MEMORIALIZING ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB: 
PATTERNS OF GRIEF AND ATTACHMENT IN 
ADULT DAUGHTERS OF DECEASED MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

The World Wide Web is emerging as the new site for mourners. Many bereaved persons are creating memorial Web sites for deceased loved ones, providing text-based representations of what they have lost with frequent reference to the nature of their grief. The primary purpose of this study was to measure elements of attachment style and grief as shown by the adult daughters who had placed memorials on the Internet for their deceased mothers. Participants self-selected and were solicited and completed a questionnaire online. In addition, the 24 available Web sites were content coded for textual themes and presentational styles. Fifty-nine memorial authors responded to measures of attachment style, grief, and characteristics of the memorial they created. Results revealed a lower frequency of secure attachment styles than would be expected and higher levels of grief. Prominent among the themes expressed in these memorials were missing the deceased, narratives and letters to the deceased, comments about the deceased watching over the bereft, and other references to the self. Although smaller numbers precluded statistical analyses, several evocative attachment style differences in the use of these themes were suggested. These findings contribute to the understanding of the complex relationship between adult daughters and their deceased mothers and the potential role of attachment in the ways in which such relationships are characterized and memorialized.
INTRODUCTION

In addition to its impact on how we live (e.g., Vota & de Vries, 2001), the World Wide Web (WWW) is quickly becoming a venue for the way we deal with death. Cyberspace has the potential to become a “virtual” Wailing Wall as bereaved persons create memorial websites dedicated to deceased loved ones; it is emerging as the new site for mourners. Roberts (1999) examined various Web-memorial sites, which she identified as virtual cemeteries, and found that online memorials represented and were written for all age groups and included tributes to family members, friends, and others. On these sites, the bereaved provide text-based representations of what they have lost with intimations of how they are grieving. Memorials were most frequently written by women for men and often took the form of a eulogy and sometimes a letter to the deceased updating them on events and circumstances of the family since their death (Roberts & Vidal, 2000).

The prevalence of these sites has led to the interest of online memorialization as revealed in this special issue. Descriptions of the authors and the content of the memorials are the focus of many of the empirical accounts presented herein. This article adds to this description and further attempts to understand the memorial authors in the context of attachment theory—a theoretical perspective often referenced but rarely fully engaged in the study of loss (e.g., de Vries, 2004). The authors of particular interest in this investigation are daughters bereft of their mothers; the memorials under examination are those created by these daughters and placed on their own Web page.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory attempts to explain how and why an individual connects with another, the importance of the type of connection formed, and its relevance to future relationships. An attachment represents an affectional bond that has been established between two persons, a bond that is believed to be so robust and a connection so strong that it endures over the lifetime—and beyond. The theory proposes that the attachment figure, with whom this early bond is created, represents safety and sanctuary and whose loss or unavailability stimulates certain behaviors (Bowlby, 1969, 1977). The prototype of the attachment relationship and attachment bond is that between parent (particularly mother) and infant child, although significant recent literature has extended this focus throughout adulthood into romantic or pair bonds (e.g., Bowlby, 1977; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

There have been several efforts aimed at the description of the varying styles of attachment (e.g., Ainsworth, 1991; Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The most comprehensive and theoretically elegant has been that proposed by Bartholomew (e.g., 1990) in which she describes four patterns of adult attachment in terms of models of self and models of others in close relationships.
The Secure category consisted of persons who had a positive view of self and other and were comfortable in close relationships. The Fearful category held negative views of self and other, believing that they were not worthy of love and that others could not be relied on for emotional support. The Preoccupied type was derived from the anxious category and was represented by a negative view of self and a positive view of other. They sought intimacy but worried that others did not value them. Those rated as Dismissing held a positive view of self but a negative view of other, leading to the denial of the need for close relationships. Across several studies with adults, about two-thirds of respondents report a secure attachment style with the remaining one-third evidencing some form of insecure attachment (typically about 20% Dismissing, 10% Fearful, and 5% Preoccupied) (Carpenter, 2001; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Attachment Theory proposes that the absence or loss of an attachment figure activates a motivational system that compels an individual to search for that missing figure (Bowlby, 1969). Whether the loss of the attachment figure is brief or permanent, it is felt that the resultant behaviors are motivated by the same psychological mechanisms. Yearning and searching for the lost figure are a large part of such attachment behaviors with recovery following outbursts of shock, protest, and despair. Bowlby (1980) thought that individuals whose attachment systems are organized in such a way as to chronically anticipate rejection and loss (e.g., someone classified as preoccupied) or to defensively suppress attachment related feelings (e.g., someone classified as fearful or dismissing) are more likely to suffer from psychological and physical distress following the loss of an attachment figure.

