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BEREAVED DAUGHTERS: SOCIAL SUPPORT, TURNING POINTS, AND MAINTAINING
A CONNECTION IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

A Thesis in

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by

Toni Lynn Gibson

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The thesis of Toni Lynn Gibson was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Michelle A. Miller-Day
Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences
Faculty affiliate with the Center for Human Development and Family Research
Thesis Advisor

Jon F. Nussbaum
Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences & Human Development and Family Studies

Michael L. Hecht
Distinguished Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences and Crime, Law, and Justice

Kirt Wilson
Associate Professor of Rhetoric in the Communication Arts and Sciences Department
Director of Graduate Studies

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to examine bereavement communication of motherless daughters on a weblog called “Momless Daughter.” I analyzed the blog in order to find the types of social support that are requested and provided, how daughters maintain a connection with their deceased mothers, and what turning points seemed salient to bereaved daughters. I found that both emotional and informational social support were requested implicitly and explicitly by bereaved daughters in this blog. Similarly, both emotional and informational social support were provided. These types of social support exhibited particular characteristics, many of which were unique to this online format. I also found that there were many turning points that were salient to daughters and that these turning points were experienced very differently than daughters with living mother-daughter dyads. Additionally, I found that part of the reason why the turning points were so difficult was because they violated the expectations of the daughter. Lastly, I found that daughters maintain a connection with their mothers in ways that have been previously indicated by bereavement research and in other ways that have not been noted yet. To conclude this thesis, I considered the implications of the results, directions for future research, and the strengths and limitations of the study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Momless Daughters

The goal of this study was to examine bereavement communication of motherless daughters on a weblog called “Momless Daughter.” As past research demonstrates, the mother-daughter dyad is distinct from other relationship dyads because of the uniqueness of its characteristics, including the interwoven nature of most daughters’ identities with their mother (Russel & Saebel, 1997). Boyd (1989) shows that, based on theories such as the social learning theory and psychoanalytic theory, a daughter has a lifelong identification with her mother. A daughter may have a difficult time disentangling herself from her mother’s values, especially when there is little social pressure to differentiate from her. Also, because female identity is highly influenced by relationships with others (Gilligan, 1982), a daughter’s relationship with her mother is highly salient (Miller-Day, 2004). The life of a daughter is impacted by her mother in ways that other relationships do not; for example, a mother’s views on sex roles and employment strongly influence her daughter’s views on these issues (Boyd, 1989).

Being that the mother-daughter relationship is so salient to daughters, what happens when daughters lose their mothers and do not have access to this relationship as they develop into adulthood? Pill and Zabin (1997) reported that maternal loss has a lifelong impact on a woman’s sense of self and on her development. Despite how devastating it can be for a daughter to lose that special relationship with her mother, a daughter has issues that need to be dealt with after her mother’s death that are especially difficult, such as maintaining a relationship with a surviving parent and siblings (Silverman & Silverman, 1979). Because the mother-daughter relationship is often very close and intimate, bereaved daughters may have a difficult time accepting the finality of the death (Silverman & Silverman, 1979). Fischer (1981) shows that, during life transitions

such as marriage, pregnancy, and the birth of a child, a mother and daughter may grow together as they share support and advice. Life transitions allow mothers and daughters to re-evaluate their relationship with each other and become more involved in each other's lives. Without her mother, a daughter might experience these transitions differently. Finally, Riches and Dawson (2000) point out that widowed men are often quick to remarry after a wife dies. A father's remarriage often poses significant problems for a daughter. Daughters may feel as though fathers wish them to replace "Mom" with someone else and that the bereavement should no longer be a concern (Riches & Dawson, 2000).

A study done by Moss, Moss, Rubinstein, and Resch (1993) shows that daughters both hold onto and let go of their deceased mothers. Daughters are comforted by thoughts and memories of their mother and many feel that they will be reunited with their mother again. Similarly, Silverman (1987) reported that daughters dream about their mothers and may hang onto the sadness of the death to keep their mother alive.

Although there has been some research designed specifically to understand the experiences of momless daughters, much of the research makes assumptions about the experiences of momless daughters, sometimes describing daughters as "mourners" (Gamino, Hogan, & Sewell, 2002) or lumping them together with sons into the "children" classification (Silverman, Nickman, & Worden, 2002). Such a broad view of these daughters' novel experiences does not do justice to the uniqueness of the mother-daughter relationship. The mother-daughter dyad is such a unique dyad that requires separate and extensive research. Miller-Day (2004) describes the tie between the mother and daughter as "velvet chains—chains of security, love, and devotion that may keep a daughter anchored to maternal protection, but may well hold her back from experiencing the world as an individual." (pp. 264-265). But with

these “velvet chains” missing, how does a daughter’s experiences change? Because there is so little research that depicts the impact of bereavement on a daughter, it is important to assess the significance that the death of a mother has on the daughter separately from other dyads.

When a daughter loses her mother, she often feels distressed and these distressed feelings can last months or years (Stiles, 1987). Thus, it’s important to explore how this distress contributes to our understanding of communication surrounding bereavement. As Eliot (2003) points out, it is important to study bereavement individually:

Every 23 seconds one of these human beings is dying. This is the equivalent of approximately 26 deaths in 10 minutes. Yet to most of us, as death comes to the individual or to the family, it seems a new experience if not a unique shock. (p. 543)

Given the uniqueness of the mother-daughter relationship and the salience of grief experiences, it is important to gain knowledge about momless daughters’ grief communication in order to more fully understand this communication and to be able to assist women in their grief process. This study begins to explore some of the aspects of grief communication for momless daughters.

Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure

The Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure addresses bereavement communication and specifically describes why some distressed individuals might disclose certain kinds of information (Stiles, 1987). Initially, the model argues that many distressed individuals are “trapped” in their frame of reference, that is, they are so overwhelmed with their internal states and meanings that they cannot think about other things. The overwhelming nature of distress starts to build a subjective pressure, creating a feeling of being “bottled up.” To relieve this pressure, the distressed individual might feel as though they need to talk to someone. The preoccupation with these feelings, then, is represented through speech; with distressed people

talking about their distress. But why? What benefits do distressed individuals gain by successfully conveying their feelings to another individual? The model suggests that individuals disclose their distressed feelings for two reasons: catharsis and self-understanding (Stiles, 1987). According to Stiles, “getting it off my chest” is accompanied with a sense of relief. An understanding ear allows the individual to put their feelings elsewhere or “out in the open” and feel relieved by doing it. Additionally, catharsis has been recognized as an important part of recovery in bereavement (Humphrey, 2009).

Second, disclosure of feelings might produce self-understanding. Stiles (1987) wrote that disclosing personal feelings of distress and information about the lost relationship can, “bring distorted or misvalued experiences and inconsistent feelings to awareness, where they can be reevaluated, reconciled with the self, and accepted” (pp. 264-265). Thus, disclosure gives the individual an opportunity to bring feelings of misunderstanding to awareness and evaluate them. The Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure suggests that, ultimately, this type of disclosure will increase self-understanding (Stiles, 1987).

As an individual goes through the cathartic experience and increases in self-understanding, disclosure of distressed feelings allows the individual to return to a psychological homeostasis. According to the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure, there is a built up pressure resulting in a feeling similar to “I have to talk to somebody,” and disclosure alleviates this pressure, allowing for a cathartic experience, increasing self-understanding, and ultimately, returning the individual to psychological homeostasis (Stiles, 1987).

In this study, I will be analyzing daughters’ disclosure to each other in online social support weblogs. The Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure provides a framework for understanding why daughters might describe their most personal feelings online; yet, while the

model explores the motivations for disclosure, it has guided me to ask more general questions—what is the content of these disclosures? What do motherless daughters write to each other when seeking and offering support? How do the motherless daughters express the mother-daughter relationship in the absence of the mother? What classic mother-daughter turning points are still salient to daughters in the absence of their mothers?

Blogging

Individuals often disclose in computer-mediated communication (Wright, 2000). One particular type of computer-mediated communication is through weblogs (or blogs). A weblog is defined as “a frequently updated webpage, typically consisting of fairly brief posts presented and archived in reverse-chronological order.” (Schiano, Nardi, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). The content of blog posts is usually textual, but might also contain photos, videos, or other multimedia content. Some blogs are interactive, that is, other members are invited to post commentary on the original blog post. Although blogs have been used in the past primarily for discussion of politics, punditry, and technology, blogs are now being used as a discussion forum for ordinary people to discuss personal themes. Blogging, in this context, can be described as personal journaling online, which may or may not include the opportunity for other individuals to comment on the “journal” posts (Schiano et al., 2004).

Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004) described what might motivate an individual to blog about their personal life. First, they reported that individuals participating in blogs might like to “work on their own issues” (p. 4). Thus, blogging can be an outlet for their thoughts and feelings and the posts can be deeply emotional. One of the participants in the Nardi et al. study reported that blogging gave her closure from the death of her grandfather. Second, individuals might contribute personal information to a weblog is to get in a conversation with

someone similar. Nardi et al. (2004) reported that blogging can help build support communities because it allows for similar individuals to come together in one forum. This could be helpful as bereaved individuals adapt to the changes in their lives.

There are many kinds of weblogs, but the weblog of interest for the present study were weblogs that support “motherless daughters.” On these blogs, daughters tend to discuss feelings they have about the death of their mother (Nager & deVries, 2004). Previous studies have indicated that talking about the death of a loved one influences healthy adaptation to the loss (Gray, 1987). However, research also shows that the discussion of the grief experience may be considered taboo, insensitive, and self-centered, and therefore, avoided, despite its implications for healthy adaptation (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005). Little is known about the discussion of bereavement in online communities; however, researchers note that computer-mediated communication might be helpful for meeting people experiencing similar situations (Wright, 2002). Thus, this present study will explore how bereavement is expressed through computer mediated communication, specifically, in a momless daughter blog.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social Support

Introduction. The support of others during the grieving process is important. Humphrey (2009) described that “The better the quality of a grieving individual’s social support network, the more functional is her or his loss adaptation” (p.31). Albrecht and Adelman (1987) defined social support as “verbal and nonverbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one’s experience” (p. 19). Generally, researchers have classified four categories of social support: emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental (Braithwaite, Waldron & Finn, 1999; Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002; House, 1981; Segrin & Flora, 2005). Segrin and Flora (2005) define emotional social support as providing a person with someone “with whom one can discuss problems, concerns, and feelings” (p. 227). Emotional support has been reported as the most or one of the most helpful types of support. Many factors may moderate emotional social support, such as demographic factors (gender), personality traits of the recipient, type of relationship between the recipient and the provider, type of stressor, specific outcome examined, and timing of the support effort (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002).

Informational social support has been defined as giving “guidance, feedback, and resource information that is helpful in addressing the problem” (Segrin & Flora, 2005, p. 227). There are mixed results regarding the helpfulness of informational support, however, the support can be moderated by the expertise of the support provider, the extent to which the support provider has control over the recipient’s problem, and whether the informational support is accompanied by emotional support (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002).

Appraisal social support has been defined as involving the “transmission of information in the form of affirmation, feedback and social comparison” (House, 1981). The social network, environmental, and personal factors have shown to be mediating factors in the presence of appraisal support (Halle & Wellman, 1985). Because appraisal and informational support have overlapping concepts, I joined these two together when I analyzed the weblog.

