Continuing bonds in the age of social networking:

Facebook as a modern-day medium

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Abstract: As Facebook's popularity grows and endures, many profiles are becoming gravemarkers of the dead, scattered among the profiles of the living. The integration of Facebook usage into many people's everyday lives makes it unsurprising that ongoing interaction by the living with deceased persons' profiles is increasingly commonplace, but this is little studied. This research undertook qualitative document analysis of 943 posts on five 'in-memory-of' Facebook groups and an interpretative phenomenological analysis of three interviews with bereaved Facebook users. Four themes arose: (1) modes of address, (2) beliefs about communications, (3) experience of continuing bonds, and (4) nature and function of the Facebook community. The article has a threefold aim: (1) to contextualise the findings within a sociologically focused version of the continuing bonds theory of bereavement; (2) to argue that Facebook, as a modern-day 'medium', may supplant more traditional 'mediator deathworkers'; and (3) to enhance bereavement professionals' awareness and understanding of bereavement in an age increasingly marked by technologically mediated relationships, and to thus inform clinical practice.

Key words: Facebook, online mourning, continuing bonds, bereavement, mediator deathwork, posthumous communication

Introduction

Several decades ago, the philosopher Martin Heidegger remarked upon how new technologies were shrinking distances across time and space, saying, 'Man...now receives instant information, by radio, of events which he formerly learned about only years later....The peak of this abolition of every possibility of remoteness is reached by television, which will soon pervade and dominate the whole machinery of communication' (Heidegger, 1971, p163).

His assumption that the apex had been reached was premature. The Internet far outpaces television in its ability to diminish the distances of time and space. More than 750 million of us worldwide use the social networking site Facebook as a vehicle for self-representation and interaction, half of us logging on at least once a day (Facebook, 2011c). Particularly for members of the 'Facebook generation', those who are telepresent may feel as close to us as those who are present in an embodied way. Cyberspace in general, and social networking sites in particular, have rapidly evolved into extensions of our human bodies, opening up new possibilities for us to be with one another in the digital world (Kim, 2001).

In February of 2004, when Facebook was launched (Facebook, 2011a), it is unlikely that its founders anticipated its exponential growth and the implications of many Facebook profiles eventually becoming digital gravemarkers, sites of mourning and remembrance scattered amongst the profiles of the living (Andrews, 2010). It makes intuitive sense that the predominance of social networking is having a significant impact on how we mourn and how we interact with the dead, and research is just beginning to cast more light on these changes.

In presenting and discussing this author's research on posthumous Facebook communication, this article has three overlapping aims. The first is to contextualise the findings within a sociologically focused model of the continuing bonds theory of bereavement (Klass, 2006; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Klass & Walter, 2001). As readers of this journal will probably be aware, the notion that 'healthy' resolution of grief involves breaking bonds and letting go of the relationship with the deceased person is a 20th century phenomenon and is largely due to the influence of Freud, who felt that to hold on to such connections was pathological, and that it was important to invest one's energies fully into other things, other relationships. Continuing bonds theory is an increasingly influential alternative to this view and holds that, while relationships necessarily *do* change, they do not *end* as such, and that this can be normal, adaptive and comforting (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996).

The second aim of this research is to speculate about how Facebook, as a modern-day 'medium', may supplant more traditional 'mediator deathworkers' (Walter, 2005) such as funeral celebrants, priests, spiritualist mediums, and obituary writers.

The third and overarching aim is to enhance bereavement professionals' awareness and understanding of bereavement in an age increasingly marked by technologically mediated relationships, and to thus inform clinical practice.

Facebook in life and in death

The telepresence and the sense of one's identity conveyed on Facebook are not static, and much moves and shifts continuously on an active profile. What can result is a rich and multifaceted representation of individuals in the context of their relationships and many of their realms of existence. Heidegger (1962) described being-in-the-world-with-others as an existential given, and a well-developed and well-used Facebook profile illustrates this fundamental truth. Our identities are co-constructed, negotiated and established between individuals (or between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities) (Jenkins, 2008), and our existence is inextricably intertwined with others'.

When someone dies and Facebook is informed, his or her profile is currently 'memorialised'. No one can access it or change it, although people can continue to post on the 'wall' and those on the friends list can continue to view and interact with the profile as before. If an immediate family member requests the profile's removal, however, this request will be honoured (Facebook, 2011b). What may additionally happen is that someone creates an in-memory-of group. This has many of the same functions as an in-life profile. Ongoing accessibility of the dead person's image is made possible. Mourners communicate with one another; they share memories of their unique relationships with the deceased person in a communal space, allowing a more 'complete' picture of the person to emerge. The circumstances of the death and funeral and memorial arrangements may be shared.

