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Social Networking Sites and Grief: An Exploratory Investigation of Potential Benefits

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SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND GRIEF: AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF POTENTIAL BENEFITS

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This study examines the effectiveness of the use of social networking sites (in this case MySpace.com) in helping grieving individuals adjust to bereavement. A questionnaire was completed by 106 college students who had experienced the death of a friend or loved one and also were aware of the deceased person having a personal MySpace page, memorial page, or both. Participants completed the Hogan Grief Reaction Checklist, a measure of adjustment to bereavement, and answered questions regarding activities in which they had engaged to move them forward in their grief, such as funerals and online activities (Bereaved Activities Questionnaire, Revised). Results indicated that, although participants thought their online activities were helpful and attributed many positive outcomes to expressing their grief on social networking sites, there was no relation between use of the sites and grief adjustment scores. It appeared that this sample was not in great distress and had, in many ways, already adjusted well to bereavement. Further research should investigate the extent to which using social networking sites can be helpful for individuals who are known to be in distress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although I would like to be able to say, as B.F. Skinner did, that my history of reinforcement and punishment alone is what has gotten me this far, it is also true that there are many individuals who have helped me along the way. I would not be here at all without the love, care, and guidance so graciously given by my parents and grandparents, and most likely would not have become interested in this field at all if it were not for the untimely death of my mother, Nancy Dilts Graves. From her I learned that where there is loss, there is also hope: the raging wildfire that seemingly destroys the forest also brings with it opportunities for new growth.

I would also like to say that this dissertation has been a labor of love, but in truth, at times it has been quite a struggle. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee, Lynda Federoff, Gordon Thornton, and Dasen Luo, for their seemingly limitless patience, time, and dedication. I must also thank Donald Robertson for his support and kind words, and my colleagues, Hey-Mi Ahn, Jessica Buckland, Kimberlee DeRushia, Bronwyn Murray, Dennis LaLonde, and countless others who continue to encourage me from afar. And last but not least, my dear friend and fiancé, Charles Scheffold, for tolerating my ups and downs, helping in any way he could, and buoying me through the storms of work and life.

Finally, I would like to thank the client whose grief over the suicide of her friend inspired this project. Had it not been for her, I probably would not have seen the Internet a serious option for grief self-help. I sincerely hope that you have found peace – grief is a road that we all have to walk sometimes, but you found a unique way to avoid traveling it alone.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites: are they a time-waster, or something more useful? Although social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, are relatively new arrivals to both the world of the Internet and, even more so, to the world of psychological research, they have become a permanent fixture in many individuals' lives, and not always as a way to pass time. Some individuals use these sites to reconnect with old friends, seek career advice or job leads, whereas others may use them to gain support from others. Bereaved individuals use these sites too, sometimes in a unique way.

This research evolved out of the author's relationship with a teenaged client who pursued psychotherapy at the insistence of her family after the death of her friend by suicide. Although she was only seen for a few sessions, it came to light that she was visiting her friend's MySpace page to leave messages for him, as well as to communicate with other individuals who were grieving his death. As a therapist, this writer had many questions about her activities. What exactly was she doing and did it help her? Could it have possibly made things worse? Was it helping her to form connections with others? And, did other bereaved individuals engage in similar practices?

Later, this writer came to realize that her client was certainly not alone in using social networking sites this way, but the question remained: was it helpful? Certainly, it was possible that this was a select group of people who had chosen to express their grief in a very public place like the Internet because of personality characteristics such as extraversion, or a need for attention and sympathy. Perhaps getting this attention may be detrimental by causing individuals to continue to ruminate on their losses. Another

possibility is that the public and anonymous setting of the Internet may expose individuals to negative and hurtful comments by strangers. These are legitimate concerns. However, other, more traditional bereavement practices, are also performed in public, such as the funeral, and most individuals would describe that ritual as, at the very least, causing no harm, and at best, as being helpful or comforting (Bolton & Camp, 1987; Bosley & Cook, 1993; Gamino, Easterling, & Stirman, 2000; Weeks, 1996; Wolfelt, 1994). Therefore, it may be possible to see the online activity as a type of ritual that could move a person forward in their adjustment to grief.

Humankind has long performed rituals to mourn its dead. It is thought that even the most primitive humans, Neanderthals, buried their loved ones with flowers (Solecki, 1975). The funeral rite is one of the most common mourning rituals, but it is certainly not the only one. At different times throughout history, the dead person was offered food, flowers, and other goods for days, weeks, and years after his or her death. In present day Mexico and South America, a variation on this practice still continues during Los Dias de los Muertos. In the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, bereaved individuals wore special mourning clothing to mark their status, often for several years after the death. What these individuals gained from taking part in these rituals is unclear, but it seems likely that they must have derived some kind of benefit for the practice to have lasted for so long.

Nowadays, traditional mourning rituals are often minimized or altogether avoided (Romanoff & Tenezio, 1998). Wolfelt (1994) pointed to several factors that underlie our aversion to rituals, such as the importance placed on independence, avoidance of negative feelings, and the decreasing role of religion in our culture. Furthermore, it has often been

said that we live in a death-denying society that glorifies youth and perpetuates a myth of eternal life. In contrast to past eras when mortality rates were high, many individuals reach adulthood without ever encountering death, except perhaps on television or in the movies. Individuals in earlier days, even children, would have had a familiarity with death that we cannot comprehend, given that the care of the old and the dying is now outsourced to strangers in hospitals and nursing homes. Most individuals are unfamiliar with and/or afraid of death and may have negative perceptions of funerals, such as that they are too expensive or cause unnecessary pain (Wolfelt, 1994).

Therefore, we often eschew the funeral itself and shy away from exhibiting signs of grief in public. Thinking it is best to "not make a fuss" and "get on with life," bereaved individuals plan a simple funeral and get back to work as quickly as possible. Post-funeral rituals are even rarer in this country (Romanoff & Tenezio, 1998). However, bereavement does not always end with the funeral and grief is a process that may be enhanced by the performance of additional rituals.

Rituals are important. Romanoff and Tenezio (1998) defined rituals as "cultural devices that facilitate the preservation of social order and provide ways to comprehend the complex and contradictory aspects of human existence within a given societal context" (p. 3). Generally, there is an element of drama or performance and the use of symbols embedded within the rituals that mark one's progression through life. Christenings, birthdays, graduations, and weddings are all celebrations that are generally recognized by society. In this culture, we are all familiar with the symbol of the cake with candles on it, or the mortarboard and tassel. Why avoid the funeral, one's "grand exit"

from life? Rituals organize and make meaning out of life (Romanoff & Tenezio), and, perhaps, death.

Given the norms about death in our country, some bereaved individuals question their own sanity when they find they aren't able to "get on with life" when everyone around them seems to be adjusting well. Bereavement rituals that do exist often focus on saying goodbye when it may be more appropriate, and more healthy, to maintain some kind of connection to the deceased (Romanoff & Tenezio, 1998). It can be difficult to find information and rituals that "fit" one's grief experience, which is inherently very personal. Some bereaved individuals find information about grief and meet others in support groups or online, in chat rooms, or over a listserv. Some end up creating a new repertoire of mourning rituals, custom-tailored to suit their own needs. As Weeks (2004) put it, "To be helpful, a death ritual must have value. To have value, it must have meaning. To have meaning, it must be personal" (p.123).

Defining Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning

To avoid confusion, it is important for us to define several terms. Kastenbaum's (1977) definitions of bereavement, grief, and mourning are useful because they differentiate between words that are often seen as interchangeable. Kastenbaum defined bereavement simply as the state of having had a loved one die. He adds that is also a status change, which may mean that the person who was once a wife is now a widow. Kastenbaum went on to state that grief, however, is the emotional reaction to the loss of an attachment relationship. The current view is that grief not only includes emotional reactions, but also physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms, and sometimes social and spiritual aspects as well (Corr, Corr, & Nabe, 2006). These symptoms (not an

exhaustive list) include physical sensations, such as weakness or dizziness, feelings such as anger, sadness, relief, or anxiety, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, loss of social support, and decreased belief in one's faith and other once-valued ideas. Finally, Kastenbaum (1977) said that mourning is a behavior – what we do in reaction to our loss. Mourning usually refers to taking part in socially sanctioned, public rituals.

It is, therefore, possible for a bereaved person to grieve, but not mourn, or for a person to mourn, but not grieve. Normally, however, grieving and mourning go hand in hand to help a person adjust to bereavement.

Stage Models of Adjustment

Adjustment to bereavement is often thought of in terms of stages or phases. Many models have been proposed, such as one based on the work of Bowlby (1961; 1980) and Parkes (1970; 1996), which suggests four stages describing the process of realization of the loss: shock and numbness; yearning and searching; disorientation and disorganization; and reorganization and resolution. Another model, "the six R's" (Rando, 1993) describes six tasks of mourning: recognize the loss, react to the loss (emotionally), recollect and reexperience the relationship, relinquish attachments to the deceased, readjust to the changed world, and reinvest in new relationships. There are also other models, such as that of Kübler-Ross (1969).

Kübler-Ross's Model

Many individuals are most familiar with Kübler-Ross's (1969) 5-stage model, although it was developed based on her observations of patients' reactions to a diagnosis of terminal illness. The 5-stage model can also help us understand adjustment to

bereavement. The first stage, denial, can be subtle or, alternately, it can be more explicit. The bereaved individual may simply avoid thinking about the fact that a loved one has died or may have the thought: “It didn’t really happen,” or “There must have been some kind of mistake.” The next stage, anger, could involve anger at the deceased person, medical personnel, one’s self, or other individuals involved in the death, for example, a drunk driver.

