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The Impact of Social Media on Emerging Adults' Grieving Experiences

by

Nikole Marie Sharpe, B.A.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St, Paul, Minnesota
In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Andrea Nesmith, Ph. D., (Chair)
Sandra Forest, LICSW
Susan Murr, LICSW

The Clinical Research project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

The Impact of Social Media on Emerging Adults' Grieving Experiences
By Nikole Sharpe

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph. D.
Committee Members: Sandra Forest, LICSW; Susan Murr, LICSW

Emerging adults experience developmental challenges when faced with loss. They are responsible for meeting developmental milestones, such as, identity achievement as well as mourning a loss both at the same time. This complexity is heightened when adding social media. Social media grieving has become a new way of mourning losses. However, there is still little data on the impact of social media on emerging adults' grieving experiences. A systematic review was utilized to gather and synthesize the most current and relevant empirical data. Twenty five quantitative studies were selected for analysis and key data was abstracted including, sample size, age and age category (college student, emerging adult, or young adult) from a dual process model framework. Results indicated that emerging adults are most at risk for complicated grief, which plays a role in identity achievement (without social media) and are at risk for unidentified depression or emotional distress (with social media). Furthermore social media plays a role in emerging adults' psychosocial well-being, serving as a source for connecting with others and instant gratification. Social media is a newer more widely accepted form of grieving, providing the opportunity to keep a connection with the deceased and serving as another outlet for their emotions similar to traditional grieving practice. These findings highlight the growing importance of understanding the impact of social media and the ways that emerging adults grieve in a technologically advanced world. Future research should utilize qualitative studies in order to explore and understand the breadth of experiences.

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The Impact of Social Media on Emerging Adults' Grieving Experiences

Introduction

Since the emergence of social media, traditional methods of processing grief and loss have changed. There is evidence that more and more individuals are turning to social media as a way to grieve. Particularly, emerging adults, find social media grieving useful as they are experiencing these obstacles for the first time.

For young people in the early 20th century, there was a societal expectation to find a stable career, move towards independence from parents and getting married (Arnett, 1998). There has been a shift in social norms and trends. Today, many young people are living with parents after college graduation taking their time in advancing romantic relationships, delaying additions of children, postponing complete independence, and finding career paths (Arnett, 2007; Hooyman & Kramer,2006).

In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2014), researchers were interested in examining the trends of millennials in adulthood. The researchers defined the millennial generation as those that are 18 to 33 years of age in 2014. Researchers compared the trends of the millennial age group to other age groups including: generation X (born 1965-1980), baby boomers (1946-1964), and the silent generation (1928-1945). The results showed that there was a lower percentage of millennials getting married, higher percentage of millennials connected with friends via social media and higher percentage of optimistic views of the future than other generations. Additionally this generation is faced with increased economic struggle, higher levels of student loan debt, unemployment and lower levels of personal income.

The term "emerging adult" has been presented as a new developmental stage to represent individuals 18-25 years of age (Arnett, 2007), which is similar but not the same as young

adulthood which represents 22-35 years of age (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). Furthermore, emerging adulthood consists of five distinct characteristics. These include "the age of identity explorations, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities" (Arnett, 2007, p.69). Hooyman and Kramer (2006) describe young adulthood as "an orientation toward the future and anticipation of positive changes" (p.191).

This new area of study has received less attention than other age populations. Furthermore for a population that represents an integral part of life, there has been little attention on their grief and loss experience and how social media plays a role in the grieving experience. According to the Pew Research center (2014) the millennial generation represents 27% of the adult population, which matches the percentage of generation X adult representation in the adult population.

Arnett (2007) emphasizes the importance for emerging adulthood to be recognized as a developmental stage and not just a transitional period. Labeling this time as a transition instead of developmental stage minimizes the attention given to this time as whole, focusing on the events considered to be transition at the beginning and end of the age range. By categorizing this time as a developmental stage it gives attention to all areas of development that any other stage of development research would include, such as "cognitive development, family relationships, friendships, romantic relationships, and media use" (Arnett, 2007, p.70).

Out of all of the areas of development, there are two that are noted as the most important for emerging adults; identity making and development of intimacy. Identity formation begins during adolescence, but grows in complexity when faced with independent choices including career pathways, religious association and ethnic identity.