Finally, instrumental support is defined as providing assistance with various tasks. This can include helping with chores, auto repairs, grocery store visits, or other daily activities (Segrin & Flora, 2005). For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing particularly on informational and emotional support. Being that the nature of the support given on the weblogs is communicated rather than performed for another individual, I cannot explore the instrumental support in the text.

Social support is often accompanied with disclosure of feelings. Social support has important implications for those receiving it: it enhances general well-being and happiness, as well as ability to withstand major stressors, such as death of a loved one. Having a support network helps reduce uncertainty that may accompany stressful events (Wright 2000). Braithwaite and Waldron (2000) emphasized the importance of having a social support network, especially during stressful life events, such as a health crisis or bereavement. People who do not receive social support during major stressors are vulnerable to developing a variety of different physical and mental problems (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Social support is communicated by both non-verbal and verbal messages.

Content of Social Support Messages and Bereavement. Research has shown that most messages bereaved individuals receive are usually not helpful or harmful rather than supportive (Range, Walston, & Pollard, 1992). Davidowitz and Myrick (1984) found that 80% of messages

that the bereaved individuals in their study received were unsupportive. Similarly, Lehman, Ellard, and Wortman (1986) reported that 62% of the bereaved respondents in their study had received unhelpful messages.

A variety of studies have shown that person-centered messages sent to a bereaved individual are perceived as more supportive (Rack, Burleson, Bodie, Holmstrom & Servaty-Seib, 2008; Servaty-Seib & Burleson, 1997). Similarly, messages sent to a bereaved individual that express one's willingness to help have shown to be more supportive (Rack et al., 2008; Range, Walston, & Pollard, 1992). Messages that express care or concern, and the sender's presence are perceived as more supportive (Knight, Elfenbein & Messina-Soares, 1998; Marwit & Carusa, 1998; Rack et al., 2008). Finally, messages that were facilitative and provided the opportunity for the bereaved to express their feelings were found to be more supportive (Davidowitz & Myrick, 1984; Lehman, Ellard, & Wortman, 1986; Marwit & Carusa, 1998).

On the other hand, there are many characteristics of supportive messages that might contribute to that message being perceived as unsupportive. For example, many studies have shown that messages that include advice, forced cheerfulness, or clichés, such as "I know exactly how you feel" are unsupportive (Davidowitz & Myrick, 1984; Hogan & DeSantis, 1994; Knight et al., 1998; Lehman et al., 1986; Marwit & Carusa, 1998; Rack et al., 2008). Additionally, messages that minimize feelings, attempt to distract the bereaved from the problem, or encourage recovery are also unsupportive (Knight et al., 1998; Lehman et al., 1986; Marwit & Carusa, 1998; Rack et al., 2008).

Finally, in a study by Range et al. (1992), results found many messages that were perceived as unsupportive. These messages included comments about the funeral home doing a good job, questions about foreknowledge of death, questions about the deceased individual's

pain, questions about how the death happened, remarks about the death's suddenness, remarks about how life is unfair, or expressions of permission to be angry at God. These results varied slightly according to the type of death (homicide, suicide, expected natural death, unanticipated natural death).

Social Support in Computer Mediated Communication. Pennebaker, Zech, and Rime (2001) describe the power of the writing experience. They report that, when writing, bereaved individuals disclose “a remarkable range and depth of traumatic experiences” (p. 530). Wright (1999) reported that given time investment, satisfying relationships can develop through writing to each other in computer-mediated communication. Baym (2001) reported that online communities have a propensity to be interpersonally supportive. Bakardjieva (2003) found that various types of social support are given in online communities and that recipients find ways to deal with life problems. Research has shown that many people undergoing various types of hardship benefit from computer-mediated communication. Some of these people include those going through depression (Shaw & Gant, 2002), cancer (Fogel et al., 2002; Han & Belcher, 2001; Wright, 2002), heart disease (Dickerson et al., 2000), infertility (Epstein et al., 2002), migration to a new country (Chen & Choi, 2011), and diabetes (Loader et al., 2002).

Fukkink (2011) did a study where young volunteers (ages 16-23) helped other young people with psychosocial problems on a one-on-one computer chat service. He found that the support the young volunteers provided were varied types of support and were perceived as satisfactory. He also found that the support provided was both person-centered and problem-focused. Most notably, he reported that young volunteers were able to provide satisfactory social support. However, it is important to note that these volunteers were trained to provide social support before the study began.

Although relationships can develop online, the online nature of the social support changes the interpersonal transaction, but nonetheless, allows for a functional alternative to face-to-face interactions. First, it allows for many people with similar issues to communicate with each other at one time, despite geographical constraints (Jones, 1997; Wright 2000). Also, the online nature allows for anonymity, which may alleviate the shame and stigma that come with asking for help (King and Moreggi, 1998; Winzelberg, 1997; Wright, 2000). Burleson & MacGeorge (2002) discussed that some social support interactions might be face-threatening to the provider (the desire to give good advice or not be nosey) or to the recipient (the desire to be unimpeded or to appear as if the recipient does not have problems). Anonymity of computer-mediated communication has the potential to allay these fears. Other findings indicate that the use of computer-mediated communication might prevent feelings of isolation and alienation in learning environments (Dickey, 2004). On the other hand, in computer mediated communication, members may experience delayed feedback between sending and receiving messages and may question the credibility of the people with whom they are interacting (Wright, 2002).

In computer-mediated communication, informational and emotional social support may have different characteristics than face-to-face support (Wright, 2002). In computer mediated communication, informational support comes from the provider's similar experiences. In this instance, the support provider will give advice or guidance based on how their own comparable experiences worked out. An example of this would be, "I remember feeling the same way. Listening to music that reminded me of my mom was really helpful—maybe you can try that too?" Also, because the computer mediated communication takes place online, there is an easily accessible plethora of online information available for searches outside of the online community

to draw from. Thus, informational support might come in the form of the provider sending along helpful websites (Wright, 2002). An example of this type of support might include, “You must feel terrible! Here is a link to a website that might be really helpful for you.” (Wright, 2002).

Researchers report that emotional support is the most frequent type of support given in online support communities (Braithwaite, Waldron & Finn, 2000; Wright, 2002). Emotional social support in computer-mediated communication has very different forms than in face-to-face support. In computer mediated communication, nonverbal cues are either removed completely or altered. Because 90 percent or more of emotional messages are nonverbal, this presents a significant issue when creating messages. Creation of support messages in an online environment might be more difficult than face-to-face, as a person may struggle with how to convey their emotional support without complimentary nonverbal messages (Wright, 2002).

Very little is known about the social support process in weblogs for motherless daughters and this knowledge is important to understand how to best assist women during this grief experience. Thus, my first two research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What kinds of social support are explicitly and implicitly requested from others in the Momless Daughter weblog community and what are the characteristics of these request messages?

RQ2: What types of social support messages do individuals in the Momless Daughter weblog community provide and what are the characteristics of these support messages

Turning Points

In addition to the sharing of social support, momless daughters may experience difficulty with classic mother-daughter turning points due to their mothers’ absence. A turning point is shift in closeness (toward or away from one another) in a relationship that requires the mother

and daughter to adjust their relationship (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006; Miller-Day, 2004). Fischer (1981) has shown that, during these transitional moments such as a daughter's marriage or the birth of the daughter's first child, a mother and daughter typically grow together as give each other support and advice. These points allow mothers and daughters to re-evaluate their relationship with each other and become more involved in each other's lives. Without her mother, a daughter may be left confused and yearning for the presence of her mother.

Depending on the age of the daughter when the mother dies, she might be forced to experience many life transitions without her mother. Because bereaved daughters often desire their mother's presence in these situations, the turning points could be reminders of the death of her mother and could be perceived as hurtful, less meaningful, or unenjoyable. Given the importance of turning points in a daughter's life, it's important to understand how they are experienced when her mother is deceased. There is a tremendous amount of research describing the importance of the mother to her daughter as she experiences turning points (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). However, there is relatively no research designed to look at how these tuning points might be perceived as more or less difficult when her mother is deceased. Because of this situation, we first need to address what turning points are perceived as salient to a bereaved daughter. We can speculate that, with her mother absent, a daughter might have a different perspective of her turning points than other daughters with present mothers. Even though her mother is deceased, a motherless daughter may strive to keep the memory of her mother alive as she experiences the "typical" mother--daughter turning points. Thus, the third research question guiding this study is:

RQ3: What mother-daughter turning points seem most salient for momless daughters?

Maintaining a Connection

A bereaved person is left with many questions: What does it mean that a loved one has died? What does that mean for individual roles in a family? What does it mean for the relationship with the person that died? Is the relationship over? The process of making meaning of another's death is important in the grieving process. Bosticco and Thompson (2005) discussed the importance and centrality of communication in grieving so that the bereaved family can make sense of the finality of the death. The communication challenge with discourse about death is that the topic is so difficult to talk about. Despite outlining the need for communication to fight loneliness and confusion after the death of a loved one, Bosticco & Thompson (2005) discuss the concept of "conspiracy of silence," which is consistent avoidance of references to the loss. Many times it is too difficult for outsiders to listen to the emotional toll another's death has taken on a bereaved person (Silverman, 1987), but the bereaved are also restricted by their inability to bring up the subject (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Pill & Zabin, 1997). This leaves the bereaved with many unanswered questions.

Gamino, Hogan, and Sewell (2002) discovered nine distinct themes of meaning-making in the lives of those who lost a loved one. After being asked to discuss "What does the death of a loved one mean to you?" these consistent themes arose: the absence of the deceased person, experiencing relief for the deceased person, disbelieving the death, changing relationships with those that are still alive, focusing on the negativity of the death, experiencing the meaninglessness, continuing the connection with the deceased person, invoking an after-life in which the deceased person went to, and going on with life.

Attempting to continue a connection with the departed is also a key element of bereavement. Gamino, Hogan, and Sewell (2002) note that continuing the connection means a person "remains loving someone who is physically gone from life but who remains a reference

point and an object of affection” and is distinguished as part of the “recovery” process of bereavement. Similarly, Silverman, Nickman, and Worden (1992) describe children maintaining a connection with their deceased parent necessary for healthy bereavement. Maintaining a connection, which is described as part of making meaning of the death, is broken down into five categories: locating the deceased parent, experiencing the deceased parent, initiating a connection with the deceased parent, remembering the deceased parent, and keeping something that belonged to or reminds them of the deceased parent. Klass and Walter (2001) describe maintaining a connection as sensing the presence of the dead, talking with the dead, using the dead as moral guides, and talking about the dead. Silverman, Nickman, & Worden (1992) emphasized that the connection with a deceased parent is integrated into many of the surviving relationships.

Silverman and Worden (1992) also discuss specific ways that children maintain a connection with their deceased parent: dreaming about, talking to, frequently thinking about, believing the parent is watching over them, keeping things belonging to the parent, and visiting the graves of the parent. Bosticco & Thompson (2005) show that children connect to their deceased loved ones through believing physical things can happen if they think enough or wish for it, a developmental phenomenon called “magical thinking”. Children remain connected because they feel that, if they keep on wishing for it, maybe their loved one will come back.

