

Contemporary Apparitions: Ghost Stories as Personal Narratives

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

For the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Concentrated Honours in Social Anthropology and

Minor in History

At

Dalhousie University

Halifax, Nova Scotia

April 2024

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Abstract

Storytelling, an integral part of the human experience, encompasses a diverse range of narratives, with ghost stories standing out as a near-universal phenomenon. While anthropologists and folklorists have long been interested in these type of stories, little research has looked at the multifaceted motivations behind why we might tell these types of stories. Drawing from scholarship on hauntology, the uncanny, storytelling processes, narrative sensemaking and collective memory, this study aims to answer the question – *why in the 21st century, do we continue to tell ghost stories to one another?* Through a qualitative analysis of story collection and nine semi-structured interviews with thirteen Nova Scotians from the Halifax region, this study finds that the ghost stories we share are often deeply personal narratives. Remarkably, all thirteen participants shared stories about their own personal paranormal encounters, even when asked for a ghost story in broad, undefined terms. For participants, these stories provided a place for sensemaking, self-discovery, grief processing, and cultural transmission. Furthermore, this study identifies the commonalities in the ghost storytelling process, from establishing truth, navigating, and negotiating belief, and drawing on shared cultural milieu. Therefore, the reason we tell ghost stories is not to merely frighten or entertain. Rather, in the Canadian context, we tell them to make sense of our social worlds, our beliefs, and our own sense of self.

Acknowledgements

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to my 13 participants, Abbey, Marn, Meaghan, Shannon, Enya, Ansu, Pat, Terry, Dan, Mike, Jim, Amanda, and Sharon. Without your willingness to share your stories this project would not have been possible. Each story and interview brought a unique and compelling perspective to ghosts and ghost storytelling that guided my inquiry. A special thanks to Dan, Mike, Jim, Amanda, and Sharon for inviting me along on a paranormal investigation. It was so much fun and a memory I will never forget.

Thank you to the entire Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology for welcoming a mature, returning student into your community and fostering my desire for further education. To my supervisors, Dr. Martha Radice and Dr. Karen Foster, for your unwavering support, encouragement, and guidance. You often had the difficult task of assuaging my fears and anxiety. To Dr. Lindsey DuBois and Dr. Robin Oakley, thank you for taking time to meet with me and explore my unconventional topic. To every SOSA professor at Dalhousie who I have had the privilege to learn from - thank you. You have given me the knowledge and confidence to continue pursuing my academic dreams.

To my SOSA honours peers, I am so glad we undertook this journey together. Your support, laughs, tears, and reassurances have been invaluable. We made a daunting task fun, exciting and memorable. I cannot wait to see what you all do! You are all so inspiring and brilliant.

Finally, thank you to my husband Chris. When I wanted to go back to school as an adult, you took it in stride. We moved our life across the country for me to follow this dream. Next year, we are moving our life across the ocean so I can continue my education. You are my rock and the definition of support. Throughout this honours project, you have talked me through moments of self-doubt and listened to my anthropological musings without complaint. Thank you for all the coffees and dinners you slide onto my desk silently while I was squirreled away working. Knowing that you believe in me makes me feel like anything is possible. This project is dedicated to you and our future.

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Stories and Storytellers

Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated by the supernatural. Many nights I would stay awake late reading the short horror stories contained within Alvin Schwartz's (1981) famous series, "Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark." As I grew older, one of my favourite ice breakers when meeting someone new would be to ask if they have a ghost story. Therefore, from the very start of my honours project I knew I wanted to study these stories from an anthropological lens. I began to ask myself if the ghost stories we tell one another are crafted for more than mere entertainment or fright. So, when I asked participants for ghost stories, and they all came with stories of their own personal encounters rather than some legend that had been passed down to them – I knew ghost stories were more than they appeared to be on the surface.

My study contributes to the anthropological research of the paranormal, storytelling, and narrative construction. Ghost stories and ghostly encounters have been studied in anthropology and folklore; however, few scholars have focused on how ghost narratives are communicated in ways that are deeply personal. Even further, little literature exists on how ghost stories intertwine with other narratives such as those of grief and loss, uncanny discourses, and cultural transmissions. Ghost stories then, like any other story we tell, offer rich opportunities. They allow us to explore ourselves, our social worlds, our beliefs, our challenges, and successes, as well as broaden our perspectives and worldviews (Kottler, 2015). They are more than just entertainment, although they do provide entertainment value as well.

This study aims to explore the complex motivations and reasons for telling ghost stories, answering my research question *why, in the 21st century, do we tell continue to tell ghost stories*

to each other? To investigate this question, I designed a research project that is qualitative, and narrative based. In semi-structured interviews, I asked thirteen participants to share a ghost story. All participants, without prompting, shared stories about their own personal encounters with ghosts. After sharing their stories, brief interviews took place to discuss some of their views on the practice of ghost storytelling. The fact that all participants shared deeply personal experiences with me, crafted into stories, made me realize that this type of storytelling is perhaps misunderstood. That is where my participants lead me – to ask why we share stories about our own personal ghost experiences with one another.

Literature Review: Ghosts, Storytelling, and the Narrative Process

My research aims to comprehensively explore the persistent phenomenon of ghost storytelling in the 21st century, a practice deeply entrenched in the oral traditions of diverse cultures (Del Pilar Blanco & Preen, 2013). To construct a solid foundation for this exploration, my research adopts a theoretical framework that draws upon anthropological scholarship on hauntology, uncanny discourses, storytelling practice, and collective memory. Additionally, my research explores how storytelling acts as a mechanism to find meaning and make sense of the world.

Hauntology in Anthropology

Hauntology is a specific subgenre of Anthropology interested in exploring the reasons behind ghostly occurrences and their impact on the human experience (Lincoln & Lincoln, 2014; Good, Chioyenda & Rahimi, 2022; Hollan, 2020). Hauntological anthropology posits that individuals find themselves haunted by either metaphorical spectres representing past injustices or by lingering spirits seeking retribution (Lincoln & Lincoln, 2014). By adopting a

hauntological lens, ghost narratives can be contextualized for their underlying societal and cultural influence.

The hauntological perspective allows for an exploration of the non-linear and indirect ways the past continues to haunt the present. For instance, Avery Gordon's (1997) work explores how African American individuals are haunted by the memories of American slavery. This haunting is not merely a spectre of the past but a manifestation of unresolved issues and traumas that persist into the present. Hauntology allows us to understand ghost stories as a medium through which individuals grapple with complex histories and injustices.

Moreover, Lincoln and Lincoln (2014) categorize hauntings into two distinct types: primary and secondary hauntings. Secondary haunts, which are the focus of hauntological anthropology, are concerned with the feelings associated with being more generally 'haunted' by the past. In these types of hauntings, individuals must contend with reminders of the past – as if being haunted by them. In this sense, haunting is, “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (Gordon, 2004, xvi). In contrast, primary hauntings involve ghosts encountered in daily life, usually appearing to settle a score or because they are attached to a specific location and/or item (Lincoln & Lincoln, 2014; Hollan, 2020). Primary hauntings often evoke more fear and are considered more intense. By understanding the different types of ghosts within ghost narratives, we can begin to unravel the meaning behind ghost storytelling.

