

Experiences of memory-writing in bereaved people



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Abstract: Grief following the loss of a close person, and dealing with bereavement, is painful and demanding. Grief theory emphasizes the positive value of memories and of continuing bonds to the deceased. Furthermore, writing is a powerful tool for expressing and handling difficult and painful experiences. This qualitative study explores and describes the experiences of memory-writing in 13 bereaved people attending a structured grief management programme. Qualitative data from written reports following writing in groups and at home, and from an extensive individual report compiled two weeks after completion, was analysed. The findings indicate that memory-writing seems to evoke and preserve significant memories. Although distressing, this memory process has a meaning-reconstruction role for most people, and provides power to move forward on the road of life. The findings suggest that memory-writing might be a useful tool in grief processing and suitable for use in health care.

Keywords: Bereavement; grief; memory; health care; suffering; writing

Introduction

Recent grief theory emphasizes the positive value of memories and of continuing bonds to the deceased as a source of further enrichment of life (Attig, 1996, 2002; Neimeyer *et al*, 2006). Several researchers have characterized writing as a powerful tool for expressing and handling difficult and painful experiences (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Lepore *et al*, 2002; Pennebaker, 2004). In studies on expressive, explorative writing and its implications for health, researchers have identified the potential for increased positive health and well-being gained through such writing (Lowe, 2006; Pennebaker, 2000; Pennebaker *et al*, 2002). Writing is an aid to reflection; a way to express, explore and discover one's own thoughts and feelings (Elbow, 1973, 1981). Furthermore, writing yields increased awareness, clarification and understanding (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Elbow, 1973, 1981; Furnes & Dysvik, 2011). Such aspects are essential in dealing with grief (Attig, 2002; Furnes & Dysvik, 2011).

Grief processes

Dealing with bereavement and grief can be painful and demanding, and can constrain life (Attig, 2002; Parkes, 1986). Suffering is a natural part of grieving (Ferrell & Coyle, 2008). Morse (2001, 2011) defines suffering as a basic human response to a physical or psychosocial threat, including the illness or death of a loved one. Morse (2001, 2011) has identified two broad behavioural states of suffering: enduring and emotional suppression. Suffering refers to the bereaved individual's experiences of managing the adjustment to living with grief. Moreover, it involves the whole life situation (Attig, 2002).

The grief process can be understood as a movement between relearning the world and adaptation, dominated by multifaceted and overwhelming experiences. "Relearning the world and adaptation consists of a continuous movement involving experiences like: 'despair-hope', 'lack of understanding-insight', 'meaning disruption-creating meaning' and 'bodily discomfort-reintegrated body'" (Furnes & Dysvik, 2010, p137).

Central aspects of grief processing incorporate actions such as being allowed to express the grief experience, gaining an awareness of the loss, and acknowledging it through new insights and organization (Attig, 2002; Furnes, 2008; Furnes & Dysvik, 2010). Therapeutic writing is defined as: ‘client expressive and reflective writing, whether self-generated or suggested by a therapist or researcher’ (Wright, 2004, p8). According to Bolton and Wright (2004), therapeutic writing is of great value in health care because it employs processes of personal, explorative, and expressive writing. In dealing with grief, writing about memories specifically, what we call ‘memory-writing’, can be a form of therapeutic writing that focuses on an exploring, expressive, personal writing form. This can reveal memories and experienced situations related to the previous life with the dead person.

Many researchers have documented the effects of writing as an aid to adjusting to demanding life experiences (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth *et al*, 2001), but there seem to be few empirical studies that focus on memory-writing and bereavement, or using this kind of writing in groups as a help in living with grief. Therefore, drawing on the above assumptions, it is important to investigate the value of memory-writing from a broader perspective, to inform and improve practice.

Based on the previous considerations, in this article we aim to explore and to describe the experiences of memory-writing experienced by bereaved people attending a grief management programme. We address the following two research questions:

- What kinds of experiences are described and related in memory-writing?
- What kinds of thoughts and feelings are described during and after memory-writing?

Method

We used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach inspired by Ricoeur (1976; Delmar *et al*, 2005, 2006). Thus, in our approach, we were open to the experiences of the bereaved people. The empirical material consisted of written reports collected after diary writing and writing tasks completed as a part of a grief management writing programme (Table 1).