Bargaining is the third stage and, in the model’s use with terminally ill individuals, involves asking God or others for more time, possibly in exchange for “being good.” This stage may not translate as well to work with grieving individuals. Although the stages are not necessarily seen as successive, someone who has reached the bargaining stage should realize that the person is actually dead and it is not possible to bargain for more time with the individual. The fourth stage, depression, may involve typical grief reactions, such as crying and feeling sad. Finally, the last stage is acceptance, where the bereaved individual can acknowledge that the loss has happen and has made some kind of sense of it. Recent empirical examination by Maciejewski et. al. (2007) of Kübler-Ross’s theory (1969) has revealed support for the 5-stage model, but their data suggest a somewhat different order: denial or disbelief, yearning, anger, depression, and acceptance. Overall, they saw an increase in acceptance over time, and a peak in negative grief symptoms at 6 months post loss.

As suggested earlier, Kübler-Ross did not see the stages as linear and thought that it was possible to work on more than one stage simultaneously and to cycle through the stages several times. However, some grieving individuals do not understand this or may

become disappointed if they do not seem to be making "progress" through the stages and, therefore, the 5-stage model may be more confusing than helpful in some cases.

Worden's Tasks of Mourning

A more useful stage model could be Worden's (2002) "tasks of mourning." The first task is accepting the reality of the loss. The funeral is a ritual that helps individuals accept that the loss has happened by providing an opportunity to see the body. The second task is working through the pain of grief, which can be both physical and emotional. Individuals may exhibit many typical symptoms of depression, such as insomnia, irritability, sadness, and appetite disturbance. The next task is adjusting to a changed environment. Even after a bereaved individual has worked through the pain of grief, it may still be difficult to assign roles that the deceased once played to someone else. Adjusting to a changed environment may also mean disposing of some of the deceased person's belongings. The final stage is emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life. For some individuals, this may also mean mentally relocating the deceased person to a physical place, such as heaven or some other place. The fourth stage also may involve reinvesting energy into new relationships or reviving old ones.

Potential Negative Outcomes of Bereavement

In most cases, grief resolves on its own over time and requires no outside intervention (Currier, Neimeyer, & Berman, 2008). The individual stops showing outward signs of grief, as well as more inward ones, such as depression and anxiety, and may, in the best-case scenario, also gain something positive from the experience, such as a deeper appreciation for life. However, if grief is not successfully resolved, the bereaved person may be at risk for deleterious outcomes. "Complicated grief" is a mental disorder

that has been proposed for inclusion in the upcoming edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, which is used by most mental health workers in diagnosing patients. Complicated grief appears to be a more intense grief reaction, distinct from depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and so-called "normal" grief (Hogan, Worden, & Schmidt, 2005-6) and may be associated with traumatic loss, multiple losses, and disenfranchised grief (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005). Bereaved individuals, particularly those who lose someone early in life, may also be at risk for other mental disorders (e.g., Barnes & Prosen, 1985; Dowdney, 2000; Silverman & Worden, 1992). Bereavement is also known to have health consequences (Denes-Raj & Ehrlichman, 1991; Graves, Miller, Ratcliff, & Vrabel, 2007). However, for most, these symptoms dissipate with time (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006) as one moves through their grief and eventually reaches some kind of resolution, such as acceptance in Kübler-Ross's (1969) model.

Mourning rituals are considered by many researchers to be an optimal way to move individuals through the grieving process, and thus potentially avoiding some of the aforementioned negative consequences. Therefore, participation in rituals, including the proposed concept of using the Internet as a kind of ritual, should lead to better adjustment (i.e., moving through the stages of grief and avoiding negative outcomes). Overall, it is hypothesized that using social networking sites to express one's grief can serve as an effective post-funeral mourning ritual.

The reader will find that this dissertation is divided into chapters. Chapter II will review relevant literature regarding rituals and their relationship with adjustment to bereavement, as well as previous research on bereavement and the Internet. Chapter III

describes the sample, measures, and procedure used in this research. Results are explained in Chapter IV, and their implications are discussed in Chapter V. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This project intends to show that using social networking sites to express bereavement can be seen as a type of mourning ritual that is helpful in facilitating adjustment to bereavement. Other researchers have looked at the relationship between other rituals, both traditional and nontraditional, and their relationship with adjustment to bereavement. In addition, previous research has examined resources available on the Internet for bereaved individuals, such as online memorials and chat rooms. This section will review this research and explain its importance for our subject matter.

Mourning Rituals and Adjustment

There are many types of mourning rituals and, therefore, this list is by no means exhaustive. Some rituals worthy of our attention are funerals, ceremonies involving disposition of either cremains or of the body, visiting the cemetery or other place where the remains are located, site of death memorials (a.k.a., "roadside memorials"), and other various rituals, including online memorials and possibly, use of social networking sites.

Funerals

The majority of deaths are followed by some kind of funeral or other ritual (National Funeral Directors' Association, 2006). The general consensus is that attending the funeral is helpful (Bolton & Camp, 1987; Bosley & Cook, 1993; Gamino, Easterling, & Stirman, 2000; Weeks, 1996; Wolfelt, 1994). Wolfelt stated that some benefits of attending the funeral are: it allows for confirmation that someone has died because the body is usually present, it normally happens relatively soon after the person has died, and it allows a socially-accepted outlet for the expression of strong feelings.

In a study of bereaved adults, Gamino, Easterling, and Stirman (2000) found that participants who felt comforted by the funeral were more likely to show better adjustment to bereavement. Those who were involved in planning the funeral also showed better adjustment. The authors suggested that involvement in rituals may help individuals feel more "in touch" with both one's self and with others (Gamino, Easterling, & Stirman). In another study, Bosley and Cook (1993) found that the funeral helped their participants form memories of the deceased individual, affirmed their religious beliefs, allowed for emotional expression, offered social support, and helped to clarify their place in their family tree.

In addition, Weeks (1996) detailed other benefits and limitations of the funeral. He stated that funerals are "rituals of binding and release" (p.130), bringing communities together to grieve a common loss and mark the separation from the deceased. However, he cautioned that funerals are not helpful if they are not personally meaningful to the bereaved. Weeks stated that a funeral without meaning can actually be harmful, leaving the family feeling as if they have attended the funeral of a stranger, which could serve to delay grieving.

Funerals have other limitations as well. For example, some believe that they happen too early for any real grieving to occur. Social norms, such as "men don't cry," may inhibit mourning even in the funeral setting (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006). Additionally, funerals may not be helpful for individuals in unrecognized relationships with the deceased, such as ex-spouse, or in gay/lesbian relationships, where the bereaved person's loss may be unsupported, which is known as disenfranchised grief.

Rituals Involving Disposition of Remains

The funeral often concludes with a graveside ceremony, where the body and casket are lowered into the earth. This ceremony may include religious elements, or it may not. Deaths that are followed by cremation may not end with disposition of remains in a cemetery. Loved ones may keep the ashes in their homes or find other ways to disperse the ashes. Traditionally, ashes may have been scattered in a favorite place or scattered to the winds but, more recently, individuals have found more creative things to do with ashes. For example, for-profit companies now exist that will turn a loved one's ashes into a diamond that can be worn as jewelry (Life Gem, 2005), or mix ashes with concrete to form a structure that will be lowered into the sea, eventually becoming part of a coral reef (Eternal Reefs, 2007). These new methods of disposition of remains create new, unique venues for "visiting" the deceased.

Visiting the Cemetery or Other Location of Remains

Weeks (2004) stated that the most common post-death ritual is visiting the deceased person's grave, often on multiple occasions, possibly on days that are significant to the bereaved or deceased, such as birthdays and holidays. This ritual may involve leaving items at the cemetery, such as flowers, flags on the graves of veterans on national holidays, or stones on the grave. If the remains are not located in a cemetery, it is possible that bereaved individuals may find comfort in visiting the place where the ashes were scattered, or the site where the death occurred.

Site of Death Memorials

Site of death memorials often emerge when a death has happened suddenly and/or violently. For example, after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on

9/11/01, this author witnessed many of the spontaneous memorials that emerged at sites throughout the city, but especially near where the attacks occurred and many lost their lives. Site of death memorials are usually called roadside memorials when they are placed near the site of a motor vehicle accident.

Reid and Reid (2001) examined the phenomena of roadside memorials in Texas and Oklahoma, finding evidence of frequent visits to the memorials in the form of new items and decorations left at the site, especially on special days such as birthdays or holidays. The authors concluded that the memorials do not seem to serve as messages to society, such as a reminder to refrain from drunk driving, but rather that they serve as a place to communicate with and remember the deceased. The body is not present, and rules about what to leave at the memorial may not be as strictly enforced as in a cemetery. It may be that there is something special about these sites, that survivors view them as a kind of "hallowed ground."

It appears that many of the rituals described above were helpful because they were personally meaningful to the bereaved, and provided opportunities for expressing emotions, remembering the deceased loved one, and gaining social support. However, all of the above-mentioned rituals involve traveling to or being invited to a specific place or event. Although most individuals found the rituals to be helpful, this helpfulness is limited to the extent to which bereaved individuals are able and allowed to participate in them. For example, for financial or other reasons, some individuals may not be able to travel to the site of death. Likewise, individuals who are not recognized as being bereaved (gay/lesbian relationships, ex-spouse, etc.) may not be invited to participate in the funeral or other rituals. Furthermore, in some cases, there may not be a place or event

to go to because the body is missing or never recovered, or perhaps because the bereaved individuals chose not to (or were encouraged not to) have services because they felt their loss was less meaningful (perinatal loss, pet loss, etc.).

So what do these individuals do? Western culture does not have many, if any, common traditional post-death rituals, let alone ones that do not involve a specific place like the cemetery. Nontraditional rituals require some creativity but could be helpful, especially in cases where individuals did not or could not participate in traditional rituals.