The concept is clear; when loved ones die, some people attempt to maintain some type of relationship or connection to that person, despite their lack of physical being. Specifically, when children lose a parent, the relationship between parent and child is ongoing. Davidman (2000) emphasizes the importance to study the mother-daughter dyad separately, as she discusses that at least two thirds of the motherless daughters that participated in her project “expressed a need to

maintain their mother's presence in their lives" (p. 248). Thus, I pose the following research question:

RQ4: In what ways do momless daughters report staying connected to their deceased mothers?

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

To explore the issues relevant to momless daughters and answer the research questions guiding this study, I examined online forums dedicated to discussing daughter bereavement. Specifically, I focused on blogs that offered personal accounts from momless daughters who were experiencing bereavement. These blogs provided access to discourse that was motivated and facilitated by momless daughters rather than guided by the researcher's agenda. Thus, analyzing this discourse allowed me to explore matters that are especially significant to momless daughters.

To conduct this analysis, I used a qualitative research method because these methods are a logical tool for collecting and analyzing detailed textual and visual data (Cresswell, 1998). Additionally, a qualitative approach is important when studying bereavement because it is such a personal event and qualitative inquiry is specifically suited to studying personal experience and meaning-making (Mason, 2002). As in most qualitative research, the goal of this study was not to find the answer to how every bereaved person maintains a connection with another deceased person; but to purposely target bereaved daughters who have lost their mothers that seek support in this specific online environment. This research was intended to be heuristic; that is, the answers were descriptive and intended to guide further research.

Sample

Because so little is known about the grief in the mother-daughter dyad, I performed a content analysis of an online blog called "Momless Daughter" located on a hosting site called Livejournal.com. This is a very active blog in which daughters who have lost their mother write to each other to collectively grieve their losses. Although the users on this blog remained

nameless through the use of screennames, the blogs led me to believe that the users were female, because this blog is specifically designated for motherless daughters. Second, I believe the women's ages were varied; there is no age requirement to write in Livejournal communities. The only requirement is that, if an individual is under the age of 13, that individual is required to have a parent read the Terms or Service and Privacy Policy. Finally, I believe the women were living throughout the world because the "About" section of the livejournal.com reports, "LiveJournal is an online journaling community, where people from around the world share stories, discuss topics and keep in touch with friends" (Livejournal Quick Tour, 2010). In order to write in this blog, one must register to have a journal on the hosting website, www.Livejournal.com, however, reading it is free to public. Although the main purpose of this site is to enable users to have an online diary, users can join a "community" in which they discuss a particular topic with other users. This community has 1006 members, was created in May of 2001, and included 4,054 posts, as of January 14, 2012. Additionally, users have the ability to "comment" on each other's posts. Below is an example of a post from May 5, 2009 with two comments:

momlessdaughter: Mother's Day - Windows Internet Explorer


http://community.livejournal.com/momlessdaughter/1019549.html


File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Favorites Suggested Sites Web Slice Gallery

momlessdaughter: Mother's Day

Page Safety Tools

 xkawaii_robotx ([xkawaii_robotx](#)) wrote in [momlessdaughter](#),
@ 2009-05-04 13:44:00

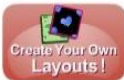

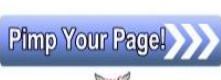




Mother's Day

I've decided to take a huge step, and go visit my mom this year.. I'm nervous about it, and my dad is taking me, and I dunno what to do. I haven't gone to her grave since the day we buried her back in September 08.. My friend Julie suggested that I write my mom a letter, and put it with the flowers we're putting on her grave, so I'm going to do that.


One of my friends wanted me to help her pick out a bouqet for her mom for Mother's Day, and I did it, then I cried for hours that night. I'm slowly getting back on my feet, but the depression is just too much for me to handle a lot of the time, and I kind of go inside myself...

My friends keep telling me I'm strong, and alot of the time I'd agree, I am strong, but when it comes to this? I'm not.. and I don't think I'm ever going to be.

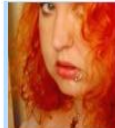
www.Webfetti.com Ads by Google

(2 comments) - ([Post a new comment](#))

 [hug_athon](#)
2009-05-04 08:12 pm UTC ([link](#))

I plan to do the same thing this Mother's Day, and it will also be the first time I've been there since we buried her last September. I am going alone, which may be a disaster, but i don't think I really want anyone to be there with me to watch me breakdown, plus they all have mothers to see that day.
It'll be a hard day made harder by the fact that I have the biggest final on Monday.
I don't think anyone is strong when it comes to this.

([Reply to this](#))

 [vikkilynn](#)
2009-05-10 04:41 am UTC ([link](#))

I lost my mom in December and my dad three weeks ago. Some people have said I'm strong through this but I don't see it. I don't feel strong. But I suppose we are both stronger than we realize.

hugs

Done Internet 100%

Figure 1. Example blog posts. This figure illustrates a post from May 5, 2009 with two comments.

I analyzed the posts and comments during the months of April, May, and June of 2007 and 2009 to identify patterns of social support, turning points, and maintaining a connection. I chose these specific months because the blog is particularly active in this time; as the holiday, Mother's Day, approaches and passes in May, the blog becomes more active. I purposely skipped the year 2008 to increase the likelihood of different users contributing. The unit of analysis was each "string" (i.e. *Figure 1* shown above is one string); that is an original post with each of its subsequent comments/responses. The six months that I analyzed included 131 strings. The strings varied in length. The authors within each string will remain confidential because no identifying information was provided.

This sample was particularly important to answering my research questions, as writing in a community with other bereaved daughters provided momless daughters with the opportunity to be comfortable with their audience in order to express feelings and seek support. Because the experience of momless daughters may be emotionally wrought, the safety of sitting behind a computer may make daughter more comfortable expressing their emotions without feeling overly vulnerable. Finally, the anonymity of daughters' posts may reduce the perception that expressed emotions will be judged.

Data Collection

The website for this weblog is <http://www.livejournal.com/community/momlessdaughter>. When I went to this website, I clicked on the left-hand tab labeled "Calendar." Upon opening the calendar, I clicked to visit any month or day since the beginning of the blog. Here I clicked on the months and days I have chosen to analyze. When I opened a particular day, I copied the

entire string, including the original post, its subsequent comments, and the screennames of those participating in the string. Upon copying, I pasted the string into Microsoft Word. When pasted, the format was a little messy due to copying and pasting from a website, so I changed some of the spacing issues so that it was neater and easier to analyze. I saved each string as its own Microsoft Word document. The document name was saved as "date_# of that day". For example, the first "string" on May 4, 2007 was 05042007_1. The second string on May 4, 2007 was 05042007_2. After saving, I uploaded the document into the qualitative data management and analysis software, Nvivo, for analysis.

Data Analysis

When all of my data were imported into my computer for analysis, I completely immersed myself in the data. The data analysis process of immersion, data reduction, and data synthesis was employed (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Immersion. I read the dataset at least three times to get a feel for the data before even beginning to reduce or code it. After immersing myself, I began reducing the data by coding each data string. My goal of coding was to first reduce the data into conceptual categories and then organize that information into broader themes that address my research questions. Throughout the coding process, I wrote memos about my personal thoughts as a researcher and these are titled "researcher reflexive notes" (personal thoughts and reflections on the data) and "conceptual notes" (notations about constructs, ideas, theoretical linkages in the data), stamping each memo notations with the time and date so that document supported a chronological sequence (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Data Reduction. To reduce the large amount of data collected, I identified the topics discussed in each string, divided each into a meaningful unit of data. A meaningful unit was

defined as a complete thought and could have been a few words (e.g., that hurt), a full sentence (e.g., I really miss her today) or more than one sentence (e.g., “Today was really important to me. It is the day that I should have spent with her helping me and guiding me through it.”) Each meaningful unit was probed for its relation to social support, maintaining a connection, and turning points and if it was interpreted as related to any of these three areas of inquiry, I commenced with open coding procedures.

This data reduction process was conducted to identify central concepts of turning points, social support, and maintaining a connection within the discourse. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this process as open coding or “the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (pp. 62). During this process, I broke down the data into distinct parts, examined them closely, and compared them for differences and similarities. Using NVivo, I coded my data explicitly and in parallel, that is, I coded for one research question at a time. Additionally, I constantly questioned my assumptions about the phenomena, allowing for new findings. Questions I asked myself included, “What is this expression? What does it represent?” Answering these types of questions allowed me to label the particular phenomena. I did not give a label to every single piece of discourse, but rather, marked pieces of the discourse I interpreted as meaningful to my research questions. After developing a list of concepts, I began to organize them under three categories: social support, maintaining a connection, and turning points. These categories were developed before coding and were guided by my research questions, however, I was open to exploring categories that emerged as I coded. The categories were not mutually exclusive, that is, some sentences or phrases from the weblog were placed in more than one category. During the open coding process, I read the data at least three times for proper labeling. Additionally, I created and maintained a codebook to keep my codes organized (see appendix for

sample). The codebook consisted of five parts: (1) a “brief definition” to jog the analyst’s memory of the code, (2) a complete conceptual definition of the code, (3) a “when to use” section providing specific instances—based on the data—in which the code should be applied, (4) a “when not to use” section that provides instances in which the code should not be applied, and (5) an “example” section that includes exact quotes and excerpts from the data as exemplars of the code. Following is the process I used to reduce the data.

Data Synthesis. Next, the coding was compared and contrasted to identify relationships and patterns. Strauss and Corbin (1990) labeled this process of data synthesis axial coding and defined it as “putting the data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories” (p. 97). Here I assessed the ways in which the grouped-together units were similar and/or different. Lastly, I conducted selective coding to examine the data closely within each of the core areas of my research focus (e.g., turning points, support) to provide a descriptive account that represents the thematic elements of the data; that is, to identify recurrent and salient themes that cut across the entire sample of data strings or occur within sets of data strings.

The final level of abstraction employed in my coding was the identification of cross-cutting themes. I reviewed the data set four times to look for recurrent themes within and across the topics discussed by these motherless daughters. Themes were identified based on depth of feeling with which the issue was expressed in the discourse (intensity) and amount of times they surfaced (frequency) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

When reporting the results, I used words from the weblog users to describe my findings, to maintain authenticity, and to paint the picture of the themes clearly. Also, during the coding

process, I did not ignore posts that might be contradictory to the common themes; instead, I noted those and they are described in the Results section.

Trustworthiness

One advantage to this type of research is that there is a complete absence of transcription error. I retrieved this information directly from those daughters experiencing it. In other types of methodologies, there might be the risk of losing significant information during the transcribing process; it could be easy for a researcher to miss a nonverbal cue or a relevant comment as he or she quickly wrote notes trying to paint the reality of the a certain event in a limited time. However, these blogs were stuck in time and I had access to them as they are for as long as I needed them. This was an incredible advantage to my research, as it allowed me to evaluate and process them slowly and at my own pace, paying careful attention to the detail and emotion within them.

Undoubtedly, though, those involved and reading this research still might question “Why should I believe this study?” The question itself addresses the trustworthiness of my research, and therefore, it is appropriate for me to address the threats to my trustworthiness.