Context and intended contribution of this research

Although the Internet has been used by bereaved persons for social support for well over a decade (Sofka, 1997), and the earliest versions of web memorials or 'virtual cemeteries' appeared in 1995 (Roberts, 2006), Facebook only launched in 2004 (Facebook, 2011a) and has only been open to anyone with an email address for five years (since September 2006) (Facebook, 2011d), meaning that mourning on Facebook is a relatively new phenomenon and a young area of research. Most of the research to date has concerned virtual cemeteries (eg. Green, 2008; Roberts, 2006).

Carroll & Landry (2010) have produced some of the only research to date on the phenomenon of mourning on social networks, combining an ethnographic analysis of 200 Myspace memorial posts with a quantitative survey of 100 undergraduate users of Facebook. Of Carroll and Landry's survey respondents, 60% had visited the page of someone who had died, although only 10% had posted themselves and only eight respondents had addressed themselves directly to the dead. The researchers noted the greater likelihood of young adults visiting Facebook pages than of them reading obituaries; the ability of the medium to facilitate connection with the deceased person, with memories, and with the community of mourners; and the phenomenon of the persisting digital self. Carroll and Landry's initial, quantitative findings provide a grounding for further studies seeking a deeper and more detailed understanding of the lived experience of mourning on Facebook.

Preconceptions at the start of the research, based on this researcher's observation and experience of these virtual forums, included that mourning on Facebook differs from dedicated memorial sites/virtual cemeteries (studied by Green, 2008, and Roberts, 2006) in several significant ways, but perhaps particularly in terms of *continuity*: (a) the mourning takes place in the same 'place' or 'space' as formerly, rather than in a new 'place' such as a virtual memorial site, and (b) interaction continues with the same co-constructed representation of self created during that person's life, rather than with a new, eulogised representation of the person created by someone else in a virtual cemetery. It is also noted that Facebook differs substantially from Myspace (Carroll & Landry, 2010) in representations of self, features and functionality, and types of interaction. It is therefore hoped that this research will add something new to the body of literature.

Method

In the first phase of research, five in-memory-of groups that memorialised a reasonably homogenous group of individuals – all late adolescents who died suddenly in car crashes, who had lived in the English-speaking west (United States, United Kingdom, Canada) and whose in-memory-of groups had 400+ members – were purposively sampled. To analyse these groups, qualitative document analysis (QDA) was employed, which is a method particularly well suited to analysing content generated and conveyed within the 'mass-mediated world' and to 'illuminat[ing]…the process of the social construction of reality'(Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese & Schneider, 2008, p133). Immersion in, exploration of, and reflection on the content of the sites was followed by more systematic and detailed observations with a focus on process, meaning, and key themes arising from the 943 total wall posts across these five sites.

In the second phase, administrators in-memory-of groups who were at least six months post bereavement were approached via Facebook with an email outlining the purpose and method of the research. Three individuals who responded to the researcher's initial inquiry consented to participate. They were subsequently interviewed about their experience of interaction with the memory group as well as posthumously with the person's in-life profile. Two of these interviews took place on MSN instant messenger, and one took place on the telephone. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), an idiographic qualitative method that aims to illuminate how individuals experience and construct the meaning of phenomena that are significant to them (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), guided data collection and analysis. IPA and QDA possess similar epistemologies and processes, and hence data gathered from the two phases of research were combined to generate themes.

Ethics

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee in the Psychology Department of London Metropolitan University. Several ethical points warrant mention here. For the first phase of research, the observation and analysis of the posts on in-memory-of Facebook groups, the researcher was a 'lurker' whose presence was invisible and passive. Sofka (1997) has raised the question of whether 'participants in bereavement-related groups may feel that the private nature of the experience should be respected' (p569). This was addressed by focusing on themes and trends and not presenting raw data that would be highly personal or identifiable.

The researcher followed the British Psychological Society Research Board's ethical guidelines for psychological research conducted online (2007). Parkes'

(1995) guidelines for ethical bereavement research were also considered, which include all the standard ethical guidelines to ensure anonymity, informed consent, and protection of participants, but which also emphasise experience in working with bereaved persons (which this researcher has) and skill in detecting and managing distress. Rosenblatt (1995) also highlights bereavement counselling training as important, and his guidelines on qualitative interviews with bereaved people were closely considered, particularly with regard to avoiding pressure or coercion on potential research participants and attempting to ensure minimisation of pain and distress during interviews.