Other Rituals

Other typical post-death rituals include family-created rituals, such as celebrating the dead person's birthday with a cake, or leaving an empty chair at the table, and religious rituals, such as having a memorial mass on the anniversary of the person's death (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006). Many post-death rituals take place on important days, such as the deceased person's birthday, anniversary of the death, or special holidays. A memorial may be placed in the local newspaper, for example, on the person's birthday.

Gowensmith (2000) used a qualitative method to examine post-funeral bereavement rituals. He found that, although most participants were initially reluctant to perform their rituals, almost all attributed positive outcomes to the rituals. Overall, the participants believed that the rituals were valuable and 83% attributed life changes to the ritual, such as gaining a new perspective or moving forward in one's grief.

Castle and Philips (2003) also hypothesized that post-funeral rituals facilitate adjustment to bereavement. Nearly all of their participants (98%) rated their activities as "at least moderately helpful." The most helpful ritual was a memorial celebration designed by the bereaved person. The two aspects of rituals that were rated as most

helpful were "being in an emotionally safe environment" and "participating in an activity that was personally meaningful." Seventy-six percent stated they experienced a positive outcome, the most commonly endorsed outcome being "reevaluate my priorities in life." Seventy-two percent said that they would perform more rituals and 94% stated that they would recommend them to others.

It appears that nontraditional post-death rituals can have many of the same benefits as traditional rituals that necessitate being in a specific place, possibly at a specific time. Nontraditional rituals also provide more options for the bereaved individual, particularly in terms of timing, location, and content of the ritual. A nontraditional ritual can be created to involve whatever personal elements would be most meaningful and helpful to the individual or individuals involved, and can be performed in public or in private. And although some individuals may have been reluctant or perhaps felt silly, most found the experience to be valuable. Unfortunately, the researchers did not include an objective measure of adjustment to bereavement.

Another increasingly common venue for post-funeral rituals is the Internet. As more and more people, especially younger individuals, spend their lives on-line, it is no surprise that some seem to spend their "hereafter" there as well.

The Internet

Many researchers have speculated about the long-term effects of the use of technology. In its early days, some individuals predicted the next generation would lack social skills because of long hours spent online. More recently, some individuals have been predicting the downfall of the English language due to instant messaging and text message lingo (*Irish Times*, 2007). But other researchers point out that technology use is

not always detrimental and often has many benefits. For example, Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) tied the use of online friend networking sites, such as "MySpace" and "Friendster" to social self-esteem and overall well-being in non-bereaved individuals. A small number of researchers have looked specifically at bereavement and the Internet.

Previous Research: Bereavement Online

Relatively few studies have examined how bereaved individuals utilize the Internet to cope with bereavement. The Internet provides many opportunities: chat rooms for bereaved individuals, web sites with information about bereavement and other topics, topic-specific listservs, and sites that provide space for user-created memorials.

Some research has been devoted to analyzing online, user-created memorials for content and themes (DeVries & Rutherford, 2004; Roberts & Vidal, 2000). Roberts and Vidal found that participants were more likely to post memorials about younger deceased loved ones, possibly because these deaths were more upsetting. Multiple studies found that memorials were written by individuals with closer relationships to the deceased, for example child or parent of the deceased (Blando et al., 2004; DeVries & Rutherford, 2004; Nager & DeVries, 2004). Several studies found that females were more likely to be the authors of memorials than males, whereas men were more likely to be the subjects of the memorials (DeVries & Rutherford; Blando et al.).

Roberts (2004) examined the phenomenon of creating and visiting web memorials in terms of how they facilitate existing relationships, continue bonds with the deceased, and create new communities of bereaved individuals online using a sample of bereaved parents. She found that many of the memorials were addressed to the deceased person and that the majority of messages posted to the "guestbook" were for the deceased

person, rather than the author of the memorial. Additionally, she found evidence that visitors came back multiple times.

The majority of survey respondents indicated that they created their memorials in order to have "a meaningful activity that I could still do for my child" (Roberts, 2004). Many memorial authors continued to revise the memorial and visited at least daily in the first month after it was created, and after the first year 68% were still visiting weekly. Many told others about the memorial, and most memorial authors had guestbooks that they read and responded to frequently. Interestingly, even though most participants also had a physical memorial that they could visit, the web memorial was visited more frequently. The majority of survey respondents rated four statements as very important in their decision to visit the memorial, "to show my respect for my child," "to stay in touch with what is missing from my life," "to show my love for my child," "and to feel closer to my child" (Roberts, 2004).

Other researchers have looked at the use of online support groups for bereaved individuals. Hollander (2001) found that many participants perceived the support groups as a refuge where they could talk about whatever they wanted, whereas, in "real life," signs of grieving were frowned upon and other individuals urged them to move on with their lives. Some felt reluctant to talk about their loss because the death had happened by suicide. Hollander (2001) suggested that online support groups take the place of the lost or strained relationships and she argued that online groups are a vital piece in rebuilding the individual's identity to include the death.

Similar to the traditional and nontraditional rituals discussed earlier, online activities appear to be helpful because they are personal, help maintain a connection to

the deceased, and facilitate social support. However, like previous research, these authors also did not include an objective measure of adjustment to bereavement.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites may be another place for bereaved individuals to meet and support each other. Social networking sites allow users to personalize their web pages, adding content such as pictures, stories, and comments from others. They also allow users to connect with friends and develop new relationships. After a person dies, their page may stay up, just as they left it, indefinitely. Dodero (2006) wrote about individuals who died and whose MySpace pages were turned into virtual memorials. Many messages that are posted on these sites come from individuals the person may never have met in life – they are posted by "Internet friends." Other messages come from "real-life" friends and family members who view the site as another way to communicate, with each other, and with the deceased. For example, one of Dodero's participants stated that when she read in the paper that a friend had died, the first thing she did was to go to his MySpace page. She explained that she felt uncomfortable going to her friend's funeral, and the website allowed her to mourn his death online instead.

St. John (2006) also commented on the phenomenon of grief on MySpace. He describes a father who logged onto his deceased daughter's account, thinking he would post something telling her friends what had happened, but found there were already several comments from friends, expressing their grief over her death. This man saw the page as a positive thing, maintaining connections with her and her friends, but felt that the public aspect of MySpace is a down side. Another page created for a 17-year old who was murdered received 1,200 comments in the three days after its inception. St. John

stated that MySpace users found comfort in the messages left to their dead friend and seem to hope that the dead person may be reading the page.

Hypotheses

Social networking sites appear to contain many of the same elements previous research has shown to be most helpful in both traditional and nontraditional post-death rituals. They are highly personal. They can help users stay in touch with friends, as well as make new ones, thus facilitating social support. Moreover, they can serve as a place to express grief and maintain a connection to the deceased by providing an opportunity to write to and to write about the person who has died. Therefore, it is hypothesized that using social networking sites in this way can serve as a post-death ritual that can enhance adjustment to bereavement. Because research seems to show that multiple visits (Reid & Reid, 2001; Roberts, 2004; Weeks, 1994) and being able to personalize one's experience (Castle & Philips, 2003; Gowensmith, 2000; Reid & Reid; Weeks, 1996) are helpful, it is hypothesized that frequency of participation (the number of times the participant visits the dead person's MySpace page), intensity of participation (whether the person simply visited, left a comment, left several comments, or altered their account in different ways to reflect the death), perceived helpfulness, and perceived number of positive outcomes will all be associated with better grief adjustment. Furthermore, because personalization seems to be a central issue (Castle & Philips, 2003; Gowensmith, 2000; Reid & Reid, 2001; Weeks, 1996), it is also hypothesized that intensity will be associated with greater perceived helpfulness of participation and increased number of positive outcomes.

Because grief is a process that normally resolves itself over time, it is hypothesized that individuals who are adjusting to more recent deaths will have, overall,

poorer adjustment scores than those for whom the death is less recent. Participants with more recent bereavement are also expected to use the site more frequently in an attempt to cope with their losses. Furthermore, because traditional rituals, such as the funeral, are viewed as helpful (Bolton & Camp, 1987; Bosley & Cook, 1993; Gamino, Easterling, & Stirman, 2000; Weeks, 1996; Wolfelt, 1994), it is expected that participation in traditional rituals will be associated with greater adjustment to bereavement, but that traditional mourning rituals and use of MySpace as a mourning ritual will differ in terms of perceived helpfulness.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This research employs a survey design to collect data from individuals regarding their behavior and feelings related to the death and related activities in which they have taken part. Although it may have been possible to examine this topic through experimental design, because this is a preliminary study, it was thought that the use of a questionnaire would provide an opportunity to look at a larger sample and possibly provide greater depth of information about a new area of study. This section will provide additional information about social networking sites, and will describe the sample, measures, and procedures and the rationale by which they were chosen.

About Social Networking Sites

Although several types of social networking sites exist (e.g., Facebook, LiveJournal, Friendster), MySpace was chosen for investigation because at the time of data collection, it was one of the most popular sites in terms of number of users (Stelter & Arango, 2009) and did not require an invitation to join. MySpace (www.myspace.com) is a free online social networking site that allows users to create a personalized page, known as a profile or one's "MySpace page." Individuals need to be at least 14 years old and have an email address to create a profile. Profiles allow the individual to upload content, such as photographs, graphics, and written content, and some individuals may also have a web log or "blog" on their page. All profiles allow users to post general information, such as name, age, location, school/career information, and interests. Users can then search for other individuals on the site using these criteria and add them as friends. Once a user is added as a friend, they can leave comments on friends' pages. However, anyone can see

an individual's profile, regardless of "friend status," unless the individual has limited others' access to his or her page. Individuals can also join MySpace groups, which are usually organized by topic, such as a particular hobby or sport.

