home (Lisa, 34).

Aubry and Lisa both describe examples where they were questioned because their sex did not match the customers' cultural understanding of who is a funeral director. Similarly, clergy that

Lisa worked with assumed that her male colleague was the funeral director and not her. In all of these instances women occupied contradictory statuses (women working in male-dominated occupations) and were seen as out-of-place by onlookers.

Similarly, in other instances, women were sometimes assumed to be the secretary and treated accordingly. Most of the time, these “mistakes” were fixed after a quick correction by the funeral director or coworkers. The mistakes demonstrate how clients still see the occupational category as gender-typed masculine. Though these misunderstandings were typically harmless, it does speak to the general unwelcome feeling many women feel in the funeral industry. This unwelcoming culture also manifested in much more extreme ways as women also experienced instances where they were openly discriminated against by coworkers.

Hiring

One of the most prominent beliefs about women in the funeral industry is that they are not physically strong enough to go on removals and lift bodies into caskets. Like being questioned about being a funeral director, women were regularly questioned on their physical abilities when being interviewed and out on the job. In the following example, Rob, a funeral home owner, explicitly states how he was reluctant to hire women at his funeral home because he feared women’s inability to lift bodies on removals.

One of the things that was always a fear, and Jennifer’s actually the first woman I’ve hired, and the only reason I did not hire women is because when you’re doing removals and things you always have to have some brawn and more brawn than brains sometimes. That was always the excuse I heard as I got into the industry: “Well women are fine if they’re here for funeral directing, but we can’t take them on a removal. They’re not strong enough.” Well, to a point that’s true. The funeral world now, most of those same

funeral homes are hiring services to do that work, so it isn't an issue. Here's another change in the industry that has allowed women to move in easier, and of course, we have a lot of hospice which are at home, but let's face it, most people die in some sort of care facility, and there's always somebody there. But that was my biggest concern is that I wasn't sure that I could have a woman when I needed brute strength, and then I hurt my neck, and after my neck surgery, I realized I wasn't any stronger than a 90 pound woman. I had to diligently start using all the equipment that's available to lift a body, move a body, and I have to have help with all of that. Once I learned that, and I do most of it by myself, if you're using the equipment and you're thinking about what you're doing, very seldom are you in a situation that a woman can't handle, but the same situation a 70 year old man couldn't handle. You've got the same issue (66).

Rob's cultural beliefs about women's ability as funeral directors shaped his hiring practices at his funeral home. As Rob demonstrates, originally, he believed and expressed fear in having female employees going on removals. This resonated so strongly, that he actually did not hire women on his staff for a long time. His current employee, Jennifer, has only worked for him for three years. Something that is interesting about Rob's case is that he actually highlights a change in his beliefs about women's physical capacity after he injured himself and was rendered unable to do heavy lifting. He realized that with the appropriate equipment, anyone can perform removals and a person's gender doesn't matter for their ability or inability to complete a task. The technological advances made in the funeral industry actually make performing removals much easier and doesn't require brute strength anymore and thus, the "privilege" of physical strength male funeral directors claim to have over women becomes obsolete. In addition, Rob's example serves as a negative case in which male funeral directors do not question women's physical

abilities. Despite this, these belief systems about needing brute strength to go on removals still resonate with many “old boy” funeral directors and are powerful enough to shape hiring practices as they once did for Rob.

Overt Discrimination

Experiences of outright discrimination were not uncommon for female funeral directors. Several women reported incidences where funeral directors treated them as incompetent and/or questioned their working ability and overall skills. In the following example, Kate recounts how she overheard a coworker talking about her:

There was one incident when I went over to help another funeral director, and he has a baby monitor on in the embalming room, and he did not know it. It was like my third week there, maybe, and he had a baby monitor on. I called him because there were two tables and one of the tables had, it was like it had been washed down, and I was like well, that’s weird, maybe I’m supposed to set it on that table so I called him, and I could hear him talking to me [through the baby monitor], and I was like “Am I supposed to sit on this table or at the dressing table?” and he was like “Oh, just the dressing table,” and I was like “Oh, okay,” so I get off the phone with him and he had another person with him, and I could hear him. I’ve never been talked about so badly before, not to my face at least, but he called me everything but a white girl. He was saying that I was stupid, how could I not know...and just horrible things. He did not think that women should be in the funeral industry. After everything was done, after he got done, I was just standing there, and I had tears streaming down my face, and I was like “Oh my goodness, how dare him.” So I took the baby monitor, and I took it into the back of the funeral home because the embalming room and the funeral home are two separate things, and I went in there

and threw the baby monitor down on the ground, I kind of like smashed it on the ground, and I told him to go fuck himself, and I left. That's the most discrimination I've ever had, but that wasn't this company. In college, all of my professors kept saying "You're not going to be able to find a job because this is a man's industry, and you're just not going to be able to find a job. They tell you. They tell you it every day that you're not going to be able to find a job (26).

Typically these are not fleeting experiences; instead they are common experiences that many female funeral directors in this study shared over the course of their employment in the industry. In a similar experience, Charlotte describes how her status of being a woman has affected almost every aspect of her career trajectory as a funeral director from securing a job, while on the job, and interacting with families and other members of the community.

I called 33 funeral homes; I printed out 33 resumes; I went on several interviews, and they all told me no. One thing that they said was "When somebody dies how are you going to lift the body?" and I said "What? Get out!" So that was one problem. It was like being a woman in the industry you just couldn't do it, so every interview I went on it was always men. I did not really run into any women who were hiring but the struggle came from a lot of this area. That was the main one, being a woman and not wanting to work there. Once I got an internship, I got in with a female funeral director, and I was only there because the secretary was on maternity leave, so I probably wouldn't have gotten a job there either. I was only there because she needed extra help. Once I got my license, opposition came from everybody, even the families. Nothing was extremely hard but a lot of the families said, "You can't possibly know what you're doing." I do not know why not, you know. I've been working at funeral homes for years; I graduated

mortuary school; I have the license; I'm a licensed funeral director, and they wouldn't believe that I knew what was I was doing. I would go to family's homes, and they would actually ask me to leave. I would get to their front door, and they would say "We do not really want to deal with you." A lot of the males in the industry would call and ask me what I was doing with the funeral home, why was I running a funeral home, and the stories go on and on. I could talk all day about it. It was a lot of hurt feelings, and I thought I was the only one, honest to God. Honest to God, I thought I was the only one until I started the t-shirts and products, and women started sending in their applications and their stories, and I said "We're all in this struggle together." That's just a few things but there is a lot of opposition when it comes to women in the funeral industry, especially if you do not have family in the industry. If you have family in the business, you most likely do not have anything to worry about, but if you're a first generation, then it's another story (45).

Despite Charlotte's training and years of working in the funeral industry, her status as a woman automatically negated any legitimacy she may have as a funeral director. She was dismissed by families, customers, and denied employment. In addition, Charlotte describes how she felt as if she was the only one who was having these experiences. It wasn't until she began socializing with other female funeral directors that she found out this was actually a common experience for female funeral directors. Charlotte occupied a structurally powerless position in the funeral industry. This can be particularly problematic for women in male-dominated fields in which they feel isolated and do not have access to other women due to low numbers and structural/geographical location. Charlotte was eventually able to secure a job despite many of the obstacles she faced. It was these experiences that motivated her to start a group specifically

for women funeral directors. She realized that her experience was not unique to her and felt a space needed to be created where women could come together and share experiences and support one another.

Division of Labor

Structure of Corporate vs. Family-Owned Funeral Homes

Corporate

For the purpose of this study, family-owned funeral homes refer to funeral homes owned by either an individual funeral director or a partnership of funeral directors; corporate funeral homes refer to funeral homes that are owned by corporate entities i.e. Stewart Enterprises or Service Corporate International.

Given that many of the gendered beliefs in the funeral industry deal with physicality and emotionality – gendered attributes – it is expected that how labor is divided up will greatly reflect essential understandings of gender. Before looking at the gendered division of labor in the funeral industry, I will explore how work is typically structured in corporate vs. family-owned funeral homes in the United States to contextualize the division of labor in each setting. The following descriptions of funeral services and processes reflect funeral practices typically associated with white, middle class, Judeo-Christians in the United States (Mitford 1998).

