The Role of Social Networking Sites as a Medium for Memorialization in

Emerging Adults

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This dissertation is dedicated to my children – Cody and Bree.

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Kimberly Hieftje

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS A MEDIUM FOR
MEMORIALIZATION IN EMERGING ADULTS

After the death of a loved one, social networking sites may provide several important functions in relation to feeling connected to the deceased as well as others during grief. Logistically, because social networking sites can be accessed at any time of the day from anywhere in the world, bereaved individuals are able to connect with their social network whenever the desire arises. This may be especially important to college students who may be hundreds of miles away from their family and friends or access to their deceased friend's gravesite. Feeling connected to others during grief may also provide a much needed sense of comfort and community for the bereaved, which may not be readily available away from home.

The focus of the study was to examine the meanings participants in emerging adulthood attribute to a deceased loved one's social networking Webpage. Continuing bonds with the deceased were also explored. Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology (BNIM) methodology, which is used for exploring the lived-experiences through biographic narrative interviews, was used to collect and analyze data for this research which included a systematic approach to interview methods, interpretive panels, and narrative interpretation. The final analysis utilized a thematic narrative analysis approach.

Social networking sites, with their own unique social structure and social interaction, were openly accepting of the expression of grief and continuing

relationships with the deceased. In essence, the members of the social networking site created their own definitions of certain roles such as "bereaved friend" and "grieving member". Whereas in modern society where openly expressing the emotions of grief in public may be looked down upon, especially if the loss occurred many months earlier, the expression of grief emotions on a deceased person's social networking profile appeared to be normative, even months after the death. Within the social networking realm, discussing grief emotions and talking to the deceased appeared to be accepted and supported by other social network members.

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INTRODUCTION

The following chapter introduces the study which includes the focus, purpose, and justification of the research project. Delimitations as well as limitations to the study are presented, including a list of common terms relating to social networking sites that are used throughout the paper.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of the study was to examine the meanings participants in emerging adulthood – a distinct developmental period characterized by change and exploration for most people in terms of work, worldviews, and relationships - attribute to a deceased loved one's social networking Webpage. Continuing bonds with the deceased were also explored.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how the use of social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook might contribute to meaning making after death, continuing bonds with the deceased, and the grief process in emerging adults.

Justification for Study

Many individuals have turned to cyberspace to seek new opportunities to express their grief, commemorate the deceased, create and find community (de Vries & Rutherford, 2004). Personal social networking Webpages, such as MySpace and Facebook, often become Web memorials after a person's death, leaving behind a unique opportunity for bereaved friends and loved ones to "send messages" to those beyond death. Although several studies have looked at the use of Web memorialization

on the Internet (Roberts & Vidal, 2000; de Vries & Rutherford, 2004), only one study to date can be found on the use of personal social networking Webpages that have become Web memorials after someone dies. Personal Webpages may create an immediate memorial after a death and be more personal than those created by friends and family for the deceased. Web memorials and Web cemeteries, on the other hand, are most often created by deceased's loved ones and can take days, weeks, months, or even years to appear online. Personal Webpages may also a powerful venue for the bereaved to share memories, express their grief, and perhaps most importantly, continue a relationship with the deceased. Friends of the deceased may find the personal Webpages of greatest value if they are unable to attend family and funeral rituals that often proceed a loved one's death.

In Western society, with the many social sanctions surrounding death, there may be very few opportunities to openly talk about death, especially when the death was of a traumatic or questionable nature. Friends may find even fewer opportunities to express their grief socially. Web memorials tend to allow continuity of expression of grief, offering unobtrusive access and thus facilitating enfranchisement of grief (Moss, 2004).

Web memorials allow the bereaved to honor their dead in their own way and at their own time, to visit the memorial whenever they choose, and to share with others memories and information about the deceased (Roberts, 2004). Personal Webpages, such as MySpace and Facebook, often remain active indefinitely, providing an ongoing place for friends and loved ones to feel a personal connection to the deceased, even years after their death. Social networking sites are very popular among youth and may provide a unique venue for grief in a space that feels familiar and comfortable to them.

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As the use of the Internet and social networking sites continue to increase, those working youth, specifically adolescents and emerging adults may benefit from recognizing and appreciating the significance of these social networking Webpages as a venue for both the expression of grief and continuing of bonds with the deceased. Maintaining a tie with the deceased loved one can be self-affirming and comforting, and the maintenance of the bond can be more freeing than its denial (Moss, 2004). Writing to or about the deceased also assists in the expression of emotion and sharing of perspective (Lottanzi & Hale, 1984-85).

Messages left to the deceased in a public forum may also benefit other bereaved friends that may be visiting the personal Webpage. Visits to both the traditional cemetery and to the Web memorial are post death rituals symbolizing private mourning in a public place (Moss, 2004). Even though messages posted on personal Webpage are often directed to the deceased and not the public, a sense of community may be created through the sharing of the bereaved friends' grief. In some ways, the Web site may be similar to a support group in providing a place for persons with similar losses to interact and find comfort and understanding (Moss, 2004). It is therefore important to appreciate the significance of not only writing messages to the deceased, but the act of reading messages written to the deceased as well.

In general, very few studies can be found on the use of the Internet and grief. To date, no qualitative studies on the use of social networking sites as a venue for meaning making and grief have been published. However, the few studies that can be found suggest that the use of the Internet may assist in the grief process, encourage continuing bonds with the deceased, and enfranchise those whose grief may otherwise

be overlooked or dismissed. This study hopes to provide a unique contribution to grief literature by exploring a fairly new, and increasingly popular, grief venue – social networking sites.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following:

1. The study was qualitative using data obtained through personal interviews with participants who have lost a loved one within the past two years and have visited their deceased loved one's social networking Webpage.

2. Participants were all college students with ages ranged from 18 to 22 at the time of the interview.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study included:

1. The study was limited to six participants with a focus on particularization.

2. All but one participant discussed having a positive experience with the social networking Webpages after their friend's death.

3. The study was limited to participants' use of two social networking sites, MySpace and Facebook.

Terminology

In this section, terms frequently used throughout this research paper are defined. Because most of the participants in this study refer to the social networking site, Facebook, I have provided a mock Facebook page (See Figure 1 and Figure 2) to facilitate comprehension of the terms.

Figure 1 Facebook Webpage 1
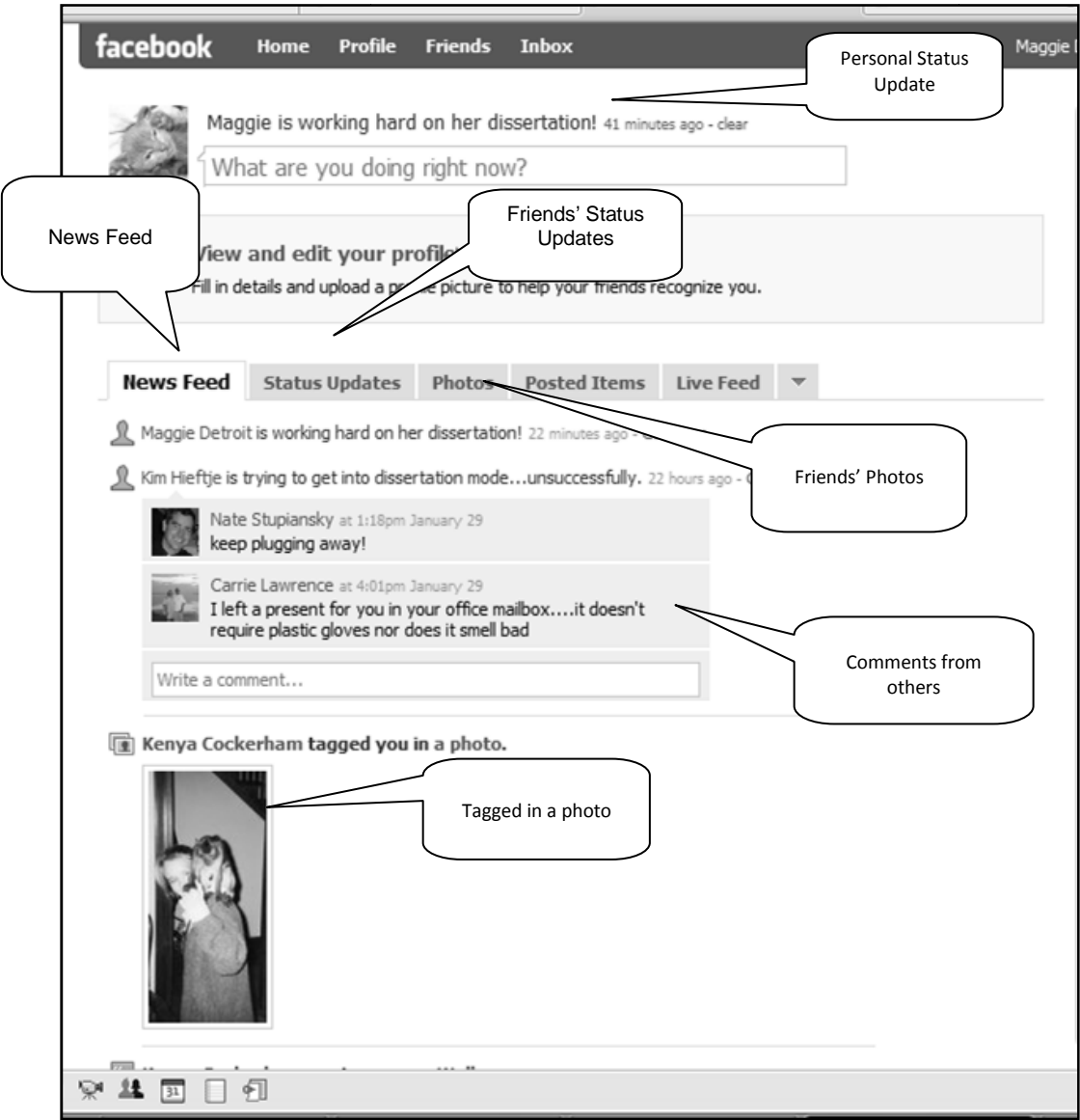
Figure 2 Facebook Webpage 2
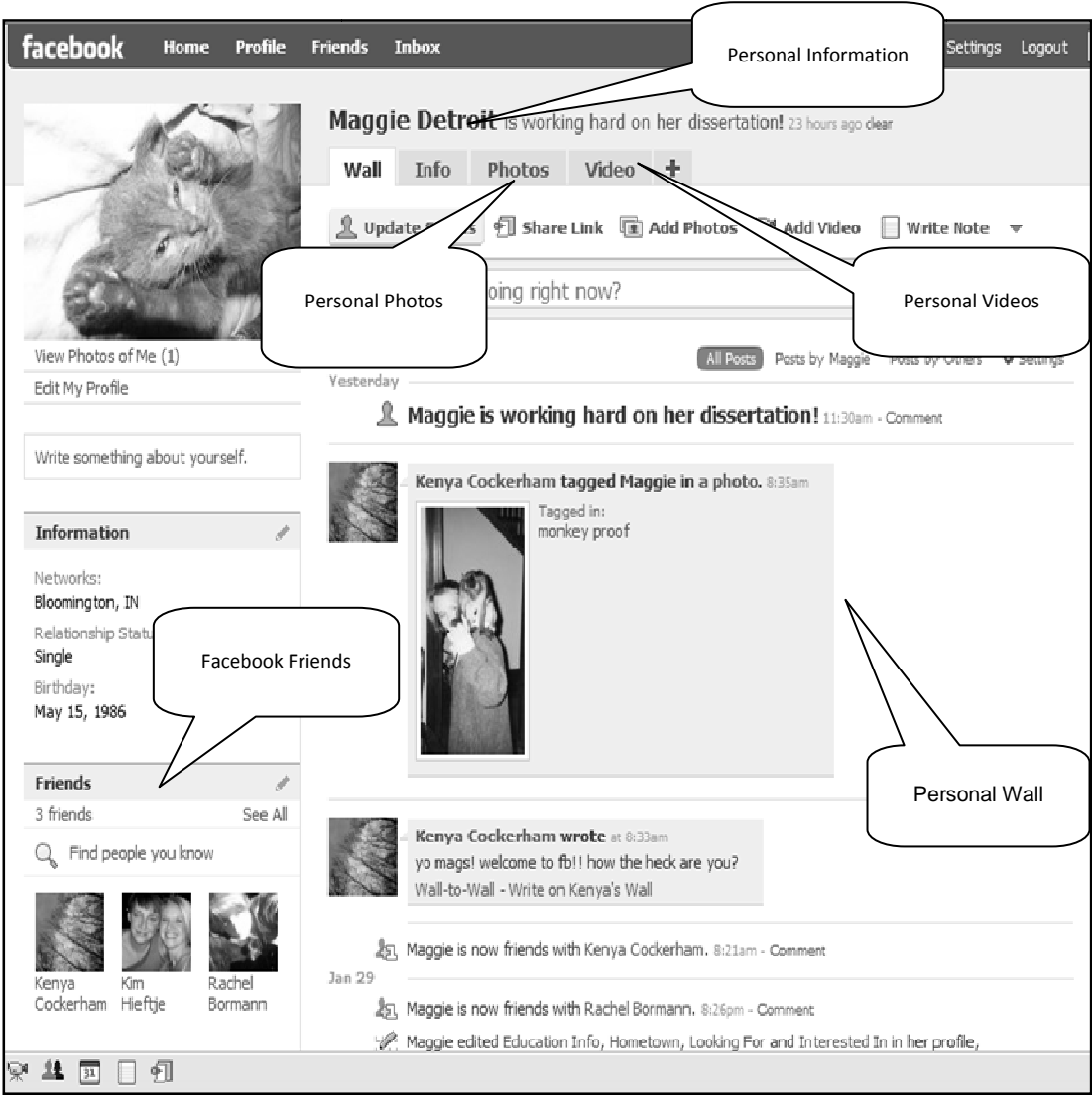
Facebook Specific terms:

- <u>Facebooking</u> – (v.) describes the activity of logging into Facebook in order to create a profile, share personal information, and meet other members

- <u>To Facebook him/her</u> – (v.) the act of going to someone's Facebook Webpage, to look them up on Facebook

- <u>Wall</u> - (n.) area on your profile where friends post comments, photos, etc. (see Figure 2)

- <u>To write on his/her wall</u> – (v.) the act of posting a message on someone's Facebook Webpage "Wall" located on their homepage (see Figure 2)

- <u>To tag him/her in a picture</u> – (v.) a feature on Facebook that allows you to identify friends in photos (see Figure 2)

- <u>Status Updates</u> (n.) a message you update to tell friends what you're doing (see Figure 1, Figure 2)

- <u>News Feed</u> - (n.) a constantly updating list of stories about your friends' Facebook activities, located on your homepage (see Figure 1)

- <u>Leave/post a comment</u> – (v.) a comment you post on someone's homepage wall (see Figure 1)

- <u>Post a video</u> – (v.) to post a video clip, or a link to a video clip, on your own homepage wall or a friend's wall (see Figure 2)

- <u>To add him/her as a friend</u> – (v.) the act of adding a person to your list of "Facebook Friends" (see Figure 2)

- <u>Post</u> – (v.) means the same as "to put up" (i.e. post a comment, post a picture, etc.)

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Other social networking terms:

- <u>A blog</u> – (n.) a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and Web links

- <u>To blog</u> – (v.) the process of writing frequent, chronological publications of personal thoughts and Web links

- <u>Text him/her, Receive a text</u> –(v.) to send or receive a brief, electronic message (less than 160 characters) via a wireless network and viewed on any number of mobile or handheld devices

- <u>IM'ing</u> – (v.) An acronym or text message used in online chat, IM, email, blogs or newsgroup postings.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The following chapter presents a review of the existing literature and research studies that helped to frame this research theoretically, conceptually and methodologically. The following sections are organized in the following manner: First, a general description of social networking sites is provided. Second, relevant research studies and literature are presented and critiqued. Finally, theoretical frameworks chosen for this research are discussed.

Social Networking Sites

Fundamentally, social networking sites are a category of online community sites which incorporate three commonalities: profiles, friends, and comments. Intrinsically, social networking sites are based around profiles, which are a form of individual home page that provide a description of each member. This description may include demographics (i.e. age, gender), but most often includes information of a more personal nature (i.e. pictures, personal blogs). MySpace, a popular social networking site, allows users to upload music, colorful backgrounds, or artwork as a way to personalize profiles.

Aside from the ability to present oneself through text and images, profiles also contain a public list of people, known as "Friends", which one identifies as their social network. After creating a profile, participants are asked to invite people they know to the site by supplying their email addresses. Alternatively, they can look at others' profiles and add those people to their list of Friends. If Friendship is confirmed, the two become Friends in the system and their relationship is included in the public display of

connections on all profiles (boyd, 2007). This enables people to "codify, map and view the relational ties between themselves and others" (Marwick, 2005, p.3). As social networking sites have become more widely used by both adults and teenagers, the definition of Friend has inherently taken on a new meaning within the social networking realm. On a social networking site, the term Friend does not necessarily imply that the networking member has close, intimate ties with all the members listed in his or her Friends list. The term can also be used to describe a connection with a classmate, family member, coworker, or even a popular band or movie star that is within the member's social network.

Another unique function of social networking sites is the ability to post comments on a Friend's profile. Generally, a particular section of a user's profile is dedicated to posting comments. On Facebook, another popular social networking site, this is referred to as a user's "Wall." Much of a user's time on social networking sites is spent reading, writing, and responding to comments. Such browsing of other's people's profile/walls helps users keep track of their friends, the events in their lives, as well as their friend's interactions with others (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008).

Most emerging adults, in the period of the late teens through the twenties, utilize online social networking sites as a means to connect with and interact with peers. College students, who are often on their own for the first time, utilize social networking sites as a way to stay connected with family and high school friends as well as connect with new friends and colleagues. Emerging adults reported that one favorite activity was browsing other people's profile/walls help users keep track of their friends, the events in their life, as well as their friend's interactions with others (Subrahmanyam et

al., 2008). More so, posting comments on a person's profile can help deepen an association between individuals, thereby making relationships feel more intimate (Manago et al., 2008). Self-disclosure is an important component of emerging adults' feelings of intimacy in friendships and intimate behaviors with friends and includes emotional support, trust and loyalty, sharing activities, and offers of instrumental support (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 429).

At its core, use of online social networks is still a phenomenon of the young (Lenhart, 2009). Sixty-five percent of teenagers aged 12 to 17 years old (Lenhart, 2009, 4) and 75% of adults 18-24 years old have an online social networking profile. Comparatively, about three in ten (35%) adult internet users age 18 and older have a social networking profile. At the time of this study, the most popular social networking sites used by both adults and teenagers were MySpace and Facebook, consisting of 50% and 22% of all social networking site users, respectively (Lenhart, 2009).

<div align="center">Research Studies on Web Memorialization</div>

Relatively few research studies can be found on the use of the Internet and Web memorialization. Only one relatively similar study (Williams & Merten, 2009) can be found on the use of social networking sites after the loss of a peer. No studies exist, however, that specifically examine the use of social networking sites as a venue for meaning making, continued bonds, or the grief process in emerging adults. The following research studies, however, do provide valuable insight into the cyber world of grief by examining related studies which include social networking, Web memorials, Web cemeteries, and email support groups. Many of the studies are quantitative and descriptive in nature. However, the findings still provide a platform upon which this

qualitative study was built. Continuing bonds after death and writing during grief are also explored, including references to the limited research studies available that were applicable to this research.

Social Networking and Grief

Currently, only one study exists that explores the use of social networking sites after the loss of a peer (Williams & Merten, 2009). In particular, the study examined how online social networking facilitated adolescent grieving following the death of a peer. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into how the Internet facilitated coping, expression, and interaction after the death of a peer through the use of social networking sites.

The sample in the study consisted of 20 online social networking profiles authored by adolescents who died suddenly between the years of 2005 and 2007 in the United States (Williams & Merten, 2009). The researchers reviewed the comments of the blog section of the deceased individual's social networking Webpage, and examined all the comments posted by users who had known the deceased. Furthermore, the researchers then selected only the comments that were posted by adolescents.

The study used a both deductive and inductive process similar to the comparative method (Glaser & Holten, 2004) of qualitative research. The researchers first reviewed each profile for text illustrating specific emotional or cognitive coping strategies collectively based on theories related to grief and coping (Williams & Merten, 2009). Afterwards, the researchers precoded the comments related specifically to the following themes: emotional pain, guilt, self-concept, anger, sadness, or acceptance. Also, an open category was created for any topic that did not fit into the researchers'

anticipated themes. After all comments were placed in a thematic category, they were then coded based on their relationship to the deceased. To increase trustworthiness, three members of the research team reviewed commentary samples to determine that comments appropriately fit into the correct category.

There will several findings reported in the study. Perhaps the most interesting finding included one-sided dialogue between the friends and their deceased peers, which Williams & Merten (2009) suggest the main purpose for visiting the profile was for the purpose of talking to the deceased adolescent. The researchers also suggest that talking to the deceased indicated the adolescents were attempting to maintain the same relationship they had prior to their peer's death.

The study also highlighted some of the intense emotions experienced by the adolescents, which may have provided insight into adolescent coping processes. Moreover, the researchers suggest that there may be stages of coping particularly salient to adolescents such as guilt, mourning lost opportunity, information seeking, humor, and personalization of others' emotions and actions (Williams & Merten, 2009).

Limitations to the study, as discussed by the researchers, included the lack of demographic information on the adolescent peers who posted the comments on the deceased friend's profile. A second limitation that was reported was that only one Web site was used to collect data and that by examining other social networking sites may have produced varied results. A third limitation included the fact that researchers were unable to assess any participants' progression of grief or coping over time based on commentary alone (Williams & Merten, 2009).

This study provided important insight into how social networking sites might contribute to the adolescent grief process, including continuing bonds with the deceased, although the researchers used the term "ongoing attachment" to describe the phenomenon. The researchers provide a clear narration of their analysis process, including a discussion of the theoretically underpinnings which helped to inform their methodological choices. Although they reported several limitations to their study including the inability to generalize, the researchers also acknowledge the importance of particularization in their qualitative study.

I would argue, however, that having preexisting categories for coping themes before analyzing the data might have been a downfall in this study. The researchers contradict themselves by stating "contemporary views of coping endorse a more fluid process", and citing authors such as Wortman and Boerner (2007) who state that most people do not experience strict stage-like coping. However, several of the categories chosen prior to the analysis were based on a stage-like approach to grief, thus contradicting their reported literature. The researchers also concluded their argument by suggesting that "there may be stages of coping particularly salient to adolescents" which again supports a stage-like stance to coping with a loss.

Also, the term *adolescent* is used to describe the study population and includes comments posted on the profiles of adolescents who were between the ages of 15 and 19. I would argue that there may be a fundamental difference between the comments posted by adolescents and those posted by emerging adults, who are over the age of eighteen and are considered to be in a transitional period of their lives. For instance, a college student may not be able to fly home to attend a deceased friend's funeral or

have the close proximal support of family and friends in comparison to a young

adolescent still living at home and in school where support might be more accessible.

For this reason, social networking sites may provide a different type of grief venue for

emerging adults which might have been reflected within the posted comments.

Finally, I would argue that by taking the posted comments out of context and

compartmentalizing them into categories, the overall essence of the adolescents' grief

process is lost. While the study did report important findings, they are more descriptive

in nature and do not necessarily provide enough grounding to imply an actual *process*

of adolescent grief had emerged from their findings.

Online Email Support Groups

One unique qualitative study by Hollander (2001) used an ethnographic

approach to examine online suicide support groups and listservs for survivors of suicide,

provides an example of how the Internet can provide a refuge for the bereaved to grieve

openly with the support of others who had experienced a similar loss. Over a nine week

period, Hollander received over 10,000 emails from survivors of suicide of loved ones,

averaging around 250 per day. Some were inquiries, some memoirs, some arguments,

some accounts, some poems, some political calls to action, some jokes, some pleas for

understanding; some were things learned elsewhere and though to be of use or general

interest (Hollander, 2001). The volume of emails received suggested the importance of

electronic networking for the list members. As Hollander reported, "Looking at the

cyberspace data…is a vast testament to the need to make meaning of the loss of life by

communicating about it" (p. 137)

Hollander used both the emails from list members as well as interviews with some of the survivors online as data for her study. To interpret her data, Hollander used simple textual analysis and her own orientation toward narrative analysis.

Her study revealed several important findings. Most importantly perhaps was that what appeared to matter the most to survivors of suicide was the importance of finding a place to "discuss" or write about what they are otherwise compelled to go through alone and in silence. According to Hollander, the "talk" was going on in a kind of cyber refuge from the larger social order where grieving was perceived as unwelcomed (Hollander, 2001).   In the sense of belonging to the community, they (the bereaved) also lose their sounding boards, the others with whom they work out their sense of place and identity in the social order (Harvey, 1996; Ricoeur, 1996). It therefore becomes key to find a place or means as a way to talk the grief over with others who will allow whatever is felt to be expressed (Hollander, 2001). Hollander also reported that suicide survivors often were attracted to Websites where Web memorials of the deceased were displayed.

Hollander's unique study provides a glimpse into a cyber community where suicide survivors, who are often disenfranchised in their grief, are given permission to grieve their loss in a supportive, nonjudgmental environment.   As mentioned briefly by Hollander, the use of Web memorials often attracted suicide survivors to particular suicide support Websites. Web memorials allow the bereaved to honor their dead in their own way and at their own time, to visit the memorial whenever they choose, and to share with others memories and information about the deceased person (Roberts, 2004).

Web Memorials and Web Cemeteries

Several studies can be found that explore the use of Web Memorials and Web Cemeteries after a loss. One study describes the characteristics of the deceased who have been honored in Web cemeteries and the general content and format of the memorials themselves (Roberts & Vidal, 2000). General characteristics such as age, gender, cause of death and time elapsed since the deaths were reported. An interesting finding in this study was that a significant difference in time elapsed since death was for audience – memorials for deaths that had happened within the previous year were less likely to be written to the deceased (18.7%) than memorials for deaths from one to five years prior to the posting (36.4%) and then for deaths that had occurred more than five years before the memorial was posted (37%). The majority of the Web memorials (67%) were written in the third person, presumably to a community audience. The study also examined themes within the context of the Web memorials. An interesting finding was that storytelling was the primary theme in the majority of the memorials (50.4%) and that the stories often celebrated the life of the deceased (Roberts & Vidal, 2000). Another theme described in the study, though not a primary one, was a statement of regret or guilt in the memorials. Also, musing about life and death was a primary theme in 2.5% of the memorials. While the majority chose to tell stories about and to celebrate the dead, others utilize this opportunity to openly grieve, replay the circumstances of death, and to confess regrets or guilt (Roberts & Vidal).

As the authors discuss, Web memorials are developing their own purpose – perhaps fulfilling needs that have had no forum before the Internet. Also, for those who are often disenfranchised in their grief, Web memorials created a place where grief

could be recognized. This included friends, pets, and others who are often disenfranchised in death system (Doka, 1989).

Another study by de Vries and Rutherford (2004) explored the memorialization of deceased loved ones on the Internet. The study utilized content analysis on a sample of 244 Web memorials from a memorial site on the Internet: Virtual Memorial Garden. The analysis revealed that the majority of Web memorials were written by children (33%) of the deceased, followed by friends (15%). This pattern favoring younger authors may reflect the newness of this venue and facility with computer technology (de Vries & Rutherford). The average age of the deceased was 48.5 with the majority of memorials written for deceased parents. In this study, memorials were more likely to be written to the deceased as opposed to being written about the deceased. Also, more than half of the memorials were in the form of a letter to the deceased. This finding contrasted with Roberts and Vidal's (2000) earlier study, which found a majority of the memorials (67%) were written in third person.