Participants

Participants were recruited from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) General Psychology subject pool, identified as a result of a pretest asking about history of losses (see Appendix A), as well as through an online survey emailed to a random sample of undergraduate IUP students. This population was chosen because college-aged individuals are a primary audience for social networking sites (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008) and because most college students have experienced at least one death (Balk, 1997) by the time they finish school. Inclusion criteria for participation were: age of at least 18 years old, having one's own MySpace profile, and having experienced the death of a loved one who either had a MySpace profile or had a memorial profile dedicated to him or her. Approximately 1000 individuals in the subject pool took the pretest and another 1000 were sent an email invitation to participate in the study. Of these, 262 individuals attempted the questionnaire, of which 106 met participation criteria and completed the full questionnaire.

Table 1 shows sample characteristics. Most participants were female (71%) and identified as Caucasian (74%) or African-American (14%), which is overall consistent with the makeup of the student population. Nearly all participants were between the ages of 18 and 20 (94%) and had experienced the death of a friend (89%). Forty-one individuals had experienced the death within the past year, 50 had experienced it between 1 and 2 years ago, 12 had experienced it between 2 and 5 years ago, and 3 had

experienced it more than five years ago. This means that less than half of this sample was grieving a recent loss. Most participants (53%) were aware of their deceased person having both their own page and one or more memorial pages dedicated to him or her. Finally, the mean rating for perceived closeness of participants' relationship with their deceased loved one was 3.0, corresponding to a rating of "average closeness." Compared to subject pool participants, individuals recruited through email tended to be older (M=24.29, SD=10.78).

Measures

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) consists of several measures as well as demographic information, and a space for the participant to provide a narrative about the death.

Hogan Grief Reaction Checklist (HGRC)

The HGRC (Hogan, Greenfield, & Schmidt, 2001; see Appendix C) is a 61-item self-report questionnaire that examines several common reactions to bereavement. This scale was chosen because it is easy for participants to complete and provides a multidimensional assessment of adjustment to bereavement. Participants are asked to rate the degree to which each statement applies to them on a 5-point Likert scale. It is comprised of six factors: despair, panic behavior, personal growth, blame and anger, detachment, and disorganization. Items were based on a thematic analysis of interview as well as anecdotal data from bereaved adults. An initial set of 100 items was reviewed by eight focus groups, four that were based on the cause of death, and another four based on the bereaved individual's relationship with the deceased, in order to determine the extent to which the items accurately represented a bereaved individual's experience with grief.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Measure	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Gender			
Male	31		
Female	75		
Age		19.42	3.76
Race			
African American	15		
Asian	1		
Caucasian	78		
Latino	4		
Other	8		
Relationship to the person who died			
Aunt/Uncle	3		
Child	1		
Cousin	6		
Friend	94		
Grandparent	1		
Sibling	1		
Significant other	1		
Profile type			
Deceased person's page	24		
Memorial page	26		
Both	56		
Time since death			
Zero to two months	5		
Three to six months	13		
Seven to twelve months	23		
One to two years	50		
Two to 5 years	12		

More than 5 years	3		
Perceived closeness of relationship with deceased*		3.03	1.21

**As rated on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 meaning extremely close and 1 meaning not close at all.*

The items were also reviewed by experts to determine content validity. Items that were deemed theoretically significant, or had 80% consensus, were retained. Test-retest reliability is estimated at .84 (Despair), .79 (Panic Behavior), .81 (Personal Growth), .56 (Blame and Anger), .77 (Detachment), and .85 (Disorganization) for the six subscales. In terms of convergent validity, the HGRC subscales correlated well with the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (Faschingbauer, 1981), Grief Experience Inventory (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alverez, 1979), and Impact of Events Scale (Sanders, Mauger, & Strong, 1985).

Each factor represents a unique aspect of grief and, therefore, a total score would not make sense. For instance, Personal Growth measures positive outcomes of grief; whereas, the rest of the factors measure potentially harmful outcomes. Therefore, a higher score on Personal Growth indicates better grief adjustment, whereas higher scores on the rest of the factors indicate poorer grief adjustment. Scores range from 1 to 5 on each factor.

Bereavement Activities Questionnaire, Revised (BAQ-R)

The BAQ-R (see Appendix D) is a revision (revised by this author) of a questionnaire (BAQ) developed by Castle and Phillips (2003), who based their work on an interview template developed by Gowensmith (2000) and their own work in the field of bereavement. The original questionnaire looked at helpful aspects of a variety of post-funeral mourning rituals and consisted of three sections consisting of statements that participants rated on a Likert-type scale: the helpfulness of traditional and nontraditional/self-created rituals, specific aspects of those rituals that were particularly

helpful, and positive outcomes of the rituals. The BAQ was revised by this writer by rewording the original statements if necessary, or in some cases, adding new statements and questions in order to make the questionnaire more relevant to the Internet. All changes made were based on the author's knowledge of the Internet and experience in the field of bereavement, with attempts made to change as little as possible to preserve the integrity of the instrument. However, no psychometric information exists for either the original measure or the revised measure. The BAQ-R consists of four sections: BAQ Offline, BAQ Intensity/Frequency, BAQ Helpfulness, and BAQ Positive Outcomes.

The BAQ Offline contains 18 traditional mourning rituals. The participant is asked to indicate which of the activities they participated in, and to rate them in terms of perceived helpfulness. There is also a space to write in additional mourning rituals that the person participated in that did not take place online. Scores on this subscale range from 0 to 90.

BAQ Frequency/Intensity lists eight possible aspects of participation in mourning on MySpace and the participant is asked to indicate how often they engaged in each activity. BAQ Frequency is quantified based on the participant's rating of the first statement "visiting the deceased person's page," and scores on this subscale can range from 0 to 6. Intensity is quantified based on ratings of the seven other statements. Participants can also indicate that they did not participate in any of the activities, which would indicate that their participation is both of low frequency and low intensity (i.e., they are simply aware of the deceased person's page, but do not visit). Scores on this subscale range from 0 to 42.

The BAQ Helpfulness section consists of 22 aspects of participation that may be helpful in facilitating mourning on MySpace and the participant is asked to rate each statement in terms of helpfulness. Participants can also write in other helpful aspects. Scores on this BAQ-R subscale range from 0 to 110.

The final section of the BAQ-R, BAQ Positive Outcomes, consists of 21 statements, plus an optional write-in alternative, that are possible positive outcomes of participating in mourning rituals. Participants are asked to rate to what extent they have experienced each positive outcome as a result of participating in mourning on MySpace. Scores on this subscale range from 0 to 105.

The original developers, Castle and Phillips (2003) provided no information about psychometric properties of their instrument or about scoring, other than the fact that each item was scored on a 5 point Likert-type scale. Therefore, each item is scored on a Likert-type scale and scores are summed to obtain totals for each scale.

Procedure

A pretest (see Appendix A) was administered during undergraduate psychology courses to all members of the IUP subject pool (approximately 1000) in order to screen for individuals who were 18 years old or older, had MySpace profiles, and also experienced the death of a loved one who had a MySpace profile or had a memorial profile dedicated to him or her. Subject pool participants who fit the participation criteria (*N*=164*)* completed the questionnaire in a computer lab in the psychology building so that they could fulfill their introductory psychology course research participation requirement. Ninety-nine subject pool participants completed the entire questionnaire.

Additionally, an online survey provider, Student Voice, emailed a link to the online survey to a random sample of 1000 IUP undergraduate students. This sample was chosen at random by Student Voice from a list of all IUP undergraduate student email addresses. The questionnaire was essentially the same as above, with the addition of the pretest (see Appendix A) before the text of the online questionnaire (see Appendix B) in order to screen out individuals under the age of 18, those who did not have MySpace profiles, and/or those who had not experienced the death of a loved one who had a MySpace profile, and anyone who had previously completed the study. Ninety-eight individuals attempted the survey, 20 met participation criteria, and 7 completed the entire questionnaire. It is possible that response rates were lower for these participants because they did not receive monetary or other compensation for their time.

Statistical Analysis

The computerized statistical software package, PASW (2009) was used to aid statistical analysis. Although it was originally hoped that Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could be used to test hypotheses and goodness of fit, the sample size appeared to be too small, which may cause the model to be accepted even if it was not a good fit for the data (Hox, 1998). Therefore, hypotheses were tested by examining correlations.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations for the BAQ-R and HGRC are provided in Table 2. In terms of bereavement-related activities, the average BAQ Frequency was fairly low (*M*=1.75, *SD*=1.48), with most participants indicating they visited the deceased person's page once every few months or once a year. The average BAQ Intensity was also low (*M*=8.91, *SD*=7.92) suggesting that most individuals, when they did visit their person's page, did little more than read content on the page. However, most participants had engaged in multiple "offline" rituals and had found these to be helpful (BAQ Offline, *M*=35.11, *SD*=19.66).

Additionally, most participants indicated they found their online activities to be at least moderately helpful (BAQ Helpfulness, *M*=43.20, *SD*=27.24) and also saw them as leading to many positive outcomes (BAQ Positive Outcomes, *M*=63.75, *SD*=17.50). In terms of adjustment scores, overall, participants scored fairly low on the individual factors of the HGRC, with the exception of Personal Growth (*M*=3.19, *SD*=.82), suggesting that most participants were adjusting fairly well to their bereavement and were not experiencing intense distress at the time they completed the questionnaire.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the BAQ-R and HGRC

Measure	*M*	*SD*
BAQ-R		
Frequency	1.75	1.48
Intensity	8.91	7.92
Offline	35.11	19.66
Helpfulness	43.20	27.24
Positive Outcomes	63.75	17.50
HGRC		
Despair	1.67	0.78
Panic	1.71	0.79
Anger	1.66	0.83
Detachment	1.59	0.84
Disorganization	1.74	0.81
Personal Growth	3.19	0.82

The most frequent activities participants engaged in on MySpace were looking at pictures, reading other content, and reading others' comments on the deceased person's page (see Table 3). Most participants indicated they did not leave comments, change their own profile or screen name to reflect the person's death, or write about the deceased person on their own page.