Finally, the challenge of detecting and managing distress within online or telephone interviews was a concern for the researcher. To meet this challenge, the researcher developed distress protocols for use with telephone/Skype interviews or instant messaging (Kasket, 2009a; 2009b), adapted from Cocking (2008). Ultimately, implementation of these distress protocols proved unnecessary, as participants reported the interviews to be emotional but not unduly distressing.

Findings

Four main themes arose, each with several subordinate themes. These are summarised in Table 1 and described and illustrated in the subsections below.

Table 1: Themes emerging
Theme 1: Modes of address
…as mediated by social norms of the medium
…as mediated by other social norms
…as mediated by beliefs about communication
Theme 2: Beliefs about communications
…deceased persons as conscious recipients of communication
…evidence of return communication via other means
…Facebook as effective medium/mediator
Theme 3: Experience of continuing bond
…comfort of communication
…vividness of deceased person's telepresence
…investment in maintenance of bond
…sense of 'everydayness'
…fear of bond breaking
Theme 4: Nature and function of Facebook community
… as a source of comfort and help
… as a source of information
… as a source of conflict or competition
… as co-constructors of deceased person's biography

Theme 1: Modes of address

The phrase 'modes of address' is intended to capture a number of elements of communication, to include directness/indirectness (second- versus third-person speech);

in/formality of speech; and structure of posts. The chosen mode of address seems to be influenced by three main factors: the social norms of the medium (Facebook); other social norms, for example, norms associated with age group/generation, degrees of connectedness (knew her/ didn't know her), and roles such as 'teacher' or 'colleague'. Older individuals tend to use 'condolence letter' style; younger individuals speak directly to the dead person, in the informal (and sometimes profane or text-speak) style that they utilised in Facebook interactions during the person's life. Of the direct-to-deceased-person communications, 7% came from people who confessed to not having known the deceased person. Although these came from younger individuals well accustomed to computer-mediated communication and potentially situations in which one addresses oneself to strangers over the Internet, the circumstances seemed to make them feel uncertain:

> 'I don't feel like I should be writing on here as I didn't know you as a friend.'

> 'I feel like I didn't deserve to write on here as we were never that close.'

Direct, second-person address (ie. 'you') was used for 77% of the posts, far exceeding the 30% Roberts (2004) found on an analysis of virtual memorials and perhaps indicating a stronger sense of continuing bond (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996) on social networking sites such as Facebook.

Sometimes the choice of direct communication versus third-person voice seemed to be influenced by what the writer believed about the deceased person's ability to receive the communication, as illustrated by the following contrasting examples:

> 'I know he can't read anything, what we are writing here. But I just want to share my feelings with his friends and family.'

> 'Even though it seems silly to talk through Facebook, I know u can see and understand every word I type.'
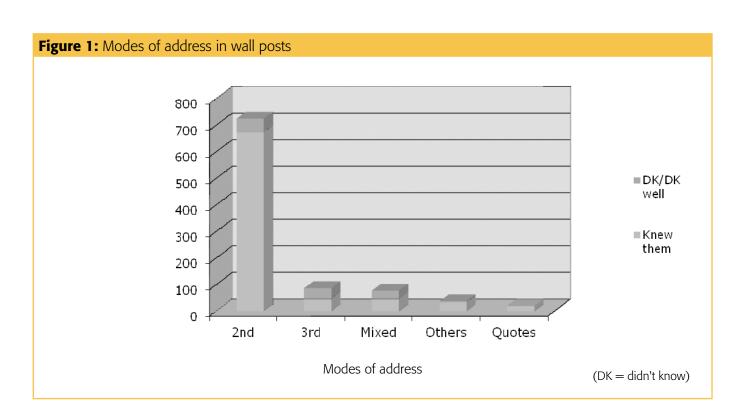
Theme 2: Beliefs about communications

It is recognised that direct communication can represent mere adherence to social norms and need not indicate a belief in the deceased person's ability to receive said communications; however, echoing the last quote above, there are ample examples of postwriters explicitly expressing a belief that the dead are getting the message.

> 'I know u can read this, it just sux that u can't talk back…thanx for lettin me talk to u again [on Facebook].'

> 'I know you are reading this.'

> 'Sorry I haven't been around in a while to say hi.'

