

DISSERTATION

CONTINUING BONDS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD:
THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN ADOLESCENT GRIEF

Submitted by

Libba James

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2014

Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: Nathalie Kees

James Banning
Linda Kuk
Susan McQuiddy

Copyright by Libba James 2014

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

CONTINUING BONDS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN ADOLESCENT GRIEF

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the adolescent grief experience when it is being lived out through the online social media site, Facebook. The primary research question, “What is the grief experience like for adolescents who use Facebook for grief support by communicating with the deceased and with other grieving individuals?” guided the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Eight high school students agreed to participate in this study. Each adolescent had experienced the death of a peer within the previous two years and acknowledged that they used Facebook as a means of support during their grief. Participants took part in two interview sessions with the researcher. The researcher used interpretive phenomenological analysis to interpret the data. After the final phase of analysis, five major themes emerged from the text: remembering the dead, not forgetting the dead, self-expression of grief, connecting with the living, and continuing bonds with the dead. These themes led to results that support the use of online social media in adolescent grief. Understanding the importance of this phenomenon is critical for any person who works as helping professional with adolescents. Because of the rapid developments occurring daily in technology and in online social media, future research possibilities could be endless.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am incredibly grateful to all of the people who helped me in the completion of this dissertation and who supported me throughout my entire doctoral journey. This accomplishment could not have been possible without the following teachers, colleagues, family, and friends.

I want to express my extreme gratitude to my Counseling Office family: Angie, Margie, Amanda, Konda, and Keely. Thank you for your unwavering belief in me, for loving me as your sister, and for always standing by me.

Dr. Peggy Whiting is solely responsible for developing my passion for loss and grief counseling. I am eternally grateful for her guidance and support throughout my development as a counselor and scholar. Most importantly, I am grateful for our beautiful, lifelong friendship.

Thank you to Dr. Linda Kuk and Dr. Susan McQuiddy for joining my dissertation committee during the most difficult steps of the process. You both provided wonderful insight and helped to make my research stronger and more meaningful. Thank you to Dr. James Banning for making qualitative research methods relevant and exciting. I am forever grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from the best. I cannot begin to adequately express my extreme gratitude to Dr. Nathalie Kees. You have stood by me as a teacher and as a friend and are a constant inspiration to me. You are simply wonderful, and I am so thankful to know you.

Finally, I thank my incredible family. I am so grateful to my parents, Harold and Pam James, who made it possible for me to seek out my dreams in Colorado and who have supported me every step of the way. And to Reese, Hazel, and especially my Karen, all of my successes are because of you. You are my foundation and my life. I never knew this kind of happiness and love before you came into my world. I am overwhelmed with gratitude and love for each of you.

DEDICATION

For my Aunt Debbie

“I know for certain that we never lose the people we love, even to death. They continue to participate in every act, thought and decision we make. Their love leaves an indelible imprint in our memories. We find comfort in knowing that our lives have been enriched by having shared their love.”

Leo Buscaglia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
DEFINITION OF TERMS	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Primary Research Question	2
Sub Questions	2
Delimitations of Study	3
Assumptions and Limitations	4
Significance of Study	5
Researcher Perspective	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Adolescent Development at a Glance	9
Development Risks	11
Historical Views of Grief	13
Adolescents Coping with Grief.....	14
Grief Support in Schools	16
Daily Grief Reminders in Schools	17
Historical Trends of Adolescent Online Grievors	19
Contextual Background of Online Mourners	21
Adolescent Development in an Online World	23
Using Online Social Networking in Positive Developmental Growth	26
Developmental Risks of Online Social Networking	28
Risks and Benefits of Online Grief Support	32
Continuing Bonds in an Online World	35

CHAPTER 3: METHOD	38
Research Question	38
Sub Questions	38
Methodology	38
Sampling Criteria	40
Data Collection	40
Interview Questions	41
Trustworthiness	43
Data Analysis	44
Methodology Assessment	45
Conclusion	46
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	47
Primary Research Question	47
Sub Questions	47
Description of Participants	47
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	49
Remembering the Dead	51
Not Forgetting the Dead	55
Self-Expression of Grief	57
Personal Connections with the Living	59
Continuing Bonds with the Dead	62
Outlying Themes	65
Conclusion	67
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	72
The Experience of Remembering the Dead	73
The Experience of Not Forgetting the Dead	73
The Experience of Expressing Grief	75
The Experience of Making Personal Connections with the Living	76
The Experience of Continuing Bonds with the Dead	76
The Experience of the Outlying Themes	78
Limitations of Study	79
Future Research	79
Implications for Practice	81
Conclusion	83
REFERENCES	84
APPENDIX	95
A: Session 1 Interview Questions	95
B: Session 2 Interview Questions	97
C: Formal Research Request	99

D: Research Approval	101
E: Approval for Human Research	104
F: Parent Letter	106
G: Consent Form	108
H: Transcription Services Confidentiality Agreement	113
I: Participant Themes	115
J: Master Themes	130

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Social Networking: Oxford Dictionaries (network") defines social network as “a dedicated website or other application that enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.”

Continuing Bonds: According to Klass et al. (1996), the term continuing bonds refers to the interactive relationship between the grieving individual and the deceased. This experience can be described in “terms of interfaces-with the survivor’s inner representation of the deceased, and with the living community that surrounds the survivor” (p. 349). Klass et al. supports that the “inner representation of the deceased is normal rather than abnormal” (p. 349).

Remembering the Dead: For the purposes of this research, remembering the dead refers to grieving adolescents’ use of Facebook as a tool to remember a deceased friend. Grieving adolescents may refer to photos, videos, previous posts, and other social media that had been shared by the deceased in the past.

Not Forgetting the Dead: For the purposes of this research, not forgetting the dead refers to an adolescent’s desire to memorialize or honor a deceased friend in a way that keeps their memory alive for others who experienced his/her death.

Thanatology: The Center for Thanatology Research and Education, Inc. (2014) defines thanatology as “the study of everything that has to do with dying, death, and grief, including cemeteries and gravestones, such as AIDS, The Arts, Children, Counseling, Cancer & Heart Disease, Euthanasia, Funerals, Grief, History, Hospice, Multi-Cultural Rites, Pain, Counseling, Suicide, Widows & Widowers, etc.” (p. 1)

Thanatechnology: According to Sofka et al. (2012), thanatechnology is “communication technology used in the provision of death education, grief counseling, and thanatology research.”

Imaginary Audience: Elkind (1967) defines the imaginary audience as a “premise that others are as admiring or as critical” (p. 6) of the adolescent as he/she is of himself or herself. Adolescents are “continually constructing, or reacting to, an imaginary audience” (p. 6).

Personal Fable: According to Elkind (1967), the personal fable is an adolescent’s “complex beliefs in the uniqueness of his/her feelings and of his/her immortality” (p. 7). These beliefs are usually in the form of an untrue story that the adolescent tells himself or herself.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a prevalent tool used for everyday communications with family, friends, acquaintances, and quite often, strangers (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011; Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Gross, 2004; Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Reich, 2010; Schmitt, Dayanim, & Matthias, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Weaver & Morrison, 2008). Facebook is the most popular and most commonly used social media website with over 1.11 billion users as of March, 2013 (Associated Press, 2013). With over one seventh of the world's population connecting to each other through this social media site, including 73% of adolescents ages 12-17 (Smith, 2014), the number of possible connections between users is massive. Consider that each of these online relationships evolves through the same transitions of relational development that a typical, face-to-face relationship experiences. This means that each relationship held or created through social media must also end either by termination from one party or because of the death of one of the participants. It is estimated that about three million Facebook users died in 2011 ("Statistics | Facebook," 2012). However, the existence of online profiles allows the relationship to continue even after death (Bouc, 2013; DeGroot, 2009, 2012; Kasket, 2012; Stokes, 2012). This study examined the adolescent grief experience as he/she continues to communicate with the deceased through the online social networking website, Facebook.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the growing use of Facebook as a tool for grief support and to understand the experiences of bereaved adolescents as they use online connections through Facebook to make sense of a death related loss. This topic has developed

through my work with adolescents in my nine-year career as a high school counselor. I have assisted many teens as they deal with various loss events. Year to year, I noticed that that it was necessary to amend the way that I engaged in grief counseling because of the growing inclusion of social media and technology in the lives of adolescents. As cell phones became more commonplace, I noticed that students were constantly turning to their phones for text updates and communication surrounding the loss event. My students were often distracted by the influx of texts from people sharing details about the situation and offering condolences and support to the teen.

Later, online social media was added as a primary form of communication among adolescent peer groups. Interactions through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram drove much of the grief experience as the bereaved adolescents used these venues to seek out support. The importance of technology for grieving teens was evident, and I knew that my practices had to evolve in order to meet the needs of my students. Several questions came to mind, which became the sub questions that eventually led to my central research question.

Primary Research Question

What is the grief experience like for adolescents who use Facebook for grief support by communicating with the deceased and with other grieving individuals?

Sub Questions

1. Did online support prevent adolescents from feeling isolated or misunderstood?
2. Did online expressions of personal grief provide safe outlets for students seeking grief support?
3. When adolescents received online support from their peers, was it helpful? Was it harmful?

4. How did grieving adolescents approach the online profile page of a friend who had died?
5. Did forms of online support foster a healthy reconciliation of grief?
6. How did the theory of Continuing Bonds (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996) fit into the experience of continued communications on the online profile page of the deceased?

Delimitations of Study

This study focused on students ages 15-19 who attended a suburban high school in Northern Colorado where I am employed as a high school counselor. I chose not to include other schools in this study in order to assure the safety and well being of the participants. By restricting the sample population selection to students in my home high school, I was able to connect each participant with his/her assigned counselor for follow up and support in case of complications that arose after reliving his/her personal grief experience. Each participant already had an established connection with his/her counselor, providing a trusting and comfortable environment.

The student's assigned school counselor identified possible participants within her caseload and then invited the student to speak with me about the specifics of the study. Only students who have experienced the loss of a peer in the last two years were considered in order to ensure that the grief experience occurred during the participants' adolescent years. Another requirement for participation was that the adolescent had to have an active, online Facebook profile. I set this requirement in order to allow participants the access to past posts, comments, photos, etc. surrounding the loss event. Students who agreed to participate were given the option to remove themselves from the study at any time without question. This ensured that students did not feel obligated or pressured to engage in the research study.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study is qualitative in nature, therefore the results were not meant to be a reflection of the experiences of all adolescents. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of a particular group of adolescents at a specified moment in their life. Participants were assured anonymity throughout the study and were guaranteed that their responses would be held in confidence by myself and by his/her assigned counselor. Because of this, it is probable that participants were open in honest when talking about his/her personal grief experience.

In this type of qualitative study, my own biases and lived experiences are certainly a limitation of the study. In order to counteract this reality, I kept a personal, audio journal throughout the interview process and analysis. This provided an opportunity for intentional reflection on how my preconceptions of this phenomenon may be influencing my analysis, which in turn brought these biases to the forefront so that I could consciously eliminate as many of my own personal experiences from my role as a researcher as I possible could.

Another recognized limitation is in the sample population that produced the participant group. Because of the racial and socio-economic make up of the community that holds the particular high school used in this study, it was almost guaranteed that the participant group would be fairly homogeneous. Also, I understood that several of the participants might reflect on his/her experience surrounding the death of the same student. Knowing that these limitations exist, it is even more imperative that readers understand that this is an exploration of the lived experiences of a particular group of students at a set time. The results should not be generalized to the adolescent population as a whole, but can be used as a springboard to further, more extensive research.

Significance of Study

The grief experiences of adolescents are unique as they include the developmental tasks and stages that we know to be occurring during this important time in a person's life (Balk, 1996, 2000; Balk & Corr, 2009; Cohen & Mannarino, 2011; Corr & Balk, 1996; Ens & Bond, 2005; Fleming & Adolph, 1986; Gewirtz, 2009; Glass, 2001; James, Oltjenbruns, & Whiting, 2008; Kaplan, 2004; Mallon, 2011; Meshot & Leitner, 1993; Morgan & Roberts, 2010; Morin & Welsh, 1996; Oltjenbruns, 2001, 2007; Pfefferbaum, 2001; Schachter, 1992; Servaty-Seib & Pistole, 2006; Walter & McCoyd, 2009; Wilson, 2009; Worden, 1996). As part of their development, we know that adolescents seek for identity, independence, and belonging (Bell & Bromnick, 2003; Collins & Collins, 2005; Erikson, 1959b). Each of these concepts are directly challenged when a loss event enters the life of an adolescent (Morgan & Roberts, 2010) and must be seriously considered when assisting a grieving teen. The addition of online social media into this already complex combination significantly complicates the grief process for adolescents and, especially for the adults who attempt to offer support, as we are not as accustomed to this kind of communication.

Many clinicians and researchers in the area of thanatology are recognizing this significant shift in how adolescents choose to communicate and connect with their peers during grief (Bennett, 2009; Brondou, 2012; Hieftje, 2010; James et al., 2008; Oltjenbruns & James, 2006; Pennington, 2013; Sofka, 2009; Sofka & Gilbert, 2012; Vicary & Fraley, 2010; Williams & Merten, 2009). We have only begun to tap into this ever-changing phenomenon and will always face challenges in gaining understanding because of the rapid development of technological tools and online social media. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the overall body of literature that is, fortunately, becoming more meaningful among clinicians and thanatologists.

If we continue to grow this body of literature on the lived experiences of adolescents as they grieve online, we will gain a better understanding of how to develop clinical practices at the adolescent level.

Researcher Perspective

Since beginning my initial graduate studies in 2000, I have been drawn to and involved with loss and grief research and counseling. I was given the opportunity to assist one of my professors in her ongoing research and publications surrounding loss and grief topics. I also assisted in the facilitation and organization of her graduate level course on the subject. My understanding of loss and grief in research and in practice was much more in depth and concentrated than that of the typical counseling graduate student. As I continued my graduate studies in Counseling and Human Development, I began to see the evident links between loss and all other life experiences that may lead one to seek out professional counseling. My counseling lens had developed to one that considered individual losses as I approached each counseling situation that was presented to me. I believe that every presenting issue can very often be connected to an experienced death or a non-death related loss. This approach allowed for a richer and more comprehensive counseling experience for the client and a better understanding for me as the helping professional. It has also helped me remain engaged and curious in the complex lives of my students/clients when they seek out my guidance.

Previous to my graduate studies, I had worked extensively as a mentor to adolescents, particularly high school teens, through working as a youth leader in various organizations. I knew early in my life that I had a passion for working with this age group and I knew that my future would focus on bettering the lives of adolescents and increasing understanding of this

complicated age group for those who interacted with them. The marriage of adolescents and grief seemed to be a natural progression for my professional and educational path.

My work as a high school counselor coincided with the beginning of my doctoral studies at Colorado State University. At the beginning of this ten-year journey, I concentrated my studies on adolescent grief. My experiences in the high school setting contributed to my understandings and guided the direction of my eventual research. Throughout my nine years as a high school counselor, I have unfortunately had to put my loss and grief training into practice more than I would have hoped. Along with the numerous deaths of parents, significant family members, and friends of my students, I have experienced the tragic death of four current students and several students who had previously graduated. Each loss ripped through our school and community, leaving intense and complicated grief experiences for our adolescents. The last death was not easier than the first. Each experience brought its own complexities and challenges. However, in each event, I felt prepared to handle the needs of our student body.

I was not prepared to handle the ripple of events that occurred as a result of technology and online grieving. While our crisis team was discussing the procedure for informing students and staff about the death at hand, our students were already grieving the loss of their friend after receiving the tragic news through text messages, Facebook posts, and Tweets. It was impossible for us to stay ahead of the rapidly spreading news. Our students' grief seemed to quickly lose focus as it became tarnished with the misinterpreted texts and Facebook postings of grieving friends. My counseling sessions became less about mourning the loss of a peer and more about anger towards others' display of grief as it was unveiled on Facebook. Dialogue with students was constantly interrupted by incoming texts, tweets, and posts, which then projected our conversation into a completely different direction without completing the previous thoughts.

Each loss experience left me unsettled, and I became concerned about how our students may be expressing their grief through unsecure, online social networks. After diving into the limited research, it became evident that exploring adolescent grief within online social networks is a necessary venture.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of adolescent development seems to be a constant moving target as the influences of the outside world continue to change and evolve. However, there are standard theories that one can always refer to when exploring the development of today's adolescents. Theorists and practitioners are continually creating new ideas and approaches to those members of this complicated life stage. It is crucial to include all aspects of an adolescent's environment when considering their development. Additionally, when referring to a grieving adolescent, one must understand that the occurring loss event has interrupted the normal flow of development (Balk, Wogrin, Thornton, & Meagher, 2007; Collins & Collins, 2005) and could hinder or accelerate the process. As stated by Bonanno (2009), grief is different for everyone and does not seem to go through stages (Kübler-Ross, 2009) as theorists once thought. This truth certainly impacts the coping and reconciliation of grief for adolescents.

This chapter will explore these steadfast theories of adolescent development through a lens of grief while placing them in the context of the rapidly changing world of accessible technology and peer influence. The construction and maintenance of a meaningful grief group experience for adolescents will be discussed as well as effective counseling techniques and strategies that should be incorporated into a counselor's work with a grieving adolescent.

Adolescent Development at a Glance

Adolescent development is an ongoing and ever-changing process that is influenced by one's environment, social interactions, familial connections, and life circumstances. Young people exist through this process while under the expectation that certain developmental tasks will be met (Havighurst, 1972). Adolescence is difficult to manage in the best of situations.

However, when a loss event interrupts the life of a teenager, normal development is threatened.

Morgan and Roberts (2010) stated:

We encourage adolescents to be responsible and accept reality at a time in their lives when they are confronted with a variety of temptations and avenues of escape. Teenagers are also expected to act as mature adults before they are ready for full autonomy. And they are encouraged to think of the future even as they have a strong desire to live for the moment. This paradoxical context in which they live can easily give rise to confusion, isolation, and loneliness. Superimpose on this scenario a significant loss, and teenagers become vulnerable to a personal crisis that may not be readily apparent to the adults in their lives (pp. 208-209).

Conversely, an adolescent's response to a grief event can be influenced by one's developmental process (Balk & Corr, 2009). For example, association with certain social groups could define how an adolescent feels about whether it is acceptable or unacceptable to show physical emotion over the death of a friend. Certainly, the interruption of a teen's assumed reality can produce feelings of anger, confusion, and guilt. All of these developmental challenges and social dynamics should be taken into consideration when working with grieving adolescents and implementing support groups for grieving high school students.

Collins & Collins (2005) suggest that development offers a context within which an individual's cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to crisis may be viewed. Additionally, affected persons are best understood through a holistic lens that includes their environment, community, and the cultural factors that influence resilience. When applied to grieving adolescents, the developmental-ecological model suggests that the crucial developmental tasks of defining identity and future direction for oneself, becoming autonomous, and sustaining intimate peer relationships form the backdrop of an adolescent's world when bereavement enters (Balk, 2000).

There is no agreed upon age parameter that defines adolescence within the lifespan. In fact, some hold the idea that adolescence is a culturally defined period (Walter & McCoyd,

2009). This phase, however, has been characterized as unique in biological, psychological, and social influences (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2009). Changes in cognitive ability (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), the importance of belonging to and acceptance by peers (Bell & Bromnick, 2003), and the shaping of independent identity and self-concept (Erikson, 1959) are some of the more important characteristics and tasks of this developmental period. So, what happens when loss is interjected into the life of an adolescent? As Balk et al. (2007) describes, there is both an opportunity for maturation and a risk in adapting to the inherent unbalance that grief produces. Adolescents may experience vulnerability when the identity, autonomy, and belonging tasks typical of this phase are interrupted (Collins & Collins, 2005).

Developmental Risks

Most theorists discuss identity formation as a key component of adolescence (Erikson, 1993). Bruce and Shultz (2001) state, “the stage and strength of identity formation become of utmost significance when loss jeopardizes aspects of identity” (p. 127). At a life stage when identity formation is developmentally new, bereaved teens may have the difficult task of reforming their self-perception as a result of the death of a significant adult figure or peer. Adolescents will seek avenues within their social and technological environments to experiment with who they are, which at times may create an increase in risky behaviors and could open the door to unsafe relationships. It is concerning to consider the lack of judgment many adolescents may have when seeking immediate relief and solace around the complex issue of grief.

Some research indicates a differing rate of development in the brain functioning within the adolescent (Casey, Getz, & Galvan, 2008). This research suggests that while cognitive advances traditionally occur, the domain of impulse control may not develop in sync (Casey et al., 2008). Couple lagging impulse control with the *imaginary audience* and *personal fable*

concepts identified by Elkind (1967), and the chance for vulnerability increases in a bereaved adolescent. Self-consciousness rises as the individual feels everyone is watching, particularly peers whose social approval is crucial; and a teen's false sense of invincibility is questioned when a death related loss enters the adolescent's life. This is why an increase in risky and dangerous coping behaviors is common to the bereaved teen.