Surprisingly, this link between attachment style and bereavement behaviors is rarely operationalized in the research literature. Researchers will often comment on the loss of an individual in the context of attachment and go on to interpret findings along similar lines, but rarely do researchers examine the attachment status of those who are grieving and the impact of this status on the nature and form of their grief. This is a context in which the present report has something to contribute.

Death of a Parent

As Moss and Moss (1989, p. 89) said, “parental death is an event in the lives of most middle-aged people and a poignant theme in the lives of all.” For most adults, the death of a parent represents myriad emotions and psychological experiences. A parent’s death represents the loss of the history and memories that shaped and remain part of that relationship (Moss & Moss, 1989). A parent’s death signals a different sense of time and self (Moss, Resch, & Moss, 1997) as the buffer between life and death dissipates. The death severs, or forever alters, the attachment bond that was established in childhood.
The number of adults whose parents die each year is increasing to where parental death is becoming a normative life-span transition (Moss & Moss, 1989). It is the most common family death of the middle years, although it is surprisingly rarely studied. What little is known suggests that adult children’s reactions to a parent’s death fall on a continuum from that of relative dispassion to extreme distress. Persons who had an extremely dependent relationship with their parent seem to respond with greater distress at the death (Scharlach, 1991; Umberson & Chen, 1994). In relative contrast, Douglas (1990) reported little or no impact following the death of the parents on the adult children in her sample and further reported that 65% said that they felt relief.

The earliest attachment relationship is usually with one’s mother, whose death then represents not only the loss of the attachment figure but also the loss of the longest-standing relationship with another. Moss and Moss (1989) claimed that the essential qualities of the relationship continue; “the child continues to hear echoes of the parent’s voice, which may be carried over a lifetime” (p. 101). The child continues to look to the parent for direction and for support that they are fulfilling the parent’s “developmental stake” in him or her (e.g., Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971). When an adult’s mother dies, it may stimulate behaviors in the bereaved that are based on the original attachment relationship between the two (Weiss, 1993). The death of a mother was found to be equally distressing to both sons and daughters (Scharlach & Fuller-Thompson, 1994; Umberson & Chen, 1994). In an examination of middle-aged daughters, 42% indicated that losing their mother was the hardest thing they had ever done (Moss, Moss, Rubinstein, & Resch, 1993). One to five years after the death of their mother, 67% of the respondents reported that they were still experiencing a number of emotional and somatic reactions and 45% complained of a general decline in overall physical health (Scharlach & Fredrikson, 1993). This most normative of family losses embodies the history and ongoing intimate influences of parents on children, as expressed in affective, cognitive, and structural ways (de Vries, 2001).

The Present Study and Its Goals

This study examines the attachment status as reported by bereaved daughters who have created Web memorials for their deceased mothers. The explicit manner in which a person’s loss is revealed on these memorial sites may well become a way that we can begin to understand the role of attachment in adulthood and how it affects grief and bereavement. Of particular interest are the following:

• What is the distribution of attachment styles reported by these bereaved daughters? Is this distribution comparable to those as revealed in prior investigations?
• What is the association between attachment style and grief?
• What is the content of the memorial created by these deceased daughters and how does this content vary by attachment style and grief?
METHOD

Sample

Participation in this study was limited to adult daughters who had placed an online memorial for a deceased mother. Participants were solicited mainly through email and through notices placed on several Web sites that focused on loss and grief. Due to a computer malfunction, the number of e-mail requests sent to potential participants is unknown. Fifty-nine completed surveys were received. In addition, the Web page memorials created by these daughters were treated as data and coded for content.