Although there is no expectation that the deceased person will return communication via the same means, there are also numerous examples of a belief that while Facebook messages may only flow one way, replies are forthcoming via natural phenomena, dreams, and intercessions, and that deceased loved ones are guiding and helping the living:

Figure 1: Modes of address in wall posts

Modes of address

(DK = didn't know)

'Thanks for the dream you gave me, you weirdo…'

'There's been a really bright star in the sky lately and I know that that's you.'

'The car almost skidded over the median. Thank you for keeping me from going across all the way.'

It was via the three participants in the second phase of research that the researcher was able to get a sense of how Facebook could be experienced as a particularly *effective* way of communicating with and feeling close to the deceased person, more so than graveyard visits, visits to the home, thinking thoughts, or writing letters.

'I feel she will see it if it's on her wall. [If I were to leave a letter for her at the gravesite]…when I can't see what I've wrote to her, I feel like she won't be able to see it too….' ('Ava')

'You can think thoughts in your head, and think, "Oh, I'm hoping he can hear me," but when you write something in Facebook, it's a more tangible way to communicate.' ("Ruby")

'It's strange but part of me just feels like he sees it somehow. When I'm communicating with him on Facebook, there isn't that immediate reminder that he's gone. But when I see his name on his headstone in a silent cemetery or I see his room frozen in time, it's more in-your-face.' ('Clare')

The belief that Facebook is the best way of getting hold of the dead is also expressed in wall posts that seem to assume that while the dead are not omniscient, they must surely be reading their wall posts:

'Happy late birthday! I did not have computer access yesterday…but I did remember your birthday and thought about you all day!'

'I'm sorry that I haven't written to you for a while now, I know the castle is luxury but not so much that it has the Internet.'

Theme 3: Experience of continuing bond

The continuing bond experienced by mourners can be inferred from modes of address, frequency and persistence of posting messages, and frequency of participants' reported visits to the profiles. It can be seen in the way in which people update the deceased person on everyday things long after the death – 'I think your cousin's so cute', 'We won the game', 'Your brother had his confirmation the other day', 'We're going ice fishing this weekend'. The reassuring sense of 'everydayness' is echoed by research participants: 'I do feel such a comfort in having a normal conversation with

her' ('Ava'). There is an investment in the maintenance of the bond: 'I check it…almost every other day, give or take' ('Clare', a year after her friend's death). The persisting digital self and the mourner's bond with it is experienced as somehow 'real', and there is a terrible fear of that bond being broken.

'[If the profile were deleted] it would feel like I wouldn't be able to talk to her properly…it would be deleting the last bit of her that's still almost real.' ('Ava').

This brings up a potential criticism of Facebook's current policy of removing profiles at the family's request (Facebook, 2011b). Friends have traditionally been a disenfranchised group of mourners (Carroll & Landry, 2010) but have been admitted into the community of mourners via social networking, even if they had not known the deceased person well.

'A piece of who he was is still going to live on, his heartbeat will always be with his family…but for the rest of us, as a friend, or the people who sat next to him in class, it's a way for them to remember him too…to feel connected' ('Ruby')

The threat of profile removal, however, means that these friends still run the risk of being marginalised – and traumatised.

'I would be close to inconsolable. Having something that may seem so small to some people is everything to me. [His profile] is the one last thread of him that I have. If we lost it, it would be like losing him all over again. There are just certain things that rip the wounds open.' ('Ava')

Theme 4: Nature and function of Facebook community

Research participants and wall posts alike refer to the other members of the community, especially in terms of the succour provided by reading others' posts. Research participants who set up in-memory-groups were aware of this benefit.

'All I wanted was a place that people could visit in privacy to share memories of him…I shared comforting quotes and lyrics that I found. Anything that helped me, I put up there in hopes that it would help someone else.' ('Clare')

Support and information on a more pragmatic level – gleaning of information about the death, pleas for rides to a memorial – is also sought from the community.

Wall posts frequently refer to how much more the writer now feels they understand or know about the deceased person from the community's recollections and from engagement with all of the photographs and other elements posted on the in-memory-of wall. From the researcher's perspective, as one reads through hundreds of wall posts and sees dozens of photographs, the image of the deceased builds in complexity and becomes more multifaceted, more detailed, more vivid.

