Mourning 2.0 – Continuing Bonds between the Living and the Dead on Facebook

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the burgeoning phenomenon of Facebook memorial pages and how this research about dynamic, online social networking environments can contribute to the existing literature related to Klass et al's (1996) continuing bonds thesis. Contrary to Klass and Walter's (2001) findings that in contemporary Western culture, individuals lack the cultural framework in which to incorporate the paranormal co-presence of the deceased into their lives, the Facebook users in my sample chose to express publically their ongoing paranormal experiences with the deceased, regardless of a possible lack of cultural framework or performative script for doing so. My project demonstrates that, increasingly, individuals supplement traditional bereavement rituals, such as funerals, which often signaled the termination of bonds, with new, technologically-situated ritualized spaces (such as Facebook) for continuing bonds with the deceased. I argue that memorial pages constitute a new ritualized and public space for maintaining these continued bonds and that individuals exhibit several types of bonding interactions with the deceased. I conducted a content analysis on a purposively selected sample of 12 public Facebook "pages" where I coded 1,270 individual Wall postings. Analyses demonstrated that many individuals routinely used these Walls to continue their relationships with the deceased. This research highlights how individuals have transcended the limitations of time and physical space in relation to traditional bereavement behavior and rituals and how data found on public websites, such as Facebook, can be used to further theorize bereavement and to demonstrate continue bonds between the living and the dead.

MOURNING 2.0 – CONTINUING BONDS BETWEEN

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD ON FACEBOOK

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Introduction

After we die, the people we leave behind mourn our deaths – in diverse ways, degrees,

and for varying lengths of time. Those who remain are tasked with memorializing our deaths

and with ensuring that who we were in life is, hopefully, not forgotten. Our friends, family, and

countless others create meaning out of our deaths in the ways in which they choose to celebrate

our lives and to mourn our passing. Through memorialization, those who remain provide the

dead with a sense of immortality and find comfort in the memories of and in continuing bonds

with those they have lost.

The following thesis examines the burgeoning cultural phenomenon of public Facebook

memorial pages where site members create and comment on the deceased's online pages. In

contrast to Klass and Walter's (2001) findings that in contemporary Western culture, individuals

lack the cultural framework in which to incorporate the paranormal co-presence of the deceased

into their lives, the Facebook users in my sample chose to express publically their ongoing

experiences with the deceased, regardless of a possible lack of cultural framework or

performative script for doing so. This content analysis provides a characterization ("snapshot")

of these memorials, and my thesis addresses the following: Despite lacking a collective, Western cultural framework for incorporating the deceased's paranormal co-presence within peoples' lives, do interactions with a deceased individual's Facebook page constitute a new, public, ritualized form of "continuing bonds?"

The primary theoretical focus of my thesis is to provide document-derived data supporting the contention that continuing bonds between the living and the dead exist in cyberspace and have expanded beyond dedicated (and more private) memorial websites. My project demonstrates that, increasingly, individuals supplement traditional bereavement rituals (such as funerals) which often signaled the termination of bonds, with new, technologically-situated ritualized spaces (such as Facebook) for continuing bonds with the deceased. My research demonstrates that online memorial pages constitute a novel, ritualized, and public space for maintaining these continued bonds and that bereaved individuals exhibit bonding interactions with the deceased in a public, online environment.

This project provides a detailed, scholarship-informed qualitative content analysis of the burgeoning practice of memorial pages on Facebook and serves to promote discussion and further research into how the internet, in general, and other web sites, specifically, are being used by individuals as bereavement-coping mechanisms. I used qualitative content analysis methods (QDA - Altheide et al 2008) to examine how individuals have transformed Facebook into a technologically-mediated ritualized space where they can continue bonds with the deceased. In my analysis of 1,270 Wall postings (where I assigned an initial 46 codes), I abstracted one main thematic category, paranormal co-presence, and three thematic sub-categories that demonstrate various types of continuing bonds: messages and visitations from the deceased, guidance from beyond and reunion with the deceased, and conversations with the deceased. This project

demonstrates how individuals publically create and continue bonds with the dead on Facebook and how individuals have transformed Facebook into a ritualized bereavement space.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

Memorialization and Ritualization – How We Come Together to Grieve

We publically remember our dead in a variety of ways – most commonly with funerals, in cemeteries with gravestones and epitaphs, in literary works, and increasingly, in the online sphere. Smith (1996:192) noted that because our memories tend to fade quickly, without memorial products and practices, eventually everyone would be forgotten, and "Only through memorialization is the memory of anyone prolonged beyond the lifetimes of those who remember them based on experience." New meaning is added when a person dies, and this shared meaning is created by the survivors. Granting and creating immortality for the deceased reinforces the social and symbolic relationships that we have with the deceased and with others.

According to Howarth (2000) and Klass et al (1996), this sense of immortality created and maintained for the deceased functions to solidify a continuing, "eternal" bond which may reflect American's tendencies, in particular, to blur the boundaries between the living and the dead. Rituals, in general, organize and make meaning out of life and of death. According to van Gennep (1960), death ceremonies are rites of passage for both the deceased and for the living. Hertz (1960) and Gorer (1967) both noted that a main function of final ceremonies is to place a distinct time limit on bereavement, and the participation in a death ritual (such as a funeral) publically commits an individual to complete the mourning process.

Durkheim (1912) argued that individuals use religion to counter a sense of loss. The collective experience of religion in relation to death, which is often accompanied by collective rituals such as funerals and other religious services, culminates in what Durkheim (1912) referred to as collective effervescence. This collective effervescence occurs during mourning, when a group brings their pain to a gathering (e.g. a funeral) and when society "exerts a moral pressure on its members to put their feelings in harmony with the situation," where "the origin of mourning is the impression of diminishment that the group feels when it loses one of its members" (1912:297, 299). In expanding Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence to a more generalized paranormal realm, Hill (2011:185) noted that the "collective experience of producing paranormal beliefs helps people to see themselves and society in action."

In the 21st century, new sites are emerging for death rituals and memorialization, not only challenging pre-conceived notions of what is "appropriate" mourning behavior but also challenging Freud (1917), Hertz (1960), and Gorer's (1967) notions that mourning is limited to not only a specific place but also to a specific time period. With the advent of inexpensive video technology, personal computers, and the internet, individuals have found a new sphere in which to create and perform death rituals, to memorialize, and to continue bonds with the dearly departed. Traditionally, the dead were sequestered to the public (yet private) graveyard and physically bound by their interments within the earth, whereas now, we can visit them with a simple click of a mouse.

Continuing Bonds

Although the continuation of bonds with the deceased had been researched and theorized by others (Bowlby 1980, Rosenblat 1983), Klass et al (1996) first introduced the term into the

bereavement literature in *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief.* According to Klass (2006:844), the edited work served as a response to the general 20th century notion stemming from Freud (1913, 1917) that continuing bonds were an indicator of pathology in grief: "We wanted to show that interacting with the dead could be normal rather than pathological." Freud (1917, 1913:96) argued that individuals need to relinquish the bonds with a loved one after that person's death: "Mourning has a very distinct psychic task to perform, namely to detach the memories and expectations of the survivors from the dead." Therefore, Freud viewed the *discontinuation* of bonds as an essential task of mourning. In contrast to Freud, Klass' primary thesis is that "the resolution of grief involves continuing bonds that survivors maintain with the deceased… these continuing bonds can be a healthy part of the survivor's ongoing life" (1996:22).