A prominent theme, letter writing, was discussed briefly in the study by de Vries and Rutherford (2004). Letters may reflect the continuing bonds of the living with the deceased (Silverman & Klass, 1996). Also, the inclusion of updates in some of the letters further support this interpretation and assumes an active listener who keeps up with the day-to-day comings and going of the living (de Vries & Rutherford, 2004). Themes including *watching over the living* and *the use of religion* supports the notion of continuing bonds with the deceased.

Both studies by Roberts and Vidal (2000) and de Vries and Rutherford (2004) provide interesting descriptive information about Web memorialization through the use

of quantitative methods. However, because of the quantitative methods used, the studies are limited. The choice of methods used in the studies help to describe the phenomenon of Web memorialization, but does not attempt to explain *why* individuals chose to utilize this venue or *what meanings* they attribute to Web memorialization.

The following studies provide evidence that the use of the Internet does provide an outlet for grief in the form of Web memorialization and through online communication with other bereaved individuals. Continuing bonds with the deceased appears to be salient themes in several studies, through both writing and "talking" to the deceased. Disenfranchised grievers are also often mentioned in the studies, as they are often drawn to the Internet, where their grief can be recognized and legitimatized.

Writing during Grief

Several authors have written about the benefits of writing during grief (Cable, 1996; Lattanzi & Hale, 1984-85; Rosenblatt, 1983). Although writing to and about the dead has been described as positive and therapeutic, researchers have had limited access to personal writings during bereavement (Roberts and Vidal, 2000). As the use of social networking sites, Web memorials, and Web cemeteries continue to emerge online, a plethora of writings during grief are easily available for future research studies. Currently, very few studies (Williams & Merten, 2009; Roberts and Vidal, 2000) exist on the use of the internet as a venue for writing about grief, including writing to the deceased. However, related studies have contributed to overall importance of this phenomenon.

The literature on continuing bonds with the deceased has described the need to communicate with the deceased loves ones through writing (e.g., Lattanzi & Hale, 1984-

1985, Rosenblatt, 2000) and talking to the deceased (Klass, 1988; Rosenblatt, 2000; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993; Silverman & Nickman, 1996). Bereaved persons may write to immortalize the deceased or their relationship with the deceased (Lattanzi & Hale, 1983-84). It is therefore essential to make the connection between continuing bonds and writing during grief.

Aside from continuing bonds with the deceased, writing during grief can provide many other benefits to the bereaved. As described by Lattanzi & Hale (1983-84) writing during grief may be a way of experiencing and dealing with harsh new realities that now encompasses death. Writing enables the bereaved to explore and express their hopes, fears, fantasies, and realities. Writing can generate valuable insights into oneself and one's experiences. They may also write with the hope of having others find comfort or benefit from reading of their experience (Lattanzi & Hale).

The social isolation experienced by some bereaved people also results in a lack of opportunities for expression (O'Connor, Nikoletti, Kristjanson, Loh, & Willcock, 2003). It is generally acknowledged that the expression of grief can soften the impact and contribute to the management of the experience (Lattanzi & Hale, 1983-84). Venues like personal Web memorials provide that opportunity of expression for the bereaved.

Continuing Bonds

The idea of continuing a relationship with the deceased is not a new one. However, it has become more central to survivors' experiences than commonly has been recognized in the past (Silverman & Nickman, 1996, p. 349). Continuing bonds with the deceased can be described as a dynamic, ever-changing process that includes constructing an inner representation of the deceased into the lives of the living.

Phenomena that indicate interaction with the inner representation of a deceased person have been described as a sense of presence, hallucinations in any of the senses, belief in the person's continuing active influence on thoughts or events, or a conscious incorporation of the characteristics or virtues of the dead into the self (Marwitt & Klass, 1996, p. 298). The inner representation of the deceased may change over time, and can include an active or a passive role in the lives of the bereaved. At times, the deceased may play a central, leading role in their lives, while at other times the role may be that of a supporting one. The connection, however, remains intact.

Contrary to the view that grief has a predetermined time allowance, those who have experienced a significant loss would argue that grief never ends. Grief is not constant, but rather recurrent. As new life opportunities and experiences arise, it is not unusual for grief to be revisited. Grief may be linked to the remembrance of happy memories, love, and a time of laughter. Looking through photographs or visiting a cherished place of the deceased may evoke grief recurrence, but also provides the person with a reminder of how important that person was in their lives. People often welcome grief recurrence, and even if there is a sad or bitter side to it there may also be a sweet, affirming, and to-be-cherished side (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 55). The pain of grief is synonymous to the love one feels for the deceased. Recurrent grief might be related to personal commitment to the deceased (Rosenblatt, p. 56).

Several studies provide evidence that the recurrence of grief appears to be normative event for the bereaved.   For instance, Rosenblatt's (1983) study of 19th-century diaries is an ideal example of how grief often reoccurs many years after a loss. The study provided a window into the minds of bereaved individuals who were not

impacted by the 20th-century view of grief resolution as breaking bonds with the deceased. The study was limited, however, in the fact that focus was on grief in the first three years following a loss, which did not allow for implications for how grief can continue over the course of a lifetime.

The recurrence of grief suggests that the bereaved continue to stay connected to the deceased. Death does not need to end one's relationship with the deceased. Continuing bonds is not relinquishment of the bond with the deceased, but rather a transformation of the relationship that differs from when the person was alive. Several studies (e.g. Silverman, Nickman, & Worden, 1992) reveal that even years after the death of their parent, children continue to stay connected to them through their memories and actions. They continued their relationship with their deceased parent by dreaming about them, talking to them, viewing them as "watching over them", and keeping items that belonged to the parent.

For emerging adults in college, grief may become a lifelong companion for those who maintain some or much attachment to the persons they loved in their life (Balk, 1996, p. 325). College campuses, like most ecological niches, do not necessarily support or acknowledge grief expressions, much less ongoing attachments to the deceased. A survivor's inner representation of the deceased is in many ways dependent upon the survivor's living community. The living can influence the individual's desire and ability to remain involved with the deceased (Silverman & Nickman, 1996, p. 349). For instance, survivors may look to their social support network for help in keeping their continued relationships alive.   For students, who may be hundreds of miles away from their social support, may utilize personal Webpages, such

as Facebook, as a way to continue a bond with the deceased within the supportive presence of their social network.

<div align="center">Theoretical Frameworks</div>

For the purpose of this study, I chose both emerging adulthood and symbolic interactionism as theoretical frameworks. The following sections provide a brief overview of each framework with a specific focus on the most relevant concepts. Also, each theory as it relates to the main premise of this study is discussed.

Emerging Adulthood

Over the past half century, the age period from about 18 through the mid-twenties has changed in several important ways. Sweeping demographic shifts that have taken place over the past half century have made the late teens and early twenties not simply a brief period of transition into adult roles but a distinct period in the life course, characterized by change and exploration of possible life directions (Arnett, 2000). What was once a time of settling into adult roles such as getting married, having children, starting a career, and establishing a home is now a time marked by instability for young people as they try out many various possible futures in love and work before making enduring commitments (Arnett, 2004, p. 7).   Arnett (2000) argues that this period, known as *Emerging Adulthood*, is neither adolescence nor young adulthood and should be considered as a theoretically and empirically distinct developmental period.

Focusing on the ages between 18 and 25, this developmental period is characterized by change and exploration for most people, as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2007). Although they have left the dependency of childhood

and adolescence, they have not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, including taking on various adult roles. More specifically, Arnett (2004) describes five main features that make emerging adulthood distinct as a developmental period including: it is the age of identity explorations, especially in the areas of love and work; it is the age of instability; it is the most self-focused age of life; it is the age of feeling in-between, neither adolescent nor adult; and it is the age of possibilities, when optimism is high and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.

Emerging adulthood is a distinctly self-focused time of life (Arnett, 2006, p. 10). Without commitments to adult responsibilities like marriage and children, emerging adults are relatively free to make their own decisions concerning their lives. Being self-focused also allows emerging adults the psychological space to contemplate the "who am I?" questions that are at the heart of identity. The self-focused quality of emerging adulthood makes it arguably the freest time of life, at least in terms of freedom from social obligations and expectations (Arnett, 2006, p. 10).

Although emerging adults are fiercely self-focused during this time, they are not necessarily self-centered or selfish. According to Arnett (2006, p. 10), emerging adults are much less egocentric, more considerate of other people's feelings, and are better at understanding others' points of view than adolescents. Arnett suggests that this implies that there is a change in social cognition which seems to take place during the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood that makes people less self-centered. Perhaps the most important feature of emerging adulthood is identity exploration and formation. In the past, identity exploration has most often been associated with

adolescence. According to Erik Erikson (1959/68), establishing a coherent identity is the fundamental psychosocial task of adolescence. More recently, however, scholars have contended that identity formation actually continues through the late teens and the twenties (Arnett, 2000; Valde, 1996; Whitbourne & Tesch, 1985).   Consequently, first steps toward an adult identity may take place in adolescence, but identity explorations become more prominent and serious in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007).

Identity formation involves trying out various life possibilities and gradually moving toward making enduring decisions (Arnett, 2000). Arnett defines identity as a "concept of one's values, abilities, and hopes for the future" (Arnett, 2001, p. 370). It is a time when emerging adults learn more about who they are and what they want out of life. For most emerging adults, college affords the opportunity to explore their own as well as other possible identities, including reexamining personal and religious beliefs, considering new possible world views, and exploring new relationships and career opportunities. During emerging adulthood, formerly held beliefs are often reevaluated, adjusted, or even relinquished (Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003).   For instance, research on religious beliefs suggest that emerging adults consider it important to reexamine the beliefs they have learned in their families and to form a set of beliefs that is the product of their own independent reflections (Arnett & Jensen, 1999, Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993). However, cultural influences and structure sometimes limit the extent to which emerging adults are able to use their teens and twenties this way, and not all young people in this age period are able to use these years for independent exploration (Arnett, 2000).

One important way that emerging adults engage in identity exploration is through peer interactions (Manago et al., 2008). As emerging adults present themselves within social interactions, they share goals and reflect common values, helping one another consolidate identities as they move into adulthood (Nurmi, 2004). Although the college experience presents itself with a variety of social interactions, many emerging adults also utilize online social networking sites as a means to connect with and interact with peers. College students (Calrk, Frith, Demi, 2004; Gemmill & Peterson, 2006; Jones, 2002) are heavy users of the Internet relative to the general population, and use it extensively for communication with peers. Social networking sites allow college students, often on their own for the first time, to stay connected with family and high school friends as well as connect with new friends and colleagues. Emerging adults reported that one favorite activity was browsing other people's profile/walls help users keep track of their friends, the events in their life, as well as their friend's interactions with others (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). College students use social networking sites such as Facebook to maintain or bolster existing offline connections rather than to form new relationships (Ellison et al., 2007) or to strengthen existing offline connections that may not be that strong within the context of their face-to-face lives (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008).

Social networking sites also provide a tool for the expression of feelings, especially towards friends. For instance, posting comments on a person's profile can help deepen an association between individuals, thereby making the relationship feel more intimate (Manago et al., 2008). Self-disclosure is an important component of emerging adults' feelings of intimacy in friendships and intimate behaviors with friends

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and include emotional support, trust and loyalty, sharing activities, and offers of instrumental support (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 429).

Aside from staying connected to peers, social networking sites also provide other functions in relation to identity exploration and formation. For instance, creating a social networking profile provides the opportunity for emerging adults to present themselves to others in any which way they chose to so. Profiles can represent the authentic self, selected aspects of the multifaceted self, the idealized self, or experiments with possible selves (Manago et al., 2008).

However, the presentation of self online is not merely a person centered activity. Social identity is partially defined by the self, partially defined by others (boyd, 2007). Goffman (1959) posits that individuals develop a sense of self from creating an impression they wish to give to others. Social networking sites are, in essence, a social and cultural institution wherein members are expected to write themselves into being in a way that encourages social acceptance. For instance, emerging adults utilize social networking sites, like MySpace, to construct a sense of self in relation to what their peers are doing, gauging their progression in comparison with others. Public comments showcase social skills and connections to valuable others (Manago et al., 2008), along with a public list of others within a person's social networking network. Combined, this sets the stage for the presentation of who one is in relation to others – as well as who one is to one's own self.

Researchers are only just beginning to question the ways in which emerging adults are navigating the social norms and virtual affordances of online social networking sites (Manago et al., 2008), including how this new tool influences the

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formation of an identity through peer interactions. Moreover, no studies can be found

on how emerging adults might utilize social networking sites to assist in the formation of

the identity after the death of a friend.

Symbolic Interactionism

With a variety of symbolic interaction frameworks to choose from, each taking on

a somewhat different stance theoretically and conceptually, I decided to focus on the

work of Sheldon Stryker. In the following paragraphs, a general overview of Stryker's

position and contribution to the symbolic interaction framework, including the relevance

of Stryker's work within this research study is presented.

In his book, *Symbolic Interactionism,* Stryker (1980) provides a general overview

of several important underlying statements about symbolic Interactionism that frame his

perspective. Briefly, this includes the following statements: (1) Behavior is dependent

upon a named or classified world that carries meaning in the form of shared behavioral

expectations which grow out of social interaction, (2) positions, or relatively stable,

morphological components of social structure, carry shared behavioral expectations,

known as "roles", (3) persons who act in the context of organized patterns of behavior

name one another in the sense of recognizing one another as occupants of positions,

(4) persons acting in the context of organized behavior apply names to themselves as

well, which become part of the "self" and create internalized expectations with in regard

to their own behavior, (5) when entering a social situation, persons define the situation

by applying names to it, to others, to themselves, and to particular features within the

situation, and use the resulting definition to organize their own behavior accordingly, (6)

social behavior is not determined by these definitions, but rather behavior is the product

of a role making process, (7) the degree to which roles are "made" rather than simply "played" will depend on larger social structures in which the situation is embedded, and (8) changes can occur in the character of definitions which can in turn lead to changes in the larger social structures within which interactions that place.

Compared to alternative versions of symbolic interactionism, Stryker's (1980) version is unique in that it focuses heavily on social structure, or the patterned regularities that characterize most human interaction (p. 55). He contends that it is social structures – including systems of positions and related roles as well as larger principles around which societies are organized – that shape interaction (Stryker, 1987). This structural version of symbolic Interactionism places emphasis on the importance of being able to bridge social structure and person with the ability to move from the level of the person to that of a larger-scale structure and back to the level of the person. As Stryker debates, a focus on the person without a correlative focus on social structure, or vice versa, is necessarily partial and incomplete (Stryker, 1980, p 53). Thus, the basic premise of his perspective can be written: Society shapes self shapes social interaction (Stryker, 2008). He contends that it is in the context of the social process – the ongoing patterns of interaction joining individual actors – that social structure operates to constrain the conceptions of self, the definitions of the situation, and the behavioral opportunities and repertoires that bound and guide the interaction that takes place (Stryker, 1980, p. 52).

Influenced heavily by Mead, Stryker also expands on his theoretical concepts and principles of *role* and *self* as a way to adequately deal with the reciprocal influence of the social person and social structure. According to Stryker, although Mead

recognized that the human being has many selves, and hence roles, he did not

elaborate on self-structure. Consequently, Stryker elaborated on Mead's idea and

introduced a new set of concepts into his version of symbolic interactionism: identity (or

role identity), identity salience, and commitment.

According to Gregory Stone (as cited in Stryker, p. 60, 14), one has an identity

when one is placed as a social object by others in the same terms that one appropriates

and announces for oneself. One may have a list of identities with which he or she might

identify, such as doctor, spouse, parent, friend, etc. Identities, when taken all together,

comprise the concept of self. Identity salience is the way in which the self is organized,

such that the higher the identity within the hierarchy, the more likely that the identity will

be invoked in a given situation or many situations (Stryker, 1980, p. 61). When a

particular identity affords the maintenance of ties with others, one is said to be

committed to that identity. Since entering into social relationships is premised on the

attribution and acceptance of positions and associated roles, then commitments are

premised on identities (Stryker, p. 62). More so, it is reasonable to assume that

persons will generally seek confirmation or validation of their identities by behaving in

ways that elicit validating responses from others (Stryker, p. 64).

The expectations of others serve to define roles and are important to the

structure of the self. A role can be viewed as template that provides guidance for

individuals as they try to construct their conduct. That is, one knows what to do – how

to "play" one's role – because the norms that define the role provide a script for any

given situation in which one is called on to play the role (Hewitt, 2003, p. 64). One takes

the role of others by using symbols to put oneself in another's place and to view the

world as others do (Stryker, 1980, p. 62), also known as *role-taking.* Role-taking is the process of anticipating the responses of others with whom one is involved in social interaction by imagining oneself in the role of the other. It is from this perspective that one attempts to not only understand the other person's conduct, but also one's own conduct from that particular point of view. To take the role of the other is not to enact, play, or make the other's role, but rather to imagine that role, how the situation looks from its vantage point, how one looks to the other, and what the other expects of one (Hewitt, 2003, p. 79). Making use of symbolic cues present in the situation of interaction, prior experience, and familiarity with particular others or with comparable others, one organizes a definition of others' attitudes, orientations, and future responses which is then validated, invalidated, or reshaped in ongoing interaction (Stryker, 1980, p. 62). This definition, in turn, either helps to reinforce or modify the person's behavior.

In summary, Stryker's version of structural symbolic interactionism proposes that the self guides and organizes behavior and that the self is shaped through interaction with others.   However, it adds to that it is social structures – including systems of positions and related roles as well as larger principles around which societies are organized – that shape interaction (Stryker, 2008).

In terms of this research, Stryker's stance on symbolic Interactionism is fitting for several reasons. First, at the most basic level, social networking profiles can be viewed as symbols. A symbol, through a symbolic interactionist's viewpoint, has no natural connection with that for which it stands. It has an entirely arbitrary relationship to what it represents, a relationship that has been created by and is shared among a group of individuals (Hewitt, 2003, p. 39). In terms of a social networking profile, the profile itself

is not actually a person, but rather a symbolic representation of that person. In isolation, a social networking profile serves no social function. However, when placed in the context of a social networking site with other profiles, it becomes a socially structured situation and provides symbolic meaning for its members.

Stryker (1980, p.66) defines social structure as "subsets of persons tied together in patterned interactions and are separated (at least with respect to those interactions) from other persons". Using this definition, social networking sites can be defined as being a social structure where social interaction can – and does - occur. It is social structure, Stryker contends, that shapes the possibilities for interaction - and ultimately, shapes the person. Conversely, if the social person creatively alters patterns of interaction, those altered patterns can ultimately change social structure (Stryker, 1980, p. 66).

Social networking sites provide a unique situation for social interaction that is relatively new within the social realm. As Stryker pointed out, when there are periods of rapid social change, prior generations may not have experienced a social situation in which they are able to provide ready-made articulated definitions of the situation. When this occurs, there is a need to construct new definitions of the situation. These new definitions are often revisited and reconstructed through the process of interaction, which serve to challenge or validate newly constructed definitions. Constructing a new definition of a situation also involves naming aspects of that situation, including symbols, others, and the even the self. For instance, even the language used in social networking sites has created new meaning for some words, such as "Friend" and "Social Network". Conventionally, the term "Friend" was used to refer to a close,

intimate tie with a person. On social networking sites, the term now refers to not only

those close, intimate ties with people, but it can also encompass distant relatives,

colleagues, or even a favorite rock band. Conversely, a person's "Social Network",

which usually included several dozen close individuals that a person came into contact

with frequently, can now include several hundred individuals, some of which a person

has perhaps never even met.

Most importantly, perhaps, is the inherent need for individuals to define roles

within the newly created social situation. Without any prior experience with this unique

social situation, individuals must create roles and expectations of behavior through their

interaction with each other that is deemed socially appropriate and acceptable within the

social structure. For instance, it is through the ongoing interaction of social networking

members that the role of "Friend" is defined and ultimately embraced. Beyond its

definition, expected behaviors are attached to the role, which ultimately provide

guidance to existing as well as incoming members.

In terms of this research, I also argue that social networking sites, with their own

unique social structure and social interaction, may be more tolerant of the expression of

grief and continuing relationships with the deceased. In essence, social networking

sites have created their own definitions of roles such as "bereaved friend", "deceased

friend", and "grieving individual". For instance, in modern society, openly expressing the

emotions of grief in public is often looked down upon, especially if the loss occurred

many months earlier. However, expressing grief emotions on a deceased person's

social networking profile is considered normative, even months after the death. Also,

one might be viewed as "odd" if they disclosed in an everyday conversation with

someone that they spoke to their deceased friend posthumously. However, on social

networking sites, friends openly "talk" to their friend for months, if not years, after the

death. Within the social networking realm, discussing grief emotions and talking to the

deceased appears to be accepted and supported by other social network members.

I also argue that social networking sites, with their unique definitions of particular

roles may assist in the formation of identity and self as one must learn to incorporate

these newly defined roles, such as "bereaved friend" and "friend of a deceased person",

into their identity. Specifically, visiting a deceased person's profile might provide the

opportunity for role-taking, where bereaved individuals may attempt to imagine

themselves in the place of others who are experiencing the same grief – and hence, the

same roles. Although grief is a private venture, it yearns for public validation.

In conclusion, Stryker's structural version of symbolic Interactionism provides a

convincing framework for this study. In order to understand how bereaved individuals

use social networking sites after the death of a loved one, it is essential to also

understand the social structure of social networking sites and its influence on the

definition of situation, self, behavior, roles, and identity formation. Social networking

sites are social structures that guide social interaction. And, as Stryker would argue,

social interaction shapes the self.

<center>Summary</center>

Relatively few studies on the use of the Internet and Web memorialization can be

found. The few studies that are available provide mostly descriptive information about

individuals that visit Web memorials, and in one case, social networking sites. Related

literature and research studies were presented in this chapter, which helped to inform

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this research. Two important theories, emerging adulthood and symbolic interactionism, which helped to frame this research theoretically, conceptually, and methodologically, were also discussed.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized two qualitative methodologies, including Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology (BNIM) and narrative analysis. The following chapter describes each methodology, including a rational for the use of each one. Next, a description of the data, including the process of data selection and participant recruitment is discussed. The interview process, transcription of the interviews, and the analysis process are also presented. Ethical considerations involving the use of online research are also discussed.

Analysis of Data

Biographical Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Biographical-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology (BNIM) is a methodology used for interpreting narrative material. BNIM methodology, as originally laid out in textbook detail by Tom Wengraf (2001), is used for exploring the lived-experiences through biographic narrative interviews. It has been used over the past fifteen or more years in a variety of collective research projects (e.g. Rosenthal, 1998; Chamberlayne, Rustin, & Wengraf, 2002). It has also been used as a modified version (e.g. Heggie, Neil, Green, & Singleton, 2007) and in conjunction with other methods (Firkin, Dupuis, & Meares, 2004; Robinson, Hobby, & Kirkcaldy, 2006).

BNIM methodology provides a systematic approach to both interview procedures and narrative interpretation. This section first provides a brief overview of Wengraf's (2001, 2008) approach to BNIM interview procedures, followed by an overview of BNIM

analysis.   A more detailed description of the process of BNIM is provided later in the chapter, which also includes my own variation to Wengraf's approach.

According to Wengraf (2008, p. 47), the BNIM perspective or mind-set is best encountered through a text by the stressing of those "rules of BNIM practice" which make it different from other practices of interviewing and interview interpretation. Wengraf (2008) provides a detailed description of "BNIM rules" for interviewing, and recommends adhering to the rules as much as possible in order to evoke free expression of both narrative content and form. When done correctly, BNIM interviews produce a relatively coherent "whole story" that provides crucial insights into the interviewee's subjectivity, which is at the heart of BNIM analysis. BNIM interviews provide also rich material for many other interpretive procedures beyond BNIM analysis. However, BNIM interpretation procedure works best on material generated in BNIM or BNIM-like interviews (Wengraf, 2008, p. 50).

BNIM interviews take on the form of two, and sometimes three, separate interview sessions. Typically, the first two interview sessions make up one interview. In the first subsession, the interviewer offers only a carefully constructed single narrative question (e.g. "Please tell me the story of your life, all the events and experiences that have been important to you personally; begin wherever you like, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for afterwards") and sticks to the promises given in the question (Wengraf, 2008, p 52). During this time, the interviewer intently listens to the interviewee tell his or her story without interruption, taking notes that will assist in development of questions in subsession two. The first subsession is only finished when the interviewee has indicted that he or she has finished telling his or her story. Directly

afterwards, there is a short ten to fifteen minute break so that the interviewer may prepare to ask questions during the second subsession.

In the second subsession, the interviewer seeks for more narrative by asking questions, but sticking strictly to the sequence of topics raised in the first subsession, and only uses words or phrased introduced by the interviewee. The second subsession allows the interviewee to fill out all the segments or chosen segments of the overall narrative with much more detailed particular incident narratives (PINS). The session also allows the interviewee to reflect upon their account as a "first approximation", and thus to visualize going further (Wengraf, 2008, p. 53).

A third subsession may be conducted in which further narrative questions can be posed. This usually takes place several weeks after the initial two subsession interview, after the researcher has had time to transcribe and think about the interview. However, much BNIM research does not use the third subsession option.

Wengraf stresses the importance of debriefing oneself by keeping extensive field notes after each interview as well as during the transcription and analysis process. He also provides guidance for transcribing the interviews and preparing the transcripts for BNIM analysis. Because of the complexity of these procedures, a more detailed description of the process is provided elsewhere in this chapter.

In terms of analysis, BNIM focuses on two distinct, separate tracks of processing and interpretation: the objective event *lived-life-living track*, and the subjective account *told-story-telling track* (Wengraf, 2008). The data are processed differently so that two separate interpretation tracks may be followed.

The two tracks, known as *the living of the lived life* and *the telling of the told story*, serve two separate purposes. First, the living of the lived life reconstructs the experiencing of the "interpreting and acting" subject as he or she lived his or her life events. This track consists of "objective" events that have happened in a person's life. This biographical data is extracted from the interview transcript as well as other relevant sources (e.g. official documents, school records).

The second track, the telling of the told story, is the subjective account of the interviewee's story, focusing on the moment in his or her life when the interview happened and how he or she chose to recall and interpret events (Wengraf, 2008). This track is focused on the evolution of the told story as it is being told, including information that may be left out of the story. *How* the story is told becomes as important as *what* is being told during this track.

One unique aspect of BNIM analysis is the use of interpretive panels. BNIM interpretive panels usually consist of groups of non-specialists drawn from a variety of backgrounds to ensure differences of experiences and perspectives. The interpretive panels engage in a chunk-by-chunk future-blind approach (Wengraf, 2008). Often, two separate panels are convened, one for each interpretive track. The panel facilitator uses the chunk-by chunk future-blind procedure as a way to allow the panel participants to go through the chunks moment by moment, having intentions and predictions, but never knowing what will actually come next or later. This provides the panel with the opportunity to reconstruct the interviewee's story as it was told. During this time, panel participants create counter, alternative, and tangential hypothesis for all experiential hypotheses are initially put forth. This challenges any assumptions one may have about

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the most obvious hypotheses.   In particular, it avoids the "biographic inevitability illusion" whereby the researcher's god-like immediate impressionistic grasp of the "whole text of the whole life-story" generates a numbing sense that the life and the story could only be lived that way and told that way and above all understood that way (Wengraf, 2008).