Ages of participants ranged from 17 to 65; the mean age of these daughters was 37. The mothers were, on average, 62 years of age at the time of their death (range = 38-86). The majority of the daughter respondents were married (59%) and Caucasian (83%). A sizable number of daughters were single (24%), with the remainder divorced or separated. Additionally, 72% of the respondents had at least some college education. Forty-six percent of daughters commented that they had been caregivers to their mothers; just over 50% of daughters reported expecting the death. Seventy-five percent of the daughters reported that their mother’s remains had been cremated.

Measures

The data were collected through an online survey on a Web site created by the researchers specifically for the purposes of this study. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. It contained both open and closed ended questions. It was interactive which allowed respondents to select and/or change their choices immediately, and provide answers to open-ended questions.

The survey contained demographic questions as well as questions regarding their mother’s death. In addition, daughters were asked if they felt they had grieved for their mothers, if they became upset at the anniversary of the death (both of which were true-false response options), and their overall life satisfaction on a 5-point scale. Integrated into the survey was the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) to measure attachment status (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), a widely used measure that has been validated for use with romantic relationships and young adult friendships, and the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG) (Faschingbauer, Zisook, & DeVaul, 1987) slightly modified to reflect a mother’s death.

The RQ is an eight-item self-report measure used to identify the four categories of adult attachment based on models of self and other in close relationships. Different relationship styles are described in four short paragraphs and participants are asked to rate, on a 7-point-Likert scale, the degree to which these styles apply to them. They then categorically indicate which of these four styles is most like them. Due to the relatively small sample size, this study used only the
categorically rated attachment styles. As is the nature of a brief self-report measure, the reliability of the RQ has been reported to be moderate (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Garbarino, 1998; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

The TRIG is a 21-item self-report measure containing statements regarding the bereaved person’s feelings and actions at the time of the death and presently. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from completely true to completely false; higher scores are associated with more intense grief. The scale is intended to measure past adjustment, present feelings, and progress through stages of grief. The TRIG is divided into two sections of items: the first part consists of 13 short statements representing attitudes and feelings at the time of death; the second part consists of eight short statements that represent attitudes and feelings regarding the death at the present time.

Participants were asked to provide an address for their Web site they created for their mothers. Twenty-eight such addresses were reported and, of these, 24 memorial pages were located, downloaded, printed, read, and coded for textual themes and presentational styles. Two coders read the downloaded and printed text of these sites developing 16 themes and presentational styles. Inter-rater agreement on the coding of these themes was achieved with 90% of the materials; disagreements were resolved through discussion and the negotiated code was used in analyses. These coded themes were then subjected to a secondary level of analysis to represent the superordinate dimensions implicit therein. Two coders again reviewed these themes and agreed upon the following nine dimensions:

- **Narratives** (including letters, poems). An example of a letter contains these poignant phrases: “Dear Mom, I have written to you so many times . . . but I didn’t know where to send the letter. I hope cyberspace will deliver it to you.” Another letter describes to her deceased mother some things that were happening while she was dying: “It is hard to get over your leaving. I hope you heard us tell you how much we loved you and miss you as we watched you pass away. . . . You never seemed to understand about hospice care although we tried many times to tell you.”

- **Missing** (the deceased and activities with the deceased). This theme was typified by such statements as: “Not a day has gone by that I haven’t thought of her and missed her greatly”; “. . . I miss her every day and probably will for the rest of life”; “there is never a moment that I don’t miss her.”

- **Descriptions of the Mother** (including positive qualities and health descriptions). Descriptive accounts included: “My mother was diagnosed with cancer in March . . . she never regained her strength or health, after surgery . . . she grew sicker and sicker . . . her once strong body was reduced to thin and frail. . . .”; “When the surgeons opened her up they discovered a large inoperable tumor . . . they could do nothing more for her . . . she lived only two months after returning home from the hospital.”
• Watching Over (including reference to God and comments about reunions). One daughter wrote: “I feel better . . . knowing I’m really not alone and that you are watching me (now all the time!).” Another said: “I believe in ANGELS and know that she is watching over me everyday.”

• Family Issues (including comment on family updates and roles). Mention of the roles played by the mothers and daughters included: “She was a family person who enjoyed spending quality time with them” and “My mom was a wife and a mother and did her job very well.”

• Messages of Love. These references typically and explicitly included comments such as “I love you” and “I know how you loved us.”