Eric (50), probably best captures the difference between family-owned and corporate funeral homes: “We’re [family-owned] kind of more multitasking and a lot of times they’re [corporate] more singular task.” Corporate funeral homes have centralized operations between many different funeral homes. The division of labor in corporate funeral homes is broken down into varying steps which are handled by different entities of a larger operation. Removal services pick up the body and take it to be embalmed by “trade-embalmers” who specialize only in

embalming. Following the embalmment the body is taken to the funeral home, and the arrangement and ceremony are organized with a funeral director. If the body is being cremated, it is taken directly to the crematorium by the removal service, and the family will meet with the funeral director the next day to make arrangements for the funeral ceremony. In the corporate funeral home, directors are assigned families by administrative assistants and their family assignment depends on their current workload. As Lisa describes it, “So you would get to work that morning and through the fax machine that day you would know that you’re meeting with this family at 9, you’re meeting with this family at 1, and this family at 3. Someone else was doing all of that so there was no one person” (34). Thus in the corporate funeral setting, someone is hired to fill a specific role:

When you’re in the corporate setting, you’re specialized so whether you’re a funeral director or an embalmer. You can’t do both in their settings, so I was hired to be a funeral director, so I never did any embalmings. They do those in a central location, and then we would go get the bodies from the central location and bring them back to our location, so I never did any removal. I never even made my own appointments with the families. Someone else was doing that (Lisa, 34).

Lisa highlights the specialized division of labor in the funeral home where each task involved, from the removal of the body to its final deposition, is conducted by separate entities of the corporate funeral home. Families will deal with several different people from start to finish. For instance, they may make the arrangements with one funeral director; however the funeral director in attendance at their ceremony may be someone else. Thus, jobs in corporate settings are interchangeable given the explicit division of labor.

Family-Owned

Many of the funeral directors who worked in family-owned settings whom I interviewed for this study laughed when I asked them “What is a typical day for you?” or “Can you please describe a typical day on the job?” The most common answer was: “unpredictable.” This is particularly accurate for family-owned funeral directors whose job is based on what is needed to be done in that instance instead of a specific role. In family-owned settings, the division of labor is much more flexible. Funeral directors in family-owned settings participate in every step from pick up to preparing the body for final deposition. Typically, they serve the same family from their initial contact until the end of the funeral ceremony. In the family-owned funeral home, the division of labor is often determined on a first come, first served basis (who receives the call) or by seniority, though this is not always the case, especially in smaller funeral homes with limited employees. Typically, when tasks are ranked by seniority, more inexperienced funeral directors are more likely to do the embalming and go on removals. This gradually shifts, and as Weylin states, “It’s rare that the older funeral directors to do embalmings. They typically just meet with families.”

Both work settings exemplify differently organized work: specialized vs. flexible. This differentiation coupled with CGBs informs how much say those in positions of power (owners) have in determining the types of tasks allocated for men or women funeral directors. Here is where cultural gender beliefs about funeral directors intersect with the organization of work to shape what men and women are allowed to do.

Gendered Division of Labor

“Old Boy”

Cultural beliefs about gender shape the basic social relations of institutions within society (Ridgeway 2009). Thus, the cultural beliefs about gender that pervade the funeral directing

occupation are likely to shape and be used to justify how work is organized on a more micro-level. In most general terms, funeral directors in family-owned funeral homes described themselves as “being the jack of all trades” and that they did everything. This, however, was slightly different for women. Societal CGBs shaped what was seen as appropriate working duties for female funeral directors. Most notably, what it involved was women not performing certain duties in the funeral home (removals or embalming); however, the rationale varied as to why women were prevented or discouraged from performing said duties. In these instances, embalming and going on removals were not seen as appropriate duties for female funeral directors.

Heather explains how the jobs she was assigned were determined by these beliefs systems about what she was or was not able to do because she is a woman. She explains how she was deterred from going on removals because of her small stature and was discouraged from going into the embalming room for similar reasons.

One of the things that people are pretty reluctant to do, and I’m pretty petite in stature, I’m about 5’2,” and I weigh around 100 pounds, so they’re often very unwilling to allow me to go do things like make removals from houses because they’re concerned about my ability to move the weight around. A lot of times, they are unwilling to let me back into the prep room. I worked for a funeral home where he kept promising me that he would register me as an apprenticeship, but he would never let me in the prep room, and it wasn’t ever explicitly stated, but there was definitely an air of “You’re a woman, and I do not have any problem allowing myself back here to embalm, but I do not think that I trust you.” He had a serious woman problem. He wouldn’t let me drive the coach, which is what we call the hearse. Even if I had worked with the family and scheduled all the

services, he wouldn't let me go out and work the services. None of it is ever explicitly stated, but it's all just kind of shown in action. You can tell where you're not wanted. It's just kind of an undertone of the way you're told to do things or the way you are sent out or are not sent out (28).

Tracy on the other hand was pushed towards more traditionally female roles in the funeral industry:

Yeah, that's kind of 50/50 for me because... Well, actually, no, it's not. One funeral home, I was really able to get out and do a whole bunch, but I was also taking a mandatory school internship, so I think it probably would have reflected poorly on them if the student hadn't learned anything, but I would say yeah, the other two where I got employment on my own it was very much "Here's paperwork, file it. You're good here in the office. You can definitely answer the telephone." It was very much "go ahead and be a desk jockey" (40).

In one of Heather's previous jobs she was deterred from driving the hearse, embalming, and going on removals. Countering Heather's experience, Tracy was actually pushed toward what is considered "women's work" in the funeral home. Many respondents shared similar experiences where they were relegated to secretarial roles and described their work as either "glorified secretary" or "desk jockey." In addition, Heather identifies this culture of not allowing women to perform certain duties as something that was never made explicit, yet was an underlying, unspoken belief system. Specifically, Heather is touching on how CGBs frame the basic social relations of the workplace "before we know it" (Ridgeway 2009). Individuals have already been ascribed with these basic notions of what men and women can/can't do in terms of funeral

directing. In a more extreme example, Sarah reflects on how she was completely barred from certain job duties in her experience working at a family-owned funeral home for ten years.

Sarah: I worked at this funeral home since 2000, and it was actually the wife who thought I wasn't doing appropriate gender roles. She basically said that I shouldn't be embalming, so basically what she wanted me to do is work with her in the office instead of being downstairs. Downstairs is where we had the embalming room, and the office was upstairs. When I would try to go downstairs she would say, "well I need you up here," or "we need more candles." She tried to keep me more around the office and out of the embalming room. Basically, I stopped embalming bodies around 2003, and they had me doing more office work instead of the behind the scenes things because the owner's wife did not see embalming as an appropriate job for a women to do.

Interviewer: Would her son keep you out of the embalming room too?

Sarah: Yeah pretty much. He'd do the same thing his mother would. He would say that I need you upstairs for this and this and this. I told him what his mother had said to me years back, and he said, "she's just joking." But I knew better. There was a time when one of the other male funeral directors, not the owner's son, let me go and embalm a body. He said that the McAdams' were out of town and knew that I had been trained to be a funeral director and knew how to embalm. So three years ago was the last time I embalmed a body. But I did not embalm any bodies from 2003-2009 (34).

In Sarah, Tracy, and Heather's experience, all were either prevented from performing the traditionally considered masculine aspects of funeral directing and in some cases were pushed into more secretarial roles. This rationale reflects how the "old boys" perceive women in the funeral industry as not fitting. Sarah, in particular, worked at this funeral home for approximately

ten years. She eventually decided to leave the home after being continually denied opportunities to embalm bodies, something that she readily enjoyed. She is now pursuing a degree in respiratory therapy. Sarah was very aware that she was blatantly being discriminated against; however, when further questioned why she did not sue for gender discrimination, Sarah elaborated:

I decided not to file a law suit basically because it was a small business, and it might get around. I was afraid that it might affect my ability to get another job. Essentially, I did not want people to think I was too aggressive, and I did not want to be known as Sarah Johnson the ball-buster (34).

Sarah decided not to file a law suit because she did not want to hinder her chances of getting hired again in a very small, interconnected industry and because filing a law suit seemed incompatible with gender-appropriate behavior for a female funeral director. What is very interesting is that Sarah describes herself in very gendered terms as not wanting to be too “aggressive” or a “ball-buster” – behavior that is not gender-appropriate for women. In a similar instance, Michelle reiterated the same sentiment, as to why she did not pursue legal action in clear instances of gender discrimination.