Table 3

Percentage of Participants Engaging in Various Activities on the Site

BAQ Intensity item	Several times a day to several times a month	Once every few months to a few times a year	Never
Leaving comments	10.4	31.2	58.4
Reading other's comments	30.2	50.0	19.8
Reading other content	26.4	52.8	20.8
Writing about the person on own page	12.3	32.1	55.6
Changing own profile to reflect the death	9.4	26.4	64.2
Listening to music	14.2	32.1	58.5
Looking at pictures	32.1	49.1	18.8

**Participants rated the items on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (several times a day) to 7 (never).*

In terms of specific aspects of online activities that individuals found to be useful (see Table 4), participants rated the statement "knowing that I have the option to visit the page whenever I want" as being most helpful (*M*= 2.62, *SD*= 1.84). The next most helpful aspects were "viewing photos of the deceased" (*M*= 2.60, *SD*= 1.58), and "being able to remain anonymous if I choose to do so" (*M*= 2.56, *SD* = 1.86). The least helpful aspects of participants' online activities were "religious/spiritual practice as part of your visit to the MySpace page of the person who died" (*M*=0.81, *SD*= 1.34), and "leaving pictures/graphic comments on the person's page that have special meaning" (*M*= 1.30, *SD*= 1.58).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Highest and Lowest-Rated Items of BAQ-R Helpfulness Scale

	M	*SD*
Most Helpful		
Knowing that I have the option to visit the page whenever I want	2.62	1.84
Viewing photos of the deceased person	2.60	1.58
Being able to remain anonymous if I choose to do so	2.56	1.86
Being in an emotionally safe environment	2.55	1.78
Just knowing that my loved one still has a page	2.54	1.84
Least Helpful		
Religious/spiritual practice as part of your visit	0.81	1.34
Leaving pictures/graphic comments on the person's page	1.30	1.58
Inviting special people to view the page	1.31	1.63
Leaving comments on the MySpace page of the person who died	1.39	1.58
Feeling the presence of the deceased	1.49	1.65

Participants rated "sharing stories about the deceased" as the most helpful traditional, offline activity (see Table 5) in which they had engaged (*M*=3.49, *SD*= 1.51). Other helpful offline activities were "dedicating something in memory of the deceased person" (*M*= 2.65, *SD* = 1.88), and "displaying photos of the deceased" (*M*= 2.59, *SD* = 1.70). The least helpful offline activities were "participating in individual psychotherapy" (*M*= 0.60, *SD*= 1.20), and "attending a grief support group" (*M*= 0.87, *SD* = 1.35).

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Highest and Lowest-Rated Items of BAQ-R Offline Scale

	M	*SD*
Most Helpful		
Sharing stories about the deceased	3.49	1.51
Dedicating something in memory of the deceased person	2.65	1.88
Displaying photos of the deceased	2.59	1.70
Attending the funeral	2.51	1.80
Least Helpful		
Participating in individual psychotherapy	0.60	1.20
Attending a grief support group	0.87	1.35
Visiting the place where my loved one died	1.25	1.41
Writing a letter or poem to the deceased person	1.49	1.81

In terms of benefits (see Table 6), the most commonly attributed positive outcome of using social networking sites was that it helped the bereaved individual "reevaluate my priorities in life" (*M*= 3.44, *SD* = 1.22). Other positive outcomes that participants were likely to rate as true were "explore my attitudes toward life and death" (*M* = 3.38, *SD* = 1.18), and "reevaluate my relationships with others" (*M* = 3.34, *SD*= 1.18). The least commonly attributed positive outcomes were "increase my overall physical activity level" (*M*= 2.53, *SD*= 1.14) and "formulate a new relationship with my loved one" (*M*= 2.63, *SD*=1.08).

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Highest and Lowest-Rated Items of BAQ-R Positive Outcomes Scale

	M	*SD*
Most often rated as true		
Reevaluated my priorities in life	3.44	1.22
Explored my attitudes about life and death	3.38	1.18
Reevaluated my relationships with others	3.34	1.18
Developed a new perspective on the deceased person's life	3.23	1.25
Least often rated as true		
Increased my overall physical activity level	2.53	1.14
Formulated a new relationship with my loved one	2.63	1.08
Had less intense feelings about the death of my loved one	2.71	1.09
Developed a new awareness of who I am	2.85	1.15

Testing the Hypotheses

It was initially hypothesized that BAQ Frequency and BAQ Intensity would be associated with better grief adjustment (i.e., lower scores on all but the Personal Growth factor of the HGRC and higher scores on Personal Growth). However, the correlation matrix (see Table 7) shows that neither BAQ Frequency nor BAQ Intensity is significantly associated with any of the HGRC factors (Despair, Panic, Personal Growth, Anger, Detachment, and Disorganization). Therefore, these hypotheses were not supported.

Table 7

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations

	Time Since Death	HGRC Despair	HGRC Panic	HGRC Pers.G	HGRC Anger	HGRC Detach.	HGRC Disorg.	BAQ Off.	BAQ Help	BAQ Pos. O.	BAQ Freq.	BAQ Inten.
Time Since Death	1.0	.18	.04	-.04	.27**	.13	.01	.06	-.03	-.03	.05	.09
HGRC Despair	.19	1.0	.70**	-.07	.57**	.73**	.50**	.21*	.03	-.10	.06	.14
HGRC Panic	.04	.70**	1.0	-.02	.52**	.70**	.57**	.04	-.11	-.10	.10	.15
HGRC Pers G.	-.04	-.07	-.02	1.0	-.14	-.17	-.03	.41**	.34**	.21*	.11	.12
HGRC Anger	.27**	.57**	.52**	-.14	1.0	.67**	.38**	-.02	-.10	-.07	.00	.02
HGRC Detach.	.13	.73**	.70**	-.12	.67**	1.0	.63**	.10	-.08	-.10	-.07	-.02
HGRC Disorg.	.01	.50**	.57**	-.03	.38**	.63**	1.0	-.00	-.08	-.02	-.17	-.09
BAQ Off.	.06	.21*	.04	.41**	-.02	.10	-.00	1.0	.61**	.30**	.29**	.34**
BAQ Help.	-.03	.03	-.11	.34**	-.10	-.08	-.08	.61**	1.0	.58**	.38**	.41**
BAQ Pos. O.	-.03	-.10	-.10	.21*	-.07	-.10	-.02	.30**	.58**	1.0	.27**	.29**
BAQ Freq.	.05	.06	.10	.11	.00	-.07	-.17	.29**	.38**	.27**	1.0	.73**
BAQ Intens.	.09	.14	.15	.12	.02	-.02	-.09	.34**	.41**	.29**	.73**	1.0

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

It was also hypothesized that BAQ Intensity would be associated with greater perceived helpfulness and an increased number of positive outcomes. The correlations between BAQ Intensity and BAQ Helpfulness, and BAQ Intensity and BAQ Positive Outcomes were both significant at the .01 level (r=.41 and r=.29, respectively). Overall, it appears that this hypothesis is supported.

Furthermore, it was hypothesized that BAQ Helpfulness and BAQ Positive Outcomes would be associated with greater adjustment to bereavement. It appears that these variables have poor correlations with all of the HGRC factors, except for Personal Growth. The Personal Growth factor was significantly positively correlated with both BAQ Helpfulness and BAQ Positive Outcomes (r=.34 and r=.21, respectively). Unlike the other HGRC factors, Personal Growth measures positive outcomes of bereavement and not just a return to earlier functioning, such as being able to put the death into a greater context and find some benefit from the experience (Hogan et al., 2001). Because BAQ Helpfulness and BAQ Positive Outcomes were not associated with other aspects of adjustment to bereavement, such as a reduction in grief symptoms, support for this hypothesis is mixed.

It was thought that individuals who were adjusting to more recent deaths would have poorer adjustment scores than those whose loved ones died in the past. Interestingly, this was not the case. Correlations between most of the HGRC factors and time were not significant, except HGRC anger, which had a statistically significant positive correlation with time (r=.27, p<.01). It was also hypothesized that time since death would be associated with frequency, however this correlation was not significant (r=.05, p>.05). Therefore, neither of these hypotheses was supported.

Participation in traditional, offline rituals was hypothesized to be associated with better adjustment to bereavement. However, correlations between most of the HGRC factors and BAQ-Offline were not significant, except its correlations with Despair and Personal Growth, which interestingly, were each significant and positive (r=.21, p<.05, and r=.41, p<.01, respectively). This seems contradictory, because it appears to suggest

that participation in traditional rituals is associated with both poorer adjustment (the Despair factor) and better adjustment (Personal Growth).

Finally, it was hypothesized there would be differences in how helpful participants found traditional mourning rituals to be (BAQ Offline) and how helpful they found the use of MySpace as a mourning ritual to be (BAQ Helpfulness). For the purposes of comparison, scores for the BAQ Offline and BAQ Helpfulness scales were converted into averages. A paired samples t-test shows that participants found no difference between the helpfulness of MySpace (M = 43.20, SD = 2.65) and traditional mourning rituals (M = 35.11, SD = 1.91), $t(105) = -.067$, $p=.946$).

Although not originally hypothesized, it appears there were significant gender differences in terms of adjustment and use of the site (see Table 8). One-way ANOVAs show that men and women differed significantly in terms of BAQ Frequency, F (1, 104) = 12.68, $p<.05$, and BAQ Intensity, F (1, 104) = 10.70, $p<.05$. Women tended to report more frequent and intense use of the site than men. In terms of adjustment, Table 8 suggests that women tend to report more negative symptoms, but the only significant difference in HGRC factor scores was on HGRC Panic, F (1, 104) = 8.15, $p<.05$. Women tended to have higher HGRC Panic scores than men.