One particular threat that might be of concern in this study is researcher bias, or when a researcher chooses data that fits the researcher’s preconceptions or simply “stand out” to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In other words, the researcher gathering evidence is a subjective experience, rather than an objective one. In my own research, however, my goal was not to eliminate that subjectivity, but rather understand how it influenced my study. In order to avoid negative consequences of potential researcher bias, it is important for me to express my background with my mother and mother loss and evaluate how that might influence the way in which I interpreted the discourse.

My mother was 21 years old when I was born. She was young, so I would argue that she did her fair share of growing up with me. As she struggled financially and with different partners throughout our lives together, there was one thing that stayed consistent: I was her daughter and she would always, under every single circumstance, put me first. Regardless of the fact that finances and partner problems were *her* issues, they still affected me in both good and bad ways. All of these individuals, I thought, would be “forever” in my life. Regardless of who came and went, what always stayed constant was my bond with my mother. We’ve always been a team—a fast-paced, hard-working pair of women. I have not lost her...yet. However, there might be a day when I will need to say good-bye to my beautiful selfless mother. That very moment is what has inspired me to do this research.

Going into this research, I had ideas of how a mother-daughter dyad “should” look like: close, loving, making sacrifices for each other. After all, that is what my experience has been. When I imagine losing my mother, I have ideas about what grieving might look like too: devastating, requiring lots of outside support, and a time that forces me to re-evaluate my life, my goals, and what they will look like without her. These perceptions, undoubtedly, colored the way that I viewed these blogs. The blogs that are written with rich emotional expression might have been more salient to me, as I expect my experience in bereavement to be similar. I made every effort to bracket those expectations and not interpret the posts with “rose colored glasses.” Additionally, although I whole-heartedly desired to describe the experiences of these women from a researcher’s perspective, there was absolutely a small personal piece of me reading these blogs, grabbing small pieces of advice and filing them away in my “when-this-happens-to-me” folder. Because my relationship is so close with my mother, I read these blogs with a deep-seated curiosity and attention to emotion. Nonetheless, I went into this research with careful

attention to how my preconceptions about the mother-daughter dyad and daughter bereavement affected how I interpreted the discourse and I made every attempt to bracket or set aside these preconceptions by bringing them to the fore of my consciousness and writing them down.

Additionally, to enhance the trustworthiness of my research, I kept an ongoing audit trail. First, I frequently wrote memos. The conceptual memos were written in an on-going basis as I conducted data analysis. I also wrote many memos to describe if and/or how my experiences with my mother permeated my interpretations. The goal of these memos was to keep myself in check. I aimed for results that were accurate representations of the experiences of these women and not what I think I would have found. Thus, ongoing memos describing the process and how my experiences impacted the process enhance the credibility of my research.

I made every effort to explicitly include any contradictory or negative case examples. For example, in my initial reading of these blogs, many women reported that they maintained a connection with their mother by visiting her at a cemetery. This finding was recurrent across most of the blogs. There were exceptions to that pattern, however. There were some women who reported feeling “nothing” when they went to the gravesite. These posts deviated from the majority experience, but nonetheless, their experience was represented. Special cases like this were explored in my research. When evaluating these negative cases, I decided whether it was appropriate to broaden my conclusions to include these negative cases or to keep them different and provide explanation for how these are real experiences that deserve recognition, despite the deviance from the majority.

Finally, throughout the entire research process, I worked closely with my advisor, Dr. Miller-Day. With her extensive background in qualitative research, she was able to keep me on track with my analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Question 1: Requested Social Support

In my first research question I asked, “What kinds of social support are explicitly and implicitly requested from others in the Momless Daughter weblog community and what are the characteristics of these request messages?” Wright (2002) has shown us that social support in an online community might look different than in typical face-to-face interactions. Thus, requesting of social support might look different in this blog. With little access to nonverbal communication, increased anonymity, a delay in feedback, and other unique factors, I was interested in seeing what types of support were being requested and what the characteristics of those requests were. After close analysis of the social support requested on this blog, it is clear that both emotional and informational support were requested. Further, the majority of the requested support was emotional support.

Requested Emotional Support. Emotional support in a normal face-to-face interaction is often accompanied with nonverbal communication and is moderated by demographic features, personality traits, type of relationship between the sender and receiver, etc. (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). However, in an online format, many of this is either missing or unknown. For example, a few women on this blog might be slightly familiar with some of the demographic information of other users in the blog, but due to the anonymity on the site, it is reasonable to assume that they do not know very much about each other. Without that information, I anticipated requests for emotional support to be different.

In this blog, the very nature that daughters are writing on the blog might be an unintentional request for emotional support. Being that the blog is very conversational and public, daughters were aware that their posts will not only be read, but will also be commented

on. They probably assumed that, upon posting to the blog, someone else will probably comment on it. Because they understood this, daughters probably wrote information that they would like others to read and comment on. Thus, the action of writing and posting to the blog at all might be an unintentional request for emotional support.

Another characteristic of some the requests for emotional support include rhetorical questions. Many daughters in this blog posed questions that did not necessarily need to be answered but still invited a response of emotional support. For example, one daughter wrote, “The hardest thing you’re dealing with and that I deal with still is the guilt and the anger. Why didn’t she love me enough to stop drinking? Why couldn’t I do anything?” (05042007_3).¹ Although these questions did not require a response, such open-ended questions allowed other users to provide emotional support. Another common form of rhetorical question included after a daughter stated a particular thing and then says “ya know?” For example, one daughter wrote “This is the only place I could say that, and you guys understand, I’m afraid in the world of women with mother’s it would sound like “whew I’m sure glad she died and I didn’t” ya know?” (04032007_1). While this also did not require a response, it provided a clear opportunity for other daughters to provide emotional support. It was not clear whether the daughters used rhetorical questions intentionally or unintentionally to receive emotional support.

A very common characteristic of requesting emotional support was explicitly asking for it. This was exhibited throughout many of the posts, and there was always a response. For example, one daughter wrote, “Guess you guys will have to be the ones to listen to me bitch, since I don’t have a mum anymore” (04012007_1). Another daughter wrote, “Only people who understand what losing a mum is like know how hard it is, and I hope I can offer you all support,

¹ These identifiers indicate the date the blog was posted and the chronological order it was in if multiple were posted on that particular day.

as well as I hope to get from you” (04022007_2). These two daughters were explicitly asking for support and received it in return.

Some daughters expressed gratefulness for the previous emotional support they received and, in turn, received even more emotional support. Whether this was an intentional implicit request for social support or not, it most definitely invites more emotional support. For example, one daughter wrote “I knew you guys would get it here.” ... “I’m so glad I found these boards. I have now found a few grieving groups and I already feel a bit better.” (04032007_1). Although this daughter was merely expressing her gratefulness for the group supporting her, this post was immediately followed with more social support. Similarly, another daughter wrote “Thank you, for commenting. It’s nice to know that some people still care.” (04112007_2). Again, this post was followed by more social support.

In this case, I wondered why after expressing gratefulness a daughter is met with more social support. I speculate that daughters follow with more social support because they know they are doing something right. In such a sensitive topic, many daughters probably worry that they are saying the “right” things. In an instance where a support recipient responds positively, the other daughters might be more inclined to continue giving the emotional social support.

Finally, it appeared that, the more detail and emotion the daughter described in her post, the more emotional social support she received. For example, there were many daughters that provided very rich, emotion-laden stories about how their mothers passed away. Below is a post from May 9, 2009 where a daughter describes that her mother committed suicide.

momlessdaughter: My mo died two years ago.. It was her bi - Windows Internet Explorer

http://momlessdaughter.livejournal.com/1021640.html

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momlessdaughter: My mo died two years ago.. It...

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 DTBTHIN ([kass_kass](#)) wrote in [momlessdaughter](#),
 2009-05-09 19:16:00



My mo died two years ago.. It was her birthday may 3rd..

We were in a fight so we were not talking witch is why her body sat in her apartment for a week and a half before the nabours complained about a smell.. Her body emptied itself all over the floor and the computer desk.. She was sitting on her computer.. The blood and liquids were all over and her hair had fallen out.. When i went to get the cat I couldn't breath the smell was so bad.. Well i had to plan the funeral myself and everything .. I dont have any other family members just a brother that was adopted and another one that i didn't know how to find.. The hardest part of it all was the part where i had to look
 I tell everyone my mom had M.S. and died.. I dont need people knowing I killed my mother..


[Post a new comment](#) 8 comments

 [blue_cat](#)
 2009-05-10 12:14 am UTC [link](#) [Collapse](#)

I am so sorry. You did not kill your mother, fights are kinda normal, killing yourself over one is sad. She made the choice to die, not you.


(hug) ~ I wish there was more I could say or do.

[Reply](#)

 [kass_kass](#)
 2009-05-10 12:20 am UTC

i told her i wish she would die so i can be free and not have to take care of her anymore.. She was crippled and depressed i shoulda known she would think i meant it..

[Reply](#)


 [blue_cat](#)
 2009-05-10 12:28 am UTC

You were 20, and she should have known you were not serious.

No matter what she had a choice. she made it.

It is always going to be a 'what if?' ~ what if you hadn't had the fight, would it have happened over something else? Maybe, maybe not.

[Reply](#)




[heathrow](#)
2009-05-10 12:50 am UTC

Her death is not your fault!
She had psychological issues and her choosing to take her life is not your fault.

I'm so sorry you are dealing with this. Please talk to a counselor about this.


[Reply](#)



[wwmd29](#)
2009-05-10 01:11 am UTC

I'm so sorry you have had to deal with this.
I agree with the other posters you did not kill her.
She was obviously sick. I'm sorry she left that note.
I too am any only "child" I had to clean up her room after the ambulance took her away, when I got home from the hospital. It was miserable. so I can not imagine having to do what you had to do.
I am so sorry.


[Reply](#)



[lux_roark](#)
2009-05-10 01:53 am UTC [link](#) [Collapse](#)

I blamed myself for my moms suicide as well, because of what she wrote in her journal. It's not your fault though. She was sick and in a lot of pain and decided to end it the only way she knew how.

[Reply](#)



[frumiousb](#)
2009-05-10 06:06 am UTC

Hey-- it's been 13 years now since my mother killed herself, and I know how hard it is to let go of the guilt. The last conversation that I had with my mother was also not a peach. For years she had been using me as a therapist regarding her relationship with my dad, and on advice from my own shrink I set boundaries and told her that I wasn't a good person for that. Two weeks later she was dead. And so it goes.


But you know what? It wasn't my fault and it wasn't your fault, either. Suicide is the fault of the person who takes their own life. I hate it "so much" when people glamorize suicide-- someone takes the pain that they can't live with and passes it on to their survivors.

Her suicide ripped my life to pieces. I destroyed my good relationship. I fled to Europe. I cut off any ties that I might have had. Self-punishment, fear of loss, guilt... But it does get better.

And, here's the other thing. You are not alone. I don't know where you are, but you might consider looking for groups who focus on survivors of suicide-- there is also a suicide survivor group here on livejournal. (not for survivors of attempts-- the people left behind.) I found that someone who lost their mother in a "normal" way just made me angrier. But people who've been through it can really help.

Good luck and strength to you. It wasn't your fault.