The bad thing about this industry is if you go public with something like that, because I know it’s a lawsuit waiting to happen, but if you go public with something like that and file a lawsuit, then I would be blacklisted in the industry, and I would never ever get a job. It’s a matter of either I suck it up and deal with it and hope and pray that somebody has an opening that they’ll put me in, or I get blacklisted, and I can give up the dream of ever doing it (34).

Sarah's and Michelle's experiences demonstrate the complete lack of structural power that female funeral directors have in terms of their ability to protect themselves. In these instances, women are openly discriminated against; however, they do not seek outside legal help because they fear being ousted from a very close-knit and male-dominated industry.

Benevolent Sexism

Not all women reported having such hostile interactions; instead, they described situations in which male colleagues volunteered to lift caskets for them or help them with other tasks. In these instances, women experience what is commonly known as benevolent sexism in which men do things for women because it is considered chivalrous.

I do not think that's exclusive to the funeral industry, and as women get more involved in the funeral industry and become funeral directors, I still think some of the men go "Oh, well, if you're here go ahead and make these folders for me," and try to put them back in the secretarial role. You know, you're here, you can meet with the families, but you've got to do these folders, and you've got to do this paperwork. "Oh, do not worry about that, I'll take care of it." It's still that way a little bit in some situations, but I'm just as strong as some of the guys, and I'm not as strong as the others, but I can still do my fair share, and I can lift the casket, and I can move things around, and they will be like "Woah, woah, woah, it's okay; we'll get it. Let me help you with that." Chivalry is not dead but there is a time and a place for it (Audry, 45).

The owner does not see any difference between male or female. I mean he is not going to have me out there lifting bodies; he's just not going to do that, but the work is the same. Arrangements, anybody who is a funeral director can do that. Anybody that's funeral

staff can handle arrangements. Anybody that's funeral staff can direct funerals. Anybody that's funeral staff that's trained well enough can embalm and prep. It doesn't make any difference. We all have our specific roles that we have chosen, but at the end of the day any of us could do it and will and have (Trisha, 44).

Of course these interactions could be perceived as coworkers being nice to each other and helping one another out. However, what we miss in this previous interpretation is the gendered nature of this interaction. In this situation women are relegated to the less powerful position in which women need men to do things for them because they aren't strong enough, thus recreating stereotypes and perceptions of women being not as well-equipped as men to be funeral directors.

All of the aforementioned examples have been from women who have been employed in family-owned funeral homes. Typically in family-owned funeral homes, the gendered division of labor was overtly reinforced by explicitly barring women from specific duties, or it was reinforced in a more casual sense by men doing things for women in the funeral industry to be nice to them because they are women. In the following example, Heather describes a similar experience in corporate settings when being questioned about the division of labor by sex in her work experiences:

No, not in corporate which is kind of one of things that's interesting about corporate because they would get slapped with a lawsuit so hard and so fast, so it's definitely a place where you couldn't do that, and I would actually say that they're pretty good about it legally, but in any situation I've been in at this corporate place where if anyone has called me out for my gender it hasn't been "Oh, you can't do that because you're a woman," it's been kind of very old fashioned, chivalrous, "I would like to do that for you because I feel like it is my job as a man. Please let me lift that for you." It's interesting

in that way. There's not such a negative tone to it comparative to the family-owned where it seems very derogatory as they're looking at us the lesser and the weaker sex and not just we're trying to look out for you because you're littler than us (28).

Those who worked in corporate settings consistently cited corporate as being more equal or gender-friendly to women. When further questioned about this respondents like Heather said that discrimination did not happen in these settings because they would get "slapped with a lawsuit." Despite the general consensus that corporate settings were more equal than family-owned settings, the gendered division of labor was recreated in corporate settings. The mechanisms for the reproduction of this type of gendered division of labor are much more subtle and can be perceived as male coworkers being nice to women. It's important to note here that, despite being perceived as more equal or better for women, CGBs about women and funeral directing also shaped the tasks women did in corporate settings as well.

Challenging the Gendered Division of Labor

There were instances where funeral directors had experiences where bosses did not determine their job duties using beliefs about gender. For example, Kate after several years of having trouble finding a job and being treated negatively by other employers, found an employer who did not treat her differently because of her gender.

I do absolutely everything. I do everything from cleaning to washing the hearse, going on removals by myself; I do embalming; I embalm autopsies; I do every body. I do restorative art; I do arrangements; I do memorial packages; I do price changes; I write contracts; I do prearrangements; I arrange the flowers; I take pictures; I do everything. There's nothing that I do not do. I really lucked out. My boss will go away for a week on vacation and leaves me in charge, and I can have five funerals and do them all. I pay

bills, I do everything. He trusts me to do everything. I do not know one thing I do not do. We just remodeled our funeral home last year, cleaning and everything, and I did not know that I signed up for cleaning, but I did. I do everything (26).

Despite the general consistency of a gendered division of labor, women being treated differently and feeling out of place in family-owned funeral homes, Kate's experience serves as a negative case in determining how to challenge the gendered division of labor for women working in family-owned settings. Kate's boss is in his 30s and is a first-generation funeral home owner, both of which are atypical.

What Skills Make a “Good” Funeral Director?

Compassion

The funeral directors in my sample continually identified compassion as a necessary skill required to be a good funeral director. Fifteen out of twenty-two funeral directors in this study commented on women's ability to be more compassionate than men. Though this was a consistent skill necessary to be a funeral director, they often directly compared men and women's ability to be compassionate and actually privileged women in this regard. Both men and women in this sample continually identified women as better at the emotional side of funeral directing than men. Using gender essential explanations of women's skills, several respondents commented on how women were inherently more compassionate.

I think women are really good funeral directors because, for whatever reason, I think they can show more compassion but still be in businesslike form. Sometimes, I think men may have a hard time with that, and I'm not knocking them. I tell them that all the time in class. Women are just compassionate. They can turn on the water works if they need to, and that's good for them if they can turn them off (Tracy, 40).

Women bring you into this world, all right, and women should take you out. Women are much more compassionate, much easier to talk to than men. In my opinion, men should be behind the scenes, doing the trade embalming and the lifting and everything, and women should be making all of the arrangements and dealing with the family because women have that soft side to them (Josephine, 62).

I think it's that connection. It's looking at something that has been traditionally male-dominated because it was a difficult thing to deal with that we know that men – ha ha – are so much better with emotions. It's traditionally been male-dominated and thinking that women can't do this for whatever reason, either the emotion or the business side. Women have come a long way in independence and in business and in emotion, and yet we still have the compassion to handle it. We're caregivers. Women have been raised to be caregivers. We're taught to be caregivers so what better way of putting that to work and to use than to be in an industry where caregiving is a very important part? We're also able to earn a living at it. If your work is what you love, you never work a day in your life, right? I think a lot of women are going into it and some of the more gruesome things, the embalming itself, women are too delicate to handle things like that, right? We aren't. The embalming portion of it is no worse than sick kids and dirty diapers. Women do a lot of things that men will not do (Aubry, 45).

In the three previous examples, Tracy, Aubry, and Josephine comment on women's ability to be more compassionate than men. In the first example, Tracy indicates that women are better at navigating between the business and emotional sides of funeral directing because they are

better able to perform emotional labor. Josephine, on the other hand, comments on the gendered division of labor in the funeral home, that men should stay in the backstage area performing embalmings etc. while women should be doing the front stage working with family. Finally, Aubry comments on how women have actually made progress in the funeral homes, and inherent characteristics that were once seen as deterrents for them (emotionality) are now strengths attributed to female funeral directors. These three examples demonstrate the multitude of different ways CGBs can be used to justify the saliency of gender to the occupational category of funeral directing. Despite these essentialist notions making sense, there were many occurrences of gendered beliefs conflicting.