Klass (2006, 1996:295) asserted that he never regarded continuing bonds as simply an existing or non-existing phenomenon: "If we talk only about the presence or absence of the phenomenon, then we may miss the subtleties in the way that the survivor integrates the bond or how the bond changes with time." However, as Klass (2006) noted later, his work does not claim that continuing bonds support better bereavement adjustment, but rather, as was suggested in his primary work: "As we develop a model of grief that includes continuing interactions with the dead, we need to be open to both the positive and negative consequences of this activity" (1996:72). Additionally, Klass and Goss (1999:561) argued that continuing bonds serve a private, rather than a public, function, where "the bond with the dead is relegated to the private sphere of the family or a community of friends that is separated in modernity from the sphere of public discourse." My thesis explores how individuals in the 21st century have transferred their continued bonds with the deceased from the private to the public sphere of Facebook memorial

pages. My research also furthers Klass et al's (1996) theoretical stance that the continuation of bonds exists and that individuals continue to modify its practice despite research that questions the validity of continuing said bonds.

Researchers have extensively applied Klass' continuing bonds thesis to a variety of contexts regarding bereaved individuals: spouses (Field and Friedrichs 2004, Field et al 2003), adult children (Tyson-Rawson 1996), siblings (Davies 1999, Worden et al 1999), pet owners (Field et al 2009), and parents (Foster et al 2011, Barrera et al 2009, Doran and Hansen 2006, Howarth 2000, Klass 1993 & 1997, Ronen et al 2009). Field et al (2003) developed the Continuing Bonds Scale which primarily focuses on comforting effects and purposeful reminders. Researchers have also applied the continuing bonds thesis to populations and bereavement activities outside of the United States: Francis et al (2001) examined public cemeteries in England as evidence of continuing bonds, Valentine (2008) analyzed participant narratives to examine how continuing bonds affect British individuals in their daily lives, and Lalande and Bonanno (2006) conducted a cross-cultural study between participants in both the United States and China.

Researchers have broadly applied the continuing bonds thesis. According to Klass (2006:857), "The question of how humans both hold on and let go of those who have died is a worthwhile, and a grand problem of science. To a great extent, it still lies before us." "…even in the individualistic and secular culture that characterizes much of the modern West" (Klass and Walter 2001:444). The continuing bonds thesis is flexible in its application to various populations and activities, and my master's thesis expands its application to cyberspace and social media. The practice of continuing bonds has moved beyond the traditional private sphere and into more public realms, such as cyberspace and social networking sites, like Facebook,

which shares both collective and individualistic characteristics and which can easily serve as a wholly secular space. A plethora of online spaces, such as Facebook, now exist where the continuation of bonds could extend infinitely in time and where the bonds are not necessarily bound by traditional physical limitations for their creation and practice (e.g. cemeteries, clothes, bedrooms, etc.).

Paranormal Co-presence

With death and its resulting bereavement comes a wide array of individual experiences – some ordinary and some extraordinary including that of "sensing" the co-presence of the deceased. In their study of the predictability of widows' co-presence experiences, Simon-Buller et al (1988-1989) noted that the sensing of the co-presence of the deceased by an individual is often pathologized as aberrant behavior by other individuals in our society that traditionally categorize such experiences as mystical. Consequently, many individuals are highly reluctant to discuss their experiences, even though scholars consider experiencing a co-presence to be a normal reaction to grief (Parkes 1972).

In relation to the co-presence experience in Western societies, the phenomenon has been viewed paranormally (Berger 1995, Simon-Buller et al 1988-1989, as cited in Datson and Marwit 1997), rationally (Stroebe et al 1993, as cited in Datson and Marwit 1997), religiously (Lindstrom 1995, Moody 1993, as cited in Datson and Marwit 1997), or psychopathologically (Berger 1995, Kalish and Reynolds 1973, Simon-Buller et al 1988-1989, as cited in Datson and Marwit 1997). In their study of personality constructs related to the reported perception of a co-presence, Datson and Marwit (1997) concluded that there were no significant differences found between non-perceivers and perceivers in relation to age, religious affiliation, educational attainment, gender, or income level.

Similar to Simon-Buller et al's (1988-1989) findings, Klass and Walter (2001) argued

that sensing the presence of the dead is not hallucinatory or pathological, because a significant

enough portion of individuals experience it, although they may not readily and openly discuss it.

According to Klass and Walter (2001), people are reluctant to discuss said experiences with

others, because in contemporary Western culture, individuals lack the cultural framework in

which to incorporate the paranormal co-presence of the deceased into their lives, unlike in other

cultures where the spirit world is embraced and incorporated. Rees' (1971) early research into

the phenomenon investigated widows and widowers who sensed their deceased spouses, and

Rees found that many of these co-presence experiences occurred while the participants were

awake. Additionally, Rees (1971) concluded that these experiences were unrelated to social

class, gender, nationality, or level of social isolation. Three quarters of Rees' (1971) sample of

widows and widowers kept their experiences private.   Several additional studies have replicated

Rees' (1971) findings in a variety of settings (Glick et al 1974, Kalish and Reynolds 1974,

Greeley 1975, Rosenblatt 1983, Olson et al 1985, Rogo 1986, Haroldsson 1988, and Schuchter

and Zisook 1993).

After-Death Communication

Related to paranormal co-presence, after-death communication is also experienced by

many bereaved individuals. Based on the work of Guggenheim and Guggenheim (1996),

Kwilecki (2011:241) defined after-death communication (ADC) as "spontaneous

communications from the dead [which] introduce the possibility of constant, ongoing contact

outside of ritual settings," and "…believers may experience continuing bonds through faulty

electrical equipment, passing cars, stray coins, and so on…." The bereaved may have a variety of

ADC experiences, including experiencing a presence, dreams, odors, voices, and "meaningfully

timed appearances of animals, rainbows, and other symbolic natural phenomenon" (Kwilecki 2011:220). Since the 1960s, several researchers have investigated ADC, including Ress (1971) and Yamamoto et al (1969) whose research found ADCs to be common and helpful experiences for the bereaved. Klass (1993, 1996), Silverman & Klass (1996), and Botkin and Hogan's (2005) research suggested that ADCs might contribute to continuing bonds with the deceased. The works of Guggenheim and Guggenheim (1996), Devers (1997), Botkin and Hogan (2005), and LaGrand (2006) concluded that the bereaved's experience of ADC is useful in the therapeutic setting and is primarily a beneficial experience.

Often happening in tandem with the identifiable sensing of a paranormal co-presence, after-life conversations with the deceased also continue, although little research has been dedicated to the extent of the practice. In addition to the continuing bonds literature, my research also addresses this gap related to paranormal co-presence and ADC. Some notable exceptions include Shuchter and Zisook's (1993) research into widows and widowers who regularly spoke with their deceased spouses, and Silverman and Nickman's (1996) and Francis et al's (1997) studies which found that individuals often visit cemeteries and their loved-ones gravesites in order to continue their bonds via conversations with the dead.

Cybermemorials on the Net and Facebook - Social Networking between the Living and the Dead

There is a growing trend for the bereaved to create memorial pages on popular social networking sites such as Facebook.com. Unlike cemeteries, which are the predominant physical memorialization space for the dead, Kastenbaum (2007:421) noted that cybermemorials provide a "nearly dimensionless form of memorialization [and it] occupies no fixed space. It is everywhere and nowhere." Because the cybermemorial phenomenon is so new, there is little

social science research on its usage and function. De Vries and Rutherford (2004), Roberts and Vidal (1999-2000), Roberts (2004), Musambira et al. (2006), and Williams and Merten (2009) are notable exceptions, but none examined social networking sites. Because the majority of social science research regarding web memorialization was conducted prior to the meteoric rise in popularity of social networking sites, there is ample opportunity to expand Williams and Merton's (2009) previous research beyond cybermemorial-only dedicated sites. Aside from Williams and Merten's (2009) article, anecdotal accounts which have appeared in media publications in print and online within the last decade are the primary source of data regarding this new type of memorialization on social networking sites, especially Facebook, and how its users create meaning from it.