Cognitively, the adolescent is shifting toward greater complexity in comprehending the finality, causality, and universality of death through the onset of abstract reasoning. However, the importance of belonging can exaggerate the self-focused belief of the imaginary audience (Elkind, 1967), which can be defined as the idea that peers are watching and evaluating me at all times (Oltjenbruns, 2007). This belief contributes to increased fear of being perceived as different or perhaps being denied acceptance with others. Certainly, the notion of expressing feelings is often considered out of the norm by the peer group and will most likely be met with reservation by the grieving adolescent.

The belief that "this cannot happen to me", or a personal fable (Elkind, 1967; Kaplan, 2004), creates a pronounced feeling of disbelief and shock when an adolescent is confronted with making sense of bereavement events, especially untimely deaths of parents, siblings, and peers (Oltjenbruns, 2007). While disbelief may be a normal response for all ages, it is particularly potent for the adolescent who believes that he/she has an unlimited time to: live, find a destiny, establish self-image, belong, and feel confident about the direction of one's future. The adolescent's belief in the personal fable (Elkind, 1967; Kaplan, 2004) can result in both an increase in disbelief about a bereavement event and about the potential dangers of advice from strangers. This means that an adolescent experiencing shock can be equally unaware and

unprepared for the kinds of suggestions they may receive as coping strategies. As we know, all responses to grief are not equally helpful.

Historical Views of Grief

Throughout the 20th century, the process of grief was considered to be a structured and terminal process. Freud (1957) argued that grieving individuals must detach themselves from the dead by transferring energy from the deceased to something else (Stroebe & Schut, 2005). When this occurs, Freud determined that the grief work had concluded. If the detachment did not occur, an individual's grief experience was at risk of becoming pathological (Freud, 1957). Kübler-Ross (2009) concludes her five stages of grief with the stage of acceptance in which the dying individual and those grieving the death finally accept the loss and "move on". Both theorists embrace the ending of the grieving process as the only acceptable way to reconcile a loss.

The theory of continuing bonds challenges the finality of the previously understood processes of grief. Klass (2006; 1996; 2001) argued that through continuing bonds, the bereaved maintains a link, or relationship, with the deceased. This relationship can be long lasting and is often impacted by the belief system of the survivor (Brubaker, Hayes, & Dourish, 2013). Klass et al. (1996) talks about grieving individuals visiting gravesites, bereaved spouses talking with their deceased partner, and anniversary or memorial celebrations as examples of continuing bonds with the dead. While these practices seem harmless and rather normal behaviors within grief, the theory of continuing bonds has gone under much scrutiny from traditional loss and grief theoretical camps as well as many progressive researchers.

Stroebe and Schut (Stroebe & Schut, 2005) argue that whether or not continuing bonds is a helpful practice for the bereaved cannot be concluded with the present research. Klass (2006) counters that whether or not continuing bonds is a healthy component of grieving or not is too

simple of a question and does not consider the social and cultural components of continuing bonds with the dead. Klass (2006) believes that continuing bonds with the dead often occurs in a social or familial context and should not be defined only as an internal relationship between a grieving individual and the deceased (Schut, Stroebe, Boelen, & Zijerveld, 2006). This social nature of continuing bonds allows the social identity of the dead to continue through post-mortem interactions with the dead and a collective reconstruction of memories (Brubaker et al., 2013; Kasket, 2012).

Facebook provides an online social gathering place for common grievers to collectively experience continuing bonds with the deceased. It offers a safe forum for grief expression that surpasses geography and disenfranchisement. Kasket states:

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 (p. 67).

Since it has become increasingly acceptable for people to grieve with others through participation in online social networking sites (Kasket, 2012; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Moore, 2011; Pennington, 2013; Phillips, 2011; Reich, 2010), the theory of continuing bonds (Klass, 2006; Klass et al., 1996; Klass & Walter, 2001) fits hand in hand with the phenomenon of grieving in a virtual, online community.

Adolescents Coping With Grief

The reality of bereavement during adolescent development can influence an adolescent's ability to cope with the core issues of predictability, personal control, justice and fairness, self-confidence, and connections symbolic of belonging (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Researchers have reported such influences as an increase in fear associated with a lack of predictability over life events (Worden, 1996), a dismissal of support and connection from peers who find the

bereaved adolescent to be exhausting (Oltjenbruns, 2001), and a lowered sense of self-efficacy accompanying a higher sense of self-doubt. Grief counselors must consider the possibility that the experience an individual adolescent may find when outreaching for support and comfort may contribute to increased fears around social dismissal and self-doubt.

Adolescents have a social and interpersonal style focused upon group acceptance and independence from adult figures. Experimentation with intimacy through peer relationships is central (Balk et al., 2007). While experimentation is present in questions around “who am I” and “to whom do I belong”, adolescents desire some anonymity and privacy such that adult monitoring may be difficult or perceived as intrusive (Oltjenbruns & James, 2006). This is against the notion that the most notable predictor of a positive outcome of an adolescent’s grief is the availability of a responsible and responsive adult within the broader environment (Worden, 1996). Adolescents in grief may be unaware of the need for interaction with adults who have a wider perspective on living and dying and on reconciling personal losses.

Adolescents are more resilient when they are thought to possess a “restoration orientation” described by Stroebe and Schut (1999) as a perspective that holds hope and promise for the future. Desetta & Wolin (2000) define resiliencies such as insight [asking tough questions and confronting the truth of a situation], independence [making action decisions on your own behalf], relationships [seeking sources of support] and initiative [taking action to meet challenges] as critical elements of adolescents in their struggle to be strong in the face of adversity. Schaefer and Moss (2001) proposed appraisal-focused, problem-focused, and emotion-focused coping skills as resources for mastering adaptive tasks associated with bereavement. Therefore, an adolescent’s skillfulness in cognitive redefinition, identification of action options, finding sources of support, and exercising emotional control and release will enable the

individual to successfully complete the tasks of establishing meaning of the death, confronting the realities of the event, sustaining relationships, maintaining affective balance, and preserving self-efficacy. So, this question arises: How do we as supportive adults assist and hinder the successful transition toward restoration, resilience, and coping skills for the adolescent confronting grief?

There have been many generational changes that impact adolescents of today as they work through the normal developmental tasks of their life. These changes help explain the environmental influences that create the context for the use of technology as a means of reconciling grief. The changes have moved from rural to urban environments of influence; from nuclear and extended family construction to complex, varied families of influence; from homogeneous to heterogeneous social structures of influence; from limited sources of delayed information to an overload of immediate information; from delayed and more monitored social interactions to spontaneous, independent encounters with unfamiliar individuals; and from greater to lesser accountability with adult figures. These collective changes are producing risks for the current generation of adolescents, particularly as they confront the crisis of bereavement. Helping professionals must reconcile questions about what is valuable and what is at risk for adolescents, with their unique developmental tasks and perspective, so that significant assistance with grief can be provided.

Grief Support in Schools

Neimeyer, Prigerson, and Davies (2002) interpret the phenomenon of grief “psychologically as a response to the disruption of personal assumptions and relationships that sustain the self” (p. 235). Interventions with adolescents should provide support and strong, caring relationships with credible and reliable adults. Counselors, and the like, should enable

adolescents to withstand and transform the disruption of bereavement into a survivor identity with strong coping characteristics directed toward resilience; and all of this must be done within the set hours of a school day.

Balk, Zaengle, and Coor (2011) state that “a well-facilitated group experience helps teens grapple with complex issues underlying ‘blame’ and ‘anger’” (p. 158). Facilitators must allow participants to freely, but appropriately, express the myriad of emotions that they may be experiencing through grief. It is important to remember that each student attends a group session with their own “stuff” in addition to the grief that they are experiencing because of a death. Adolescents may have trouble sorting through these feelings and distinguishing what emotions are tied to everyday encounters and which emotions are tied to the loss event. Helping professionals should be reminded that, on some level, the grief experience is probably fueling most everything in the student’s life, even if they do not recognize the connection.

Especially in the death of a friend, adolescents may experience trauma symptoms triggered by various reminders that surface in almost every aspect of their life. Traditionally, when working with a student who has lost a parent or other family member, the student often expresses a need to attend school regularly because school is the only “escape” that they have from their grief. The grieving adolescent desires normality and may find that comfort through school interactions and activities. However, if a death impacts an adolescent’s immediate social network, they may face more struggles in reconciling their grief.

Daily Grief Reminders In Schools

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Cohen & Mannarino, 2011) suggests that trauma symptoms can be triggered by three cues: trauma reminders, loss reminders, and change reminders. Trauma reminders remind the grieving individual of the actual death event (Cohen &

Mannarino, 2011). Imaginations often run wild as the bereaved students try to fill in specific details about the loss that are still unknown. It is important that helping professionals only discuss factual information about the death that has been experienced (Servaty-Seib, Peterson, & Spang, 2003) so that they may move toward some kind of reconciliation without being confused or delayed by rumors and mistruths.

Loss reminders prompt the bereaved to think of the person they lost (Cohen & Mannarino, 2011). For example, students may struggle with the “empty chair” that is left in classrooms after the loss of a peer. Change reminders are prompts that remind the grieving adolescent about how their life has changed because of the death. Adult supporters certainly cannot remove all of the triggers that could remind students of a loss, even though the desire to protect each student from any pain or suffering is great (Morgan & Roberts, 2010). However, with proper planning and foresight, schools can, at the very least, provide ongoing support for students as they navigate their personal and collective grief experience.

Adolescent grief is an important experience that is often misunderstood by helping professionals and educators. It is all too easy for school personnel to move forward with daily school business, never taking into account the undercurrent of grief that is being experienced among an adolescent student body. Adolescents already face the difficulties of navigating their own developmental process on a daily basis. Inserting a major loss event not only interrupts the normality that is expected by most adolescents (Elkind, 1967; Kaplan, 2004) but, also, can be detrimental to the course of personal development. Helping professionals working with adolescents have a moral obligation to educate themselves on the impacts of grief and mourning as it relates to teenagers so that these supportive adults can assist adolescents through these tragic and unexpected loss events.

The rapid rise of technology use among adolescents is a fact that cannot be ignored by those in helping professions. It has now become the norm for adolescents to have their own cell phone, access to their personal computer, and wireless connectivity wherever they may go. This trend brings great possibility and the requirement of great responsibility from a group who is known to constantly seek new identities and commonly test established boundaries. This concept certainly surfaces as adolescents create online profiles, blogs, and other social networking platforms, testing the boundaries of their freedom in an online world.

Historical Trends of Adolescent Online Grievers

The use of technology for grief support is certainly a new and growing phenomenon. People of all ages are finding new ways to memorialize those who have died through online interactions (de Vries & Rutherford, 2004). Grieving individuals are also able to find non-traditional forms of support through online grief support groups and forums that allow the bereaved to connect with others who are experiencing similar losses. Online grief support is particularly important for adolescents as internet use among young people is rapidly increasing every day with the majority of adolescents participating in online social networking sites, such as Facebook (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Adolescents who have experienced loss are able to find great comfort through online support systems and connections through online social networking as they are able to “normalize” their unfamiliar grief experiences through the experiences of others (James, Oltjenbruns, & Whiting, 2008). As Diane Nash stated, “They mourn on Facebook because that is where their friends are” (Bennett, 2009).

The first online memorials appeared on the Internet in 1995 (Carroll & Landry, 2010). Because today’s youth do not know a world without the Internet, grieving online, or “e-grieving” (Hieftje, 2012), is an obvious outlet for adolescents who are mourning a loss. According to a

2001 study, between 31% and 49% of adolescents surf the Internet for thanatology related topics (Borzekowski & Rickert, as cited in Sofka, 2012). Adolescents may also use the Internet to gather information regarding the cause of death as it may be helpful in reconciling a sudden or unexpected loss (Sofka, Cupit, & Gilbert, 2012b). Additionally, websites such as those created through Teen Health and Wellness, BeliefNet, and GriefNet are online tools that offer support and information to grieving adolescents. Other websites, such as CaringBridge, allow for more personal and private accounts of one's journey through a significant health issue. This website can be an invaluable resource for adolescents because it allows for more opportunities to gather meaningful information that can assist in the coping and grieving process.

While there are numerous online grief resources available, adolescents are much more likely to turn to social networking sites like Facebook for online grief support (Hieftje, 2010; Sofka, 2009). Online social groups have exploded among today's youth and have become a central form of communication for teens (Lenhart et al., 2010). Walter, Hourizi, Moncur, and Pitsillides (2011) suggest that if the way grieving people socialize continues to change, we may also see major changes in the overall grief experience.

Grieving through social networking sites has already challenged what may be socially and/or culturally acceptable responses to loss situations (Carroll & Landry, 2010). Adolescent mourners can publically announce their grief with just a simple change in status, inviting others to join in their grief. It then becomes acceptable for others to join in someone's grief even if they did not know the person who was lost (Carroll & Landry, 2010). Those who have died and the people who mourn their death are no longer kept in isolation (Walter et al., 2011) but are open to consideration by an expansive network of online users. This can enhance vulnerability within bereaved adolescents as their grief experience is now open to scrutiny and judgment by friends

(Oltjenbruns, 2007) and, all too often, complete strangers. The threat of cyber bullying becomes heightened as adolescents expose their intimate feelings of loss to an online forum (Sofka, 2009). Because of these threats and risks, it becomes increasingly difficult for helping professionals to assist grieving adolescents because of the growing number of outside factors that now influence and sculpt one's grief experience.

Contextual Background of Online Mourners

The “digital divide” refers to the “perceived gap between those who have access to the latest information technologies and those who do not” (Compaine, 2001). Pascoe (2007) addresses the digital divide in reference to adolescent use of technology. She reports that through her interviews with teens, the divide becomes evident in families with a lower socio-economic status as there may be one, outdated computer in the home. Adolescents within these families may have to battle the uncertainties of dial-up Internet connection versus the newer, faster modes of data transfer. Therefore, the digital divide is not known to these adolescents in the traditional way of having or not having access to a computer. The divide comes in how an adolescent is able to use the computer. Pascoe (2007) adds that it is the participation, not just the access that needs to be addressed in order for youth to experience technological equality.

The demographical data on adolescents engaging in online social networking shows that there is little difference in regards to an adolescent's gender or age (Lenhart et al., 2010). However, expected differences surface when looking at an adolescent's involvement with online social networking and the socio-economic status of a teen. The following chart represents adolescents who reveal that they are online “content creators” meaning that they participate in creating online profiles, blogs, websites, or other personal disclosure through online creation (Lenhart et al., 2010).

Table 1. Demographics of Teen Content Creators

Demographics of Teen Content Creators	
<i>The percentage of content creators* in each demographic category:</i>	
	Sex
Boys	45%
Girls	55
	Age
12-14	45
15-17	55
	Family Income
Less than \$30,000 annually	13
\$30,000 - \$49,999	21
\$50,000 - \$74,999	19
\$75,000 +	38
	Locale
Urban	23
Suburban	52
Rural	25

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey of Parents and Teens, October-November 2006. Content Creators n=572. Margin of error for teens is $\pm 4\%$. *Content creators are defined as teens who have done at least one of the following: created or worked on a blog, created or worked on webpages, shared original creative content, or remixed content they found online.*

Additionally, Lenhart et al. (2010) report that adolescents from wealthier families participate in video and photo sharing within social networking sites because of access to more technology and better broadband internet connection. However, there is still an overall increase in online activity among adolescents, regardless of demographic information. This trend should only increase as technology becomes more accessible and costs of faster, more secure online connections become more available.

Adolescent Development in an Online World

The Pew Internet and Life Project reported on the current data regarding teens and their use of technology for social interaction. In 2007, 93% of youth ages 12-17 utilized the internet, with 61% of these online users accessing the internet at least once a day (Lenhart et al., 2010) for at least 50 minutes a day (Schmitt et al., 2008). Of these online teens, 55% reported that they have created some kind of social networking profile on sites such as Facebook (Lenhart et al., 2010). Most recently, Smith (2014) reported that 73% of all adolescents ages 12-17 use Facebook as a social networking tool. Pascoe (2007) explains that online social networking has exploded among adolescents because “teen culture is a social culture” (p. 2). With these statistics rapidly growing each year, questions of how online social interaction impacts adolescent development are imperative in how we understand and interact with today’s teen.

Social networking has become a standard method in how adolescents build personal connections and explore individual expression. Through this online experimentation, adolescents are actively and sometimes publically developing their personal identities (Schmitt et al., 2008). Erikson (1993,1950) theorizes that all humans progress through a series of “Psychosocial Stages”, each stage presenting a different crisis that must be addressed. In this structure, the crisis of the adolescent is that of “identity vs. role confusion”. Adolescents are constantly trying

to determine who they are and who they will become and, currently, are using the Internet as a tool for this kind of self-exploration. In an article featured in The New York Times, Camille Sweeney (1999) stated:

Maybe this is the Internet's greatest asset to teendom: access, and the confidence to slip in and out of personalities, the ability to try on identities, the adolescent equivalent of playing dress-up in the attic, standing before the mirror in heels and lipstick long before you own your own. Adolescents can choose to disclose pieces of themselves, see how others respond, and then determine if they want to explore that personal trait further based on the positive or negative feedback that they receive (p. 66).

Additionally, adolescents may choose to adopt a completely new identity through the creation of avatars in online gaming or, more concerning, through the deletion or addition of personal demographic information or characteristics that are not true about themselves. Gross (2004) surveyed 175 adolescents in the seventh and tenth grades about their internet usage. The results of the survey revealed that 49% of the participants indicated that they had never “pretended” to be someone else online. However, 41% of participants admitted that they had pretended a couple of times with another 10% revealing that they pretended to be someone else online occasionally, pretty often, or all the time. A large majority of the students who admitted to changing their identity online stated that they presented themselves as someone much older than they actually were. It could be argued that an adolescent disguising their true age is a form of identity exploration (Gross, 2004) as defined by Erikson (1993). While this might be true, we know that presenting a false identity, especially presenting as an older person, can lead to inappropriate and potentially dangerous interactions from online predators.

When looking at theories of adolescent development, interpersonal connection is viewed as an important step. Robert Havighurst (1972) refers to the developmental tasks that each adolescent must accomplish including the formation of same sex and opposite sex relationships with others in the same age group. When investigating adolescent peer relationships, Kaplan

(2004) indicates that there are five ways in which interpersonal relationships differ as children move into adolescence. First, adolescents have a greater need to create peer relationships and to spend more time engaging with their friends. Second, peer relationships include more limited supervision from adults, permitting more individuality and freedom within the peer connection. Third, adolescents begin to be drawn more into friendship groups as opposed to relationships with individuals. Fourth, opposite sex relationships become more and more prevalent among adolescents. Finally, adolescent's friendships begin to change into romantic relationships. When considering these five changes in adolescent peer relationships, online social interactions can be viewed as a critical tool in the evolution of adolescent peer groups.

Traditionally, social networking sites like Facebook may have been viewed as online ways to stay in contact with friends who one may not see often. However, 91% of adolescents who use social network sites revealed that they use the sites more for contacting friends with whom they are already in frequent, face-to-face contact (Lenhart et al., 2010). Therefore, adolescent peer relationships are being discovered and created in cyberspace. They are developing with the assistance of laptop computers, smart phones, and tablets without the care and guidance of trusted adults. Adolescents are forming cliques and other social groupings through online affiliations and "tagged" links. Romantic connections are emerging through posted relationship statuses and private messaging. Those who formed peer groups through more conventional manners may view this type of personal interaction as lacking and may assume that forming and nurturing relationships online could negatively impact one's social development. However, adolescents have reported that they feel closer to their friends because of the additional online connection (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). It was also revealed that adolescents find it easier

to share intimate aspects of their lives with friends through online communication, creating an increased “closeness” in peer relationships (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

Using Online Social Networking in Positive Developmental Growth

Adolescents truly have the world and everything that it offers at their fingertips through the Internet and other technological modalities. Teens are able to create personal connections and expanded communities through virtual interactions, even if they were not previously successful in finding group affiliation among the peers with whom they physically interact with on a daily basis. Adolescents are able to explore and participate in an unlimited amount of interests and hobbies that would not normally be available because of various factors such as homogenous communities or geographic limitations. Therefore, many teens have found their “niche” through online socialization and have been able to celebrate their individuality through these connections. Online interactions have, in a sense, saved many adolescents from feeling alone, lost, or misunderstood. Online social media has permitted adolescents to create a private community without leaving their home and has granted a kind of independence that many teens did not experience before this type of technology (Pascoe, 2007).

Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, and Weigel (2006) coin the term “participatory culture” and identifies social media as a perfect example of such culture. A participatory culture is defined as:

A culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices (p. 4).