Emergence of Women's Spaces

Challenging the Industry's Masculinized Culture

Women's Spaces

Despite their contradictory status of women in the funeral industry; there has been the development of spaces specifically for women funeral directors. Most notably has been the development of female funeral directing occupational associations. Both were founded out of a need to create more female friendly environments where women could meet and discuss their experiences in the industry, network, and provide mentorship and support for one another. In the following example, Charlotte talks about how she discovered she wasn't the only one who had experienced hostility within the funeral industry:

I said "Hmm, a movement?" and then I thought about all the things that I had been through in the funeral industry, and I said "You know, maybe this is bigger than what I'm seeing here," so I created an application online, and within about a month, we had 25 women, and now it hasn't even been two years, and we have over 700. So women were

right; it was a movement, and I realized it needed to be created based on their stories, based on my story about the struggle that I had been through (45).

In addition, not only do these groups give face to the struggles that women experience in the industry, it also provides a place of support and empowerment.

I think things like Funeral Divas and AAFP are really good for camaraderie, networking, and support. I think it's a great place for first generation funeral directors. Funeral directors to go for networking they can meet similar people who go through the same types of things they do in the funeral industry (Sarah, 34).

I think that it's really important for people in any industry to have contact with others and especially for women in the funeral industry because we are a growing number but we're still sort of newer in the industry. So it's important for us to always know a name when like a wife calls and says she just lost her husband, and he's over here, can we refer her to anyone? It's nice to know some of the other funeral directors and other people in the industry so you can refer them personally when a situation arises and just for camaraderie. We understand each other (Rebekah, 33).

Women's spaces served several purposes. First, it provided an opportunity in which women could share their experiences of what it was like being a woman in the funeral industry. Second, they served as locations for gaining structural power. Charlotte identifies how the low visibility of women in the industry leads her to believe that she was the only one experiencing discrimination. By collectively identifying women's experiences and needs, women-centered groups are addressing the issues that women face and giving voice to their movement in to the funeral directing occupation.

Obscuring the Sex and Gender of Funeral Directing

In a study conducted by Kelan (2010) of a male-dominated information computer technology occupation (ICT), she studied how the numerical presence of women was enough to obscure the traditional gender-typing of ICT occupation. Though this is not akin to undoing gender, it does obscure the automatic cultural association of men with funeral directing when women are numerically present in the occupation. I observed similar things in the funeral industry.

I think the industry is proud of the women. I think we're moving them into the current century. Funeral service has a tendency to be about two centuries behind where we should be, especially in some things, so I think women are trying to close the gap a little bit (Tracy, 40).

I think more and more there is becoming a place for women to move into the industry. I think partially because the industry is changing. The stereotype of the older white man in a suit is slowly dwindling away, and I think because that is happening because more and more women are moving in (Sarah, 34).

In the previous two examples, Tracy and Sarah express how the movement of women into the industry is challenging two things. First, is the archaic nature of the funeral industry and that women are bringing it up to the current century. In addition, the movement of women into the funeral industry is obscuring the cultural stereotypes of a funeral director being an older white man in a suit, while also making it more acceptable for women to be funeral directors. In addition to obscuring the "gender" by their presence in the industry, other female funeral directors attribute the feminization of the funeral industry as bringing a "softer" or "fresher" side to the funeral industry, again emphasizing the essential explanations of women and funeral

directing. As Lisa elaborates, it brings a fresher face to the funeral industry because families are better able to connect with women than they are with male funeral directors.

Yeah, director, and so really there's an immediate connection once we start talking and there's a whole level that I do not know how it changes but it does, the dynamics in the room changes. At first it's kind of like "What are you doing in here? You're not old enough to do this." I just think it puts a fresher face on the changes that are going on in the industry (Lisa, 34).

Similarly, Tracy highlights how the movement of women into the industry has made the death-care industry more acceptable to the general public.

Women have changed probably... they probably have helped with a little bit more personalization of funerals. I think that if you've talked to anybody in the business you've probably heard them say baby boomers, the generation of baby boomers has changed a lot of the things that funeral business has done in the past because they're original thinkers. They think outside the box, and they think more on personalization versus "let's pick this casket, and let's put her in this casket. Let's have all that matching, and let's close her up." They think more of "Let's celebrate her life. Let's talk about what she did in life, and let's celebrate that. Let's not celebrate what color casket she's in." It's part of the presentation, but it's not all of it, so I think females may have helped encourage more of that. You know, we're okay with putting pictures out. There's nothing wrong with putting a memory table up and putting pictures of the loved one and what they did during their lives and all these pictures of their hobbies, them doing their hobbies, whatever they were. Women have just made it more acceptable. That's the best way I can put it. They've made things more acceptable to the general public (40).

Obviously women's movement into the funeral industry obscures the cultural association of men with funeral directing and breaks the cultural stereotype of the funeral director as an elderly white man. This cultural association of men and funeral directing is further disrupted by emphasizing the essential understanding of what women bring to the funeral industry. Another area in which the cultural association of men with funeral directing is disrupted happened in instances where customers first assumed that the man was director, but it was the woman. These customers had to reframe their cultural understanding of who is a funeral director. As the previous examples illustrate, the funeral industry is changing because women are moving into it. For instance, women bring a fresher face, and it is associated with their ability to plan celebrations of life. In these instances, the movement of women has softened the image of the funeral directing occupation through personalization of funeral ceremonies. Women, because they are soft, caring, good at talking with families etc., have made death less scary, and therefore, have made it more acceptable to the funeral industry. In a broader sense, the movement of women into the funeral industry challenges the stigmatization of funeral directing and death.

What this demonstrates is that the traditional gender-typing of the funeral industry – masculine – is being challenged, but the way in which it is being challenged reproduces – via essential femininity – the gender status quo. It challenges the masculinized culture because women's presence in the industry obscures the automatic association of men with funeral directing. The gender status quo is reproduced because essential notions of women are used to justify women's movement into the industry, their position as funeral directors, and how they are changing the industry.

Conclusion

What this research demonstrates is how different gender ideologies can function and interact with each other in one occupation and shape work in a myriad of different ways. In most beliefs systems and processes in the funeral home, gender is being reproduced. The “old boy” understanding of women keeps them in less powerful positions. The gender essential understanding reinforces very essentialist notions of women as funeral directors who are inherently good and better at being caring and compassionate than men. These essential understandings of men and women funeral directors is further recreated when seeing how wider CGBs about women in funeral directing shape the types of tasks men and women perform in the funeral home. Even in instances where the gender binary is challenged and funeral directors acknowledge that attributes of good funeral directors are not sex-specific; they later contradict themselves by stating that typically one or more of the attributes are more likely associated with a particular gender. The sites of (minimal) resistance are in instances where gender was not used to determine what types of jobs funeral directors should perform, where they formed women funeral directing organizations, and challenged funeral directors’ claims that they couldn’t lift or perform other elements of the job. Additionally, respondents and research present the idea that women’s presence in male-dominated occupations temporarily can obscure the automatic cultural association of men with funeral directing. In these instances, they reproduce the traditional gender-typing of the industry; however, in speaking in terms of how they challenge this traditional gender-typing, women directors emphasized the softer side they were bringing to funeral directing, thus reproducing very essential gendered understandings of what it means to be a woman funeral director.

Chapter 8 - Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigates the relationship between the feminization of the funeral industry and CGBs about funeral directing. This research was guided by three overarching research questions: 1) What are the CGBs (gender-typing) in the funeral directing occupation? 2) What are funeral directors' and students' beliefs about women in the funeral directing occupation? 3) How do current funeral directors and future funeral directors use CGBs to challenge or reproduce gender inequality in workplaces and educational settings? To answer these questions, I analyzed articles from funerary trade journals and interviewed mortuary science students and funeral directors.

Typically, prior work does emphasize that beliefs follow feminization and are then used to justify the redistribution of inequality; however, there is a feedback loop here. People can negotiate CGBs and how they can influence gender inequality. The main contribution of my study demonstrates how individuals negotiate gender explanations and use gender explanations to challenge and reproduce gender inequality. The remainder of this chapter addresses my main findings, main contribution, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Trade Journals, Funeral Directors, and Students

Occupational Cultural Gender Beliefs: Trade Journals, Students, and Directors

My research identified four competing gender explanations that were used to explain women in funeral directing: “old boy,” gender essential, gender blind, and gender progressive. “Old boy” clearly states that women do not belong in the funeral industry; gender essential suggests that women make good funeral directors because of their inherent caring and nurturing natures; gender blind states that men and women are equal or the same; and gender progressive

identifies that gender issues shape work in the funeral industry and that gender should not be used as a proxy to evaluate or determine job skills of men or women.