Roberts (2004:43) contended, "Web memorialization provides unique, supplemental postdeath rituals for the bereaved. Web memorials, unlike most postdeath rituals, can be created at one's own pace… and can be created by friends and others who were not included in standard mourning rituals." Robert's (2004) study results indicated that nearly 40% of all cybermemorials examined (dedicated memorial sites, not social networking sites) contained direct messages to the dead – indicating that evidence exists for the need of the bereaved to continue communication with the deceased even if it occurs within a relatively public setting. Roberts (2004) concluded that those who create cybermemorials exhibit bonds between the living and the dead that have continued for decades.

On Facebook, a member can create a group or page that can be dedicated to almost any topic, and as a result, site members have created dedicated memorial pages to the deceased, in addition to the "live" deceased member's profiles.   When the deceased's profile remains "live," friends can continue to post messages on the decedent's Wall and often address the deceased as

though they are still alive. The majority of users on social networking sites are relatively young (under 40), and in a country such as the United States where individuals rarely discuss death or the performative scripts and behavioral expectations for people when someone has died, cybermemorial pages on social networking sites such as Facebook appear to have emerged as a constructive way for the younger generation to both confront and make meaning out of someone's death, even if they have never met the deceased.   Issues related to deceased members' profiles are so pervasive that Facebook now has official policies related to them (see Appendix 1).

Data and Methods

Data Analysis

I used computer-driven data content analysis as the primary analysis method to examine Facebook memorial pages. As an unobtrusive method, computer-driven data content analysis examines online messages that are "placed freely by people who know that it can be looked at and used by anyone who wishes to" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006:308). More specifically, I used qualitative document analysis (QDA) to guide my content analysis of 1,270 Wall postings on Facebook memorial pages.

QDA is an integrated, emergent content analysis method that involves exploration, immersion, contextual understanding, and emergent insights into social activities, meanings, and relationships (Altheide 1987, 1996 as cited in Altheide et al 2008). According to Altheide et al (2008), documents are more reliable than observations, and relevant documents related to social phenomenon, such as Facebook memorial pages, are appropriately studied *in situ* and should be studied ethnographically, even if the field is cyberspace. Accordingly, web documents and their

resulting computer-driven data can have an ethnographic perspective, viewing symbolic communication in places other than physical spaces, including cyberspace (Altheide et al 2008).

QDA entails document sampling, protocol development for a more systematic analysis, and comparisons to clarify frames, discourse, and themes (Altheide et al 2008). Because one of the main emphases of QDA is to "discover and demonstrate the nature and importance of thematic meanings in public discourse," the final research product can be used by others and "… is also an emergent creative act, clarifying some questions while adding material for others to investigate" (Altheide et al 2008:149).   This is a central goal of my project, and my ultimate aim is that my thesis answers questions related to *how* individuals use Facebook memorial pages in their continuation of bonds with the deceased and that other questions will arise that will inform my future dissertation which will concentrate on *why* individuals participate in this burgeoning phenomenon.

Data Collection Procedures
Site Selection: Facebook.com

A social networking site, unlike a dedicated cybermemorial site, is a web-based service that permits individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles within a bounded system, to amass a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and permits individuals to view and navigate their connections list and those that others make within the system (Boyd and Ellison 2008). Facebook.com, created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, is the world's most widely used public social networking site, with over 712 million worldwide members as of September 2011 (Inside Facebook Gold 2011). Facebook is comprised of a member's Home page, which includes a News Feed (personalized members' friends' updates) and a Profile (displays member information, such as interests, education, employment, and contact information) (Facebook

2011a). Facebook also includes core applications including uploading of photos and videos and the creation of events, groups, and pages (Facebook 2011c). Individuals can also communicate with one another via Chat, Wall posts, Pokes, personal email messages, and Status Updates (Facebook 2011a).

Sample Selection Procedures and Data Description

I was purposive in my sample selection of an initial 12 pages. A "page" is defined not in the traditional one paper page only sense. Rather, I define a "page" on Facebook as the memorial page in its entirety which can constitute tens to hundreds of actual online screen pages worth of writing and content. I located the majority of Facebook pages of deceased members via a text search for "RIP" (rest in peace) in the Facebook search box. I did not "like" any pages, since it was unnecessary to do so in order to read the Wall postings. I also chose one Facebook member profile of which I am already a "friend."

Once I found a page that I might select for analysis, I conducted a Google search for the decedents' names to gather additional information that was often not located on the Facebook page (e.g. cause/manner of death, age, hometown, place of death, etc.). I rejected any deceased individual who had received nationwide media coverage (e.g. "Dateline NBC" or something similar), media coverage related specifically to their Facebook memorials, or who were worldwide or local celebrities, as this project did not evaluate the potential effects of media or celebrity. I perused hundreds of initial search results, as the Facebook search functionability is severely limited (and non-replicable), and many pages with "RIP" as a search parameter yielded *all* names and words that included "RIP" and random, unrelated pages.

My final sample includes Facebook pages for 12 individuals, seven female and five male deceased individuals, located in the United States whose pages are designated as public (see Appendix 2). All individuals in my sample are 35 years of age or younger, which roughly corresponds to the average age demographic of worldwide Facebook users. I purposively selected the final 12 pages by gender and perceived race/ethnicity of the deceased, so as to create a sample that had roughly representative numbers within the sample for male/female and White, African American, and Hispanic individuals. Some pages have thousands of "likes" and postings while others have relatively few, and some pages are relatively new (created only a few weeks or months prior to my data collection), while others are over a year old. Table 1 includes demographics related to the twelve Facebook memorial pages:

Table 1: Demographics of Facebook Memorial Pages (*n=12*)[1]

Name	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Manner/Cause of Death	Date of Death
Caitlin Buemi	16	Female	Caucasian	Automobile accident	3/7/2010
Charles Barber	27	Male	Caucasian	Unknown[2]	6/3/2011
Janece Murrell	18	Female	African American	Possible homicide via gunshot	4/25/2011
Jason Giessinger	30	Male	Caucasian	Unknown	5/16/2011
Nicole Ramsden	12	Female	Caucasian	Leukemia	2/22/2010
Nyrianca Kelley	17	Female	African American	Unknown	12/30/2010(?)
Rachel Daggett	18	Female	Caucasian	Complications from drug use	12/9/2008
Richard "Thesis" Sanchez	16	Male	Hispanic	Possible homicide or accidental death	8/25/2010
Richard Carlston III	19	Male	Caucasian	Automobile accident	7/21/2010
Stephen W. Payne	35	Male	Caucasian	Suicide by hanging	10/7/2010
Tifani Cutty	25	Female	Caucasian	Unknown	3/31/2011
Violeta Dremova	16(?)	Female	Caucasian	Suicide	12/10/2010

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1 Some of the following demographic information related to the deceased was readily available on the Facebook pages, but in cases where it was not, a simple Google search that generally led to a local news report of the death provided the missing information.

2 Deaths listed as "unknown" often signified suicide, determined from somewhat thinly-veiled postings (e.g. 27 year old White male's Wall: "How could you do this to me?").