The Uncanny

Freud's conceptualization of the uncanny, explained as the experience of something that is simultaneously strange and familiar, serves as a poignant framework for understanding the

enduring appeal of ghost stories (Freud, 1919; Lepselter, 2016). Ghost encounters fall into the realm of the uncanny. These encounters often provoke bodily sensations and psychological unease, as uncanny events are experienced sensorily (Lipman, 2008). Many participants described hearing voices and sounds that were familiar, such as footsteps across the floor or feelings of being watched, but they were unable to identify the source. This inability to find rational explanations for their uncanny experiences often led them to supernatural explanations.

Experiences with the uncanny can be both frightening and exhilarating, and by attempting to make sense of them in narrative form, they serve as important “resources for self-understanding, identity construction, healing and work on one’s social relations” (Bergroth, Andell & Honkasalo, 2019). Through exploring the disquieting yet alluring aspects of the uncanny, my research uncovered how ghost stories bridge the gap between the known and unknown. By allowing the narrator an opportunity to make meaning out of extraordinary, seemingly unexplainable experiences, uncanny narratives serve a crucial function.

Exploring the uncanny in the context of ghost stories brings forth the ways in which these stories disrupt our conventional understandings of reality. In Lepselter’s (2016) work on American UFO culture, she highlights the ways in which encounters with the unknown disrupt established norms. Similarly, ghost stories often tell tales that challenge our understanding of the natural world, bringing forth supernatural forces that blur the lines between fantasy and reality. Underscoring the uncanny elements of ghost storytelling will provide insight into why individuals are drawn to these types of stories and how they navigate the boundaries between fantasy and reality.

Lepselter (2016) investigates the significance of these seemingly unbelievable stories for those who tell them. Drawing on Freud’s ideas, she suggests that uncanny stories take on a

familiar “repetition with variation” (p. 28). These stories share similar themes and tropes with small variations that give them a personal touch. This repetition offers meaning to those who share uncanny experiences and suggest patterns and significance, serving as the driving force behind the social life of uncanny discourse (Lepselter, 2016, p. 28). I will be interested to notice any emerging patterns within the ghost stories I collect – noting repetition with variation. Are there certain phrases that get used when describing a ghost encounter? Do my participants allude to ghosts having scores to settle, or business to finish? My research aims to contribute to the limited knowledge of the uncanny in anthropological literature and find a way to bring ghost stories into dialogue with larger anthropological discourses and Folklore.

Storytelling Processes

Anthropology and Folklore Studies have long examined storytelling processes and the construction of legendry (Finnegan, 1992; Oring, 2008). The stories that I am interested in hearing fall under the categorization of legendry. Aptly described by folklorist and anthropologist Elliott Oring (2008) legendry refers to, “the stuff of legends – the supernatural, the horrific, the disastrous, the uncanny, the improbable, and the comical – ‘it’ is the stuff of our everyday attention and conversation” (p. 1).

In his work, *Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth*, Oring (2008) outlines key characteristics of folk rhetoric and legendry. This offers a valuable framework for analyzing these forms of storytelling. I plan on applying Oring’s framework in my own research. Specifically, I will use Oring’s (2008) three distinct qualities of stories, which he based on Aristotle’s work on rhetoric: ethos, pathos, and logos.

The ethos of legends, according to Oring (2008), is comprised of factors such as the authority of the source, risk to the narrator, distancing, judgement, reflexivity, alternative explanations, reluctance, ignorance, and testing (p. 130). These concepts help to underscore how the narrator positions themselves as a trusted storyteller. For example, someone with perceived authority or a personal connection to the supernatural might carry more weight with an audience. For the purpose of my research, I was interested in how narrators convey themselves as truthful and trustworthy. Did they use certain strategies, such as, providing and discounting alternate explanations? I wondered if participants would try to establish themselves as authorities on ghosts. How storytellers establish their credibility when telling spooky, supernatural stories matters to how to story is perceived and received.

Oring's conception of pathos concerns the emotional dimension of storytelling. Ghost stories can elicit a wide range of emotions, from fear to laughter. By examining the emotional impacts of ghost storytelling, my research will help to explain why such stories resonate with people. Logos, according to Oring (2008), is found by examining narrative strategy: the ways in which a narrator strategically constructs and presents their narrative (Oring, 2008, p. 145). Many narratives associated with legendry are told in non-linear forms. Non-linear forms are much looser and can jump between time and space. These non-linear approaches to storytelling invite the audience to feel and experience the story with the narrator (Oring, 2008; Lepselter, 2016). They invite discussion and are open-ended (Oring, 2008, p. 146). Using Oring's (2008) framework for examining legendry, the narrator's role in the practice of ghost storytelling becomes clear.

When telling stories of legendry, storytellers also have to establish a mutual understanding of their subject (Carlisle 2015). If the audience does not understand a narrator's

conception of ghosts, for example, the story will be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Some of us may believe in poltergeist, malevolent spirits that are unruly and noisy. Others might believe ghosts to be angels sent from Heaven above. There is a plethora of conceptions about what ghosts are with many being culturally specific. Therefore, belief and understanding are central to these types of narratives and so, we often draw from our sociocultural environment and local folklore (Carlisle, 2015). By using cultural knowledge in storytelling, we are hoping to foster a shared understanding. We want our stories to resonate with our audience and as previously established, we want them to believe what we say is true. In order to do so, we must first navigate our beliefs and understandings of the supernatural to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Collective Memory

Narratives are performative and often ritualistic, and this is evident in ghost storytelling. Perhaps you have been told a ghost story around a campfire or have been on a guided ghost walk late at night. Some ghost stories have specific narrative elements that get emphasized or repeated. Other times, ghost stories can masterfully convey historically and culturally significant information in an entertaining, if at times frightening, package. For anthropologist Paul Connerton (1989) rituals serve as mechanisms for preserving and transmitting cultural memory. In his study of commemorative public rituals, he determined that rituals are constituted by repetitive, structured practices that incorporate embodiment. Rituals are performed through both sound and body, where facial expressions, gestures and movement are habituated into the act (Connerton, 1989, p. 79). Specific actions and behaviours are associated with rituals and become ingrained and automatic within us. When telling ghost stories, it is common to speak in hushed tones, lean in close to the listener, use facial gesturing and maintain eye contact. These embodied

practices may constitute ritualistic behaviour. On the surface, ghost stories may seem trivial – entertainment fodder. However, I am interested in examining whether they are modes of cultural transmission.

Cultural transmission, the act of sharing cultural knowledge and weaving threads of collective memory, is another aspect of ghost storytelling. Similar to hauntological anthropology's interest in ghost narratives as a device for capturing past traumas, collective memory theorists would argue that ghost stories contain important historical, traditional, and cultural knowledge. Connerton (1989) argues that by telling these stories, we are passing down important information and collective memory (p. 39). Folklore, myths, and legends get told and retold. After all, "since the historical past is not transmitted genetically, it must be transmitted exogenetically i.e., culturally" (Jackson, 2005, p. 357). For anthropologist Michael Jackson (2005), culturally transmitted stories served as both a mechanism for imparting collective memory, and as a way to comprehend the present (p. 358). I will be considering how the ghost stories might be transmitting cultural and historic knowledge.