One of the main findings of my research was the constantly changing and contradictory nature of the gender explanations used to describe women in funeral directing. “Old boy” was the traditional gender-typing of the industry. This gender explanation was used at the turn of the century to prevent women from entering the occupation and mortuary science programs. Since feminization, women moving into the funeral industry have co-opted “old boys” essential understanding of them and used it to justify why they belong in the industry. Gender essential’s reorientation of these essential attributes as positive is a direct challenge to the “old boy” explanations of funeral directing. The “old boy” rhetoric of funeral directing is still present within the industry but, as my analysis of trade journals shows, has declined in prominence.

Gender essential understandings in the contemporary industry are the hegemonic gender explanations found throughout trade journals and students’ and directors’ accounts. Typically the gender essential ideology saw women as inherently nurturing, compassionate, and caring – all attributes seen as well-suited for the central tasks for funeral directors’ jobs. Connected to this was also seeing women’s movement in the industry as positive, that their female perspective was adding a dynamic (emotionality) that had previously been missing and that they were assets to the industry. Similarly, funeral directors and students’ beliefs about funeral directing saw women (and themselves) as particularly suited to be funeral directors for the same reasons: inherent attributes that made them good funeral directors (caring, compassion, ability to organize) and being better than men at these things. My findings align with other research that finds gender-typing explanations drawing on women’s inherent attributes (Irvine and Vermilya 2010; Reskin

and Roos 1990; Pierce 1995; Acker 1990; Rabe-Hemp 2009), thus resulting in the reproduction of gender.

Typically, studies that explore the gender-typing of an occupation focus on hegemonic gender beliefs. My study differs from the aforementioned in the fact that it identifies multiple gender-typing explanations in the funeral directing occupation. Gender essential and nonhegemonic or alternative gender beliefs, gender blind, “old boy,” and gender progressive coexist within the same occupation. Instead of just funeral directors and students “buying in” to hegemonic beliefs systems, my findings demonstrates areas where there are instances of competing gendered explanations of women in funeral directing. These breaking points in gender explanations become particularly apparent when discussing gender blind juxtaposed against gender essential. Points of contradiction emerged when inherent differences between men and women were emphasized in the context of equality. This was a contradiction found across trade journals, funeral directors, and students’ belief systems. When this happened, their explanations began to break down. They often accounted for this contradiction by saying there was variation in what attributes men and women possess, that it was more about the person instead of their gender, but would often further contradict themselves by saying, “women generally have more of...” The contradictory and/or competing nature of these explanations demonstrate the change mechanism in how dominant beliefs about gender in funeral directing shift as funeral directors and students reinterpret and adapt CGBs.

For the trade journals, gender essential remains a prominent explanation throughout; however, as feminization progresses, other explanations begin to emerge, most notably gender blind and gender progressive. Though the trade journal did indicate a more progressive approach to gender and funeral directing in more recent explanations, this understanding of women in

funeral directing (as being gender aware and breaking the saliency of gender and funeral directing) did not translate into funeral directors' and students' beliefs about women in funeral directing. Funeral directors and students continued to use gender essential understandings to talk about women in funeral directing.

There is a large debate among occupational feminization: what comes first, CGBs or inequality often found in feminizing occupations? In some studies of feminization, material inequality comes first, and CGBs are used later to justify this inequality (Reskin and Roos 1990). In other approaches, such as devaluation, CGBs set up women's work as devalued, and because it is socially devalued, it is provided less compensation (Levanon et al. 2009). In the funeral industry, which comes first is a bit muddled. For instance, prior to feminization there was already an understanding that women did not belong in the funeral industry, and as some of my respondents accounts suggest, "old boy" notions were used to justify overt discrimination of women, keeping them out of mortuary science programs and not hiring them. In addition, it seems then after feminization, the gender explanation regarding women in the industry changed. Essential notions of women are framed in a positive way and women are encouraged to become funeral directors. This is then used to justify the reconfigurations of the division of labor, e.g. that women are better at caring, and men are better at the physical job duties. My study provides some evidence in favor of both: CGBs are available as a social template before ("old boy"), during (gender essential), and after feminization (gender blind, gender progressive).

Workplace and Educational Setting: Directors and Students

CGBs also structured workplace and educational settings in terms of people's opportunities, experiences, and the division of labor. In a more direct example of how people in positions of power (funeral home owners) can shape workplace opportunities, Rob directly

tapped into “old boy” notions of women as funeral directors when he explained how he feared hiring a woman on his staff because of physical limitations. Rob was afraid that a woman did not have the brute strength to keep up with the physical demands of lifting and going on removals.

Other workplace experiences involved instances of hostile sexism. In these instances, women in interactions with others were consistently questioned or second-guessed on their abilities to perform certain tasks (removals or embalming) or were mistaken for secretaries or assistants instead of being perceived as funeral directors by customers. The second guessing of women as funeral directors reinforces the cultural idea that funeral directing is gender-typed as a man’s occupation. Students were less likely to report experiences of overt discrimination. They reported no experiences of overt discrimination in school settings. They were more likely to experience discrimination while completing their practicums or looking for jobs. Though few experienced this, their experiences were similar to female funeral directors, i.e. being told that they weren’t going to be hired because they were a woman. I attribute student’s minimal experiences of discrimination to student’s lesser time spent in the funeral industry. They still (for the most part) occupy positions that shield them from hostile experiences. Male funeral directors and students did not report any experiences of discrimination based on sex.

Similar sentiments – gender essential understandings of women – were used to justify the division of labor. In the aforementioned examples, essential understandings of women were used to effectively bar women from access to the funeral industry, whereas in the following examples essential understandings were used to structure the division of labor. For the funeral industry, the CGBs used to rationalize the distribution of jobs was consistent across context. This was reflected in the gendered division of labor found in family-owned funeral homes and corporate settings. The gendered division of labor places women as most appropriate in dealing with

families and the front room whereas men were suited for going on removals and embalming the deceased. This gendered division of labor was even further reinforced by interactions between workers and coworkers and bosses. Female funeral directors illustrated how their male colleagues would lift things for them because it was the chivalrous thing to do. In other instances, they were completely barred from embalming by the funeral home owner.

As the gendered division of labor demonstrates, typically women were seen as compatible with emotionality; however, this was not always the case. This understanding is complicated a bit when we consider “old boy” explanations against gender essential explanations. Emotionality is culturally understood as “feminine;” however, in the context of working with funeral directing, CGBs are differentially used to explain who is better suited for the job. When we breakdown “old boy,” men are seen as being better able to handle funeral directing because of their emotional strength; in contrast, gender essential puts women as being better able to handle funeral directing because they are emotionally expressive. This follows Liedner’s (1991) idea that interpretations of job features is largely shaped by audiences and, in the case of funeral directing, also by clients, customers, and funeral home owners.

Funeral Directors’ and Students’ Gender Negotiation

Women in the funeral industry occupy what is known as a contradictory status, where their gender status does not match the gender-typing of the occupation (Denissen 2010). Research finds that women respond to contradictory statuses in three ways: by using essential femininity (Irvine & Vermilya 2010, Denissen 2010), de-emphasizing gender differentiation between masculinity and femininity (Rabe-Hemp 2009, Denissen 2010), or destabilizing gender (Kelan 2010). Similar to other studies of women occupying contradictory locations in masculinized workplaces, my research demonstrates how funeral directors used these strategies

in ways that resulted in outcomes that reproduced or challenged the gender-typing of funeral directing.

Funeral directors' and students' use essentialist understandings of women to justify their position within the funeral industry. Like female veterinarians, funeral directors and students saw themselves and other women as particularly suited for funeral directing given their innate emotionality (Irvine and Vermilya 2010). In addition, students also acknowledged how the caring element of funeral directing is what drew them to funeral directing. In this regard, female students saw their work as funeral directors as a calling. In juxtaposition, male students were more likely to emphasize business related things (wanting a steady job or being connected to the family business) which drew them to funeral directing. The reasons for choosing funeral directing as an occupation mimics the gendered division of labor found in funeral homes (i.e. women caring for families, and men oriented toward the physical and business aspects of funeral directing).