The following three sections are related to the initial mapping of characteristics related to the memorial pages' landscape.

Characteristics of Sampled Memorial Pages

In my sample of twelve Facebook memorial pages, seven pages were dedicated to deceased females and five to deceased males. Because I purposively sampled Facebook pages to attain a roughly-equivalent gender sampling within my final sample, I cannot make any conclusions or generalizations related to whether other Facebook memorial pages are dedicated more to one gender than the other. In my sample, friends and family members created pages for Facebook members under the age of 35, although there were many initial "RIP" searches that yielded pages created for older users and non-users, such as members' grandparents. However, because I wanted to create a purposive sample that roughly correlated to the average age demographic of Facebook users, I do not have any data related to pages created for any individuals outside of my chosen age demographic (under 35) and cannot generalize to other user populations.

Characteristics of Memorial Pages' Writers

Of the 1,270 Wall postings that I coded, a total of 579 distinct individuals wrote on the deceased's Walls. Of the 579 writers, 436 were female, 130 were male, and 13 were indeterminable. As in the case of determining gender for the decedents, I also determined the writers' genders based on their first names and profile pictures. In the 13 cases where gender

could not be determined based on these factors, the name of the writer and profile pictures were wholly ambiguous (e.g. RIP RAD and RIP CMB, the administrators of the pages).

Judging solely from the Wall posters' profile pictures attached to their comments, the age of the majority of writers appears to be similar to the dominant Facebook user demographic of 18-25 years old. Since many of the posters were friends with the deceased, their ages seem to roughly correspond to one another – for example, for the deceased school-aged individuals in my sample, many of the posts refer to missing the deceased in class or in other school-related activities, which suggests that these posters are of roughly the same age (12-19, depending upon the deceased's ages). Gathering definite data as to the ages of the writers was not feasible due to project time constraints, to the sheer number of distinctive posters, and to member page restrictions (e.g. writers' profile pages have privacy restrictions).

Most of the memorial pages were created by friends of the deceased, although a few appeared to be created by family members. It was not possible to definitively determine if friends or family members created the pages, as the administrators' profile names were ambiguous (e.g. RIP RAD). However, some of the Wall postings from said administrators, such as RIP CMB, often yielded clues to their relationships (e.g. "Goodnight, son."). Additionally, I attributed 29 of the 1,270 Wall postings to complete strangers, who had possibly seen the memorial page on a News Feed or another member's profile page and decided to post their condolences without knowing the deceased:

> *I don't know you Janece but ur story made it all the way 2 Cali and I felt bad.*
> - Wall posting for an 18 year old African American female, possible homicide victim
> *Even Though I dnt Know You Imma Give my Respect…R.I.P*
> - Wall posting for a 16 year old Hispanic male, possible homicide victim

I didn't' know him, but I wish how many people he would impact with the decision he made. I hope that more people will get help before it gets to this point.

- Wall posting for a 35 year old White male, suicide

Characteristics of Memorial Pages' Content

Individuals who chose to post on the twelve Facebook memorial pages had many different approaches to doing so, and a plethora of codes emerged from their writings. In my analysis of 1,270 Wall postings, I identified 46 initial codes. Some examples of the 46 codes include: blaming someone for and/or questioning the death, references to religion (e.g. heaven, angels, God), marking passage of time since death (e.g. "Happy birthday!" and "It's been 3 months now…"), expressions of love, loss, sadness, and missing, and information related to funeral arrangements and donations. Because many postings were condolences-based and did not reflect any direct relation to demonstrating a continuing bond, I did not select those postings for the final analysis.

The style and tone in which individuals wrote also varied greatly – ranging from formal to highly informal:

Brother, tomorrow is going to be the hardest day of my life. I don't want it to come, but I know I have to. I'm so sad that this happened. I love you.

- Wall posting for a 27 year old White male written by his adult brother

Lovelovelove youuu! Miss youu, and your always in my heart and on my mind<3333.

- Wall posting for an 18 year old White female written by an adolescent White female

rip baby boy we miss u as fuk fuk the mutherfukers tat killed u even tho i didnt noe u tat much nd u hanged with the cuzin we love nd miss u u were like a bro for me we miss u niggah ♥ my heart breakes when i see u :/

- Wall posting for a 16 year old Hispanic male written by an adolescent Hispanic female

Many Wall postings address the deceased in the present tense, further confirming the generally non-explicit notion that posters believe a paranormal co-presence exists. Additionally, the use of non-standard, informal language and slang suggests a lack of general sense (or cultural capital) related to "appropriate" and expected public mourning behavior and may be indicative of how behavior and correspondence related to death (e.g. formal, traditional condolence postings) have become less ritualized and scripted.

Coding

The final twelve public Facebook pages that I selected for my analysis contained 1,270 Wall postings, and demographic details related to the twelve pages are available in Table 1. I used NVivo 7 (QSR 2007) to organize, code, analyze, and manage all data. The Wall postings ranged in size from one word (or symbol, e.g. <3 or ☹) to multiple lines of text. I coded Wall postings over several readings which occurred over a roughly six month period. I also coded the number of distinct Wall posters and their genders which resulted in a final tally of 579 individual posters (13 unknown, 130 males, and 436 females). Initially, I identified 46 codes related to the content of Wall postings, and Wall postings analyzed under these initial codes translated into almost a thousand printed pages of data. I coded all of the text in each posting, and I assigned several different codes within the whole text of each posting. For example, a Wall posting from an individual might contain six lines of text with each line containing a different code (or multiple codes) which I assigned to the initial, emergent codes.

From the 46 emergent codes, I abstracted several initial themes that are relevant in demonstrating that individuals use these Facebook pages to continue their bonds with deceased loved ones. From the initial codes, my theoretical focus on continuing bonds emerged from combining several categories, "guidance from beyond and reunion with the deceased" (often

including references to religion specifically – e.g. heaven and God), "messages and visitations from the deceased," and "conversations with the deceased," which I then combined under a central thematic heading of "paranormal co-presence." There were 267 Wall postings coded under "guidance and reunion," 26 for "messages and visitations," and 340 for "conversations," with the total of 633 Wall postings under the central thematic heading of "paranormal co-presence." I abstracted the aforementioned themes based on their overall frequency and relatedness to Klass et al's (1996) continuing bonds thesis and to one another.

Findings - Continuing Bonds between the Living and the Dead on Facebook

Thematic Categories of Wall Postings - Paranormal Co-presence of the Deceased

One over-arching theme that emerged throughout all twelve Facebook memorial pages and was present on many of the Wall postings is that of a paranormal co-presence of the deceased felt by bereaved individuals in their daily lives. In my sample, many individuals who posted on Facebook memorial page Walls appear to share some belief in life beyond death and are aware of their loved one's paranormal co-presence, albeit in varying degrees. There are three primary thematic sub-categories represented in my sample that illustrate individuals' belief in the paranormal co-presence of their deceased friends and family members. The following categories demonstrate how these Facebook members utilize this belief to continue their bonds online in a public venue after the death of their loved ones and before and after the culmination of traditional, private bond-termination rituals (such as funerals).

Messages and Visitations from the Deceased

Twenty-six Wall postings specifically exemplified individuals' after-death communication (ADC) experiences with the deceased. These Wall postings directly referenced

messages or visitations from the deceased, and these experiences appear to be overwhelmingly positive in nature for the recipients. The following excerpts best exemplify this thematic sub-category, and the excerpts presented are representative of patterns found across the Wall postings.