However, identity achievement is just one area of development that is disrupted when faced with a loss. Ribbens Mccarthy (2007) note that bereavement is becoming a normal part of everyday life and young people experience some sort of loss of a close friend or family member due to death by the time they reach 18 years of age. Similarly, with the prevalence and popularity in emerging adults' lives, Brubaker, Hayes, and Dourish (2013), identify that with the increase of social media use, the discovery of a death in a person's social network has increased.

Some of the most common types of losses for this developmental period are: death of family or relatives, death of friends, unborn children or children born with disabilities, sexual assault or loss of familial relationships (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Ribbens Mccarthy, 2007). When emerging adults are faced with a loss they often feel isolated, guilty and unsure of where to express their grief. They are unequipped with enough "life experience or perspectives" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006), to be able to make meaning of the loss by themselves. However, many emerging adults report that they feel unsupported and unacknowledged from other adults (Williams & Merten, 2009; Ribbens Mccarthy, 2007; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006).

A new phenomenon is the relationship between grief and social media. There has been evidence suggesting that emerging adults use social media as a way to grieve a loss. Many emerging adults cite that "Seeing others who have endured, survived, and emerged from similar significant losses may give them hope" as inspiration to moving towards the internet and social media (Hooyman & Kramer,2006, p. 217). According to Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr (2010) 72% of 18-29 year olds use social networking sites, nearly twice as much as internet users 30 years old and up. Interestingly, 81% of adults 18-29 are wireless internet users, using devices like laptops, cell phones and other wireless internet devices, emphasizing the prevalence of internet and social media in emerging adults' lives.

It was identified by Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, and Espinoza (2008) that emerging adults used social media as a way to keep connected to others. The most popular activity for emerging adults was reading and responding to comments or posts on one's social media page, followed by browsing social media pages of friends' and then sending and responding to messages. The researchers found that Myspace and Facebook were the two most used social media sites.

Myspace was first launched in 2003 as a social networking site, reaching its peak at 75.9 million users in December of 2008 (Smith, 2013). Facebook was launched in 2004 and by 2009 was declared to be the most popular social networking site having more than 200 million visitors (CNN Library, 2014). By 2011, social media had taken over. Social media had unlimited accessibility and became a part of daily life. Facebook had 550 million people, 65 million tweets on Twitter (a site to share events and status updates), and 2 billion videos viewed on YouTube (Curtis, 2013).

With the popularity of this new avenue of grieving, it is important that social workers keep current and familiar. Not only is this a new medium for potential social work practice but it also expands the grieving experience. It provides a space for those that are not comfortable being vulnerable in front of other people and an opportunity for those that are far away in distance and those not a part of the immediate family to feel connected to others that know the deceased person. It also provides support from others (Brubaker et al., 2013). Survivors of the deceased also cite that social media provides the opportunity to stay connected to the deceased person and make meaning out of the loss (Boss,2006; Degroot, 2012; Getty, Cobb, Gabeler, Nelson, Ellis, Weng & Hancock, 2011;Williams & Merten, 2009; Brubaker et al.,2013).

However, while it seems that social media has more positive effects, it must be noted that it can also have some negative effects. Most notably, due to the social expansion and interconnectedness of people associated with the deceased person, regardless of the closeness of the relationship before the passing, ambiguous loss often results following the discovery of a death via social media (Brubaker et al., 2013).

Social workers can also use social media as a way to screen for potential threats and emotional distress in messages. Emotional distress and signs of the onset of depression can be determined by ways of social media. This may include: increase or decrease in activity on social media, negative affect in messages and the linguistics of the messages, relational and medicinal concerns, and increased expression of religious involvement (DeChoudhury, Gamon, Counts, & Horvitz, 2013; Brubaker, Kivran-Swaine, Taber, & Hayes, 2011).

The following project is a systematic analysis of empirical data focusing on the role of social media on emerging adults' grieving experiences. Emerging adults' grieving experience has been given little attention. Similarly, the role of social media on grieving experiences has only started to gain attention in the past few years. A systematic analysis will synthesize the existing research to understand the importance and emergence of this topic.