Women funeral directors and student de-emphasized the differentiation between masculinity and femininity in funeral directing by proving themselves as workers. For instance, Shelby was made fun of by male colleagues for wearing high heels and skirts to work. Shelby's gender was seen as not consistent with her worker identity of funeral director. In an effort to challenge this stereotype and prove herself as a funeral director, Shelby goes on removals, even when coworkers and bosses did not want her to. In addition, Shelby's experience highlights her contradictory status of being a woman in the funeral industry. She was called out in terms of her femininity (dressing like a lady) and her ability to perform the requirements of the job (going on removals and lifting). Jill also attempted to break the gendered understanding of funeral directing by critiquing the gendered expectations that hold her accountable to be caring and

compassionate as a woman funeral director. Despite her challenge to the gendered expectations, she also realized that to succeed as a funeral director she would have to comply with these expectations.

Finally, Sarah destabilizes gender by rejecting the gendered nature of funeral directing. She did this by critiquing the idea of gender being used as an evaluative mechanism for determining who is a good funeral director. For Sarah, it doesn't matter if the funeral director is a man or a woman, instead it matters if they possess skills – compassion and understanding – that are necessary for the job. As Sarah describes, male or female is not necessary for an employer's assessment of their workers. And in this instance, gender is rendered irrelevant to funeral directing work.

Theoretical Contribution

How Feminization can Challenge the Traditional Gender-Typing of an Occupation

Research long documents that feminization is bad for women, mainly resulting in the re-creation of gender inequality (Reskin and Roos 1990; Enarson 1993; Nesbitt 1997; Rich 1995; Tienari 1999; Chiu and Leicht 1999; Irvine and Vermilya 2010). Despite this consistent finding, researchers continue to advocate for studies that look at feminization in varying contexts to see if there are instances where feminization challenges the gender-typing of an occupation (Adams 2010; Le Feuvre 2009). My research offers a context in which the gender-typing of an occupation is challenged in four ways.

The first way the traditional gender-typing of the occupation is being challenged involves gender essential assertions that women make better funeral directors. When “old boys” used essentialist explanations to keep women out, women moving into the industry challenged this by using the same essentialist explanations to justify their place in the industry and say that women

should come in. Despite its apparent reproduction of traditional understandings of gender, it simultaneously challenges the “old boy” gender-typing of funeral directing. Thus, on one hand, we have the reproduction of traditional understandings of gender, while on the other there is a direct challenge to the masculinized nature of funeral directing. Ridgeway (2004) further elaborates how this preference for women in workplace settings can further challenge gender inequality:

If the structural terms on which people who are classified as men and women are allowed to encounter one another do not repeatedly enact power and influence relations that predominantly favor men in people’s everyday experience, then the cultural beliefs that create gender as a distinct system of difference and inequality will become unsustainable (523).

In simplest terms, if CGBs exist that allow women to be favored over men (in everyday experience) the current CGBs are being challenged. In the context of funeral directing, my research indicates that in the realm of dealing with the family, female funeral directors are actually preferred. Thus, in this case, the preference for women, even under essential understandings of women’s “innate” abilities, creates unsustainability in the hegemonic gender belief system – a place where change can happen.

The second way the “old boy” gender type was challenged involved interactional challenges by funeral directors and students. When women were told they couldn’t lift, they directly challenged this by going on removals and demonstrating to their colleagues and bosses that they in fact were physically capable despite their bosses’ notions of them. Their efforts debunked stereotypes that girls can’t be strong, and in some cases, changed funeral director’s minds about the physical capabilities of women funeral directors.

Third, the masculinized gender-type of funeral directing is challenged because of women's large numerical presence in the industry. Historically a male-dominated occupation, women now make up approximately 60% of students enrolled in mortuary colleges and 25% of funeral directors. As Kelan (2010) notes in her study of women in ICT, the numerical presence of women was enough to obscure the traditional gender-typing of ICT occupation. Similar things happened for women in funeral directing. The presence of women as funeral directors also obscured the cultural association of men with funeral directing during interactions with customers. This occurred where female funeral directors had interactions with customers who second guessed them as the funeral director. Originally, they thought the respondent was the secretary or assistant; however, after being corrected, they learned that the woman was in fact the funeral director. This interaction, though simple in nature, provides an instance where the cultural association of men with funeral directing is obscured, and customers and other audiences had to reframe their cultural understanding of who is a funeral director. Though we can recognize this as a challenge to the traditional gender-typing of funeral directing, we must be cautious in stating how much change this break in saliency results in.

Finally, Kim Stacey's idea of "ambigender" challenges the masculinized gender-typing of funeral directing at the occupational level. Here ambigender is to toss gender out on its ear and to focus on skill sets and unique potential instead. "Ambigender" advocates for separating gender from the assessing of skills needed to be a funeral directors. This explanation emerged most recently in the line of gender explanations and directly challenges gender essential understandings of the link between funeral directing and women. This challenge fits with Kelan's first mechanism of how gender can be undone in occupations where gender is ignored or made irrelevant. Even though people can individually decide that gender doesn't matter, it does

not create sustainable change unless people in positions of power adopt similar beliefs systems of the irrelevancy of gender to funeral directing.

In a similar line of thinking, multiple explanations of gender complicate the gender-typing of the occupations, at least on the occupational level. My study revealed four competing explanation that each use gender in different ways to talk about women (and men) working in the funeral industry. Kelan notes that when there are multiple interpretations of gender being used, gender trouble is created because multiplicity undermines gender as a binary, and thus, gender can be reconfigured in new ways, as we see with the gender blind, gender progressive and “ambigender” approaches to funeral directing. I did not find the multiplicity of gender on the interactional level in funeral homes or educational settings, as funeral directors’ and students’ dominant interpretation of women in funeral directing reinforced essentialism.

Most of the mechanisms presented in this research about how to resist occupational gender-typing do not produce sustainable change; instead, they temporarily obscure the gender type of the funeral industry. Thus, it becomes hard to imagine what sustainable change looks like. Below, I discuss the successfulness of these methods.

Successfulness of Challenging the Traditional Gender-Typing of the Funeral Industry

In the obscuring or destabilizing of the occupational gender type, the change is temporary; however, there is a space created in which the gender of funeral directing can be reinterpreted or reconfigured in new ways. We begin to see this in the emergence of competing gender explanations: gender essential, blind, and progressive. What remains to be seen is if these occupational (trade journal) reconfigurations of gender will translate into actual workplace and educational experiences.

The most successful place in which the CGBs about funeral directing are challenged involved contradictory experiences where the person's behavior is different than the stereotype (i.e. women going on removals). Gender stereotypes pervaded much of the cultural beliefs surrounding funeral directing. Some funeral directors held the stereotype that women can't lift and used this to forgo hiring women in their funeral home or not letting them go on removals or embalm bodies. Several women purposefully acted with the intention of disproving these stereotypes held by male coworkers and colleagues by proving themselves and going on removals even when they were discouraged. However, once they were provided with evidence to the contrary (seeing women lifting and going on removals), they realized they were holding stereotypes and were wrong. Both of these examples demonstrate how the contradiction between gendered expectations and job tasks provides an opportunity for the CGBs about funerary work to be challenged. The most effective way for challenging the gender type is finding instances where gender is incompatible or mismatched with a work duty and then performing that duty to break the stereotype.

Limitations and Future Research

This study used qualitative research techniques to study the movement of women in the funeral industry and how this shaped CGBs about the industry, including a content analysis of 35 funeral trade journals, twenty-one interviews with mortuary science students, and twenty-two interviews with funeral directors. One limitation of this study is that it drew from a purposive sample, thus the findings are only generalizable to this sample. Despite this limitation, given the underlying research questions of my dissertation, using qualitative research is beneficial because it focuses on discovering meaning. In addition, the sample comes from the United States, mostly

from the Midwest, therefore my findings are only reflective of death practices in these geographic areas.

My sample consisted almost entirely of white persons; thus, it is uncertain how race shapes the funeral directing occupation. Though race was rarely brought up in interviews, Weylin did give insight on the segregated nature of funeral work:

Yeah, we predominantly serve all white clients, which is really weird because we are located in a mostly black neighborhood, but the majority of our clients are people who moved out to the suburbs during “white flight.” But they still come to us because their entire family has, and they have a history with us.