• Hyperbolic descriptions. Such descriptions were found in texts such as: “you were the most beautiful, strongest, determined, smartest, fascinating woman in the world” and “Her heart was so pure so loving she didn’t deserve to die.”

• Focus on the self (author). Examples of this theme include: “I cried today . . . I cried again today . . . I don’t want to feel what I am feeling”; “My story is a very hard one, I got a call to go check on mom . . . I tried to prepare myself for what I might find, . . . I found my mom dead . . . what I had to walk into is more than any daughter would want to ever remember . . . what made it so very hard was that my mom had been dead for 2 weeks.”

• Negative emotions. Expressions of negative emotions include: “I never knew my mother as a person, only as my mother and I feel very cheated because of that. I am angry and tired” and “I was minutes late of telling her goodbye . . . it hurts to know that I failed her in the last moments of her life... I live with that guilt each and every day.”

RESULTS

Initial data analyses examined the distribution of attachment styles as evidenced on the RQ measure. This revealed a modest preponderance of securely attached individuals, with roughly comparable proportions of the remaining styles: Secure \((n = 24)\) 40.7%; Preoccupied \((n = 12)\) 20.3%; Dismissing \((n = 10)\) 16.9%; Fearful \((n = 9)\) 15.3%. This distribution differs from that of other samples of adults (women and men) in that there appears to be a smaller presence of secure attachment and a correspondingly larger presence of insecure, particularly preoccupied.

Mean scores were computed for the present and past appraisals of grief and were used as the dependent variable in a repeated measures ANOVA, with the attachment styles as the between-group variable. This analysis revealed a main effect for the repeated measure only, \(F(1, 50) = 9.593, p < .01\). As expected, grief scores reflecting the past were higher than were grief scores reflecting the present with respective means 3.98 and 3.67. These scores appeared higher than those from previous studies; moreover, this pattern did not differ by attachment style.
Attachment style was also examined in relation to the caregiving role of the daughter, the daughter’s expectedness of the death, the daughter’s emotional upset at the anniversary of the death and the daughter’s overall rating of life satisfaction. As previously mentioned, 46% of daughters (n = 25) reported that they had been caregivers for their mothers. Within attachment style, 60% (n = 6) of the caregiving daughters were dismissing, 54% (n = 13) were secure, 33% (n = 3) were fearful, and 25% (n = 3) were preoccupied. Framed in another context, just over half (52%) of the caregiver daughters identified as securely attached.

Crossing ratings of expectedness with attachment style yielded a significant chi-square statistic (somewhat compromised by the smaller cell size): \( \chi^2(3) = 12.384, p < .01 \). Dismissing daughters disproportionately reported that they expected the death (90%, n = 9); 58% (n = 14) of securely attached daughters expected the death as did 44% (n = 4) of fearful daughters whereas only 17% (n = 2) of preoccupied daughters reported expecting the death. Recall that dismissing and securely attached daughters were also more likely to report having been a caregiver and indeed those who were caregivers were also more likely to report expecting the death, \( \chi^2(3) = 7.592, p < .01 \); 70% of caregivers reported expecting the death.

A significant chi-square was also revealed in analyses comparing the attachment styles and reports of feeling upset at the anniversary of the death, \( \chi^2(3) = 8.752, p < .05 \): 91% of securely attached daughters (n = 22) reported feeling upset as did almost as many fearful daughters (89%, n = 8); 66% of preoccupied daughters reported feeling upset (n = 8) as did 50% of dismissing daughters (n = 5). Scores on life satisfaction did not differ by attachment style; the overall mean score was 3.13 (on a scale ranging from 1-5).

**Content Themes**

Table 1 presents the coded themes described above by attachment types. Recall that these themes were derived from the Web sites created by the daughters, fewer than half of which could be retrieved and downloaded (itself an interesting point of the impermanence and/or mobility of websites). This smaller sample necessarily precludes statistical analyses; the patterns revealed in Table 1, however, are evocative. Comments on missing the deceased were offered on almost all of sites and particularly by fearful and preoccupied daughters. Narratives were the second most frequently noted theme apparently favored less by preoccupied daughters than by daughters in the other attachment styles. (It is worth noting that these themes are not mutually exclusive; that is, any one participant could, theoretically, receive codes noting the presence of each of these themes on the Web site they created.)