Conceptual Framework

Continuing bonds theory has been a newer proposed theory to describe the way that young people grieve. Continuing bonds theory presents the opportunity to maintain a relationship with the deceased, which is crucial to the grieving process (Getty, Cobb, Gabeler, Nelson, Weng, & Hancock, 2011). However, just using the continuing bonds theory as a framework for this project ignores the implications of development. As suggested before, young people or emerging

adults are at a crucial time developmentally. To ignore their developmental tasks while exploring their grieving experience would be a disservice to the age group.

Stroebe and Schut (1999) suggest that the dual process model is a method to organize the way that people process and understand the loss they are experiencing. Additionally, Brubaker, Hayes and Dourish (2013) state that the model gives attention to the balance between the need of developmentally appropriate grieving and the continuation of bonds with the deceased. This is achieved by understanding the various parts of the model. Stroebe and Schut (1999) present the various parts of the model including loss vs. restoration-orientation stressors and the movement between the two orientations. Loss orientation refers to processing the loss and understanding of the loss (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Restoration-orientation refers to the secondary consequences as a result of a loss. This may include changes in roles or other adjustments following a loss (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). The movement (or oscillation) between the two types of stressors illustrate the process of a person dealing with the loss. This highlights the "alternation between loss- and restoration-oriented coping, the process of juxtaposition of confrontation and avoidance of different stressors associated with bereavement" (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, p.215).

The dual process model has been used to explain and understand the complexities of grief (Servaty-seib & Taub, 2010). Servaty-Seib and Taub (2010) examined the role of the dual process model with college students. The researchers examined previous research to determine the role of grief in college students. Additionally researchers used the results to offer advice and recommendations for university and college staff working with college students experiencing grief. Brubaker et al. (2013) used the dual process model for data analysis, analyzing the role of social media on postmortem identities and practices of online grieving, resulting in an expansion of grieving experiences.

The dual process model has not been used with the emerging adult population in research yet. It has been used with individuals in college (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010) and individuals 24-57 years of age (Brubaker et al., 2013). These both fall into the age range of emerging adults (18-25 years of age); however, it does not target the unique complexities experienced by emerging adults. This model was selected based on the incorporation of both developmental complexities as well as the maintenance of continuing bonds.

In this review, the dual process model was used to synthesize the data of empirical studies on social media and emerging adults grieving experiences. The continuing bonds theory was considered for a framework as it utilizes post mortem bond experiences. However, it was not selected due to lack of inclusion of developmental experience and tasks crucial to the grieving experience. The dual process model is unique in that it incorporates the experience of post mortem bonds and the developmental experiences of emerging adults. The synthesized data will assist in determining how the use of social media plays a role in the grieving experience for emerging adults, leading the examiner to explore the grieving experiences and developmental challenges faced by emerging adults, the motivations of using social media, the context of social media activity, and the positive and negative effects of using social media.

Methods

A systematic review is collection of the most relevant and available research on a particular topic or specific question. Systematic literature reviews are often selected in order to address the lack of focus on a specific area of research or interest. In a systematic review, research is selected based on clearly defined and systematic methods. Given that there is a growing interest in research on social media and the grieving experience and there is little research on emerging adults grieving experiences and social media, a systematic review was

selected for this topic. By utilizing a systematic review, the most current and relevant research was synthesized together thus creating a universal understanding of where the research stands.

Data Collection

Articles were located using Psych Info and Ebscohost. The search engine that was used was Google Scholar. The key words used in the search included: grief, loss, bereavement, young adults, emerging adults, social media, Facebook, development, virtual memorials, web memorials, coping styles, meaning making, benefit finding, continuing bonds and sense making; key words will also be used in combinations.

Inclusion Criteria.

Studies selected for analysis were not older than the year 2000, which is the earliest year that emerging adulthood gained recognition. Additionally the studies that were selected to be used in the analysis included at least one of the following: grief and loss experience, emerging adults or those that covered the ages of 18-25 years old, development, social media use, and the association between emerging adults and social media. Furthermore the study was selected for analysis if there was a combination of terms (i.e. emerging adults and development, emerging adults and social media, emerging adults and grief and loss, social media and loss). Studies that were included in the analysis utilize quantitative data with a cross sectional design.