What is very interesting about the funeral home where Weylin works is that his funeral home is located in a black neighborhood, yet despite this, the majority of their clients are white. This raises an interesting question: what is it about funeral work that leads to the segregation of service delivery by race? Future research could benefit from incorporating racially diverse funeral homes into analysis as well as studying funeral practices beyond white, middle-class Judeo-Christian, American funerary practices.

Finally, social desirability may have influenced respondents’ responses during interviews. Given the nature of this research, gender inequality in male-dominated occupations – an unfavorable topic to discuss in contemporary America –, it is likely that respondents may have downplayed or modified their responses to make the funeral industry sound more gender-friendly. I imagine this might be more likely with male respondents given that I am a young, white, woman doing research on gender inequality. Male respondents would not want to come off as sexist or chauvinistic to me as a researcher. Despite this, it is beneficial that I have accounts from both men and women in the funeral industry as it is more representative of how

accounts of gender inequality in the funeral industry can vary across sex, age, and occupational location (student vs. FD).

Future research on feminization could also benefit from expanding its analysis to include CGBs associated with the occupation under question; in particular, what is the relationship between CGBs and inequality? As my research demonstrates, CGBs shift as occupations feminize. In this realm, it would be beneficial for more studies to examine how CGBs change in relation to feminization because it can demonstrate potential spaces or locations for change.

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Appendix A - Recruiting Statement

Interested in participating in a research study?

Hello there! My name is Sarah Donley and I am a PhD Candidate in Sociology at Kansas State University. I am currently conducting dissertation research on women in the funeral industry, including changes, impact, and reception of women's movement into the industry. As part of this study, I am looking for female funeral directors and/or students to interview. The interview would be approximately thirty minutes to one hour in length and I will ask you about your work history, education, participation in the industry, and overall experience in the industry. The interviews can be conducted in person, over the phone, or through video chat. I have university approval through the Institutional Review Board here at Kansas State and the study is supervised by my major professor, Chardie Baird. As part of maintaining IRB protocol, all participants and interviews will remain confidential throughout the duration of this research. If you are interested in participating or have any questions regarding the study feel free to email me at sdonley@ksu.edu.

Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you!

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Appendix B - Interview Schedule

Funeral Directors (Men)

Work and educational background:

1. When did you first decide you were interested in working in the funeral industry? Tell me about how you came to this occupation.
2. Did you have any other jobs in the funeral industry before you ended up here at your current job? If so, can you describe them for me?
3. Did these previous occupations help you in your role as a funeral director? If so, can you describe how?
4. Describe your educational experience. Did you attend college? What was it like? What types of classes did you take? How did you become a licensed embalmer, funeral director etc.? What other forms of training (formal or informal) have you had?
5. Do you think your previous training and education adequately prepared you for the job? Please explain.
6. What licenses do you have?

Workplace Structure/Culture:

Workplace/job:

7. Can you describe the history of this funeral home? How long has it been around? What makes this funeral home “special” or “different” than others?
8. How many people work in your office? How long have they been employed here? Do people generally work here for a long time?
9. Can you please describe a typical day on the job? What are your duties/tasks at work? Where do you spend most of your time?

Division of labor in funeral home:

10. What does the division of labor look like? How are jobs/tasks split up or assigned in your workplace?
11. How do you determine who does what jobs? Are certain people better at certain jobs than others? Why?
12. What types of jobs do men generally have? What types of jobs do women have? Is there any particular reason it’s divided this way?

Interaction with families:

13. How many families do you serve per year? What are your customers like?
14. Walk me through a typical interaction with a customer/family. What does this involve? How do you talk to them? How do you interact with them? Do men/women interact with families differently?
15. What is the hardest part about interacting with families who have recently lost a family member? The most rewarding thing?
16. Have you ever had any negative experiences with families that you’ve worked with? If so, please describe this experience.

Working with death:

17. Describe the techniques and procedures used to prepare a body for funerary display. What are the steps? Who generally does what? What do you like/dislike about this task?
18. In American society, people are often afraid of death. In your experience have you found this to be the case? Are people afraid to talk about death? How do you deal with this on a day to day basis?
19. How does the general public perceive your occupation? How do people generally react when you tell them what your job is?

Occupational Structure/Culture:

Occupational association participation:

20. Are you a member of any occupational associations? If yes, which ones? Do you attend annual meetings or conferences?
21. What do you do there? What is your role in these organizations? Do you enjoy participating in these meetings? What is beneficial about being a member in these organizations?
22. Do you have any specific occupational goals that you would like to tell me about?

Understanding of the occupation:

23. How would you describe the occupational culture of the funeral industry?
24. What types of qualities does a “good” funeral director possess? How/where did you learn this?
25. What would you say is the most important characteristic or quality needed to be a funeral director?
26. Have these qualities changed since you first entered the industry? If so, can you please explain?
27. What kinds of qualities do you possess as a funeral director that you think other funeral directors may not necessarily have? Why?

Occupational Changes:

28. Does the funeral industry look different now than when you first started working in it? If so, how?
29. Why do you think more and more women are moving into the funeral industry?
30. What are people in the industries reaction to this? Is it good or bad?
31. How is women’s movement into the industry changing the overall industry? Culture? Structure? In funeral services? In work?
32. Do you think women face discrimination or barriers at all? If yes, what kinds? Can you give me an example?

Closing questions:

33. What are the most rewarding aspects of your job? What aspects would you like to change or improve?
34. If you had to do it all over again, would you do anything differently?

35. Anything else you'd like to talk about/add?

Appendix C - Interview Schedule

Funeral Directors (Women)

Background:

Work/Education:

1. Tell me about how you came to this occupation. What was your motivation for becoming a funeral director?
2. Did you have any other jobs prior to becoming a funeral director? If so, can you describe them for me?
3. Did these previous occupations help you in your role as a funeral director? If so, can you describe how?
4. Describe your educational experience.
 - a. What licenses do you have?
 - b. What other forms of training (formal or informal) have you had?
5. Do you think your previous training and education adequately prepared you for the job? Please explain.

Being a Woman in Educational Field:

6. In terms if your training do you think being a women affected that at all?
 - a. What changes could be made to ensure gender-equality in the program?
7. What could be done to attract more women to the funeral/mortuary sciences?
8. Would you encourage other women to become funeral directors? Why or why not?

Workplace Structure/Culture:

Workplace/job:

9. Can you describe the history of this funeral home? How long has it been around?
What type of funeral home is it?
10. How would you describe your basic work duties as a funeral director?
 - a. What are some business elements?
 - b. What are some caretaker elements?
 - c. Which role is more important and why?
 - d. Do you think the elements of business and caretaking interfere with each other?
 - e. Can they help each other?

Division of labor in funeral home:

11. How many people work at your place? What does the division of labor look like?
12. How do you determine who does what? How are jobs/tasks split up or assigned in your workplace?
13. What types of jobs do men generally have? What types of jobs do women have? Is there any particular reason it's divided this way?

Interaction with families:

14. How many families do you serve per year? What are your customers like?

15. Walk me through a typical interaction with a customer/family. What does this involve? How do you talk to them? How do you interact with them? Do men/women interact with families differently?
16. What is the hardest part about interacting with families who have recently lost a family member? The most rewarding thing?

Working with death:

17. Describe the techniques and procedures used to prepare a body for funerary display. What are the steps? Who generally does what? What do you like/dislike about this task?
18. In American society, people are often afraid of death. In your experience have you found this to be the case? Are people afraid to talk about death? How do you deal with this on a day to day basis?
19. How does the general public perceive your occupation? How do people generally react when you tell them what your job is?

Occupational Structure/Culture:

Understanding of the occupation:

20. How would you describe the occupational culture of the funeral industry?
21. What skills/attributes are the most important being a funeral director? How/where did you learn this?
 - a. Which do you have the most of/least of?
 - b. In general, do men or women have most of these skills? Are they more likely to have certain skills?
22. Have these qualities changed since you first entered the industry? If so, can you please explain?
23. What qualities do you have, other funeral directors might not have? Why?

Occupational Changes:

24. Does the funeral industry look different now than when you first started working in it? If so, how?
25. Why do you think more and more women are moving into the funeral industry?
26. How is women's movement into the industry changing the overall industry? Culture? Structure? Funeral services? In work?
27. What are people in the industries reaction to this? Is it good or bad?
28. Do you think women face discrimination or barriers at all? If yes, what kinds? Can you give me an example?
 - a. Have you personally experienced discrimination or barriers? If so can you provide an example?
 - b. How have you dealt/address these experiences?
 - c. What advice would you give to other women, who may experience similar things?