After the panel work, the researcher then proceeds on their own to complete work on any remaining chunks (separately or bundled together): or in some other way of "getting to think the whole" (Wengraf, 2008, p. 60). The researcher then attempts to find a linking hypothesis that explains the relationship between two tracks, relating the lived life findings to the telling of the told story findings. Once this hypothesis, also known as a structural hypothesis, is created, a historical narrative of the evolution of the case is written. The case account describes the dynamics and significance of the way the case evolved over time, which includes the historical subjectivity-in-situation at the start, and that at the end of the period covered and at the time of the BNIM interview (Wengraf, p. 65). Once several cases have been analyzed using BNIM (usually three to five), then another panel-based procedure is conducted to compare the dynamics of the caes which can be used to lay the foundation for theorization.

However, as discussed by Wengraf(2008, p. 384), BNIM is constructed as a methodological tool that is usable by people with a wide variety of ontologies and epistemologies and can be used in various ways as well as for various purposes. Although the central focus of BNIM is on the understanding of the subjectivity-in-situation of the person being interviewed, the methodology is also of value for those who are not interested in subjectivity of the stories or the interpretation of the

significance of the telling, but rather only of the content of the story told (Wengraf, 2008,

p. 49). Also, the methodological component of *biographic-narrative-based* research

does not mean that the research product has to take the form of a collection of accounts

of individual biographies or experiences; it may do, but at least as often it doesn't

(Wengraf, 2008, p. 28).

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis refers to a diverse family of methods for interpreting texts that

have in common a storied form (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Reismann (2008) describes

four broad methodological approaches to narrative analysis: thematic, structural,

dialogic/performance, and visual analysis. Each method describes narrative differently

and deals with the following important issues: definition of narrative, the task of

transforming talk into text, attention to language and narrative form, focus of an inquiry

and associated unit of analysis, and attention to context. Each analytical approach is

not considered mutually exclusive, however, and can be adapted or combined with

other approaches depending on the researcher's epistemological and theoretical

perspective. In the following section, a broad overview of narrative and narrative

analysis, with a focus on thematic and structural narrative analysis, as described by

Riessman is presented, followed by my own personal approach to narrative analysis

that was used for this particular study.

First, it is important to define what "narrative" means. The term "narrative"

carries many meanings and is used in a variety of disciplines, often synonymously with

"story" (Riessman, 2008, p. 3). Narrative may include texts that include spoken, written,

or visual materials. More specifically, it may include memoir, biography, autobiography,

diaries, archival documents, social service and health records, other organizational documents, scientific theories, folk ballads, photographs, and other art work (Riessman, p. 4). However, not all talk and text is considered narrative. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected (17, p. 5). Fundamentally, whatever the content, stories demand the consequential linking of events or ideas. At their very core, narratives provide a function and a purpose.

Beyond this fundamental principle, there is a range of definitions of narrative, most often linked to discipline. For instance, in social linguistics, narrative refers to a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centered and temporally organized (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). In social history, narrative can refer to an entire life story which utilizes one or more interviews in combination with outside documents or observations. In human sciences, narrative can refer to texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even a narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives (Reissman, p. 6).

How a researcher approaches narrative analysis ultimately depends on several factors, including his or her definition of narrative, theoretical and epistemological perspectives, and purpose of the research study. All narrative inquiry is concerned with content – "what" is said, written or visually shown (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). However, the primary focus of each methodological approach differs. For instance, thematic

analysis focuses primarily on context while keeping a story "intact". Primary attention is focused on "what" is said, rather than "how", "to whom", or "for what purpose". In general, thematic analysts are mostly interested in the "told" – informants' reports of events and experiences, rather than aspects of the "telling" (Riessman, p. 54). In thematic analysis, "narrative" can be defined as an entire life story, an extended account of a speaker, or a bounded segment of a text or document. Most importantly, within the sequences within the story are presented intact. Narrative analysts strive to preserve sequence and the wealth of detail contained in long sequences, while attending to time and place of narration. In thematic analysis, prior theory also serves as a resource for interpretation, with most narrative investigators rejecting the idea of generic explanations (Riessman, p. 74). Unlike grounded theory, where the main objective is to inductively generate stable concepts, or themes, that can be used to theorize *across* cases, thematic analysis theorizes from *within* a particular case.

Structural analysis, on the other hand, focuses primarily on how narratives are organized. A structural analysis approach shifts away from the "told" story to the "telling" of the story with exclusive attention to the narrative itself. Like thematic analysis, structural approaches are concerned with content, but attention to narrative form adds insights beyond what can be learned from referential meanings alone (Riessman, 2008, p. 77). Structural analysis is often combined with other approaches, such as thematic analysis. This can generate insights that are missed when interpretation concentrates narrowly on "what" is said, ignoring how content is organized by a speaker. The use of narrative can be defined in many ways in structural analysis, ranging from a brief and temporally ordered story to a longer, organized story that

includes flashbacks, asides, and perhaps, an episodic rather than temporal organization (Riessman, p. 101). In structural analysis, the term "narrative" is reserved for a bounded unit of speech, rather than the entire biography. This type of microanalysis provides a unique tool for researchers to question how participants use language to construct themselves and their histories. Microanalysis of several narratives can build theories that relate language and meaning in ways that are missed when transparency is assumed, as in thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, p. 103).

For the purpose of this study, I utilized both thematic and structural narrative analysis as my methodological approaches. During the first part of my analysis, I chose to utilize a BNIM-like approach for one particular case study, which focused on the narrative of both the "told" and the "telling" of the participants' story. Wengraf (2008, 2001), defines narrative both as a story as well as a bounded unit of speech, and utilizes narrative somewhat differently depending on which track the researcher is using to interpret the material. Although the tracks are analyzed separately, they are ultimately linked together during final analysis.

During my own approach to analysis utilized BNIM, I concentrated mostly on the context on the story with less focus on the actual structure of the narrative itself. At times, however, I did utilize microanalysis of particular segments of text to assist in my understanding of meanings a participant might be trying to convey. In my analysis of the case study, narrative was defined as both entire participant's story and at times, a particular segment of text. I preferred to analyze the narrative within the context of the story told, without as much focus on the linguistic structure of the text. However, use of BNIM did force me to look at the narrative text in various ways, both within and outside

the context of the story, which at times included accounting for the structure of the participant's choice of language. This ultimately did influence my interpretation of the narrative, and consequently, my findings. The second part of my analysis included a thematic approach to interpreting all six of my participants collectively. In this approach, I did not focus on the structure of the narrative but rather the themes that evolved from within each case. The actual process of my approach is discussed later within this chapter.

<div align="center">The Selection of Participants and Data</div>

Description of Data

This study was qualitative and used data obtained from personal interviews as well as written information shared by participants with me either during or shortly after the interviews. Several times after an interview a participant would offer to email me some of their own personal comments they had posted on their deceased friend's Webpage or provide me with a link to a video or pictures of their deceased friend that was posted online outside of the social networking sites. For instance, one participant emailed a link to an online video posted on Youtube.com which she had created in memory of her best friend. Another participant brought his laptop with him to the interview and would refer to pictures and comments on his friend's Facebook Webpage as well as his own Facebook Webpage as he told his story. However, I was very cautious in the content that I used, using only written information given to me by the participants for this study. To ensure that quotes and comments could not be searched quickly in a search engine, I changed the participants' wording slightly.

The Selection Process

According to Wengraf (2001, p. 96), because of the comparatively small numbers of informants that a process of semi-structured interviews can be applied to, given finite resources, it is unlikely one would be able to do many interviews. Consequently, the chances are that the numbers one does collect will not be enough to enable you to draw any broad inferences from them. Qualitative researchers' goal is typically not to make external statistical generalizations, but rather an attempt to obtain insights into particular educations, social, and familial processes and practices that exist within a specific location and context (Connelly, 1998). The goal of qualitative research is particularization. In general, sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), nor should the sample size not be too small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation (flick, 1998; Morse, 1995). When utilizing the BNIM method, saturation may occur within as few as five narratives (Tom Wengraf, personal communication, May, 2008). For the purpose of this study, my sample size continued until the point of saturation occurred. This included six participants.

When selecting participants, Wengraf (2001, p. 95) explains that whatever way the researcher finds and selects his or her participants, he or she must make clear in the analysis and reporting how the participants were sought out. Initially, I put an advertisement in the local campus newspaper for a week in hopes to recruit participants. From the posting, I received five responses, of which one did not respond back to my email that described the study in further detail. The other four respondents replied with an interest in being interviewed. After interviewing the four respondents, I decided not to use my very first interview as data because her story, while interesting

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and rich in description, did not contain much information about the use of social networking sites after the loss of a friend. I decided to use this interview as a way to critically examine my first use of the BNIM interview process.

Because the advertisement in the campus newspaper only produced four potential participants and the cost of the weekly advertisement was high, I decided to seek out participants in other ways. I posted an advertisement on the campus OneStart bulletin board as well as on Craigslist.com which offered free advertisements. Because I was teaching two classes in the fall semester, I also showed the advertisement to my students at the beginning of the semester. When I guest lectured for my colleagues, I would also show the advertisement at the end of my lecture with the permission of the instructor. This method recruited five more participants over the course of the fall semester.

Wengraf (2001, p. 95) suggests specifying any direct or indirect relationship the researcher may have with their participants or they have with each other. In this way the researcher as well as the reader can allow for how non-interview relationships might impinge on the interview data that are generated in the interview. It is important to note that three of the participants selected for this study were, in fact, my students during the fall semester. Because of the size of my class (80-90 students) and the short duration of the class time (eight week course), I did not know my students personally. However, the student-teacher relationship may have had some influence on the narratives produced by the participants. For instance, one participant was hesitant to tell me about some previous trouble she had gotten into when she was in high school during our interview. However, I speculate that she may have been hesitant regardless to share

this information even if I had not been her instructor.

In total I interviewed eight participants of which I chose six narratives to utilize as my data. According to Wengraf (2001, p. 95), a researcher should avoid haphazard selection of participants. I chose a purposive non-randomized sample, which included selecting information-rich cases for study in depth (Patton, 1990, P. 169). I decided not to include one participant's interview for my study because her narratives were not particularly rich in description or information. As Wengraf (2001, p. 105) put it, "the participant needs to be trusted to turn up…to be able to articulate their knowledge and ideas well enough."

Description of Participants

Initially, participants were to be comprised of friends who had visited their deceased loved ones' Webpages after their loved one had died within the past year. However, during the interviews, two participants noted that their friend had died between a year and two years from the time of the interview. Consequently, the time that had elapsed from the time of the interviews and the deaths of the participants' friends ranged anywhere from two to twenty months. However, I did not notice much difference between the narratives of those who had lost a friend within the past year and those who had lost a friend within a year and two years from the time of the interview. The greatest difference between participants who had lost a friend within the year and participants who had lost a friend for over a year was perhaps the frequency of which the participants had visited their friends' personal Webpages. Those who had lost a friend longer than a year at the time of the interview tended not to visit the Webpages as frequently as participants who had lost a friend within the past year. Also, one

participant I interviewed has lost two friends within the past year and included both

losses in his story. Although I had not anticipated interviewing a participant who had

lost two close friends, his story was not much different that those who had lost one

friend and undoubtedly added insight into my research findings.

All participants were college students and ranged in ages from eighteen to

twenty-two at the time of the interview. Although recruitment was not limited to college

students only, the individuals that replied to my advertisements all turned out to be

Indiana University college students.

The Interview Process

BNIM methodology utilizes a specific, unique interview technique for eliciting

narratives.   For the purpose of this study, BNIM interviewing methods were utilized as a

way to provide richer, more in-depth narratives that most likely could not normally have

been obtained through a traditional open-ended, non structured interview. The following

section describes the interview process, including the interview structure and particular

interview methods unique to BNIM that were used during this research study.

A Brief Overview

An interview design that focuses on the elicitation and provocation of storytelling,

or narration, can be called a narrative interview design (Wengraf, 2001, p. 111). BNIM

approach utilizes a particular type of lightly structured depth interview (LSDI). This

particular design starts from a single initial narrative question, or SQUIN (Single

Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative) which focuses on an individual's life story, or part

of his or her life story.

The interview structure is divided into two, and sometimes three, subsessions.

The first two subsessions occur during the initial interview and are separated by a twenty to thirty minute break. While the first subsession consists of the interviewer asking the participant one single initial narrative question then listening without interruption, the second subsession is used to ask for more story about the topics raised during the first subsession and strictly follows the order in which the topics were raised, using the exact words used by the participant.

An optional third subsession, which is always a separate interview usually conducted several weeks after the initial interview, is completely structured by the interviewer's concerns which gives a strong directionality to the flow of the interview (Wengraf, 2001, p. 120). It is during this third interview that questions may be asked about topics that were not mentioned in the previous subsessions. For the purpose of this study, I did not conduct a third subsession with my participants.

The Interviews

After receiving an initial email from a prospective participant expressing their interest in my study, I would respond back with more information about my study (see email below). If interested in continuing with my study, the prospective participant would email me back and we would make arrangements to meet. Only one individual out of the nine prospective participants did not respond to second detailed email. All nine interviews took place between the months of October and February at the Indiana University Wells Library. When arranging a place to meet each participant, I would ask each participant if he or she had a preferred place to meet, but would always offer up the library as a possible location. Interviewing at the library offered the following advantages: First, the library is centrally located on the IU campus, which was

convenient for the participants if they did not have access to a vehicle. Second, I often met students between classes, which meant they were already on campus. Third, the library was a neutral, safe place to meet. And lastly, the library had private, sound proof rooms which offered privacy and provided an ideal atmosphere for recording the interviews.

At the beginning of each interview, I would discuss with each participant what they could expect from our time together, including the format of the interview process in which I would ask them a single question, listen to their story, and then ask more questions about their responses. I would then ask a few basic questions, such as the name of their friend they would be talking about, how old they were, or where they were from. I believe that spending those initial few minutes talking about what to expect during the interviewed helped to create a more relaxed atmosphere for myself as well as my participants.

The interviews took anywhere from forty-five minutes to over two hours to complete, including discussions before and after each interview. Most participants wanted to continue our discussion after the initial interview on a more personal level, including how the opportunity to talk about their deceased friends was therapeutic. During this time I would also ask questions that I could not ask during the initial interview without violating BNIM procedure such as, "Are you worried about your friend's Facebook page disappearing one day?" or "How often do you visit your friend's Facebook page?". During the time after the interview I would also often express my condolences to the participant or comment on some particular subject they discussed earlier.

At the end of each meeting I provided each participant with an information sheet that provided local contact numbers to grief resources (see Appendix B). I reviewed the sheet with each participant and offered to help connect them with any resources available if they were interested. Only one participant asked for assistance in referring her to a counselor.

The Single Narrative-Seeking Question

At the beginning of an interview, I asked a single initial question which was designed to elicit the full narrative, called a SQUIN (Single Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative). The SQUIN can take on various forms, including a full or partial SQUIN. A full SQUIN addresses the whole life story of the interviewee and is considered the most open framework. Regardless of the type of SQUIN, the purpose of the question is to invite the interviewee to decide how, when and in which contexts he or she introduces relevant aspects of his or her personal experiences (Wengraf, 2001, p. 121). However, most SQUINs are restricted to a phase in a person's life (i.e. youth, old age), or focuses on special issues or topics (i.e. experience of an illness, a relationship). For instance, the following narrative-seeking question was used for this study and focused on the relationship of a deceased friend.

> *As you know, I'm researching how we use social networking sites after someone we love dies. So, can you please tell me the story of your relationship with (insert name of person who died) before and after his/her death, all those events and experiences that were and are important for you, personally? I'll listen; I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes in case I have any questions for after you've finished. Please take your time. Please begin wherever you like.*

According to Wengraf (2001, p. 122), given the absolute centrality of the SQUIN in the crucial first subsession, it must be carefully designed, written out in full, and delivered without modification. I initially began working on my SQUIN during the BNIM training I attended in the summer of 2008 under the direction of Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlain. During the workshop, each participant received feedback from the group on their individual SQUIN. After the workshop, I continued to develop and refine my SQUIN with my Chairperson, Dr. Kathleen Gilbert, who had also attended the BNIM workshop and was familiar with the BNIM methodology.

The above initial SQUIN was used at the beginning of each interview. However, during my second interview I replaced the words "after someone we love dies" with "after someone we care about dies" because the participant was male and I feared the word "love" might have appeared too touchy-feely. To my surprise, during the interview the participant used the word "love" to describe how he felt about his deceased friend on his own accord. Therefore, for the remainder of the interviews, I decided to continue with my original SQUIN which included "after someone we love dies". Aside from this one modification, no other changes were made to the SQUIN for the remainder of the interviews.

In designing SQUINs for particular uses, the principle of deliberate vagueness which allows and requires the interviewee to impose their own system of relevancy on a fuzzy possibility is always adhered to (Wengraf, 2001, p. 122). However, when recruiting participants for a research project, it is inevitable that the participants will have some idea of what their narrative should include. For instance, my participants knew that my research was about the use of social networking sites after someone dies

before the interview. According to Wengraf (p. 121) the researcher will need to have decided how strong and clear or how weak or fuzzy he or she wishes their (the participants) awareness of the project details to be. When a potential participant contacted me (always through email) after having read the posted advertisement, I would respond with an email that read:

> Dear (insert name):
> Thank you for considering participating in my study. I would love to hear your story. To give you a little more information about my study, I am interested in how we use social networking sites after the loss of a friend. I would expect the interview to last about an hour or so. I would be happy to meet you in a quiet secure location to ensure your privacy is respected (like perhaps a quiet room at the library). Also, no personal information would be used in my write up. Thank you again for your email and I'm truly sorry to hear about your loss. Would you be interested in meeting with me soon? I'll be happy to work around your schedule.

I felt this email, along with my initial advertisement, provided enough information to prompt a narrative about the use of social networking sites after the loss of a friend. However, during two interviews both participants told their story without any inclusion of the use of social networking sites after the death of their friend. At the "end" of their story, both participants asked if I wanted to know anything else, by which I would prompt them to talk about their experience with the social networking sites. After the prompt, their narratives would pick back up to include this topic. Although Wengraf (2001) instructs the interviewer to "…just keep facilitating the story-telling, occasionally asking for more story, but never specifying what it would be about, never specifying the referent…" (p. 122), following this rule ultimately would have produced an unusable narrative for my research project because the story would not have included the use of social networking sites at all. In retrospect, I should have tried to actively support but

not direct the participants narrating. My direction may have inherently disrupted the participants' spontaneous *gestalt,* which is central to BNIM interviewing and interpretation. According to Rosenthal (1990), there is a gestalt (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, and order or hidden agenda) informing each person's life which it is the job of biographers to elicit intact, and not destroy through following their own concerns.

The First Subsession

After the initial SQUIN was presented and the participant begun his or her story, I facilitated the interview without interrupting or intervening until he or she insisted he or she had finished telling their story. This included allowing for moments of silence or long pauses as the interviewee tries to think through or recall material they are trying to access (Wengraf, 2001, p. 128). During the first subsession, it is essential that the interviewer is an active listener while only providing non-directed responses when the participant needs support. The interviewer's interventions must facilitate but – apart being oriented towards facilitating narrative by narrative-pointed questions – non-directional (Wengraf, 2001, p125). At most, this includes repeating in different words the original direction given, but refusing to add anything to it (Wengraf, 2001, p. 125). On no account should the interviewer change the question or "spell it out" in any way, whatever pressure he or she might feel to be under (Wengraf, 2001, p.119).

Wengraf (2001, p. 132) describes "active listening while attempting to return the interviewee to unspecified narrative" as the primary skill required for BNIM interviewing. Active listening with non-directive responses and support are not, for most people, easy to achieve and maintain (Wengraf, p. 126). During my own experience with

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interviewing, I found this task to be indeed difficult. During the interviews, I often had to

fight the urge to interrupt the interviewee with responses to his or her comments, which

at times, invited the commentary. During two interviews, as mentioned previously, I did

direct the participants' narratives by asking them to discuss their friends' social

networking sites when they did not bring the topic up during the interview.

According to Wengraf, during the interview the interviewer should refrain from

making comments or responding to the participant's narrative. However, it is also

important that the interviewer comes across as engaged, empathetic, and

nonjudgmental. Non-verbal expression of active listening (i.e. listening posture, eye

contact, non-verbal sounds like "hmm") indicates to the interviewee that the interviewer

is listening (Wengraf, 2001, p. 128). If strong emotions arise during the interview, the

interviewer should be prepared, if necessary, to mirror them. This will give the

participant the feeling that the interviewer accepts them and their expressed emotions,

and that they do not have to avoid feeling those emotions for fear of upsetting him or

her (Wengraf, 2001, p. 128). Also, the participant will immediately sense when the

interviewer has stopped listening to them and this will end or distort the expression of

their gestalt (p. 126). Because of my own personal experience with loss and the

emotions of painful grief, I felt a genuine empathy towards my participants' experiences

and tried to convey that empathy throughout the interviews with non-verbal responses

and by keeping eye contact.

Another important skill of BNIM interviewing is that of taking topic-keyword notes.

During this first subsession, the interviewer makes notes for each of the key topic

phrases that the interviewee has used during their storytelling. This later enables the

interviewer to remind the interviewee of some or all of the topics he or she raised so that they can talk more narratives about each of them (Wengraf, 2001, p. 132). The topics, or referents, are used to instantly remind the interviewee of what they were talking about. They must be in the interviewee's language and use their keywords, the key terms in their own language, their own discourse, their idiolect (Wengraf, 2001, p. 132) and usually consist of two to four word phrases.   For example, in Figure 3, I wrote down the phrase "writes to mom on Facebook" as a topic a participant discussed during subsession one of his interview.   During subsession two, if I wanted to discuss the topic of writing to his mother on Facebook further, it would be important that I use the term "mom" and not "mother". This allows the participant to recognize the keywords or phrases without effort. The main purpose of topic notes is to enable the interviewer in the second subsession to remind the participant of some particular thing they said, with the words and in the way that they said it, such that they can be asked to tell you more narrative about it (Wengraf, p. 132). Because the main focus of the BNIM methodology is to push the participant to provide narratives and narrations, notes on topics should be event focused as much as possible, including particular incidents, happenings, and occasions. Figure 3 provides an example of the keywords I noted during my interview with Alex.

Figure 3 Excerpt from Subsession One Notes

```
Pallbearer
Hardest part burying him
Visit grave
Would never Facebook mom as a friend
Writes to mom on Facebook
Found iPod – rap song
When think of him, go to Facebook
Pass house
Don't like to see posts say he was selfish
Brother got tattoo
Nuts – good guy
Still tagging him in pictures
Mom's Facebook – friends still talk
Couldn't write something to her
Can't hold conversation w/parents
Church deny
```

Only after the participant has explicitly ended their narrative does the initial

subsession one end. If the interviewer ends the session, the interviewee's gestalt is

broken (Wengraf, 2001, p. 136). Therefore, it is essential that the interviewer does not

interrupt any silences or pauses until the participant clearly ends their narrative. In most

of my interviews, this usually ended with the participant making a statement like, "So I

think that's about it" or "That's all I can really say right now that I'm thinking of."

Before the second session begins, a short break is needed for the interviewer to

reviewer his or her notes in order to prepare TQUINS (topic questions aimed at inducing

narratives) for the next session. Although Wengraf (2001, p. 137) suggests a ten to

twenty minute break between sessions, I found that much time was unnecessary. Also,

because many of participants were watching their time, I only used between five to

seven minutes to prepare for the subsession two.

Wengraf (2001, p. 137) suggests making a guess as to what amount of time on

average will be taken by the interviewee to respond to each of the interviewer's priority

TQUINS and develop a guess of the number of TQUINS that can be actually addressed

and responded to in the whole of the time available. During the break between

subsessions, I would often ask my participants how much time they had before they

needed to leave. From this amount of time given, I would develop a plan for which, and

how many, TQUINS I would ask the participant. During the first few interviews I learned

quickly that the list of TQUINS I initially chose to ask the interviewee had been too long.

By the end of the interview, I felt that I had, at times, asked too many TQUINS relating

to topics that were brought up at the beginning of the interview and did not save enough

time for TQUINS discussed towards the end of the interviews. By the third or fourth

interview, however, I became much more efficient in monitoring my time and the amount

of TQUINS I could effectively ask within a given time frame.

The Second Subsession

Subsession two begins immediately after the interviewer initiated break and is

based on the keyword notes from subsession one. In the second subsession, the only

questions that can be asked are narrative questions, or TQUINS (topic questions aimed

at inducing narrative) The sequence of the questions raised in subsession two must

take the same order, starting from the first topic raised in subsession one and

proceeding to the last topic discussed. Topics may be missed out, but an earlier topic

cannot be raised once a later one has been addressed (Wengraf, 2001, p. 138).

According to Wengraf (2001, p. 139), the interviewer must never go back to earlier

topics, never combine topics, always use their words and phrases for topics, and never

paraphrase or replace.

Figure 4 is an extension of Figure 3 by which I have underlined the topics I chose

to discuss with my participant, Alex, followed by keywords chosen from his responses to

my TQUINS.

Figure 4 Excerpt from Subsession Two Notes

```
Pallbearer
Hardest part burying him ——→ broke down
Visit grave
Would never Facebook mom as a friend
Writes to mom on Facebook ——→
Found iPod – rap song                    ——→ talk to him first, then post ——→ gives more stories
When think of him, go to Facebook ——→ people write for others
Pass house
Don't like to see posts say he was selfish ——→
Brother got tattoo
Nuts – good guy
Still tagging him in pictures——→
Mom's Facebook – friends still talk——→
Couldn't write something to her ——→ attention
Can't hold conversation w/parents
Church deny
Disagree with religion
```

It is normally the case that, when answering a narrative questions about a particular topic, the interviewee develops an account which itself embodies further topics (subtopics to each initial topic) (Wengraf, 2001, p. 139). Figure 4 provides an example of the topics I chose to discuss further with Alex. The arrows that follow a topic provide continued questioning of that particular topic. For instance, I asked Alex to discuss more about "When think of him, go to Facebook". Alex responded by discussing how he would "talk to him first, then post". I then asked Alex to tell me more about "talk to him first, then post", to which Alex continued to talk about "giving more stories".

To formulate narrative questions from the topics raised in subsession one, the interviewer should always go for more narrative/story, a narrative example with the terms "happening, incident, occasion (or event)" (Wengraf, p. 141). For instance, the following excerpt from Kevin's interview provides an example of how I used the topic "midterms hung himself" to formulate a narrative question to induce more story about

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the day his friend hung himself:

> *I: Okay. You were talking – the next, one of the next things you talked about –*
>
> *you mentioned that um, on the day that Ben hung himself you had two midterms*
>
> *and couldn't go to the funeral. Can you tell me a little bit more about that day?*

Although ideally all narrative-seeking questions will provide perfect narrations from the participant, this never happens. However, as Wengraf (2001, p. 141), as long as the interviewer asks properly for a narrative, the interviewer should be happy if, at certain points, he or she does not get it. Although I assumed I was asking my participants the proper narrative-seeking questions, on many occasions they would respond with answers that did not directly answer the question I had asked at all.

Once I completed prompting my participant for more narrative from my list of topics - in the correct sequence - subsession two had ended. Because I elected not to continue with a subsession three, which is often set for a later date and comprises of asking the interviewee questions that subsequently arose from preliminary analysis of the first two subsessions, I spent several minutes debriefing with my participants. This included discussions about the interview process or any other topic that might come up not necessarily related to the research study. It was during this time that I also provided my participants with a hand out that provided contact information for local and community grief resources.