[Reply](#)



[g04book](#)
2009-05-18 02:33 pm UTC

I feel so bad for what you went through. No matter how much you may have hurt her, it is not an acceptable reason for her decision and the pain she caused you. We all make horrible mistakes and say mean things that we can't take back. Counseling may help you put your life back together and see that she needed help for her depression.

[Reply](#)

[Post a new comment](#) 8 comments

Figure 2. Emotional post. This figure illustrates a post from May 9, 2009 that is filled with emotional detail. The daughters follow the post with a significant amount emotional support.

These stories were often followed by responses of how daughters felt the same way, had similar experiences, etc. In posts that were brief and did not mention much feeling, other daughters seemed less inclined to post with as much emotional social support.

Requested Informational Social Support. Most commonly, daughters that were requesting informational social support explicitly asked for it. For example, one daughter wrote, “I guess I am asking you all, do you think that I am overreacting in the sense of not going to the wedding?” (04112007_1). Another daughter wrote,

So I’m moving. I decided about two weeks ago and I leave in 1.5. My mom died a little over a year ago and I decided to stay around for my dad after the death. ... I’m extremely emotional, but I know I’m making the right choice. Did anybody else have trouble leaving? (04262007_1)

Finally, another daughter wrote, “If anyone has any comments, or can give me some tips on how to get through this, please help.” (04112007_2). In these cases, all of the daughters directly asked for advice from the other daughters, and they were all met with a significant amount of informational support from other daughters.

Other than directly asking for it, informational support sometimes followed when a daughter would express her confusion with something. For example, when one daughter expressed in a post her confusion regarding her family and a funeral service process, other daughters responded with advice regarding how to navigate families and funeral homes.

Requested Support Conclusion. Although social support it often requested in these blogs, the majority of support that is requested is emotional. The purpose of the of the blog is for women to be able to come together to provide emotional support, so it makes sense that the

support being requested was emotional. However, one advantage to an environment that is largely emotional support is the opportunity to give informational support as well.

There were many ways in which a daughter in this blog requested emotional support but, unlike informational support, it was more implicit in nature. The characteristics of these requests included rhetorical questions, expressions of gratefulness, and rich detail and emotion. On the other hand, informational support requests were mostly explicit, as daughters were more likely to directly ask for advice.

The reason why daughters might have been more inclined to explicitly ask for informational support instead of emotional support is because of the sensitive nature of the topic. Although the daughters they were interacting with were experiencing similar things, she might still have been afraid to ask or say too much to the other daughters. A daughter might feel like she was asking too much when she was asking for emotional support. Because she knew that the other daughters were going through intense emotions, she might not have wanted to burden them with her emotions as well. However, asking for informational support, such as asking for advice on a particular topic, could be perceived as less burdensome, and thus, requested more explicitly.

Research Question 2: Provided Social Support

The second research question asked, “What types of social support messages do individuals in the Momless Daughter weblog community provide and what are the characteristics of these support messages?” Social support provided in an online support community sometimes looks different than in a normal face-to-face interaction (King and Moreggi, 1998; Winzelberg, 1997; Wright, 2002). Wright (2002) wrote that emotional support changes because there is missing nonverbal communication and informational support might change because of easily

accessible websites. After close analysis of the social support provided on this blog, it is clear that both emotional and informational support were provided in unique ways.

Provided Emotional Support. Emotional support was overwhelmingly common in the blog that I analyzed. Many of the daughters provided emotional support to each other. In fact, emotional support was seen in almost every data string that I analyzed, and that support contains many characteristics.

The first characteristic of the emotional support provided by individuals on the blog included expressions of acceptance. Especially for members new to the group, daughters were overly welcoming for anyone that would like to post. Many daughters seemed hesitant to write, especially in the beginning. The other daughters in the community, however, were often quick to provide a sense of acceptance. For example, one daughter wrote “You have friends here who understand what you are going through” (04042007_1). This emotional social support was usually accompanied with encouragement to disclose as often and as much as they would like. Expressions of acceptance seemed to make those new daughters feel welcome. As previous research has indicated, support that provides opportunity for the bereaved individual to express their emotions is perceived as helpful (Davidowitz & Myrick, 1984; Lehman, Ellard, & Wortman, 1986; Marwit & Carusa, 1998). This is probably why this characteristic of emotional social support seemed so widely accepted by bereaved daughters.

Another characteristic of provided social support was the expression of shared experiences. After a daughter wrote a post that described what she was going through, many daughters would often reciprocate with similar stories and encouragement. The point of this type of support was to decrease the lonely feelings of the bereaved daughter. For example, one daughter wrote “Things do change. It may be slow, but try to hang in there. I’m on at least 3

medications for my depression. I've been on anti-depressants for over 10 years. It has helped me a lot." (04042007_1). The purpose of this type of support was not to take the attention off of the original bereaved daughter but, instead, to allow her to feel as though she has friends going through similar situations. Previous research has shown that reciprocated disclosure might increase a person's willingness to continue disclosing (Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969). As the bereaved daughters communicate through this blog, the conversation may continue flowing because the daughters continue opening up to each other. They continuously share stories, experiences and emotions, and this disclosure is reciprocated with more openness by the other daughters.

As daughters spoke to each other across their messages, they would often reference the original post and some of the proceeding comments before it as they offered their social support. This would indicate to the original poster that she was following the conversation and had something meaningful that she wanted to contribute. Because the daughter had taken time to read the previous posts and comments before posting their response, the responses were more well-developed and encouraging for the other daughters. Additionally, it gave the string a conversational feel. This might be helpful in creating an increasingly relaxed environment for disclosure. As the conversational feel takes over, perhaps the daughters perceive they were talking to old friends instead of random women spread out throughout the world.

While there were no nonverbal cues on the site such as tone of voice or facial expression, the daughters on this blog found their own way of expressing nonvocal emotion. Many used emoticons to help express what they are saying. For example, many women would write their response and include a ":", meaning a happy face, or ":((", meaning a sad face after the statement. Other emoticons included were ";)", meaning a winking face or "<3", meaning a

heart or love. Finally, although not present to actually behave or act in a particular way towards the other daughter, many daughters use asterisks (*) to indicate that they would be performing a particular thing. Most notably, women write “*HUG*”, indicating that they were virtually giving a hug or that, if they were in a face-to-face interaction, they would give a hug. For example, one woman wrote “*Hug* I’m so sorry :(“ (05052007_1). In this statement, they were making a sad face, saying that they are sorry, and giving a hug. Although nonverbal communication is absent in computer mediated communication, the daughters in this blog express emotional support in unique ways.

Another characteristic of emotional support in this blog was using terms of endearment, such as “hun”. This term was used frequently and it seemed to serve as a bridge for the gap between some users. For example, one daughter wrote, “Ok, hun. Try talk to your Dad but put it that there are times you need a parent and it hurts that he isn’t around because you don’t have anyone else to go to.” (04082007_2). Although the two daughters don’t know each other personally, using a term of endearment, such as “hun” can bring the two closer together, allowing of a more intimate relationship.

Most of the emotional social support included words of encouragement. It was very common to read “Hang in there” or “You can do this” throughout many of the posts. As daughters struggled sometimes to get through the days without their mothers, the daughters were able to interact in this blog and were provided with lots of encouragement to survive the loss. For example, one daughter wrote,

That said, just remember that with 2000 years of medicine and they have yet to come up with a better healer than time. It’s hard to accept that because you can’t actively do anything to make it pass more quickly, but still know that it does help. (04012007_1)

Many of the daughters on this blog express a lot of pain and the encouragement from the other daughters seemed to help.

Another characteristic of social support from the daughters in this blog included positive comments about deceased mothers. It was common for a daughter to write stories about their mothers or post pictures of their mothers. Many daughters followed with nice things in response to the mother's personality, appearance, etc. For example, one daughter wrote, "Your mum was a very beautiful lady, I bet not only on the outside, but on the inside as well." (04112007_2). As other daughters said positive things about the deceased mothers, it might have made the bereaved daughter feel good and proud of her mother.

Finally, and most notably, when giving emotional social support, daughters continuously said how sorry they were for each others losses. For example, one daughter wrote "I'm so sorry this happened. You are way too young to have lost your mom." (04112007_2). Daughters seemed to be especially sensitive to each other's losses and were always expressing how sorry they were for each other.

Provided Informational Support. As Wright (2002) described, many of the informational support that was provided was based on advice from previous experiences. Many of the daughters were experiencing similar things and because of that, they were able to pass advice back and forth to each other. For example, one daughter posed a question about whether or not she should go to her father's wedding. She was upset that he was getting married so quickly after her mother's death, and she did not want to attend the wedding. Many daughters had experienced similar situations and expressed their advice. One daughter responded,

Honestly? IF you don't go you will- probably- make it a LOT more difficult to maintain the relationship with your Dad and form one with your step-mother- it is after all a fairly

major insult to anyone to say ‘I don’t want to come to your wedding because I don’t want you two to get married’. (04112007_1)

Although the advice that the daughters delivered was not always easy to hear, they delivered it nonetheless.

Another daughter described her battle with anti-depressant medication and was curious about other daughters that had experiences with it. One daughter responded, “As a fellow college student, I can feel the hurt and mixed feeling you are going through right now... *hugs*. One a side note, I would ditch any medication... Nothing good can come of it.” (04042007_1). This daughter was giving advice based on her previous experiences.

Although most of the informational support was in the form of advice, the most notable thing that daughters gave advice about was how to deal with loss. Many daughters came on to the blog looking for ways to cope. Again, the daughters offered advice. Although the advice was not always the easiest thing to hear, the daughters remained honest. For example, one daughter wrote, “I can promise you it will not always hurt as sharply as it does right now. It will get easier to get through each day, but it never stops sucking.” (04012007_1). Another daughter wrote,

Take time to write down any positive memories you can. You’ll need that list when she’s gone. Secure yourself into a support system, and put safe, strong people around you. You’ll have more to latch onto when you start missing the relationship you could have had. (05042007_1)

Although I only give brief examples, this blog was filled with informational support on how to cope. Especially because daughters might not have people that understand their

experiences in “real life”, they look to others in this online format to help them through the difficult time.

Provided Support Conclusion. Research has previously indicated that there are a variety of things that moderate provided social support (Burlinson & MacGeorge, 2002). One of these moderators is the expertise of the provider. In reading these blogs, I believe that the expertise of the provider played an integral role in the delivering of social support. The daughters came to this blog for a particular reason: to find women that were going through similar situations. If they were looking on the blog for those women, it means they are probably having a hard time in “real life” finding other women that can understand them. Thus, the women on this blog had expertise that other daughters do not.

I would be interested in seeing how the same type of social support messages would be perceived if the provider had a living mother. Because the daughters are all aware that each social support provider was a bereaved daughter too, the social support is always accompanied with at least a small bit of understanding. However, because it is such a sensitive topic, I believe we might see different results if the provider was less of an “expert”, or in other words, a daughter with a living mother.

Lastly, throughout this blog, emotional and informational support were most often delivered together. Many of the comments and posts were neatly woven together with individual stories, emotional support, and informational support. In fact, I did not find one instance of informational support that was not expressed in tandem with emotional support. Therefore, I argue that messages of support requested and provided on this blog were dominated by emotional support messages.