In this scene of connectedness and support, however, competition and conflict are not completely absent. One participant in particular referred to attention-seekers and opportunists:

'Many people are eager to jump on opportunities [like making a memory group] just for the popularity; in fact there were several people who tried…one guy…who is always trying to be in control of everything…was doing it just to get the credit….My friend overheard another girl complaining the week after the accident because people were leaving her in memory of group to join mine. It's just so petty and immature.' ('Clare')

Discussion

Continuing bonds theory

In 2006 there was a special issue of *Death Studies* devoted to continuing bonds. In the following issue, Dennis Klass made a reply, observing that all the articles had seemed to portray continuing bonds as being about an individual, inner experience. 'The most obvious element missing [here]', he says, 'is the social and communal component of continuing bonds' (Klass, 2006, p848). Klass describes how our adjustment to bereavement is achieved *in conversation*. 'In our study of grief we need to include the cultural narratives in which conversations with both the living and the dead are set' (p852).

This latter point is an echoing of Walter (1996), who argues that the purpose of grief is to construct a durable biography that allows the survivors to continue to integrate the deceased person into their lives and to find a stable and secure place for them. For that place to really feel secure, he says, the image of the deceased person has to be reasonably accurate and shared with other people. This happens through conversations with other people who knew them. But '[u]nfortunately,' says Walter (again, writing 15 years ago) 'these others might not be readily available in a mobile, secular…society' (p12), and he suggests that things like the funeral and the obituary play a role in facilitating these conversations and in achieving this stable, secure, durable biography. In Klass & Walter's (2001) more recent co-authored chapter, they note again that social and geographical separation may prevent those people who knew the deceased individual from talking about them.

The existence of social networking radically changes the constraints that geographical separation and social division formerly placed upon talking about – and, indeed, to - the dead. When one considers Klass' (2006) and Walter's (1996) arguments for a more sociological, communal understanding of continuing bonds alongside the above-described research, one becomes aware of how well Facebook fits within this framework. Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou (2005) write that a deceased person's 'social identity will not perish so long as it can be reconstructed through the memories and actions of the living' (p21). When the community of mourners gathers on a social networking site, their memories and actions serve to evolve and add to the society identity, the durable (digital) biography, that was begun by the deceased individual during his or her life. The biography that a priest or a funeral director or other mediators would have to work to construct and convey accurately is already there, *in situ*.

… it is not surprising that people are visiting virtual memorial sites more frequently than they do physical cemeteries

This biography is a situated biography, a 'person-in-context' biography. If you visit your dead friend's Facebook profile, you can click on 'See friendship' and see a snapshot of all your interactions with that person. You can scroll down the wall to see all their visible posts and conversations with yourself, right back to the inception of the profile. You can immerse yourself in potentially years of photographs, videos, records of events, private jokes, likes, dislikes, arguments, breakups and make-ups. You can partake in the post-death ritual of changing your own profile picture to a photograph of the dead person, or of yourself together with the person, as a testimony to and an honouring of the relationship. You can review the dead person's old postings on your own profile. Finally, you can see many of these same kinds of interactions with many other people, some of whom you may know as well, but many of whom may be drawn from all realms of that person's life, people to which you might not have access if it were not for social networking. This community makes sense of this person's death and life together. Overall, looking at the themes that emerge in this research, Facebook seems to neatly facilitate all four processes of grieving that Klass & Walter (2001) discuss and situate within continuing bonds theory: sensing the presence of the dead, talking with the dead, experiencing the dead as guides, and talking about the dead.

Compare all of this to a grave-marker in a traditional English cemetery – 'the solid enduring gravestone, the words on the stone' (Moss, 2004, p78). Especially given ease of accessibility and the comparative vividness of the deceased individual's presence, it is not surprising that people are visiting virtual memorial sites more frequently than they do physical cemeteries (Roberts, 2004). As presented above, research participants explicitly spoke of visiting Facebook as being more satisfying and carrying more of a feeling of connectedness than did visiting the grave or a physical memorial. For months and years they continue to post on the person's wall, mostly *to* the dead person but also in explicit or implicit communication with the whole community of mourners, an excellent example of the kind of more sociologically or communally experienced continuing bond Klass (2006) spoke about. One of my research participants, referring to both Facebook's power to facilitate communication with the dead and also to the power of experiencing *communal* continuing bonds, said:

> '*I like the thought of her being able to see what I write and what everyone else writes; it's definitely a comfort, doesn't feel like she's gone completely.*' ('Ava')

Facebook as mediator deathworker or 'medium'