Table 8

Gender Differences

Measure	Males		Females	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
BAQ-R				
Frequency	2.0	0.86	3.07	1.58
Intensity	6.16	5.56	11.45	8.26
Offline	34.23	17.98	36.89	20.38
Helpfulness	44.35	24.19	44.13	28.21
Positive Outcomes	64.36	17.76	64.91	17.51
HGRC				
Despair	1.48	0.63	1.75	0.82
Panic	1.39	0.62	1.84	0.79
Anger	1.71	0.82	1.64	0.83
Detachment	1.48	0.68	1.64	0.90
Disorganization	1.81	0.83	1.71	0.80
Personal Growth	3.13	0.85	3.21	0.81

Although women used the site more frequently and intensely than men, the relation between frequency/intensity and adjustment remains not significant with the addition of gender as an independent variable.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This project set out to examine evidence for the use of social networking sites as an effective mourning ritual by studying the relation between use of MySpace and adjustment to bereavement. However, support for the hypotheses was mixed. Although the research seemed to suggest that multiple visits (Reid & Reid, 2001; Roberts, 2004; Weeks, 1994) and the opportunity to personalize the intensity and nature of one's experience (Castle & Philips, 2003; Gamino, Easterling, & Stirman, 2000; Gowensmith, 2000; Reid & Reid; Weeks, 1996) would be helpful, neither frequency nor intensity of use were associated with the objective measures of adjustment to bereavement (i.e., the HGRC factors) in this sample. Although the literature appears to suggest that frequent, intense use of social networking sites to express grief could cause individuals to ruminate on their loss, increase distress, and decrease one's ability to process and cope with events (Nolem-Hoeksema, 2001), this effect was not observed in this sample, perhaps due to the observed low level of online grief activities. All of these observations, when considered together, seem to suggest that using MySpace was not associated with any beneficial outcomes for the participants.

However, considering evidence in the current study differently suggests that benefits may exist. As predicted, intensity of use (BAQ Intensity) was associated with the more subjective measures of adjustment to bereavement, such as the ratings of online activities as helpful and attributions of positive outcomes to use of the site (BAQ Helpfulness and BAQ Positive Outcomes). This appears similar to results from Gowensmith (2000), who found that most participants who designed their own rituals

believed they were helpful and led to positive changes in their lives. However, it is also possible that individuals who were using MySpace frequently, in an intense way (and thus spending a great deal of time online), felt a need to justify their time expenditures when answering the questionnaire. Regardless of whether they actually benefited, participants may have unconsciously or consciously inflated their ratings of helpfulness and positive outcomes. The potential for intentional or unintentional dishonesty is an inherent weakness of using self-report measures.

In addition, the subjective measures of adjustment to bereavement, BAQ Helpfulness and BAQ Positive Outcomes, were associated with better scores on the Personal Growth factor of the HGRC. It should not be surprising that that these measures were intercorrelated. All of these measures focus on benefits and growth related to bereavement. As stated earlier, Personal Growth is unique among the factors of the HGRC because it measures gains achieved as a result of the bereavement experience, not just a return to prior levels of functioning (Hogan et al., 2001). Neimeyer et al. (2002) stress the importance of being able to make meaning out of one's loss, and propose that an inability to do this can lead to complicated grief, an intense, long-lasting grief reaction (Hogan, Worden, & Schmidt, 2005-6) that may be associated with traumatic loss, multiple losses, and disenfranchised grief (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005). Perhaps when taken together, Personal Growth and the subjective measures of adjustment function as a kind of barometer measuring how able participants were to view the silver lining in their losses (i.e., find meaning in the loss or see positive growth in one's self as a result of it). Alternatively, it is possible that the relation between perceived benefits and the Personal Growth factor of the HGRC could be viewed as evidence of an underlying overall

positive mindset, tendency to be optimistic, or a resiliency to setbacks, such as bereavement.

Perhaps surprisingly, participants' ratings of the helpfulness of their online activities was not significantly different from their ratings of the more traditional, "real life" rituals in which they had participated. Although the Internet is always available, whereas access to traditional rituals, like the funeral or visiting the cemetery, are time-limited or may involve a long trip, it appears that participants drew similar benefits from both online and offline rituals. Although Roberts (2004) found that even though most of the authors of web memorials in her study had a physical memorial they could visit, their web memorial was visited more often, perhaps real-life rituals have a sense of "specialness" or "sacred space" that online activities do not have. Although the "virtual world" of the Internet may be more familiar to this relatively young sample, it appears that for most, it did not replace the traditional rituals, but may have acted as an adjunct to more commonplace rituals like the funeral.

Attending the funeral was the fourth most-helpful offline activity in which participants engaged. This is similar to findings by other researchers (e.g., Bolton & Camp, 1987; Bosley & Cook, 1993; Gamino, Easterling, & Stirman, 2000; Weeks, 1996; Wolfelt, 1994). However, funerals and other rituals are most helpful when they include personal, meaningful elements and, if possible, are designed by or with input from mourners (Weeks). Perhaps the accessibility and personal nature of social networking sites led to them being rated as similar in terms of helpfulness to rituals such as the funeral.

Most participants indicated that they were not using the site on a daily or weekly basis. When they were using the site, the most frequent activities in which participants engaged were: looking at pictures, reading other content on the deceased person's page, and reading others' comments on the page. These are all relatively passive activities that do not require the individual to do anything other than merely look. These activities are relatively safe, in that they do not run the risk of subjecting the individual to possible embarrassment, criticism, or questions from friends and/or family, which may result from making obvious changes to one's profile or publicly writing about one's feelings about the death. Although some individuals may not need to do anything more than visit the page, for affirmation that their loved one still has a page or to read others' comments and know that they still care about the person, it is also likely that our culture, which discourages individuals from expressing sadness for "too long" after a death," influenced feelings of discomfort with outright expressions of grief in this public setting (Romanoff & Tenezio, 1998). In addition, given that most of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 20, developmental considerations also need to be made. Many of these individuals, being in late adolescence/early adulthood, would likely be concerned with what others think (Elkind, 1967) and would probably refrain from engaging in activities not perceived as approved by their peer group.

Of the many aspects of using the site, participants rated its ease of accessibility, anonymity, safety, and ability to display relevant content, such as photographs, as being most helpful. This also appears to be consistent with the developmental level of the majority of the participants (Elkind, 1967) and their likely preference for a safe venue where individuals can behave as they wish, without worrying what others think.

Participants also stated that using the site had helped them reevaluate priorities, explore attitudes about death, reevaluate relationships with others, and develop a new perspective on the deceased person's life. This appears to be consistent with results from other researchers whose participants attributed similar positive outcomes to the rituals in which they had engaged (Bosley & Cook, 1993; Castle & Phillips, 2003; Gowensmith, 2000).

Although not part of the original hypotheses, there were interesting gender differences in terms of frequency and intensity of use of the site. Women tended to use the site more often and became more involved in personalizing their use to suit their needs. This may stem from fundamental differences in how men and women tend to grieve. Doka and Martin (2000) differentiate between two patterns of grieving: an intuitive pattern, in which individuals tend to express grief through displays of emotion and through sharing experiences with others, and an instrumental pattern, where individuals express grief cognitively or through activity designed to solve a specific problem. Typically, women tend to grieve intuitively, and men tend to grieve instrumentally. Instrumental grievers are reluctant to talk about feelings, and probably would be less likely to do so in a public setting like the Internet. Female participants in this sample may have been more likely to find benefits because the modality (i.e., sharing feelings) matched their style of grieving, whereas men were less able to see how it could help them.

What role does the Internet play in facilitating social support? Although in this project, no hypotheses were developed regarding social support, there is certainly a potential for individuals to maintain old friendships and develop new connections through using MySpace in this way. Indeed, that appears to be one of the reasons for

which social networking sites were developed. Many researchers have tied Internet use to increased perceived social support and an enhanced sense of wellbeing or life satisfaction (Baker & Moore, 2008; Liu & Larose, 2008; Shaw & Gant, 2002; Tichon & Yellowless, 2003). In addition, both online and offline social support have been linked to experiencing stressful life events as less distressing (Leung, 2007). Sofka (1997) was an early proponent of the use of the Internet by the bereaved, positing that viewing others' grief narratives may decrease isolation and normalize the experience of bereavement. More recently, Vanderwerker and Prigerson (2004) linked use of technology such as cell phones, email, and Internet to increased social support, decreased incidence of certain psychiatric disorders, and improved quality of life.

However, there may be disadvantages to using the Internet as a major source of social support. Although Internet users tend to have larger social networks than non-users, the networks are populated with more friends than family members, with weaker ties to each (Hlebec et al., 2006). In addition, although some relationships that begin online turn into real offline connections, many do not. Online relationships are less likely to provide tangible assistance, or "instrumental support," such as help with meals, childcare, or transportation (Taylor, 2007). For example, an analysis of the content of messages posted to an online HIV/AIDS support group showed that instrumental support was the least common type of assistance offered (Mo & Coulson, 2008). Tichon and Shapiro (2003) found similar results in an online support group for children and adolescents. It is also possible that the Internet is less effective at providing emotional support because of its inability to provide nonverbal cues during conversations about painful issues (nodding, looking sympathetic, etc.) or physical touch and affection.

Because this research was of an exploratory nature, a non-experimental design was chosen that relied on a questionnaire for data collection. As stated earlier, participants were selected from a general college student population based on meeting the inclusion criteria of maintaining one's own MySpace profile as well as having experienced the death of a loved one or friend who also had a MySpace profile and/or memorial page dedicated to him or her. Participants were not chosen based on their being in actual distress related to the death, nor was there an actual intervention prescribing them to use the site in a certain way. It is possible that, if participants had been chosen based on grief distress, an improvement in adjustment scores would have been seen over time.