Sensemaking

Stories act as a way for us to understand our lives and make meaning out of our experiences. Stories "give lives legibility; when shaped as narratives, lives come from somewhere and are going somewhere" (Frank, 2002, 5). By putting our experience into narrative form, we affirm that our experiences are, "worth telling and thus worth living" (Frank, 2002, 5). To put an experience into a story is to recontextualize the experience, where the storyteller is no longer merely retelling events, but reshaping them within a narrative framework to convey a particular message or meaning.

Personal ghost stories exhibit this form of sensemaking. Crafting narratives out of ghostly encounters affords storytellers the opportunity to reexamine the past (Lipman, 2008). Many ghost stories are embedded within the family home, a place that is rich with interpersonal history and lore. These stories then, speak to notions of lineage, home, and heritage. Ghost stories can connect us to our past, our family histories, and our place.

Ghost stories can also help us make sense of trauma. We all must contend with grief and loss in our lives due to the impermanence of our attachments. Grief narratives help us to make sense of the loss of someone and redefine our relationship with them (Neimeyer et. al, 2014). For some, ghost stories become the tales of visiting with a lost loved one. For others, it seems that the story becomes a way to keep their memory alive and find solace in the connection they had after death. I am curious as to how individuals narrate their experiences into a ghost story, in order to make sense of complicated facets of everyday life.

Methods: Bringing the Ghost Story to Life

As I was interested in exploring the practice of ghost storytelling, it was essential to witness it firsthand. Therefore, I recruited participants from the Halifax Greater Municipality who are aged 18 and older to share ghost stories with me. I specifically asked for participants who are 18 years and older, in order to avoid any difficulty in relaying, recalling, or experiencing undue harm in sharing their story. By recruiting participants from the Greater Halifax Municipality, I conducted research that is locally focused and can provide insights into Maritime, Nova Scotian ghost storytelling traditions. Participants were recruited through the use of a recruitment poster (Appendix A), which was posted on Halifax-based internet forums on Reddit and Facebook. Most of my recruitment came from neighbourhood Facebook groups for Porter's Lake, Cole Harbour, and Lake Echo, Nova Scotia.

Each participant was asked to answer a series of questions before sharing their ghost story. Following the narration, I asked participants an additional set of questions about their story and the experience of telling it. Participants and I agreed upon a quiet location to ensure a reasonable amount of privacy. Most stories were collected in people's homes or in community spaces that offered some level of privacy. While I took some notes throughout the interview, I minimized the act of notetaking to fully engage in the storytelling ritual with my participant. I used a blend of narrative inquiry and interviewing as research methods.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry focuses on the collection and analysis of stories people tell. As my research focused on the practice of ghost storytelling, this method provided a framework in which to collect and examine stories more deeply. It allowed for the participant's voice to become the star of the research and was useful in analyzing signs, symbols, and expressions of feeling within stories that shape meaning (Marshall, Blanco & Rossman, 2021; Gotsch & Palmberger, 2022). As I was interested in why we continue to tell ghost stories, this method allowed me to examine and cross-analyze each story for emerging key themes.

Although this method seemingly focuses on individual stories it allows for inquiry into, "groups, communities, and contexts through individual's experience" (Marshall, Blanco & Rossman, 2021, p. 118), I examined each story independently, and then cross-analyzed stories to see if patterns emerged. I was initially interested in the temporality of the story, asking whether the narrative followed a linear or non-linear structure. Linear narratives are straightforward and chronologically sequenced, often involving a cause-and-effect storyline that is easy to follow. Non-linear storytelling is much looser and can jump between time and space and is usually used

in legendry. However, this did not prove to be the most interesting aspect of ghost storytelling and did not provide the insights I initially anticipated.

Furthermore, I looked for uncanny elements within the story and storytelling practice. Uncanny stories involve reinterpreting inexplicable events into a cohesive narrative. By doing so, narrators make sense of their own experiences, bodily sensations, and feelings that seem disconnected from reality. Uncanny experiences can be profound and have therapeutic benefit. When we make sense of uncanny experiences through ghost storytelling, we turn our experiences into something real and tangible, which can “shape one’s actions, life paths and conceptions of oneself and the surrounding world in ways that often promote stability and healing.” (Andell et al., 2019, 188). I was interested in the transformative, therapeutic nature of the uncanny in addition to its role in sensemaking.

Additionally, I asked whether these stories and the act of storytelling are connected to collective memory. I explored what cultural elements might be present in the story being told. I looked for the ways in which the story may reflect cultural taboos, anxieties, or fears. Finally, I asked if the story imparts information on the culture of the narrator or the culture in which the story is situated. Historical elements that link the story to a specific time and place offered interesting insights into why these stories may be shared.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with voluntary participants who shared an interest in the paranormal. The interviews were divided into two parts: before and after participants shared their ghost stories. At the beginning of the interview, I asked broad questions about ghost stories in general, whereas after story collection, questions focused on the story and act of

storytelling itself. I used semi-structured interviews as they provided an opportunity for an “egalitarian arrangement,” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 68) in which two people can engage in a conversation of mutual interest. As participation was voluntary, it was assumed that participants shared an interest in the paranormal, thus creating a mutually beneficial dialogue contributing to the research process (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Kvale, 1996).

Interviewing offered a unique opportunity to explore each participants’ lived experience and worldviews (Kvale, 1996.) They provided more information than initially appeared by exploring meanings, “communicated not only by words, but by tone of voice, expressions, and gestures in the natural flow of a conversation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 125). My interview guide was structured thematically, using a variety of question types to ensure a robust collection of quality data. The thematic structure allowed for a natural flow of conversation and an opportunity for me to steer the interview (Kvale, 1996). All interviews began with the signing of a consent form, and all interviewees were informed that they could withdraw from the study up until March 1st, 2024.

Coding and Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed using transcription software. Interviews were then coded and analyzed. While coding, I was looking for emerging themes based on my theoretical frameworks. Codes included cultural and historical information, uncanny experiences, religious and spiritual beliefs, alternate explanations, truth claims and what people enjoy about ghost storytelling.

After coding each individual interview, I then did a cross-analysis of all interviews to gauge emerging themes across participants. Although I did not anticipate it, many stories centred around the loss of a loved one. This made me consider and examine the role of grief in ghost

storytelling and supernatural narrative construction. This prompted a review of additional literature on grief narratives and narrative sensemaking, which I have incorporated above.

Potential Ethical Concerns and Mitigation

Participation in this research study was low risk as participants were at no greater risk than they would be in their daily lives telling ghost stories to friends or family. However, personal ghost encounters can be traumatic as they at times were linked to grief and loss. Furthermore, ghost encounters could have elicited fear, and the retelling of these encounters could have triggered a fear-response. However, it is important to note that participation was voluntary, and participants only had to share a story they were comfortable with. If a participant did have an unforeseen response to the sharing of their story, I debriefed with them. If needed, I was able to provide a toll free 24-7 mental health support phone number. I did not need to provide this information during data collection. I anticipated very few ethical concerns within this research project and have ensured that my participants could remain deidentified in the project if they chose.

Analysis: Contemporary Ghost Storytelling

Ghost stories are a near-universal phenomenon. In our contemporary culture, ghost stories are packaged as entertainment. They may be recounted around the campfire to evoke fear or featured in horror films meant to frighten and amuse. However, my research reveals that ghost stories are more than just mere entertainment, they serve as unique personal narratives through which storytellers derive meaning from their experiences and explore their own identities. By examining both the way participants tell their stories and the content embedded within each narrative, the personal and social significance of ghost storytelling becomes apparent.