'Medium' has various definitions. One is a channel through which information is transmitted. Another is a person through whom spirits are said to communicate with the living. In performing this function, spiritualist mediums are one variety of what Walter (2005) terms 'mediator deathworkers' (p2). Mediator deathworkers may also be pathologists, funeral directors, obituary writers, priests, eulogy-givers, or biographers, but they are all involved in a flow of information from the dead person to the mediator to the mourners, via some kind of public rite that interprets the dead for the living. Walter emphasises that the dead do and always have 'told tales' but that they have traditionally needed assistance to do so. 'These tales need a teller', he says, 'one with privileged access to the dead body, to the dead spirit, or to other sources of knowledge about the death and/or the dead. They are all mediums…passing on information about the dead' (p4). Such mediators have traditionally been important players in the construction of a durable, stable biography of the dead for survivors to connect with.

In the context of death, Facebook meets both definitions of medium. In terms of the first definition – a channel – just as they use it as a channel for information transmission in life, people use it to channel information to their dead friends, often believing that their communications are getting through to the person – no crystal balls or séance required. In terms of the second definition, an in-life

Facebook profile already serves as a foundational 'durable biography', as a ground for a tale co-constructed with others. At first it is under the editorial power of the living person, and after the death, the community automatically takes on the biography, developing and negotiating it in a relatively egalitarian manner. No one person, no one tale-teller or medium, need be delegated to collate, sift through, edit and present information about the deceased individual. This is automatically carried out as a collaboration between the dead person and the community of survivors.

In-memory-of-group administrators, such as my research participants, are deathwork mediators to the extent that they have contributory and gatekeeping roles with regard to the initial setup of the site and its contents. Anyone is usually free to join the group and to post, but my three administrators took a fairly passive role when it came to the editing and presenting of the image of the dead person, reserving intervention for posts considered completely inappropriate in some way. They also described that over time the activity on the administrated in-memory-of-wall tailed off, with more enduring and frequent communication and interaction taking place on the in-life profile; as the participants reported, the in-life profile is most redolent of the *real person*. The in-life-profile itself seemed to be the medium that most readily and powerfully facilitated a sense of connection and communication between the living and the dead. No one else was needed to facilitate this.

Implications for bereavement care professionals and further research

The findings of this research validate and expand upon the findings of researchers such as Roberts (2006) and Carroll & Landry (2010), who emphasise the Internet's ability to facilitate a strong sense of continuing bond with the deceased individual, and who note that the online context in general and social networking sites in particular are changing the processes and rituals of mourning in our society. There is every reason to expect that this evolution will continue, that increasing numbers of people will leave behind digital durable biographies when they die, and that technologically facilitated mourning will become more widespread. Continuing research will be required to keep pace with the rapid evolution of technology and the social mores that now evolve alongside it.

However helpful it may be for a mourner to continue to interact with a deceased person's Facebook profile, social networking sites have the power to excite strong opinions in many, and debate about whether social networking is inherently 'good' or 'bad' for us as individuals and as a society rages on (for a snapshot of contrasting sides of the debate, see Procon.org, 2011; for a deeper investigation and discussion of the sociological implications of social

networking, see Miller, 2011). Even a bereavement professional who is theoretically aligned with continuing bonds theory may have a lack of exposure to, lack of understanding of, or even a deep prejudice towards social networking, and this can affect how he or she responds to a grieving individual's maintenance of an online connection with the deceased person. An attitude survey of bereavement professionals would be a valuable direction for research. From the standpoint of both a researcher and a practitioner involved in bereavement counselling, this researcher would argue that an awareness of this fast-evolving phenomenon, and a framework for understanding it, are both critical to providing effective bereavement support in the digital age.

The implications of online mourning, both on social networking sites and in virtual cemeteries, extend beyond bereavement support into the other rituals around death, dying, and memorial. This research shows the persistent digital self to be a vivid, everyday presence in mourners' lives. In even a few years' time, will we still be moved to visit the place of physical interment of our dead? Will this be satisfying, or give us a feeling of connectedness? If so, will we integrate the physical markers with virtual technologies such as holograms with artificial intelligence? What will change about funerals and eulogies, when durable biographies of the dead exist with such wide accessibility? What will an increasing awareness of our Facebook profiles as being part of our digital legacy, our durable biography, mean for the way we co-construct these profiles? Will we as a society need our mediums, our priests, our obituary writers, and our bereavement professionals in the same way? These questions are a logical outgrowth of our digital society, and their salience shows the extent to which social networking is revolutionising both our lives and our deaths. ■

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