Research Question 3: Turning Points

The third research question asked, “What mother-daughter turning points seem to be perceived as the most salient for momless daughters? In the coding of the blog entries for turning points, seven topical themes arose. In this online community, daughters discussed seven different turning points salient to the mother-daughter relationship. Each of these turnings points will be discussed individually.

Requesting Advice while Dating. One issue discussed in the postings on the blogs focused on the daughters dating lives. Many daughters described their significant others on the blog and expressed that they were disappointed that they couldn’t ask for dating advice from their mothers and that their mothers would never meet their significant others.

For example, one daughter reflected on how she wishes that her mother was there so that she could ask for dating advice and support:

All I want, more than anything in the world, is a mom I could talk to about this boy. I want my mom that I could ask for advice for about this boy, and go on for hours about how much I really like this boy, and for her to tell me if this boy is even worth my time, and to be there for me and tell me that everything will be OK when this boy makes me cry, only to listen to how much I still really like this boy the very next day. (05032007_1)

When daughters begin dating, the relationship between a mother and daughter might shift, especially as advice and support are passed. This is a time where daughters might grow closer to their mothers (Fischer, 1981). However, in an instance where a mother is deceased, the turning point may look significantly different. Instead of a daughter growing closer to her mother, a bereaved daughter might yearn for those things that she cannot receive, such as support, advice, and a meeting between mother and significant other. The daughters in this blog described how unfair it was that other daughters are able to experience this turning point with

living mothers. For living mother-daughter dyads, this turning point might be an exciting one. As mother and the significant other meet each other, opportunities arise for their relationship development, which might result in strengthening the mother-daughter relationship. For motherless daughters, these blogs describe that the process of daughters dating might be a painful one, as she is reminded that her mother cannot be there to give the support, advice, and meetings that she might yearn for.

Most notably, when the daughters described this, they often used the word “unfair”. By using this word, daughters might have been indicating that, because they were missing their mother during this turning point, they are somehow being cheated. When using the word “unfair”, daughters were also indicating that having Mom available during this turning point would be “fair”. While this points out something about momless daughters—that they feel cheated when Mom isn’t there—it also indicates something about daughters with living mothers. This indicates that, in order for a turning point to be “fair”, Mom might have to be present.

Leaving Home. Another issue discussed in the postings on the blogs focused on daughters moving out and leaving their home. Many daughters described feeling hesitant about leaving home for a variety of reasons. Some daughters described that it was difficult because they did not want to leave a surviving parent alone, while others were hesitant to leave because they felt it was too close to the time when her mother died. Even though some of the daughters reported that it is the “right time” to leave, they were still hesitant to leave.

For example, one daughter described her decision-making process to take a job that required her to move out and leave her surviving father:

So I’m moving. I decided about two weeks ago and I leave in 1.5. My mom died a little over a year ago and I decided to stay around for my dad after her death. I, however,

cannot get a job in my field and I feel like I've become stuck. I was offered a job about 1,800 miles from my dad, but it just feels right. He has a girlfriend now- only about 2 months, and I like her a lot. This also helps with the fact that I'm leaving- he won't be alone. I'm extremely emotional, but I know I'm making the right choice. Did anybody else have trouble leaving? (04262007_1)

When a daughter leaves home, the relationship might shift for a living mother-daughter dyad. This might be an instance where the daughter grows up as she develops a life of her own outside of the home. It might be an opportunity for the mother and daughter to develop more of a friendship. However, the daughters in this blog seemed to struggle with this turning point. Despite feeling it might be an appropriate move, many daughters described it as a confusing time period that is accompanied with many emotions, most notably, sadness and fear of leaving surviving family members.

Although many daughters noted that they were sad and confused, the daughters didn't always clearly identify why they were sad or confused. Silverman (1987) indicates that bereaved daughters might have to grow up before their time and fill the shoes of their deceased parent. Perhaps this could be the reason why daughters are hesitant to leave surviving parents and siblings. Some daughters might begin taking on the role of the mother. Typically, behaviors constituted by a motherly role include taking care of a spouse and children. If a daughter takes on that role, they could be left feeling torn—how can they justify leaving the role of taking care of the surviving spouse and children?

The blogs also indicated that daughters might not leave home because it was “too close” to when their mothers passed away. This leads me to wonder why it is so hard to leave. I believe this question might be more thoroughly answered in the results of my research question

about maintaining a connection but, in the analysis of this blog, I have found that daughters sometimes stay connected to their mothers by locating a place in which she remains living. In this case, a daughter might believe that, although Mom is gone, she still resides in the home in a more spiritual sense; that she still sits in her favorite room, still cooks in the kitchen, or still does gardening in the backyard. If that is the case—if daughters do believe that their mothers reside in the home, it is reasonable to understand why it is difficult for a daughter to leave the home. Why should she leave when she yearns to stay close to her Mom?

However, one issue that is not clearly defined in this blog is the definition of “home”. While not explicitly stated, the reader is left to assume that the “home” that the daughters are describing is one that they were living in with their mothers when their mothers passed away. However, this was never clearly stated by the daughters, and the circumstances could be drastically different for many of the daughters, even though they are discussing the same topic. Thus, the results here indicate that “leaving home” is a difficult process for a bereaved daughter, but more circumstantial information would be helpful.

Marriage. Another issue discussed in the postings on the blogs focused on the daughters getting married. Previous research has indicated that this is an important turning point in the mother-daughter relationship (Fischer, 1981). However we have no research that describes this turning point in the absence of a mother. In the blog entries, some daughters described extremely painful feelings regarding their wedding because their mother is not present to both prepare for and attend the wedding. A few of the daughters even questioned how much they value getting married now, as they felt that their mother’s presence was such an integral part to the wedding process.

For example, one daughter described some of the painful feelings she was experiencing during her wedding planning:

I just recently got engaged, and while I found the dress I want online, there are a lot of things I'm not looking forward to while planning my wedding. It sucks reading these books and seeing all the "mother of the bride" stuff. It makes it even harder for me, because when we found out my mom had cancer, she told me she wasn't leaving me until she saw me get married and have kids. My mom died eight months later, and it's now two years after that. Yeah, I can probably take my soon-to-be-mother-in-law, but it won't be the same. (05202007_1)

Typically, discussion regarding marriage and wedding planning was brought up when one daughter described a sad feeling she was having regarding her wedding planning. Following the post, there were many daughters that responded with her descriptions of their past experiences and how they coped with their anxiety and sadness about a potential or upcoming wedding. This turning point generated quite a bit of discussion and it seemed as though many active users had feeling towards it.

The discussion was broken into two parts: daughters describing their past experiences and other daughters describing potential upcoming experiences. Those daughters describing potential upcoming weddings or wedding planning often expressed feelings of disbelief by saying something similar to, "I can't believe she won't see me get married." Also, the daughters described they had trouble locating the value of the wedding since their mother would be gone, for example, by saying something similar to, "If she isn't there, what's the point?" Finally, many of the motherless daughters described anger because their mothers will not be there. These types of feelings and experiences seem different from those daughters with a living mother that are

planning a wedding. For a living mother-daughter dyad, this could be an exciting time as the two engage in wedding rituals together. However, for some motherless daughters, this time is filled with sadness, disbelief, and anger.

The other participation in this discussion was generated by daughters who have experienced their weddings without their mothers. Many of these daughters described that the wedding planning process and the wedding were difficult and generated sadness. Most of the time, their participation was accompanied with support for the other daughters that are anticipating their wedding planning. Typically, the support provided was emotional support, as they expressed their empathy for the wedding-planning daughters.

Similar to the discussion regarding dating, daughters often expressed disbelief and a sense of “this is unfair”. Indicating that it isn’t fair might direct us to believe that daughters believe that marriages are “more fair” when Mom is available.

Finally, a lot of the discussion surrounding weddings included “replacement moms”, or, available women that have the potential to engage in particular mother-daughter rituals with the motherless daughter (i.e. Picking out a wedding dress). Many of the daughters describe “I could do this with my mother-in-law” or “I know that my grandmother is available”. Although many discussed having other women that were capable in assisting them, most described it with a sense of sadness. For example, in the post described above, the daughter wrote “Yeah, I can probably take my soon-to-be-mother-in-law, but it won't be the same” (05202007_1). This type of response towards replacement moms was common. While the daughters acknowledged that they had other options, they also expressed that they were not appealing options. This is especially important as we continue to analyze the significance of wedding planning and a wedding for a daughter. It is not just at the wedding that a daughter might experience unpleasant feelings

regarding her mother's loss. Instead, a daughter might have feelings of sadness, anger, or disbelief throughout the entire wedding planning process as well.

Having Children. The issue of having children was commonly discussed in these online blogs. In previous research, we have seen that this is an important turning point in the mother-daughter relationship (Fischer, 1981). However, similar to the marriage turning point, we have no research that describes this turning point in the absence of a mother. In coding of the blogs, it appeared that the discussion was broken into two parts: discussion regarding anticipation of having children and discussion regarding previous experiences of having children.

The discussion surrounding the anticipation of having children was wrought with expressions of very painful feelings. Many women questioned how they could possibly have their children without the support from their mothers. As these daughters thought about the support they would require, many described feelings of sadness because they will be missing their mother's advice. Also, some daughters expressed anger and sadness that their mothers will not be present to physically see them raise children. Many daughters described disbelief, that is, "I can't believe she won't be here". Finally, many daughters described frustration and sadness that their mother will not have the opportunity to be a grandmother to their children.

For example, one woman described briefly about how she wished she had children previously so her mother could be a grandmother: "I'm 32 and I wish I had gotten married and had kids. Mum wanted to be a grandmother so badly." (05062007_1)

The second part of the discussion included participation from daughters that described their previous experiences of having children without their mothers. When women described having children without their mothers, they expressed conflicting feelings. While they described excitement and happiness to have a child, many also expressed a deep sadness because there

mothers were not there. For example, one daughter describes her feelings of sadness when she had her child:

The day I had my first child I cried soo hard. My husband thinking whats wrong with me... maybe it's just because of the relief of having the baby after a long and hard labor/delivery... but it wasn't that. I was sad... hurt... and just heart broken that she isn't in this world to see my children... to see me... that she isn't here. (05112007_2)

Most of the discussion surrounded the statement of "I can't believe she won't meet my children". This clearly indicates that some daughters expect their mothers to meet their children. A mother passing away before a daughter has children violates this expectation, and as a result, we see the daughters describing a state of disbelief, anger, and sadness rather than acceptance of tolerance. Along with other consequences of bereavement, for motherless daughters, this expectancy violation is certainly unique from other dyads.

Typically the topic of marriage generated substantial discussion, as many of the active users described feelings of sadness, anger, or frustration in posts and/or comments to each other. Although the discussion was broken into two types of responses, the two responses were woven together to develop a longer discussion developed through comments on original posts. It appeared as though the issue raised a significant amount of emotion for these daughters, as original posts that discussed this issue were commonly met with a considerable amount of comments.

Graduating From School. Another turning point that was salient for the motherless daughters included graduating from school. The schools that were described here included both college/universities and high school. Much of this discussion generated similar feelings to what I had seen in previous turning points: sadness and disbelief.