How We Tell Ghost Stories

Establishing Truth

Ghost stories contend with supernatural experiences seemingly beyond explanation. They fall into the folklore category of legendry - stories that involve improbable, uncanny elements (Oring, 2008). According to my participants, ghost stories are most impactful and compelling when they appear truthful. People love a ghost story that they can imagine possible or relate to their own experience. For example, Abbey shared that she prefers ghost stories that make her say, “Oh! That’s possible, you know, [it] could be real.” Similarly, Ansu shared that ghost stories are the best when they, “get you to thinking, okay maybe there is something happening.”

We want to be able to believe that what we are being told did happen. For example, Enya shared that ghost stories that appear to be self-serving or attention seeking are uninteresting to her. She argues that “sometimes it’s just so outlandish or very produced feeling that obviously, this is [just] a story.” It seems that, for most of my participants, ghost stories need to be grounded in reality, anchored in the real-world to be worthy of being heard. This speaks to the importance of believability, trust, and truth.

Establishing truth is an essential element to crafting ghostly narratives that draw the audience in. To establish truth, narrators must prove their reliability, good judgement, and authority (Oring, 2008). Many narrators will provide alternative explanations for their story. They will then go on to disprove or discount these alternative explanations. This strategy helps to show their level of discernment and judgement, rendering them as trustworthy. It proves to the audience that the narrator is not naïve or prone to magical thinking. In my research, many

participants used this strategy in their ghost storytelling, an aspect of Oring's (2008) logos aspect of legendry construction.

For example, when she shared her story of a ghostly visit by a recently deceased friend, Meaghan stated that it might be, "all just a coincidence." In her story, she was awakened at 3:00am to the sound of a large crash in her kitchen. After she mustered up the courage, she found that a garbage can lid had been thrown across the kitchen. She stated that this strange occurrence could not have been explained by pests or pets. She noted, explicitly, that her cat had been with her in bed. She mentioned the fact that she did not have a mice problem. Even more, she stated that, "I knew for a fact when I went to bed, the lid of the garbage can was on the garbage can. It wasn't hanging off, there's no way it would have flipped off or even slid off." By providing and then immediately discounting these alternative explanations, Meaghan sought to prove that she is a thoughtful, rational person. This lended credibility to her and her story. It suggested that she had considered alternative, more logical explanations to her paranormal encounter before she concluded that her experience was supernatural.

In her ghost story, Enya shared an experience she had receiving a text message notification on her car stereo from her son who had passed away the previous year. She noted that her encounter could be explained logically, but provided additional evidence for why rational explanations were unlikely. After telling a friend about the experience, they noted that technology can glitch. Enya stated, "certainly, electronics can always glitch." However, she noted that, "there's nothing in this world that could convince me that that electronic glitch wasn't him." She provided an alternate explanation, but quickly dismissed its likelihood. Enya hinged her truth on the fact that she is a trustworthy narrator who knows what they experienced. Her conviction felt very convincing and helped her establish truth.

Ansu told a particularly harrowing supernatural account that occurred while at a boarding school in India. Ansu stated that after uncovering a human bone in the school playground, ghost activity began to occur. He shared that the children's caretaker was, "sleeping on the ground as she usually slept there. And then she heard noises. And then she like, she got up. She was sitting there. And apparently, she felt slaps on her cheeks, like out of no where." Later, he explained that she experienced poltergeist activity again when her, "sari got pulled off" in the middle of the night by an unseen entity. Children too, were victims of unexplainable phenomena. Ansu's close friend, "started acting like very hysterical. He started going mad. He started telling nonsense. He started uttering words in Sanskrit." He was seemingly possessed by an entity, and later, took his own life.

Ansu shared that he knows these events seem unbelievable. However, he ended his ghostly tale with a twist. For it was later discovered that the younger students were being sexually abused by the older children. Ansu wondered out loud, "Do you believe it was a ghost? Or do you think it was because of humanity? Are humans the reason for this?" He questioned his own retelling and whether alternative, human explanations are the most logical. However, he concluded that:

"You know humans, they did assaults. Okay. So, I believe that. But then there's something else that you can't see, you don't think you believe. But it does something that makes you believe. So, you know, I don't know. If we didn't remove that bone, would it not have happened? Would it still have happened?"

He ended his ghost story by pondering aloud the interplay between unseen forces and the potential consequences of human action. Ansu argued that two things can be simultaneously true:

abhorrent human behaviour and a demonic haunting. Instead of discounting alternate explanations, Ansu instead incorporated them into his rationale.

By providing alternative explanations to their ghost encounters, ghost storytellers both acknowledge the incredibility of their narrative and provide proof that they are rational, discerning characters. Meaghan's alternate explanations were explored and dismissed. The audience can believe in Meaghan's story, as they recognize she has considered causes outside the paranormal realm. On the other hand, Ansu's alternative explanation is not entirely discounted, but becomes intertwined with the supernatural elements of the story. In this way, Ansu and the audience understand the distinction between the logical and seemingly illogical elements of the story. Both narrators prove that they are trustworthy and thoughtful – making their story seem all the more plausible.

Navigating Belief

Ghost stories are anchored in a belief in the paranormal. Ansu summed it up perfectly when he said, "It's all about belief, isn't it?" While I did not pose direct questions about belief, many participants felt compelled to share their spiritual perspectives before telling their stories. By establishing their beliefs and perspectives, ghost storytellers had laid the foundation for their narrative and fostered a mutual understanding with their audience.

At the beginning of our interview, Terry asked, "is it okay to say if I don't believe in God?" After letting her know she was free to express herself, she stated, "Okay. I don't believe in God. But I believe in angels. I don't believe in the Devil. But I believe there are demons. That's always intrigued me." What was it about ghost storytelling that made Terry feel the need to state her spiritual beliefs upfront?

To comprehend experiences with the paranormal and craft narratives around them, we often draw from our sociocultural environment and local folklore (Carlisle, 2015). Establishing understanding between narrator and audience is central to telling a compelling narrative (Carlisle, 2015). It is essential then, that we agree on what a ghost is, and what it isn't, before we begin telling ghost stories. Therefore, by discussing belief, the narrator lays the foundational explanation for what they are about to share. This is an aspect of Oring's (2008) *logos*, where he suggests legendary narrators use a "rifle and pool" effect, a way of bookending their stories with explanation and dialogue which are, "necessary to create understanding and plausibility for the story. They are what make the tale interesting and convincing." (Oring, 2008, 146).

Terry drew from her Christian understanding of the world to help explain her ghostly encounter. Ansu too, shared his belief in angels and demons, however, differentiated them from ghosts. To explain ghosts, Ansu relied on the culturally understood concept of "unfinished business," as did Pat and Meaghan. Unfinished business is often how we explain why spirits linger in our world before passing on to the afterlife. It is believed that spirits are motivation-driven and have to complete some tasks left unfinished in life before they can move on. This concept was popularized in the media, through films like *Ghostbusters* and *Casper the Friendly Ghost*. Invoking this shared cultural trope to explain ghosts, narrators seek to resonate with their audience, tapping into a collective understanding of the supernatural.

For some participants, belief was navigated through the lens of energies. Abbey explained her understanding of ghosts as energies by sharing that,

"I do have a belief in that there's something after ... I think we are all energies. So that energy has to go somewhere when we die, right? So where does it go? I think it hangs out in old creepy houses terrifying your children."