Several ADC experiences focused on natural phenomenon that was interpreted as a message sent directly from the deceased.   For instance, an adult female posted on the Wall of her 27 year old deceased male friend, where she recounted her experience with a butterfly and interpreted it as something that her deceased friend would do writing, "*P.S. I know that you sent that butterfly to attack my dress. It was totally you!! It worked. It totally made me laugh.*" This interaction suggests that the woman believed that her deceased friend was paranormally contacting her from beyond via her interaction with the natural world, the butterfly - symbolizing both beauty and life. Her indication that this natural interaction caused her to not only think of her friend but to believe that he prompted the butterfly to "attack" her can be interpreted that she believes in some type of life beyond death – one where the deceased can control natural phenomenon, can directly message living people, and can directly impact their daily lives. That the natural interaction with the butterfly and the paranormal interaction with her friend made her laugh suggests that this experience was positive and reassuring to her and indicates a continuing bond extending beyond the mortal plane of existence.

In another example of natural phenomenon being interpreted as interaction with the deceased from beyond, an adolescent female inferred the natural weather phenomenon of snow in winter as a message from her deceased 12 year old female cousin writing, "*i know its not true haha but i just wanted to say thanks for the snow!!*" This young female appears to be somewhat skeptical ("*… not true haha*") but generally believes (or at least, wants to believe) that her

deceased cousin sent her a message (or a gift) via the snow – most likely something that the young girl had wished for, although this is not explicitly stated. The enthusiasm expressed in the posting suggests that the snow itself and interpreting the snow as being sent from somewhere beyond directly from her deceased cousin were a pleasant amalgam of natural and paranormal experiences.

Another young-adult female recounted her indirect experience, interpreting a natural phenomenon as a message from the deceased, writing on her 18 year old deceased female's Wall, "*<3 your mama told me you made a pretty rainbow for her a week after you passed.*" This posting is particularly relevant in exemplifying the belief in a paranormal co-presence of the deceased and the ability of the deceased to control what would otherwise be interpreted as a natural phenomenon – the rainbow. Although the mother of the deceased did not directly post anything related to this experience on her daughter's Wall, the fact that someone else (the poster), who had spoken to the mother and who had understood the importance and impact of the paranormal experience, did post is significant. It not only demonstrates that the young female writer believes in this ability of the deceased to make and send "a pretty rainbow" directly to those with whom she wishes to communicate but also that the deceased's grieving mother believes the same. Although the experience of the pretty rainbow was second-hand for the writer, her willingness to publically post it suggests that the experience was overwhelmingly positive for both the deceased's mother and for herself and that she felt comfortable enough within the page and with fellow posters to do so.

Another example of a Wall poster interpreting an everyday occurrence as a sign from his deceased 27 year old brother relates to a seemingly random song occurring on the radio at precisely the right time to impact him: "*Like today, I was dealing with a situation and I was in*

the middle of making a choice. Lo and behold a song came on the radio from when we lived in Memphis on Caravel. I haven't heard that song in so long, but I know it was him helping me out." Although he is not speaking directly to his deceased brother, as in the previous examples where the writers are directly engaging the deceased and her paranormal activities directed toward them, the sentiment is the same: The brother believes that his deceased brother is not only capable of but did directly interact with him via the selection and transmission of a song on the radio that held some kind of significance to them both. His posting indicates that when he needed guidance, his brother was able to transcend the limitations of death in order to come to his brother's immediate aid. In posting this experience on his deceased brother's Wall, the writer is publically stating his belief that the deceased can not only communicate with those who remain but that the deceased are charged with providing guidance and aid to us as well – experiences which both continue and reinforce the bonds previously held in life between the siblings. The willingness to share this experience so publically with others also suggests that the experience was a positive one that can serve to reinforce others' beliefs related to paranormal co-presence.

Other writers experienced visitations of the deceased. These visitations occurred during their dreams or during their waking hours. One Wall poster recounted a directly interactive experience with the deceased in her dream writing, "*You were in my dreams last night. It was so good to see that pretty smile and talk to you. We had so so much to talk about. Thanks for the visit, love you and miss you so much!"* This young adult female was also posting directly to her deceased 16 year old female friend. Her appreciative sentiments toward the deceased for visiting her indicate that she viewed this experience as positive and reassuring. By publically posting about her direct paranormal experience with the deceased, she is reinforcing the belief that the

deceased are able to interact with the living and that the possibility of continuing one's bonds

with them is not only possible but assured, even if said interaction is restricted to the dream state.

While several posters expressed experiences related to natural phenomenon and dream

visitations, others described their direct experiences related to paranormal co-presence which

occurred during their waking hours. One adult female recounted her direct experiences with not

only her 30 year old male deceased friend (on whose Wall she was posting) but also with other

deceased relatives during a fund-raising walk writing, "*At the NAMI walk yesterday I felt Jason*

walking with me! I felt his spirit with me encouraging me to keep walking. My daughter Rosanna

(R.I.P.) and my Dad (R.I.P.) were with me too. I had the strength to keep going! I am so grateful

for my Guardian Angels looking out for me!" There are several salient themes represented in

this posting. First, the woman is publically expressing her belief that this particular friend, her

Dad, and her daughter, all deceased, are capable of visiting and interacting with the living –

reinforcing the notion of paranormal co-presence. Second, her post heavily implies that the

support she "felt" from the deceased individuals provided her with the encouragement and

strength she required for completing the task at hand. Her use of the term "felt" also implies the

direct experience of paranormal co-presence, as in she literally "felt" the deceased loved ones

there with her. Her reference to "Guardian Angels" also indicates her religious belief(s) and the

expectation that there are such paranormal beings that aid, guide, and "watch over" the living,

when necessary or called to do so. Her newly deceased friend was "there," as were her Dad and

her daughter, who presumably, had died some time ago. Her experience of the other deceased

family members being "there" with her is also suggestive of long-standing continuing bonds with

them.

Another pertinent example is related to the direct experience of paranormal co-presence and to the expectation that said interactions would not simple be a singular, isolated experience. A young adult female asked the following of her deceased 18 year old female friend writing, "*Leave me hints to know when you are with me. i know you were with us the other night in pauls car. i could feel it.* ☺" Not only is this woman recounting her experience of her friend being with her and others in another friend's car, but it also demonstrates the desire and expectation that this paranormal co-presence that she can "feel" will continue, although she is unsure as to how she will be notified that the deceased is "with" her. Clearly, this writer believes that her deceased friend can be "with" her and others but also that continuing the bond with her friend is not only possible but likely. Her use of the smiley face emoticon indicates that she is looking forward to continuing their bond, especially if she directly "feels" the paranormal co-presence of her friend. Thus, this writer's experience with paranormal co-presence suggests that it was a positive one.

Guidance from Beyond and Reunion with the Deceased

Writing on and reading the posts of others on the deceased's Wall is a public, group experience. Many Wall posters chose to include references to religion, and this suggests that their public declaration of their particular religious beliefs (e.g. existence of an afterlife) serves to strengthen their group bond during their respective bereavement periods via a Durkheimian experience of collective effervescence. There were two hundred sixty-seven Wall postings that directly referenced the deceased providing guidance from beyond, survivors requesting such guidance, the possibility (inevitability) of the bereaved being reunited with the deceased in the hereafter, and other religious sentiments. Many of the Wall postings specifically referenced religion, and in most cases, Christian symbols or tenets related to heaven, angels, and/or God.

The following excerpts best exemplify this thematic sub-category, and the excerpts presented are representative of patterns found across the Wall postings.