Participants in this sample indicated that they felt they were helped by using MySpace to cope with their grief, whereas objective measures of adjustment to bereavement indicated that they were not. Does it matter? Is the perception of help as good as the real thing? Despite the limitations of this study, there is some evidence, other than the ratings of helpfulness and positive outcomes, to suggest that participants found their use of social networking sites to be helpful in their grief. Many participants answered the open-ended questions to clarify how they felt use of the site had helped them. For example, one participant stated, "I feel that these kinds of memorial pages help others to cope better with their loved ones [*sic*] death. I feel that if you never got the chance to get to know them or regret it or if you have grown apart from them over the years, it is a good oppritunity [*sic*] to express their thoughts and feelings about the death of their loved one." Another person stated, "just being on ther [*sic*] page help me to cope with many things that where [*sic*] left unanswered!!!!" Overall, 43% of participants used

the open-ended question to make a positive comment about the use of the site. Twenty-five percent made either a neutral comment or no comment, and 32% made a negative comment. Of those who made positive comments, several participants indicated that they visited multiple times, on special days or when they were feeling distressed:

> "It helped me a lot at the beginning because I would often go to the site to read storys [*sic*] about my friend that others worte [*sic*], and my own storys [*sic*] about him, and look at pictures and stuff people posted. It still helps me now because i [*sic*] visit the site on his birthday, chirstmas [*sic*] the day of his death…I love that theres [*sic*] a myspace page that i can go to, to express my feelings."

> "It helps to know that I can always go there, its [*sic*] comfoting [*sic*] to know that he is not forgotten. Its [*sic*] nice to see and think about memories with him, especially during those times when I really miss him."

> "What helped me was that I have the chance to go on the deceased person's page when ever I want and just leave a few comments that express the way I felt towards that person!"

Others indicated that it helped them understand the finality of the death and begin to move on:

> "Myspace helped me relize [*sic*] that he was actually gone. In a sense it helped me cope with letting my own reality of the matter happen. I feel that myspace can gave my friend respect and somewhat, honored him."

> "It just helped me to know that my friend was once there, and that page was, to me, like a little piece of himself that he left behind. Having that there made me smile, because no matter what, I'll always be able to talk to him through that."

Several participants indicated that it helped connect them with new and old friends, thus gaining social support:

> "… I hadn't seen her in a long time and viewing her myspace made me feel reconnected with her. It also helped me reach old friends that I haven't seen or talked to in a long time."

> "In my relative's case, he committed susicide [*sic*] and always thought that no one cared about him. With his site still being up, it has showed me that soooo [*sic*] many more people care than he thought. It actually makes me feel better about the way people come together."

> "It helped me to gain a better understandiing [*sic*] that death is just another part of life. It helped me cope with the loss of *(redacted)* and feel less alone, seeing other people grieve as well."

From these and many other such comments, it appears that participants gained substantial benefits that could not have been as easily acquired had they not had access to MySpace. The personal, easily-accessible nature of the site meant that they had freedom to use it however felt most comfortable at the time. Many individuals indicated that they visited on multiple occasions, accessing several different types of content on the site.

Thirty-two percent of individuals made a negative comment about the site. The likelihood of making a negative comment appeared to be unrelated to time since the death, age, the closeness of the relationship with the deceased, frequency and intensity of use, or any of the HGRC factors. Some individuals pointed out negative consequences of using the site for example that it was making things worse by reminding them of the finality of the death or by forcing them to remember what they were missing:

> "Her MySpace made me think of the times when she was alive, and the things that we had done together. Her death was very sudden, so her page still made her look like she was alive. It made me feel even more worse about her death and how it had affected everyone."

> "It didnt [*sic*] help bring him back."

> "Looking at the pics and viewing the comments was just a constant reminder that he was never going to come back and made it harder to move on."

> "It was just a constant reminder that that person was really gone and i [*sic*] didnt [*sic*] get to see him before his death."

> "It brings back up the feeling that he is gone. You could go through your day and not think about what happened, especially right after it happene [*sic*], but then get online and see his myspace account and all of the memories get brought back up about what happened and how he's no longer here."

Others stated that it was not as meaningful as other activities in which they had engaged, or seemed to feel that the informal nature of the Internet was disrespectful to the deceased:

> "That a myspace page or memorial page is something i [*sic*] can look at but it does not really mean much to me cause i [*sic*] have my own memories that i [*sic*] shared with my loved one that no one else shared."

> "Myspace does nothing to help anyone get over anything. It's a cold virtual world that is nothing close to being real."

> "I think that people shouldn't dedicate pages to people or comment on the pages of people who have passed away. I believe that if that person meant anything to you then you should go to their burial site and show your grievances there, where it means something, rather than on a website that has no real connection."

> "I feel that instead of people taking time out of the day to visit where this person actually is, rather than whenever they have free time to go to his MySpace is insulting."

A few participants indicated that they had experienced negative or hurtful comments online.

> "Seeing people joke about it, there was a memorial joke page which disgusted me."

> "The driver of the car that my friend was killed in changed her profile around to appologize [*sic*] to *(redacted)*. I did not agree with what she did because it seemed like it was more about making everyone else forgive her for the accident rather than saying sorry to *(redacted)* about what she had done."

These comments seem to indicate that use of social networking sites is not indicated for everyone experiencing grief, and that those who do choose to use the sites should do so with care, and with knowledge of basic Internet safety.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This project was intended to be an exploration of the use of social networking Internet sites by bereaved individuals. As stated earlier, there is a great deal of evidence suggesting that rituals can help individuals move forward in their grief, lessen distressing and painful symptoms, and increase positive outcomes, such as being able to make sense of the loss. Therefore, it was hypothesized that, if use of these sites was another type of ritual, it would inherently have some type of value. Although use of these sites does appear to have some characteristics in common with more traditional rituals, as well as unique, helpful aspects, unfortunately, it remains unclear if these sites make a significant difference in one's adjustment to bereavement. Although, in this sample, frequency and intensity of use were unrelated to adjustment, there is other evidence to suggest that use is associated with positive outcomes, such as personal growth, and a subjective sense of helpfulness and positive outcomes. Moreover, it appeared that participants found their online activities to be no less helpful than traditional rituals in which they had engaged.

This evidence should not be dismissed out of hand. This small sample of relatively well-adjusted individuals may have already adjusted to their bereavement, for the most part. Most of them were not experiencing a recent loss, and many of them were grieving the loss of someone with whom they did not share a particularly close relationship. A sense of being helped and having experienced positive outcomes may be its own reward.

As a cautionary note, using the Internet in this way is not for everyone. There is a real potential for a person to become stuck in their grief by ruminating on the loss, unable

to move forward. Spending too much time on the Internet is probably never a good thing, even if the time online is devoted to something that is supposedly "good," such as learning more about bereavement. Becoming too heavily involved in the Internet may prevent bereaved individuals from maintaining social support and reinvesting in new relationships. What is considered "too much" probably depends on the individual and their unique needs, but spending so much time online that one is significantly neglecting other duties, responsibilities, and relationships should be a major warning sign.

Psychologists should be sensitive to how their clients, bereaved or otherwise, are using the Internet and the client's impression of its helpfulness or harmfulness. They should also ask questions about their reasons for using the site. Is it because it is easier than going to the cemetery, or is it because they are avoiding talking about it with friends or family because of embarrassment or guilty feelings? The answer would be important in determining whether the site is beneficial, or if it is actually holding them back from recovering from their grief. This may be a sign that the therapist should have the client start to talk about those feelings and later experiment with more adaptive strategies for expressing their grief. Psychologists could also help their clients by providing basic psychoeducation in Internet safety, such as to take care to avoid revealing personal information that could lead to them being exploited or harassed by others, such as addresses, phone numbers, financial information, or their real names.

The Internet is full of potential for psychological intervention, either through entirely web-based therapies, as an adjunct to traditional therapy (i.e., exchanging emails with patients between sessions), or other applications. Although it would be unlikely, or even impossible, for a client and therapist to visit a gravesite together, it may be possible

to do so either in session by visiting the deceased person's MySpace or Facebook page, reading comments, looking at pictures, and/or writing something on the page. This could be an interesting way for the client to reflect on the person's death in a safe space and for the therapist to gain a new perspective on the client's loss(es). As an intervention for bereavement, it may be best if social networking sites are combined with other techniques if indicated, such as group or family therapy, to ensure that the bereaved client is able to reconnect with friends and family, and ultimately, to move on from their loss.

The correlational nature of this research and high number of comparisons made in the statistical analysis may have led to an inflated error level, and thus one should be cautious about drawing conclusions from this study. Further research should rely on experimental methods to investigate the effect use of Internet sites on the grief process. It may also be interesting to consider closeness to the deceased as a mediating or moderating variable. It is suggested that participants be selected either from a college student or general population because of acute distress, and then should be assigned randomly to either a control group or an experimental group, with the experimental group being directed to participate in some kind of activity on social networking sites, such as MySpace or Facebook. It may be helpful for the participants to be given measures of adjustment to bereavement and perception of helpfulness at least twice (before and after the intervention). Mourning is one of the most difficult and painful tasks humans have to perform in a lifetime; any resources effective in the alleviation of some of the grief and pain are, in this author's opinion, worth the time spent to identify and define those resources.

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APPENDIX A

PRETEST

Banner #_____

Instructions: Please read each question carefully and answer by circling either yes or no.