This statement is reflective of contemporary spirituality, wherein the concept of energy serves to bridge the divide between the physical and spiritual realm. Similarly, Enya discussed energies when navigating her own belief in the supernatural. She explained that we all possess energies that can attract ghosts to us, or at least allow us to be open to communicate with them. Many North Americans hold contemporary spiritual beliefs, regardless of religious affiliation (Gecewicz, 2018). There is in fact, an increasing number of people who believe that our consciousness, or energy, survives beyond death (Finnegan, 2018). It is unsurprising then, that many of my participants drew from New Age spiritual concepts to describe paranormal phenomena.

By navigating belief within the construction of ghost narratives, storytellers seek to establish shared meanings and understandings of the supernatural. Whether framing ghosts as angelic or demonic entities, spirits with unfinished business, or manifestations of spiritual energy, these narratives are influenced by commonly understood cultural ideas and personal belief systems. Sharing our beliefs when telling a ghost story helps to build a mutual understanding of the paranormal and makes our narratives more compelling.

Furthermore, ghost stories also offer an opportunity for narrators and the audience to explore their own beliefs and challenge their own understandings of the age-old question – what happens to us when we die? Many participants were eager to explore existential questions in their interviews and wanted my perspective on what the afterlife might encompass. I found this particularly compelling as it seemed as though ghost storytelling provided a launching pad to contemplate complex, meaningful questions many of us have about life, death and meaning. This project did not include questions about belief; however, future research should consider how ghost storytelling may be a practiced component of existential questioning.

Why We Tell Ghost Stories

Making Sense of the Uncanny

We've all experienced moments that send shivers down our spines, causing our hair to stand up on end and feel generally unsettled. We may feel that there is a presence or an unnerving atmosphere surrounding us. These experiences often defy explanation, seeming to have no verifiable reason to make us feel as we do. These moments in our lives constitute what are known as uncanny experiences. The uncanny describes situations, feelings and sensations that feel strange yet familiar (Freud, 1919). Paranormal encounters then, fit well within the uncanny category. A ghostly apparition in human form in both strange and familiar, recognizable in shape and appearance, but strange in its movements and presence.

Picture this: you are at home, curled up with a good book good in your favourite chair. The house is quiet, and you feel safe, content and at ease. Suddenly, you get the sensation that you are being watched. You get goosebumps, and a wave of fear and anxiety washes over you. You think to yourself, "I am alone, there is no one here. I'm just being paranoid." Yet, as you get up from your chair and peer down the hallway, you see a ghostly figure silently gliding from one room, across the hall, into the next. You run to the room the apparition just entered, only to find it empty.

In this scenario, the familiarity of home is disrupted by the intrusion of the unknown. What normally feels safe now feels threatening, as the presence of an unexplained figure shatters your sense of security. However, this figure defies logic. The form is familiar, but it does not belong there. It moves silently and vanishes without a trace. This is how ghost stories intertwine

with the concept of the uncanny. Often, we struggle to make sense of these experiences, and crafting a ghost story might help storytellers make sense of experiences that seem inexplicable.

In an interview with paranormal investigators, bodily sensations and uncanny elements came up a lot. Jim, a retired Naval officer, now works at the Halifax Naval Museum setting up displays and giving paranormal tours. He shared that,

“I was standing by the crypt door and then all of a sudden, I can feel somebody, my hair stood up on end. I wasn’t expecting any of that. And I’m like, okay, my imagination, because when you look at this door, it’s a big scary old Victorian door. But I’m always getting the feeling I’m being watched.”

Another investigator, Amanda, shared that while exploring Fort Louisbourg at night, she suddenly felt, “anxiety creeping in. But it didn’t feel like my typical anxiety, because I feel my anxiety in my chest, this one more felt kind of like, all over and around me.” She then, “felt a presence, you know, like standing behind me.” Eventually, she noticed that the lights started to go dim and then brighten again. These sensations, this all-encompassing feeling of the uncanny, do not seem to fit within a rational framework. There was no corporeal person standing behind Amanda. The lights were not being manipulated by the flick of a light switch. There was no realized threat that should have made Amanda feel anxious. However familiar these feelings were, there were tinged with an inexplicable strangeness.

Crafting ghost stories around uncanny experiences provides us with an explanation. It allows us to package experiences that we cannot explain, that leave us feeling bewildered and unsure of ourselves. Ghosts take responsibility for the shudder down our spine, or the strange noise we heard. They become the familiar in the strange. Pat is constantly inundated with

uncanny experiences in her haunted home. Throughout the 40 years she has lived in her home in Cole Harbour, she has heard disembodied footsteps, seen smoky entities move throughout her hallways and up her staircase, as well as had household items moved and manipulated by unseen forces. According to Pat, these experiences would provoke fear and anxiety if she was not convinced that it is her late father-in-law's spirit. Pat's uncanny experiences are packaged and explained by the presence of a comforting familial entity. In this way, she is making sense of her experience by giving the presence in her story a likely identity (Frank, 2002).

By assigning meaning and making sense of the uncanny through ghost narratives, storytellers can reap therapeutic benefits (Andell et al., 2019). Through the act of constructing a narrative around an inexplicable experience, narrators work to cultivate their own sense of self-understanding, identity, and the social world. For example, the paranormal investigators I interviewed all described themselves as open to communicating with spirits. They saw themselves as spiritual helpers, who assist trapped spirits in resolving unfinished business. In essence, they usher ghosts into the afterlife. Their uncanny experiences with the paranormal provide the opportunity to craft these identities and find meaning in their work.

While discussing her interest in ghost stories, paranormal investigator Sharon stated that, "I was always different. As a child I noticed I had a different awareness than the other kids my age... sensed different things." As she got older, she

"decided to delve into it a little bit more. I started taking Reiki, therapeutic touch, reading, taking courses and different things. And as I did that, I opened myself up more and had more experiences. I just wanted to know more, ask questions to spirits."

Her uncanny sensual experiences as a child, set her on a path that led her to explore the paranormal into adulthood. It allowed her to craft an identity and a sense of the world, and perhaps, allowed herself to fully embrace being ‘different.’ By narrating her uncanny experiences, Sharon was able to hone her own identity and foster self-understanding.

When we turn uncanny experiences into ghost stories, we are assigning meaning and making sense of experiences we struggle to define. Ghost narratives help us make sense of the unknown, packaging these uncanny moments in our lives into neat, communicable stories. Ghost stories are another form of the uncanny discourse, as they are often the source of the uncanny event or the ghost itself constitutes an “uncanny other” (Lipman, 2008). Even more, storifying uncanny experiences has therapeutic benefit. It offers us an opportunity to explore our own sense of identity, self-understanding, and the social worlds we inhabit. The ghost story might also help us make sense of another human experience – grief and loss.

Narrative Sensemaking, Grief, and Loss

Stories provide a guide through which we convey our values, hopes and dreams, feelings, and sense of the world. Stories are often how we make sense of ourselves and our lived experience. In the human experience, nothing is perhaps more disruptive than the death of a loved one. The stories we craft about the one’s we’ve lost constitute a renegotiation of our relationship with them (Kottler, 2015). Although they are no longer corporeally present in our lives, they are still with us in our memories and dreams (Neimeyer et. al, 2008). However, for some of my participants the deceased loved one is still with them in spirit. At times, the stories they shared were emotionally charged narratives about their grief. Others told humorous anecdotes about their lost loved one playfully teasing them from beyond the veil. In all of these stories, the love and desire to connect with their loved one was apparent.