There were 40 references to requests for the deceased to watch over individuals (or groups) from an afterlife (most often, heaven specifically) or declarations that the bereaved believe that the deceased is currently watching over those who remain. For example, an adolescent female teammate of a deceased 16 year old female friend expressed her desire for the friend to "watch over" their team writing, "*Watch over us next season. We can do anything with our guardian angel looking out for us. Were doing this for you! <3*" By asking the deceased to watch over the team's next season, the young woman is publically expressing her belief that there is an afterlife and that in that afterlife, we have some type of sway or control over what does or does not happen to those left under our charge as "guardian angels." She is speaking directly to the deceased, imploring her to "watch over us" and indicating that she and her teammates will continue their bonds with the deceased young woman by vowing, "*Were doing this for you!*"

In another example which incorporates both the themes of religion, an afterlife, and being under the watchful eye of the deceased, a young adult female speaks directly to her deceased 18 year old female friend, writing "*But I know you are looking after me up in heaven. Hopefully, I can make sense of all this craziness one day.i know yr looking out for me and keeping me on track. thank you. thank you for everything youve done for me and continue to do for me.* Both the writer and the deceased were illegal drug users, with the deceased succumbing to her addiction and the writer emerging from a stint in drug rehab. Therefore, the call upon the deceased to look after and keep her surviving friend "on track" is akin to the sponsor/addict relationship, albeit one transcending into the realm of the paranormal. Simply knowing and

believing that her deceased friend is actively looking out for/after her is suggestive that this continuing bond is beneficial and may provide the writer with the support, via her experiencing of paranormal co-presence, which may be needed so that she does not relapse into drug use.

There were 49 references related to the bereaved being reunited in the future with the deceased (most often, in heaven). Many writers expressed desire and anticipation in being reunited with their deceased friends and family, and most writers expressed these reunions in religious terms. A young adult African American female expressed her desire to see her deceased 17 year old African American female friend in the afterlife writing, "*Someday baby girl im gonna meet at the cross roads and I Know u gonna be there waiting on me with open arms and that distinctive grin u have.*" This posting does not simply express the potential that a reunion might occur but rather, the certainty that it will. The writer is secure in her faith that her friend will be waiting for her with open arms "at the cross roads" – a thought that is wholly reassuring and positive for the writer. She writes directly to her friend, publically indicating her belief that there is an afterlife and that those who have died are there waiting for us. The writer believes that not only is the continuation of bonds with the deceased possible for the living but that these bonds will continue in the afterlife, as well.

Another example of the security and faith that bonds will continue in the afterlife is exemplified in a post by a young adult Hispanic female to her deceased 16 year old Hispanic male friend writing, "*Seee You Sooon MyNigga ; UnTill Then Save Me Ah Spot Uhp Ihn Thuggs Mansion k (:*" This post exemplifies the anticipation that one day soon the two friends will be reunited – not only in heaven, but in something that they refer to as "Thuggs Mansion." This term suggests that God is a "Thugg" (used positively) and that He resides in a "Mansion" (heaven), where those who are accepted into it will reside in luxury. This post also suggests that,

although their conception of heaven and God may be unorthodox, the writer has publically

announced her belief in a definite, unifying religion – most likely Christianity. The use of the

smiley face emoticon also indicates that the writer is looking forward to said reunion with the

deceased in "Thuggs Mansion" and that the deceased will "Save [her] Ah Spot" there, indicating

that whatever bond they shared (and continue to share) in this life will be continued in the next.

Conversations with the Deceased

Three hundred and forty Wall postings contained conversations (albeit one-sided) with

the deceased. These conversation-based postings were often the longest text-wise, in that

individuals wrote of experiences in which they wished the deceased could have participated or

accounts of daily activities. Some writers expressed wishing that the deceased could be there to

see or to experience something specific. Others wrote of everyday activities that might mean

something to the deceased, while others explained to the deceased what they missed or loved

about him or her. The following excerpts best exemplify this thematic sub-category, and the

excerpts presented are representative of patterns found across the Wall postings.

There were 29 references related to the bereaved wishing that they and the deceased

could experience something together. Many writers expressed their longing to see the deceased

one last time, as in the case of the young adult male who wrote the following on his 16 year old

girlfriend's Wall: "*you are on my mind again tonight.. listening to a song that reminds me of you.*

just wishing I could see your face one more time.. Its not easy to let go..but i know im never

alone. see you soon babe." The bereaved boyfriend is directly expressing his desires, wishes,

and experiences of grief to the deceased. By doing so, he is continuing his bond with her, albeit

via his experiences of paranormal co-presences, especially in relation to "a song that reminds me

of you." By choosing to continue his conversations with his deceased girlfriend, emoting, and expressing his frustrations and grief, he is publically demonstrating not only his belief that she is where she can also communicate with others but that his public conversations with her serve some purpose or hold some meaning for himself and others. He is also expressing his belief that he is "never alone," suggesting that his deceased girlfriend is "with" him somehow – indicating his belief in paranormal co-presence - and that one day, they will be reunited where their bond will continue in the afterlife.

There were 220 combined references to everyday activities or memories that the bereaved wanted to share with the deceased and explanations regarding what the bereaved missed or loved about him or her. The Wall postings related to everyday activities or memories that the writers wanted to share with the deceased (and others) were the longest postings that I coded and often consisted of one or more lengthy paragraphs of text. Many postings were directed primarily toward the deceased, while others were reminiscent of speaking out loud to no one in particular.

One example of directly addressing and engaging in "conversation" with the deceased demonstrates how the young adult sister of a 27 year old male suicide victim feels compelled to share her emotional difficulties with him writing, "*I too call your phone to hear your voice. I know one day it will be gone like you are. I cry often. I yell at you and myself… We made it to southaven today. The first thing I did was take your urn picture and angel out. I love you so much. I miss talking to you. Well actually I talk to you all the time, you just don't talk back.*" This posting was in response to their mother, who had posted that she often calls her deceased son's cell phone in order to listen to his disembodied voice, which she also finds somehow comforting. In his sister recounting that she also calls her deceased brother's cell phone and that she and her family visited "southhaven" (the cemetery) describing their activities there, she is re-

affirming her and her family's connection to her brother. Their visitation to the cemetery is indicative of a more traditional post-death ritual, and his family's and her continued communication online with their deceased son/brother indicates their willingness to supplement traditional rituals with new, technological ones. His sister writes to him as though he can hear her and admits that "*I talk to you all the time, you just don't talk back,*" indicating that she also believes that there is some type of existence beyond. However, her direct *"…you just don't talk back"* firmly denotes that she does not believe that he is capable of directly talking back to her, as some other writers have expressed as not only possible but occurring.

Another example of writing directly to the deceased about life bereft of their physical presence is from an adolescent Hispanic female written to a 16 year old Hispanic male writing:

> *I Just Wish There Was A Way To See You One More Time &; Just Hear Your Voice ,*
> *Telling Me Everything Will Be Ohkay . I Know I Dont Go Visit You Often But Dont Think*
> *I Forqot About You . Its Just Hard For Me To Know That Your Under Me &; Then I Cant*
> *Help But Look At The Picture Of You That They Have Showing Your Smile &; It Just*
> *Makes Me Cry Knowinq I Wont Be Able To See That Smile For A Whilee . But We Have*
> *So Many Good Memories Toqether &; Thats What Gets Me Throuqh Everday . But Untill*
> *I See You Aqain I Just Want To Let You Know That I Miss You , Everyone Do*

The adolescent female is publically expressing her longing for his corporeal presence and relating how he would emotionally support her when he was alive. Her statement, "*I Know I Dont Go Visit You Often But Dont Think I Forqot About You*" indicates that she believes her friend is able to discern whether or not she visits his grave and that he can hear her, wherever he may be, thus demonstrating her belief that some type of existence beyond death is not only possible but in this case, at least, definitive. In writing, "*I Wont Be Able To See That Smile For A Whilee*" and *"But Untill I See You Aqain,"* she is also publically expressing her belief that some other realm of being exists and that she will be reunited with her deceased friend at some point in the future. In choosing to publically express her grief and longing, she has demonstrated not

only her belief that there is some type of existence after death, albeit in more secular terms that in some other postings, but she has also demonstrated her desire to continue a bond with the deceased. In believing that he is watching over her and that she can "speak" with him via online communication is suggestive that she also anticipates that this bond will continue online and in the "hereafter."