Within a participatory culture, members feel socially connected to the other members and believe that their individual contributions are valuable and matter to the overall group (Jenkins et al., 2006). Adolescents’ creation of blogs, online profiles, and web pages can certainly be considered

activity within a participatory culture as teens provide personal information and expression while seeking out online validation from friends and strangers.

The report on social media by the Pew Internet and Life Project, Lenhart et al. (2010) indicated that 64% of online teens are “content creators” meaning that they have “created or worked on a blog or webpage, shared original creative content, or remixed content they found online into a new creation” (p. 2). These modes of online personal expression allow adolescents creative outlets without the normal fears they may encounter when expressing themselves in face-to-face interactions. Social networking sites are perfect mediums for creating and displaying new content or for sharing personal thoughts, pictures, or artistic creations. Teens who use social networking sites are more likely to share personal content, are also more likely to also participate in blogging, and are more likely to post pictures and/or videos online. The following chart (Lenhart et al., 2010, p. 7) indicates the percentage of adolescents who create online content and also participate in an online social network opposed to those teens who do not participate in an online social network:

Table 2. Users of Social Network Sites Are More Likely to Create All Kinds of Content

Users of Social Network Sites Are More Likely to Create All Kinds of Content		
<i>Content - Creating Activities</i>	<i>Online teens who use SNS</i>	<i>Online teens who don't use SNS</i>
Post pictures for others to see	73%	16%
Share own artistic work	53	22
Create / work on own blog	42	11
Maintain own webpage	42	8
Create / work on webpage for others	41	23
Remix content	32	18
Post videos for others to see	22	6

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey of Parents and Teens, October- November 2006. Teen social network users n=493. Margin of error for teens is $\pm 4\%$.

Obviously, social networking websites allow more opportunities and, possibly, a more acceptable and comfortable platform for adolescents to express themselves freely.

Developmental Risks of Online Social Networking

When considering the risks of adolescent's use of social media, Sofka (2012) warns readers that there are no longer barriers, such as transportation or schedule conflicts, preventing teens from interacting with friends. While this kind of access can be beneficial to many youths, the dangers that are inherent in such a "publically private" online community are plenty. Pascoe (2007) points out that while many adolescents are able to find groups of people who are like minded and share similar interests or experiences, these connections bring about dangerous subcultures that could be incredibly damaging to teens who are already participating in

pathological behaviors. For example, some online social websites pertaining to self-mutilation have failed to serve as a supportive online community but, rather, as a collection of people who normalize and/or glamorize the act for those who may enter their site seeking help.

Unfortunately, these sites often have keen marketing strategies that allow quick and immediate access to vulnerable adolescents surfing through cyberspace.

There seems to be a false sense of anonymity among online users, particularly young adults, that creates an inflated sense of courage when it comes to communicating with their peers online. They believe that they are justified in posting hurtful comments about others as long as they do not mention specific names. They believe that their online communications are kept anonymous because they only allow access to specific friends. These single comments or anonymous posts spread like a virus throughout their online communities, causing irreparable harm to individuals.

This kind of unguarded, online peer interaction is a fascinating phenomenon when coupled with Elkind's (1967) theory of adolescent egocentrism and the creation of the "personal fable." Elkind (1967) states that adolescents are unable to differentiate between their obsessions with their own appearances and behaviors and the thoughts that others have about them. In other words, adolescents believe that others are far more critical of how they present themselves than they actually are. Therefore, adolescents are constantly performing for an "imaginary audience" who they believe to be consumed with their every move (Elkind, 1967). We know that the imaginary audience is primarily created through the self-consciousness of the adolescent and reflects what the individual perceives himself or herself to be in the world.

Now, what happens when the imaginary audience becomes real? What happens when an adolescent is allowed freedom to create an online profile for, essentially, the entire world to view

and criticize? The audience is no longer imaginary, and the adolescent is no longer dependent on his or her own egocentrism to feed into their personal fable. They have constant, daily feedback from friends and strangers alike supporting their own beliefs about their behaviors and appearances being acceptable or not. Teens are receiving immediate input from their created social network, which could be a devastating or uplifting experience. Additionally, online teens may develop feelings of inadequacy (Schmitt et al., 2008) when comparing themselves to other teens through viewing online profiles that may or may not be truthful, valid, or authored by a person who is truly an adolescent. This unfair comparison to a possible fictitious teen could be detrimental to the healthy development of an adolescent's identity. If adolescents already hold themselves in low esteem, this feedback would certainly support their feelings, which could lead to depression or self-destructive behavior. But again, within the idea of an imaginary audience, an adolescent may assume that others hold these opinions of them, but they may never have to endure the experience of internalizing the thoughts of others. Through online interactions, not only will a teen be forced to hear the comments of their friends but may also be opening themselves up to the opinions of complete strangers who have no regard for their well-being. This is certainly a significant danger for online personal exposure, particularly for a young adult who already struggles with accepting his or her personal identity.

When using online social media for personal support, it is also important to note that while an online community may have thousands of members, adolescents may experience a lack of support simply because of the flexible design of online communication. Adolescents may reach out for guidance by posting comments or questions on an online support group at a time when traffic is slow, which could produce little or no response to the original request (Sofka, 2012). The lack of response could also be incredibly damaging to a teen who is already

experiencing feelings of isolation or depression. Therefore, it is important to educate our youth on responsible and safe use of the Internet so that they may understand the possibilities and the limitations that come with online social interactions.

Online social media is an incredible resource that, if used responsibly, can assist grieving adolescents in meaningful and life-changing ways. It is important to meet adolescents inside the world in which they live in order to offer meaningful guidance. This world will always include progressive technology that is constantly evolving. It is the ethical responsibility of helping professionals to become both knowledgeable and responsive to the adolescent's use of technology as developmental concerns emerge. Much more research needs to occur in order to expand our understanding of the benefits and liabilities for youth as teens become more dependent on online supports for grief.

Online grief support is becoming more and more socially utilized and acceptable (Bennett, 2009; Collins & Collins, 2005; Hieftje, 2012; Moore, 2011; Sofka, 2009; Vicary & Fraley, 2010; Williams & Merten, 2009). Adolescents typically think that communicating intimate, personal, self-disclosing information about themselves is easier to do through online conversation as opposed to offline conversation (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Although there is limited research on adolescents' use of technology for grief support, helping professionals are well aware of this commonly used tool. This section will begin to explore how technology, especially online social support, impacts the grieving process in adolescents. The risks and benefits possible for grieving adolescents will be observed as well as the questions that should be posted by helping professionals who participate in online social networking.

Risks and Benefits of Online Grief Support

Carroll and Landry (2010) stated that “social network sites are altering the process of mourning” (p. 342). Certainly the phenomenon of online grief has created a new lens in which helping professionals must view the experiences of grieving adolescents. Grief has now evolved from a sometimes private and internal experience to one that can be much more exposed and public (Walter et al., 2011). It is vitally important that we understand the differences between virtual grief and grief that is expressed without the assistance of texting, social networking sites, and other forms of technology (Sofka, 2009). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to this change in how one grieves because of how technology is integrated into their everyday existence (Lenhart et al., 2010). As this trend grows, helping professionals and other supportive adults must stay on the cusp of current developments in technology so that meaningful and personal connections may continue to develop with adolescent clients.

Online social networking sites have created new ways for grieving adolescents to experience “continuing bonds” (Klass et al., 1996) as bereaved teens are allowed continued access to the online profile page of the deceased. James Woods (as cited in Hortobagyi, 2007), a 23-year-old survivor of the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech, spoke about how he continued to post comments on the Facebook profiles of friends who were killed in the tragedy. “It might seem silly to post messages to people who will never respond, but these pages are what’s left of their voices, and the rest of their voices have been stolen from us” (p. 1). Mary Gottlieb, who lost her husband in 2009, decided to leave her husband’s Facebook profile active, which allowed event invitations and friend requests to still occur on his page (Moore, 2011). While this may seem odd to some, she finds comfort in the activity because she said that he “loved to be invited to parties” and was the “life of the party” (p. 4).

Facebook profiles of deceased users can also create a kind of community as those grieving over the lost loved one can migrate to the existing online profile to express their grief and to connect with others experiencing similar grief. Moore (2011) states, “A deceased person’s Facebook page becomes a virtual condolence book, a public, communal mourning place that gives everyone processing a shared loss a place to gather and grieve together” (p. 1). This becomes vitally important in the lives of the bereaved. Facebook and other social networking sites have instantly helped to resolve disenfranchised grief (Attig, 2004; Doka, 1989, 2002) in so many grieving individuals who have struggled with how to grieve over a lost loved one or who have been unable to benefit from a face to face, social network of griever because of their geographic location.

There has been much controversy over whether or not social networking sites, such as Facebook, should allow profiles of the deceased to remain online and active. The deaths that occurred through the shootings at Virginia Tech made Facebook act on these questions.

Facebook’s Brandee Barker (as cited in Hortobagyi, 2007) stated:

Until the Virginia Tech tragedy, we had a very simplistic policy in place, and that event made us reevaluate. Now, when we are notified by a family member or a confirmed friend of the victim, we will put the page in a memorialized state indefinitely (p. 1).

However, there are problems and concerns with this process. The following figure captures the form required to report a deceased Facebook user profile (Facebook, 2012).

Report a Deceased Person's Profile

IMPORTANT: Under penalty of perjury, this form is solely for the reporting of a deceased person to memorialize.

Full Name: on the account	<input type="text"/>
Account email addresses: which may have been used to create the account	<input type="text"/>
Web address (URL) of the profile you would like to report: Please copy and paste the web address (URL) of his/her profile.	<input type="text"/>
Relationship to the person:	<input type="text" value="Please select:"/>
Requested action:	<input type="text" value="Please select:"/>
Proof of death: an obituary or news article	<input type="text"/>
<input type="button" value="Submit"/> <input type="button" value="Cancel"/>	

Figure 1. Report a Deceased Person's Profile

While Facebook has attempted to address the issue through this report, obviously this process allows a lot of room for forgery and false reporting. Additionally, a close friend could legitimately report a person as deceased causing the profile to become memorialized [and unable to be logged into] without the knowledge or consent of the immediate family members. This could cause enormous distress and sadness, as a family would be forced to unexpectedly dive into another grief experience as they lose the online connection that they once had to their lost loved one. So, what is the solution? Nationally syndicated advice columnist Amy Dickenson (as cited in Moore, 2011) spoke to this issues by stating, "...people should do whatever they want. I

don't like the idea of developing some sort of protocol – because then people feel like they have to follow it” (p. 2). More debate on this issue is certain to surface.

Clearly, social networking sites are not going away. It is certain that bereaved adolescents are not going to stop finding ways to grieve online, whether or not the online support is socially acceptable. Knowing this, is use of the Internet by bereaved individuals, particularly adolescents, helpful or hurtful? Vicary and Fraley (Vicary & Fraley, 2010) conducted a study after the shootings at Virginia Tech University and Northern Illinois University to determine if online grief support impacts how one reconciles the loss event. The researchers contacted over 1,800 students from both schools. Approximately 300 students responded and participated in the study. Of these student participants, 64% indicated that they had left a message or post on someone's Facebook “wall” regarding the shootings and 72% of respondents admitted to changing their Facebook profile picture to a photo or graphic that showed support to one of the two schools. Online chat programs were used by 78% of respondents in order to talk with others about the shootings. Additionally, 13% of students stated that they had visited the profile of one of the students who lost their life in the shootings at either school. The surviving students of both tragedies greatly utilized online support to work through the grief that they were experiencing at the time. Overall, the participating students revealed that they felt better after participating in such online grief support (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). Also, online support was not tied to any symptoms of distress two months after the shootings. Therefore, through this study, the benefits of online grief support greatly outweighed the possible risks.

Continuing Bonds in an Online World

In noting social networking sites where individuals have intentionally memorialized the online profile pages of the deceased, it becomes clear that the bereaved have embraced a new

way to talk with the dead (Walter et al., 2011) or experience continuing bonds (Klass et al., 1996) with the one who has died. The majority of people who post messages on these profiles are directing their dialogue toward the one who has died and rarely toward the other living responders (Williams & Merten, 2009). This is an important observation in the debate on whether continuing a relationship with the deceased is helpful or detrimental in one's personal journey through grief as this kind of interaction can produce a false sense of relationship to a person who is no longer living. Some griever respond in ways that indicate their belief that the dead is listening to what they are saying (Walter et al., 2011). At what point does this kind of behavior create a threat of complicated grief? Certainly, more longitudinal research will need to occur before any conclusions can be made on this point.

Williams and Merten (2009) noticed an interesting trend when dissecting the online messages posted from grieving adolescents on the profile page of the deceased. While most participants spoke of the relationship that once existed with the friend who was lost, many adolescents attempted to create a new relationship with the deceased that did not previously exist before the death (Williams & Merten, 2009). There seems to be a "competition" between those who had a personal relationship with the one who has died and those who wish to establish a significant position with the person after their death (Carroll & Landry, 2010). This interesting conflict is one that is saturated in developmental theory and warrants significant consideration for further research.

There are so many possibilities for future research in the area of adolescent thanatechnology (Sofka, Cupit, & Gilbert, 2012a). Current research has shown how adolescents are using technology for grief support. Now, it is important to observe how this online grief support changes the face of adolescent grief overall so that the comprehensive development at

this life stage is better understood. With technology changing rapidly each day, it is crucial that helping professionals continue to educate themselves on the current uses of technology by adolescents if they expect to build meaningful relationships with their teen clients (Oltjenbruns & James, 2006).

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Research Question

What is the grief experience like for adolescents who use Facebook for grief support by communicating with the deceased and with other grieving individuals? This question explores how the bereaved teenager uses online connections through Facebook to make sense of a death related loss.

Sub Questions

1. Did online support prevent adolescents from feeling isolated or misunderstood?
2. Did online expressions of personal grief provide safe outlets for students seeking grief support?
3. When adolescents received online support from their peers, was it helpful? Was it harmful?
4. How did grieving adolescents approach the online profile page of a friend who had died?
5. Did forms of online support foster a healthy reconciliation of grief?
6. How did the theory of Continuing Bonds (Klass et al., 1996) fit into the experience of continued communications on the online profile page of the deceased?

Methodology

My desire to explore bereaved adolescent experiences of online continued bonds with the deceased is best served through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, or IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This approach allowed me to understand the grief experience of the adolescent as they participate in continuing bonds through online interaction. IPA seeks to explore the phenomenon through the experiences of the participant, while taking the perspectives and views

of the researcher into account (Willig, 2008). In Moustakas's (1994) seven key principals found in all phenomenological research, it is stated that the focus of phenomenological research should be on the whole encounter, not just the segments or separate parts of the experience.

Phenomenologists try to fully describe one's personal experience within a certain phenomenon, not necessarily explain the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this study was not to analyze the text shared online from the participant and his/her lost loved one, but to examine how these online communications with the deceased and other grieverers either enhance or inhibit the participant's ability to make meaning out of the specific loss event in the context of his/her individual world. In order for me to understand the loss experience from the perspective of the grieving adolescent, a phenomenological approach was best suited for this study (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Previous studies were also examined in order to determine what is lacking within the topic of adolescent use of social media for grief support. Degroot (2012) recently conducted a study in which she used grounded theory methods to analyze the discourse shared on Facebook memorial walls and groups as well as direct postings on the profiles of the deceased. The results were substantial in progressing the research on online grief experiences, but the limitations of the research revealed the need for a deeper and more meaningful analysis. Fearon (2011) also investigated grieverers on Facebook. In her study, the experiences of the creators of Facebook memorial groups were explored. In order to expand on the existing research, this study incorporated the personal accounts and interpretations of those who have used Facebook to communicate with someone who has died through the deceased's Facebook profile page. While this type of inquiry is extremely personal, it is necessary in order to fully understand the benefits and possible dangers of young adults engaging in this ever-evolving, online expression of grief.

Sampling Criteria

A purposeful sampling selection was implemented in order to determine participants for this study. Six to eight adolescents between the ages of 15-19 were given the opportunity to engage in the research. In order to narrow the initial pool of participants, only adolescents who experienced the loss of a peer in the last two years were considered. Also, participants had to have an active, online Facebook profile. Adolescents meeting the above criteria had the opportunity to opt in as a participant in this study. Parental consent was mandatory and follow-up counseling with the student's school counselor was required.

Participants were demographically classified but remained anonymous within the presentation of the conclusive research. The sample was selected from a homogeneous student population within the same school where I work as a high school counselor. While this restriction presented some limitations that challenged the generalizability of the study on the larger adolescent population, it allowed for rich data as I already had an established strong rapport and credibility with the student participants. Additionally, I arranged for each participant to have direct access to his/her assigned counselor throughout the research process. Drawing a sample from my school allows this unique, immediate, and familiar support system for each participant as he/she revisits the difficult experience of losing a peer.

Data Collection

Participants were required to attend at least two sessions with me and one session with another counselor. In the first session, I explained the purpose of the study; the participant's and researcher's role and expectations were presented in detail, and an opportunity for questions and clarification was afforded. During the second session, each participant was asked a pre-determined set of questions. The interview was semi-structured, which allowed for flexibility had

I decided that follow-up questions needed to occur with one or more of the participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2003). This also allowed the participant to speak freely and openly about their experiences. One setback of a semi-structured interview is that the flexible framework forced me to partially surrender control of the interview as the participant had the freedom to expand on his/her own interests or concerns (Smith & Osborn, 2003). However, the richness of the collected data far outweighed this negative aspect. This kind of interview also assures that only one interview session is needed for the purpose of data collection. Since it may have been difficult for some adolescents to revisit the loss event, minimal interview sessions were preferred.

Questions were carefully scripted in order to address all elements of the adolescent's experience. The interview explored: the participants account of the peer death, if the adolescent actively sought out information or support through Facebook, if the participant has posted or is still posting comments on the deceased peer's Facebook page, and, if so, how communicating with the deceased has impacted the grief experience. I provided immediate online access so that the students may review the Facebook profile of the deceased and the previous messages that were posted by the participants.

The third session occurred with the participant's assigned school counselor in order to follow-up with any psychological difficulties that the adolescent may have had after revisiting a traumatic loss. After this meeting, the participant and his/her counselor determined if additional follow-up sessions were needed or if outside counseling needed to be referred.

Interview Questions

The interview questions that were formed for this study were derived from my curiosity about the lived experiences of adolescents who had lost a peer by death. This led me to structure

the questions in a manner that gathered factual information about the loss event while promoting an expansive and meaningful recollection of the participant's grief experience. The first session included questions that focused on the historical account of the loss event and defining the relationship with the adolescent's peer before he/she died. These questions for the first session were as follows:

1. Do you currently have an active Facebook profile?
2. Have you experienced the death of a friend in the last two years?
3. Did you use Facebook to communicate with your friend before his/her death?
4. Did you continue to post messages on your friend's Facebook page after his/her death? If no, please skip to question #6.
5. How many times did you post messages on your friend's Facebook page after his/her death?
6. After your friend's death, were your messages posted publically or privately on your friend's Facebook page?
7. If you did not post messages on your friend's Facebook page after his/her death, do you revisit his/her Facebook page to read past messages, look at photos, or to read other's messages?

The questions for the second session included more open ended inquire related to the participant's feelings about the loss, his/her beliefs surrounding the participant's online communication with the dead, and the adolescent's thoughts on the helpful and/or harmful aspects of expressing his/her grief online. The questions for the second session are listed below:

1. Describe the relationship between you and your friend before he/she died.
2. How did you learn about the death of your friend? Describe how you felt at that time.
3. Why did you post on your friend's Facebook profile after he/she died?
4. Describe the context of the messages that you posted on your friend's Facebook page after he/she died?

5. Who was the intended audience of your posts?
6. Describe your feelings when you posted on your friend's Facebook page.
7. Describe how you felt when you read messages on your friend's Facebook page that were posted by other people.
8. Describe how you feel when you revisit the messages/pictures that you posted on your friend's Facebook page.
9. Describe your current relationship with your deceased friend.
10. How do you think that using Facebook to communicate with your friend after they died helped or hindered your grief process?
11. How do you currently feel about the death of your friend?

These questions helped the adolescent explore their lived experience in a deeper way, allowing for richer dialogue between the participant and myself. Each question ties back to the original, primary research question and was designed with the established sub-questions in mind.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was strong throughout the research design and implementation. I used triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) by including an in-depth literature review, the use of online social media resources like Facebook, and a strenuous analysis of the transcriptions in order to establish the complexity and richness of the adolescent grief experience and their use of online social media in grief. The concept of transferability was strong as evident by the tremendous number of adolescents who participate in online social networking sites (Lenhart et al., 2010). As stated earlier, online relationships must endure the same beginnings and ends of traditional, face-to-face relationships. The experiences of grief that the participating adolescents explore should be identifiable to most anyone who engages in online social networking. While dependability is hard to establish in qualitative research

(Shenton, 2004), this study opened a plethora of research options as online social networking is constantly evolving and adolescents are continually experimenting in online relationships. Finally, I invited the participants to read through the interview transcriptions in order to member check the gathered data and ensure that their words and experiences were accurately recorded.