Sites in which comments about being “watched over” by the deceased and sites in which comments focused on the daughters themselves were found in equal proportion, although the former theme was very rarely used by dismissing
daughters while the latter theme was very rarely used by secure daughters. Descriptions of the mother and comments on love were also found in equal proportion; mention of love did not vary by attachment style while descriptions of the mother were rarely found among fearful daughters. Hyperbole was noted among almost all preoccupied daughters, much less so among fearful, rarely among dismissing, and not at all among the secure. Family issues, by contrast, were absent on the sites of the dismissing, found on about half of the sites of the fearful, and rarely on the sites of the secure and dismissing. Finally, negative emotional comments were absent on the sites of the secure and the fearful, and infrequently found among the dismissing and preoccupied.

Table 1. Coded Themes from Web Sites by Attachment Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Secure (n = 7)</th>
<th>Fearful (n = 7)</th>
<th>Preoccupied (n = 5)</th>
<th>Dismissing (n = 5)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5 (71%)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
<td>5 (100%)</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>20 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>6 (86%)</td>
<td>5 (71%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
<td>17 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching Over</td>
<td>4 (57%)</td>
<td>5 (71%)</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>13 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Self</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>5 (71%)</td>
<td>4 (60%)</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>13 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Mother</td>
<td>4 (57%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
<td>12 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>4 (57%)</td>
<td>4 (57%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>12 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperbole</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>8 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Issues</td>
<td>2 (29%)</td>
<td>4 (57%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>7 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotions</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>3 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Themes are not mutually exclusive.
DISCUSSION

This study focused on bereaved daughters who had placed memorials on the Web for their deceased mothers. Participants completed measures of attachment style and grief intensity. Their written memorials were analyzed for theme and presentation style. The data revealed that the largest proportion of participants was categorized as insecurely attached; grief scores did not differ by attachment status. The content of the memorials suggested differences according to attachment status, the overall results revealing how Web memorials offer a window onto the grief and the nature of the ties between the bereaved and the deceased.

Attachment

A wide distribution of attachment styles were found among those bereft daughters who authored memorials on the Web; about 40% of the daughters identified as securely attached, with the remainder fairly evenly divided among the insecure styles. In relative contrast, Carpenter (2001) examined the attachment styles of mid-life caregiving daughters (with a mean age of 50 years) finding, as did others before him (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990), approximately 66% securely attached daughters, 9% fearful, 6% preoccupied, and 19% dismissing. The differences between the styles reported herein and those of previous investigations are intriguing. The fact that these daughters manifested their grief, at least partially, through on-line memorialization distinguishes them from many; i.e., their representativeness of adult daughters in general is questionable. However, these data do suggest that the nature of ties that exist between daughters and their mothers (in life and perhaps death) is associated with their creation of an online memorial. Perhaps preoccupied daughters, for example, are over-represented among Web-memorial authors reflecting their anxiety in the relationship and ongoing search for approval and evidence of their value in relationships. Perhaps fearful daughters are over-represented as a testimony to their fear of rejection and their reluctance to get close to others (maintaining electronic ties instead).

Grief did not differ by attachment style, although it did, predictably, differ over (retrospectively) assessed time period with lower scores of grief representing the present and higher scores of grief representing the past. These grief scores were, however, somewhat higher than those reported for bereft individuals in other contexts (e.g., the spousally-bereft, Thompson, Gallagher-Thompson, Futterman, Gilewski, & Peterson, 1991; younger adults, Faschingbauer, 1987). Perhaps this suggests that these daughters are experiencing a particularly intense grief—an intensity that may be associated with their efforts to memorialize their deceased mothers online. Such a comment has interesting research implications (i.e., addressing issues of generalizability) about the particular and intense grief of those creating an online memorial. Alternatively, perhaps this association speaks to the intensity of the bonds that exist between adult daughters and their mothers.
Such a comment is qualified, however, by variations in attachment style and the reporting of upset feelings at the anniversary of the death. In particular, dismissing daughters were equally as likely to report feeling upset as they were not to report such feelings, unlike daughters in the other styles and particularly secure and fearful daughters who were more likely to report feeling upset. Dismissing individuals are noted to downplay the importance of attachment needs and to maintain emotional distance in relationships (e.g., Oram, Landolt, & Bartholomew, 2001). These findings suggest that motivations and behavior—and further, even types of behavior—play a role in the nature and expression of grief.