Each of the preceding Wall posting examples demonstrates not only the belief of the writers that the deceased can interact with the living but that the deceased is able and does interact with them – via coded messages and feelings of paranormal co-presence. Public expressions of religious or secular, perhaps spiritualistic, beliefs related to an afterlife and reunion with the deceased are also conveyed. Although each of the postings may vary slightly in relation to their experiences with the deceased, all of the writers directly express their continuing bonds with them.

Discussion

Mourning 2.0 – From Private to Public Ritual, Memorialization, and Continuing Bonds

My project demonstrates that, despite lacking appropriate cultural frameworks related to the deceased, increasingly, individuals supplement traditional bereavement rituals, such as funerals (which often signaled the termination of bonds) with new, technologically-situated ritualized and public spaces (such as Facebook) for continuing bonds with the deceased. According to my data, Facebook memorial pages constitute a novel, ritualized and public space for maintaining continued bonds, and individuals exhibit several types of bonding interactions with the deceased. In addressing Klass and Walter's (2001) findings that in contemporary Western culture, individuals lack the cultural framework in which to incorporate the paranormal

co-presence of the deceased into their lives, the Facebook users in my sample chose to express publically their ongoing paranormal experiences with the deceased, regardless of a possible lack of Western cultural framework or performative script for doing so.

Although traditional death rituals (such as funerals) are still widely practiced and experienced by Westerners, my research demonstrates that individuals are supplementing these traditional rituals with new, technologically-situated ones in the online sphere, regardless of the lack of performative scripts or Western cultural frameworks for doing so. Many individuals continue to perform traditional rituals, perhaps not knowing any other alternative or perhaps simply adhering to traditional Western norms regarding death ceremonies. In light of technological advances which now offer online, virtual ritualized spaces for memorialization and the resulting potential to create new rituals associated with the dead, both traditional and innovative rituals will continue to serve an important function for those who remain.

Giddens (1991) argued that one possible reason for the decline of formal rituals, and by extension, knowledge of performative scripts related to death rituals, is the post-modern focus on increasing individualism and that ritual has been replaced by discourse. Klass and Walter (2001:440) also argued that "the sacred reality of ritual may not mesh with the personal constructions of the varied individuals who participate in them today." My sample demonstrates that ritual has not necessarily been replaced by discourse but rather that online discourse is now being used to supplement traditional, terrestrially-bound death rituals. Such stark, personalized individualism and the increasing focus on discourse, which supplements traditional ritual, are publically displayed on the Wall postings for the deceased in my sample, lending credence to both Giddens' (1991) and Klass and Walter's (2001) arguments related to ritual behavior and its importance in post-modern Western society.

Although Klass and Goss (1999:561) argued that continuing bonds serve a private, rather than a public, function, where "the bond with the dead is relegated to the private sphere of the family or a community of friends that is separated in modernity from the sphere of public discourse," my analysis reveals that individuals are now able to continue their relationships with the deceased in a new, public, ritualized online space, such as Facebook. These burgeoning practices challenge long-standing notions regarding "appropriate" memorialization and bereavement which were traditionally viewed as private, individualized experiences. Contrary to Klass and Walter's (2001) findings that, in contemporary Western culture, individuals lack the cultural framework in which to incorporate the paranormal co-presence of the deceased into their lives, the Facebook users in my sample chose to express publically their ongoing experiences with the deceased, regardless of a possible lack of Western cultural framework or performative script for doing so.

In my sample, individuals use Facebook as a ritualized memorial space, and these individuals publically recount their experiences with their deceased loved ones via their Wall postings. The central theme found throughout many Wall postings is that of a paranormal co-presence of the deceased felt by bereaved individuals in their daily lives. In my sample, many individuals who posted on Facebook memorial page Walls appear to share some belief in life beyond death and are aware of their loved one's paranormal co-presence, albeit in varying degrees. The three primary thematic sub-categories represented in my sample illustrate individuals' belief in the paranormal co-presence of their deceased friends and family members, and these categories demonstrate how these Facebook members utilize this belief to continue their bonds online in a public venue after the death of their loved ones. Some postings directly exemplified the feeling of paranormal co-presence, while others exemplified various other

communications with the deceased which ranged from natural phenomenon symbolizing messages from the deceased to direct and indirect "conversations" with the deceased.

My research contributes to not only research related to continuing bonds but also to that of co-presence and after-death communication (ADC). In 633 postings, individuals expressed their experiences related to paranormal co-presence, which supports the research of Klass et al (1996) in relation to continuing bonds and which also supports other research related to paranormal co-presence and ADC. Additional postings from my sample, which mirror Kwilecki's (2011) findings related to natural phenomenon interpreted as ADC, also adds to the literature related to after-death communication.

Mourning and memorialization 2.0, including Facebook memorial pages, have more permanence and can function to indefinitely immortalize the deceased and provide an unbounded online space for interactions between the living and the dead. Thus, bereavement periods can extend long after the internment and decay of the physical body. Perhaps finally achieving immortality, the dead now live among us in the virtual sphere, transcending both time and space, where they can virtually live forever in ethereal cyberspace. The potential for ongoing ritualistic interaction and continuing bonds with the deceased in cyberspace is palpable in our technologically-dominated era.

While my research offers valuable insights regarding continuing bonds in the 21st century and provides additional data related to existing literature associated with several different bereavement related topics, there are some limitations to my research. One primary limitation is the small, non-representative (site entirety-wise) sample size of twelve Facebook memorial pages, despite the inclusion of the large (1,270 Wall postings) data sample. Additionally, because

I wanted to create a purposive sample that roughly correlated to the average age demographic of Facebook users, I do not have any data related to pages created for any individuals outside of my chosen age demographic (under 35) and cannot generalize to other user populations. Because I also sought to attain a roughly-equivalent gender sampling within my final sample of pages dedicated to the deceased, I cannot make any conclusions or generalizations related to whether other Facebook memorial pages are dedicated more to one gender than the other. Although I have a relatively large sample related to the gender of Wall posters (579 individual posters - 13 unknown, 130 males, and 436 females), I did not run any statistical analyses related to this data, and therefore, cannot make any generalizations related to the gender of Wall posters.

Conclusion

The tenuous balance between tradition and technology and its ever-evolving impact on our lives ensure that the interactions between the living and the dead will continue to be negotiated. It remains to be seen if online memorialization, such as on Facebook, will have a positive or a negative impact on our relationships with one another and with the dead. My project demonstrates that, despite lacking appropriate cultural frameworks related to the deceased, increasingly, individuals supplement traditional bereavement rituals, such as funerals (which often signaled the termination of bonds) with new, technologically-situated ritualized and public spaces (such as Facebook) for continuing bonds with the deceased.