Because of the specific nature of the bereaved adolescent's experience and the extensive investigation of each participant interview, a small sample size was preferable (Moustakas, 1994). While the research has started to tap into the different ways adolescents use social media for grief support, there is very little said about their personal experiences while actively pursuing online support. This study assists in an overall understanding of the adolescent's complex experience of grief is expanded and recognized as a fluid, evolving phenomenon that exists within the ever-changing world of today's young adults.

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded in full length. Transcription services were utilized from Absolute Research & Marketing in Bloomington, Indiana in order to obtain a full written account of the interviews. After receiving the transcriptions of each participant interview, I continued with the interpretive phenomenological analysis, or IPA, in order to construct meaning through the participant's responses and to explore my own interpretations of the text (Willig, 2008). I dove into each transcript by reading and re-reading each interview in hopes of finding common themes among participants relating to lived experiences, meaning making, and reconciliation of grief.

The first layer of analysis consisted of my early thoughts about content of the interviews. I kept free flowing notes in the left margin of the transcriptions that highlighted my initial insights and questions. This process allowed me to keep my thoughts unrestricted, therefore

often included my own biases and beliefs. However, by incorporating these personal insights in the first phase of analysis, it was easier to later recognize and eliminate these biases from the final analysis. I also kept a personal, audio journal throughout the analysis in order to capture the evolving issues and questions that emerged and to record my own thoughts and interpretations. After I identified the emerging themes, for each participant, I took on the important task of giving the analysis structure (Willig, 2008) in order to determine any connections that may have existed between the themes (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It was critical that while common themes were extracted from each participant's interview, I also recognized new and unique themes from within each individual transcript. Each participant's themes were organized in a summarization table and are included in Appendix I.

After the transcripts were dissected, revealing the many themes for each adolescent experience, I determined which themes surfaced as primary and would serve as the overall focus of the research (Smith & Osborn, 2003). For this phase of the analysis, I listed the themes for each participant, and then looked for commonalities in content and focus to determine the overall master themes. These master themes were also organized in a summary table (Willig, 2008) that would drive my attempt to find common meaning within the participant's experiences. This table is included in Appendix J.

Methodology Assessment

In such a specific, narrowly focused study, one could criticize the openness of the interview process, the smaller sample size, or the homogeneous pool from which the sample was taken. However, as Miles & Huberman (1994) stated:

Our view is that qualitative studies take place in a real social world, and can have real consequences in people's lives; that there is a reasonable view of "what happened" in any particular situation, including what was believed, interpreted, etc. (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The data collected through this study was relevant and authentic. It was compiled from the words of the grieving adolescent about his/her personal accounts of living with the loss of a peer and continuing the bond with the peer even after death through online expressions. Again, so little research has been done on this subject matter and with this specific population. Beginning the process of understanding adolescent grief as it exists within online social networking sites will surely open new avenues for research and will pose new and developing questions as this phenomenon evolves.

Conclusion

The core of this research remained focused on the unique experiences of the participating grieving adolescents. With current technologies and rapidly developing forms of social media, it will be nearly impossible to stay current with the new online and virtual forms of grief support. However, regardless of what technologies develop in the future, grief is always a difficult experience for adolescents, no matter what extensive supports are available. It is the job of the diligent researcher, the persistent helping professional, and all other caring adults involved in an adolescent's life to seek understanding of his or her unique perspective so that meaningful support is provided.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Primary Research Question

What is the grief experience like for adolescents who use Facebook for grief support by communicating with the deceased and with other grieving individuals?

Sub Questions

1. Did online support prevent adolescents from feeling isolated or misunderstood?
2. Did online expressions of personal grief provide safe outlets for students seeking grief support?
3. When adolescents received online support from their peers, was it helpful? Was it harmful?
4. How did grieving adolescents approach the online profile page of a friend who had died?
5. Did forms of online support foster a healthy reconciliation of grief?
6. How did the theory of Continuing Bonds (Klass et al., 1996) fit into the experience of continued communications on the online profile page of the deceased?

Description of Participants

Both interviews and the follow up session were completed for each participant in just over one month. Seven female students and one male student agreed to participate in the study. In the first interview, each participant shared demographic information as well as basic details surrounding the peer death that he/she had experienced in the past. Names and locations have been changed in order to protect the identity of the participants.

- Abby, a 17-year-old senior at Northern Colorado High School has had an active Facebook profile since the end of her 7th grade year in school. Eli, a close friend and teammate, was killed in an unexpected car accident two years ago.
- Megan is 16-years-old and is a sophomore at Northern Colorado High School. She has had an active Facebook profile since she was in the 6th grade. Four months prior to the interviews, Megan's friend died after a heroin overdose.
- Desi, an 18-year-old senior at Northern Colorado High School, has also had an active Facebook profile since she was in the 6th grade. Two years ago, she also experienced the death of her peer, Eli. Additionally, she lost a close friend of her mother's, Elsie, about five months prior to the interviews.
- Erin is a 17-year-old senior at Northern Colorado High School. She currently has an active Facebook profile and indicated that she created this profile many years ago. Erin experienced the death of a peer from her school, Eli about two years ago. He was killed in a car accident while driving his sister to school.
- Henry is an 18-year-old male and a senior at Northern Colorado High School. His Facebook profile has been active for only a couple of months. Henry was also Eli's teammate on the cross-country team and on the track team when he died.
- Mollie is 18-years-old and is also a senior at Northern Colorado High School. She stated that her Facebook profile has been "very active" since her freshmen year in high school. Mollie's close friend and gymnastic coach completed suicide about two years prior to the interviews.

- Kelsey, also an 18-year-old senior at Northern Colorado High School, has had an active Facebook profile for a couple of years. Kelsey was a cross-country teammate of Eli's when he was killed in a car accident.
- Jess is a senior at Northern Colorado High School and is 16-years-old. Her Facebook profile has been active for four years. Jess was Eli's teammate on the cross-country team and track team during the time of his sudden death.

Each student participated in both interviews and in the follow up session with his/her counselor. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the student participant and of his/her parent. Absolute Research & Marketing, an organization that provides transcription services out of Bloomington, Indiana, transcribed the interviews before the first phase of analysis began. A confidentiality agreement was obtained before the interviews were sent to the transcriptionist.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, or IPA, demands that the researcher become engulfed in the transcription in order to understand the meanings hidden within the text. Smith describes this connection as "engaging in an interpretive relationship with the transcript" (p. 66). To begin this process, I first listened to the audio recording of each interview while simultaneously reading the matching transcript. This allowed me to connect the emotion of each participant with his/her actual words. I then read each transcript sequentially and multiple times. In the left margin, I recorded my initial thoughts and insights about each interview. This was an unstructured process that allowed me to freely record my ideas as they came to mind, including my own biases. Some of the documented thoughts were as follows:

- negative feelings toward other's posts
- seems to be healthy perspective on loss

- no regrets-can still communicate with dead
- lots of discussion about deceased not responding to living
- stages of grief through Facebook
- adamant that deceased is not forgotten
- shock and disbelief over death of peer
- is this a healthy reconciliation of grief?

After several more readings of each interview, I organized my initial thoughts. Any thoughts or insights that were influenced or guided by my own beliefs or biases were eliminated from the thematic design, but were grouped together in case I needed to refer to them later in the analysis. I then organized my notes into themes that had emerged from the text. I attached the participants' specific phrases and quotes to the established themes in order to provide textual evidence. Each interview was studied exclusively throughout this phase of the analysis. The themes found in each individual interview were then considered in relation to the original research question: What is the grief experience like for adolescents who communicate with the deceased through the social media site, Facebook? Each participant's themes and supporting textual evidence was organized in a table. With the research question still in mind, I began to look for connections among the emergent themes for each participant and clustered those that were theoretically similar.

Until this point in the analysis, I considered each participant's interview individually, allowing for a separate analysis of each case. This phase of the analysis showed how each individual grief experience is alike and how each experience differs. The similarities and differences became more evident as I conducted the final step of IPA. In this final phase, I worked to cluster the themes from the participant group as a whole. Five master themes emerged

from the interviews of eight high school students. These master themes are remembering the dead, not forgetting the dead, self-expression of grief, personal connections with the living, and continuing bonds with the deceased. Through this analysis, I was also able to extract the superordinate themes for the group. The superordinate themes were connecting with the dead and connecting with the living.

Finally, I was drawn to themes that I thought were significant, but did not naturally fall into the five emerged themes. While these themes are unique to specific participants and may be viewed as outliers, their significance was very apparent and surfaced multiple times throughout the individual interview. I decided to include these themes as part of the analysis in order to stimulate further conversation around this phenomenon. These outlying themes will be discussed later in this chapter.

Remembering the Dead

The master theme of remembering the deceased was very strong in several of the student interviews. Mollie described how she began to forget her loved one's face and used Facebook to recall the physical representation of her deceased friend:

R: Do you ... so before they took his Facebook down, were you able to go back and revisit his page and look at pictures, and things like that?

M: And I did. And I did save a few of them at some point just so I would kind of have, you know how memories fade after a while, and I, at this point, I don't remember his face very well. So occasionally I go look back at those pictures and kind of revisit those memories and remember that, and I did get those off his Facebook page.

R: So when you revisit the pictures that you have, and like you said it's in black and white now so you can go back and read your posts and things like that, how does that make you feel to go back and look at those memories, and revisit those feelings that you had initially?

M: Especially when I look at the pictures, it does make me really sad because it's a completely physical representation. It's a still image of who he used to be.

The use of Facebook provided an opportunity for Mollie to know that she will never have to wonder what he looked like as she grieves his loss. This advantage eliminates the possibility of a secondary loss occurring if those memories had ever faded. Henry also used the photo feature in Facebook to recall the good times that he experienced with his deceased friend:

R: Have you been able to go back, have you gone back to look on his page and see some of his pictures or things that other people have posted?

H: I have a little bit, yes.

R: Tell me about that, like what kinds of things you have looked at on there?

H: There was a few pictures of athletics when he was in athletics, and that's what I mostly remember him from. Then I remember seeing him in the halls too around school, and that brought back a lot of memories when I went and saw the pictures.

Personal pictures that have been uploaded to one's Facebook profile not only serve as a photographic account of the life that one has lived, but also serves as a cherished reminder of the connection that a grieving adolescent had with a peer that has died. Megan indicated that she posted pictures of her friend after she died and printed several of the pictures off of Facebook to keep in her bedroom and in her car to remember her deceased friend. She also revisited pictures that her friend had posted from a recent vacation and remembered how beautiful her friend once was.

M: Yes, and I posted pictures of her and me on Instagram and, yes, I always think of her. I always have a picture of her in my car and room, so, yes.

R: So when you revisit the messages and pictures on her Facebook page, it makes you feel good?

M: Yes. I don't know, I keep saying that but she had the most pretty smile, and without even makeup. She was in Cancun and I was looking at pictures of them, and she just was so pretty, and her eyes, like she was just, I don't know why she got into that. I don't know how she did. But, yes, she was very pretty.

Jess also spoke about how she used the photos and postings on Facebook to remember her friend Eli.

R: So when you go back and you look at pictures, or messages, or things like that, what does that feel like for you, to be able to do that on Facebook?

J: Yes, it's definitely hard to see how life can be changed so fast, and it's just kind of a reminder like that. But, it's just, it's nice to see those things and have the image still fresh because I don't want things to fade away and I want to remember what he looks like, and how positive he was, and just a smile always on his face.

Erin not only used Facebook to look at pictures of her deceased friend, but also utilized this social media tool to revisit the online activity that occurred on the day of Eli's death in order to remember the day that he died.

R: So do you revisit his page and revisit his photos and things like that?

E: Yes. I look at his photos, his past poems, things people tagged him in, everything. His family posts on there sometimes. The anniversary of his death, they post on there. So that's the hardest. January 18th, looking at it, going back and revisiting how it all happened and like he, like how many lives he changed. He was such a good person and you could just tell that he had so many friends and impacted so many people.

This kind of remembering could be the topic of future research as it might be beneficial to understand the significance of revisiting the events surrounding a death experience.

Many of the student participants indicated that he/she used Facebook to remember the deceased through honoring their memory through actions. Erin also talked about the positive impact that Eli had on her life and how she uses his memory to gain personal growth in her own life.

E: He's making people smile. He's doing what he's always done. So, I mean, it's made me stronger in the fact that because right a few minutes after he died, in July my uncle died. So it was a lot easier to cope with after him dying, after my uncle dying, it was, it hurt but I knew how to handle the hurt. I knew what to do, who to go to so his death helped me with deaths in the family. So I have a lot to be thankful for. He was a good guy and I know that no matter what he'll always be watching over me and everybody else at this school.

When reflecting on the death of her friend, Eli, Jess states that many of the things that she now does in her everyday life are done in honor of her deceased friend:

R: How would you describe your current relationship with Eli? Do you feel like you still have one?

J: Yes, I definitely, like any time I tie up my running shoes it's for him, and any time I feel tired or exhausted, or sad, I know that I just need to keep pushing through the rough parts and always have a positive outlook on life. And any time I'm sad, it feels like the sun always comes out, and I know it's Eli because, like I said, every time I talk about him the sun always ends up coming out for him. And he just reminds me that life's going to be okay and the extra hard push will really help, and just the little extra things that I need to push me through every day.

Jess has taken the positive aspects of Eli's life and applied them to her own as a way of constantly remembering who he was and the kind of impact that he had on her life. Abby also said that she takes the positive characteristics that she remembers about Eli and applies them to her daily life.

A: And they make me just happy that we got the chance to know him, because the people who didn't get the chance to know him aren't going to learn the lessons that I've learned of how to live life with everything you have, everyday be happy. And other people have seen that. But it just makes me grateful that even though the pain that came with it, it was worth knowing him no matter what, because he taught me so much.

R: So tell me, describe kind of the context of the messages that you post, what kinds of things did you say to him?

J: Just that he's inspired me to push myself running, and push myself in life, and just kind of different things like if I did something good in track it was for him, or at the end when I had no energy, like the kick was for him because his kick was amazing, and just little things like that, that he can still live through us, that I just think that's important.

Kelsey also states that when she runs, she now runs for Eli:

K: I think it's just like I still run for him, like if it's soccer, or Cross Country, or at the gym, it's still running for him because he was such a big part of the team when I did run.

Kelsey also used Facebook to fondly remember past interactions with Eli.

R: So what does it feel like when you posted something on his page? How did you feel when you did that?

K: It felt good just to know that I was still thinking about it, even after it had happened, a year later, and ...

R: How do you feel when you read other people's Facebook messages, and pictures, and things that they post? How does that make you feel?

K: It kind of makes me sad, still thinking that he was there one day and gone the next, and just remembering everything that he said, or had done for us.

Mollie spoke extensively about how she keeps the memory of her past gymnastics coach and friend alive by performing for him. She talked about how her Facebook posts expressed her desire to continue in gymnastics to honor his memory.

M: I was saying messages like I know that he would want me to continue, and so I will continue in his honor, and everything I do will be in his memory. So I hope that he's proud of me. And since then, everything I do in cheer, like if I accomplish a new skill, or like I try out for my college team, and I'm sure that whether or not I make the team, I'll end up posting something like, well, hey, I did it for you so. It just kind of waivered back and forth between really emotional and really hard to kind of like you are still the light in my life especially with cheer, like you are the motivation that I have.

Each of these students was able to take a physical activity that was shared with their deceased friend and turn it into a personal memorial in his honor. This kind of connection will hopefully continue to serve as a positive reminder throughout their lives.

Not Forgetting the Dead

Several participants were very passionate about ensuring that their deceased friend was not forgotten after their death. This theme became so strong during my analysis that I considered it to be very different that the desire to remember the dead in that it did not seem to be satisfactory to only keep the memory of the dead alive on an individual basis. It was crucially important that those who never had the chance to know him/her also remembered by others who loved him/her and the dead. Through my close investigation of the text, I noticed that some students became emotional and somewhat angry at the thought of their loved one being forgotten by those who knew him/her. Abby engaged in extensive dialogue on the subject:

R: Describe how you felt when you read messages from other people that were posted on Eli's Facebook page?

A: I like the other messages, like made me really happy to know that everyone else was thinking of him too, not just me and not just people who were close to him. People who didn't know him, they were posting on it and just being like you're a really cool dude, or whatever, I'm sorry. And it was just good to know that other people weren't going to forget him too because he doesn't deserve to be forgotten. Just because he wasn't the most popular kid in school or whatever, it was good to know that other people were behind him and behind his family through everything that they were going through.

R: How do you feel now when you revisit the messages and pictures that you posted or other people posted, at this point?

A: I feel really happy because me and Nik, we were able to get their family a bench, and like know, and I remember his mom hugging me and being like now my son's never going to be forgotten. And that makes me just think of that over and over again, and know that his mom is reassured that her son isn't just going to be another kid who got killed or whatever, like he actually means something to this school.

Abby's words were filled with such intensity and commitment as she proclaimed again and again that Eli would not be forgotten. When she stated that Eli should be remembered even though "he wasn't the most popular kid in school" seemed to heal possible guilt that Abby might have been carrying since Eli's death. Her direct actions toward Eli's family that helped to memorialize their son may have assisted Abby in reconciling the death of her peer.

Jess spoke about how she was comforted knowing that Eli will not be forgotten by others because of the connections and expressions made about him on Facebook.

R: Describe how you felt when you read messages from other people on his Facebook page?

J: It felt really good to see that because I didn't know who was close to him and stuff, but it felt really good to know that other people were supporting him and other people won't forget about him. And still, if they post, it feels really good that his legend lives on and that he won't be forgotten.

Megan and Desi also found comfort in knowing that other's had not forgotten about her friend by reading other griever's posts.

R: Do you revisit her page often and read messages?

M: Yes.

R: And read what other people have said and stuff?

M: Yes, just to see if people are still thinking of her and stuff, I guess, yes.

R: Describe how you felt when you read messages on your friends' Facebook page that were posted by other people?

D: I was happy. It's just knowing that no one's, like even though they're not here, they're not forgotten.

It is as if these grieving adolescents need to be constantly reassured that when someone dies, their life is not really over. Adolescents usually consider themselves to be invincible and rarely think about their own mortality. Only when one of their own dies and the expected sequence of life is interrupted do they begin to take stock in their own place in this world. Making sure that their friends are not forgotten might ease their own fears of what would happen should their life end unexpectedly.

Self-Expression of Grief

The participants' use of Facebook as a way to express his/her grief is certainly one of the more predominant master themes found among the interviews. Mollie spoke about how she used her own Facebook profile to express her sorrow and confusion over the loss of her friend:

R: So now your former coach has died, do you still visit his Facebook page? Have you ever posted anything on it after he died?

M: Not on his Facebook page specifically because I think they actually took it offline after he passed. But I do use my own to communicate that around the time every year. I don't remember the exact date because we don't really know if it was the night before or the day of, but either way around that time I use my own Facebook profile to kind of say something like I miss you or I'm still doing cheer and I hope you're proud of me, and things like that. So I communicate through my own profile.

Mollie also described how posting her feelings on her Facebook page helped her through the grief process:

R: How did it feel when you posted something, and I know you had different feelings, but how did it feel after you posted something about him?

M: 90 % of the time I would say that it's sort of a relief, like a weight off of my shoulders, because I had been carrying those burdens and holding all of that stuff in, because I had no one else to talk to. So I felt like when I posted something online I had this entire audience that I could just share everything with. Whether they cared or not, it was out there. So, it just helped me kind of forget those things for a little bit because it was in black and white, somewhere where I could go back.

Mollie's use of Facebook to express her feelings around this significant loss event resulted in a positive and healthy outlet for her to explore her grief. Megan spoke about how posting about the loss of her friend felt like a relief and gave her a way to release her feelings about the loss.

M: But for her, I think getting it out and it felt like it was like a relief, like I didn't have stress and I could just take a breath for a second, and that helped me a lot saying that. And I'll read them and be just happy I told her certain things, yes.

R: How does it feel when you post something on her Facebook page?

M: Good, just to like I guess get it off my chest and stuff, just so she knows, and I think about her a lot, so yes I just think it's really little to do but I think it means a lot to her if she was here.

Megan had an interesting response to the expressions of grief posted by other people. She spoke about a message that her deceased friend's boyfriend posted on her Facebook page after she died.

R: Describe how you feel when you read other people's messages on her Facebook page?