Enya told the story of how her deceased son contacted her after his death. Enya became emotional during her storytelling, with the weight of her loss hanging in the air between us. Enya's son died from a drug overdose at 23 years old, and after his death she, "felt an urgency to feel close to him and know he was okay"; she would talk with her son and ask him to make his presence known to her through a secret password, the word or colour red. If she saw the word red or noticed something red out in the world, Enya felt as though her son was communicating with her. So, when she bought a brand-new red car, she knew her son would approve and be watching.

It was in this red car that Enya would feel her son make the most direct contact with her. When showing the car off to her family, she received a text message alert on her car's screen from her son, at this point deceased for over a year. She frantically pulled out her phone, only to find no message had been received from him. This happened in her red car more than once. These messages gave Enya a lot of comfort and she is certain, "it was a definite message from him that he was with us." This ghostly encounter and the constructed narrative surrounding it, provided Enya with certainty that her son was still present in her life. It helped her to make sense of profound loss and provided an opportunity to talk with and about him.

Much like personal narratives, the grief journey is not linear. Coping with loss can take many different forms. For some participants, their encounters with lost loved ones were framed in a humorous way. In her haunted house, Pat's deceased father-in-law would make his presence known by manipulating household objects and making noise. Her father-in-law passed away shortly before they moved into the home they intended to share with him. Although his ghost sometimes scared her, she ultimately felt at ease knowing it was him. She believed that he was, "watching over [us], supervising." In one encounter, Pat recalled that a baking mixer flew out of a kitchen cupboard on its own. When she investigated the loud crash from her kitchen, she found

the mixer sitting upright in the middle of the floor. Pat laughed when retelling this story and stated that she “guessed Grandad just wanted cookies.”

Terry too, told a story of interacting with her deceased stepfather. Terry shared her great love of her father, a man she described as, “the biggest meanest looking man who was the biggest, sweetest hearted person.” Terry shared that she misses him to this day, but that his ghostly presence in her life brings her, “pure joy.” As she explained, when she was a child, her stepfather would tickle the back of her head. One night long after he had died, Terry was sleeping in bed with her husband. She awoke to that familiar tickle on the back of her head. As she went to swat her husband’s hand away, she turned around to realize he was fast asleep. Terry felt a knowing sense that it was her stepfather. Now, she sleeps with the covers over her head and will audibly tell her stepfather’s ghost, “I know you are there. I love you, goodnight. Mind your business!” This encounter, and her subsequent nightly conversations with him, offer Terry a new way to connect with her deceased loved one. The story she shared brought her laughter and when asked how she felt telling it she shared that, “it just brings me pure joy. Like, deep down ... I know it was him. I know.”

Anthropologists have studied grief narratives extensively. However, there is little research on how personal ghost stories can become part of the grief process. In my research, many participants told stories that involved connecting with the spirit of deceased loved ones. These stories evoked a wide range of emotions – from sadness to amusement. One constant theme in all of these types of ghost stories was the comfort that was felt when experiencing and retelling them. My participants were able to make sense of their loss through ghostly narratives and reimagine their relationship to a lost loved one. Ultimately, these personal ghost narratives served as a poignant reminder of the therapeutic role of storytelling in the mourning process.

Cultural Transmission and Place

Many of the ghost stories thus far have been deeply personal narratives of individual experience. Stories told about grief, loss, uncanny experiences, and trauma are deeply personal, whereas stories imparting cultural knowledge and wisdom are more collective. After all, the stories we tell help us to make sense of the worlds we inhabit. They can be a mechanism to pass down information and impart collective memory (Connerton, 1989; Jackson, 2005). My participants all reside in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Some of them were born here, others moved here to the East Coast of Canada by choice. Many of the collected stories held important local historical information and were tied explicitly to place.

The Halifax Explosion is an important historical moment in the city's history. In 1917, a cargo ship collided with another ship in the Halifax Harbor. The cargo ship, containing highly explosive material, exploded and decimated the city. Over 1700 people were killed and another 9000 injured (Nova Scotia Archives, 2024). The memory of this event leaves a traumatic scar on the city, with buildings still carrying damage from the blast. It was difficult for Shannon to forget this event in her city's history. As a child, she resided in its Hydrostone district, which, she explained, "was pretty devastated by the Halifax explosion. Even in my backyard, there was lead in the soil." As a result, she always felt unsettled in her childhood home. There were times as a toddler, she would wake up not in her crib, but in the middle of the floor. When Shannon was 4 years old, she woke up to the feeling of pressure on her chest. Fearful, with her eyes still closed, she reached down to feel what was pinning her to the bed. It was then that she felt an icy, bony hand.

Shannon never discovered the history of the home. She does not know who the ghost might have been. However, by framing her story within the context of the Halifax explosion and

her historic neighbourhood, she communicates important cultural information. Nova Scotians are encouraged to remember this event. Later, she shared that she would love to research the history of the area. Her ghost story might lead her to uncovering even more knowledge about where she grew up.

One of Terry's ghost stories also carried the spectre of history. While visiting a friend's home in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, she was struck by a seemingly mysterious illness. Although it was in the heat of the summer, Terry could not get warm. Everyone else in the home felt fine. Terry would say, "it was not until months later that I knew why. I'm going through my pictures on my phone. And I'm like ... I see a Black man, a spirit, peeking through the window." Terry believed that this mysterious visitor's presence made it impossible for her to get warm – in effect, he chilled the air. Many ghost stories involve this type of atmospheric manipulation – a change in temperature, or an electric-feeling to the air. Terry then explained that the area around Shelburne, Nova Scotia has a rich Black loyalist heritage, containing one of the largest communities of freed Black slaves during the revolutionary war in America. Her family would later uncover a grave on the property, one they would determine belonged to an African American settler.

Terry's ghost story seems straight forward. After all, she went to a friend's home, came down with a mysterious illness which she promptly recovered from, and upon looking at her vacation photographs noticed a spectre in a window. However, when retelling her story, it becomes more complex. Terry makes sure to communicate the historical information of Shelburne and its Black heritage. Her story is framed with context that transmits important cultural information that should not be lost. Perhaps Terry will tell this story to someone who is unaware of the history of Black loyalists on Nova Scotia's southwestern shore.

Marn also shared a story that provided historical information relevant to the tapestry of Halifax. Marn shared that her mother worked at Kay's Department store on Barrington Street in 1950. The department store was a popular shopping destination and highly patronized. One evening,

“a little girl came in and stole a pair of shoes and my mother chased her out of the store. When she caught up to her, the little girl was crying and said she didn't have any shoes. So, my mother said, take the shoes and if they don't fit come back and see me. The day Kay's burnt to the ground, that little girl came and asked for my mother. That's why she got out of the fire. She didn't say it was a ghost, but that it was a kind of test, about kindness.”