According to my data, Facebook memorial pages constitute a novel, ritualized and public space for maintaining these continued bonds, and individuals exhibit several types of bonding interactions with the deceased. Some bereavement experts view Facebook as a positive addition to the grieving process for the internet savvy generation, because younger users are not hesitant

to show their feelings and vulnerability, even in the public sphere (Katims 2010). Hence, the younger internet generation could catalyze the development of a new model of grieving and the solidification of this burgeoning bereavement ritual, and future research could address how the younger generation of mourners has influenced traditional rituals and grieving models. With so many Facebook site members creating and visiting cybermemorial pages, this usage implies that these pages serve a vital function for those who are left behind and who find comfort in the continuing interaction they can have - with not only someone who has died but also with the broader online friend community who can potentially provide some degree of emotional support, whether it be akin to Durkheim's collective effervescence or a more secular experience. Additionally, as evidenced in my data results, their online participation would also suggest that younger individuals are more inclined to mourn openly and publically than previous generations were generally apt to do.

There are several relevant social science research topics that could potentially blossom from this project, as there is widespread public interest in Web 2.0 memorialization, as evidenced by human interest pieces which have appeared in the widespread media over the last few years and increasingly, in academic journals. My research indicates that the tension between relinquishing and continuing bonds may be lessening and that the very nature of continuing bonds is also changing in the twenty-first century. Although my research is suggestive that the continuation of bonds is beneficial to the bereavement process, more research is warranted which will expand these theses. In light of limitations related to generalizability (referenced in the discussion section), further research into other age demographics and factors related to gender-based participation of both posters and deceased members is warranted.

Because Facebook members can create and maintain pages dedicated to the deceased, those left behind can also provide a type of virtual immortality, ensuring that their deceased friends, family members, and others are not forgotten.   So long as the Internet exists, individuals can and will continue their bonds online with the deceased. Regardless, one certainty remains: every minute of every hour of every day, people die, and with their deaths come sorrow and mourning. We miss those who are no longer with us. Although we have memories of them, those memories too fade with time. Without death rituals and memorialization - traditional or burgeoning, technology-based or otherwise - and our loved ones to perform these acts and maintain our memories, those who have died would be forgotten – simply lost to the sands of time. It is through these rituals and memorials that we hope to provide a potentially everlasting meaning to their lives and to perhaps make sense of our own. Although these practices and memorials have both remained the same and have evolved over time, they function to ease the suffering of those who remain. Death rituals, memorialization, and continuing bonds between the living and the dead, whether on Facebook or elsewhere, provide a valuable function to not only living and deceased individuals but to society as a whole.

APPENDIX 1 – FACEBOOK MEMORIALIZATION POLICIES (AS OF JULY 2011)

Facebook's current account memorialization policy includes one of two options. The first option is the "Report a Deceased Person's Profile" which includes the following:

IMPORTANT: Under penalty of perjury, this form is solely for the reporting of a deceased person to memorialize. Memorializing the account sets privacy, so only confirmed friends can see the profile or locate it in search. The Wall remains, so friends and family can leave posts in remembrance (Facebook 2011b).

The second option is "Deceased Users – Special Requests" and reads as follows:

In order to process the request to remove a profile or any other special request, we will first need to verify your relationship to the deceased user. Please fill out the following form and we will be able to further assist you. Also, please upload attachments of the following two additional pieces of information to this report.

1. Proof of death (e.g., an obituary, news article or the deceased's death certificate)
2. Verification that you are an immediate family member or executor (e.g., the deceased's birth certificate or proof of authority under local law that you are the lawful representative of the deceased or his/her estate)

Rest assured that we will permanently delete the information from our servers once we have used it to verify your relationship with this person. We appreciate your patience (Facebook 2011b).

**Group or profile pages that are not set to "private" or have not been "memorialized" are still accessible to any registered Facebook user, and these are the pages from which I drew my sample (discussed further in the Research Plan section).

APPENDIX 2 – SAMPLED FACEBOOK PAGES (*n*=12)
(information available as of October 2011)

1) Caitlin Buemi – 4/26/92-3/7/10 - White female – 16 – car accident - Foley, Alabama – high school student
RIP Caitlin! – 1,740 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 204
Page created: March 7, 2010
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Caitlin/377215177322?sk=wall

2) Charles M. Barber – 2/25/94-6/3/2011 - White male – 27 – unknown cause of death – Georgia - "trainer at Cheddar's Casual Café in Valdosta, GA"
RIP CMB – 188 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 51
Page created: June 5, 2011
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-CMB/170374806356154?sk=wall

3) Janece Murrell – 8/8/92-4/25/2011 - African American female – 18 – probable homicide via gunshot – Donald Gordon, 37, charged with "having weapons while under disability and possession of drugs" – Cincinnati, Ohio - occupation unknown
RIP Janece – 465 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 40
Page created: April 25, 2011
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Janece/204884632877697?sk=wall

4) Jason Michael Giessinger – 11/23/80-5/16/11 – White male – 30 – cause of death unknown – Milbank, South Dakota – Volunteer firefighter and worked at Poet – father of one daughter – married to Ashley Ammon July 2007
RIP Goose – 424 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 11
Page created: May 20, 2011
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-goose/224551470888508?sk=wall

5) Nicole L. "Nikki" Ramsden - ? – 2/22/2010 – White female - 12 – leukemia - middle school student – Wayne, New Jersey – donated lungs to research
RIP Nicole – 1,765 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 14
Page created: February 6, 2011
 https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Nicole/325872466725

6) Nyrianca E. Kelley – 2/7/93-12/30/10(?) – African American female – 17 – high school student - cause of death unknown – one daughter – Georgia
Remembering Nyrianca Kelley – 463 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 38
Page created: December 30, 2010
https://www.facebook.com/pages/Remembering-Nyrianca-Kelley/170538756321386?sk=wall

7) Rachel Daggett – 11/28/90-12/9/2008 – White female - 18 - complications from drug use (smoked Oxycontin and died of fluid on the lungs and organ failure) – high school student – Damascus, Oregon
RIP RAD – 460 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 54
Page created: January 27, 2010
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-RAD/275011351765

8) Richard "Thesis" Sanchez - ?- 8/25/10 – Hispanic male - 16 – run over by two cars while passed out in the street; possible homicide – Fresno, California
Rip Thesis – 321 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 31
Page created: April 29, 2011https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rip-Thesis/126477784096255?sk=wall

9) Richard "Richie" Carlston III – ? – 7/21/10 - White male – 19 – car accident (head and internal injuries) – college sophomore Syracuse University – Fairport, New York
RIP Richie - 1,452 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 11
Page created: July 22, 2010
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-richie/140245632670836?sk=wall

10) Stephen W. Payne - ? – 10/7/10 – White male - 35 – suicide by hanging – occupation unknown - Fort Dodge, Iowa
RIP Steve – 249 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 40
Page created: October 8, 2010
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Steve/120289101363254?sk=wall

11) Tifani Delores Cutty – 12/14/85-3/31/11 – White female – 25 – probable overdose/suicide/complications from drug abuse – one daughter – divorced – behavioral therapist – Lawrence, KS
Tifani Cutty – In Memory – 54 "friends" (this is a private profile page that was converted to a memorial page) – pages of comments converted to word: 43
Page memorialized: April 1, 2011
https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001546125510

12) Violeta Dremova – ?-12/10/10 – White female - 16? – suicide
RIP Violeta – 636 "likes" – pages of comments converted to word: 15
Page created: December 11, 2010
https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Violeta/162974027078735?sk=wall

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