Participants

The participants were 13 bereaved adults (10 women and three men) aged between 20 and 59 years (Table 2). We used purposive sampling, where researchers’ knowledge of

Table 1: Organization, writing situations, and topics of the writing programme

Organization	10 meetings over five months (in total): – Every second week for three months, for 2.5 hours – Once a month thereafter, for 2.5 hours	
Writing situations and topics		
Meeting	Group writing	Home writing
1	Writing about the present life situation	Writing diary
2*	A description of the person who is lost	Writing diary
3*	A story about an important occasion spent with the person who is lost	Writing diary
4*	Writing a letter/obituary for the lost person	Writing diary
5	Defining ‘despair’ and ‘guilt’	Writing diary
6	Writing a story based on pictures that illustrate different aspects of grief experience	Home writing based on a previous theme; Writing diary
7	Defining loss and loneliness	*Home writing about a good memory; Writing diary
8*	Previous and present relationship to important persons	Home writing about good and bad thoughts and feelings experienced during the last few days; Writing diary
9*	Experience of grief, longing, hope, and joy	Home writing about situations related to a strong feeling of grief/situations related to joy; Writing diary
10	Writing about the things that are important to know; the capacity to meet the new life situation; a meaningful life; and future plans	

*Topics specifically concerning memory-writing

the population and its elements are used to handpick typical cases to be included in the sample. Deacons (bereavement counselors) engaged in a bereavement support service visited bereaved people two weeks after the loss, and informed them about the bereavement support groups with writing as part of the service. Those bereaved persons who needed support, expressed willingness to participate in the writing groups, and were found suitable, were included. Those that were excluded were offered alternative support.

The participants met the following inclusion criteria:

- bereaved adult women and men who had lost a close person through death
- aged between 20 and 70 years.

Exclusion criteria were as follows:

- bereavement following loss of a child
- lack of motivation for participation
- unwillingness to attend a group
- major psychological problems including complicated grief.

Persons suffering from the loss of a child, and bereaved persons suffering from complicated grief, were excluded from participation. Parents' grieving following loss of a child has been described as unusually difficult and prolonged (Rubin & Malkinson 2002). Furthermore, complicated grief is a particularly demanding experience and may require special treatment (Bonnano & Kaltman 2001).

The participants in the writing programme were divided into two groups: one group consisted of individuals who had experienced the loss of a spouse or partner (7 participants) and the other group consisted of those who had lost a parent or sibling (6 participants). The time span between the loss and starting the writing was not included as a criterion for participation in the programme. This decision was supported by both Attig's grief theory (Attig 2002) and the deacons (the counsellors in the groups) who indicated that grief could be 'alive' for several years after the loss. During the ten group meetings, three of these had one drop-out, while two drop-outs were registered in another. However, none of these meetings dealt with topics specifically concerning memory-writing.

Prior to inclusion, written instructions were handed out. It was emphasized that the participation was voluntary and that participants could leave the programme at any time. Confidentiality was guaranteed and written consent was obtained. The participants had on hand professional support from a psychologist and nurse if needed. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee and the Data Inspectorate responsible for this region.

Table 2: Participants and background information (N = 13, 10 women and 3 men)

Age	20–59 years
Time Since Loss	4 months–1.5 years
Type of Loss	Expected/unexpected death
Group Assignment	1) spouse or partner 2) parent or sibling

Description of the writing programme with memory-writing tasks

The writing programme (Table 1) lasted five months. Group meetings were held every two weeks during the initial three months, with one meeting in each of the following two months, a total of 10 meetings. Two counsellors led each group. They had experience of grief group work and knowledge of writing theory and the writing process. They emphasized an accepting and including group climate as important in their counselling. The first group meeting included general information about writing as a possible tool to facilitate difficult thoughts and feelings. Dialogue and inputs about the nature of grief were emphasized. In addition, guidelines for writing were communicated to guide and initiate the writing activity (see Appendix 1).

Group members wrote at a grief writing group and at home, producing pieces based on specific topics and keeping diaries if they wished. All themes in the writing programme could appeal to memory-writing, while some topics were specifically designed to stimulate memory-writing (Table 1).

Empirical data

Participants anonymously submitted written reports to the researcher, and these comprised the empirical data for our study. Participants wrote these report texts after each writing period in the grief writing groups, and after the periods of writing at home. They described their experiences and commented on the positive and negative value of such writing. In addition, each participant also provided a more extensive report two weeks after the writing programme ended.

Analysis

We identified our findings through an analysis and interpretation of the report texts that was inspired by the thinking of Ricoeur (1976; Delmar *et al.*, 2005, 2006). According to Ricoeur (1976), reading the text is the dialectic between two attitudes: explanation and understanding. Both of these potentialities belong to the reading of a text (Ricoeur, 1976). We used the following steps in our analysis and interpretation.