Debriefing

Post-interviewing debriefing, or making notes immediately after an interview session, is a key operation often neglected or mistakenly left until later or treated as being of minor importance (Wengraf, 2001, p. 143). Debriefing allows the researcher to

capture any short-term material from the interview that may be lost as time passes. This includes writing down anything and everything that the researcher can remember about the interview, such as content, feelings, and process (Wengraf, 2001, p. 144). Another function of post-interview debriefing notes is the re-ordering of the material in a free-associative flow (Wengraf, 2001, p. 144). This helps the researcher make connections within and outside the interview itself while also providing material about emotions and feelings. According to Wengraf, debriefing is the start of the researcher's eventual theorizing of the interview experience.Wengraf suggests writing in a free associative flow without adherence to any particular format or design for at least thirty to sixty minutes.

Debriefing notes serve several functions. For instance, debriefing notes capture non-verbal data that cannot be captured by a tape or digital recorder. Figure 5 provides an excerpt of the debriefing notes I took shortly after my interview with Rachel. During the interview, Rachel made very little eye contact with me as she spoke and I noticed her hands would often shake as she held them on the table. When I was transcribing her interview, I had forgotten about this non-linguistic data until I had reread my debriefing notes. This data, along with her spoken words, helped me later to convey her painful grief as I recounted her story during my analysis.

Figure 5 Excerpt from Debriefing Notes

I interviewed Rachel this afternoon. She talked to me about the death of her friend, Brandon. Rachel kept her eyes on the table in front of her and rarely made eye contact with me while she told her story. Sometimes I would notice her hands were a little shaky or her voice would start to crack from time to time. She seemed to be trying very hard to keep her composure. I have noticed with Rachel, as I have noticed with my other participants that the initial SQUIN question only gives me about a 12-15 minute response initially. It is during subsession two that I really feel like I am getting the meat of their story. Rachel did not talk about that first time she got on Facebook soon after his death, or how often she visits Facebook – again it seems to me that the timing of the visits just don't seem to matter as much as the essence of the Facebook itself.

Because I met my participants at the main library on campus, it was easy for me to find a computer immediately after each interview and write my post-interview debriefing notes. In my notes I would write about anything that came to my mind, including non-linguistic data or comments made before or after the interview that might be useful later on. I often critiqued the interview process, including the effectiveness of my SQUIN or narrative seeking questions. I would often begin theorizing about themes that were beginning to emerge with each passing interview. I also used the time to write about my own emotions and responses to my participants' stories.

Wengraf (2001, p. 209) also suggests debriefing, or making notes on one's experience and ideas that are stimulated during the re-hearing of the audio tape, during the transcription process. The follow section describes my process for transcription, including debriefing.

Transcription Process

Wengraf (2001) suggests several specific ways to transcribe interview tapes with a great emphasis on diligent note taking throughout the process. According to Wengraf (p. 209), if at the end of the process of transcription, all one has is a perfect transcription and no theoretical notes, one has wasted 60% or more of this window of opportunity. Wengraf also stresses the importance of documenting the mechanics of the transcription process, including the researcher's choice of transcription symbols.

During an interview, stopping to take notes on what is going on is not possible without breaking contact and rapport with your participant (Wengraf, 2001, p. 209). During transcription of the interview, however, the researcher has an indefinite amount of time to pause and write down any ideas or thoughts that may come up during the

transcription process. Wengraf emphasizes note taking during transcription as crucial because listening to the audio taped interview will provoke memories and thoughts that will only be available once. The point of note taking is to spark off many theoretical memos for the researcher in this crucial interaction of active struggle with the transcript and active struggle of the researcher's mind as it remembers the original interview process, and the data generated (Wengraf, 2001, p. 210).

Wengraf also suggests writing short notes in the margin and use free associative writing on a notepad during the interview transcription. The constant writing of memos to oneself provides material for final writing; it also provides a basis for improving one's spelled-out thoughts at the earlier date (Wengraf, 2001, p. 211). During transcription of my interviews, I made notes in a separate journal and linked them to the corresponding line number in the interview transcriptions.

In terms of transcribing, Wengraf (2001) suggests many different ways to produce a written transcript, including using a blank matrix in a word processing program to create several columns. This provides a column for the transcript itself and other columns for comments or coding. I chose to not use the columns in my transcription, having become comfortable with my own way of transcription from previous research studies. Instead, I typed the interview transcription into Word 2007, using line numbers as a reference for my notes in my journal. This allowed me to use the line numbers as a reference later on when I referred back to my notes.

When transcribing interviews, Wengraf (2001, p. 216) suggests providing an explanation of the notations used by the researcher during the transcription process to enable the researcher and anyone else reading them to avoid a degree of puzzlement

or having to speculate. Although there are many formal ways to take paralinguistics into

account during transcription, Wengraf suggests using a more informal approach which

is preferable on large chunks of text. Figure 6 provides a list of the transcription

symbols I used during my transcription.

Figure 6 Transcription Symbols

Symbol	Example	Explanation
( )	Um. ( ) Every once in awhile I look at his pictures, too.	Empty parentheses indicate the transcriber's inability to understand or hear what was said
-	I just – I went – I don't know where	Hyphen indicates an abrupt cut-off of a word or a quick change from one sentence to another
(( ))	Here's in Mexico ((shows picture)).	Double parentheses contain descriptions or non-verbal actions made by the interviewer
(pause)	But um. (pause). Um. (pause).	Indicates a short pause made by the interviewer, no more than five seconds
(long pause)	I kind of get in a different mood. (long pause).	Indicates a long pause made by the interviewer, between five and fifteen seconds.
" "	So I called him, he said, "no, no. We're all going home."	Quotations indicate words paraphrased by the interviewee that another person said

In an attempt to make reading the transcripts easier, I created sentences within

the interviewee's dialogue using capital letters, punctuation, and dashes. Although this

inherently created incomplete or run-on sentences, it also facilitated reading the

transcript later. Also, written sounds such as "uh" and "mm" are included within the

transcript.

The Analysis Process - BNIM

Background and Overview

There are several steps in the BNIM analysis. Figure 7 represents the BNIM

process that I used in my own research with my case study. This figure illustrates how

Figure 8 Stages of BNIM
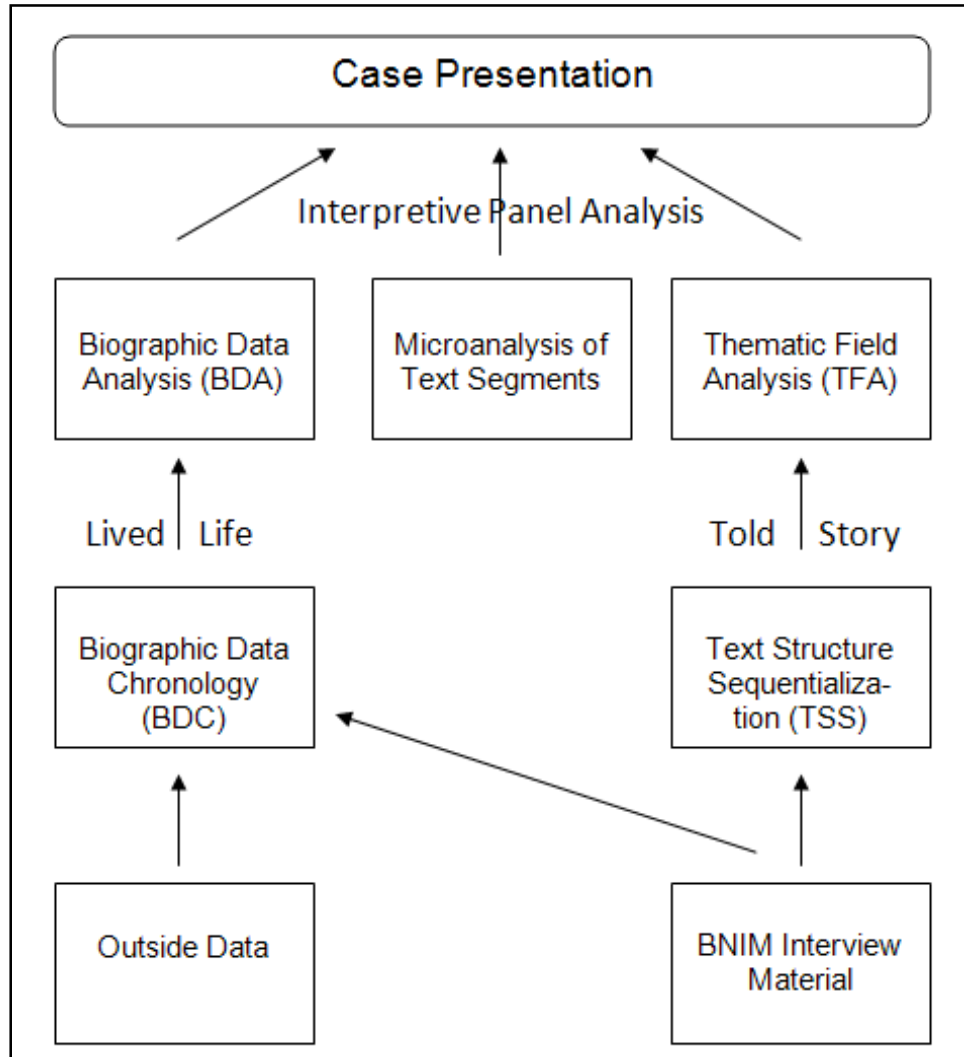
the different stages of BNIM are interconnected while also providing a visual roadmap of

the analysis process.   In the following section, I will discuss each stage of the BNIM

analysis process, beginning with the Biographical Data Chronology (BDC) and Text

Structure Sequentialization (TSS) which is constructed from the BNIM interview

materials (i.e. interview transcripts, debriefing notes) and other outside data (i.e. emails

from participants, links to social networking sites).

The first stage of analysis comprises of sequentializations of lived life and told

text (Wengraf, 2001, p. 236). From the written transcript, two documents are produced:

the Biographical Data Chronology (BDC) and the Text Structure Sequentialization (TSS). The first document is the BDC, which describes the chronology of the interviewee's life and is discussed in detail in the following section. The second document, the TSS, describes the participants' delivery of the biographical account and responses to the interviewer interventions as a result of which it is told (Wengraf, p. 236).

The Creation of the Biographical Data Chronology (BDC)

The *lived life* is composed of the uncontroversial hard biographical data that can be extracted from the interview material and any other helpful source: it is organized chronologically in the BDC and expresses the "objective" data about the person's life, the life events as they happened (Wengraf, 2001, p. 236). The BDC is constructed with the use of the interview transcript and any outside data available to the researcher, such as personal documents, official files, and historical research.

Although a participant may discuss some of these events as they happened in chronological order, the researcher will often need to sort through the interview transcript and other available outside data and put the events in order. Figure 8 is an excerpt from Alex's BDC which is derived from his interview transcript and my interview notes. Although Alex provided relatively few clear dates of the events he discussed, I was still able to arrange the episodes as a sequence of events. For the purpose of my study, I did not feel it was essential to have exact dates of the events Alex discussed within his interview. Rather, because my initial narrative seeking question asked for the story of the participant's relationship with their deceased friend and not the story of their lives, I was more interested in the choice of life events that each participant chose to

share that they found meaningful.

Figure 8 Excerpt from BDC

July, finds out grandma has cancer

August 1, on Alex's birthday, goes out with girlfriend, friends go to a party at Michael's ex-girlfriend's house, plan to meet later

Michael gets drunk at party, goes home, Alex doesn't meet up with friends because party was over

Michael sends text message to friend "I wish we could be as good as some other shit", sends text message to girlfriend, "you were lucky to see me tonight"

Michael doesn't send text to Michael that night

August 2, 12:30 or 1a, Michael hangs himself in garage with dad's boat rope

August 2, 7:30a, dad finds Michael

The Creation of the Told Story Sequentialization (TSS)

A TSS is a description of the sequence of structural changes in a biographical account, especially of the initial narration in subsession one (Wengraf, 2001, p. 239). The purpose of the TSS is to facilitate in the analyzing of the participant's *told story*. The told story is not as concerned with the events and happenings that occur in a person's life (BDC), but rather the way in which these events and happenings were experienced and are presently understood by the participant. In order to analyze the told story, the interview transcript must be processed into a TSS, which helps to describe the structure of the text. Breaking down the structure of the text helps the researcher to try and understand the participant's perception of how events and actions were experienced within his or her story. The TSS also helps to facilitate subsequent group analysis and discussion.

Figure 9 is an excerpt from my TSS of Alex. The left hand column presents the page and line number in the transcript used to identify where the topic (found in the right

hand column) is discussed within the interview came from. The middle column is used

to indicate the speaker and the *textsort,* or the way a given topic is being treated by the

speaker.

Figure 9 Excerpt from TSS

Page #/Line	Speaker/Textsort	Topic/Quotation
1: 1-3	I: Initial Question	So as you know I'm researching how we use social networking sites after someone we care about dies. Can you tell me the story of your relationship with Michael, before and after his death, um, and all those events and experiences that were and are important to you personally...take your time and begin whenever...
1:9	S: Desc	Michael was not my exact best friend. No. No. He was my best friend.
1:9-10	S: Desc	We had a really tight knit group of friends throughout high school.
1:10-11	S:Rep	I've known him since – since nine years old...we played soccer together
1:13	S:Eval	Everybody liked him. Nobody hated him.
1:16-18	S: Rep/Arg	In high school, played basketball and soccer with him for two years and he quit and played football. And I went and took basketball. So we kind of weren't–I mean we weren't teammates anymore. Which kind of maybe separated us a little bit.
1:19-21	S: Desc/Rep	Only friend who didn't play football... There was there's ten of us, and we were the closest kids I've – close as I could ever imagine. All of us. We hung out every weekend.
1:22-23	S: Rep/Arg	Summer going into junior year of high school we started drinking. Um. But that's it. We kept it at drinking. None of our friends ever used any kind of drugs at all. Um. No cigarettes. Nothing.
1:24-25	S: Desc/Eval	Michael had a girlfriend. Um. She was a year older than him. Her name was Megan. it started off alright, and then I think they had a –a rough breakup up because she went away to college.

The principle behind the sequencing of the transcript is one in which each new

"segment" is said to start whenever there is a change of at least one of the following

three features of the transcript text: a change in speaker, a topic change, or a textsort

change (Wengraf, 2001, p. 241). There are five different types of text currently

distinguished in the typology of textsorts, known as the DARNE Typology: description,

argumentation, report, narrative, and evaluation (Wengraf, 2001, p. 241). Derived from

the literary theory (see Breckner, 1998), the BNIM-DARNE school of interpretation holds

that a change in the way somebody talks about an old or new topic is held to be

significant (Wengraf, p. 243). Figure 3.10 describes the DARNE Typology textsorts used in the TSS in greater detail.

Figure 10 DARNE Textsorts

Description	The assertion that certain entities have certain properties, but in a timeless and non-historical way: there is no storytelling or narration
Argumentation	The development of an argument or taking a position, not usually connected to the content of a particular narrative
Report	Recounting a sequence of events, experiences and actions but from a distance: usually contains little detail and can include a relatively long period of time
Narrative	The telling of a story with rich, full details
Evaluation	Provides the interviewee's opinion or "moral of their story" of a particular part of their narrative

The generation of the TSS was a long, painstaking adventure. Having spent a considerable amount of time working on the creation of the TSS during my BNIM training, I felt I had a pretty good grasp on the basic principles of constructing the TSS. As discussed in his book (Wengraf, 2001), and at the BNIM training, the production of the TSS often takes several attempts to grasp and the experience itself is quite subjective. I felt the process of creating the TSS itself was helpful in the sense that it allowed me to dissect the interview transcript, which was twenty pages of text with very few breaks in between, into coherent "chunks" which were easier to manage and sort through. Also, labeling the textsorts themselves helped me to see arguments and self evaluations within the text that I may have overlooked during the initial transcription.

BNIM Interpretive Panels

After the creation of the TSS and BDC, the documents are then used during the second stage of analysis, which involves datum-by-datum analysis with the use of interpretive panels. The following section describes the construction of and purpose of

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the interpretive panels, case study selection, the process of the BDA (Biographical Data Analysis), TFA (Thematic Field Analysis), and microanalysis of verbatim text.

Datum by Datum Analysis

The purpose of datum by datum analysis is to create as many hypotheses as possible to explain each event or piece of text within the biographical life-data (BDC), text sequentialization (TSS), or microanalyis. This process invites the analyst (researcher) to think about all possible hypotheses, each of which could be regarded as sufficient to explain the empirical phenomenon (Brecker, 1998, p. 93). The use of interpretive panels is not a substitute for the researcher's own theorizing or thinking, but rather they serve the purpose of forcing the researcher to look beyond his or her own assumptions and beliefs about how the narrative should unfold. The panels also generate alternative hypotheses that might have been overlooked by the researcher had he or she analyzed the data alone.

During the datum by datum anylsis, separate interpretive panels are used to analysis the BDC, TSS, and small pieces of text (microanalyis). This process, also known as emergent thinking, was developed by Glaser and Strauss, (1968, cited by Wengraf, 2001, p. 256) and involves predicting data that ought to follow another data and then checking back from such future data to earlier predictions (Wengraf, p. 256). As hypotheses are either strengthened, weakened, or confirmed by following data, predictions about what will occur in the future are continuously being developed. This allows the researcher to consider all the possibilities that the participant could have considered concering an event, action, or choice or words, but did not.

Although the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss and BNIM analysis

both follow in terms of hypothesis generation and falsification, an important distinction between the two, as discussed by Wengraf (2001, p. 258) is noteworthy. Based on phenomenological tradition, grounded theory attempts to generalize typical actions of typcial actors from the start of analysis. However, the phenomenological approach of BNIM attempts to "enter the world of the agent" in their unique life history and life story which produces a qualitatively different experiencing of analysing and a different sort of result (Wengraf, 2001, p. 258).

Choosing a Case Study

For the purpose of this research study, I chose to fully analyze one case study using a BNIM-like approach. Despite this considerable single-case restriction, the intensive study of one single case can produce insight which the superficial study of many cases in no way can. These insights from single-case analysis can then be used in and enriched by a multiplicity of comparative studies (Wengraf, 2001, p. 104). From my original eight BNIM interviews, I chose the case of Alex because his story shared many of the same qualities as my other interviews. Like several other participants, he had lost one of his best friends to suicide before the start of college. His story was rich in description and emotion. Also, I was excited to analyze Alex's case because he was one of the only two participants who were male. A brief biography of Alex is presented below.

> Alex was eighteen years old and a freshman at Indiana University studying business at the time of the interview. Originally from the east coast, Alex moved to Indiana in August of 2008 to attend college. Shortly before leaving college, Alex's best friend, Michael, committed suicide. Immediately after Michael's death, Alex began visiting Michael's Facebook page, leaving him messages and browsing through his photos. Even months after Michael's death, Alex continues to visit the Webpage frequently.

Facilitating Panels

At the beginning of October, I sent out an email invitation to several of my colleagues and friends requesting their participation in my panel groups. I put forth two dates, one for the BDA (Biographical Data Analysis) panel and another for the TFA (Thematic Field Analysis) panel and asked those who were interested in participating to chose a date of their preference. As an incentive, I announced that I would be providing dinner for their participation. Having been a part of a mock panel group during my BNIM training, I also provided my colleagues with a brief description of what they could expect during the panel group work and ensured them that the meeting would be an entertaining and fun event.

During my first panel, I was able to recruit six participants, two males and four females. Wengraf (2001, p. 258) suggests having a panel of at least two members, but having five or six members is even better, as this will produce a greater diversity of hypotheses that can be reached with only one or two members. My panel consisted of four colleagues, wife of a colleague, and my dissertation chair person. My chair person's presence turned out to be invaluable, as she had also received the BNIM training with me and was familiar with the panel process. Wengraf also suggests recruiting panel members that are different from each other to ultimately create greater objective results (p. 258). Although all my panel members were from some form of academia, their research interests were very different from each other. For instance, some of their research interests included human sexuality, adults with disabilities, health policy, and European art. Also, the ages of my panel members varied from age 25 to 59. Several of the panel members knew each other through class or other academic

groups. In retrospect, I would have liked to have had at least one panel member that was similar in age to Alex who was 18. However, this did not happen.

The first panel session was held in a seminar room provided by my university department.   My panel participants sat around a large conference table while I stood in the front of the room so I could write down any hypotheses on large, white sheets of paper. Before the panel began brainstorming, the group spent some time talking with each other and getting comfortable with the panel process. Although facilitating the panels did not require the participants a great deal of understanding of the BNIM process, several participants, were in fact very interested in the methodology itself. Therefore, extra time was often spent throughout the meeting explaining the panel.

My second panel, which was constructed to analyze my TSS, consisted of three participants. This panel was much more relaxed than the first, perhaps because I felt more confident as a facilitator which may have reflected on my participants' ability to speak freely and openly. All of the participants were female, one was my colleague and the other two were close friends. This time their ages only ranged from 29 to 34. Although this group was not as diverse as the previous one, the hypotheses that were generated were more creative and thought out than the first group. This may be attributed to the comfort level of atmosphere, which was in the living room of my home.

During both group sessions, I stressed to my panel members the following objectives: to remain open minded about any and all hypotheses generated during the panel process, to be respectful of each other's responses, and above all, to remember that there are no wrong answers. Overall, all of my panel members adhered well to the objectives I put forth, even at times reminding me that "there are no wrong answers"

when I was hesitant to write down a hypothesis that, to me personally, was completely off in left field. After both panels, I received a lot of positive feedback from my participants.

The individual processes for each panel are discussed further in the following sections, including the creation of the BDA (Biographical Data Analysis) and the TFA (Thematic Field Analysis), which were subsequently a product of the two panels.

Creation of the Biographical Data Analysis (BDA)

The main objective of my first panel meeting was to produce a BDA from Alex's biographical data chronology (BDC) which had been created prior to the session (see Figure 3.7). The BDA focuses primarily on the *lived life*, with any knowledge of the *told story* put aside (Wengraf, 2001, p. 259). To do this, I printed out my BDC in a large, bold font and cut between each line segment so that I could place each segment, one by one, on the large adhesive white paper for the panel to generate as many hypotheses as possible without any knowledge of the following future biographical events. It is important to note that both panel groups, aside from my chair person, did not know anything about Alex's story before the panel discussion. According to Breckner, 1998, p. 93), not having prior knowledge about future data ensures free multiplication of hypotheses.

Wengraf (2001, p. 259) suggests that each datum segment should attempt to develop a minimum of three hypotheses: an original one, spontaneously produced; a counter-hypothesis to the first, declaring the opposite, and a tangential hypothesis which is concerned with some completely different dimension that in which the first two hypotheses operate. During the process of creating hypotheses, previous hypotheses

are always reflected back upon for refutation or confirmation. The goal of the process of

refuting and confirming particular predictive datum-hypotheses is to move to a higher

level of abstraction in which structural hypotheses can be put forward, which may

eventually allow (the panel) to move to a *structural understanding of the whole of the*

lived life (Wengraf, p. 267). To create different types of hypotheses, the panel should

be asked the following types of questions (Breckner, 1998, p. 93 as cited by Wengraf, p.

260):

1. How could this event be experienced, in relation to the context of age, personal

    development, family, generation, and milieu?

2. How could the sequence of events so far shape the future lived life?

3. For each suggested hypothesis under (1) and (2), what event of phenomenon

    would I expect to come next or to follow either in the sequence of biographical

    data or later life phases?

During my first panel discussion, I quickly learned that these particular questions

were very difficult for my panel members to understand and follow. Therefore, I asked

my own variation of the following questions, which were built upon Breckner's (1998, p.

93) original panel questions but seemed easier for my panel members to comprehend:

1. How might this event have been experienced at the time?

2. For each hypotheses put forth, what might be expected to happen next?

3. What counter hypotheses or tangential hypotheses might have been experienced

    instead?

4. Given the data that does come next, are any of the hypotheses falsified,

    confirmed, strengthened, or changed?

Initially, even my own adaptation of Breckner's (1998, p. 93) panel questions, which I felt were easier to understand than the original, still created a sense of confusion and frustration among my panel members in the beginning. This frustration, I believe, was mainly caused by the inherent endless amount of hypotheses that could be created at the very beginning of the analysis when very little was known about Alex. However, as more biographical data began to emerge, the hypotheses naturally became more focused to with each addition of biographical data. As more data were revealed, the panel members eventually became more relaxed with the process of analysis. To record the panel's generation of hypotheses, I used large, white adhesive sheets of paper and colorful markers. As each sheet of paper became full, I would tape the paper on the wall within eyesight of the panel members and begin again with a new sheet. By the end of each panel session, dozens of the large sheets of paper adorned most of the wall space in the room.

Figure 11 provides a key of the abbreviations I used when I recorded the panel's generation of hypotheses, including a brief definition of the terms. Figure 12 provides an excerpt taken from the analysis process of the interpretive panel which was typed directly from the group's written notes.

Figure 11BDA Key

Key

- Each experiential hypothesis is labeled with an H followed by a corresponding number (i.e. H1, H2, H3)
- Following hypotheses, or hypotheses that follow an experiential hypothesis, are labeled with an FH
- Counter hypotheses, or hypotheses that declare the opposite of a hypothesis, are labeled with a CH followed
- Tangential hypotheses, or hypotheses that are concerned with some completely different dimension than that of the following and counter hypotheses, are labeled with a TH

Figure 12 Excerpt from BDA

Michael gets emotional when he drinks, cries sometimes
    H1: Michael drinks more
        FH: Goes to rehab
        FH: overdoses on alcohol
        CH: Functioning alcoholic just fine
        CH: Becomes dry, AA instructor
    H2: Michael has serious accident when drinking
    H3: Michael reveals secrets about himself when drinking
        FH: Michael pulls back from Alex
        CH: Alex pulls back from Michael
    H4: Michael becomes a loner
    H5: Alex encourages Michael to rehab
        CH: Alex makes fun of Michael when he drinks
        FH: Michael goes to rehab
            FH: Strengthens their relationship
            CH: Weakens their relationship
    H6: Michael makes a pass at Alex
    H7: Alex struggles with gender identity
    H8: Friends tell him to go away, but girlfriend says to stay
    H9: Michael attempts suicide
    H10: Michael pushes Alex to drink
        FH: Alex becomes alcoholic
        CH: Alex stops drinking on his own

After concluding the BDA, the researcher then creates a narrative summary that encapsulates the biographical data (see Figure 13) as well as the themes or issues related to the lived life that were brought up during the biographical data analysis process. The narrative summary is an expansion of the BDC and is useful for later analysis to refer to and useful for presentation purposes to other researcher and to an eventual audience, such as the researcher (Wengraf, 2001, p. 269).

Figure 13 Alex BDA Narrative Summary Excerpt

Alex meets Michael in grade school when they are nine years old. They play on several different sports teams together, including basketball and soccer, throughout middle school and into high school. During their sophomore year, Michael quits playing soccer and joins the football team while Alex joins the basketball team. For the first time since middle school, the two are not teammates anymore.

However, the two friends still hang out together with a close knit group of friends on the weekends. They often hang out in Michael's basement, which Alex often refers to as "our place". The group of friends begin drinking before the summer of their junior year in high school, but do not do drugs or smoke cigarettes. Sometimes when they are drinking, Michael becomes emotional and often cries.

During high school Michael has a girlfriend, Megan. During Michael's senior year, the two break up because Megan is going to college. Michael becomes emotional after the breakup.

Following the creation of the narrative summary, I next created a model of turning points and phases of Alex's lived life (see Figure 14). Wengraf (2001, p. 269) suggests creating a list of between two and seven phases with each phase being terminated by a turning point that introduces the next phase. From the model, I next created a list of "possible told stories", which included possible ways in which Alex might tell his life story (see Figure 15). Creating the list of "possible told stories" is an exercise that multiplies the researcher's sense of possibilities and sharpens his or her expectations (Wengraf, p. 271). The next phase in the analysis moves the researcher on to consider the "told-life" story in the Thematic Field Analysis (TFA).