Analysis

In this analysis, the researcher tracked and reported how many articles were accepted or rejected based on the inclusion criteria. Information taken from the studies chosen for analysis was recorded using a data abstraction form. The data recorded included: article name and author, design type, purpose of study, sample and sample size, measures and findings. Data was then organized by key themes. Once placed in a category, the data was assessed for the quality of

the findings based on sample size, age, and age categorization. Scores were then averaged based on the score from the assessment criteria. Further explanation of the assessment criteria can be found in Table 1.

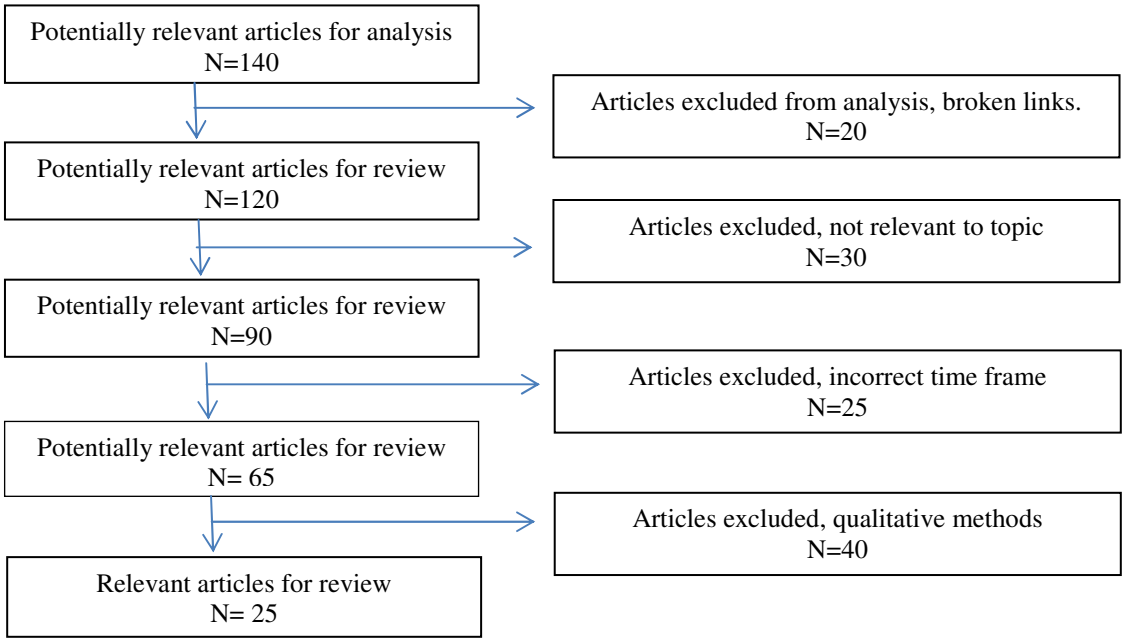
Table 1. Assessment criteria

Method	**Quality**		
	Score of 1	Score of 2	Score of 3
Sample Size	<500	500-1000	>1000
Age	<18 years old	>25 years old	18-25 years old
Age categorization	College students	Young Adults	Emerging Adults

Results

In total, 25 articles were selected for analysis from an original set of 140 studies. Studies were not included in analysis if there was a broken link, not in the right time frame, not relevant enough to the subject and if they were qualitative reviews. The article selection process can be seen in detail in Figure 1.

***Figure 1.*Flow Chart of selection process**



Overall, the studies that were selected for analysis were of medium-high quality. No article scored an average above 2.67 and the lowest average was a .33. Based on the research, the results indicate that there are two different ways to look at the findings. The first way is by looking at standard grieving without a variable of social media. This includes grief outcomes, like complicated grief, complicated grief and the two construals of meaning, sense-making and finding benefit, and the association of the construals of meaning with identity achievement. These results can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Grieving Experiences

Theme	Article	Sample	Age	Category	Score*
Complicated Grief	Currier et al. (2006)	1056	18+	college	2
	Herberman et al. (2013)	107	17-29	YA	2
	Boyraz, Home & Sayger (2012)	325	18-76	x	1
	Schnider et al. (2007)	123	18-45	college	1
CG & Construals	Currier et al., (2006)	1056	18+	college	2
	Neimeyer etal. (2006)	506	18-53	YA	2
	Holland et al. (2006)	1022	18-53	college	2
	Michael and Snyder (2005)	158	18-37	college	1
	Emr and Collier (2012)	200	x	EA	2
Construals & Development	Dezutter et al., (2014)	8492	19.98	college	2
	Schwartz et al., (2011)	9034	18-25	EA	3
	Luyckx et al. (2013)	5834	14-30	EA	2

* Scores were averaged based on assessment criteria. Scores were then rounded up or down.