Table 3: Example from the analysis process

Units of Meaning (What is said)	Units of Significance (What is being spoken about)	Theme (Memory-writing evokes significant memories)
'The memories poured in.'	Opens up for memories	Awareness of memories
'Suddenly it dawned on me how many good memories I have from that time.'	Opens up for good memories Good to look back	Memories emerge Awareness and meaning of memories
'Many thoughts and memories come over me.'	Opens up for memories Brings up thoughts	Memory creation and preserving
'I need to hide the stories in my heart.'	Storing memories/something valuable Take care of memories/something valuable	Construction of meaning
'During the writing I was overwhelmed by memories, and thought of the good life together with him.'	Provokes memories Creates memories	Memories emerge Memories value
'Along came all the memories I had from that time, all the positive good memories, and it felt good to sit and reminisce and think back on that time.'	Good feelings connected to memorizing Gives a feeling of well-being	Construction of meaning

- 1) Naïve reading. This reading was carried out to get an impression of all report texts to arrive at an overall view and to obtain a holistic understanding of the meaning content: 'what is said.'
- 2) Structural analysis. According to Ricoeur (1976), the structural analysis is intended to clarify the dialectic between the holistic understanding ('what is said') and an explanation of the text ('what is spoken about') to make a deeper critical interpretation possible. Interpretation of the explanatory structures and the understanding of the content leads to themes. Presentation of the findings reflects the dialectic between 'what is said' and 'what is spoken about'. We present examples of the findings from the structural analysis in Table 3.
- 3) Critical interpretation and discussion. The naïve reading and the structural analysis gives direction to the selection of theory. The critical interpretation and analysis illuminated by theory can bring about new understanding.

Findings

The following two thematic findings emerged during the analysis.

- Memory-writing evokes significant memories.
- Memory-writing involves a wide range of thoughts and feelings.

Methodological considerations

To secure trustworthiness we provide here a detailed description of the analytic steps, by a thorough presentation

and interpretation of quotations, which contribute to the transparency and credibility of the findings. We consider the written reports to be rich and detailed, offering rich variation in the phenomena studied. Representative quotations are presented to give the participants a voice. There is no single correct meaning or universal application of our research findings. As such, our approach allows the reader to look for alternative interpretations. Transferability of the findings to similar situations can be considered by taking into account the participants' culture and context, data collection and analysis.

Memory-writing evokes significant memories

Participants generally experienced memory-writing as a valuable task that contributed to meaningful perspectives. Several participants described how the writing tasks opened up memories and brought them into a type of memory work where they were confronted with experiences and situations related to their lives with the people they had lost. They were somewhat surprised that writing about an event could initiate a significant memory process. Some of the bereaved said that many good memories were invoked while they were writing:

'Suddenly it came clear how many good memories I have from that time. The memories flowed, and it felt good to go back to these fine old memories. I need to hide the stories in my heart as a treasure'. (Ann, age 20, grieving the death of her brother)

'It helped to bring up valuable memories. I felt gratitude. The memories should be kept as a fervent memory

and treasure'. (Burt, age 42, grieving the death of his brother)

Through writing, they described the memories as important to preserve. The memory-writing helped them to be aware of fine or good memories, and the thought of these memories enriched them.

In their reports, many participants emphasized that it was important to highlight memories, and several of them stated that the memory-writing tasks evoked significant or valuable memories. It appeared that these memories helped them to deal with the grief experience and to maintain some ties to the lost person. Participants described this as a closeness that was painful but good and meaningful. They described writing and thinking back as clarifying, and a help in broadening their perspective on further life experiences:

'Afterwards I have to remind myself that it is reality and that I need to hide the stories in my heart. . . . For what I write here I will not let go away, because it's something I can pick up later on. This topic made it clear to me that, after all, I have many great memories to take with me further in life – such writing could help me to preserve them'. (Cecilie, age 24, grieving the death of her mother)

Memory-writing promotes awareness of the past and has an impact on the way forward. Such snippets reveal good experiences and show that the writing and telling can help with including memories in the reconstruction of meaning. In their reports, several participants described how formulating a story created self-understanding and gave meaning and coherence to an awareness of themselves. In the text reports, they consistently stated the positive impact of reminiscence:

'The task: the experience of hope and joy helped me to see the positive side of life and all that has been of great value for me, and that there is hope for a better life after a while'. (Judy, age 44, grieving the death of her partner)