Figure 14 Excerpt from "phases and turning points of Alex's lived life"

- **Grade school/middle school –** close friends with Michael, play sports together
- **High School –** closeness with Michael and other friendship waivers on and off, experiments with drinking, have girlfriends
- **Summer after High School –** Michael commits suicide, Grandmother develops cancer, Alex grieves, prepares for college
- **College –** visits Facebook pages to remain connected to Michael, wears bracelet to honor friend and remember the importance of friendship

Figure 15 Excerpt from "possible told stories of Alex's lived life"

1. **A Story of Friendship**: Alex might tell a story of how his friendship with Michael influences who he is today and how he treats others. This may involve a great deal of argumentation on Alex's part as he theorizes about how the past has influenced who he is presently.
2. **A Story of Regret**: Alex might tell a story of regret for not intervening in Michael's life when he was emotional during particular occasions in the past, which might have ultimately saved his life. Alex might use argumentation, using the present perspective as he reflects back on the "red flags" he saw during his friendship with Michael that might have suggested he was troubled.
3. **A Story of Growth through Grief**: Alex might tell a story of growth through his grief of losing Michael. Using narrative and reports to tell his story about Michael's life and death, Alex might evaluate their friendship and give several "morals of his story" that he has taken away with him after Michael's death. Michael might also create an argument of how he might react to his impending grandmother's death given that he now understands grief and loss.

Thematic Field Analysis (TFA)

The next stage in BNIM analysis involves analyzing the *told story,* or the text analysis of the way the story was actually told (refer to Figure 7 Stages of BNIM). Also referred to as Thematic Field Analysis (TFA), the goal of TFA is to understand the told story of the life narration as constructed by, and consequently expressing, a gestalt or pattern or structure that has been detected (Wengraf, 2001, p. 272). To do this, the researcher must look beyond the "surface" of the told story in order to uncover a deeper structure within the text. It is within this deeper structure that the "thematic fields" can be found. Rosenthal (1993, p. 64) defines a thematic field as "the sum of events and situations presented within the topic that form a background or horizon against which the top stands out as the central focus." According to Wengraf (p. 275), it is the task of thematic field analysis to move towards understanding the thematic fields or sequence of thematic fields in which the topics emerge and in terms of which they have their specific (and often changing) meanings.

The process of analyzing the TFA is the nearly identical to the BDA, which

includes generating, confirming, and refuting hypotheses while using a datum-by-datum

future blind approach. Like the BDA, the researcher, or panel members, continuously

look for structural hypotheses that explain the story as a whole. However, the questions

to be asked about the sequentialization are different, since the researcher or panel

members are analyzing the short history of a textual production in an interview rather

than the long history of the lived life (Wengraf, 2001, p. 275). Unlike the BDC, which

consists of a chronology of later occurrences in a person's life, the TSS refers to later

occurrences of speaker action which occurred in the interview, including speaker

change, topic change, or textsort change.

Wengraf (2001, p. 276) presents a list questions to be asked when analyzing

each datum segment of the TSS. However, I found the questions difficult to follow and

worried that my panel members, who were unfamiliar with BNIM entirely, would have an

even harder time trying to understand the questions and panel objectives. Therefore, I

constructed my own list of questions that I felt were easier to understand but could still

generate hypotheses and uncover thematic fields within the text. The following

questions were adapted from a dissertation by Carina Meares (2007, p. 109) who also

reconstructed Wengraf's original TFA questions for the same purpose:

1. Why is the speaker talking about this topic now?

2. Why are they talking about this topic in this way?

3. What might come next in the story?

4. How might the speaker talk about it? (Will he or she tell a story? Describe

    something? Give a present perspective? Give a "moral" of a particular part of the

story or a "moral" of life as a whole?")

5. Is there a sense so far of the "bigger picture" or "hidden agenda"?

6. What effect does this piece of text have on any previous hypothesis created? (Is it strengthened? Weakened? Confirmed? Falsified?)

The second panel, created for the purpose of analyzing the TFA, was an enlightening and highly productive event. The second panel seemed to grasp the idea of generating hypotheses much easier than the first panel, and this may have been attributed to several things: First, by the time of the second panel, I felt much more comfortable and confident with the panel process. This may have helped facilitate a more productive panel. Second, in my experience, analyzing the TSS is more entertaining than analyzing the BDC because there is more of a sense of "story" within the TSS. This may have ultimately contributed to the second panel's stronger connection and ownership towards the story's "main characters". Lastly, I printed and posted a copy of the panel questions on the wall in front of the panel so that the panel members could easily reference the questions when they felt confused or "stuck". I did not do this with the first panel, and instead prompted the panel members verbally with the questions throughout the analysis process. Providing a written copy of the questions for easy reference may have helped the focus of the panel members. Figure 17 provides an excerpt from Alex's TFA. A key (Figure 16) is also provided.

Figure 16 TFA Key

Key

- Each experiential hypothesis is labeled with an H followed by a corresponding number (i.e. H1, H2, H3)
- Following hypotheses, or hypotheses that follow an experiential hypothesis, are labeled with an FH
- Counter hypotheses, or hypotheses that declare the opposite of a hypothesis, are labeled with a CH followed
- Tangential hypotheses, or hypotheses that are concerned with some completely different dimension than that of the following and counter hypotheses, are labeled with a TH
- Structural hypotheses, or hypotheses that eventually allow the researcher to move to a structural understanding of the whole of the lived life, are labeled with a SH and are in bold

Figure 17 Excerpt from TFA: Alex

Michael was not my exact best friend. No. No. He was my best friend.
    H1: Justification of why he is not exact best friend
        FH: Gender thing, not sure who was his best friend before his death
        CH: Really just an acquaintance, now that he's dead, pretend he's more of a friend than he ever really was
        TH: Doesn't really know him at all
        H2: Strain before causes relationship status change
        FH: Last interaction before death was a fight
        FH: Last interaction was drama
        TH: Lost touch with friend before he died
    H3: Had a falling out
        FH: Was best friend before the falling out
        FH: Never made up, died before
        CH: Made up, then died shortly afterwards
We had a really tight knit group of friends throughout high school.
    H1: Had a falling out within the group
    H2: Had a falling out with an individual in the group
        FH: Alex was sweet on Michael's girlfriend
    H3: They met through group of friends
        FH: Alex finds Michael on Facebook
        FH: Michael finds Alex on Facebook
        TH: Michael was outsider of group
            FH: Alex befriends Michael through Facebook
    H4: Last interaction was with group doing favorite activity
    H5: Know each other through sport/activity
SH: Alex explores his friendship with Michael throughout his story.
SH: Friendships are central in Alex's life and have influenced who he is today.

During the three hour panel session, we were able to analyze only a few pages

of the initial TSS.   It was apparent that my panel members were invested in Alex's story, for they all stayed an addition hour or so to discuss Alex, his story, my research, and the panel process. This information created new conversations and insight into my research study. After my panel members left, I spent some time debriefing in my journal, attending to the suggestions and conversations that happened during – but also – after the panel had concluded.

<div align="center">Final Stages of Analysis</div>

Although Wengraf (2001; 2008) presents BNIM as a highly structured methodology that utilizes strict rules for both interview methods and interpretation processes, he also emphasizes the importance of experimenting with variations of BNIM to ensure fitness with the overall research objective. For some, this may include the use of BNIM interview methods but not utilizing panels or consideration of the TSS or BDA. According to Wengraf, many people who value the BNIM interview procedure very highly do not use all of the BNIM interpretation procedures. For example, Wengraf (2008, p. 397) postulates that the majority of BNIM-based publications perhaps "do not make the 'depiction of the evolution of cases' the major mode of their writing up", but rather utilize BNIM for their interviews and, for their interpretation, the extraction of themes.

For instance, many researchers do not have a need to create a BDC or utilize a BDA. However, in very many cases working out a straight chronology of what happened can be very useful (Wengraf, p. 394). I found this to be particularly true for my research study. I would argue that the BDC and BDA are most likely extremely helpful when considering life stories or other larger chunks of a person's story. However, because

my research focused primarily on a short time period – the time shortly before their

friend's death leading up to the current time of their interview, the BDC and BDA did not

assist much in my final analysis. In the case study of Alex, for instance, the time span

was less than a year, which created a very short, limited BDC. This also caused a

somewhat limited BDA panel experience, in my opinion. Also, in my approach to

analysis, I was not as interested in verified historical facts such as the date of the

friend's death or the date of the friend's funeral. Personally, I was more interested in the

account of the story and not necessarily the verified facts linked to their stories. The

process of creating the BDC was helpful, however, as a way to look at Alex's narrative

differently. The BDC created a logical progression of the events in Alex's life during that

short period. Because Alex's story jumped around and included flashbacks and asides,

the BDC created a way to organized Alex's story into a more linear progression of

events and experiences in his story.

Furthermore, oftentimes a TSS and a TFA are not utilized at all in data analysis.

Most often, this occurs when a researcher may not have access to "an instrument for

looking at the 'form of the telling'" (Wengraf, p. 394). Other researchers may create a

TSS, but only for the purpose of looking at the form of the interview or for creating a

condensed, structured version of the verbatim interview transcription. Again, much like

the alternative purposes of creating a BDC, the TSS may provide a new way to look at

interview text. I personally found the creation of the TSS and TFA of great value during

my analysis of Alex's story. Creating the TSS did provide a new way to look at the

interview, especially in terms of the participant's subjectivity, which is at the core of

BNIM interpretation. Identifying textsorts, for instance, provided a way for me to look for

the "morals of the stories" and identify personal meanings and reflections. Along with the BDC, the TSS created yet another approach to the interview material which ultimately contributed to my overall understanding. Moreover, the TFA that was developed with the use of panel members assisted in expanding my initial ideas and theories about the participant's narrative. Utilizing the many different approaches to the interview material created a "triangulation of methods of communicating understanding" The same meaning when received in (many) different ways is more likely to be retained by the receiver than when he or she receives the meaning by a communication in only one mode (Wengraf, 2001, p. 316)

Regardless of how a researcher decides to utilize BNIM methodology, the 'telling of the told story' is a distinguishing feature of BNIM work and nearly all publications referring to BNIM include some account of this (Wengraf, p. 394). Within my own analysis of my interview material, I was mainly focused on this particular track, with much less focus on the "living of the lived life" track.   My write up of Alex's story did not focus on the "history of the evolution of the case", which is ultimately developed by integrating the two tracks, living of the lived life and the telling of the told story. Furthermore, I was not interested in searching for structural explanations between the two tracks. My research focus was interested on Alex's relationship with his deceased friend. I chose to utilize a narrative thematic analysis approach to the case study. BNIM interview methods as well as particular BNIM approaches such as the creation of the BDC, BDA, TSS, and TFA as well as the use of panels all helped to create new "voices" which influences my final analysis.

The Analysis Process – Narrative Analysis

After an initial case study was conducted and analyzed utilizing a BNIM-like approach, I took a separate narrative approach to analysis which included the stories of the initial case study participant, Alex, along with five other participants. Utilizing a thematic narrative approach, I focused primarily on the context of the interviews, or the "told" story, with less focus on the "telling" of the story, or structure of the language used.

Aside from the several approaches to analysis that were used in my case study (i.e. TFA, BDA), I chose to focus exclusively on the other five participants' stories as they unfolded in the interview transcripts. I reflected on my journal entries, notes, and my literature review as I read and reread each story. As themes, thoughts, or theories arose from each story, I kept a separate detailed journal which included specific page and line numbers for later reference. Because I was interested in the interpretation of each separate case as a whole and wanted to prevent the stories from becoming fragmented, I allocated separate journal pages for each participant and used color coded highlighters to differentiate. This allowed me to keep the stories "intact" so that I could later "theorize from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases" (Riessman, p. 53).

Researchers do not act as a conduit of information, but as co-constructors of a finished narrative (Gilbert, 2002). As I analyzed each case, the themes that did emerge were ultimately based on my theoretical perspectives, research interests, and my own personal characteristics. Through our presence, and by listening and questioning in particular ways, we critically shape the stories participants choose to tell (Riessman,

2008, p. 50). The telling of the story creates a new story, as well as new interpretation and understanding of the story (Gilbert, 2002). As a researcher, it is essential to recognize and acknowledge the role we play in constituting the narrative data that we analyze. During the entire research process, from the interviews to the final analysis, I kept a detailed journal on my own reflections and personal reactions to the process. During the final write up of the participants' narratives, I incorporate my ownership in the final analysis.

As a way to organize and present my thought processes during my analysis, I created a concept map for each participant's narrative (see Figure 18-23), which highlighted important themes and constructs. This also created an audit trail for my research process, adding to the trustworthiness of my study.

<center>Ethical Considerations in Online Research</center>

During the process of this research, several ethical dilemmas were presented, especially in regards to the collection and use of online data. Initially, my data was going to include participant interviews and publically available information that could be accessed online. I assumed participants would refer to their deceased friend's Webpage during their interviews and even possibly offer up a link to the Webpage in question if it were publically accessible. I was not prepared, however, to deal with the many follow up emails that provided personal videos, photos, personal writings, and various outside links such as MyDeathSpace.com and YouTube.com which contained, at times, very personal information about their deceased (and other living) friends. For instance, during one interview in particular, one participant read comments directly from his deceased friend's Facebook Webpage, which included private messages from

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others that were not accessible publically. After conducting several interviews, it

became apparent to me that I would need to consider many ethical implications before

using some of the online data that was electively shared with me, regardless if the

information was publically available or not.

Informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality are basic ethical tenets of scientific

research on people (Eyesenbach & Till, 2001). In order to determine whether or not an

informed consent is needed, a researcher must first decide whether the information

obtained online is considered private or public information. However, there is an

ongoing debate between social scientists as to what is considered public and what is

considered private information that is accessible online. Some researchers argue that

Figure 18 Concept Map - Brian
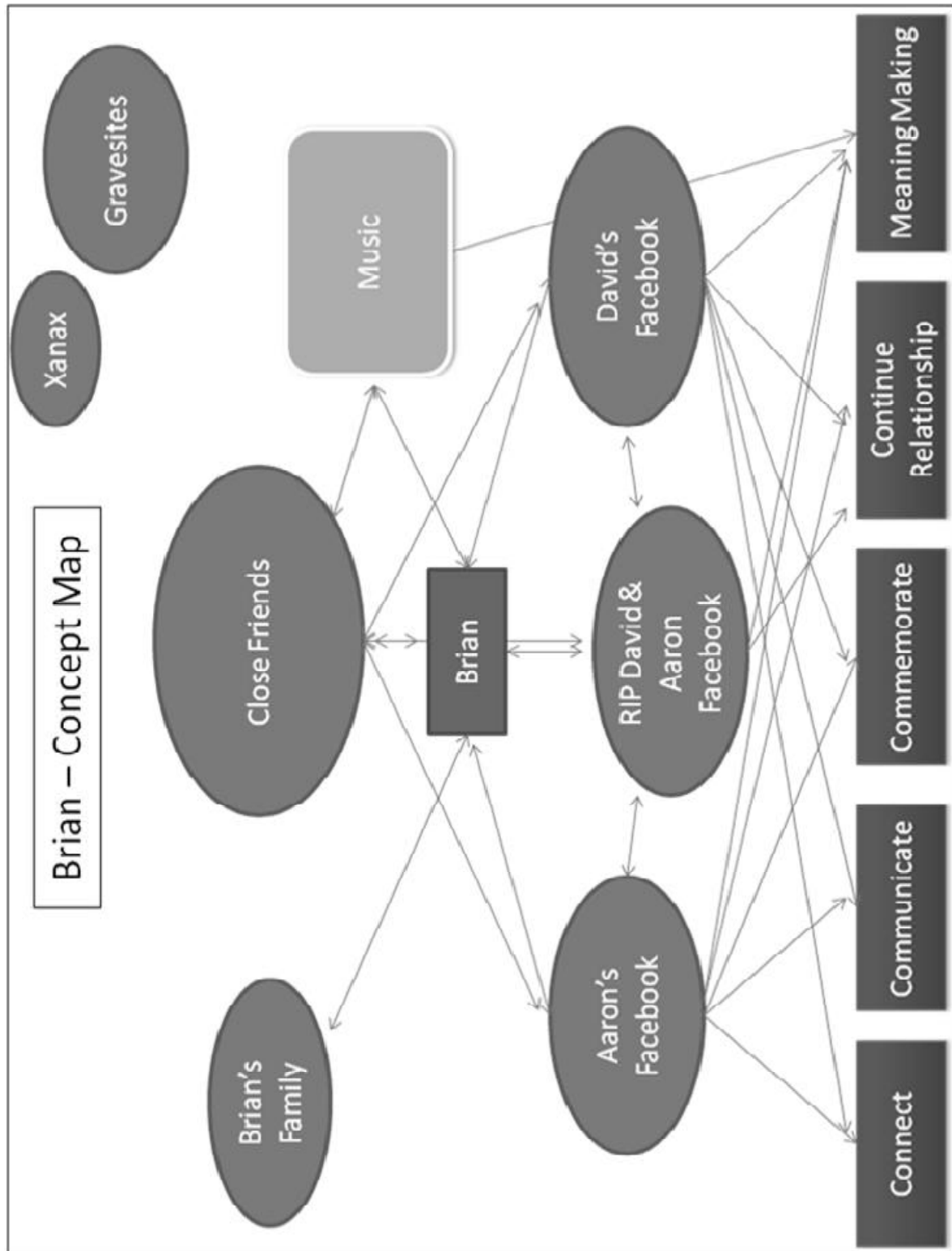
Figure 19 Concept Map - Iris
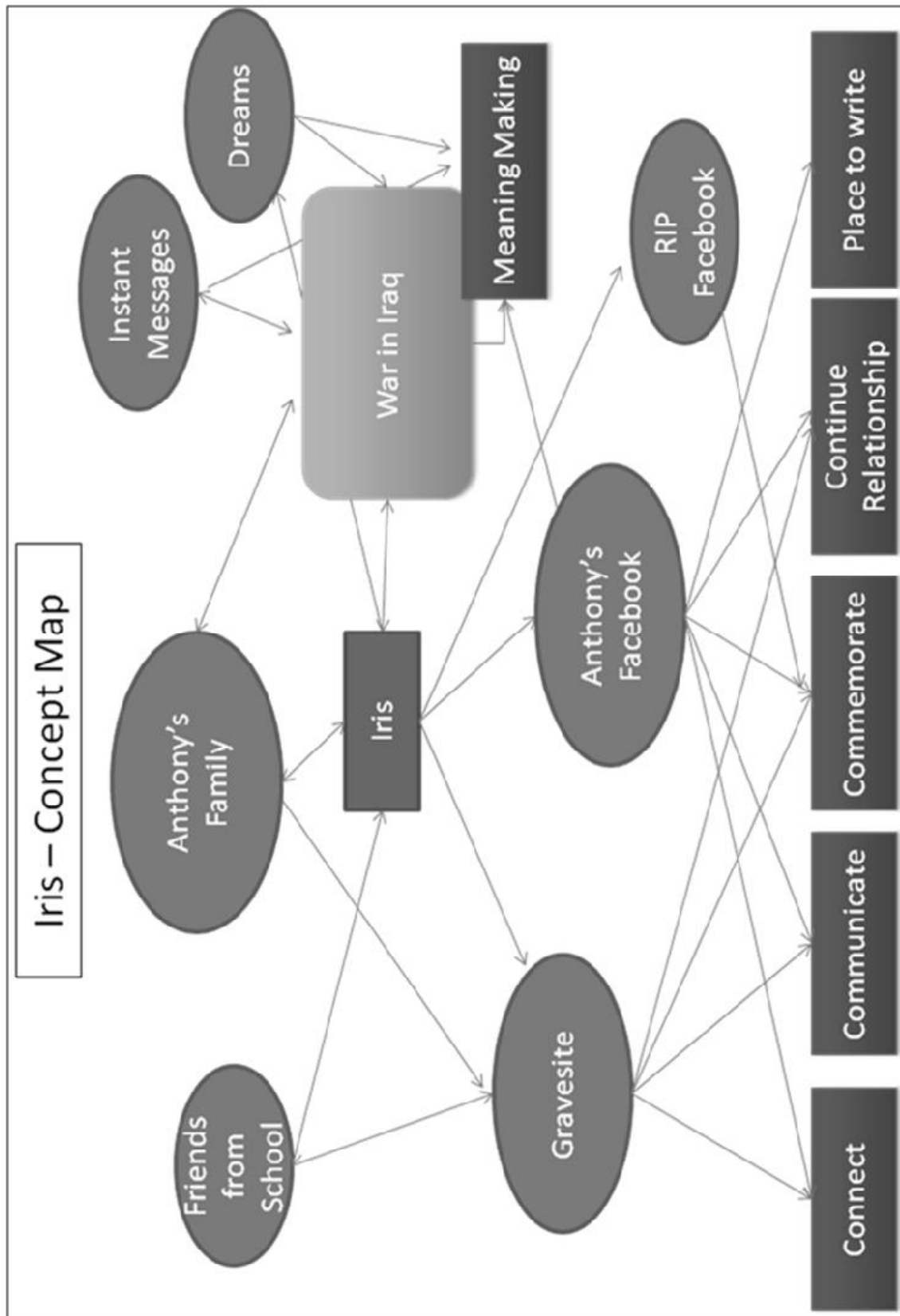
Figure 20 Concept Map - Michelle