The other way of viewing the findings is by the grief experience in regards to social media. This includes the importance of social media to emerging adults' daily life, emergence of social media grieving, and some of the outcomes of using social media to grieve including: continuing bonds and predicting depression or other negative outcomes. These results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Grieving Experiences with Social Media

Theme	Article	Sample	Age	Category	Score*
Importance of SM	Manago et al. (2012)	88	18-28	college	2
	Park et al. (2009)	1715	18-29	college	2
	Burke et al. (2010)	1193	33.7	x	2
Social media grieving	Marwick and Ellison (2012)	37	x	x	0
	Egnoto et al.(2014)	270	19.91	college	2
	Massimi and Baecker (2010)	41	35.1	x	1
Posting behaviors	Massimi and Baecker (2010)	41	35.1	x	1
	Getty et al., (2011)	11	17-32	x	1
	Vries and Rutherford (2004)	244	x	x	0
Negative outcomes	Brubaker et al. (2012)	2213	27.68	x	1
	Deatherage et al. (2014)	267	22	college	2
	De Choudhury et al. (2013).	476	25	x	1
	Moreno et al (2011)	200	20	x	1

* Scores were averaged based on assessment criteria. Scores were then rounded up or down.

Complicated Grief

There were four articles that had similar results of experiences with complicated grief (CG). Overall this theme had an average score of 1.5. This suggests that the quality of the finding are medium-low. The low score can be attributed to the variance in age. The data of this theme had no emerging adults represented and ranged in ages beyond which are considered for emerging adult criteria. Complicated grief has been found to be one of the common themes in the grieving experience of emerging adults (when analyzing grieving without the component of social media). Women reported more troubling symptoms with the loss of close relationships (Currier, Holland & Neimeyer, 2006) and the loss of a sibling results in more symptoms of CG than those who lost a friend or did not experience a loss at all (Herberman Mash, Fullerton & Ursano, 2013), gender of bereaved (Currier et al., 2006), lower levels of social support due to high levels of neuroticism (Boyraz, Home, & Sayger,2012), and avoidant-emotional coping styles (Schnider, Elhai, & Gray, 2007).

Complicated Grief and Construals of Meaning

There were five articles that fit into this theme. The overall average score for this theme was 1.8. This number suggests that the data is slightly less than medium in terms of quality. This is due to the range of age, similar to the experience of complicated grief. Results show that there is a strong correlation between complicated grief symptoms and the two construals of meaning (sense-making and benefit finding). Sense-making and benefit finding facilitated the relationship between the symptoms of CG and the type of traumatic loss (i.e. violent vs. natural) (Currier et al., 2006) and experience of traumatic distress (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006). Whereas Holland, Currier and Neimeyer (2006) found that neither the type of loss nor the relationship to the deceased were predictors of CG, rather the two construals of meaning were the primary predictors of CG.

Low levels of sense-making and benefit findings were the most likely to have adverse outcomes of grief (Holland et al., 2006). Lower levels of sense making resulted in greater traumatic stress in the case of adeceased young person (Neimeyer et al., 2006). On the other hand, higher levels of sense-making and low benefit finding resulted in the most favorable outcomes (Holland et al., 2006; Currier et al., 2006). Higher levels of sense making and a non-familial relationship to the deceased moderated the impact of a high continuing bond (Neimeyer et al., 2006), and resulted in less depressive symptoms, anxiety and bereavement-related rumination (Michael & Snyder, 2005). Emerging adults who experience greater traumatic distress, especially unexpected, are more likely to experience a greater amount of identity change (Neimeyer et al., 2006) resulting in increased risk for CG (Emr & Collier, 2012).