For a living mother-daughter relationship, this turning point can be a very important one. For some daughters, graduating high school could mean that she leaves the home to attend college. At this point, one can expect a big shift in the mother-daughter relationship, especially as they might not be seeing or talking as often as they did originally. Similarly, leaving to attend college could make a daughter much more independent, as she could be forced to engage in many different adult responsibilities on her. Although this could create space between the mother and daughter, it also might create a closer relationship as a daughter contacts her mother for advice and support. For a daughter that is graduating from college, it might mean entering the workforce as an adult juggling many responsibilities, including full independence.

Although the daughters cannot experience this shift in the relationship, many motherless daughters find this turning point very difficult. Although I noted many behaviors accompanied with graduating (i.e. Moving out, accepting more responsibilities), motherless daughters in this blog talk less about them. Instead, the daughters focus mostly on the act of graduating or graduation ceremony. They note that they are sad or that they “can’t believe” that their mothers will not be there to see them graduate.

Although the daughters do not clearly note why they desire their mother’s presence during the graduation, we can speculate that it could be for two reasons. The first—graduating might be a symbolic representation of a young woman heading into adulthood. In the cases of many of these daughters, the mother might have been a large part of their upbringing. Establishing independence from the child years is a significant change for their daughter and she might desire her mother’s presence during that point. However, her mother not being available might make a daughter angry and sad.

The other reason why a daughter might desire her mother's presence is because obtaining a good education might have been one of Mom's expectations. For example, a daughter in the blog wrote "I went to college after high school because that's what was expected of me" (04192007_1). Another example from a daughter expressed why she ultimately went to school, "My mom asked (begged) me to do a few things before she died... finish high school, finish college, get a job, get married" (04032007_1). It seems that one of the reasons why some daughters on this blog finished high school and college was because their mothers wanted them to. However, when they completed Mom's expectations, it would be reasonable to assume that they would have liked their mother present. When their mothers were not there to see the completion of the work, daughters could be left feeling angry and sad.

Birthdays. Another category that arose during the coding was birthdays. This category was broken down into two parts: some daughters expressed sadness on or around their birthdays because their mother wasn't there. Secondly, some daughters expressed sadness regarding upcoming large birthdays (i.e. turning 18, 21, etc).

First, some of the posts on this blog seemed to be motivated by birthdays. More specifically, women dedicated entire posts to describe that it was their birthday and they were sad because their mothers were not present. For example, one daughter wrote

I'm 21 and it was my birthday two weeks ago, the first without my mum, its so funny, everyone is so happy and smiling and all I want to do is cry. I feel so raw and dead inside and no matter what I do nothing seems to help. (04202007_3)

In these posts, daughters expressed feelings of sadness and loneliness. Many of the daughters described how happy everyone else seemed and how sad she felt.

Some research indicates that there is a “conspiracy of silence” surrounding death, meaning that there is consistent avoidance of references to the loss (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005). Because there were posts dedicated entirely to the topic of “Today is my birthday and everyone is happy except me”, we can suspect that birthdays might be an instance of when bereaved individuals are more likely to experience that “conspiracy of silence”. Some bereaved daughters in this blog expressed intense feelings of loneliness on their birthday, and this might be generated by the lack of communication regarding those feeling of sadness.

The second part of the birthday discussion included feelings of sadness surrounding upcoming big birthdays (i.e. 18, 21, etc.). For example, one bereaved daughter wrote “It makes me really sad, when I realize that she isn’t going to be there, waking me up in the morning, and when I start thinking about how she is never going to see me on my 18th birthday” (04112007_2). The daughters, over and over, express deep feeling of sadness when they anticipate their mothers not being present during their birthdays.

Although, again for this category, it is not clear why daughters are anticipating such events and are already sad about them. Perhaps, again, these daughters have an expectation that Mom will be present during this time—that it is part of the Mom’s responsibility to be available. However, when Mom dies, the expectation of her being present during those large moments is shattered. The sudden shattering of that expectation might result in these deep feeling of sadness.

Employment. When a daughter with a living mother finds her full-time employment that she enjoys, the relationship with a mother might change even more (Fischer, 1981). For example, a daughter might officially feel as though she is an adult. Here she may carry full responsibilities that an adult might have and no longer require the help of her mother. In this

instance, the mother and daughter might see a large change in the relationship as the two become a set of friends rather than a parent-child relationship. However, when Mom is not present for this turning point, the daughters on this blog seem to have mixed responses.

The daughters on this blog seem to understand the importance of having full-time work. They express desire to have a full-time job that they enjoy and consistently bring this up as something that is frustrating (if they are not able to obtain the work) or a sense of contentment (if they have reliable work). In either situation, Mom seems to be an important part of their thought process.

When daughters have reliable work that they enjoy, the daughters on this blog seem to be content with it. Additionally, they write that having a reliable enjoyable career would be something that their mother would be proud of. For example, one woman wrote “But at least she saw me get a license for a job that can be a career” (04192007_1). The daughters seem as though having a reliable enjoyable job—something that Mom would be proud of—is something that helps them through the coping process because they are doing something that Mom wanted them to.

On the other hand, when the daughters on this blog do not have a reliable and enjoyable career, the daughters seem more lost, sad, and confused. For example, one woman wrote

I often worry about whether my mum would be proud of me, especially as I’ve been so sick with depression and an eating disorder recently, and feel like I’m wasting my life away. I had dreams to work in an ambulance too- and my mum really encouraged that dream. (04192007_1)

The daughters would sometimes write about how they wonder if their mothers would be proud of them, even though they did not have a reliable enjoyable career.

Overall, it seems as though a good career seemed to help the coping process for some of the bereaved daughters. Despite being unhelpful or helpful, though, this life event was especially salient for the bereaved daughters on this blog, as it came up many times in discussion. Whether or not they had a good career seemed to determine whether or not their mothers would be proud of them. Then, depending on whether they have determined that their mother would be proud or not, they felt better or worse. Thus, the presence or absence of work certainly seems to influence the grieving process for these bereaved women.

Turning Points Conclusion. Through the analysis of this research question, there were many turning points that are salient for a motherless daughter. Many of these turning points are the same ones that are salient for a daughter that has a living mother. However, it is absolutely clear that turning points look different to bereaved daughters. The turning points for these motherless daughters were often wrought with feelings of deep sadness, anger, anxiety, and feelings of being cheated. For the most part, it was hard for the daughters to have to go through the turning points alone and even more frustrating that the turning points were accompanied with such strong negative emotions.

Throughout the findings, however, it seemed as though many of the daughters on this blog had expectations for their mother-daughter relationship (i.e. That Mom would be available to see her children, be there for birthdays, graduation, etc.) and, when their mothers passed away, those expectations were violated. The violation of these expectations resulted in many strong feelings, including sadness, anger, and disbelief. Although my analysis here was to find the turning points that were difficult to daughters, I would be extremely interested in seeing further research that applies the Expectancy Violations Theory to turning points in motherless daughter's life.

Research Question 4: Maintaining a Connection

The fourth research question asked, “In what ways do momless daughters report staying connected to their deceased mothers?” In coding blog entries for how daughters maintained a connection with their deceased mothers, twelve topical categories were identified. When an individual maintains a connection with a deceased individual, it means they remain loving someone who is physically gone from life but who remains a reference point and an object of affection (Sewell, 2002). Motherless daughters in this blog remain connected to their deceased mothers in twelve ways. Each of these will be discussed individually.

Thinking About/Remembering. Many daughters in this blog described that they thought about and remembered their mothers often—even as much as every single day. For example, one daughter wrote,

My Mom passed in 2002 and I often think I should call her, or even worse, I get mad at her for not calling (especially when doing something domestic). But what’s strange is that more often than not I take comfort in those thoughts. I would prefer to think of mom fondly, that I want to talk to her and that she has a reason to pop in and out of my day than to forget. (05062007_1)

For the daughters in this blog, remembering Mom kept her available and present. The daughters sometimes even expressed fear of forgetting about their mothers—as though forgetting for one day would mean that she really is gone. For the daughter quoted above, if she remembered consistently that she needs to call her mother or that her mother needs to call her, her mother is still available to her. Her mother is not gone—she is only one phone call away. This can help in the coping process. Accepting that their mothers are gone forever and are unable to be contacted can be a very difficult thing to accept. On the other hand, though, if a

daughter keeps her mother present by thinking about her and remembering her often, the loss might be easier to live with.

When analyzing the blog for how a daughter maintains a connection with her deceased mother, I asked myself why these daughters might maintain a connection in that particular way. Whether a conscious decision or not, daughters maintain connections in very different ways, and in my analysis, I considered the advantages to each way. In this instance, thinking about and remembering their mothers are relatively easy and private ways to maintain the connection. Especially because discussion of bereavement is considered a taboo topic, daughters might be hesitant to discuss their feelings outwardly (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005). However, remembering or thinking about their mothers is something that the daughters can do without anyone else even knowing that they are doing it, thus, making it an easier way to maintain the connection.

Visiting. Many daughters on this blog described that they allocated their mother's presence to a particular place and then visited that place when they wanted to "meet" with their mothers. A lot of the time, the location that the daughters allocated to was wherever the body was (i.e. cemetery). However, there were other daughters that reported differently.

In most cases, daughters described visiting gravesites. For example, one daughter wrote "My father and I went to her grave with flowers." (05062007_1). They understood that the gravesite is where mom lives and, to visit her, they should go there. Although it was only the physical body that resided in that location, many of the daughters felt that, if they visited the gravesite, they were also visiting their mother. They felt they were visiting more than just a deceased body. Thinking this way allowed those daughters to keep their mothers present. Mom is not really gone because the daughters were able to visit her at the gravesite.

Although many daughters reported that they could visit their mother at the gravesite, others were not as quick to agree. Some disclosed that they felt very empty when visiting a gravesite. For example, one daughter wrote

I went to her gravesite. I don't go often, maybe a little more than the number of times I post to this community. It's only about 20 minutes away from where I live, but I don't feel her there, and to be honest, I'm not exactly sure what I'm supposed to do when I am there. (04192007_1).

Here, this daughter describes a different point of view towards gravesites. While some daughters felt they could find their mothers there, others felt nothing towards the site.

However, many of the daughters that did not feel their mother's presence at the gravesite admitted that they had other places where they could locate their mothers. Some of these included particular room, coffee shops, in a garden, etc. While not a gravesite, these locations provided some of the same advantages that some gravesites do for motherless daughters. They are locations in which a daughter is able to find her mother. Her mother is not gone, because she lives in the garden, the bedroom, or the coffee shop, and by going there, they can easily connect with her again.

Why might daughters maintain a connection in this way? Again, it might be easy to do this. It is another way in which a daughter can continue the connection without disclosing to other individuals. Also, it might be comforting knowing that a daughter can linger in a particular place (i.e. at the gravesite, in the coffee shop) for as long as they need or want to, but when they are ready, they can leave. It is reasonable to assume that, when visiting Mom, a daughter might experience overwhelming emotions. To avoid encountering them at random, if a daughter maintains a connection to her mother by allocating her to a specific place, a daughter has the

power to choose if or when she visits this place and, thus, experience those overwhelming emotions.

Talking About Her. Another way that some daughters on this blog maintain a connection with their mothers is talking about them. This task is incredibly complex for daughters as they must navigate societal expectations regarding discussion of bereavement.