Being a Woman funeral director:

29. How do you think being a women influences how you do your basic work as a funeral director? In your day to day job?
 - a. How does it affect business elements of your job?
 - b. How does it affect caretaker elements?
30. What are the gender-consistent skills of your job duties? What are gender inconsistent skills?
31. Are you ever treated differently because you are a women?
 - a. By customers?
 - b. Are men treated differently by customers, than women?
 - c. If treated negatively, how do you deal with these experiences?
32. How has being a women effected your job experience? Positively or Negatively?
 - a. What techniques do you use to overcome any negative experiences?
33. Do you think overall men or women are better suited to be funeral directors? Why?
34. Do you feel that your general experiences within the funeral industry would be different if you were a man? If yes, how?

Occupational association participation:

35. Are you a member of any occupational associations? If yes, which ones? Do you attend annual meetings or conferences?
36. What do you do there? What is your role in these organizations? Do you enjoy participating in these meetings? What is beneficial about being a member in these organizations?
 - a. For women? The occupation as a whole?
37. Do you have any specific occupational goals that you would like to tell me about?

Closing questions:

38. What advice would you give to an aspiring funeral director?
39. What are the most rewarding aspects of your job? What aspects would you like to change or improve?
40. If you had to do it all over again, would you do anything differently?
41. Anything else you'd like to talk about/add?

Appendix D - Interview Schedule

Mortuary Science Students

Work/Educational Background and Future Goals

Background

1. What brought you to this occupation?
2. How did you decide funeral directing was the career for you?
3. What is your motivation for becoming a funeral director?
4. How did your family/friends react to your choice in career?
5. Do you have any family/friends that work in the funeral industry?

Workplace/Job

6. Do you have any previous employment in funeral homes? If yes, can you describe your previous job experience?
7. Can you tell me about the places you work/worked in? History of funeral home? What type of funeral home is it?
8. How would you describe your basic work duties?

Division of labor in funeral home:

9. How many people work there? What is/was your relationship like with your coworkers?
10. What is the workplace hierarchy? How are jobs/tasks split up or assigned?
11. Is there a division of labor by sex? What jobs do men/women generally have? Why do you think they are divided this way?
12. What did you like most about this job? Least?

Education

13. Describe your program of study. What is involved in your course of study? Requirements?
14. What types of courses are you taking?
15. What types of things are you learning? What do you like learning about the most? The least?
16. What is your favorite class? Least favorite class? Why?
17. Working with death, dead bodies, what do you think about this? How do you deal with it?
18. Sex comp of school.
19. What is your relationship like with your classmates?
20. What is your relationship like with your teachers?
21. How would you describe the overall culture or climate of your program?

Being a women in educational field

22. In terms of your training, do you think being a woman affected it at all? Have you been treated differently because of your gender by classmates or teachers?

- a. If yes, what changes could be made to ensure gender-equality in the program?
- 23. What do you think could be done to attract more women to the funeral directing occupation?
- 24. Would you encourage other women to become funeral directors? Why or why not?

Future Employment

- 25. What are your future plans after you graduate?
- 26. What skills/qualities are you learning that you think will benefit you later?
- 27. What about being a funeral director are you looking forward to? Not looking forward to?
- 28. Do you have any specific occupational goals that you would like to tell me about?

Occupational Culture/Changes:

Understanding of the Occupation

- 29. How would you describe the occupational culture of the funeral industry?
- 30. What types of qualities does a “good” funeral director possess? How/where did you learn this?
- 31. What types of qualities are not “good” for a funeral director to possess? Learn?
- 32. What would you say is the most important characteristic or quality needed to be a funeral director?

Feminization of the funeral industry

- 33. Why do you think more and more women are moving into the funeral industry?
- 34. How is this changing the overall funeral industry? Culture? Structure? Funeral services?
- 35. What are people in the industries thoughts/reactions to this? Is it good or bad?
- 36. Do you think women face discrimination or barriers at all? If yes, what kinds? Can you give me an example?
 - a. Have you personally experienced any discrimination or barriers?
 - b. How have you dealt with these experiences?

Occupational association participation:

- 37. Are you a member of any occupational associations? If yes, which ones? What is your role in these organizations? What is beneficial about being a member of this organization?
- 38. Do you attend annual meetings or conferences? What do you do there? Do you enjoy participating in these meetings? What is beneficial about attending these occupational meetings?

Closing Questions

- 39. What advice would you give to an aspiring funeral director?
- 40. If you had to do it all over again, would you still want to work in the funeral industry?
- 41. Anything else you’d like to talk about/add?

Appendix E - Informed Consent Statement

1. Name of Researcher: Principal Investigator: Dana Britton, Professor of Sociology, Kansas State University, Co-Investigator: Sarah Donley, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, Kansas State University

2. Title of Study: Gendering deathwork: Labor in the contemporary funeral home

3. Objectives of Study: The objective of this study is to further understand the work experiences of individuals employed in the funeral industry in the United States.

4. Description and purpose of procedures: This section of the research involves interviews with approximately 50 individuals who are employed in the funeral industry throughout the United States. There is one interview per person, and the interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. With your permission, I will tape record this interview. The questions asked throughout the interview will involve basic demographic information, questions regarding your everyday work experiences, information about your training and education, how you handle the bereaved family, preparation of the deceased and other procedures involved in funerary preparation, perceptions of work environment and involvement in occupational associations. The information will then be used to better understand the working dynamics within contemporary funeral homes.

5. Use of results: Data collected will be used for a PhD dissertation. The data may be presented at occupational meetings or published in sociological journals. Your name will never be used in any published or unpublished report.

6. The risks and discomforts: None of the questions I will ask will be extremely personal or intimate, however. I am interested in the experiences of day to day work only. I do not anticipate that the interview will create emotional distress. If you are uncomfortable at any time you may end the interview.

7. Possible benefits to you or to others from participating in this study: Being interviewed may offer you a time to reflect on personal experiences and feelings about your job and working in the funeral industry. Your participation in this research will also contribute to the study of gender and work within sociology.

8. Reducing potential risk: You may terminate your participation in this study at any time. Your name will never be used in any published or unpublished report based on this study. With your permission, I will tape record our interview, but I will keep this recording separate from this consent form at all times. The tape will be erased immediately after it is transcribed. If this interview creates any distress for you, the XXXXXX can also provide you with counseling and other resources. If you need to access these resources please call this phone number: XXXXXX.

9. Debriefing: The main purpose of this study is to gain greater insight into the everyday experiences of people who work in the funeral industry. The information gathered here will be used for a PhD dissertation at Kansas State University. In the future, I may present a paper from

(Researcher Signature)

(Date)

****Location may change. The corresponding information for the appropriate facility will be added prior to interview.

Appendix F - Coding Tree

Cultural Gender Beliefs

“Old Boy”

Unfit

Physically

Emotionally

Discrimination

Embalming and Gender

Gender Essential

Benevolent Sexism

Biological Essentialism

Differences between men and women

Gender Blind

Equality

Sameness between men and women

Gender Progressive

Ambigender

Awareness of Gender

Students

Beliefs

“Old boy”

Gender Essential

Gender Blind

Gender Progressive

Conflicting Beliefs

Challenges

Experiences

Occupational Entry

Calling

Family owns a funeral home

Death of family or friend

Other

Occupational Structure/Socialization

Generation

Advantages

Disadvantages

Mentoring by FD

Practicums

Requirements

Discrimination

Not fitting in

Clothing

Challenges

Proving yourself

School/Classes

Treated the Same

Curriculum

Favorite

Least Favorite

Funeral Directors

Beliefs

“Old Boy”

Gender Essential

Gender Blind

Gender Progressive

Conflicting Beliefs

Challenges

Workplace

Experiences

Not Fitting In

Discrimination

Hiring

Structure

Division of Labor

Corporate

Family-owned

Gendered Division of Labor

Old Boy Justification

Essential Justification

Challenges

Skills Required for Job

Compassion

Occupational Culture

Women's Organizations

Importance

Purpose

Changes

How women changing industry

Cremation

Technology