Construals of Meaning and Development

The overall average score for the three articles in this theme was a 2.33. This suggests that the quality of the results is of medium quality. These were surprising as the components of the scoring all ranked higher with the majority of the sample being emerging adults and within the correct age range. Dezutter, Servaty-Seib, and Aksoz (2014) found that low presence of meaning-low search for meaning had the highest score for negative psychosocial functioning; followed by slightly lower scores from high presence-high search and the last being high presence-low search. Those that ranked in low presence- low search had low levels of eudemonic and psychological well-being, and higher levels of rule breaking and social aggression (Dezutter et al., 2014). This is supported by Schwartz et al. (2011) who found that lower levels of work towards identity achievement were more likely to result in rumination and depression; which is more likely to occur in emerging adults than adolescents or those in their late 20s (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Van Petegem, &Beyers, 2013).

Importance of Social Media

This theme ranked at medium quality with an average score of 2. This indicates that the data of this theme is a result of being within the correct age range. The increasing popularity of social media has become a new avenue of social connection to others (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012; Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010). The composition of the network and the size of the network play important roles in the pervasiveness of social media on emerging adults' lives (Manago et al., 2012; Burke et al., 2010; Park et al., 2009).

Larger networks of friends were associated with positive attitudes towards social media as well as more social support (Manago et al., 2012). Those who utilize Facebook to collect a large network of friends that consist of long-lasting intimate friendships are generally more satisfied with life (Manago et al., 2012; Burke et al., 2010). Life satisfaction was greater when

emerging adults perceived their networks as an audience instead of an opportunity for reciprocal gratification of exchanging messages. Those with greater life satisfaction were more likely to engage in social activities (Burke et al., 2010) and participation in Facebook groups and have higher social trust which resulted in more civic activities(Park et al., 2009). By using social media, emerging adults participate in acts of public emotional disclosure by sharing information, representing a key part of development, which is intimacy (Manago et al.,2012).

Social Media Grieving

The three articles of this theme received an overall average score of a 1. This is a result of the variance of age and lack of sample size. Using social media can create more awareness and the visibility of these virtual memorials can serve a better range of people. It is becoming a more widely accepted form of grieving. People are turning to the internet and social media more these days as way of grieving and communicating their grieving. The internet is used to share practical information like funeral or memorial service details, news related to death and families of the deceased use it to communicate with others (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Emerging adults turn to social media for grieving purposes. Emerging adults prefer to use social media because "[they] preferred to share information about the deceased in online environments in order to demonstrate that they cared about the individuals as opposed to simply gaining a sense of closure" (Egnoto, Sirianni, Ortega & Stefanone, 2014, p.295). Furthermore, as using social media or other online avenues has become socially accepted, subjects were more comfortable with online grieving and did not want to change their grieving methods (Egnoto et al., 2014; Massimi & Baecker, 2010) and used social media as a front stage of grieving (Getty et al., 2011). The internet and social media is also used as a way to remember the deceased. Some find that online memorials are just

as meaningful as the physical counterpart and would rather have digital mementos (i.e. Photos, reminiscing, online memorials) (Massimi & Baecker,2010).

Social Media Posting Behaviors

The overall average for the three articles was a .67. This suggests that the findings of this theme were of extremely low quality. Many cite that they use online grieving and social media as a way to keep a relationship with the deceased (Massimi & Baecker, 2010;Getty et al., 2011). There were more online memorials written to men than women and the memorials included things like letters to the deceased, eulogies and tributes (Vries & Rutherford, 2004; Massimi & Baecker, 2010). The attempts to keep a connection could be described in messages and posts that contained: sadness or missing the deceased, the expectations of a reunion, some sort of religious belief, the cause of the death and the deceased watching over the survivors (Vries & Rutherford, 2004; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). The language of continuing bonds (as described previously), was more frequent after death than before death (Getty et al., 2011).