M: I feel good. But when she passed, her boyfriend, it was kind of weird, he just did like a short I love you. I don't know, it was really nice but you would think that he would just be more like ... but everyone else, like all of her other friends, they're very supporting her family and stuff. So that's good. They posted really nice things about her, and pictures.

Megan initially had a negative response to the boyfriend's post. She considered it to be minimal and without meaning in comparison to other's posts. This kind of judgment contradicts the idea that expressing feelings of sadness and grief online is a protected and safe. I became curious

about her statement regarding the boyfriend. Because I had chosen to administer a semi-structured interview, I had the allowance to ask her an additional question on the topic.

R: So tell me more about the boyfriend's post ...

M: I don't remember it all, but it was just like I love you and you're beautiful. That was like it though. I would have thought like I was reading something very ... but then maybe he's not like that, and he did that more personally. I'm just more open. I could talk about it. So I don't really know.

After stating again that Megan thought that his posts should have been more substantial in some way, she realized her judgment. It is not known if she truly recognized this and gained insight into the uniqueness of grief, or if she was justifying her questions because I may have perceived her statement in a negative way. Regardless, her initial response to the boyfriend's posts opened another possible path for future research.

Personal Connections with the Living

Connecting with other people proved to be another master theme with the group of student interviews. One of the most important aspects of these connections was the normalization of the grief process for adolescents. As we know, Adolescents are constantly aware of their peer's behaviors and determine what is acceptable and what is unacceptable according to these behaviors. Because these grieving adolescents were able to connect with others who were either sharing in their grief or had experienced a similar loss event in the past, they were able to accept their own journey through grief. Kelsey talked about how connecting with other grievers helped her in her own process:

R: How do you think, or do you think that posting things on his Facebook page after he died, do you think that helped your grief process, or do you think it hurt it?

K: I think it helped definitely because you knew other people were struggling as well, and they'd be able to communicate too, so they could also help you, like, hey, I'm going through this too. It kind of made more friends too, they have something in common.

Abby also expressed how helpful it was to read about other's experiences of loss:

R: So, how do you think that using Facebook to post those messages, and communicate, and reading other messages, do you think that it helped your grief process, or do you think it hindered it?

A: I think it helped it because I was able to see that other people were feeling the same way as me, so it was a normal way to feel. So I was able to accept the pain that I had and move on from that, because I was like other people are feeling like this and I could reach out to them and talk to them about it, and so that helped me move on with it.

Erin was able to normalize her grief experience as she read through the posts of other's that were grieving over the loss of Eli.

E: So reading it [other's posts] makes me smile and cry, but smile as well, because he was a good guy and he did do a lot of amazing things for a lot of people. So knowing that there are other people who went through what I went through, and maybe even worse because they were closer to him, like it's something that you never really think happens, like, no, no, nobody I know could ever die, like you don't think about it and then one day it does happen and you're like, it makes you think how lucky you are to know and to see everybody you do see every day.

It can be inferred by this statement that she was comforted by knowing that other's are also experiencing grief and that she could connect with them as a means of support. Abby also connected with others and their grief, which allowed her to normalize her experience.

R: So, how do you think that using Facebook to post those messages, and communicate, and reading other messages, do you think that it helped your grief process, or do you think it hindered it?

A: I think it helped it because I was able to see that other people were feeling the same way as me, so it was a normal way to feel. So I was able to accept the pain that I had and move on from that, because I was like other people are feeling like this and I could reach out to them and talk to them about it, and so that helped me move on with it.

Jess felt relieved that others were also grieving over Eli's death.

R: How do you feel when you posted things on his Facebook? What did that make you feel like?

J: It was kind of a relief because I know that other people will be there to reach out to me as well, and to know that I have other people to relate to, and just kind of a connection

further than just something I can see on how far it's been, and just kind of a connection to other people as well.

She also stated that the use of Facebook helped to "unify" people, as if collectively they could overcome this grief experience.

R: Do you think that using Facebook to communicate with Eli after he died, do you think that helped your grief process or do you think it hindered it?

J: I think it helped because I think it unified other people together and to realize that I wasn't the only one going through it, and to have them look through what he said, and look through what he lived for, and remind me what I can do too.

Mollie made a different kind of connection with others with her use of Facebook in her grief. She stated that she was not in contact with the other people who knew her former gymnastics coach. Therefore, her support did not consist of others who were experiencing the same loss at the same time, but of other grieverers who were at different points in their own personal experience.

R: Great. How do you think that using Facebook to communicate your feelings about your friend's death, after his death, do you think it helped or hindered your grief process?

M: I definitely think it helped because there were so many posts of people, comments, I'm here if you need me, or I'm sorry, this happened to me too. And so hearing other people's stories and knowing that I had other people there in my life really kind of helped even things out because I felt so alone at that point. Like I've never gotten along with very many people very well.

M: So it's almost like losing him and losing that thing that I could lean on kind of helped realize that there were other people there both my age and not that could help me through this process and that could kind of become my friend, and not take his place but sort of fill that lonely void.

These connections created new, supportive relationships that alleviated her feelings of loneliness and isolation. Through Facebook, Mollie was able to post open inquiries in order to locate people who had similar experiences with loss. With one post, she was instantly connected with

supportive people that she believed could relate to her situation better than the people she interacted with on a daily basis.

M: I was almost reaching out for my own sake, like I need help getting through this, this is one of the hardest things that's ever happened to me, so I need people to kind of support me. So I think mainly used it as an outlet for my feelings and to kind of get that feedback from other people, like have you been through something like this or anything like that.

Connecting with others experiencing a common loss and connecting with others with similar loss experiences was one of the strongest themes that emerged from the lived experiences of the adolescent participants. The ability to receive instant feedback and support, and the realization that one could potentially connect with millions of people who have lived similar experiences with grief is attractive to a bereaved adolescent and will surely cause more and more teenagers to utilize online social media as a resource when dealing with a loss event.

Continuing Bonds with the Dead

The theory of continuing bonds (Klass et al., 1996) was certainly well represented within the student interviews. The majority of participants stated that they often used Facebook to post comments directly to the deceased, even though he/she knew that there would not be a response. Erin only posted privately to Eli, so that he was the only one reading her words:

R: Did you post things to it publicly or privately?

E: Privately so only he could see it.

R: And why do you think you did that?

E: I don't know, probably because I mean seeing what other people wrote was hard enough and we had just become friends, so, I don't know, I just ... and then it was like personal stuff about me too, and stuff. So I just kept it private so only he could read it.

This behavior could bring into question the usefulness of social media in grief if the grieving adolescent continues to interact with the dead in a way that seems to go beyond acceptable

behavior. Many of the student participants, however, used this kind of direct communication with the dead as a way to connect to his/her memory and to help slowly bring the reality of the loss to the surface. Desi spoke about this kind of online communication with her deceased friends:

R: Tell me why you think, or why did you post on your friend's Facebook profile after they died?

D: I thought of it kind of as a way to connect with them, like even if they can't read it, you just imagine that they can when you post something and even though they don't comment.

R: How did you feel when you posted the photos or the messages, or the quotes, on their Facebook pages?

D: I missed them. It just made me realize that they really can't read it, but in a way it also helped because just imagining that they could.

Desi appeared to have a healthy balance of connecting with Eli as a way to remember her friend and understanding that the communication will never be interchanging. Abby also indicated that she posted messages to Eli as a way to remember him and to let him know that he is loved:

R: So, after he died, and you said you posted some things on his Facebook, why did you do that? Why do you think you posted on his Facebook?

A: I just wanted, like I know he couldn't read it, but I felt like that was one other way that I could still talk to him. I guess praying I could, but it was like physically there and he could ... I don't know, just to me I felt like he could read it. I just wanted him to know that even though we never hung out outside of school or anything, or anything like that, that I was thinking about him and that I was praying for his family, and that I was caring about him, and that I still thought about him and that he wasn't going to be forgotten.

Many of the grieving adolescents considered the feelings of the dead when they posted comments and messages directly to his/her deceased friend profile page. They spoke about the dead as if they are still able to experience feelings and emotions that might come from reading the posts of the living. Mollie included posts that expressed her desire to still gain approval from her former gymnastics coach.

M: I was saying messages like I know that he would want me to continue, and so I will continue in his honor, and everything I do will be in his memory. So I hope that he's proud of me.

While she will never be able to confirm her hopes surrounding the coach's feelings about her, she seems to be comforted that she can use Facebook to still communicate her wishes for approval to her coach. Abby hoped to comfort Eli in telling him that he wasn't going to be forgotten. She then tried to comfort Eli regarding his death.

R: What kind of things did you post on his Facebook? Describe the kind of context of what you wrote?

A: I think I remember writing like it's going to be weird not running with you anymore but I know that god's going to have a course for you to run while you're there, and you're in a better place because this world just wasn't good enough for you. He was always smiling and like I remember telling him that I would pray for him and his family,

Jess was also concerned about the present feelings and beliefs of the dead.

R: So tell me after that why you decided to post on his Facebook profile?

J: I just want him to know that he'll always be loved and that his happiness will inspire us, because he was going to go so far in life, and was so ambitious, and it took a lot for him to get where he was, and he just always had a benefit, and I never want to let him down, like I always want to look positively and even though he won't be in this world I know that I want to show him that his happiness will live on.

This kind of online communication with the deceased was one of the most common uses of Facebook among these grieving adolescents. It provided comfort when they were confused or saddened by the loss and allowed the griever to express things to his/her deceased friend that they may have wanted to say while he/her was still living. It also provided a necessary acceptance of the finality of death when the adolescent received no response from his/her friend. While this reality may seem to be a harsh realization, it provides something concrete and actual to an adolescent who may be having trouble accepting the loss of a peer.

Outlying Themes

The outlying themes that emerged from the interviews were connecting with the family of the deceased and communications with the deceased/unhealthy responses. Often, these outlying themes are dominant in regards to the overall experience of the individual. For example, many of the themes that surfaced in Erin's interview were not similar to the themes that emerged in the other participant's interviews, but were significant in her personal experience. These outlying themes drew much needed attention to the activities of this grieving individual and certainly made me further consider the overall benefits of the use of technology for grief support. For example, Erin was the only student who posted messages privately to the deceased. Posting directly on the deceased's Facebook profile as if he were still alive, could hinder the overall grief process and cause the grieving adolescent to have difficulty accepting the initial death. Erin showed some indications of complicated grief as she spoke about her Facebook postings after the death of her friend, Eli:

R: So why do you think you posted on his Facebook page after he died?

E: Part of me was hoping I would get a response back, and part of me knew that no matter what he was looking down and knowing exactly what I was saying, and part of me it was just a way for me to not lose him, if I posted he was not really gone.

R: Yes. Has it stayed that way?

E: Yes, I mean ...

R: Or has it changed why you post now?

E: I mean it changed, what I post now is more for me to let him know like I'm still here, I still think about you and I miss you every day. But he's not coming back no matter how many times I text him or how many times I call him and he never answers. But I post more so now for the fact that I can still talk to him even though he doesn't talk back. I can still say what I want to say.

R: But what were some of the messages that you posted, what were they about, what was the context that you would say?

E: Some of it was about wishing he would come back so we could work out some more. Some of it was wish he would come back just so he would be back. Some of it was about how are you doing lately. Some of it was about family. Some of it was about how school's going. It was normal conversations, it's just one-sided.

R: So the intended audience of your post was to him?

E: Yes, just that's kind of why I made it private because it was just me, like I would, if he were never gone, I would just talk to him.

In studying Erin's words, she seems to flow rapidly between accepting the final death of Eli and believing that he could still come back. Some posts seem to promote a healthy continuing bond between Erin and the essence of her deceased friend while other posts seem to expect a response that will never come. This type of communication through Facebook could raise concerns about the damaging impact that online grieving could have on an adolescent.

While Erin stated that she had accepted the fact that Eli would never be able to respond to the messages that she posted to him on Facebook, she continued to post with hopes that he might someday post something back to her. She seemed to be surprised that he still had not replied to her.

R: How does it feel when you go back and read the messages that you posted originally, or anything else that you might have posted?

E: It hurts looking at it, but it also is good because I go back to the posts before he died and I see our actual conversations, and he's talking back, and we're just laughing and having a grand old time. And then all of a sudden his conversations stop and it's just mine, which I think is what hurts the most, is that I'll never get a, hey, how are you doing message from him.

R: How do you think posting on Facebook to communicate with Eli has helped or hindered your grief process?

E: So it's helped a lot. It definitely made it easier, not physically seeing him and not physically talking to him but at the same time it's hard because you post hoping, just praying, that he'll be like, hey, guys, it's a big joke, sorry I hurt you for so long but I'm back, I'm okay. But you know you'll never get that, so that's the part that hurts. But, it helps. It helps a lot, just talking to him.

I decided to include this theme in my data because the supporting evidence found in the interview raised concern about whether or not Erin was having a healthy or unhealthy grief experience. This concern certainly leads to other possible topics for future research in the area of adolescent grief.

Another outlying theme took my analysis in an unexpected, but interesting direction. One theme that came out of Abby's interview was the desire to connect with the family of the deceased through Facebook:

R: So who would you say was the intended audience for your post? Was it Eli?

A: I would say that it's Eli and maybe kind of family in a way too because I'm sure they probably got on his ... and I'm sure that was a major, like a really good support thing for them to know that other people are caring for him and that other people are praying for them, and knowing that they're behind them through everything that they're going through.

Since most of the other discussions around Facebook postings supported the individual adolescent through his/her grief, I found it interesting that one adolescent was overly concerned about using her Facebook postings to support the family, even while she is dealing with her own grief. I wondered if this was because of previous, familial experiences with grief or if her concentration on the wellbeing of Eli's family was a way to avoid her own grief. This selfless vs. selfish approach to online grief could pose another interesting topic for further research.

Conclusion

After I concluded my final phase of analysis, I reflected back on the primary research question, "What is the grief experience like for adolescents who use Facebook for grief support by communicating with the deceased and with other grieving individuals?" Each of the master themes was used to collectively answer this question. Overall, the adolescents in this study expressed that while his/her grief experience was difficult, it was easier to live out because of

different inclusions that were allowed by his/her use of Facebook. The online social media website provided a snapshot of the life that was once lived by his/her deceased friend. Grieving adolescents were able to revisit photos to remember the physical image of their friend and videos to recall their friend's voice. Each adolescent was able to journey back in time through online posts to remember the day that the loss occurred. Facebook served as a failsafe memory box that could always be accessed whenever the adolescents chose.

I also reflected back on the sub questions that stemmed from the primary research question. Each student's individual experiences and the master themes also provided answers to these inquiries. Several of the student participants expressed that connecting with other griever through Facebook was beneficial to their grief process as it allowed them to identify with other's grief experience. These online relationships helped to eliminate the adolescent's feelings of being alone in their grief or being misunderstood through their emotions. Most of the participants stated that Facebook was extremely helpful throughout their grief experiences because it created a network of support through exchanging thoughts and feelings with other griever or by simply providing a safe outlet for the adolescent to express their grief.

In this study, Facebook provided a safe outlet for these adolescents to express their grief in a genuine way. Most of the online interactions that were experienced by these adolescent participants were positive and certainly contributed to a healthy grief process leading toward reconciliation. However, in the case of Erin, there were indications that her online activity might have been contributing to a complicated grief experience as she often stated that she still hoped that her deceased friend, Eli, would one day respond to her messages and posts. This singular experience is significant in the definition of Erin's individual journey grief, but does not overwhelmingly describe the grief experience that is observed through this study.

The theory of Continuing Bonds (Klass et al., 2006; 2001; 1996) is prevalent in the grief experiences of these adolescents. Facebook allows these young grieverers to continue the connection that they had with a friend prior to their death through text, images, and sound. Facebook provides a physical platform for adolescent grieverers to remember their lost friends while actively continuing the relationship with the dead in the context of their personal beliefs and views on loss. This unique, online outlet is a true representation of the theory of Continuing Bonds (Klass et al., 2006; 2001; 1996) and will most likely remain as such for years to come.

Through this interview process, I discovered that it was incredibly important for the participants to safeguard the memory of their lost friend. Because Facebook allowed for a unified place where users who knew the dead gathered, grieverers can be assured that their posts will likely be read by many of their online friends. Therefore, grieving adolescents can always bring the memory of a deceased friend to the present for themselves and for the friends that they are connected to on Facebook. It was a simple way to ease the fears associated with being forgotten after death, which was clearly a common issue among the adolescent participants.

Facebook is designed to be an online site that invites users to express their true self through visual media, group affiliations, and original thoughts in the form of messages and posts. For adolescents, Facebook becomes an obvious place to express their own feelings surrounding a loss event. There is a perceived safety in revealing their true feelings through online posts versus talking about them openly and publically without the aid of the Internet. While this method of communication may not be what helping professionals traditionally consider to be a healthy form of expression, it is what adolescents know and feel comfortable engaging with. Sometimes their expressions of grief may be met with judgment and criticism, but this risk could be perceived to be much higher in face-to-face interactions. The adolescent participants generally had positive

experiences when expressing their grief through Facebook postings; therefore this method could be accepted as a useful tool in grief.

Online social media is based on making connections with other users, whether they are friends, acquaintances, or strangers. The adolescents in this study revealed that the act of connecting with other grievers online was extremely helpful as they worked through their own grief. They felt comforted by knowing that other people their age were dealing with similar loss events and experiencing similar feelings of grief. They felt supported by strangers and friends who responded to their posts about the loss. They felt encouraged by the new connections that were made with others who were either directly or indirectly connected to the loss. Grieving on Facebook means that an adolescent doesn't have to physically seek out supportive friends, risking the chance that they could be rejected or judged because of their grief response. Bereaved adolescents can simply write a post and wait for the support to come to them. While this outreach obviously has its limitations, in the immediate moments of need, can be very beneficial to a struggling teen.

Finally the act of continuing bonds with the deceased friend had a strong presence in the grief experience of these participating adolescents. It seems to be socially acceptable for an online user to post comments and messages directed to the dead as if they are still alive. While there still seemed to be some hope that the deceased friend might respond someday, the adolescents understood that the communication would always remain one-sided. However, the adolescents found happiness in talking to the dead online. They imagined that their friend could read their posts and experienced happiness and comfort through their words. Posting to the dead gave the adolescents the opportunity to tell the dead things that they never had the chance to say before. It allows them to reflect on their previous relationship with the living and restructure it so

that it continues past a physical existence. While there is certainly a level of concern surrounding ongoing communications with the dead, under proper supervision, this act could prove to be very helpful for adolescents as they grapple with understanding death and loss.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis calls for the researcher to define the true essence of the experience that is being observed (Smith, 2009). At the root of each of these adolescent grief experiences is the feeling of being connected. The adolescents may have made personal connections with other griever, with the dead, or with supportive individuals. Or, the adolescent may have made a connection with their own personal experience of grief through their online expressions on Facebook. In either situation, the adolescents were seeking out a meaningful connection to something in the midst of a confusing and terrifying experience. This is the true essence of these adolescent participants' grief experience.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Online communication with others through social media, especially in the capable hands of today's youth, can be an alarming concept when considering the developmental stages and tasks of an adolescent (Bell & Bromnick, 2003; Elkind, 1967; Erikson, 1959a; Erikson, 1993; Havighurst, 1972; Kaplan, 2004). When this online communication continues, even after the physical death of one party, it is understandable why many would question the effectiveness and safety of online grief support. After dissecting this particular set of data, I argue that the use of Facebook could prove to be very helpful in the grief process of an adolescent. In chapter four, I presented five master themes that emerged from the collection of interviews: remembering the dead, not forgetting the dead, self-expression of grief, personal connections with the living, and continuing bonds with the deceased. I also revealed the outlying themes, which were dominant in the individual's account of his/her experience. Each of these themes must then be considered in light of the original research question: What is the grief experience like for adolescents who communicate with the deceased through the social media site, Facebook?

The master themes that emerged are generally seen as positive experiences and support a healthy reconciliation of grief. However, the outlying themes, which could be considered harmful, presented equally as strong as the common master themes when considering the overall grief experience of the adolescent sample. In this chapter, I will discuss the significance of each master theme and outlying theme as it is related to the original research question: What is the grief experience like for adolescents who communicate with the deceased through the social media site, Facebook?

The Experience of Remembering the Dead

Finding ways to remember the dead is not a practice that is unique to adolescent grief. In all stages of life, we strive to hold on to the memories of our lost loved ones. This desire also held true for the participants of this study. All of the participants stated that they used Facebook as a tool to remember the friend that they had lost. We know that a majority of today's adolescents use social media to create original content that includes personal photographs, videos, and individual thoughts (Lenhart et al., 2007). This online footprint left by millions of adolescents serves as a kind of memorial that others can revisit after the user dies. Adolescents revisit the online profiles of the dead in order to remember what their deceased friend looked like, what their voice sounded like, and how they once behaved.