Participants described how their writing contributed to feelings of gratitude and strength. It helped them to recognize bright spots and to gain a new perspective on life, now and ahead. They realized that they had much to preserve and enjoy and take into the future. One pointed out that looking back on situations they had experienced shed a different light on the present:

'The good memories are of joy now. Gratitude and joy for all the events shared with the other is an enrichment. The task gave me time to reflect on all the joys in my life. I also think it was fine to write a description of

the one I have lost. It was sort of a tribute to NN, and showed me how lucky I was, after all. . . . This writing task showed me that, after all, I have many great memories to bring along in my further life – helping me to preserve them'. (Elaine, age 49, grieving the death of her spouse)

Participants appeared to gain strength from their good memories, and these might help to maintain a relationship to the lost person. They spoke of their gratitude and joy at spending some of their lifetime with the other person, and they described their memories as life-giving, a power and encouragement to move forward in life.

Several participants cited the awareness-raising function of the writing process and its role in further reconstruction:

'You become more aware of what was and what you have got now. Thinking back shows me that I have come a bit further, that grief is in a better phase, that life has a new content. To write about situations that I associate with pleasure makes me aware of everything and that I can be happy anyway, although I have become alone'. (Karen, age 38, grieving the death of her spouse)

Participants found that memory-writing helped to raise their awareness of the present situation. Memory-writing evoked reflections that contributed to a positive attitude. As bereaved people, they could look back on previous situations as significant experiences. Writing helped them to highlight and hold on to the good memories, and in turn, these memories and thoughts about what had been, brought to mind that there is always a chance of happiness.

In several reports, participants expressed a feeling of closeness to the lost person:

'It was good to write a letter to the person. Felt in a way that the person could read it. Although it's been several months now, it does not feel real as if he is gone'. (Elaine, age 49, grieving the death of her spouse)

'I think it was good to write letters to the one I lost, it was as if I spoke to him, and I told him about my innermost thoughts, feelings, the loss and grief. All this I presented to him'. (Judy, age 44, grieving the death of her partner)

'It was good to describe NN. Thought very much of him, heard his voice'. (Eric, age 30, grieving the death of his brother)

In this writing, a form of dialogue occurs. It points out a relationship, where the writing calls on memories, brings the writer close to the deceased, or gives a feeling that the other is near. For participants, writing a letter seemed to be

a way to experience a form of presence. The letter was both a meeting place and a place where they could open up and confide in the person they had lost. Participants valued this form of proximity.

Memory-writing involves a wide range of thoughts and feelings

In their text reports, several participants stated that thoughts of the other person and their memories stood out very strongly in the memory-writing. Both good and painful feelings were associated with such writing. However, it seemed to be a recurrent feature that memory-writing was related to positive experiences, thoughts and feelings dominated by good memories. Participants described how the memories provided relief when loss and sorrow seemed to dominate everything. One of the bereaved wrote as follows:

‘Along came all the memories I had from that time, all the positive good memories, and it felt good to sit and think back on that time. . . . I think it was a straightforward task we had today, I went back to when I was a child, and it felt good’. (Iris, age 26, grieving the death of her father)

When the bereaved were writing, ‘old times’ came back, and several thoughts and feelings connected to the loss were awakened. This felt fine.

Participants also reflected that an experience of sadness could follow the writing period, but this experience was interwoven with good feelings. They also encountered ambiguous experiences when writing about memories:

‘Today’s theme was a bit difficult to write about and somehow both a little hard and all right. When I started, I could not find the right words to describe it, but it came a bit later when I first started writing, and it got me thinking back and imagining my beloved NN and what he really meant. So it was a bit tough, the memories flooded in, but I think it was a very nice topic I wrote about’. (Martha, age 56, grieving the death of her spouse)

‘This writing made me think back and see myself and him together. It was tough, the memories poured out, but it still was a very OK task’. (Karen, age 38, grieving the death of her spouse)

‘When I write, I always feel the grief and the loss tremendously, and many thoughts and memories come over me. Despite the fact that it feels difficult, the memory also brings something that is meaningful’. (Catherine, age 56, grieving the death of her spouse)

While participants believed that it was good to recall memories, these also served as a reminder of what was

missing. Writing allows for memories, and although it felt painful, the bereaved people appreciated being able to recall and remember.