Michelle – Concept Map

92
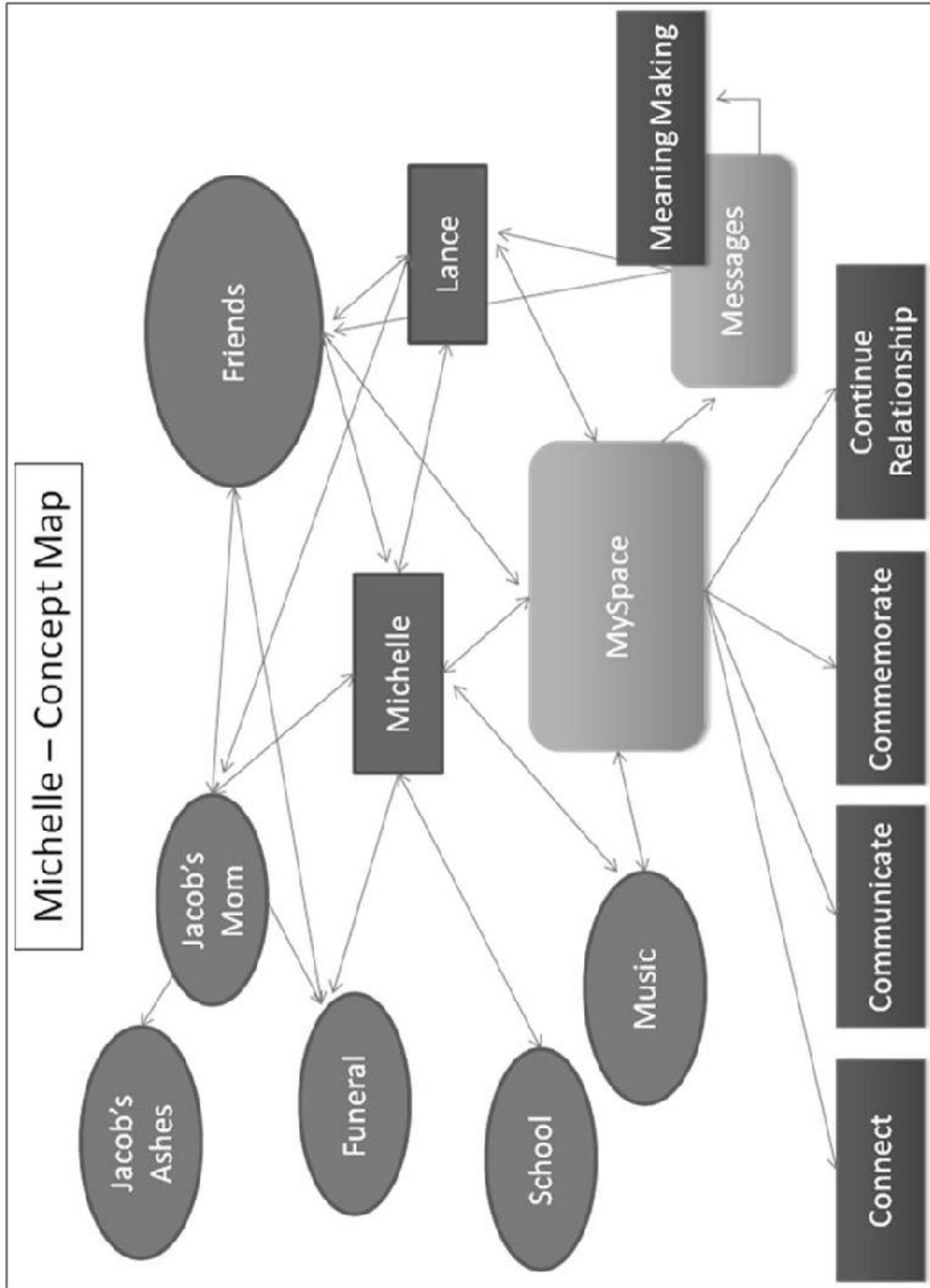
Figure 21 Concept Map - Melissa

Melissa – Concept Map

Stacy's Friends

Stacy's Poem/Dance

Dreams

Meaning Making

RIP Facebook

Shared Friends

Melissa

Stacy's Facebook

Continue Relationship

Commemorate

Melissa's Mom

Stacy's Mom

Gravesite

Communicate

Connect

93
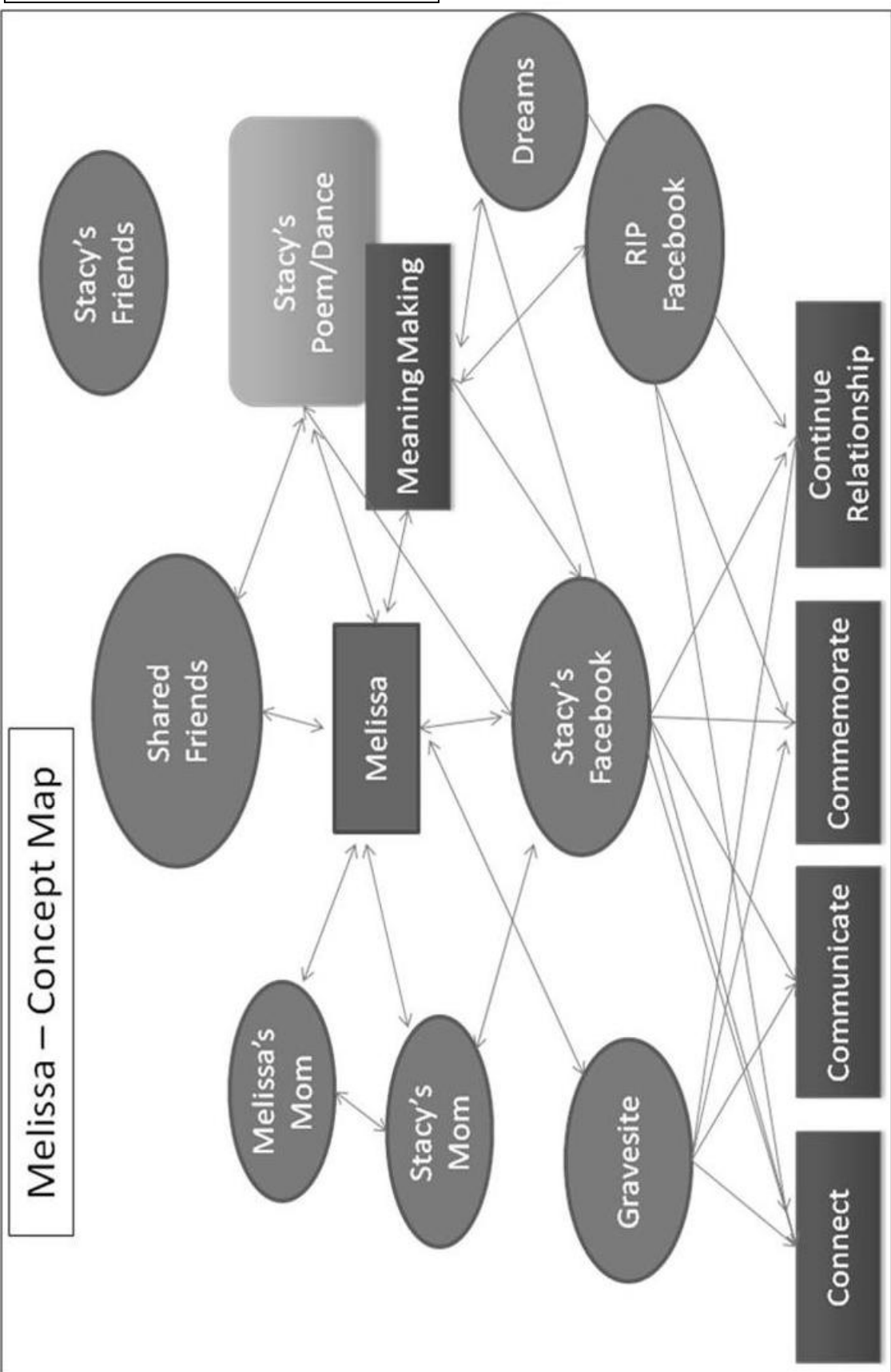
Figure 22 Concept Map - Alex

Figure 23 Concept Map - Carrie

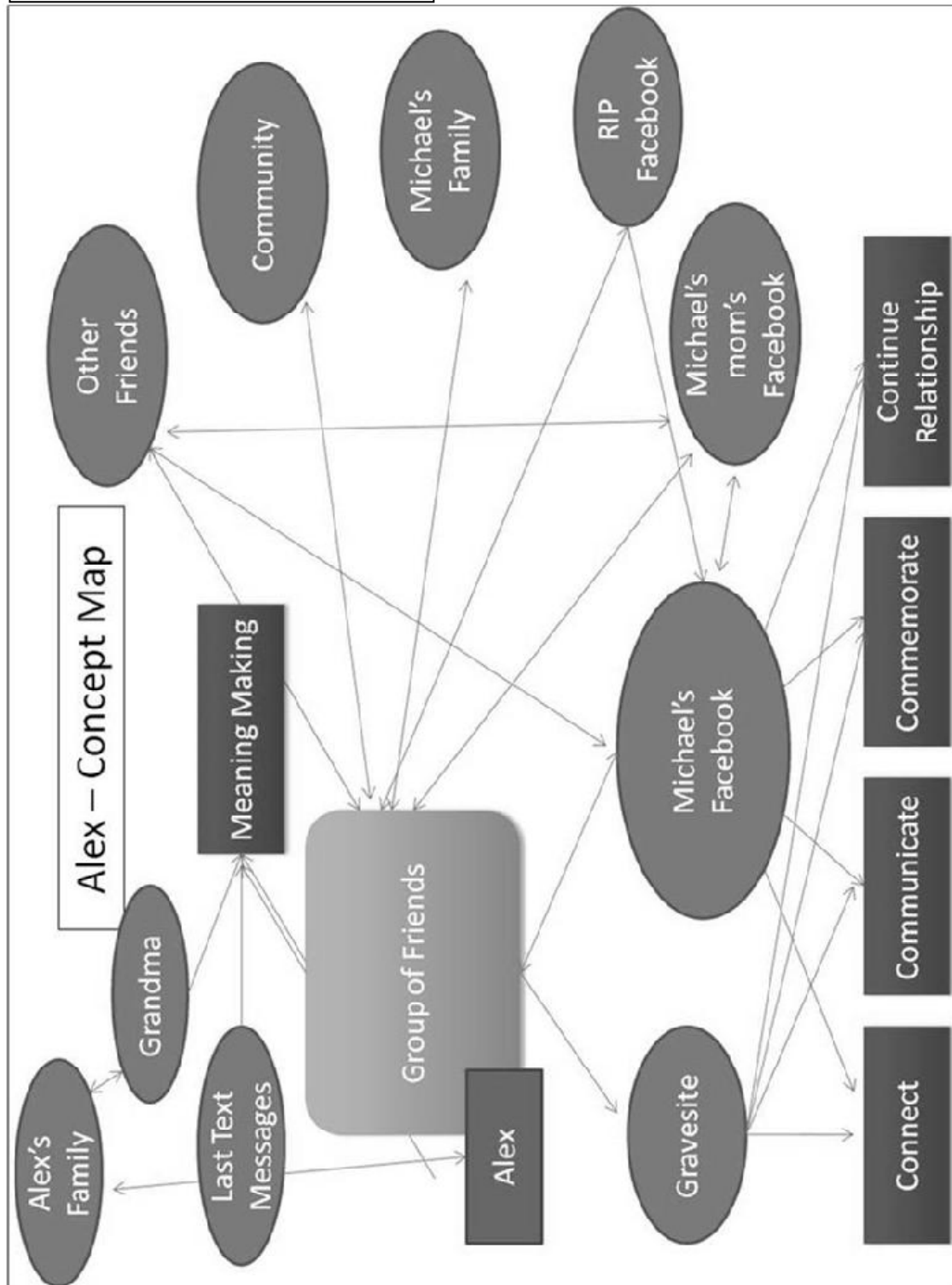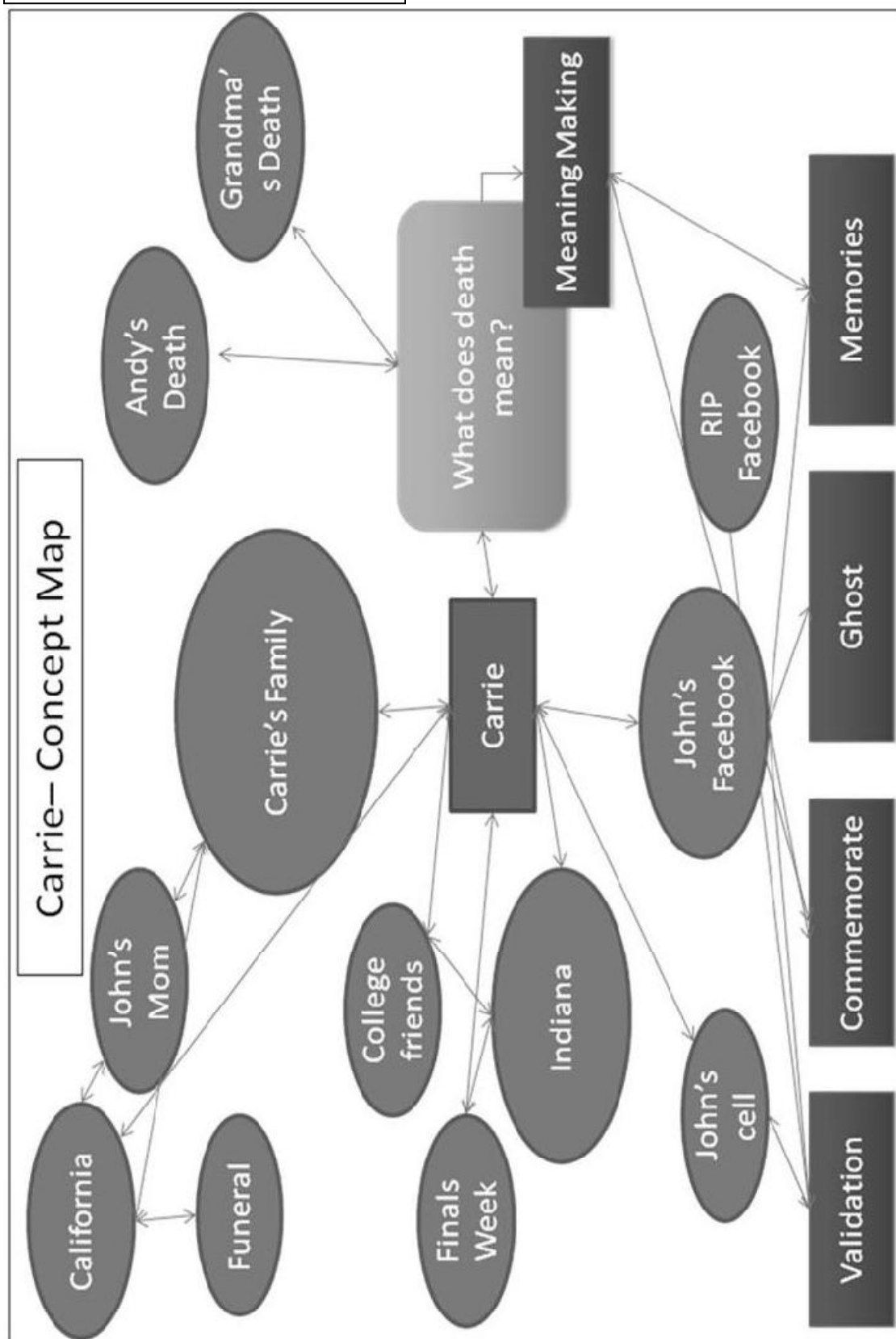Carrie— Concept Map

archived material on the internet is publically available and participant consent is not

necessary (Sudweeks and Rafaeli, 1995; Walther, 2002), while others claim that online

postings, though publically accessible, are written with an expectation of privacy and

should be treated as such (Elgesem, 2002; King, 1996; Scharf, 1999). Furthermore,

there are researchers who argue that there isn't a clear answer as to what is considered

public or private information online and it is up to the participants themselves to define

their online environment (Waskul & Douglas, 1996). Online communities, such as

support groups or social networking sites, may fall in between the dichotomy of a public

and private space because members may or may not be knowingly seeking public

visibility. For instance, if a subscription or some form of registration is required to gain

access to a discussion group (or a social networking site) then most of the subscribers

are likely to regard the group as a "private place" in cyberspace (Eyesenbach & Till).

However, the members' online postings may be publically available to anyone who

might come upon the site, rendering the postings "public", even if their intentions were

meant to be "private" messages.

Another ethical issue involved in using publically available information is the

unintentional violation of privacy. Researchers studying archived data on social

networking Webpages or websites cannot ensure anonymity for participants (Knobel,

2003). Because of the ease of access to data online, it is very possible that readers

might be able to locate the source of research data online through a series of

exhaustive internet search engines. Also, because my research extended beyond my

participants to include their deceased friends, I felt it was also a priority to respectfully

represent the deceased as well.   I did this by not including any direct links to any of my

participants' deceased friends' Webpages, videos, or other relative information that

could potentially encourage a reader to search for the connected information online.

Knobel (2003) proposes structuring a study in such a way that the linguistic choices

made by the participants, the interactional rituals they enact, or the cultural meanings

they share via their language use become the focus of the study, rather than the actual

content of the website. At times, my participants did provide me with their own personal

postings or online writings during or after the interviews to use in my research. When I

chose to use these postings in my research I changed the wording slightly enough so

that the information could not be searched via a search engine.

Researching cyberspaces does bring with it a distinct set of ethical issues a

researcher needs to attend to while planning and designing a project, while conducting

the investigation, and while writing up and disseminating a report of the study (Knobel,

2003). Although there is debate as to what is considered public and private information

online, including what information should be included in a research study write up, it is

ultimately the researcher's main ethical responsibility to represent his or her

participants, as well as others involved, with respect, dignity, and anonymity regardless

of what information is included.

In summary, this chapter focuses primarily on the methodology used in this

study. First, an overview of BNIM and narrative analysis are presented, including my

own approach to each methodology. Within this chapter, the selection of participants,

the interview process, and the transcription process are explained in detail. A detailed

explanation of both BNIM and narrative analysis, as they are used in this study, are

presented. Finally, ethical considerations regarding online research were discussed.

Chapter 4

ARTICLE 1: SOCIAL NETWORKING AND MEMORIALIZATION: A CASE STUDY

Social Networking and Memorialization after the Death of a Friend: A Case Study

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Abstract

Very few studies can be found on the use of the Internet and grief. More specifically, no studies that focus exclusively on the use of social networking sites and grief among emerging adults have been published. The following case study explores one student's personal –and social – online experience with grief after the death of his best friend. His story illuminates how his deceased friend's Facebook Webpage became a personal place to connect, communicate, and continue a relationship after death. More so, the social networking site provided an important connection with others who were also experiencing a loss, ultimately creating a sense of community and belonging.

Introduction

Soon after his best friend's death, Alex signed into his Facebook account and immediately accessed his deceased friend's Webpage. He spent the next several hours browsing through Michael's photos and reading through the hundreds of comments recently posted on the Webpage by newly bereaved friends and classmates. Each time Alex would refresh his browser, dozens of new comments and pictures of Michael flooded his computer screen. The experience of browsing Michael's Facebook brought along with it pangs of grief for Alex, but it also provided a sense of comfort and belonging, too. As the weeks - and eventual months - passed after Michael's death, Alex continued to visit his deceased friend's Webpage almost daily, utilizing the space as a place to grieve both privately – and publically – for his best friend.

The following paper explores Alex's experience within the social networking site, Facebook, after his friend's death. Methodological approaches to the case study are presented, followed by a brief introduction into emerging adulthood, social networking sites, and online memorialization. Findings from the case study are also presented, followed by a discussion.

Emerging Adulthood

Focusing on the ages between 18 and 25, emerging adulthood is a developmental period characterized by change and exploration for most people, as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2007). Although emerging adults have left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, they have not yet entered the

enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, including taking on various adult roles.

Perhaps the most important feature of emerging adulthood is identity exploration and formation. Identity formation involves trying out various life possibilities and gradually moving toward making enduring decisions (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2001) defines identity as a "concept of one's values, abilities, and hopes for the future." It is a time when emerging adults learn more about who they are and what they want out of life. For most emerging adults, college affords the opportunity to explore their own as well as other possible identities, including reexamining personal and religious beliefs, considering new possible world views, and exploring new relationships. However, cultural influences and structure sometimes limit the extent to which emerging adults are able to use their teens and twenties this way, and not all young people in this age period are able to use these years for independent exploration (Arnett, 2000).

One important way that emerging adults engage in identity exploration is through peer interactions (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkham, 2008). As emerging adults present themselves within social interactions, they share goals and reflect common values, helping one another consolidate identities as they move into adulthood (Nurmi, 2004). Social networking sites provide a tool for the expression of feelings, especially towards friends. For instance, posting comments on a person's profile can help deepen an association between individuals, thereby making the relationship feel more intimate (Manago et al., 2008). Self-disclosure is also an important component of emerging adults' feelings of intimacy in friendships and intimate behaviors with friends

and include emotional support, trust and loyalty, sharing activities, and offers of

instrumental support (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 429).

Social Networking Sites

Fundamentally, social networking sites are a category of online community sites

which incorporate three commonalities: profiles, friends, and comments. Intrinsically,

social networking sites are based around profiles, which are a form of individual home

page that provide a description of each member. This description may include

demographics (i.e. age, gender), but most often includes information of a more personal

nature (i.e. pictures, personal blogs).

Most emerging adults utilize online social networking sites as a means to connect

with and interact with peers. College students, who are often on their own for the first

time, utilize social networking sites as a way to stay connected with family and high

school friends as well as connect with new friends and colleagues. Emerging adults

reported that one favorite activity was browsing other people's profile/walls help users

keep track of their friends, the events in their life, as well as their friend's interactions

with others (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). More so, posting

comments on a person's profile can help deepen an association between individuals,

thereby making relationships feel more intimate (Manago et al., 2008). Self-disclosure

is an important component of emerging adults' feelings of intimacy in friendships and

intimate behaviors with friends and includes emotional support, trust and loyalty, sharing

activities, and offers of instrumental support (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 429).

After the death of a loved one, social networking sites may provide several

important functions in relation to feeling connected to the deceased as well as others

during grief. Logistically, because social networking sites can be accessed at any time of the day from anywhere in the world, bereaved individuals are able to connect with their social network whenever the desire arises. This may be especially important to college students who may be hundreds of miles away from their family and friends or access to their deceased friend's gravesite. Feeling connected to others during grief may also provide a much needed sense of comfort and community for the bereaved, which may not be readily available away on from home.

<div align="center">Online Memorialization</div>

Many individuals have turned to cyberspace to seek new opportunities to express their grief, commemorate the deceased, create and find community (de Vries & Rutherford, 2004). Personal social networking Webpages, such as MySpace and Facebook, often become Web memorials after a person's death, leaving behind a unique opportunity for bereaved friends and loved ones to "send messages" to those beyond death. Although several studies have looked at the use of Web memorialization on the Internet (Roberts & Vidal, 2000; de Vries & Rutherford, 2004), only one study to date can be found on the use of personal social networking Webpages that have become Web memorials after someone dies. Personal Webpages may create an immediate memorial after a death and be more personal than those created by friends and family for the deceased. They may also become a powerful venue for the bereaved to share memories, express their grief, and perhaps most importantly, continue a relationship with the deceased.

In Western society, with the many social sanctions surrounding death, there may be very few opportunities to openly talk about death, especially when the death was of a

traumatic or questionable nature. Friends may find even fewer opportunities to express

their grief socially. Personal Webpages, like Web memorials, tend to allow continuity of

expression of grief, offering unobtrusive access and thus facilitating enfranchisement of

grief (Moss, 2004). They allow the bereaved to honor their dead in their own way and at

their own time, to visit the memorial whenever they choose, and to share with others

memories and information about the deceased (Roberts, 2004).

<div align="center">Methodology</div>

Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology

This case study utilized a Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology (BNIM)

approach to gather and analyze data. BNIM methodology, as originally laid out in

textbook detail by Tom Wengraf (2001), is used for exploring the lived-experiences

through biographic narrative interviews. It has been used over the past fifteen years or

more years in a variety of collective research projects (e.g. Rosenthal, 1998;

Chamberlayne, Rustin, & Wengraf, 2002). It has also been used as a modified version

(e.g. Heggie, Neil, Green, & Singleton, 2007) and in conjunction with other methods

(Firkin, Dupuis, & Meares, 2004; Robinson, Hobby, & Kirkcaldy, 2006). For the purpose

of this research, I utilized my own variation of Wengraf's (2001; 2008) approach to

BNIM, which included the systematic approach to interview methods, interpretive

panels, and narrative interpretation.   However, the final analysis of my research utilized

a thematic narrative analysis approach as outline by Riessman (2008).

Because BNIM is constructed as a methodological tool that is usable by people

with a wide variety of ontologies and epistemologies, it is not uncommon for some

researchers to utilize BNIM in various ways as well as for various purposes. Although

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the central focus of BNIM is on the understanding of the subjectivity-in-situation of the person being interviewed, the methodology is also of value for those who are not interested in subjectivity of the stories or the interpretation of the significance of the telling, but rather only of the content of the story told (Wengraf, 2008, p. 49). Also, the methodological component of *biographic-narrative-based* research does not mean that the research product has to take the form of a collection of accounts of individual biographies or experiences; it may do, but at least as often it does not. (Wengraf, p. 28).

In terms of narrative interpretation, BNIM focuses on two distinct, separate tracks of processing and analysis: the objective event *living of the lived life* track, and the subjective account *telling of the told story* track (Wengraf, 2008). First, the living of the lived life track reconstructs the experiencing of the "interpreting and acting" subject as he or she lived his or her life events. This track consists of "objective" events that have happened in a person's life. This biographical data is extracted from the interview transcript as well as other relevant sources (e.g. official documents, school records).

The second track, the telling of the told story, is the subjective account of the interviewee's story, focusing on the moment in his or her life when the interview happened and how he or she chose to recall and interpret events (Wengraf, 2008). This track is focused on the evolution of the told story as it is being told, including information that may be left out of the story. *How* the story is told becomes as important as *what* is being told during this track.

Regardless of how a researcher decides to utilize BNIM methodology, the "telling of the told story" is a distinguishing feature of BNIM work and nearly all publications referring to BNIM include some account of this (Wengraf, 2001, p. 394). Within my own

analysis of my interview material, I was mainly focused on this particular track, with much less focus on the "living of the lived life" track.   Also, my write up of Alex's story did not include the "history of the evolution of the case", which is ultimately developed by integrating the two tracks and is indicative of a "true" BNIM research study. Furthermore, I was not particularly interested in searching for structural explanations between the two tracks. My main premise for using BNIM, which included the use of interview methods and interpretive panels, was that the approach inherently created several new ways to look at and organize my narrative material. This essentially created a "triangulation of methods of communicating understanding" which allowed "the same meaning when received in (many) different ways to be more likely retained by the receiver than when he or she receives the meaning by a communication in only one mode" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 316). BNIM methods, such as interpretive panels, also created several new "voices" to consider during data analysis, adding an element of trustworthiness to my research findings.

<div align="center">Case Study Selection and Description of Data</div>

Choosing a Case Study

The following case study is a part of a larger, qualitative study. As part of the original study, participants were recruited utilizing advertisements in the local campus newspaper and through class announcements. Participants were delimited to friends who had visited their deceased loved ones' social networking Webpages after their death within the past year. All participants were college students and ranged in ages from eighteen to twenty-two at the time of the interview.

From my original eight interviews, I chose the case of Alex because his story

shared many of the same qualities as my other interviews. Like several other

participants, he had lost one of his best friends to suicide before the start of college. His

story was also rich in description and emotion. A brief biography of Alex is presented

below:

> Alex was eighteen years old and a freshman at a Midwestern university studying
> business at the time of the interview. Originally from the east coast, Alex moved
> to the Midwest in August of 2008 to attend college. Shortly before leaving
> college, Alex's best friend, Michael, ended his own life by hanging himself with a
> boat rope in the family's garage. Immediately after Michael's death, Alex began
> visiting Michael's Facebook page, leaving him messages and browsing through
> his photos and comments posted by others. In September of 2008, Alex left
> home for college, leaving behind his group of close friends and family. Hundreds
> of miles away from Michael's gravesite, Alex continued to utilize his Facebook as
> a way to feel connected to his deceased friend as well as valuable others in his
> life.

Despite this considerable single-case restriction, the intensive study of one single

case can produce insight which the superficial study of many cases in no way can.

These insights from single-case analysis can then be used in and enriched by a

multiplicity of comparative studies (Wengraf, 2001, p. 104).

Description of the Data

BNIM methodology utilizes a specific, unique interview technique for eliciting

narratives.   For the purpose of this study, BNIM interviewing methods were utilized as a

way to provide richer, more in-depth narratives that most likely could not normally have

been obtained through a traditional open-ended, non structured interview. At the

beginning of an interview, I asked a single initial question which was designed to elicit

the full narrative, called a SQUIN (Single Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative). The

purpose of the question was to invite the interviewee to decide how, when and in which

contexts he or she introduces relevant aspects of his or her personal experiences

(Wengraf, 2001, p. 121). The following narrative-seeking question was used for this study and focused on the relationship of a deceased friend:

> As you know, I'm researching how we use social networking sites after someone we love dies. So, can you please tell me the story of your relationship with (insert name of person who died) before and after his/her death, all those events and experiences that were and are important for you, personally? I'll listen; I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes in case I have any questions for after you've finished. Please take your time. Please begin wherever you like.

Alex's interview transcription served as the primary data for this research data.

Alex's Story

After hearing about my research project during a class discussion last fall, Alex, who was a student of mine at the time, quietly slipped me a note on his way out the door after class. In his note, he briefly told me about how his best friend had committed suicide a few months earlier and that he would like to share his story with me. Excited to talk to him, we planned to meet up later that week at the campus library between classes.

On first impression, Alex looked like most of the freshman college students that I knew from my classes. He wore baggy jeans with a t-shirt referencing a local fraternity that I assumed he belonged to. His faded red baseball cap was tattered around the brim and pulled down far enough that his eyes were barely visible across the library table. And like most freshman students, I learned that he had only recently graduated high school a few months earlier and was living away from home for the first time.

I could sense Alex was uneasy at the beginning of our interview as we sat across from each other at the library. He would shift positions in his chair several times, moving his hands awkwardly around the brim of his hat, taking it off and then putting it

back on again, always looking down at the table as he spoke. It wasn't until after our meeting that I learned our interview had been the first opportunity Alex had had to share his story.

In the Beginning

Alex met Michael in grade school when they were nine years old. Inseparable, the two played on several sports teams together until high school. It wasn't until their sophomore year did the two finally separate somewhat - Alex decided to put his athletic abilities into soccer while Michael chose to play football. This put some distance between the two, however they continued to remain close, hanging out nearly every weekend with a close knit group of eight other friends.

At school, Michael was popular and well-liked by his peers. An excellent athlete, Alex described Michael as a "friend to all" who came from a loving and supportive family. Alex recalled a time when he had an argument with several of his friends within the group and it was Michael that helped bring them back together:

> And it was actually (Michael) to, uh, call me up two months later – well we kind of kept in touch and he was like, hey come over, we'll talk this out. So he really helped me get back together with all my friends…I thank him for that every day. Cos now I am even closer with those guys.

During Alex and Michael's junior year in high school, the group of friends began drinking. Although Alex felt the group's drinking never got out of hand and was always contained in a "safe" environment like Michael's basement, he reflected back on the effects drinking had on Michael, especially after his girlfriend, Amy, had broken up with him:

> … he got emotional when he was drunk, though. You'd find him crying sometimes. Like, we'd, you know, we'd just rip on him cause (sic) some people get emotional when they get drunk.

Although Alex knew Michael would become emotional about Amy when he drank, he never assumed he would take his own life because of the break up. Although Alex described Michael's suicide as a "possible accident" later on during our interview, early in his story Alex described a different possible scenario that was linked to Michael's drinking and break up with Amy:

> I – mean don't get me wrong, it was nothing to take your life over, but…I mean, I don't wanna say that's the reason, but.

Michael's Death

Like most weekends in the summer, Michael and Alex made plans to hang out with their group of friends to celebrate Alex's birthday. Alex decided to spent time with his girlfriend first and then meet up with everyone later in the evening. After their dinner together, Alex called Michael to arrange a time and place to meet. Michael, who had been drinking, told Alex that he had already gone home for the evening. Disappointed, Alex decided to end his evening and go home, too.

The next morning, Alex was woken up by a telephone call from Michael's father. Still half asleep and confused by what he was hearing, Alex was told that Michael had hung himself with a boat rope in the garage shortly after midnight. In disbelief, Alex drove to a friend's house where everyone was gathering to find out if Michael was indeed, dead.

At his friend's house, Michael and Alex's friends and classmates had already gathered, crying and hugging each other for comfort. Alex, however, still felt in shock and was unable to cry or show emotion. While listening to his friends talk about Michael's death, Alex learned about several texts messages Michael had sent out to a

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couple of friends shortly before his death, including one text that stated, "I wish we could be as good as some other (explicit)." Alex was disappointed that he had not received a message from Michael and wondered if he could have stopped the suicide if he had received the text message, too:

> I'm upset that he didn't send me a text message that night. Because I'm - I'm aware of stuff like that, I know that he gets emotional when he's drunk. I would've responded.

For the next several days, Alex and his friends stay close together, sleeping at each other's homes and spending time with Michael's family. It is not until Michael's funeral – a week later – that Alex breaks down while his friends, family, and classmates watch him carry his best friend's casket to the burial site:

> I –I could have broken down at any moment, but it was there I think. It was there when the whole town saw me carry my- my friend into the ground, you know. Maybe if the whole town wasn't there it would have been just like, just like it was at the house, you know? It was just emotional whenever I'm down there.