The little girl brought Marn's mother down to the front of the store, close to the exit on the day of the fire. This provided her mother with a quick escape from the engulfed building. Marn would go on to speak of how 10 people died in the Kay's Limited fire in 1950. This moment in Halifax history is one of immense tragedy, a story that should not be forgotten. The fire changed both national and provincial building standards and fire safety codes. The story both imparts the historical information of the fire, but perhaps also the cultural trope of Haligonians as kind and hospitable. It is the kindness her mother showed to this mysterious little girl that ultimately saved her.

It is important to make the distinction that all of the stories I received would be classified as primary hauntings (Lincoln & Lincoln, 2015). Participants' ghost encounters were explained as a presence in the home, a ghostly figure, a direct communication, or a spirit manipulating objects. However, for those stories that contained cultural transmissions, it would be advantageous to investigate whether a classification of secondary haunting could be made; the

past continuing to haunt the present. How does the spectre of the Halifax Explosion loom over the city and its citizens? How does the community in Shelburne live alongside the history of the town as a haven for Black loyalists? Does the community remember the Kay's Limited fire and if so, are they haunted by that memory? These questions are beyond the scope of my project but would be interesting threads to pick up in future work.

Although I expected to witness ritualistic elements incorporated into the storytelling process, I was surprised that my participants all told stories in different ways. It is important to note that storytelling collection occurred in public spaces which could ensure a reasonable amount of privacy, however, the spaces were not quiet or entirely private. The embodied practices of ghost storytelling that I expected, such as, speaking in hushed tones, leaning into the audience, and pausing for dramatic effect, did not occur across participants. If the environment for story collection were different these behaviours may have been observed. Ghost stories are often told in darkened rooms, across from campfires, or in settings that lend themselves to fantastical tales and these settings may have prompted participants to lean in to ritualized, embodied storytelling practices more readily than in coffeeshops and libraries.

We tell stories for a variety of reasons – to entertain, to educate, to frighten, to connect. Ghost storytelling also serves a multitude of functions. Stories that many of us might discount as fabricated tall tales shared for entertainment might communicate a lot more about the storyteller and our broader society. My research has examined how ghost stories help individuals make sense of the world, their identities, and experiences that defy explanation. Ghost stories are deeply personal narratives that deserve to be taken seriously.

Conclusion: The Enduring Significance of Ghost Stories

Throughout this project, I have aimed to answer the question – why in the 21st century, do we continue to tell ghost stories to one another? Ghost stories seem a relic of a bygone era, a time when we would use our imagination to entertain each other. With the advent of the internet, some would argue that we have become disenchanted from the fantastical as we can easily prove or disprove anything we desire. However, the ghost story persists and arguably, is just as relevant today as it has ever been.

Humans are storytellers and the stories we tell serve a variety of purposes. Ghost stories are no different. My research has shown that we tell ghost stories to make sense of our experiences, our relationships, and worlds. We tell them to entertain but we also tell them to find meaning in uncanny experiences, moments of grief and loss, and in our own sense of self. We tell them by establishing truth, navigating belief, and fostering mutual understanding by drawing from our cultural milieu.

Future research should consider how ghost stories become a mechanism through which to experience, express and cope with grief. Initially, I did not anticipate the connection between ghost stories and personal grief narratives, but throughout the research process, was struck by how often my participant's stories centred around the loss of loved ones. It would be interesting to investigate more thoroughly the role of ghost storytelling and the grieving process. Additionally, cross-cultural investigations on the practices of ghost storytelling could yield fascinating results on how the processes of, and reasons behind ghost storytelling differ dependent on cultural contexts.

When hearing my participants' ghost stories, I felt connected to them. I felt invited into a secret world in which the two of us were able to talk freely about a topic many dismiss. There

was a vulnerability I did not anticipate in the sharing of ghost stories, once that made me realize ghost stories are deeply personal narratives in which people explore meaning and are worth investigating. These stories provide a rich avenue through which to explore how we make sense of, interact with, and tell stories about the supernatural. It should also go without saying, they are also highly entertaining and make great fodder for a night around the campfire.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



DO YOU HAVE
A GHOST STORY?



Are you 18+?

If you answered YES to both of these questions, I invite you to participate in my thesis research project!

I am studying the persistence of ghost storytelling in the 21st century. Participation would involve one interview that would take about an hour.

If you are interested, or have any questions, please contact me at **ROBYN.BRISTOL@DAL.CA**. I'm excited to hear from you!

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

Project title: Persistence of Ghost Storytelling in the 21st Century

Lead researcher: Robyn Bristol, Dalhousie University, rb322122@dal.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Karen Foster, Dalhousie University, karen.foster@dal.ca

Introduction

I invite you to take part in a study being conducted by Robyn Bristol, a fourth-year honours student at Dalhousie University. Choosing whether or not to take part in this research is entirely your choice. The information below will tell you what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do, and any benefits, risks, inconvenience, or discomfort you might experience.

If you have any questions about this study, you're welcome to discuss them with Robyn using the email address provided above. Please ask as many questions as you like.

Purpose of the study

In this study, I want to explore why we continue to tell ghost stories to one another in the 21st century. I am interested in hearing your ghost story and your perspective on this enduring phenomenon.

I will be collecting ghost stories and conducting interviews with Nova Scotians aged 18 years and older. In these interviews and story collections, I will be interested in how ghost stories get told, the content of the story and what the storyteller has to say about their experiences with ghost storytelling more broadly.

Who can take part

You may participate in this study if you are

a. Aged 18 years or older

b. Have a ghost story you would like to share

What you will be asked to do

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete one interview that will take about an hour. Interviews will be conducted in person, at a location of your choosing. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions (which you may answer or skip as you choose) and be given an opportunity to tell your ghost story.

Possible benefits, risks, and discomforts

Participating in this study might not benefit you directly, but we might learn things that will benefit others. Participation in this research study is intended to be low risk. However, there may be a chance that telling your ghost story could be emotionally difficult. To mitigate this, you will be able to take breaks, skip questions or withdraw from the study completely.

To help find other study participants, I will invite you to pass on the information about the study to other suitable people. You are welcome to choose not to pass on the information if you prefer. All information from your interview will be kept completely private from other interviewees, and only myself and my honours supervisor Dr. Karen Foster will have access to your information. The information that you provide to me will be kept confidential.

Interviews will be recorded using a recording app on my personal computer or cellphone. I will tell you exactly how I will be recording the interview prior to the start. The completed recording will be stored on a password protected, encrypted laptop, with a backup saved on OneDrive, a Canadian encrypted cloud storage service. I will transcribe the interview, and the transcription will be stored on the password-protected, encrypted laptop. Once the interview is transcribed, I will delete the audio. A back-up of the transcription will be saved in OneDrive. The transcription and any associated notes will be destroyed after my thesis is submitted on April 12, 2024.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

How your information will be protected

Your participation in this research will not be shared outside of the research team (myself, Robyn Bristol, and my supervisor, Dr. Karen Foster). If you choose to share my study with others for recruitment purposes, you may choose to disclose or not disclose whether you have personally participated - I will not share that information under any circumstances. If you choose to complete the interview in a public setting, there will likely be low privacy. We can discuss a more secure location at your discretion.

With your permission, I will audio record the interviews and transcribe them afterward. Once transcribed, audio files will be deleted. You will have the choice to be identified by your first name in this study or remain anonymous. If you choose to remain anonymous, you will be assigned a pseudonym in the research. Transcripts and the legend of pseudonyms will be kept in password-protected documents on my computer which only I have access to.