Using Facebook to remember the dead is an incredible resource that grievers of the past did not have. Having the luxury of hearing the dead's voice and seeing their face with just the click of a button might change the way that we grieve in this technological age. Online content through social media has certainly enhanced the adolescent experience of grief as it allows teens to always remember the life of the dead through the images and sounds of the past that will remain through online profiles.

The Experience of Not Forgetting the Dead

As I began making sense of the themes that were emerging from the group of interviews, the difference in remembering and not forgetting became very clear. As I stated earlier, grievers across all life stages desire to remember the loved ones that they have lost. However, the adolescents in this study also had a strong desire to ensure that others did not forget their peers after their death. This can be attributed to the developmental stages and tasks that are being tackled during adolescence. Elkind's (1967) personal fable certainly plays into this experience as

the adolescent believes that they are unique and that nothing bad could ever happen to them. Once the death of a peer enters into their life story, this personal fable is challenged (Oltjenbruns, 2007). The desire to ensure the deceased adolescent is not forgotten is a way to offset the reality of the loss. It is as if the grieving adolescent is trying to find a way to prolong the life of their deceased friend.

During the interviews, many of the participants became very emotional when speaking about how they did not want their friend to be forgotten. Abby mentioned several times that she wanted to ensure that her friend, Eli, was not forgotten after his death. Abby also mentions her role in creating “Eli’s Relay,” which was an event held at their school in remembrance of Eli and the life that he lived. She expressed that she was very proud of this event. The relay was an active response that met her desire to keep his memory alive and to ensure that he was not forgotten. It brought his life back to the present day. For Abby, making sure that Eli’s life and legacy was not forgotten helped her make sense of his unexpected and untimely death.

Jess was able to use Facebook as a physical reminder that Eli was not forgotten. Because she is able to constantly refer back to the postings, she was able to find comfort in knowing that his legacy will continue. Again, this assurance that her peer will not be forgotten is used to help Jess make sense of his death.

I found this theme to be very interesting as it is not something that we typically consider when thinking of how adolescents grieve. However, through this study, I think that more attention should be given to adolescents when they have such intense desires to keep the memory of their lost peers alive. The grieving teens in this study were showing us that they were fearful of their own mortality and of the possibility that they may one day be forgotten.

The Experience of Expressing Grief

Grieving online allows an adolescent to feel “normal” about their grief (Erikson, 1959b). Adolescents can express their grief instantly, anonymously, and publically without ever physically interacting with another person. Therefore, the grieving adolescent can gain acceptance from others of their personal grief experience in the safety of their own home (James, Oltjenbruns, & Whiting, 2008). The adolescent participants of this study used Facebook as a way to safely express their grief to their online network of friends. Mollie shared her feelings as general posts to her own profile, not directed to any particular person or group. She did this in order to prevent herself from bottling up her feelings, as she is usually prone to do. In Mollie’s case, she did not have a group of friends experiencing the same loss because she was no longer in contact with people from that time of her life. This made her grief experience difficult because the peers that she interacted with daily knew nothing of the significant loss that she was experiencing. Therefore, Facebook became the tool that allowed her to begin making sense of the death of her friend. Mollie expressed that she usually keeps her feelings inside and that she usually doesn’t relate well to peers her own age. Facebook created a platform where age does not matter and expressions of grief are acceptable. Keep in mind that the online environment created in Facebook is completely variable and can be manipulated by the grieving adolescent at any time. Even though online grievers are opening themselves up to the judgment of other online users (Walter et al., 2011), if another online user posts something that is unsupportive or negative toward an adolescent’s expression of grief, the adolescent can simply delete the comment or post. This allows for a completely supportive setting for a grieving adolescent to try and make sense of the death of a peer.

The Experience of Making Personal Connections with the Living

While some online grieverers may be using Facebook to simply express their own personal feelings surrounding a death, others use the social network site as a way to connect with other grieverers for support. Mollie shared her experience of connecting with other grieving individuals through Facebook. There seems to be an overwhelming sense of safety within Facebook when it comes to expressing personal vulnerabilities. The instantaneous approval of others strengthens and supports the bereaved and opens the door for deeper and more meaningful self-expression. Mollie indicated that she felt alone in her grief and that she did not have anyone that she thought would understand what she was going through. However, as soon as she allowed her feelings to become public through her Facebook profile, numerous online users who had experienced similar loss events in their own lives immediately validated her experience.

Grieving online takes away the isolation that is typically felt by so many in grief (Oltjenbruns, 2007) and builds a supportive community that offers safety to those who are trying to make sense of a loss event. The participants of this study stated that it was helpful to connect with others who were either grieving over the same lost friend and with those who had gone through similar experiences. We know that this kind of positive interaction with others during grief is beneficial to one's journey toward reconciliation. This belief should not change simply because the interactions are through online social media instead of through face to face exchanges.

The Experience of Continuing Bonds with the Dead

The experience of continuing bonds (Morgan & Roberts, 2010; Walter et al., 2011) with the dead has certainly assisted the adolescents in this study with making meaning of the death that they have experienced. The majority of participants revealed that they had posted messages

directly to the Facebook page of their deceased friend. Abby, Mollie, Erin, Desi, Kelsey, and Jess all stated that they used Facebook to communicate directly with their deceased friend. This evidence closely reflects previous research regarding why grieving individuals post on the Facebook profiles of the dead (Klass, 2006; Klass et al., 1996; Klass & Walter, 2001).

Arguments can be made as to whether this type of one-sided communication is helpful or harmful in the grief experience of an adolescent. However, it could also be argued that posting on the dead's Facebook profile is no different than writing a letter to a lost loved one, or talking to the dead at a gravesite, all which are practices that are often encouraged to those who are grieving. The adolescents who participated in this study expressed that communicating with the dead through Facebook was helpful in their grief process. It seemed to erase the regret that many carry after a death in that the teens were able to tell the deceased that they were loved, that they were important, and that they made an impact on the lives of others. Most of the participants expressed a sense of relief after communicating with their dead peer through Facebook because they believe that their friend can read what is posted.

When Klass et al (1996) first introduced the theory of Continuing Bonds, he referred to the commonly acceptable acts of visiting gravesites or continuing a relationship with the dead through conversations with the deceased. He argued that these bonds should not be viewed only as an internal relationship with the living individual and the dead (Klass, 2006; Klass et al., 1996; Klass & Walter, 2001), but as a social concept that that is contributed by the collective reconstruction of memories (Schut et al., 2006). Facebook serves as a platform for many grieving individuals to contribute to the overall grief experience of the collective whole. It could be presented as a perfect example of what Klass has been talking about all along. The bond that

continues with the dead through Facebook can be eternal and can impact the bereaved throughout their life.

The Experience of the Outlying Themes

After determining the major themes within the whole collection of interviews, I could not ignore outlying themes that were particularly strong within individual cases. Abby's interview revealed a strong theme of family that seemed to weave throughout her responses. She stated that Eli's family was the intended audience of many of her Facebook posts regarding his death so that they would know that others cared for them and were supporting them in their grief. Abby continued to mention Eli's family throughout her interview, which is why the idea of family surfaced as an outlying theme. Later in the interview, Abby mentions the recent death of her grandfather. Suddenly, the significance that Abby is placing on Eli's family becomes relevant because of the loss that she has experienced in her own family. If further interviews and analysis were to occur, we may gain a deeper understanding of why the grief experience of the whole family is of such importance to Abby's personal grief.

The most important outlying themes were discovered through Erin's interviews. Her use of social media in her grief experience appeared to be very different from the experiences of the other participants. Erin was the only participant who continually expressed hope that her friend might not really be gone if she continued to post to his Facebook. She also spoke about her use of text messaging as a way to prove that his death was not real. Erin's use of technology in her grief seems to be a tool that assists in delaying the reality of Eli's death rather than as a tool that helps her reconcile this tragic loss. This is significant as it mirrors the concerns that many have about adolescents using social media as a means of grief support (Brubaker et al., 2013; Kasket, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

When I initially thought about this study, I immediately considered working with the students enrolled at my school of employment as my sample group. First and foremost, by including students in my school, I had more control over the participants' safety and well being by scheduling follow-up sessions with counselors that they knew and had already worked within an established relationship. Secondly, by working with my students, the interviews would be more casual and comfortable as the students and I had some form of rapport prior to the start of this research. While the comfort of the participants was evident, this arrangement did prove challenging in many ways. In several interviews, I thought that the discussion was vague and lacked a richness that would be necessary for outside investigators to fully understand their experiences surrounding the death of a peer. I found that several of the students told their story in a way that excluded the facts and feelings that they assumed I already knew. If this research were to be replicated, outside interviewers may be considered in order to collect deeper data.

Before interviewing each participant, online access to his/her Facebook account was made available if he/she chose to refer to past postings about the death that was experienced. None of the participants chose to utilize this tool. In future research, access to the participant's Facebook posts may be included in each interview instead of presented only as an option. If participants are permitted to revisit the communications made through social media, they may be able to express more of the feelings that lead to each post or the immediate feelings that emerge as the posts are read again.

Future Research

This study presents many openings for new paths of research surrounding adolescent grief and the use of social media. Future researchers may consider the impact of social media on

the overall grief experience in different loss events. One possibility would be to examine the experience of adolescents that experienced a sudden, unexpected death versus an expected, prolonged death. The outcry for support may look very different in both instances. Research may also include exploring different kinds of loss rather than only death related losses. It could be assumed that if adolescents use Facebook and other forms of online social media for support after a death that they would probably use this online tool to gain support in times of parental divorce, family relocation, illness, etc.

In this study, several of the participants had experienced the death of the same peer, Eli. I noticed many similarities in the experiences of these adolescents. A longitudinal study could be considered for a group of adolescents who experienced the same personal loss with and without the use of online social media for support. This would show how the grief experiences of each individual may or may not be directly impacted by the online communications with others.

The results of this qualitative study are based on the adolescent reflections on a loss event that occurred in the past. Future research could include a study that incorporates thoughts and insights by the adolescents as they utilize Facebook in a current loss event. This could bring about a purer and more immediate description of the grief experience as it eliminates the chance for an adolescent to determine if their responses to the researcher would be looked upon favorably.

Replicating this study could also be beneficial in order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. However, the researcher would have to consider advancements in technology and the changing trends in online social media avenues as a major factor if replication is to be explored. Geographic location could also present factors that might alter the results of the study. Even in other areas across the United States, religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and socio-

economic differences could cause drastically different results in this research were to be duplicated.

Other forms of online social media should also be considered as popularity of sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat are growing at a rapid rate. Each online venue features different ways of expression, as the main form of communication while Facebook tends to merge many different types of communication. For example, an ethnographic study could be conducted using the photos and videos that are shared through Instagram and Snapchat during times of grief.

This type of research is difficult at best as the factors that impact results are constantly changing with the advancement of online content and technological devices. It should be noted that this is not a reason to shy away from research that involves rapidly developing technology, but a reason to continually seek out new information and new understandings of how technology impacts the lives of today's adolescents, particularly in vulnerable, grieving situations.

Implications for Practice

This study was inspired and driven by my experiences with adolescent grief as a high school counselor. I desired a better understanding of adolescent's use of technology in grief so that I could better serve my students when they experience a loss. The results of this study were very revealing in the context of adolescent development. It would be beneficial for all helping professionals, teachers, and parents/guardians to understand how the use of online social media impacts the developmental tasks and stages of an adolescent. The concepts of the imaginary audience, autonomy, identity, acceptance, and belonging are all challenged and encouraged through the use of online social media activity. To ignore this important aspect of adolescent development would be risky.

For teachers, administrators, and counselors working in schools, it is impossible to ignore the presence of online social media in the lives of grieving adolescents. In times of loss, students use social media to quickly distribute information about the details of the death. Quite often this information is untrue or exaggerated from the actual facts. This rapid exchange of information can often become an issue that seems to grow bigger than the actual loss event. Schools must consider the speed at which correct and incorrect news travels throughout an academic community. Perhaps school crisis teams should explore utilizing online social media as a resource for accessing true, accurate, and current information when dealing with a loss among the students or staff. Some may argue that this kind of communication is detached and inappropriate to use in times of grief. However, through this study, I discovered that regardless of our involvement in online social media, adolescents would still utilize this form of online connection to gain information about a death. If school personnel were willing to engage with students through online social media and provide a secure and trusted voice on the Internet, we may be able to eliminate some of the misunderstandings and mistruths that often surface online.

Parents should consider having an active role in the online interactions of their grieving adolescent. Engaging in curious conversations is the easiest and most respectful way to find out what kind of online activity is occurring in the home. Parents/guardians should ask sincere questions that evoke open-ended conversations, avoiding any statements that may seem blaming or judgmental. Communication around online use should be consistent and ongoing, so that the adolescent does not feel like he/she is doing something wrong. When online activity is combined with a death, parents might pay close attention to the adolescent's online patterns to become aware if activity has increased or decreased. This could indicate that the adolescent is receiving support that could be helpful or damaging. Parents should talk about their adolescent's use of

online social media during grief in the context of the family's religious/spiritual beliefs, culture, and familial norms. All of these environmental factors should be considered when guiding an adolescent through the responsibilities that come with online social media engagement.

Conclusion

Any helping professional working with adolescents needs to understand the significance of social media in the lives of today's youth (Sofka, 2012; Sofka et al., 2012b). More importantly, it is crucial to understand the relevance of social media as it pertains to how an adolescent grieves (Compaine, 2001; Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011; Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Gross, 2004; Jenkins, 2009; Lenhart et al., 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Sofka, 2012; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Weaver & Morrison, 2008). This study examined the grief experience of adolescents who used Facebook as a means to communicate with the deceased. Through interpretive phenomenological analysis, I found that the use of Facebook in adolescent grief was not only helpful because of the ability to directly communicate with the dead, but, also, because of the expansive possibilities to express one's grief, connect with other grievers, and memorialize the dead. Therefore, the overall grief experience of the participants, while difficult, can be described as a positive experience and was certainly enhanced by the use of Facebook.

REFERENCES

- Associated Press. (2013). Number of active users at Facebook over the years.
<http://news.yahoo.com/number-active-users-facebook-over-230449748.html>
- "social network". (2014). Oxford Dictionaries. Retrieved April 27, 2014, from
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/social-network
- "thanatology". (2014). The Center for Thanatology Research & Education Inc. Retrieved April 27, 2014, from <http://www.thanatology.org/home.html>
- Attig, T. (2004). Disenfranchised grief revisited: Discounting hope and love. *Omega: Journal of Death & Dying*, 49(3), 197-215.
- Balk, D. (1996). Models for understanding adolescent coping with bereavement. *Death Studies*, 20(4), 367-387.
- Balk, D. (2000). Adolescents, grief, and loss. In K. Doka (Ed.), *Living with Grief Children, Adolescents, and Loss* (pp. 35-49). Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America: Brunner/Mazel.
- Balk, D., & Corr, C. (2009). *Adolescent encounters with death, bereavement, and coping*. New York: Springer Pub. Co.
- Balk, D., Wogrin, C., Thornton, G., & Meagher, D. (2007). *Handbook of thanatology: The essential body of knowledge for the study of death, dying, and bereavement*: Association for Death Education and Counseling, The Thanatology Association.
- Balk, D., Zaengle, D., & Corr, C. (2011). Strengthening grief support for adolescents coping with a peer's death. *School Psychology International*, 32(2), 144-162.

- Bell, J., & Bromnick, R. (2003). The social reality of the imaginary audience: A grounded theory approach. *Adolescence*, 38(150), 205-219.
- Bennett, K. (2009). Family media guide - Sharing grief on Facebook. Retrieved November 25, 2011, from <http://www.parentpreviews.com/the-big-picture/post/sharing-grief-on-facebook/>
- Bonanno, G. (2009). *The other side of sadness: What the new science of bereavement tells us about life after loss*. New York, New York: Basic Books.
- Bouc, A. (2013). *Grieving in the digital age: Using Facebook profile pages to maintain relationships with the deceased*. Kansas State University.
- Brondou, C. (2012). Grieving 2.0: As Students Turn to Facebook to Mourn, How Should Parents, Teachers and Counselors React? Retrieved November 25, 2011, from <http://www.findingdulcinea.com/news/education/2010/march/Grieving-2-0--As-Students-Turn-to-Facebook-to-Mourn--How-Should-Parents--Teachers-and-Counselors-React.html>
- Brubaker, J., Hayes, G., & Dourish, P. (2013). Beyond the grave: Facebook as a site for the expansion of death and mourning. *The Information Society*, 29(3), 152-163.
- Bruce, E., & Schultz, C. (2001). *Nonfinite loss and grief: A psychoeducational approach*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co.
- Carroll, B., & Landry, K. (2010). Logging on and letting out: Using online social networks to grieve and to mourn. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(5), 341-349.
- Casey, B., Getz, S., & Galvan, A. (2008). The adolescent brain. *PubMed Central*, 28, 62-77.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). Qualitative research guidelines project. *Robert Wood Jonhson Foundation*.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, J., & Mannarino, A. (2011). Supporting children with traumatic grief: What educators need to know. *School Psychology International*, 32(2), 117-131.
- Collins, B., & Collins, T. (2005). *Crisis and trauma: Developmental-ecological intervention*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Compaine, B. (2001). *The digital divide: Facing a crisis or creating a myth?* Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Corr, C., & Balk, D. (1996). *Handbook of adolescent death and bereavement*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Corr, C., Nabe, C., & Corr, D. (2009). *Death and dying, life and living*. Australia: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.
- de Vries, B., & Rutherford, J. (2004). Memorializing loved ones on the World Wide Web. *OMEGA--Journal of Death and Dying*, 49(1), 5-26.
- DeGroot, J. (2009). *Reconnecting with the dead via Facebook: Examining Transcorporeal Communication as a way to maintain relationships*. (3371475 Ph.D.), Ohio University, Ann Arbor. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database.
- DeGroot, J. (2012). Maintaining relational continuity with the deceased on Facebook. *OMEGA--Journal of Death and Dying*, 65(3), 195-212.
- Desetta, A., & Wolin, S. (2000). *The struggle to be strong*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.
- Doka, K. (Ed.). (1989). *Disenfranchised grief recognizing hidden sorrow*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.

- Doka, K. (Ed.). (2002). *Disenfranchised grief new directions, challenges, and strategies for practice*. Champaign: Reseach Press.
- Elkind, D. (1967). Egocentrisim in adolescence. *Child Development*, 38(4), 1025.
- Ens, C., & Bond, J. (2005). Death anxiety and personal growth in adolescents experiencing the death of a grandparent. *Death Studies*, 29(2), 171-178.
- Erikson, E. (1959). *Identity and the life cycle selected papers*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Erikson, E. (1993). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.
- Espinoza, G., & Juvonen, J. (2011). The pervasiveness, connectedness, and intrusiveness of social network site use among young adolescents. *CyberPsychology, Behavior & Social Networking*, 14(12), 705-709.
- Facebook. (2012). Report a deceased person's profile. Retrieved November 25, 2012, from http://www.facebook.com/help/contact.php?show_form=deceased
- Fearon, J. (2011). *The technology of grief: Social networking sites as a modern death ritual*. Antioch University.
- Fleming, S., & Adolph, R. (1986). Helping bereaved adolescents: Needs and responses. In C. Corr & J. McNeil (Eds.), *Children and Death* (pp. 97-118). New York: Springer Publishing Co.
- Freud, S. (1957). Mourning and melancholia (1917). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Gewirtz, A. (2009). Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents. *Death Studies*, 33(5), 487-493.

- Glass, J. (2001). Living with grief: Children, adolescents, and loss. *Educational Gerontology*, 27(5), 434-435.
- Greenfield, P., & Yan, Z. (2006). Children, adolescents, and the Internet: A new field of inquiry in developmental psychology. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(3), 391.
- Gross, E. (2004). Adolescent Internet use: What we expect, what teens report. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25(6), 633-649.
- Havighurst, R. (1972). *Developmental tasks and education* (3rd ed.). New York: D. McKay Co.
- Hieftje, K. (2012). The role of social networking sites in memorialization of college students. In C. J. Sofka, I. N. Cupit & K. R. Gilbert (Eds.), *Dying, Death, and Grief in an Online Universe: For Counselors and Educators* (pp. 31): Springer Publishing Company.
- Hortobagyi, M. (2007). Slain students' pages to stay on Facebook. *USA Today*. Retrieved from USA Today website: http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-05-08-facebook-vatech_N.htm
- Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1958). *The growth of logical thinking from childhood to adolescence: An essay on the construction of formal operational structures*. New York: Basic Books.
- James, L., Oltjenbruns, K., & Whiting, P. (2008). Grieving adolescents: The paradox of using technology for support. In K. Doka (Ed.), *Living with grief: Children and adolescents* (pp. 299-316). Washington, D.C.: Hospice Foundation of America.
- Jenkins, H. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. Cambridge: Mit Press.
- Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robison, A., & Weigel, M. (2006). Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century (white paper).