Staying Connected

Buried near Michael and Alex's high school football field, Michael's gravesite became a personal connection for Alex, especially during the first few weeks after his death. At his gravesite, Alex would talk to Michael, expressing his both his painful grief and continued love for his friend. It is during this time that Michael's Facebook Webpage also became another important connection for Alex to feel connected to Michael, especially as he prepared to leave for college, hundreds of miles away from family, friends, and the gravesite. As Alex explained, "It's just that one tie of, like, keeping in touch (with Michael)."

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Until he left for college, Alex visited both Michael's gravesite and Facebook Webpage to talk to his deceased friend. Talking to Michael provided an important way for Alex to express his pain while attempting to come to terms with his friend's unexpected, questionable death. However, unlike going to the gravesite and talking to Michael, writing on his Facebook Webpage provided a more tangible way to express his feelings, allowing him to reflect back on what he had written at a later time. Writing on Michael's Webpage also gave Alex a sense that his message would be received:

> I could talk to him by myself, but I could also write on his wall. Cos you know, there's still that feeling where maybe he – maybe he can't hear me…but maybe he could read this. Um. It's just. A second, like, um, reassurance that he might, that he's going to hear my story.

After leaving for college, the physical distance made visiting the gravesite difficult for Alex, except for on the occasional trip home during school and holiday breaks. Although he had moved away and made new friends, Alex's grief over his best friend's death still seemed raw at times, catching him off guard, like when he would hear a particular song on the radio that had shared meaning between the two friends. During those times, Alex would visit Michael's Facebook as a way to feel connected to him:

> So whenever I hear it (the song) that when I, that's when I really get down. Um. (pause) I did so many things with that kid that whenever something – whenever I get reminded - It was just – that's when I go on his Facebook.

Although Alex would write on Michael's Facebook Webpage in hopes that his messages would be received by Michael after death, he would also write the messages knowing – and hoping – others would read his messages, too. This communicated to others the importance of Michael and Alex's friendship, while also validating his right to express his painful grief:

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I think the main point of this, of his Facebook is people are typing so that people like me can see…I think its more so that, I think its half-half. You want Michael to maybe read his Facebook up there and then half is, you want other people to see, you know. You want other people to see what, what you're typing.

Alex did not feel compelled, however, to communicate with everyone through Michael's Facebook.   Shortly after Michael's death, Michael's mother became "Friends" with most of the people in Michael and Alex's online social network, connecting her to Michael and Alex's circle of friends. Like most high school students, Michael had rejected his mother's request to be a part of his online social network and kept his Facebook settings set as "private" so that only his Friends were able to view his Facebook activity. Although Alex communicated with his Friends through Facebook extensively, he did not feel comfortable leaving messages for Michael's mother through Facebook:

> I think I'm a little too close just to say hi (to Michael's mother). I call, I'd call her before, you know, I stop by their house. I'll – I'm not going to write her a message on Facebook. It's not as important as a phone call"

Alex was, however, tolerant of Michael's mother's need to be a part of his social network after his death. However, Alex felt at times people would write on Michael's mother's Facebook Webpage as a way to communicate to others how close they were – or wanted to appear – to the family:

> I feel – all the people that write to her are like, the girls that we hung out with that weren't necessarily as close…But um, once again, people just, you know, I hate being negative in this, but people just like the attention. Like, oh, I just wrote on (Michael's mother's) wall, I'm closer to Phil than you…It's not that she didn't like them, but um, just…don't say you love him now.

Alex also viewed Michael's Webpage as a way to convey to others the personal connection the two friends shared before– and after- his death. One way to convey this

connection was through "tagging" Michael in personal photos, which showcased the

importance of their friendship for others to see:

> Like, I'm going to tag as many pictures of Michael and I in there. You know, plus so he has – I think part of it is so he has more pictures. And I also think all of his pictures of Michael and I that he's not tagged in yet, so, I'm going to tag so that people think that I am closer with him, you know? Which is kind of, I kind of disagree with that part, but, you know, don't try to fool people to thinking you were closer to somebody just because they are gone you should've been closer to them while they were here.

Alex also used the Webpage as a way to monitor how his other friends were

coping with the loss of their friend. For instance, Alex noticed that Amy, Michael's

girlfriend, often wrote messages on Michael's Facebook Webpage which often

expressed a painful struggle to find meaning in his suicide. During a visit home from

college, Alex and his friends found Amy lying on Michael's grave, confirming Alex's

suspicion that she was not coping well with the death:

> I mean I don't even know how she feels. She was just, actually, last weekend was our high school's homecoming so all our friends went back uh, a couple of my friends went to his grave and uh, they found here there just laying next to him.

Alex was very protective of Michael's Webpage, which included personal

comments posted by others directed at Michael. Although Alex understood the need for

others to express their anger at Michael for taking his own life, it frustrated Alex to see

others treat Michael that way, even after his death:

> People don't, people don't literally say, "you were selfish", but they were like, "Why did you do it Silly", "Why did you do that, I need you right now" But like, now you're being selfish…I just don't like the way it sounds…Like, who are you to say, that um, he was my friend, he- you weren't that close with him…He did it, so let's deal with it and let's try and make the best, instead of trying to blame – everyone tries to blame something on somebody when something happens.

The appearance of a continued relationship with Michael by others also frustrated Alex. Because Alex and Michael were best friends and hung out with the same group of friends, Alex knew who the important relationships were in Michael's life. More importantly, Alex also knew who *was not* as close to Michael as others. While reading through the comments posted on Michael's site, Alex would often notice classmates and others writing to Michael as though they were – and continued – to be good friends. Alex felt this was not genuine, but rather the person's desire to appear to others as though he or she was close to Michael before (and consequently, after) his death:

> …but, you know, don't try to fool people to thinking you were closer to somebody just because they are gone you should've been closer to them while they were here. You know, kind of regrets.

As the months passed and Alex settled into his new life at college, he would continue to visit Michael's Facebook Webpage often. Reading through the stories posted on his wall and looking through the vast amount of photos helped Alex continue to feel connected to Michael long after his death. Photos and stories posted on the Webpage included an important reference to their time together, much like a photo album or story book. Having the Webpage provided a sense of relief for Alex that Michael's memory would not be forgotten by him, or others:

> Every once in awhile I look at his pictures, too. Its just, um, this is just to remember stories, memories. All the memories. That's what pictures are, memories. So. Um. I mean, he's got 645 and I've seen every single one of them. But every time I flip through I see one that maybe I don't remember that, it just – it's always something new that you see when you look through his pictures. I like to go back at the ones when we were like, uh, when we were uh, younger. It's just new to me because we haven't seen it in awhile. Uh, yeah, so basically, just memories.

Summary

Alex's narrative described how Michael's Facebook Webpage created a way for Alex to connect, communicate, and continue a relationship with Michael after his death. The Webpage also provided a connection to important others in his life, including a way to communicate to others the importance of Michael's friendship before – and after – his death.

Discussion

Social networking sites, by definition, are primarily a place where individuals can connect and communicate with others within their social network both privately and within the context of a virtual "shared public network space". After his death, Michael's Facebook Webpage became a post death ritual that symbolized private mourning in a public place for Alex and his friends. The Webpage provided many functions for Alex, linking both his personal and social experience of grief together. Although Alex used Michael's Webpage as a way to "talk" and stay connected to Michael posthumously, he also viewed the Webpage as a way to stay connected and grieve with others within his social networking group. Most importantly, perhaps, was how the site provided a way for Alex to continue a relationship with Michael after his death within the context of a supportive social network.

Research suggests that writing during grief may be a helpful and healing experience for most. Most research has been on the personal benefits of writing as a means of self-support (Lattanzi & Hale, 1985), where writing during grief is seen as a personal, reflective process.   With the advent of the internet, researchers now have a seemingly endless access to personal writings during grief that can be found in personal

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blogs, email listservs, chat rooms, Web Cemeteries, and the social networking Webpages' of deceased loved ones. However, unlike the writings found in personal diaries or journals, writings found on the internet differ in the sense that individuals write with the knowledge that others might – or will – read what they write. For Alex, writing on Michael's Webpage created a platform for him to express his grief and painful emotions. This was done, however, under the "watchful eyes" of others which guided what was, and possibly what wasn't, written on Michael's Webpage.

Grief may become a lifelong companion for students who maintain some or much attachment to the persons they loved in their life (Balk, 1996, p. 325). College campuses, like most ecological niches, do not necessarily support or acknowledge grief expressions, much less ongoing attachments to the deceased. A survivor's inner representation of the deceased is in many ways dependent upon the survivor's living community. The living can influence the individual's desire and ability to remain involved with the deceased (Silverman & Nickman, 1996, p. 349). Survivors may look to their social support network for help in keeping their continued relationships alive. Michael's Webpage created a platform for Alex, as well as others, to openly communicate with Michael in the presence of supportive others. On Facebook, continuing a relationship with Michael after his death seemed to be the norm rather than the exception for Alex and his friends.

Even though messages posted on Michael's Webpage were directed to Michael and not the public, a sense of community was ultimately created through the sharing of the bereaved friends' grief. In some ways, the Webpage was similar to a support group, providing a place for Alex and his friends to talk about the pain of losing their friend.

Furthermore, Alex utilized Michael's Webpage as a way to gauge the progress of his own grief in relation to how his peers were doing with their own grief.

The Webpage also provided a place for Michael's friends and classmates to showcase their close relationship to Michael – or the appearance of a close relationship - for others to see. Public comments showcase social skills and connections to valuable others (Manago et al., 2008), along with a public list of social networking connections. Being tagged in photographs and leaving personal messages for the family conveyed to others the important place one had in the life of the deceased. For example, because Alex was not tagged in many photographs on Michael's Webpage, he feared that this would convey a message to others that perhaps he was not that close to Michael.

In terms of identity exploration and formation, Michael's Webpage afforded Alex and others the opportunity to create an identity, or self, that he or she wanted to convey to others. As described by Goffman (1959), individuals develop a sense of self from creating an impression they wish to give to others.   For example, by posting comments that reflected her difficulty to cope with Michael's death, Amy presented herself as "struggling with her grief" to others on Michael's Webpage. This was later confirmed by Alex who found his friend lying on his friend's grave on a visit home one weekend, overcome by her grief.

The recurrence of grief suggests that the bereaved continue to stay connected to the deceased (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 56). Grief may be linked to the remembrance of happy memories, love, and a time of laughter. People often welcome grief recurrence, and even if there is a sad or bitter side to it there may also be a sweet, affirming, and to-be-cherished side (Rosenblatt, p. 55). Much like visiting his gravesite, browsing through

Michael's Webpage often brought along with it fresh pangs of grief for the Alex.

However, looking through old pictures and reading stories about the bereaved also

rekindled fond memories of their relationship together.

In summary, Michael's Webpage created an important link to Michael and others

for Alex after the death of his friend. Feeling connected to others during his grief was

important for Alex as he worked through the pain of his friend's suicide. Being hundreds

of miles away from his supportive network and Michael's gravesite, Michael's Webpage

was the integral in providing a place for Alex to memorialize his deceased friend within

the presence of a supportive network of other grieving friends.

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Chapter 5

ARTICLE 2: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS A MEDIUM FOR
MEMORIALIZATION IN EMERGING ADULTS

The Role of Social Networking Sites as a Medium for Memorialization in

Emerging Adults

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Abstract

Social networking sites are very popular among emerging adults. After the death of a friend, many individuals are turning to these sites as a way to stay connected to the deceased – and others – during grief. This unique qualitative research study explores how the use of the social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, may assist in the grief process, encourage continuing bonds with the deceased, and enfranchise those whose grief may otherwise be overlooked or dismissed.

Introduction

After the death of a loved one, social networking sites may provide several important functions in relation to feeling connected to the deceased as well as others during grief. Logistically, because social networking sites can be accessed at any time of the day from anywhere in the world, bereaved individuals are able to connect with their social network whenever the desire arises. This may be especially important to college students who may be hundreds of miles away from their family and friends or access to their deceased friend's gravesite. Feeling connected to others during grief may also provide a much needed sense of comfort and community for the bereaved, which may not be readily available away from home.

The following paper presents a qualitative study that examines the role of social networking Webpages, such as Facebook and MySpace, in emerging adults after the death of a friend. A brief overview of emerging adulthood, social networking sites, and online memorialization is presented, followed by a description of the research design and methodological choices used in this study. Next, the findings of the study are discussed, including a theoretical discussion and implications for the research.

Emerging Adulthood

Focusing on the ages between 18 and 25, emerging adulthood is a developmental period characterized by change and exploration for most people, as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2007). Although they have left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, they have not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, including taking on various adult roles.

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Perhaps the most important feature of emerging adulthood is identity exploration and formation. Identity formation involves trying out various life possibilities and gradually moving toward making enduring decisions (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2001) defines identity as a "concept of one's values, abilities, and hopes for the future." It is a time when emerging adults learn more about who they are and what they want out of life. For most emerging adults, college affords the opportunity to explore their own as well as other possible identities, including reexamining personal and religious beliefs, considering new possible world views, and exploring new relationships. However, cultural influences and structure sometimes limit the extent to which emerging adults are able to use their teens and twenties this way, and not all young people in this age period are able to use these years for independent exploration (Arnett, 2000).

One important way that emerging adults engage in identity exploration is through peer interactions (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkham, 2008). As emerging adults present themselves within social interactions, they share goals and reflect common values, helping one another consolidate identities as they move into adulthood (Nurmi, 2004). Social networking sites provide a tool for the expression of feelings, especially towards friends. For instance, posting comments on a person's profile can help deepen an association between individuals, thereby making the relationship feel more intimate (Manago et al., 2008). Self-disclosure is also an important component of emerging adults' feelings of intimacy in friendships and intimate behaviors with friends and include emotional support, trust and loyalty, sharing activities, and offers of instrumental support (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 429).

Social Networking Sites

Fundamentally, social networking sites are a category of online community sites which incorporate three commonalities: profiles, friends, and comments. Intrinsically, social networking sites are based around profiles, which are a form of individual home page that provide a description of each member. This description may include demographics (i.e. age, gender), but most often includes information of a more personal nature (i.e. pictures, personal blogs).

Most emerging adults utilize online social networking sites as a means to connect with and interact with peers. College students, who are often on their own for the first time, utilize social networking sites as a way to stay connected with family and high school friends as well as connect with new friends and colleagues. Emerging adults reported that one favorite activity was browsing other people's profile/walls help users keep track of their friends, the events in their life, as well as their friend's interactions with others (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). More so, posting comments on a person's profile can help deepen an association between individuals, thereby making relationships feel more intimate (Manago et al., 2008). Self-disclosure is an important component of emerging adults' feelings of intimacy in friendships and intimate behaviors with friends and includes emotional support, trust and loyalty, sharing activities, and offers of instrumental support (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 429).

After the death of a loved one, social networking sites may provide several important functions in relation to feeling connected to the deceased as well as others during grief. Logistically, because social networking sites can be accessed at any time of the day from anywhere in the world, bereaved individuals are able to connect with

their social network whenever the desire arises. This may be especially important to college students who may be hundreds of miles away from their family and friends or access to their deceased friend's gravesite. Feeling connected to others during grief may also provide a much needed sense of comfort and community for the bereaved, which may not be readily available away on from home.

Online Memorialization

Many individuals have turned to cyberspace to seek new opportunities to express their grief, commemorate the deceased, create and find community (de Vries & Rutherford, 2004). Personal social networking Webpages, such as MySpace and Facebook, often become Web memorials after a person's death, leaving behind a unique opportunity for bereaved friends and loved ones to "send messages" to those beyond death. Although several studies have looked at the use of Web memorialization on the Internet (Roberts & Vidal, 2000; de Vries & Rutherford, 2004), only one study to date can be found on the use of personal social networking Webpages that have become Web memorials after someone dies. Personal Webpages may create an immediate memorial after a death and be more personal than those created by friends and family for the deceased. They may also become a powerful venue for the bereaved to share memories, express their grief, and perhaps most importantly, continue a relationship with the deceased.

In Western society, with the many social sanctions surrounding death, there may be very few opportunities to openly talk about death, especially when the death was of a traumatic or questionable nature. Friends may find even fewer opportunities to express their grief socially. Personal Webpages, like Web memorials, tend to allow continuity of

expression of grief, offering unobtrusive access and thus facilitating enfranchisement of grief (Moss, 2004). They allow the bereaved to honor their dead in their own way and at their own time, to visit the memorial whenever they choose, and to share with others memories and information about the deceased (Roberts, 2004).

Study Design

Research Focus

The focus of this research study was to examine how the use of social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook might contribute to meaning making after death, continuing bonds with the deceased, and the grief process in emerging adults.

Participant Selection

According to Wengraf (2001, p. 96), because of the comparatively small numbers of informants that a process of semi-structured interviews can be applied to, given finite resources, it is unlikely one would be able to do many interviews. In general, sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), nor should the sample size not be too small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation (Flick, 1998). In total I interviewed eight participants of which I chose six narratives to utilize as my data, including four females and two males. According to Wengraf (2001, p. 95), a researcher should avoid haphazard selection of participants. I chose a purposive non-randomized sample, which included selecting information-rich cases for study in depth (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

Description of Participants

Initially, participants were to be comprised of friends who had visited their deceased loved ones' Webpages after their loved one had died within the past year. However, during the interviews, two participants noted that their friend had died between a year and two years from the time of the interview. Consequently, the time that had elapsed from the time of the interviews and the deaths of the participants' friends ranged anywhere from two to twenty months. However, I did not notice much difference between the narratives of those who had lost a friend within the past year and those who had lost a friend within a year and two years from the time of the interview. The greatest difference between participants who had lost a friend within the year and participants who had lost a friend for over a year was perhaps the frequency of which the participants had visited their friends' personal Webpages. Those who had lost a friend longer than a year at the time of the interview tended not to visit the Webpages as frequently as participants who had lost a friend within the past year. Also, one participant I interviewed has lost two friends within the past year and included both losses in his story. Although I had not anticipated interviewing a participant who had lost two close friends, his story was not much different that those who had lost one friend and undoubtedly added insight into my research findings. In total, four friends' deaths were suicide, one had been killed in the war in Iraq, and two deaths were accident related.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology (BNIM) interviewing methods (as described by Wengraf, 2001) were utilized as a way to provide

richer, more in-depth narratives that most likely could not normally have been obtained through a traditional open-ended, non structured interview. At the beginning of each interview, I asked a single initial question which was designed to elicit the full narrative, called a SQUIN (Single Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative). The purpose of the question was to invite the interviewee to decide how, when and in which contexts he or she introduces relevant aspects of his or her personal experiences (Wengraf, 2001, p. 121). The following narrative-seeking question was used for this study and focused on the relationship of a deceased friend.

> *As you know, I'm researching how we use social networking sites after someone we love dies. So, can you please tell me the story of your relationship with (insert name of person who died) before and after his/her death, all those events and experiences that were and are important for you, personally? I'll listen; I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes in case I have any questions for after you've finished. Please take your time. Please begin wherever you like.*

Interview transcriptions served as the primary data for this research data. Although many participants offered up links to their friends' personal Webpages or provided me with personal pictures, videos and writings, I chose to only use the interview transcripts for this study as to not violate the privacy of their deceased friends and possible others.

<div align="center">Methodology</div>

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis refers to a diverse family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Reismann (2008) describes four broad methodological approaches to narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual analysis. Each methodology describes narrative

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differently and deals with the following important issues: definition of narrative, the task of transforming talk into text, attention to language and narrative form, focus of an inquiry and associated unit of analysis, and attention to context. Each analytical approach is not considered mutually exclusive, however, and can be adapted or combined with other approaches depending on the researcher's epistemological and theoretical perspective.

How a researcher approaches narrative analysis ultimately depends on several factors, including his or her definition of narrative, theoretical and epistemological perspectives, and purpose of the research study. All narrative inquiry is concerned with content – "what" is said, written or visually shown (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). However, the primary focus of each methodological approach differs. For instance, thematic analysis focuses primarily on context while keeping a story "intact". Primary attention is focused on "what" is said, rather than "how", "to whom", or "for what purpose". In general, thematic analysts are mostly interested in the "told" – informants' reports of events and experiences, rather than aspects of the "telling" (Riessman, p. 54). In thematic analysis, "narrative" can be defined as an entire life story, an extended account of a speaker, or a bounded segment of a text or document. Most importantly, within the sequences within the story are presented intact. Narrative analysts strive to preserve sequence and the wealth of detail contained in long sequences, while attending to time and place of narration. In thematic analysis, prior theory also serves as a resource for interpretation, with most narrative investigators rejecting the idea of generic explanations (Riessman, p. 74). Unlike grounded theory, where the main objective is to inductively generate stable concepts, or themes, that can be used to theorize *across*

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cases, thematic analysis theorizes from *within* a particular case.

During my analysis, I focused on my participants' stories as they unfolded within the interview transcripts while reflecting on my journal entries, notes, and literature review. As themes, thoughts, or theories arose from each story, I kept a detailed journal which included specific page and line numbers for later reference. Because I was interested in the interpretation of each separate case as a whole and wanted to prevent the stories from becoming fragmented, I allocated separate journal pages for each participant and used color coded highlighters to differentiate. As a way to organize and present my thought processes during my analysis, I also created a concept map for each participant's narrative, which highlighted important themes and constructs. This allowed me to keep the stories "intact" so that I could later "theorize from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases" (Riessman, 2008, p. 53).

Researchers do not act as a conduit of information, but as co-constructors of a finished narrative (Gilbert, 2002). As I analyzed each case, the themes that did emerge were ultimately based on my theoretical perspectives, research interests, and my own personal characteristics. The telling of the story creates a new story, as well as new interpretation and understanding of the story (Gilbert). As a researcher, it is essential to recognize and acknowledge the role we play in constituting the narrative data that we analyze. During the entire research process, from the interviews to the final analysis, I kept a detailed journal on my own reflections and personal reactions to the process. During the final write up of the participants' narratives, I incorporate my ownership in the final analysis.

Findings

Social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, provided several

functions for bereaved friends after the death of their loved ones, both personally and

socially. The findings are presented below under four main categories: *Connection,*

Communication, Commemoration, and Continuation of the Relationship.

Connection

The recurrence of grief suggests that the bereaved continue to stay connected to

the deceased (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 56). Grief may be linked to the remembrance of

happy memories, love, and a time of laughter. Looking through photographs or visiting

a cherished place of the deceased may evoke grief recurrence, but also provides the

person with a reminder of how important that person was in their lives. People often

welcome grief recurrence, and even if there is a sad or bitter side to it there may also be

a sweet, affirming, and to-be-cherished side (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 55). Much like visiting

a loved one's gravesite, browsing through a deceased friend's Webpage might bring

along with it fresh pangs of grief for the bereaved. However, looking through old

pictures and reading conversations between the bereaved and the deceased may also

rekindle fond memories of the relationship. Personal Webpages left behind by the

deceased may provide a platform for bereaved to feel connected to their deceased

friend and important others in their lives.

Being away at college for many participants made visiting their deceased friends'

gravesites difficult, if not impossible. Social networking sites, like Facebook, provided a

way for the participants to feel connected to their deceased friends even when they

could not access the gravesite. For instance, after Iris's best friend died in Iraq, she

would often drive several hours home from college on the weekends so that she could visit his gravesite or his family. Much like the gravesite, Ben's Facebook also provided a personal connection to her friend:

> I go to his grave as often as I can and talk to him there but his grave is in Cincinnati and I'm in Indiana. And so sometimes I feel it's really nice to have his Facebook still there. (Iris)

Several participants relied completely on the personal Webpages as a way to feel a personal connection to their deceased friend. Michelle, for instance, did not have a gravesite or memorial to visit at all because her friend has been cremated after his suicide with the ashes kept at his parents' home:

> And he was, uh, cremated, so it's not like we can go to his grave or anything either, so.(Michelle)

For three participants, the personal Webpages provided a place to go when attending the funeral was not an option because of school commitments. Having two friends commit suicide within two weeks of each other, Brian struggled with not being able to go home to attend either funeral, keeping him secluded from other grieving friends and classmates:

> The horrible thing was that it was – the day of – I had two midterms on the day of his funeral so I couldn't go to his funeral…I emailed one professor and uh, he wouldn't let me, uh, reschedule it. So I, you know, it was either get two F's basically or, you know, go back to the funeral. That – that was, you know, that really hurt. I hated not being able to go there. (Brian)

Like most of the participants, Brian used his deceased friends' Webpages as a way to feel connected to others during his grief, especially when he felt disconnected from others after their deaths:

And to see a bunch of people talk to him like he's there…this is how people are dealing with their grief. Like, this is, you know, it was good to see, you know, cos it's good to see people that are comfortable with grieving, you know…everyone had the same, you know, everyone from our high school and like out of all our extended friends, you know, we all – it was good to see that we all felt the same thing. (Brian)

One participant, however, did not find comfort in using the Webpage as a way to connect to her deceased friend. After Carrie's friend died in a car crash while she was away at college, she avoiding going to his Webpage for weeks after his death. When she finally did visit his site, she was only able to browse through it for a few minutes, briefly looking at his pictures and reading comments posted by others. To her, visiting the Webpage was like confronting a ghost:

It's – it's like your heart stop a little second… he's staring right at you from that picture…And it's just – eerie. And-and-and it's almost like you're facing, um, a ghost. That's what it's like. It's like you are seeing something that's not supposed to be there. It should be gone – he's gone. So, why is this still here?…it's something that shouldn't be there. It's like a living memory. Um, if a ghost came back to haunt you. (Carrie)

Communication

Literature on continuing bonds with the deceased has described the need to communicate with deceased loves ones through writing (e.g., Lattanzi & Hale, 1984-1985, Rosenblatt, 2000) and talking to the deceased (Klass, 1988; Rosenblatt, 2000; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993; Silverman & Nickman, 1996). Bereaved individuals might write letters to the deceased, talk to them at their gravesite, or even speak out loud to the person in hopes that their message will reach them posthumously.   With the advent of the internet, bereaved individuals are finding new ways to continue relationships with

the deceased, including sending personal emails to the deceased or posting comments on their friend's social networking site or other Web memorial.