Some participants were distressed by the memory work. Their writing made their bereavement seem very close, along with the thoughts and feelings associated with it. The writers recalled several bad experiences, and they described remembering these and writing about them as solely bad. Two of them stated: ‘It hurts and makes me feel worse.’ (Peter, age 59, grieving the death of his spouse) ‘It [the memory writing] is a struggle. It leads to no good.’ (Lisa, age 50, grieving the death of her spouse)

Some participants explained that it was harmful to think back and to have the certainty that their loss was real and irrevocable. They were filled with memories of life with the loved person, and what they had lost became even clearer. In a text report, one participant outlined that the exercise of writing the obituary was almost unbearable because it led to a sore certainty that the other was gone forever. For example, writing a story about an event that had meant something in life with the other evoked and strengthened longing. However, it seemed clear that some gained something valuable from these painful experiences related to writing a story. This experience was described as follows:

‘I felt it almost unbearable when I started to write this story. Along the way, it felt all right to write about it. Suddenly it dawned on me how many good memories I have from that time. It almost made me laugh when I recalled some episodes. It was a nice theme to write about. Brought back to me lots of good old memories’. (Helen, age 28, grieving the death of her brother)

Distress related to the memory-writing seems clear. However, in spite of these pains, participants gained awareness of several good situations from the past through this writing. Several stated that creating a story based on events shared with the loved person was associated with positive thoughts and feelings, and these memories seemed encouraging. One surprising finding was that those participants who described distress related to the memory-writing in their reports during the program, clearly stated the value of such writing in the longer reports that they submitted after the writing program ended.

Critical interpretation and discussion

In this article, we have explored and described experiences of memory-writing of bereaved people attending a grief management programme. We will now go more deeply into the interpretation to illuminate our thematic findings within a theoretical context, and in this way will attempt to answer our research questions.

Experiences related to memory-writing

Memory-writing is a personal and informal form of writing that can give rise to expressive, uncensored and direct writing. This expressive writing is close to an 'inner speech' and the thought process itself, and could be an introspective technique of discovery (Elbow, 1973, 1981). Such writing is also described as a therapeutic tool because it leads to reflection and illuminates the writer's life experiences (Elbow, 1973; Thompson, 2004).

In our findings, such writing brought up valuable memories. The participants described increased awareness of their own experiences during the memory-writing tasks. The writing seemed to evoke memories that can help to maintain ties to the deceased. Several researchers have emphasized the importance of preserving good memories and the relationship to the lost person (Attig, 2002; Furnes & Dysvik, 2011; Neimeyer *et al*, 2006), and an engagement with memories seems to have a salutary function by virtue of maintaining attachment to the deceased (Attig, 2000). Furthermore, the recall and identification of memories can be a part of creating a new self-understanding (Silverman & Nickman, 1996). Neimeyer (1999) emphasizes the value and importance of creating meaning for moving forward. Meaning is about creating a relationship between life stories, and reconstruction of meaning allows a bereaved person to understand contexts, to gain new insights, to adapt to the new life situation and to achieve the spirit of a future life (Neimeyer, 1999). Through our findings in the present study, we indicate that memory-writing can be a valuable tool in this process.

In our study, participants found that writing a story through memory-writing was associated with something positive, despite the sadness that they experienced ...

After the loss of someone close, bereaved people have to reorganize their understanding of themselves in the world (Neimeyer, 2002a), and this is a difficult and necessary process of adaptation to loss (Neimeyer, 2002b). In our study, participants found that writing a story through memory-writing was associated with something positive despite the sadness that they experienced. Through telling and formulating a story, participants had the opportunity to restore continuity and to increase self-understanding. Emotional release and self-revelation enabled them to establish new goals, to recognize realistic achievements, to realize a changed future and to create meaning for what

had happened (Morse, 2001; 2011). This reorganization is also about creating continuity by building a bridge between the past and the future, and it seems that writing a story can represent this (Neimeyer, 2002b). The importance of maintaining ties to the other and of preserving the relationship to the loved person by highlighting the memories of the other are considered important in consolidating a new identity (Attig, 2002).

Studies assessing the relation between continuing bonds, coping and meaning reconstruction after loss associate these with lower levels of bereavement complication (Neimeyer *et al*, 2006). Reminiscences of the other's importance in the relationship and good common experiences can confirm memories and ties. More abstract forms of bonding, such as comforting memories, can be accompanied by less anguish (Field *et al*, 1999). Field and Friedrichs (2004) provided support for the use of continuing bonds expression in coping with loss in bereaved widows. These widows reported experiencing more positive moods at times when they were making greater use of the expression of continuing bonds. Grief research demonstrates that sustaining ties to the deceased constitutes a central part of grief resolution by enabling the bereaved person to preserve a sense of identity and meaningful connection with the past (Attig, 2002; Neimeyer, 2000). We suggest that several of the memory-writing tasks in the present study can give comfort by sustaining ties and by helping to associate the loss and grief with the best in life.