Negative Outcomes

Of the 4 articles in this theme they ranked at a 1.25, resulting in a low-medium quality. All four articles had age medians in the highest rank, the lack of age classification resulted in the lower overall scores. Furthermore, post-mortem social media use can be utilized as a way to monitor for other negative psychosocial outcomes as a result of the loss experience. Emotional distress and depression can be screened by a post on social media. Analyzing the linguistics of a post, emotional distress can be described by word choice (like first person singular pronouns and anger words, past tense verbs), word frequency per comment and the presence of negotiations (Brubaker, Kivran-Swaine, Taber, & Hayes, 2012). These findings can be supported by the work of Deatherage, Servaty-Seib, and Aksoz (2014) as well as De Choudhury, Gamon, Counts, and

Horvitz (2013).Using the internet and social media as motivation to cope, avoidant-emotional coping style (denial or self-distraction), and being female have been correlated with higher levels of perceived stress(Deatherage et al., 2014). The change of online behavior, or feelings of guilt and worthlessness can also serve as a way to predict depression (De Choudhury et al., 2013; Moreno et al., 2011).

Discussion

The expression and representation of complicated grief can be used to describe emerging adults' grieving experience (without incorporating social media).Sense-making and benefit finding, the two construals of meaning are both associated with symptoms of complicated grief and developmental tasks, like identity achievement. Identity achievement can be negatively affected by levels of sense-making and benefit-finding and the presence of traumatic distress.

Social media has played a role in emerging adults' lives. Social media serves a psychological purpose. Social media provides the opportunity for emerging adults to stay connected and informed. One of the primary objectives of using social media is to gain life satisfaction. This highlights the role of social media on emerging adults' daily life. Furthermore it highlights the association between social media use and emerging adults' abilities to reach developmental tasks (without incorporating a loss).

Social media has also played a role in emerging adults experience with grief and loss. It has become a more popular and preferred grieving method. People, in particular emerging adults, use social media to share information in regards to the death and as well as keep a connection with the deceased and they prefer to use social media vs traditional grieving practices. One of the most post prevalent variables in the motivation and social media posting behaviors is to continue bonds with the deceased or keep the deceased alive. This is consistent with the findings of Getty et al. (2011) stating that survivors are choosing social media to continue bonds not to distance

themselves but rather continue the relationship in a new way. This can be seen as either being a positive experience or negative experience, suggesting that it depends on the way the survivor utilizes the experience. Furthermore, social media activity and posts can be used to screen for depression and emotional distress following an experience of death of a friend or family member.

Implications for Practice

The information provided can be useful for social workers and their practice. Social media has already been identified as an important avenue of social connection and support as well as psychosocial functioning for emerging adults. This will only continue to grow and increase as the access to and prevalence of social media and technology increases. Additionally the information provided illustrates the unique experience of grief and loss for emerging adults and the role of social media. By using the information provided; social workers can develop new ways of practicing with this population and/or address and assess needs. Social workers can also use this information to develop a universal screening system of Facebook posts and Facebook activity to determine negative outcomes as well as identify individuals that may be experiencing those negative outcomes.

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study was that the criteria for article selection excluded qualitative studies. Originally, qualitative studies were not selected due to the breadth of data that could emerge. However, this research resulted in a lack of information in regards to social media grieving. By excluding qualitative studies, the researcher was not able to fully understand the role of social media on emerging adults grieving experiences. Qualitative studies would help support more characteristics of posting behaviors as well as the unique features of posting behaviors.

A second limitation of this study was in the sample size in the selected articles and sample data. Studies that were used for analysis used both human and non-human methods (i.e. examining posts on social media). This resulted in a range of size of samples. Some studies had over 5,000 participant subjects and some had as few as 11 pieces of data. This range of size made it difficult to determine a sound way to analyze the quality of the data.

A third and final limitation of this study was the age categorization. There was a mix between identifying the population as emerging adults, young adults or college students. All three overlap in the age range, however each have a unique perspective and have different expectations. Therefore, the quality of the results was altered based on the age categories regardless if the age was in the correct age range. This researcher felt that it was important to make the distinction between the three age categories as there has been research done identifying that emerging adult needs to be identified as its own development stage (Arnett,1998).

Future Research

Future researchers should incorporate qualitative studies in analysis in order to get a more comprehensive overview of emerging adults' grieving experience in regards to social media. This will also help support the unique grieving experience of emerging adults and dive deeper in the exploration of that experience. Future research should consider employing only one type of data (i.e. only social media posts, or only human participants), in order to reduce the sample size issue.

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