For almost all of the participants, the social networking Webpages provided a way to personally communicate with the deceased. For Iris, her friend's Webpage seemed to be, to her, the only way she could communicate directly with him aside from talking to his picture or at his grave:

> Just I don't have any other place to send him anything. I can't send a letter in the mail to God. Can't call him up. Not going to send letters to his house and upset his family. And I can't call his phone and leave him a message or anything because his brother- he gave his brother his new phone before he went to war, so. Uh. Just like the only place to leave him a message. (Iris)

Without a gravesite or memorial at all to visit, Jacob's MySpace Webpage created an important way for Michelle to communicate with her deceased friend:

> Um, so it's sort of this way that we could see him and um, just like talk to him as we would if we were visiting, like, his grave, you know. It was just this really, um, it was as close to him as we could get at that point. (Michelle)

Aside from the personal benefits of writing to the bereaved, individuals may write with the hope of having others find comfort or benefit from reading of their experience (Lattanzi & Hale, 1983-84). Even though messages posted on personal Webpage are often directed to the deceased and not the public, a sense of community may be created through the sharing of the bereaved friends' grief. In some ways, the Web site may be similar to a support group in providing a place for persons with similar losses to interact and find comfort and understanding (Moss, 2004). For instance, Michelle used her deceased friend's Webpage as a way to communicate with others, especially during moments of intense grief and the search for understanding following Jacob's suicide:

Just seeing them post something that they're just like so, like, depressed or sad or missing him a lot. And kind of just- sending them something is a like a gesture, like, you know, "I'm –I'm right there with you". (Michelle)

The Webpages also provided a place for participants to express their grief openly without fear of ridicule or rejection by their peers. After experiencing two close friends' suicides one right after the other, Brian appreciated being able to utilize Facebook as a way to work through his grief and express his feelings in a supportive environment with others who had also experienced the same loss:

> So like, if you see guys, you know, expressing their feelings and girls like, just, you know, seeing that as alright and just everybody just seeing that as okay, like I think that really helps. Like, not so much the individual but the group, the- the effectiveness of his suicide as a whole, you know. So I think –I think Facebook actually is, is more of an outlet, you know, just like, your need to express your grief. (Brian)

One participant used the Webpage as a way to keep in touch with her deceased friend's social network, even two years after her friend's accidental death. For Melissa, keeping everyone aware of events and activities involving Jessica helped to keep her memory alive:

> I think I just like going on, it helps everyone keep it touch, really. I mean, that, um, I mean, it's hard for everybody to keep in touch since there's so many people that cared about her and want to be involved with different things. Um. Just uh, you know, make her more alive, I guess. (Melissa)

Commemoration

For many participants, as the pain of grief subsided, the Webpages became personal memorials, celebrating their deceased friends' lives. For Brian, who had been in a band with his two friends before their death, used the Webpages as a way to remember the good memories they shared together without focusing as much on the

pain of their deaths:

> Their (Webpage) is more of uh, celebrating their life instead of grieving about their death. That's what I think the most important part is. You remember the good times, and you forget the horrible tragedy event.(Brian)

Writing about the deceased provided an intimate account of a loved one's life for others to read, including shared stories or memories that may provide a sense of who the person was when he or she was alive. For many participants, the personal Webpages provided a way to keep their deceased friends' memories alive and to feel their ongoing presence, even years later. For instance, Melissa utilized the Webpage's ability to upload videos and picture slideshows as a way to preserve her friend's memory and share it with others who visited the site:

> But I feel that's the way that I keep her alive, but many people keep her alive by, you know, going on her Facebook, and that's a really good way to, you know, keep her presence there. Um. I mean even though she's not there, there are many things that are there that like remind people of her and make them feel that she's with them, especially her Facebook, I think. (Melissa)

For Carrie, however, having numerous photos and videos constantly appearing on their friend's personal Webpage each time she visited felt overwhelming and uncomfortable:

> So, his wall was just bombarded with photo albums that friends had made and – and videos that they had on their computers that they wanted to post for people to see. So, all of the sudden it was this exhausting amount of "We miss you (John) " photo album. And "John: My best friend" photo album. And, you know, things of that nature. And it's just bam, bam, bam, bam! And then you are like, wow, that is exhausting.(Carrie)

For a couple of participants, looking through pictures and videos of their deceased friends created meaningful insight into their own lives which included

cherished memories of their loved ones:

> I think having that, having that ease of access to it is just…makes you remember just every little time that you could have had with them. And then it makes…me wish every time that I look at them that I would cherish that moment just that little much more, you know, that little bit more cause, you know, you never expect anything like that to happen… at first it's just, every picture is a new tear. But I think now every picture is a new smile and a new laughter because you remember and you just celebrate their life instead of grieving over it. (Brian)

Continuation of the Relationship

Continuing bonds with the deceased can be described as a dynamic, ever-changing process that includes constructing an inner representation of the deceased into the lives of the living. Phenomena that indicate interaction with the inner representation of a deceased person have been described as a sense of presence, hallucinations in any of the senses, belief in the person's continuing active influence on thoughts or events, or a conscious incorporation of the characteristics or virtues of the dead into the self (Marwitt & Klass, 1996, p. 298). The inner representation of the deceased may change over time, and can include an active or a passive role in the lives of the bereaved. At times, the deceased may play a central, leading role in their lives, while at other times the role may be that of a supporting one. The connection, however, remains intact.

Most participants used the personal Webpages as a way to continue their relationship with their deceased loved ones. Alex, who left for college a month after his best friend had hung himself, continued to remain close to his high school friends and even made several other close friends while at college. However, he still considered his deceased friend is best friend even in death:

He's always going to be my best friend whether he's alive or dead. (Alex)

For Brian, the Webpage provided a way to contact his friends even beyond death, even though he knew he would not be receiving a response in return:

> But, I did, you know, talk to him like he's there, you know, like, I'm just like it is on Facebook. It's like he's there. So you talk to him, you know, you talk to him like – like he's living, you know, but somewhere else, you know. It's – not even like really he died. It's like he moved really far away. Cos you can still contact, you can still contact him. (Brian)

While most participants left messages for everyone to see on the Webpage, Iris would sometimes use the site as a way to send very personal, private messages to her best friend that could not be read by others:

> When I'm really emotional and upset about it, I will get on it and send him a private message just about, basically just going on about how sad I am and how much of disbelief I am in that's he's really gone. And how I hate that he's gone and I hate the war and just hate it all. But other times when I just have something little to say I'll leave, like, just on the wall where anyone can see (Iris)

Most participants felt the Webpage was an important link to maintaining their relationship with the deceased. Without a place to go to talk to her deceased friend, Jacob's MySpace Webpage represented a much needed ongoing connection for Michelle to maintain their relationship:

> Just like whenever we are thinking of him, that's kind of our way to, like, let him know or get a hold of him. (Michelle)

Although Iris wasn't sure how Anthony was receiving her email messages posthumously, she felt confident that her messages were being received by her friend, no matter how they were directed towards him:

I definitely just trying to feel like, I mean, I don't know if he can, you know, get on a computer up in heaven and get on Facebook, see what people are saying. But I kind of – I hope that wherever he is, that like he can look down on the world, you know, and that like when I direct something towards him that way, that it gets to him. (Iris)

Summary

For nearly all participants, the personal Webpages of their deceased friends provided an important way to connect, communicate, commemorate and continue a relationship with their deceased friends after death. The Webpages also provided a connection to others in their lives, creating a sense of community and belonging during their grief.

Discussion

Grief may become a lifelong companion for students who maintain some or much attachment to the persons they loved in their life (Balk, 1996, p. 325). College campuses, like most ecological niches, do not necessarily support or acknowledge grief expressions, much less ongoing attachments to the deceased. A survivor's inner representation of the deceased is in many ways dependent upon the survivor's living community. The living can influence the individual's desire and ability to remain involved with the deceased (Silverman & Nickman, 1996, p. 349). Survivors may look to their social support network for help in keeping their continued relationships alive. Students, who may be hundreds of miles away from their social support, may utilize personal Webpages, such as Facebook, as a way to continue a bond with the deceased within the supportive presence of their social network.

In terms of this research, it appears that the social networking site Facebook, with its own unique social structure and social interaction, was openly accepting of the

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expression of grief and continuing relationships with the deceased. In essence, the

members of the social networking site created their own definitions of certain roles such

as "bereaved friend" and "grieving member". Whereas in modern society where openly

expressing the emotions of grief in public may be looked down upon, especially if the

loss occurred many months earlier, the expression of grief emotions on a deceased

person's social networking profile appeared to be normative, even months after the

death. Also, where one might be viewed as "odd" if they disclosed in an everyday

conversation with someone that they spoke to their deceased friend posthumously, on

social networking sites talking to a deceased friend seemed to be commonplace. Within

the social networking realm, discussing grief emotions and talking to the deceased

appeared to be accepted and supported by other social network members. The sites,

with their own unique definitions of particular roles, may also assist in the formation of

identity and self as one must learn to incorporate these newly defined roles such as

"bereaved friend" and "friend of a deceased person" into their identity. Specifically,

visiting a deceased person's profile might provide the opportunity for role-taking, where

bereaved individuals may attempt to imagine themselves in the place of others who are

experiencing the same grief – and hence, the same roles. Although grief is a private

venture, it yearns for public validation. Social networking sites may provide this

opportunity.

One important point of discussion is the challenge or issue of how "culture" is

attended to within this research. Social networking sites such as Facebook and

MySpace have essentially created their own unique culture through the social

interactions of their members. Although this "online culture" is important and worthy of

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discussion, it is also important to consider the many other cultural variations outside of the "Cyberworld" that was presented in this study which was reflective of a white, middle class, Midwestern college niche that had frequent –if not continuous – internet and technology access. The online culture described in this study was undoubtedly shaped by these social determinants. It would be interesting to see how other cultural variations and social determinants might create different online cultures and interactions amongst its members. Also, the purpose or meaning of the sites for individuals of different cultures might be notably different that what was represented here.

Another important topic to discuss is the idea of a "digital divide", or division between those that do not, or cannot utilize certain technologies such as social networking sites because of financial, disability, or age related reasons. It is essential to recognize the limits to this research in relation to its ability to explain or take into account other cultural variations outside of the ones represented by my initial eight participants, especially to those who may be considered a part of the "digital divide". Some important questions to consider include: Are those who are grieving and do not, or cannot, access the internet at a disadvantage compared to those who can? What role, if any, does the internet play for those with limited internet access during grief? These questions could also be considered for other public health issues, including the implications for those with health disparities who do not utilize the internet for health information or social support.

Aside from the inability to truly understand how cultural variations might have played a part in this study, it is still important to acknowledge the unique online culture that was represented in my participants' narratives. For instance, it was apparent that

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the use of technology was a vital component of my participants' relationships with their friends. Aside from the use of social networking sites, they also talked about using text messages, online instant messages, and emails as a way to develop and maintain friendships. Online and offline communication appeared to be equally intertwined and important in their relationships. This might have translated into the ease by which my participants felt comfortable using social networking sites as a form of communication with the deceased and their social support. For my participants, utilizing the Webpages of their deceased friends as a way to feel connected to their dead loved ones and social support network because it was how they stay connected with each other before the deaths. As one participant explained to me, it was "just what you do" because everyone else seemed to be doing it, too.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

Personal Web memorials, such as MySpace and Facebook, often remain active indefinitely, providing an ongoing place for friends and loved ones to feel a personal connection to the deceased, even years after their death. Social networking sites are very popular among youth and may provide a unique venue for grief in a space that feels familiar and comfortable to them. As the use of the Internet and social networking sites continue to increase, those working with emerging adults may benefit from recognizing and appreciating the significance of these social networking Webpages as a venue for both the expression of grief and continuing of bonds with the deceased, especially for those who are physically separated from their social support network or friend's gravesite during grief. However, because this study describes the experiences of individuals in emerging adulthood, further research into the narratives of those who

do not necessarily fit the description of this developmental period are warranted. For instance, what meanings might these sites provide for individuals who *do* have ongoing access to their social support network and friend's gravesite or memorial during grief?

Research also suggests that writing during grief may be a helpful and healing experience for most. Most research has been on the personal benefits of writing as a means of self-support (Lattanzi & Hale, 1985), where writing during grief is seen as a personal, reflective process. With the advent of the internet, researchers now have a seemingly endless access to personal writings during grief that can be found in personal blogs, email listservs, chat rooms, Web Cemeteries, and the social networking Webpages' of deceased loved ones. However, unlike the writings found in personal diaries or journals, writings found on the internet differ in the sense that individuals write with the knowledge that others might – or will – read what they write. The idea of a "watchful other" during grief writing is both an exciting and warranted topic of continued research.

Messages left to the deceased in a public forum may also benefit other bereaved friends that may be visiting the personal Webpage. Visits to both the traditional cemetery and to the Web memorial are post death rituals symbolizing private mourning in a public place (Moss, 2004). Even though messages posted on personal Webpage are often directed to the deceased and not the public, a sense of community may be created through the sharing of the bereaved friends' grief. In some ways, the Web site may be similar to a support group in providing a place for persons with similar losses to interact and find comfort and understanding (Moss, 2004). It is therefore important to appreciate the significance of not only writing messages to the deceased, but the act of

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reading messages to the deceased as well.

However, as was the case for one participant in this study, visiting a friend's personal Webpage soon after their death may feel too overwhelming and not necessarily comforting during grief. For Carrie, visiting the Webpage was like confronting a ghost, creating a sense of uneasiness and discomfort. Therefore, while utilizing personal Webpages as a way to feel connected to the deceased and others may be of great benefit for many during the grief process, it is not necessarily for everyone.

The use of technology in our lives continues to increase. Emerging adults are growing up in a time where communication is instantaneous, information and answers to questions are at their fingertips, and video games are becoming so life-like that it is becoming difficult to decipher between reality and virtuality. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace have created a platform for teenagers to market themselves and where being accepted or feeling a part of an online community is exemplified by the ability to showcase a public list of valuable "friends" who leave valuable "comments" on one's profile. There are also new ways to bully others, or be bullied, through the use of the internet or text messaging. In all, technology has dramatically affected the lives of most American youth. This research has brought up many questions regarding how technology might be affecting development, especially cognitive development, in young children and adolescents. As technology becomes ingrained into their everyday lives, where are the boundaries between reality and virtuality? Or is there even a boundary at all through their eyes?

Although this research was limited to the exploration of the use of social

networking sites during grief, the findings may also be relevant to other important public

health issues such as access to social support and health information. For instance,

research on internet sites such as Second Life, which is currently being used to provide

health education and social support for a variety of health disparities, might benefit from

exploring the meanings these sites provide to individuals, especially as the boundaries

between "real" and "virtual" are becoming more and more intertwined.

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Chapter 6

REFLECTIONS

The purpose of the dissertation was two-fold. The first, and main purpose, was to explore the meanings emerging adults attributed to their deceased friends' social networking Webpages. The second purpose was to explore a relatively new methodology, Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology, especially as it applied to this research topic. Both purposes equally provoked countless hours of reflection during the writing of this dissertation, much of which is presented within the previous chapters. This chapter presents the many thoughts and reflections that did not necessarily fit within any of the other chapters, but still merit recognition.

Points of Discussion

One important discussion is the challenge or issue of how "culture" is attended to within this research. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace have essentially created their own unique culture through the social interactions of their members. Although this "online culture" is important and worthy of discussion, it is also important to consider the many other cultural variations outside of the "Cyberworld" that was presented in this study which was reflective of a white, middle class, Midwestern college niche that had frequent –if not continuous – internet and technology access. The online culture described in this study was undoubtedly shaped by these social determinants. It would be interesting to see how other cultural variations and social determinants might create different online cultures and interactions amongst its members. Also, the purpose or meaning of the sites for individuals of different cultures might be notably different that what was represented here.

Another important topic to discuss is the idea of a "digital divide", or division between those that do not, or cannot utilize certain technologies such as social networking sites because of financial, disability, or age related reasons. It is essential to recognize the limits to this research in relation to its ability to explain or take into account other cultural variations outside of the ones represented by my initial eight participants, especially to those who may be considered a part of the "digital divide". Some important questions to consider include: Are those who are grieving and do not, or cannot, access the internet at a disadvantage compared to those who can? What role, if any, does the internet play for those with limited internet access during grief? These questions could also be considered for other public health issues, including the implications for those with health disparities who do not utilize the internet for health information or social support.

Aside from the inability to truly understand how cultural variations might have played a part in this study, it is still important to acknowledge the unique online culture that was represented in my participants' narratives. For instance, it was apparent that the use of technology was a vital component of my participants' relationships with their friends. Aside from the use of social networking sites, they also talked about using text messages, online instant messages, and emails as a way to develop and maintain friendships. Online and offline communication appeared to be equally intertwined and important in their relationships. This might have translated into the ease by which my participants felt comfortable using social networking sites as a form of communication with the deceased and their social support. For my participants, utilizing the Webpages of their deceased friends as a way to feel connected to their dead loved ones and social

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support network because it was how they stay connected with each other before the deaths. As one participant explained to me, it was "just what you do" because everyone else seemed to be doing it, too.

The use of technology in our lives continues to increase. Emerging adults are growing up in a time where communication is instantaneous, information and answers to questions are at their fingertips, and video games are becoming so life-like that it is becoming difficult to decipher between reality and virtuality. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace have created a platform for emerging adults to market themselves and where being accepted or feeling a part of an online community is exemplified by the ability to showcase a public list of valuable "friends" who leave valuable "comments" on one's profile. There are also new ways to bully others, or be bullied, through the use of the internet or text messaging. In all, technology has dramatically affected the lives of most American youth. This research has brought up many questions regarding how technology might be affecting development, especially cognitive development, in emerging adults. As technology becomes ingrained into their everyday lives, where are the boundaries between reality and virtuality? Or is there even a boundary at all through their eyes?

Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology

The use of BNIM in this study created both insight and challenges within its methodology. I initially thought having specific, detailed approaches in how to organize and analyze my data would create a sense of direction during my analysis. In some ways, it did create a definite sense of direction during the analysis process. Wengraf's approach to specific methods such as interviewing, transcribing, and debriefing were

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insightful and provided helpful strategies for the beginning of any narrative research. For the inexperienced qualitative researcher, having a step-by-step approach to data collection and organization is both comforting and encouraging.

Wengraf's approach to interviewing, which is described in great length and detail, was perhaps the most exciting part of the BNIM process. The interviewing style has the ability to create a powerful, descriptive narrative. In my own experience with telling the story of my son's death to others, I know that often it is difficult to talk about the painful emotions surrounding death and loss. I have, at times, skimmed over parts of my story that are difficult for me to talk about, or that I fear are going to make my listener uncomfortable. BNIM interviewing has the ability to dig deep into a person's narrative, asking them to confront those parts that are often glossed over. I undoubtedly was able to dig much deeper into my participants' narratives during the second subsession of my interviews because of the BNIM interviewing method. So much of their stories might have been lost if I had chosen to stop after the initial subsession where they tell their narrative in their own way, without interruption or interrogation. The second subsession was where the "meat" of their stories often came out. Unfortunately, I did not interview my participants a third time, which according to Wengraf, should occur several weeks after the initial interview. Because my participants were busy college students and I was asking them to talk about a very painful topic, I felt that a third subsession might have been impossible to arrange. In retrospect, I would have liked to have asked my participants a few follow up questions immediately after the second subsession, much like a "mock" third subsession even though this would have inherently broken the "gestalt". This could be an adaptation to Wengraf's interviewing method, for situations

like mine and should be considered by other researchers in similar situations.

After the interviewing and transcription of the narratives, the next step in BNIM is to analyze the data in two separate tracks, *living of the lived life* and *telling of the told story.* This is where several more challenges ensued. First, because my research question focused on a very specific time in a person's life that encompassed my participants' relationships with their deceased friends, creating a Biographic Data Chronology (BDC) was both difficult and substantially sparse. When discussing a short period is an individual's life, there may only be a few truly important objective facts to report, as was the case of my participant, Alex. This led to a rather unproductive Biographic Data Analysis (BDA) because my panel members had very little information to work with. In my opinion, utilizing the lived life track was not necessarily a helpful part of my data analysis. However, the process of reorganizing my participant's narrative into a BDC and utilizing panel members did create a new way to look at his story, even if the final product was not very useful during my write up.

The second track, telling of the told story, went much smoother than the first track. It is within this track that I was able to break down my participant's narrative and analyze his story as he told it. This felt more natural to me and more in line with my own ontological and epistemological views. Creating a Text Structure Sequentialization (TSS) and doing a Thematic Field Analysis (TFA) again created new ways to look at my data. The TFA also created a much more successful panel experience.

The final product of a "true" BNIM involves integrating the living of the lived life and the telling of the told story track to create a case presentation, or history of the evolution of the case. However, as I continued to analyze my data throughout the BNIM

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process, I realized that this was not what I wanted out of my narrative. The living of the

lived life track served little relevance for me and I was mainly interested in telling of the

told story track. It is within that track that I focused my final analysis of my participant's

story.

Overall, the BNIM process provides many insights into the creation and

management of narrative data. It creates several ways to look at narrative material

differently, which can be considered a form of triangulation and an element of

trustworthiness. However, BNIM is not necessarily ideal for all types of research

questions and subsequent narrative analysis. It may be more suitable for topics such as

immigration, where the living of the lived life is substantial enough to create a productive

BDA analysis and track comparison.   BNIM can be adapted, however, for various

purposes and can be used in various ways and in conjunction with other methods.

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Press.

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EDUCATION

2007-2009   Indiana University (Bloomington, IN), Ph.D. in Health Behavior

- Minors in Education Psychology and Human Development and Family Studies
- Research focus: grief and loss in the family, death/dying, bereavement and meaning making, family health, parent/child relationships, adolescent development, use of Internet as a venue for exploring grief and other health topics, technology and health, qualitative methods
- Dissertation: "The Role of Social Networking Sites as a Medium for Web Memorialization in Emerging Adults"

2005-2007   Indiana University (Bloomington, IN)

- M.S. in Applied Health Science, with a concentration on Human Development and Family Studies
- Master's thesis: "Bereaved Parents and Meaning Making"

1993-1999   Indiana University (Bloomington, IN)

- B.S. in Applied Health Science, with a concentration on Human Development and Family Studies
- Minors in Biology and Psychology

RECENT WORK EXPERIENCE

Fall 2007-present   Community Health Educator, IU Health and Wellness Center

- Teach Tobacco Cessation classes on campus and in the community
- Counsel students individually on tobacco cessation, including distribution of Nicotine Replacement Therapy
- Provide guest lectures around campus on tobacco cessation, effects of smoking

Summer 2009   Associate Instructor, Indiana University
- H315 – Consumer Health
- 8 students

Spring 2009   Research Assistant, Indiana University
- Assist in the development of university wide certification for community capacity and family resilience support after a disaster

- Research literature, develop competences

Fall 2008   Associate Instructor, Indiana University
- H263 – Personal Health (taught twice)
- 74 and 81 students
- Course instructor, developed course content
- Supervised and directed work of Teaching Assistant

Summer 2008   Associate Instructor, Indiana University
- F150 – Introduction to Lifespan Development
- 44 students
- Course instructor, developed course content

Summer 2008   Research Assistant, PDPAR (Previous Day Physical Activity Recall) study
                   on validating the reliability of a physical activity recall survey in adults with
                   disabilities.
- SPSS file creation and data entry
- Score EVT & PPVT tests on participants
- Data analysis

Spring 2008   Associate Instructor, Indiana University
- F347 – Middle Childhood and Adolescent Development
- 73 students
- Course instructor, developed course content
- Supervised and directed work of Teaching Assistant

Fall 2007   Associate Instructor, Indiana University
- H263 – Personal Health
- 84 students
- Course instructor, developed course content
- Supervised and directed work of Teaching Assistant

Summer 2007   Associate Instructor, Indiana University
- H263 – Personal Health
- 18 students
- Course instructor, developed course content

Spring 2007   Associate Instructor, Indiana University
- H180 – Stress Management
- 75 students
- Course instructor, developed course content
- Supervised and directed work of Teaching Assistant

Spring 2006   Discussion Leader
                    - F258 – Marriage in the Family
                    - Part of instruction team
                    - Carried out administrative tasks

Fall 2006-Fall 2007 Research Assistant, EBMM (Eat Better, Move More) study on
                    consumption of fruits and vegetable in children and adults.
                    - SPSS data Entry
                    - Interviews/data collection

Fall 2005-Fall 2006 Teaching Assistant
                    - H255 - Human Sexuality
                    - H180 - International Health
                    - H263 - Personal Health
                    - Part of instruction team
                    - Carried out administrative tasks

OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

2003-2005   Options for Better Living: Supervisor/QMRP, Bloomington, IN
                    - Coordinated services for adults with disabilities, including hiring,
                      supervising and training staff as needed.
                    - Assisted individuals and families with obtaining assistance through
                      Medicaid, Medicaid Waivers, SSI, WIC, TANF, Child Care,
                      Respite, Housing, utility assistance, utilization of private insurance
                      and many other case specific programs.

1999-2003   First Steps: Service Coordinator, Bloomington IN
                    - Coordinated services for children with disabilities
                    - Assisted families with obtaining assistance through Medicaid,
                      Medicaid Waivers, SSI, WIC, TANF, Child Care, Respite, Housing,
                      utility assistance, utilization of private insurance and many other
                      case specific programs.

2001-2002   Children's Organ Transplant Association: Campaign Coordinator/COTA
                    for Beka, Bloomington, IN

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

2007-present   Member of Association for Death Education and Counseling

2006-present   Member of Pi Lambda Theta, International Honor Society and
                    Professional Association in Education (student member)

2006-2007	Member of National Council on Family Relations

AWARDS AND HONORS

Spring 2009	Recipient of the Association for Death Education (ADEC) Graduate Student Paper Award
Summer 2008	Recipient of HPER Interdepartmental Travel Grant ($1500)
Summer 2008	Recipient of the Pi Lambda Theta's Georgia Sachs Adams Grant ($750)
Spring 2008	Recipient of the Women in Science Travel Grant ($500)
Spring 2008	Recipient of the HPER Travel Grant ($300)
2008	Recipient of the Crane Fund for Widows and Children Fellowship from Indiana University
2006, 2007, 2008	Recipient of the Ruth Mary Griswold Scholarship from Indiana University
2006	Recipient of the Donald J. Ludwig Scholarship from Indiana University

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Hieftje, K.D. (April 16, 2009). Continuing Bonds and Myspace: A New Venue for Grief Explored. Presented at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Association for Death Education and Counseling, Dallas, Texas.

Hieftje, K.D. (May 1, 2008). Bereaved Parents and Meaning Making. Poster presentation at the 30th Annual Meeting of the Association for Death Education and Counseling, Montreal, Quebec.

Hieftje, K.D. (April 15, 2007). Bereaved Parents: Finding Meaning in the Death of a Child. Presented at the 29th Annual Meeting of the Association for Death Education and Counseling, Indianapolis, IN.

SERVICES

May 2009	Guest Speaker, Camp Kesem in Bloomington, IN, a summer camp for kids who have (or have had) a parent with cancer.
August 2008	Guest Speaker, Camp Kesem in Bloomington, IN, a summer camp for kids who have (or have had) a parent with cancer.

2007	Ad Hoc Reviewer, special issue of *Illness, Crisis, and Loss.*
2007	Assistant Editor for the special issue on *Loss and Grief among the Culturally Marginalized for Illness, Crisis, and Loss*, May 2008.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

2008 - present	Web Editor, Association for Death Education and Counseling

CERTIFICATIONS

2009	Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES)

SPECIAL TRAINING

May 2008	BNIM (Biographic-Narrative-Inquiry-Methodology) training. London, England. Designed for PhD students and professional researchers, this course provided a thorough training in doing BNIM biographic narrative interviews, together with "hands-on experience" of following BNIM interpretation procedures.

PUBLICATIONS

Gilbert, K., Hieftje, K., & Murray, M. (2009). Disenfranchised grief, bereavement, and the Internet: Alone and together across the distance. *Grief Matters,* 12(2), 36-39.

Dabbagh, L, Torabi, M., & Hieftje, K. (2008). The impact of rural migration, poverty, and weakened global economics on the continued rise in HIV transmission rates. *Eta Sigma Gamma, 25*(2), 51-57.

Gilbert, K. R. & Hieftje, K. D. (2008). Health education on the web: Lessons learned. *Eta Sigma Gamma, 25*(1), 1-6.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Hieftje, K. & Gilbert, K. Social networking and memorialization: A case study. Expected submission to *Journal of Adolescent Research,* October 2009

Hieftje, K. & Gilbert, K. The role of social networking as a medium for memorialization in emerging adults. Expected submission to *Journal of Adolescent Research,* October 2009

Hieftje, K., Gilbert, K., & Murray, M. Meaning making in bereavement: Applicable to Traumatic Brain Injury? Expected submission to *Death Studies,* October 2009.

Hieftje, K. & Gilbert, K. The progress of meaning making over time in bereaved parents. Expected submission to *Omega: Journal of Death & Dying,* November 2009.

Hieftje, K. & Gilbert, K. Collaborative narratives: Meaning making and bereaved parents. *Omega: Journal of Death & Dying,* November 2009.

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