Thoughts and feelings related to memory-writing

Findings reflect that a wide range of thoughts and feelings are evoked during memory-writing and are linked to such memory work. Throughout the grief process, thoughts and feelings can vary in their nature and intensity (Attig, 2002; Furnes & Dysvik, 2010). To recall means to remember what was positive as well as what was negative. In our study, the positive thoughts and feelings of memory-writing seem predominant, although some participants also described ambiguous experiences in their reports. Such experiences could be understood as the result of a relearning process, with movement between relearning the world and adaptation (Furnes & Dysvik, 2010).

Stroebe and Schut (1999, 2002) highlight the necessity of both confrontation and reorganization in grief processing, where the quest for something positive and meaningful is important. Many participants reported that various thoughts and feelings were evoked during and after memory-writing, and we could say that this writing represents a confrontation with one's own experiences. Participants also found that writing about good experiences, hope, and joy gave them a positive outcome. According to Stroebe *et al*, (2002), a constructive and adaptive approach in grief processing should focus

on positive emotions. Writing that is focused on positive aspects and meaningful memories may help to promote hope and alleviation of suffering. Hope is related to the future life situation and can capture the spark of life. Moreover, this could be a help in dealing with the new life situation. Authors of studies into the health effects of writing claim that writing about positive topics appears to facilitate adaptation in relationships and coping with stress-filled situations (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001).

In the present findings, we saw clearly that the writing brought both good and sad thoughts and feelings. The participants were challenged to ventilate and confront their loss and grief experiences in the memory-writing. Our findings indicate that this was quite distressing, but it also had a valuable role. However, two participants experienced the writing solely as upsetting and negative. This might indicate reading and writing difficulties, or that they were more prone to articulate thoughts and feelings verbally. Interestingly, these participants also reported that they generally disliked writing. Those expressing aversive or onerous experiences were offered more extensive follow up to prevent their situation worsening.

As we have defined it, memory-writing includes an expressive writing form. According to Lowe (2006), expressive writing might help people toward emotional balance by allowing them to become habituated to stress-related stimuli as they repeatedly deal with them in their writing sessions. Furthermore, 'restructuring' stress-related situations by means of expressive writing can reduce intrusive thoughts and attenuate negative effects on mood (Lowe, 2006).

In our findings, we saw that participants experienced good thoughts and feelings as a result of recalling the past. Field *et al.* (2005) claim that internalization of the lost person as an inner comforting presence makes it possible for a bereaved person to be emotionally sustained by the mental representation of the deceased, with less need for the physical presence of the other. Moreover, this use of continuing bonds could be a way of coping in affect regulation (Field *et al.*, 2005).

To alleviate suffering, health care workers must pay attention to present thoughts and feelings (Dysvik & Furnes, 2010), and assist the movement from enduring loss to emotional release (Morse, 2001, 2011). As we see it, facilitating memory-writing as a tool in this movement can be a valuable contribution.

Conclusion

Raising memories through writing in a group approach can be a way to maintain proximity and continuing bonds to the deceased, and can also be a place where bereaved people can find strength and joy through exploring significant memories. Memory-writing, as exemplified in this study, brings good as well as distressing thoughts

and feelings. Most of all, it brings valuable experiences which provide power to move forward on the road of life. However, among the few that did not experience the writing as valuable, we suggest a tighter follow up with support and assistance from the bereavement counsellors during the writing process in the group. In addition, these participants should have the opportunity to articulate thoughts and feelings verbally.

We suggest that this writing approach in groups might expand the skills of bereavement supporters. Memory-writing in writing groups may supplement other follow up and care for the bereaved in their grief work. We suggest that the value of participation in groups related to memory-writing should be explored in further research.

Ethical approval: Local ethical committee, REK Vest: Nr. 03/06856 ■

APPENDIX 1: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

Guidelines

- Be honest and open in the writing process.
- Be patient. To get started, you may write about whatever you wish/daily situations.
- Do not be concerned about grammar and punctuation.
- Write about everything that occurs during writing.
- Be open and spontaneous.
- Ask yourself questions and try to talk to yourself during the writing.
- Emphasize your feelings and how they are experienced.
- You are the owner of the text, and no one else should have access to it.

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