1.	Are you eighteen years old or older?	YES	NO
2.	Do you have a MySpace profile?	YES	NO
3.	Have you experienced the death of someone close to you who either had a MySpace profile or has a a memorial profile dedicated to him/her?	YES	NO

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Social Networking Sites and Grief: An Investigation of Possible Benefits

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of using social networking sites, such as MySpace.com, to express grief related to a deceased loved one or friend. Participation in this study will require approximately 30-45 minutes of your time. If you are a student in general psychology at IUP and are a subject pool participant, you will receive participation credit for your time. First, you will complete a pre-test consisting of 4 questions. If you are then eligible for inclusion in the study, you will complete a questionnaire regarding your experiences and feelings related to the death of a loved one or friend. There are minimal risks known in this type of research. Some individuals may experience feelings of sadness or anxiety when thinking about the death of a loved one. However, you may also find that you will be better able to identify coping strategies in the future. The information gained from this study may help us to better understand how individuals use social networking sites to help cope with grief.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or IUP. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the Project Director or informing the person administering the test. If you are taking this questionnaire at home, you may simply close your Internet browser. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you have been directed to this site from MySpace.com, it is because you were randomly selected from a list of profiles listing their locality as "Indiana, PA." Please note that neither this site nor this study are in any way affiliated with MySpace.com.

If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the University, if you are a student. Your responses will be tied only to an ID number that will be assigned to each questionnaire received. Your responses will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please click the link on the screen in front of you. By clicking the link, you are attesting that you have read and understood the information on the form and consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. You may print out a copy of this statement for your records, if you wish.

For more information:

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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).

APPENDIX C

HOGAN GRIEF REACTION CHECKLIST

The following is a list of thoughts and feelings that many individuals may experience when someone they love dies. Thinking about the last 2 weeks, including today, please choose the number that best describes you, from 1, does not describe me at all, to 5 describes me well.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5
DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME AT ALL — DESCRIBES ME WELL

1. My hopes are shattered
2. I have learned to cope better with my life
3. I have little control over my sadness
4. I worry excessively
5. I frequently feel bitter
6. I feel like I am in shock
7. Sometimes my heart beats faster than it normally does for no reason
8. I am resentful
9. I am preoccupied with feeling worthless
10. I feel as though I am a better person
11. I believe I should have died and he or she should have lived
12. I have a better outlook on life
13. I often have headaches
14. I feel a heaviness in my heart
15. I feel very revengeful
16. I have burning in my stomach
17. I want to die to be with him or her
18. I frequently have muscle tension
19. I have more compassion for others
20. I forget things easily, e.g. names, telephone numbers, etc.
21. I feel shaky
22. I am confused about who I am
23. I have lost my confidence
24. I am stronger because of the grief I have experienced
25. I don't really believe I will ever be happy again
26. I have difficulty remembering things from the past
27. I frequently feel frightened
28. I feel unable to cope
29. I agonize over his or her death
30. I am a more forgiving person
31. I have panic attacks over nothing
32. I have difficulty concentrating
33. I feel like I am walking in my sleep
34. I have shortness of breath
35. I avoid tenderness
36. I am more tolerant of myself
37. I have hostile feelings
38. I am experiencing periods of dizziness
39. I have difficulty learning new things
40. I have difficulty accepting the permanence of the death
41. I am more tolerant of others
42. I blame others
43. I feel like I don't know myself
44. I am frequently fatigued
45. I have hope for the future

46. I have difficulty with abstract thinking
47. I feel hopeless
48. I want to harm others
49. I have difficulty remembering new information
50. I feel sick more often
51. I reached a turning point where I began to let go of some of my grief
52. I often have back pain
53. I am afraid that I will lose control
54. I feel detached from others
55. I frequently cry
56. I startle easily
57. Tasks seem insurmountable
58. I get angry often
59. I ache with loneliness
60. I am having more good days than bad
61. I care more deeply for others

APPENDIX D

BEREAVEMENT ACTIVITIES QUESTIONNAIRE, REVISED

BAQ-R Offline

When someone dies, individuals may participate in a number of activities to help them cope with the death. Please rate the following activities – not including those you may have done online - in terms of their helpfulness. If you did not participate in an activity, please check the box that says "did not do."

1----------2----------3----------4----------5		X
NOT	EXTREMELY	DID
HELPFUL	HELPFUL	NOT
AT ALL		DO

1. Attending the funeral
2. Attending a memorial service other than the funeral
3. Attending a grief support group
4. Participating in individual psychotherapy
5. Dedicating something in memory of the deceased person
6. Giving things to others in memory of the deceased person
7. Writing a letter or poem to the deceased person
8. Singing or playing music in honor of the deceased person
9. Creating something (a book, piece of art work, quilt, etc.) in honor of the deceased person
10. Visiting a place that was special to the deceased person
11. Doing things that the deceased enjoyed that might not otherwise by appealing
12. Lighting a candle in remembrance of the deceased
13. Visiting the place where my loved one died
14. Displaying photos of the deceased
15. Sharing stories about the deceased
16. Creating an altar or space in memory of the deceased person
17. Speaking to the deceased
18. Carrying or wearing something that is a reminder of the deceased person
19. Other (please describe)

BAQ-R Frequency/Intensity

Now, thinking about your online activities, please tell us about how many times you engaged in the following activities (several times a day, daily, several times a week, several times a month, once every 1 or 2 months, several times a year, never).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NEVER	SEVERAL TIMES A YEAR	ONCE EVERY 1-2 MONTHS	SEVERAL TIMES A MONTH	SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK	DAILY	SEVERAL TIMES A DAY

1. Visiting the MySpace page of the person who died
2. Leaving comments on the MySpace page of the person who died
3. Reading others' comments on the MySpace page of the person who died
4. Reading other content on the MySpace page of the person who died
5. Writing about the person on my own MySpace page or other website
6. Changing my profile, screen name, or other online content so that others would know that my special person had died
7. Listening to music on the MySpace page of the person who died
8. Looking at pictures on the MySpace page of the person who died
9. NONE OF THE ABOVE

BAQ-R Helpfulness

Thinking about the things you have done on MySpace, such as looking at the page of the person who died or reading others' comments, please rate the following aspects in terms of their helpfulness

1----------2----------3----------4----------5	X
NOT HELPFUL AT ALL	EXTREMELY HELPFUL	DID NOT DO

1. Religious/spiritual practice as part of your visit to the MySpace page of the person who died
2. Leaving comments on the MySpace page of the person who died
3. Reading comments left by others
4. Leaving pictures/graphic comments on the person's page that have special meaning
5. Connecting with others through the person's page
6. Visiting the page during a difficult period (holidays, birthdays, etc)
7. Being able to express my emotions freely
8. Viewing photos of the deceased person
9. Being able to share memories of the deceased with others on the page
10. Feeling supported by other visitors to the page
11. Feeling that I was doing something that expressed my continuing love for the deceased

12. Inviting special people to view the page
13. Feeling that I am doing something special (not part of everyday routine)
14. Feeling more personally empowered to accept the death of the deceased
15. Feeling the presence of the deceased
16. Knowing that I have the option to visit the page whenever I want
17. A sense of sacred space
18. Knowing that the visit can last as long as I want it to
19. Being in an emotionally safe environment
20. Being able to remain anonymous if I choose to do so
21. Having others recognize that I am grieving
22. Just knowing that my loved one still has a page
23. Other (please describe)

BAQ-R Positive Outcomes

My participation in activities on MySpace related to my loved one's death has helped me to:

1----------2----------3----------4----------5
NOT VERY
TRUE AT ALL TRUE

1. Accept the death of my loved one
2. Feel more personal power in my grief
3. Accept grief as an on-going process
4. Strengthen my faith/spirituality
5. Formulate a new relationship with my loved one
6. Develop a greater sense of confidence in my ability to deal with my grief
7. Explore feelings that were hidden or hard to get in touch with
8. Increase my overall physical activity level
9. Have less intense feelings about the death of my loved one
10. Feel a greater sense of connection to others
11. Develop a new awareness of who I am
12. Explore my attitudes toward life and death
13. Develop a greater sense of optimism
14. Reevaluate my relationships with others
15. Feel validated that I have gone through a major life transition
16. Reevaluate my priorities in life
17. Feel that I have more control over my life
18. Feel less isolated and more supported by others
19. Develop a new perspective on the deceased person's life
20. Feel a sense of peace
21. Incorporate death into my worldview as a part of life
22. Other (please describe)

APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING FORM

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the Social Networking Sites and Grief Study. The purpose of this study is to examine the use of MySpace as a mourning ritual. We hypothesize that:

a) frequency of participation, in other words the number of times a person visits the dead person's MySpace page, and intensity of participation, whether the person simply visited, left a comment, left several comments, or altered their account in different ways to reflect the death, are associated with grief adjustment, greater perceived helpfulness of participation, and increased number of positive outcomes

b) individuals who are adjusting to more recent deaths will have lower adjustment scores than those who have had more time since the death

c) time since the death will be associated with frequency of participation

d) participation in traditional rituals will be associated with adjustment to bereavement

e) there will be differences between individuals whose deceased friend or loved one had a MySpace profile, and those whose friend or loved one had a memorial page dedicated to him or her after his or her death

Finally, this study will investigate the differences, in terms of helpfulness, between traditional mourning rituals and the use of MySpace as a mourning ritual.

For some individuals, talking about the loss of a family member or friend might cause feelings of sadness or anxiety. If you feel that this questionnaire has been upsetting in any way, you may wish to utilize one of the following resources:

IUP Counseling Center (free for students) – Pratt Hall, Room 307; 724-357-2621
Center for Applied Psychology – 210 Uhler Hall; 724-357-6228
Community Guidance Center – 724-465-5576
The Open Door Crisis Hotline – 724-465-2605 (24 hours)

If you are interested in finding out more about this research, please contact the researchers:

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