Retrieved May 15, 2012, from

http://www.macfound.org/media/article_pdfs/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF

Kaplan, P. (2004). *Adolescence*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Kasket, E. (2012). Continuing bonds in the age of social networking: Facebook as a modern-day medium. *Bereavement Care*, 31(2), 62-69.

Klass, D. (2006). Continuing conversation about continuing bonds. *Death Studies*, 30(9), 843-858.

Klass, D., Silverman, P., & Nickman, S. (Eds.). (1996). *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief*. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.

Klass, D., & Walter, T. (2001). Processes of grieving: How bonds are continued. In M. Stroebe, Hansson, R., Stroebe, W., Schut, H. (Ed.), *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping, and Care* (pp. 431-448). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. .

Kübler-Ross, E. (2009). *On death and dying: What the dying have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy and their own families*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Lenhart, A., Madden, M., Smith, A., & Macgill, A. (2007). Teens and social media. Retrieved from Pew Internet & American Life Project website:
http://www.pewinternet.org/~media//Files/Reports/2005/PIP_Teens_Tech_July_2005web.pdf.pdf

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social media and young adults. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, 3.

Mallon, B. (2011). *Working with bereaved children and young people*. Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE.

- Marwick, A., & Ellison, N. (2012). "There isn't wifi in heaven!" Negotiating visibility on Facebook memorial pages. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(3), 378-400.
- Meshot, C., & Leitner, L. (1993). Adolescent Mourning and Parental Death. *Omega-Journal of Death and Dying*, 26(4), 287-299.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Moore, J. (2011). Facebook and the new face of grieving. *The Denver Post*, pp. 1-5. Retrieved from http://www.denverpost.com/lifestyles/ci_18406452
- Morgan, J., & Roberts, J. (2010). Helping bereaved children and adolescents: Strategies and implications for counselors. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 32(3), 206-217.
- Morin, S., & Welsh, L. (1996). Adolescents' perceptions and experiences of death and grieving. *Adolescence*, 31(123), 585-595.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Neimeyer, R., Prigerson, H., & Davies, B. (2002). Mourning and meaning. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46, 235-251.
- Oltjenbruns, K. (2001). Developmental context of childhood: Grief and regrief phenomena. In M. Stroebe (Ed.), *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping and Care* (pp. 814). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Oltjenbruns, K. (2007). The importance of a developmental context: Childhood and adolescence as an example. In D. Balk, C. Wogrin, G. Thornton & D. Meagher (Eds.), *Handbook of Thanatology: The Essential Body of Knowledge for the Study of Death, Dying, and Bereavement*. Northbrook: Association for Death Education and Counseling, The Thanatology Association, Routledge.

- Oltjenbruns, K., & James, L. (2006). Adolescents' use of the internet as a modality of grief support. *The Forum*, 32(4), 5-6.
- Pascoe, C. (2007). Interview conducted on July 17. Retrieved May 15, 2012, from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/interviews/pascoe.html>
- Patchin, J., & Hinduja, S. (2010). Changes in adolescent online social networking behaviors from 2006 to 2009. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(6), 1818-1821.
- Pennington, N. (2013). You don't de-friend the dead: An analysis of grief communication by college students through Facebook profiles. *Death Studies*, 37(7), 617-635.
- Pfefferbaum, P. (2001). Living with grief: Children, adolescents, and loss. *Death Studies*, 25(3), 289-293.
- Phillips, W. (2011). LOLing at tragedy: Facebook trolls, memorial pages and resistance to grief online. *First Monday*, 16(12).
- Reich, S. (2010). Adolescents' sense of community on myspace and facebook: a mixed-methods approach. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(6), 688-705.
- Schachter, S. (1992). Adolescent Experiences with the Death of a Peer. *Omega-Journal of Death and Dying*, 24(1), 1-11.
- Schaefer, J., & Moos, R. (2001). Bereavement experiences and personal growth. In M. Stroebe (Ed.), *Handbook of Bereavement Research Consequences, Coping and Care* (pp. 814). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Schmitt, K., Dayanim, S., & Matthias, S. (2008). Personal homepage construction as an expression of social development. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(2), 496.
- Schut, H., Stroebe, M., Boelen, P., & Zijerveld, A. (2006). Continuing relationships with the deceased: Disentangling bonds and grief. *Death Studies*, 30(8), 757-766.

- Servaty-Seib, H., Peterson, J., & Spang, D. (2003). Notifying individual students of a death loss: practical recommendations for schools and school counselors. *Death Studies*, 27(2), 167.
- Servaty-Seib, H., & Pistole, M. (2006). Adolescent grief: Relationship category and emotional closeness. *Omega-Journal of Death and Dying*, 54(2), 147-167.
- Shenton, A. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Smith, A. (2014). 6 new facts about Facebook. Retrieved April 27, 2014, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/6-new-facts-about-facebook/>
- Smith, J., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Sofka, C. (2009). Adolescents, technology, and the Internet: Coping with loss in the digital world. In D. Balk & C. Corr (Eds.), *Adolescent encounters with death, bereavement, and coping* (pp. 155-176). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Sofka, C. (2012). The net generation: The special case of youth. In C. Sofka, K. Gilbert & I. Cupit (Eds.), *Dying, Death, and Grief in an Online Universe: For Counselors and Educators* (pp. 47). New York: Springer Publishing Co.
- Sofka, C., Cupit, I., & Gilbert, K. (2012). Thanatechnology as a conduit for living, dying, and grieving in contemporary society. In C. J. Sofka, I. N. Cupit & K. R. Gilbert (Eds.), *Dying, Death, and Grief in an Online Universe: For Counselors and Educators* (pp. 1): Springer Publishing Company.

- Sofka, C., & Gilbert, K. (2012). *Dying, death, and grief in an online universe: for counselors and educators*: Springer Publishing Company.
- Statistics | Facebook. (2012). Retrieved November 25, 2011, from <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>
- Stokes, P. (2012). Ghosts in the machine: Do the dead live on in Facebook? *Philosophy & Technology*, 25(3), 363-379.
- Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23, 197-224.
- Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (2005). To continue or relinquish bonds: A review of consequences for the bereaved. *Death Studies*, 29(6), 477-494.
- Sweeney, C. (Producer). (1999). A chat room you can be NE1. *New York Times Magazine*.
- Valkenburg, P., & Peter, J. (2007). Preadolescents' and adolescents' online communication and their closeness to friends. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(2), 267-277.
- Vicary, A., & Fraley, R. (2010). Student reactions to the shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University: Does sharing grief and support over the Internet affect recovery? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(11), 1555-1563.
- Walter, C., & McCoyd, J. (2009). *Grief and loss across the lifespan: A biopsychosocial perspective*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Walter, T., Hourizi, R., Moncur, W., & Pitsillides, S. (2011). Does the Internet change how we die and mourn? Overview and analysis. *OMEGA--Journal of Death and Dying*, 64(4), 275-302.
- Weaver, A., & Morrison, B. (2008). Social networking. *Computer*, 41(2), 97-100.

- Williams, A., & Merten, M. (2009). Adolescents' online social networking following the death of a peer. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24(1), 67-90.
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*: Open University Press.
- Wilson, A. (2009). Counseling Children and Adolescents Through Grief and Loss. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 87(1), 127-128.
- Worden, W. (1996). *Children and grief: When a parent dies*. New York: Guilford Press.

APPENDIX A

Session 1 Interview Questions

CONTINUING BONDS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN ADOLESCENT GRIEF

Researcher: Libba James, Ph.D. Candidate, Colorado State University School of Education
libba@colostate.edu or 970-686-8123

Name:

Age:

Grade:

Gender:

8. Do you currently have an active Facebook profile?
9. Have you experienced the death of a friend in the last two years?
10. Did you use Facebook to communicate with your friend before his/her death?
11. Did you continue to post messages on your friend's Facebook page after his/her death? If no, please skip to question #6.
12. How many times did you post messages on your friend's Facebook page after his/her death?
13. After your friend's death, were your messages posted publically or privately on your friend's Facebook page?
14. If you did not post messages on your friend's Facebook page after his/her death, do you revisit his/her Facebook page to read past messages, look at photos, or to read other's messages?

APPENDIX B

Session 2 Interview Questions

CONTINUING BONDS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN ADOLESCENT GRIEF

Researcher: Libba James, Ph.D. Candidate, Colorado State University School of Education
libba@colostate.edu or 970-686-8123

Name:

Age:

Grade:

Gender:

12. Describe the relationship between you and your friend before he/she died.
13. How did you learn about the death of your friend? Describe how you felt at that time.
14. Why did you post on your friend's Facebook profile after he/she died?
15. Describe the context of the messages that you posted on your friend's Facebook page after he/she died?
16. Who was the intended audience of your posts?
17. Describe your feelings when you posted on your friend's Facebook page.
18. Describe how you felt when you read messages on your friend's Facebook page that were posted by other people.
19. Describe how you feel when you revisit the messages/pictures that you posted on your friend's Facebook page.
20. Describe your current relationship with your deceased friend.
21. How do you think that using Facebook to communicate with your friend after they died helped or hindered your grief process?
22. How do you currently feel about the death of your friend?

APPENDIX C

Formal Research Request

October 29, 2013

Weld RE-4 School District
1020 Main Street
Windsor, CO 80550
Attention: Karen Trusler, Superintendent

Dear Ms. Trusler and Ms. Scallon;

My name is Libba James, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Education at Colorado State University. The research I wish to conduct for my Doctoral Dissertation involves the examination of how online communications with the deceased either enhance or inhibit an adolescent's ability to make meaning out of the specific loss event in the context of his/her individual world. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Nathalie Kees, Associate Professor at Colorado State University.

I am hereby seeking your consent to interview six to eight Windsor High School students between the ages of 15 and 19 about their grief experience after the death of a peer and how their communication on the deceased's Facebook profile helped or hindered their grief process.

I have provided you with a copy of my dissertation proposal, consent forms, interview questions, and my protocol, which will be submitted to Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 970-686-8123 or libba@colostate.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Libba James
Colorado State University

APPENDIX D

Research Approval

Subject: RE: Research Request

Date: Wednesday, October 30, 2013 11:19:33 AM MT

From: Karen Trusler

To: Libba James, Michelle Scallon

Libba,

This will be a fascinating study. I reviewed the documents and conclude that you have outlined all of the specifics needed for confidentiality and approval by students' parents. I approve this study and hope that it will add value to support your counseling efforts.

Karen

Karen J. Trusler

Superintendent

Weld Re-4 School District

1020 Main Street

Windsor Colorado 80550

Voice: 970-686-8000

Fax: 970-686-8001

WINDSOR HIGH SCHOOL

Home of the Wizards
P.O. Box 609
1100 West Main Street
Windsor, CO 80550
970-686-8100



October 28, 2013

Colorado State University
Institutional Review Board
321 General Services Building
Campus Delivery 2011
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
Attention: Janell Barker, Senior IRB Coordinator

Dear Ms. Barker;

I am aware that Mary Elizabeth (Libba) James, a graduate student in the School of Education at Colorado State University, is conducting a research study entitled: **"Continuing Bonds In a Virtual World: The Use of Facebook In Adolescent Grief,"** and she has shared with me the details of the study. I feel comfortable that the participants in this study will be adequately protected, and I give Libba James permission to conduct this study at Windsor High School.

Windsor High School student participants will be required to attend two sessions with the co-principal investigator and at least one session with a school counselor. In the first two sessions, Libba James will be asking the participants about their grief experience after the death of a peer. She will also talk to student participants about how their communication on the deceased's Facebook profile helped or hindered their grief process. The third session will occur with one of the school counselors in order to follow-up with any psychological difficulties that the adolescent may have after revisiting the loss event. After this meeting, the participant and the school counselor will determine if additional follow-up sessions are needed or if outside counseling should be referred.

Windsor High School requests that the Windsor High School name and identifiers of its employees be kept confidential in the research results. Libba James has agreed to provide my office a copy of the CSU IRB approval document before beginning recruitment.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Sincerely,

Michelle Scallon
Principal
Windsor High School

"Empowering, inspiring, and challenging life-long learners"

APPENDIX E

Approval for Human Research

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR
HUMAN RESEARCH**

DATE: December 16, 2013
TO: Kees, Nathalie, School of Education
Robinson, Dan, 1588 School of Education, James,
Libba, School of Education
FROM: Barker, Janell, Coordinator, CSU IRB 2
PROTOCOL TITLE: CONTINUING BONDS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN
ADOLESCENT GRIEF
FUNDING SOURCE: NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 13-4552H
APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: December 11, 2013 Expiration Date: November 19,
2014

The CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled: CONTINUING BONDS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN ADOLESCENT GRIEF. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol. This protocol must be reviewed for renewal on a yearly basis for as long as the research remains active. Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's Federal Wide Assurance 00000647 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under CSU's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to:

Janell Barker, Senior IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1655 Janell.Barker@Colostate.edu
Evelyn Swiss, IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1381 Evelyn.Swiss@Colostate.edu

Barker, Janell



Barker, Janell

Approval is to recruit up to 8 student participants with the approved cover letter, verbal script, consent/assent form, and resources. The above-referenced project was approved by the Institutional Review Board with the condition that the attached consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the Committee. Subjects under the age of 18 years old must obtain parental permission.

Approval Period: December 11, 2013 through November 19, 2014
Review Type: EXPEDITED
IRB Number: 00000202

APPENDIX F

Parent Letter

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Libba James and I am a graduate student researcher from Colorado State University in the School of Education. Under the guidance of my advisor, Nathalie Kees, Ed.D., I am conducting a research study on how adolescents use the social media site, Facebook, when grieving the death of a peer. The title of our project is “Continuing Bonds in a Virtual World: The Use of Facebook in Adolescent Grief.” The Principal Investigator is Nathalie Kees, Ed.D., Professor in the School of Education, and I am the Co-Principal Investigator.

I am asking for your permission to have your student participate in this study. We would like your child to participate in 3 one-hour sessions where he/she will talk about the loss experience and how he/she used Facebook throughout the grieving process. The interviews will take place in the Columbine Conference Room of the Windsor High School Counseling Office over the span of two weeks. Your child’s participation in this research is voluntary. If your child decides to participate in the study, he/she may withdraw their consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. If your child participates or does not participate in this research will no effect on your child’s grade or status in any classes.

While there are no direct benefits to your child associated with this research, we hope to gain more knowledge on the overall grief experience of adolescents and how grieving a loss within the online social networking community, Facebook, impacts that experience. Your child’s information will be combined with information from the other students taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. Your child will not be identified in these written materials.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this research. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

I have enclosed the consent form for you and your child to read and sign. Please return to Libba James in the Windsor High School Counseling Office by TBD. If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me at: libba@colostate.edu; 970-219-8057 or my advisor, Nathalie Kees, Ed.D. at nathalie.kees@colostate.edu; 970-491-6720. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Coordinator, at 970-491-1655.

Sincerely,
Libba James
Ph.D. Candidate

Nathalie Kees
Ed.D.

APPENDIX G

Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Continuing Bonds in a Virtual World: The Use of Facebook in Adolescent Grief

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nathalie Kees, Ed.D., School of Education,
nathalie.kees@colostate.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Libba James, School of Education, Ph.D. Candidate,
libba@colostate.edu

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You have been invited to take part in this research because you have experienced the death of a peer in the last two years and have communicated on the deceased's Facebook page after their death.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

Libba James: Researcher; Angie Rizzuto, Amanda LePage, Keely Garren: Counseling Support

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the adolescent grief experience and to investigate how grieving online impacts the grief experience.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will consist of two 1-hour interview sessions with the researcher and one 15-30 minute follow-up session with a school counselor. These three sessions will be completed in two consecutive weeks and will take place in the Columbine Conference Room in the Windsor High School Counseling Office. Each session will be scheduled either before school, after school, or during the student's off block (if applicable). Students may be pulled out of class to participate in an interview session only if approved by the student, the parent, and the teacher of record.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

Participants will be required to attend each of the three sessions. Each session is described below.

- Session 1: The purpose of the study will be reviewed in detail with you, and you will complete a short survey to give the researchers basic information about you such as your name, grade, age, and your use of Facebook.
- Session 2: The researcher will ask you open-ended questions surrounding your loss, your experience with grief, and how you used Facebook to grieve the loss of a peer. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped.
- Session 3: A school counselor will meet with you following session 2 to talk about your experience as a participant in this research project and to talk about any feelings that may have come up surrounding your loss. The school counselor will determine if additional

sessions with the school counselor are needed or if outside counseling services should be referred.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be eligible to participate in this study if the peer death that you experienced was more than two years ago or if you do not currently have an active Facebook account. Parental consent must be obtained for you to participate in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

You will be asked to revisit a significant loss that occurred in your life. This may cause an increased emotional response to a grief experience that may have been recently suppressed or resolved. This study may bring about new or familiar feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion around the loss event. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There may be no direct benefit to you from being in this research. You may benefit from revisiting the loss experience as it will allow you to re-examine parts of their grief that may have been unrecognized by your support group at the time of the loss. You may gain validation of your grief expressions, including your use of social media for grief support.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

For this study, we will assign a code to your data (Student 1, Student 2, etc.) so that the only place your name will appear in our records is on the consent and in our data spreadsheet which links you to your code. Only the research team will have access to the link between you, your code, and your data. The only exceptions to this are if we are asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary. When we write about the study to share with other researchers, we will write about the combined information that we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and any identifying information private.

You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court OR to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

You may be removed from the study if you do not attend each of the three required sessions.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

No compensation will be offered for participation in this study.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Libba James at libba@colostate.edu or at 970-686-8123. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

The researchers would like to audio record your interview to be sure that your comments are accurately documented. Only our research team will have access to the audio recordings, and they will be destroyed when they have been transcribed.

Do you give the researchers permission to audiotape your interview? Please initial next to your choice below.

Yes, I agree to be audio recorded _____ (initials)

No, do not audio record my interview _____ (initials)

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing three pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

As parent or guardian I authorize _____ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. The nature and general purpose of the project have been satisfactorily explained to me by _____ and I am satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.