Web Memorial Content

Twenty-four Web memorials were available for content analysis. The sizable number of sites not available for research is noteworthy. Above, a comment was offered about the impermanence of the Web. That so many sites were missing for the purposes of research suggests that they are not regularly supported and renders them dramatically different from more traditional memorial sites. Of course, Web memorials differ in many other ways as well, as the content analyses suggested.

Memorials ranged in length from short paragraphs to five pages. Many were written in the third person. In a narrative written by a securely attached daughter, the following statements were noted: “She suffered from diabetes, glaucoma and then had to have a by-pass after which she had a stroke. I feel privileged to have been with her when she died.” A dismissing daughter wrote: “The nurse told me that her blood pressure was low and her organs were shutting down. She asked me if this was the day she was going to die. Later that night she told us she loved us and then died a few minutes later.”

Narrative approaches were heavily used, primarily involving letters which varied from short paragraphs to two pages. Letters tended to be personal and direct. Relating the moment of death was also found in some letters. A fearful daughter age 49 who addresses her letter to her “Mommy” wrote: “I’m so glad I got home in time before God took you to heaven. I was holding your hand when you died.”

Although the numbers become sufficiently small so as to preclude statistical analyses, several general statements may be offered addressing each of the four attachment styles. For example, many of the memorials seem to neatly reflect the attributes of the writer’s attachment style. A letter from a fearful daughter emphasized her negative self-image: “Mom, Thank you for all you gave to me even when I hardly deserved it.” A dismissing daughter described the relationship with her mother somewhat more objectively and unemotionally: “She wasn’t a happy person and I wasn’t a wanted child. . . . She made bad choices and a lot of times I even hated her. . . . She begged me not to let her die at home. . . . I couldn’t take care of her I lived too far away. When I went to visit she would
ignore me . . . she never said goodbye to me.” A preoccupied daughter wrote the following intimating some dependence in the relationship: “She was beloved by everyone . . . . She was everything to me.” A securely attached daughter wrote the following: “My dad, my two sisters and I got to be with her when she died. It was a very rare, unique, and oddly beautiful moment that I feel privileged to have been a part of.”

In general, the memorial sites created by securely attached daughters may be characterized by the use of narrative approaches (including letters to the deceased) and descriptions of the deceased, a sense of being watched over and expressions of love. These do suggest a positive model of both the self and the other, as attachment theorists describe, and the ability to derive support from relationships, perhaps even with the deceased. The sites of fearful daughters may be characterized by the noteworthy reference to missing the deceased, the sizable focus on the self, the feeling of being watched over, in addition to the use of narrative; there was also sizable reference to love and family issues. The desire for close relationships and the fear of rejection may underscore this focus, particularly the self-focused reference to missing the deceased, communicating with and being watched by her.

Preoccupied daughters, described by attachment theorists as approval-seeking and uneasy in anxiety-evoking situations, also focused on missing the deceased while emphasizing the self, and used hyperbolic descriptions and commented on negative emotions in greater proportion than those of other attachment styles. The sites of dismissing daughters, an attachment style in which individuals are said to diminish the importance of connections to others and maintaining emotional distance in their relationships, tended to be narrative and descriptive of the deceased while modestly focusing on the self.

Conclusions and Implications

The analyses reported above are necessarily limited by the particular nature of the sample: young adult and middle-aged computer-literate daughters who chose to create web memorials for their deceased mothers. Moreover, these results reported above remain evocative, rather than definitive, of attachment style differences in web- and other memorializing; they merit further investigation.

The variation in distribution of attachment style and the levels of grief reported by these daughters offers a glimpse into those who create Web-memorials and perhaps the nature of the ties between adult daughters and their mothers. The type of memorial they create offers suggestive evidence of validity of the link between attachment style and Web-based grief-related behaviors. Together, these results point to a window available to researchers onto the nature of grief and the nature of relationships in the complex lives of the living and the deceased.
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