In my thesis, I will only use direct quotes if you give me permission to do so. Quotes will have identifying information removed if you desire or will include your only your first name.

Transcripts and the legend of pseudonyms will be destroyed once the study is complete.

If you decide to stop participating

You are free to stop participating in this study at any time until March 1st, 2024. After March 1st, it will be impossible to withdraw you from the study because the final thesis will already be submitted. You may withdraw before, during, or after the interview up until that point.

How to obtain results

If you wish, I can email you a copy of your transcript and/or the final thesis when it is completed. You can request this by emailing me or telling me during your interview. My thesis will also be publicly available on the Dalhousie library website after March 1st.

Questions

I am happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you may have about participating in this study. You are welcome to contact myself, Robyn Bristol, at rb322122@dal.ca, or my supervisor, Dr. Martha Radice, at martha.radice@dal.ca at any time.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may also contact Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-3423, or email: ethics@dal.ca (REB file # 20XXXXXX).

Signature Page

Project title: Persistence of Ghost Storytelling in the 21st Century

Lead researcher: Robyn Bristol, Dalhousie University, rb322122@dal.ca

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I have been asked to participate in one interview of roughly an hour, and that the interview will be audio recorded. I understand that direct quotes may be used from my interview with or without identifying me at my discretion. I agree to take part in this study.

My participation is voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time until March 1st.

Name	Signature	Date
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Please provide an email address below if you would like to be sent a copy of your transcript and/or a copy of my thesis, and indicate which:

- Transcript
- Thesis

Email address: _____

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Introduction

The purpose of this interview is to collect your ghost story and ask you some questions on the story you share and ghost stories more generally. The interview should take approximately 1 hour. All information collected today will be deidentified if you choose and if so, a pseudonym will be used. If you choose to be identified, you will be identified if you choose to on the consent form. Additionally, all information collected today will be kept confidential and only accessible to me and my Honours professors, Dr. Martha Radice and Dr. Karen Foster. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study up until March 1st by reaching out my myself. Martha Radice or Dr. Foster by e-mail. This audio from this interview will be recorded using a recording app on my encrypted, password protected laptop. Do you agree to being recorded?

Thank you.

General Inquiry into Ghost Stories

- 1) Do you like ghost stories?
 - a. If yes, what is it that you enjoy about ghost stories?
- 2) Where do you usually hear ghost stories and with whom?
- 3) Were ghost stories told to you by members of your family?
 - a. If yes, by whom?
 - b. How old were you when you were told these stories?
- 4) What do you think makes a good ghost story?
- 5) What about a bad ghost story?

Framing of participant's story

- 6) Did the story you are going to tell happen to you or were you told this story?
 - a. If you were told the story, who did you hear it from?
- 7) Please tell me your story
 - a. Ask specifics if not provided – where and when this story took place.

Follow-up questions post-storytelling

- 8) How often have you told this story?
- 9) Who have you told this story to?
- 10) When you have told this story in the past, what was the setting you told it in?
- 11) When you have told this story in the past, how did your audience respond?
- 12) What, if anything, do you think this story or encounter communicates?
- 13) Do you think there are different kinds or categories of ghost stories? what are they?
- 14) Why do you think that we continue tell ghost stories to each other in the 21st century? 15)
- 15) What do people get out of telling ghost stories?

Appendix D: Final REB Report



ANNUAL/FINAL REPORT

Annual report to the Research Ethics Board for the continuing ethical review of research involving humans / Final report to conclude REB oversight

A. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

This report is (<i>select one</i>):				
<input type="checkbox"/> An annual report		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A final report		
REB file number:	2023-6951			
Study title:	Ghost Stories: Contemporary Apparitions			
Lead researcher (named on REB submission)	Name	Robyn Bristol		
	Email	Rb322122@dal.ca	Phone	902-471-5811
Current status of lead researcher (at Dalhousie University):				
<input type="checkbox"/> Employee/Academic Appointment		<input type="checkbox"/> Former student		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current student		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain):		
Supervisor (if lead researcher is/was a student/resident/postdoc)	Name	Dr. Karen Foster		
	Email	Karen.foster@dal.ca		
Contact person for this report (if not lead researcher)	Name			
	Email		Phone	

B. RECRUITMENT & DATA COLLECTION STATUS

<p>Instructions: Complete ALL sections relevant to this study</p> <p>Study involves/involved recruiting participants: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>If yes, complete section B1.</i></p> <p>Study involves/involved secondary use of data: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>If yes, complete section B2.</i></p> <p>Study involves/involved use of human biological materials: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>If yes, complete section B2.</i></p>
--

B1. Recruitment of participants	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
B1.1 How many participants did the researcher intend to recruit? <i>(provide number approved in the most recent REB application/amendment)</i>	10
B1.2 How many participants have been recruited? <i>(if applicable, identify by participant group/method e.g. interviews: 10, focus groups: 25)</i> a) In total, since the beginning of the study: Interviews: 13 b) Since the last annual report: Interviews: 13	
B1.3 Recruitment for this study is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> complete; or <input type="checkbox"/> on-going	
B1.4 Data collection from participants for this study is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> complete; or <input type="checkbox"/> on-going	
B1.5 Communication with participants related to this study is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> complete; or <input type="checkbox"/> on-going	

B2. Use of secondary data and/or biological materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
B2.1 How many individual records/biological materials did the researcher intend to access? <i>(provide number approved in the most recent REB application/amendment)</i>	
B2.2 How many individual participant records/biological materials have been accessed? a) In total, since the beginning of the study: b) Since the last annual report:	

C. PROJECT HISTORY

<i>Since your last annual report (or since initial submission if this is your first annual report):</i>
C1. Have there been any variations to the original research project that have NOT been approved with an amendment request? This includes changes to the research methods, recruitment material, consent documents, study instruments or research team. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please explain:

C2. Have you experienced any challenges or delays recruiting or retaining participants or accessing records or biological materials?

Yes No

If yes, please explain:

C3. Have you experienced any problems in carrying out this project?

Yes No

If yes, please explain:

C4. Have any participants experienced any harm as a result of their participation in this study?

Yes No

If yes, please explain:

C5. Has any study participant expressed complaints, or experienced any difficulties in relation to their participation in the study?

Yes No

If yes, please explain:

C6. Since the original approval, have there been any new reports in the literature that would suggest a change in the nature or likelihood of risks or benefits resulting from participation in this study?

Yes No

If yes, please explain:

D. APPLYING FOR STUDY CLOSURE

Complete this section only if this is a FINAL report as indicated in section A

D1. For studies involving recruitment of participants, a closure may be submitted when:

all research-related interventions or interactions with participants have been completed

N/A (this study did not involve recruitment of participants)

D2. For studies involving secondary use of data and/or human biological materials, a closure may be submitted when:

all data acquisition is complete, there will be no further access to participant records or collection of biological materials

N/A (this study did not involve secondary use of data and/or human biological materials)

D3. Closure Request

I am applying for study closure

E. ATTESTATION (both boxes *must* be checked for the report to be accepted by the REB)

I agree that the information provided in this report accurately portrays the status of this project and describes to the Research Ethics Board any new developments related to the study since initial approval or the latest report.

I attest this project was, or will continue to be, completed in accordance with the approved REB application (or most recent approved amendment) and in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2).