Minor's date of birth

Parent/Guardian name (printed)

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

APPENDIX H

Transcriptions Services Confidentiality Agreement

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Confidentiality Agreement

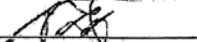
Transcriptionist

I, Sandy Keller transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Libba James related to her research study on the researcher study titled "Continuing Bonds in a Virtual World: The Use of Facebook in Adolescent Grief". Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Libba James.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to Libba James in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) Sandy L Keller

Transcriber's signature 

Date 3/28/2014

APPENDIX I

Participant Themes

Abby

THEME	EVIDENCE
Shocked at news of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it kind of didn't hit me at first • I was just kind of what? • I was like what do you mean? • it just didn't hit me until I went to class was just sitting there • and I was like, oh my gosh, that's really sad • I'm never going to run with Manuel again • he's just gone • it was too much to handle in class
Continued communication with dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know he couldn't read it, but I felt like that was one other way that I could still talk to him • it was like physically there and he could...just to me I felt like he could read it • wanted him to know...that I was thinking about him • I was caring about him • still thought about him • he wasn't going to be forgotten • it's going to be weird not running with you anymore • God's going to have a course for you to run while you're there • you're in a better place • this world isn't good enough for you • telling him that I would pray for him and his family • I would never forget you • I would always remember • make sure that other people don't forget • it kind of felt like a little bit of a relief • it was kind of still like being able to talk to him in a way • it was like he wasn't completely gone • it was like reassurance that I could still have my family member, my cross country teammate there
Justified death to the deceased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God's going to have a course for you to run while you're there • you're in a better place • this world isn't good enough for you

Abby (con't)

<p>Used Facebook to connect to deceased's family</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was praying for his family • telling him that I would pray for him and his family • I just wanted her [sister] to be okay • they didn't deserve to lose two children at one time • audience was family in a way too • I'm sure that was a major, like a really good support thing for them • to know that other people are praying for them • know that his mom is reassured that her son isn't going to be another kid who got killed or whatever • knowing that they're behind them through everything
<p>Anger about other's response to death</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I got so angry • I was like it wasn't you • you need to stop being so selfish • they were making it all about themselves • I just got so mad
<p>Assure that dead will not be forgotten</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he wasn't going to be forgotten • and make sure that other people don't forget • happy to know that everyone else was thinking of him • good to know that other people weren't going to forget him too • he doesn't deserve to be forgotten • just because he wasn't the most popular kid in school • my son's never going to be forgotten • know that his mom is reassured that her son isn't going to be another kid who got killed or whatever • like he actually means something to this school • I never want to forget him
<p>Positive impact on life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • happy that we got the chance to know him • people...aren't going to have the lessons that I've learned of how to live life with everything you have • everyday be happy • grateful that even though the pain that came with it, it was worth knowing him • he taught me so much • I need to push through it and enjoy it because he didn't get to do that • if I try to give up or something, he wouldn't have given up • whenever stuff gets hard, ...I talk to him • he gets me through a lot

Abby (con't)

Uses Facebook to normalize grief experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I was able to see that other people were feeling the same way as me• so it was a normal way to feel• I was like other people are feeling like this• I could reach out to them• talk to them about it• helped me move on with it
--	--

Megan

THEME	EVIDENCE
Desire to remember	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • posted pictures on Intstagram • have picture of her in my car and room
Ensure deceased is not forgotten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revisit page to see if people are still thinking of her • I want her to know that I will never forget her...
News of death was shocking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • laughed at first • didn't really register • out of nowhere • really weird
Self expression of grief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • had to get it out • posted to get it off my chest
Life changed after death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had drank and gone to parties and whatever • I haven't done that since • she was a blessing in disguise • it makes me want to tell my brother • so it's now helping me and others
Public postings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • directly to her • but for everyone to see
Would mean a lot to deceased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I died, I would want people • like say god things about me • posted just so she knows...I think about her a lot
Judgment of other's posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her boyfriend...he just did like a short I love you; you would think that he would just be more like • but maybe he's not like that and he did it more personally
Posting on Facebook helpful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting it out and it felt like it was a relief
Regret	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wish I could have told her not to • because my brother is kind of like in the hard place too • I just wish I could have asked her and helped her out a little more • I just wish I could have helped
Believes that deceased can read what it posted on Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • just so she knows, and I think about her a lot

Desi

THEME	EVIDENCE
Confusion over death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was just more confused • it didn't seem real • that something that could happen to a student here • especially like because everyone just got so close • it was odd • we'd never done anything like that before
Uses Facebook to connect with dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a way to connect with them • even if they can't read it • you just imagine that they can when you post something • even though they don't comment • just pictures of them • that reminded me of them • helped because just imagining that they could [read it] • closer because before then I really didn't talk to him that much
Uses Facebook to connect with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everyone else does [comment] • and they like it • so you just assume you're one of them • they're not forgotten • they're gone, and you that through Facebook with everyone posting things
Used Facebook to feel better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • just to make it easier on myself • it's just like a quicker recovery • helped me realize that they're not here • it was easier that questioning things

Erin

THEME	EVIDENCE
News of death was shocking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there's no way a student died • it was shocking at first • there's no way • it was a complete shock • like it's something that you never really think happens, like, no, no, nobody I know could ever die
Private postings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • so only he could see it • seeing what other people wrote was hard enough • it was like personal stuff about me too • so I just kept it private so only he could read it • that's kind of why I made it private because it was just me, like I would, if he were never gone, I would just talk to him
Revisits posts from the day of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So that's the hardest. January 18th, looking at it, going back and revisiting how it all happened
Believes that deceased can read what it posted on Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • like I miss you, hope you are doing ok; • so I just kept it private so only he could read it • so only he could see it • part of me knew that no matter what he was looking down and knowing exactly what I was saying • the fact that I can still talk to him even though he doesn't talk back • I can still say what I want to say • how are you doing lately • some of it was about how school's going • normal conversations, it's just one-sided • that's kind of why I made it private because it was just me, like I would, if he were never gone, I would just talk to him • makes me feel like he's still listening and he's still there, even if he's not talking back • It helps a lot, just talking to him
Minimal acceptance of loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he's not coming back no matter how many times I post, no matter how many times I text him or how many times I call him and he never answers • all of a sudden his conversations stop and it's just mine • I'll never get a hey, how are you doing message from him • seeing my messages I posted makes it real • but, you know you'll never get that
Connections to other grievers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowing that there are other people who went through what I went through

Erin (con't)

Trouble accepting death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I texted him and I was like, hey, they said you're dead, like are you ok? • I kept waiting for a text back • but I just kept texting him, like this isn't a funny joke, you can quit playing now, you can come back around • I kept looking and there was no text, no communication • I wanted so badly for it not to be real • part of me was hoping I would get a response back • it was just a way for me to not lose him • if I posted he was not really gone • wishing he would come back so that we could work out some more • wish he would come back just so he would be back; • I'm still not ready to let go • I talk to him every day • we're just about as close as we used to be • makes me feel like he's still listening and he's still there, even if he's not talking back • you post hoping, just praying, that he'll be like, hey guys, it's a big joke, sorry I hurt you for so long but I'm back, I'm okay • at some point, I've got to learn that no matter what, he's gone, no matter how much I don't want him to be • I know that he's here no matter what • he's always going to be here • he's always going to be watching over the track team, the cross country team
Meaning to deceased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to let him know like I'm still here, I still think about you and I miss you every day.
Keep memory alive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes me happy to see that people are still remembering • everybody is still like daily posts on his wall • it makes me happy that he's not forgotten • I can just go look at his pictures and see him
Positive impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it makes you think how lucky you are to know and to see everybody you do see every day • eye-opening to see how far I've come coping with his death • my uncle died, so it was a lot easier to cope with after him dying • it hurt but I knew how to handle the hurt • I knew what to do, who to go to • his death helped me with deaths in the family

Henry

THEME	EVIDENCE
Realistic/factual regarding death	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I think maybe I heard on announcements or some other teammate• I was in Spanish class, and it was very difficult that day after that• I'm not grieving over it because I didn't know him that well, but he was still a friend
Used Facebook to remember	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pictures of athletics, and that's what I mostly remember him from• brought back a lot of memories when I went and saw the pictures• it makes people remember who he was, remember what he was
Positive understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I feel sad, but I definitely remember all of the good things that he had• I remember he would always have quite a few jokes• would make people laugh
No connection after death	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• did not post on Facebook• does not talk to him after death

Mollie

THEME	EVIDENCE
Taboo death?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and we just hear that one day he was gone (initial description of death) • then he just shot himself
Uses personal Facebook profile to express grief publically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do use my own to communicate that around the time every year • I use my own Facebook profile to kind of say something like I miss you • I still communicate through my own profile • mainly just an outlet • mainly used it as an outlet for my feelings • it was really kind of these harsh emotional messages • first one was total shock • just emotional • saying things like I miss him so much • I don't know what to do with my life anymore • I had no other way to deal with it • I just kind of took it elsewhere so I wouldn't burden • 90% of the time I would say that it's sort of a relief • like a weight off my shoulders • because I had been carrying all those burdens • holding all of that stuff in • I had no one else to talk to • helped me forget those things for a little bit because it was in black and white, somewhere where I could go back
Continued communication with dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to kind of say something like I miss you • I'm still doing cheer and I hope you're proud of me • I hope he's proud of me • you are the motivation that I have • you are still the light in my life • you've pushed me to do it and I've done it • I will say his name before I tumble
Use Facebook to remember dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I did save a few of them [pictures] at some point just so I would kind of have, you know how memories fade after a while • at this point, I don't remember his face very well • occasionally I go back at those pictures and kind of revisit those memories • it's a completely physical representation • it's a still image of who he used to be

Mollie (con't)

<p>Non-traditional friendship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good friend and coach • really, really good friendship • always hang out • had this really kind of strange but awesome friendship • I was the only one that appreciated • he saw that I wanted to work • gained this really good friendship of he was this like hard and difficult person to work with for everyone except me • we just kind of had fun • knew my family really well • told us personal things about himself that he wouldn't have shared with anyone else • we had two different relationships of like personal • when he was coaching the entire team we had a more professional relationship • had an ability to go both ways • really good friend of mine • he was also a teacher, mentor • brother old enough to be a father figure • lots of different aspects to our relationship • maybe 15, 20 years older • didn't feel like I needed anyone else • I could tell him anything
<p>Honor the dead</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that he would want me to continue • so I will continue in his honor • everything I do will be in his memory • everything I do in cheer, I'll end up posting something like, well, hey, I did it for you • I'm still trying to do great things that I feel like he would have been proud of • look up to him more • I respect him a lot more for the things that he went through • a lot of things about him that I think I show in my everyday personality • after his passing he's kind of helped shape who I am • very appreciated relationship with him • biggest impacts on everything that I've done at this point • it kind of worked out how it was meant to be, in my life at least

Mollie (con't)

Uses Facebook to connect with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • didn't really have anyone to talk to • Facebook was my only way to communicate with others • I was almost reaching out for my own sake • I needed help getting through this • I need people to kind of support me • to kind of get that feedback from other people • like have you been through something like this or anything like that • when I posted something online I had this entire audience that I could just share everything with • whether they cared or not, it was out there • so many posts of people, comments, I'm here if you need me • I'm sorry • this happened to me too • hearing other people's stories • knowing that I had other people there in my life • helped even things out because I felt so alone • helped me realize that there were other people there both my age and not that could help me through this process • not take his place but sort of fill that lonely void
Feelings of guilt and confusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nobody had a clue • none of us were ever given a notion that he would go that far with it • we potentially could have helped him • placed that burden on myself for a long time • bunch of questions I never really got answered • how could this have happened • how could I not have heard • should I even continue cheer, he was my main reason
Stages of grief through Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • waivered back and forth between really emotional and really hard

Kelsey

THEME	EVIDENCE
Uses Facebook to communicate with other grievors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I talk to others on his page • they'll post things and I'll like it or say something similar to what they had said • just like comfort for others • helped definitely because you knew other people were struggling as well • and they'd be able to communicate too • so they could help you • hey, I'm going through this too • made more friends too • they have something in common
Shocked at news of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was really shocking • you didn't expect it • you had seen him the day before and the next thing you never see him again • still unreal kind of • you expect to see him there
Keep dead "here"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • so that he's not actually gone • know that he's still there kind of
Use Facebook to remember dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people can still read about him, or read stories about him • it felt good just to know that I was still thinking about it • remembering everything that he said • or had done for us
Communicate directly with dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saying how he was a good person • how he's always there for you • one was about cross country for next season and how he was always going to be a part of the races • any time running is for him • posted for him kind of too • so he knows that we are still thinking about him
Consider feelings of dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • so he knows that we are still thinking about him
Actions to honor dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any time running is for him • I still run for him • it's still running for him

Jess

THEME	EVIDENCE
Shocked at news of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I didn't believe it at first • it took me a while for it to hit • just went into shock • just went numb • everything didn't feel real • I just didn't believe that he wasn't going to be at practice
Continued communication with dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • want him to know that he'll always be loved • his happiness will inspire us • I never want to let him down • show him that his happiness will live on • he's inspired me to push myself in running • push myself in life • it was for him • the kick was for him • he can still live through us • he reminds me that life's going to be okay
Used Facebook to connect to others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they're not the only ones hurting through this • know that he will never be forgotten • other people will be there to reach out to me as well • know that I have other people to relate to • just kind of a connection to other people as well • relief • good to know that other people were supporting him • unified other people together • to realize that I wasn't the only one going through it • them look through what he said • look through what he lived for
Assure that dead will not be forgotten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his happiness will live on • know that he will never be forgotten • other people won't forget about him • feels good that his legend lives on • he won't be forgotten • other people won't forget about him • feels good that his legend lives on • he won't be forgotten

Jess (con't)

Positive impact on life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• tie up my running shoes for him• keep pushing through rough parts• always have a positive outlook on life• he reminds me that life's going to be okay• it's just shown me how fast life can go• inspired me everyday to live life to the fullest• make sure I leave a positive influence on the people around me
--------------------------------	--

APPENDIX J

Master Themes

MASTER THEME	Evidence
<p>Remembering the Dead</p>	<p>1. Honor the deceased</p> <p><u>Mollie</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that he would want me to continue • so I will continue in his honor • everything I do will be in his memory • everything I do in cheer, I'll end up posting something like, well, hey, I did it for you • I'm still trying to do great things that I feel like he would have been proud of • look up to him more • I respect him a lot more for the things that he went through • a lot of things about him that I think I show in my everyday personality • after his passing he's kind of helped shape who I am • very appreciated relationship with him • biggest impacts on everything that I've done at this point • it kind of worked out how it was meant to be, in my life at least <p><u>Kelsey</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any time running is for him • I still run for him • it's still running for him <p><u>Jess</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tie up my running shoes for him • keep pushing through rough parts • always have a positive outlook on life • he reminds me that life's going to be okay • it's just shown me how fast life can go • inspired me everyday to live life to the fullest • make sure I leave a positive influence on the people around me <p><u>Abby</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • happy that we got the chance to know him • people...aren't going to have the lessons that I've learned of how to live life with everything you have • everyday be happy • grateful that even though the pain that came with it, it was worth knowing him • he taught me so much • I need to push through it and enjoy it because he didn't get to do that • if I try to give up or something, he wouldn't have given up

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whenever stuff gets hard, ...I talk to him • he gets me through a lot <p>2. Desire to remember the deceased</p> <p><u>Erin</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can still look at his pictures and see him <p><u>Megan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • posted pictures on Intstagram • have picture of her in my car and room <p><u>Mollie</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I did save a few of them [pictures] at some point just so I would kind of have, you know how memories fade after a while • at this point, I don't remember his face very well • occasionally I go back at those pictures and kind of revisit those memories • it's a completely physical representation • it's a still image of who he used to be <p><u>Kelsey</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it felt good just to know that I was still thinking about it • remembering everything that he said or had done for us <p><u>Henry</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pictures of athletics, and that's what I mostly remember him from • brought back a lot of memories when I went and saw the pictures • it makes people remember who he was, remember what he was
<p>Not Forgetting the Dead</p>	<p>1. Important that other's do not forget deceased</p> <p><u>Erin</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes me happy to see that people are still remembering • everybody is still like daily posts on his wall • it makes me happy that he's not forgotten <p><u>Megan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revisit page to see if people are still thinking of her • I want her to know that I will never forget her... <p><u>Jess</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his happiness will live on • know that he will never be forgotten • other people won't forget about him • feels good that his legend lives on • he won't be forgotten <p><u>Abby</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he wasn't going to be forgotten • and make sure that other people don't forget

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • happy to know that everyone else was thinking of him • good to know that other people weren't going to forget him too • he doesn't deserve to be forgotten • just because he wasn't the most popular kid in school • my son's never going to be forgotten • know that his mom is reassured that her son isn't going to be another kid who got killed or whatever • like he actually means something to this school • I never want to forget him
Self Expression	<p>1. Difficulty accepting loss</p> <p><u>Erin</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he's not coming back no matter how many times I post, no matter how many times I text him or how many times I call him and he never answers • all of a sudden his conversations stop and it's just mine • I'll never get a hey, how are you doing message from him • seeing my messages I posted makes it real • but, you know you'll never get that • I texted him and I was like, hey, they said you're dead, like are you ok? • I kept waiting for a text back • but I just kept texting him, like this isn't a funny joke, you can quit playing now, you can come back around • I kept looking and there was no text, no communication • I wanted so badly for it not to be real • part of me was hoping I would get a response back • it was just a way for me to not lose him • if I posted he was not really gone • wishing he would come back so that we could work out some more • wish he would come back just so he would be back; • I'm still not ready to let go • I talk to him every day • we're just about as close as we used to be • makes me feel like he's still listening and he's still there, even if he's not talking back • you post hoping, just praying, that he'll be like, hey guys, it's a big joke, sorry I hurt you for so long but I'm back, I'm okay • at some point, I've got to learn that no matter what, he's gone, no matter how much I don't want him to be • I know that he's here no matter what • he's always going to be here

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he's always going to be watching over the track team, the cross country team <p>2. Express personal grief</p> <p><u>Megan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • had to get it out • posted to get it off my chest • getting it out and it felt like it was a relief <p><u>Mollie</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do use my own to communicate that around the time every year • I use my own Facebook profile to kind of say something like I miss you • I still communicate through my own profile • mainly just an outlet • mainly used it as an outlet for my feelings • it was really kind of these harsh emotional messages • first one was total shock • just emotional • saying things like I miss him so much • I don't know what to do with my life anymore • I had no other way to deal with it • I just kind of took it elsewhere so I wouldn't burden • 90% of the time I would say that it's sort of a relief • like a weight off my shoulders • because I had been carrying all those burdens • holding all of that stuff in • I had no one else to talk to • helped me forget those things for a little bit because it was in black and white, somewhere where I could go back
<p>Continuing Bonds With the Deceased</p>	<p>1. Private posts</p> <p><u>Erin</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • so only he could see it • seeing what other people wrote was hard enough • it was like personal stuff about me too • so I just kept it private so only he could read it • that's kind of why I made it private because it was just me, like I would, if he were never gone, I would just talk to him <p>2. Deceased can read Facebook postings</p> <p><u>Erin</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • like I miss you, hope you are doing ok; • so I just kept it private so only he could read it

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • so only he could see it • part of me knew that no matter what he was looking down and knowing exactly what I was saying • the fact that I can still talk to him even though he doesn't talk back • I can still say what I want to say • how are you doing lately • some of it was about how school's going • normal conversations, it's just one-sided • that's kind of why I made it private because it was just me, like I would, if he were never gone, I would just talk to him • makes me feel like he's still listening and he's still there, even if he's not talking back • It helps a lot, just talking to him <p><u>Megan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • just so she knows, and I think about her a lot <p><u>Desi</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a way to connect with them • even if they can't read it • you just imagine that they can when you post something • even though they don't comment • just pictures of them • that reminded me of them • helped because just imagining that they could [read it] • closer because before then I really didn't talk to him that much <p><u>Mollie</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to kind of say something like I miss you • I'm still doing cheer and I hope you're proud of me • I hope he's proud of me • you are the motivation that I have • you are still the light in my life • you've pushed me to do it and I've done it • I will say his name before I tumble <p><u>Kelsey</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saying how he was a good person • how he's always there for you • one was about cross country for next season and how he was always going to be a part of the races • any time running is for him • posted for him kind of too • so he knows that we are still thinking about him <p><u>Jess</u></p>
--	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • want him to know that he'll always be loved • his happiness will inspire us • I never want to let him down • show him that his happiness will live on • he's inspired me to push myself in running • push myself in life • it was for him • the kick was for him • he can still live through us • he reminds me that life's going to be okay <p><u>Abby</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know he couldn't read it, but I felt like that was one other way that I could still talk to him • it was like physically there and he could...just to me I felt like he could read it • wanted him to know...that I was thinking about him • I was caring about him • still thought about him • he wasn't going to be forgotten • it's going to be weird not running with you anymore • God's going to have a course for you to run while you're there • you're in a better place • this world isn't good enough for you • telling him that I would pray for him and his family • I would never forget you • I would always remember • make sure that other people don't forget • it kind of felt like a little bit of a relief • it was kind of still like being able to talk to him in a way • it was like he wasn't completely gone • it was like reassurance that I could still have my family member, my cross country teammate there
<p>Personal Connections With the Living</p>	<p>1. Normalize grief experience</p> <p><u>Erin</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowing that there are other people who went through what I went through <p><u>Desi</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • so you assume you're one of them • everyone else does [post comments] <p><u>Kelsey</u></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they'll post things and I'll like it or say something similar to what they had said • helped definitely because you knew other people were struggling as well • hey, I'm going through this too • they have something in common <p><u>Jess</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they're not the only ones hurting through this • know that I have other people to relate to • relief • to realize that I wasn't the only one going through it <p><u>Abby</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was able to see that other people were feeling the same way as me • so it was a normal way to feel • I was like other people are feeling like this • I could reach out to them • talk to them about it • helped me move on with it <p>2. Gain support from other grievers</p> <p><u>Mollie</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • didn't really have anyone to talk to • Facebook was my only way to communicate with other people • I was almost reaching out for my own sake • I needed help getting through this • I need people to kind of support me • to kind of get that feedback from other people • like have you been through something like this or anything like that • when I posted something online I had this entire audience that I could just share everything with • whether they cared or not, it was out there • so many posts of people, comments, I'm here if you need me • I'm sorry • this happened to me too • hearing other people's stories • knowing that I had other people there in my life • helped even things out because I felt so alone • helped me realize that there were other people there both my age and not that could help me through this process • not take his place but sort of fill that lonely void
--	---

	<p><u>Kelsey</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I talk to others on his page • they'll post things and I'll like it or say something similar to what they had said • just like comfort for others • and they'd be able to communicate too • so they could help you • made more friends too <p><u>Jess</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other people will be there to reach out to me as well • just kind of a connection to other people as well • relief • good to know that other people were supporting him • unified other people together • them look through what he said • look through what he lived for <p>3. Offer support to family of deceased</p> <p><u>Jess</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm friends with his parents on there • I communicated with his parents a lot more • for other loved ones <p><u>Abby</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was praying for his family • telling him that I would pray for him and his family • I just wanted her [sister] to be okay • they didn't deserve to lose two children at one time • audience was family in a way too • I'm sure that was a major, like a really good support thing for them • to know that other people are praying for them • know that his mom is reassured that her son isn't going to be another kid who got killed or whatever • knowing that they're behind them through everything
--	---