There were many daughters that discussed the desire to talk about their mothers. They described that discussion surrounding their deceased mother helped them remember their mother. As the daughters were able to discuss memories, mothers stayed fresh in their mind, as though they were not really gone. Talking about their mothers helped the daughters stay connected.

Although the advantages of bereaved daughters talking about the mother include much more than just staying connected to her, it is a much more complicated task. As mentioned previously, discussion about the deceased can be perceived as a taboo or insensitive topic (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005). Additionally, while there are many helpful things to say, there are also many things that can be perceived as hurtful (Range, Walston, & Pollard, 1992). Thus, conversation about the deceased is often avoided. As one daughter wrote,

I lost my whole family when I lost my mamma, so I didn't really expect people to remember by it was still hard to know people were trying to avoid talking about her with me, when all I wanted to do was talk about her! (04012007_1)

So, even if a daughter typically maintains a connection to her mother by talking about her, she might be met with societal roadblocks.

Although it is a shame that discussion is often avoided despite the healthy implications, it also emphasizes the importance of the blog that I am analyzing. In this blog, I might be finding that maintaining a connection by talking about their mothers is more prevalent online than in the

“real world”. Because daughters are able to communicate with other daughters dealing with the same issues, they may be more inclined to talk about memories and, thus, maintain a connection that way.

When I analyze why a daughter might maintain a connection with her mother in this way, especially because it is often complicated with society expectations, I speculate that a daughter is accomplishing multiple tasks. While she discusses her mother, she is maintaining a connection but, more than likely, she is also giving and receiving social support. Both maintaining a connection and the passing of social support is incredibly helpful in the grieving process, which might make this form of maintaining a connection an advantageous one, despite its potential consequences.

Songs and Poetry. An overwhelming amount of bereaved daughters on this blog remained connected to their mothers through song and poetry. There were many daughters that shared lyrics of songs and poetry in this blog to help other daughters also. Most notably, however, it seemed that there were particular songs and poems for many of the daughters that reminded them of their mothers. When they heard or read that song or poem, they would think of their mother and past memories of their mother. Then the daughters are able to stay connected to their mothers through the memories. For example, one daughter wrote,

I get teary every time I hear this song, but I still sing it for my daughter when it comes on the radio- my mom loved to hear her kids sing, so I like to think it makes her smile when I sing for my kids (05112007_1)

This quote is a testament to how lyrics to a song can keep a connection between a mother and daughter alive. When the daughter hears this song, she does not think that her mom is gone. Instead, she imagines her mom present and smiling.

Why might a daughter maintain a connection through song and poetry? I speculate, first, that the daughter can do this without complicated disclosures to others. This, in itself, is advantageous, as I have discussed the implications accompanied with disclosing. Additionally, she can choose when to listen to or read poetry and, thus, remember her mom. Similar to allocating a place for the presence of her mother, a daughter can choose to linger in lyrics or poetry, feel the deep rooted feelings, and leave when she feels she is ready. Except for in the rare instance that a song starts playing at an unexpected time, a daughter, more or less, has complete control. During a time that feels so out of control, the fact that she control over when and how to connect with Mom and feel those feelings might be comforting.

Activities that Remind the Daughter of Mom. Although not overly prevalent, this category emerged in the analysis of the blog. To maintain a connection with their mothers, some daughters would engage in activities that reminded them of their mothers. For example, one daughter wrote “I also make sure I eat some of my mom’s favorite foods, and do thing that remind me of her (like the laundry)” (04262007_1). As the daughter engages in different activities, like eating Mom’s favorite foods, she begins to think about her mother and remember memories, thus keeping the connection with her mother alive.

Although this category is not prevalent throughout the blog, it was still an important category to mention. Similar to some of the previous forms of maintaining a connection, this way is a deliberate action from the daughter. The daughter intends on taking part in activities that remind her of her mom to keep her mother connected to her life. Similarly, the advantages include avoiding complication discussions with others as well as being able to engage and leave the behaviors at any given time. However, taking part in activities that remind her of her mother might do more than just visiting a particular location. In this instance, a daughter might feel as

though she is almost becoming part of her mother. Rather than just visiting her mother, she is engaging in behavior that her mother previously done, thus, making her feel as though she is a part of her mother. By becoming part of her mother, she is keeping the connection alive.

Financial Donations. This category was also not very prevalent, but nonetheless, warranted description. A few of the daughters in this blog mentioned that they make financial donations to hospitals, societies, departments, etc that helped their mothers. For example, one daughter wrote,

For my mom's birthday I always make a donation to the Oncology department where she was treated. And for Mother's Day I make a donation to the American Cancer Society (though I may find a smaller organization that can better use the money). (04262007_1)

In this instance, a daughter made a financial donation to two different organizations that helped their mothers.

By making these contributions, daughters are deliberately choosing not to forget their mothers. When the contributions are made, they are thinking about their mothers and are often remembering the struggles that their mothers had to go through, thus keeping the connection alive.

Similar to some of the previous ways of maintaining a connection, this is a very private way to remember their mothers. Daughters may feel as though that they are accomplishing multiple things by making this donation. Not only are they keeping a connection with their mothers, but they are also providing resources for organizations so that, hopefully, future families will not endure what they did. By making the contribution, daughters are able to stay connected to their mothers and feel good about contributing to the future.

Guilt. Guilt was a category that arose that was more complex than the others. Daughters remained connected to their mothers through the guilt that they felt regarding their mother's death. Unlike many of the previous ways to maintain connections, guilt is generally not deliberate and does not usually accompany positive feelings. Many daughters, though, remain connected to their mother by continuously feeling guilty for how or why she died.

For example, one daughter wrote,

My mother's health had been declining the past few years- all of my nightmares were coming true. My entire childhood I worried over her high blood pressure. And then Arthritis. And then heart disease. Her weight. The broken tendon in her knee.... I want to help her, but I never knew how. This year I took a course in holistic health practices. I was going to be finished in two months. She started taking supplements I told her to. I could tell she was really going to try this time. When she had her stroke, as it turn out, she hadn't been taking her bloodpressure medicine because it interacted with her Arthritis medication. I hadn't know. I worry now that I may have mislead her somehow. I worry she may have thought that my supplements would cure her fast enough that she wouldn't be in danger. I feel like I should have paid more attention. (05062007_1)

Another daughter wrote, "I also completely understand the guilt. Why didn't I push her to go to the doctor? Why didn't I admit how sick she was? I wanted to pretend she was feeling better" (05062007_1).

Both of these daughters, and many more, felt a tremendous amount of guilt for losing their mother. Whether they liked it or not, those reoccurring feelings of guilt connected them to their mothers often. As many of them ruminated about how they could have done more before

their mother's death, they were reminded over and over of their mother, thus, keeping that connection alive.

This category has drastically different implications for a daughter than previous ones. The previous categories, for the most part, kept the daughter connected to her mother in a positive way. This, on the other hand, kept the daughters in a negative state of mind. Although it provided opportunity for the daughters to pass a significant amount of social support back and forth, it also suggested that maintaining a connection with deceased mothers may be accompanied with a considerable amount of pain.

Meeting Expectations. This unique way of maintaining a connection emerged as I analyzed the blog. Even though the mothers have died, some daughters in the blog kept them alive by still striving to meet their expectations. The expectations that the daughters strived to meet varied. Some daughters continued to try to fulfill the expectation of graduating school, getting married, or having children. Another daughter wrote about how her mother would expect her to continue living a happy life, which she struggled to do, as she was battling thoughts of suicide. Whatever the expectation was, some of the daughters on this blog would often ask themselves "Would my mother be proud of what I am doing right now?". For example, one daughter wrote "I wish I had done more with my life. I wish I was able to make my mother proud. I wonder if she would be happy with how my life has gone so far" (04192007_1). Even though the mothers are gone, a few daughters on this blog still considered their mother's expectations and had a desire to meet them.

In situations where daughters perceived that they did not or were not meeting their expectations, some of them would discuss how they planned to alter or change their behavior so that their mother would be proud. On the other hand, those that did not plan on changing their

behavior expressed feelings of sadness and disappointment because they believed their mother would not be proud. Despite the fact that the mother has passed away, some daughters still strived to meet their expectations. This, inherently, kept the daughter connected to the mother. As she thought of her mother's expectations and strived to meet them, she kept the relationship connected.

When I speculate about why a daughter would do this, I consider that this is still another private way in which daughters might maintain the connection to their mothers. In this form, a daughter is not required to discuss their goals with any one else, nor do they necessarily have to describe why they are attempting to attain those goals. Relatively speaking, a daughter might be able to maintain this type of connection without anybody's help. Additionally, maintaining a connection with their mothers in this fashion not only allows for the connection, but it might also keep a daughter on a "good track", that is, they will probably stay goal-oriented and keeping their life in motion. This would certainly have a positive effect on the grieving process as well.

Looking Alike. Although not an overly prevalent category, looking alike emerged as one of the ways daughters maintained a connection with their mothers. Some daughters on this blog discussed instances in their life where individuals reported that they look similar to their mother. Even if the daughter could not see it herself, the daughters seemed grateful that a part of them reminded others of their mother.

When the daughters felt or heard that they looked like their mothers, there was a connection between the daughter and deceased mother. The daughter, when she was told she looks like her mother, seemed to feel she embodied her deceased mother somehow—as if the mother continued living on within her. That means, then, that Mom was not really gone. Instead, it means Mom lives partially inside of the daughter.

Although this is certainly not an option for all of the daughters, for those that did experience this, it is another way of privately maintaining a connection with the mother. Although other individuals may comment on the physical appearance similarities, only the daughter understands the connection that it brings.

Physical Objects. Another way that daughters stay connected to their mothers is through physical objects. Some daughters in this blog reported holding onto particular belongings because it reminded them of their mothers. For example, one daughter wrote,

Last Easter she got me a little stuffed pink bunny, and it now sits on my computer desk. It's a constant reminder of her last couple weeks. I have to keep my cats from attacking it and making it there own special chew-toy" (04122007_2)

In this case, even though the cats want it as a play-toy, this daughter holds onto the stuffed pink bunny because it reminds of her mother.

Another daughter wrote,

As bad as our relationship was, after I left home, my mother sent me daisies every year on Easter. They are my favorite flowers. I miss getting those every year. My sister Cindy gave them to me the year after Mom died, but never since. (04092007_1)

Although the daughter didn't have daisies all the time, they are a physical object that reminded her of her mother.

There were many daughters that described different objects that they hold onto because it reminds them of their mothers. Some objects include old greeting cards, more stuffed animals, mother's personal belongings, etc. When daughters see the physical objects, they are reminded of their mothers and the connection between them stay alive.

Similar to other forms, this is a relatively private way of maintaining a connection. Although others might see that she is holding onto a physical object, they might not understand the importance or the meaning behind the object. Additionally, daughters might maintain a connection with their mother this way because it is another form that they can control. When they would like to think about their mothers, they are able to take out these physical objects. However, in times where they do not want to be reminded as easily, they have the control to put these physical objects away until they are ready to take them out. Having that control might be comforting to some daughters.

Feeling the Presence of Her. This category is a very common in bereavement research. Many daughters on the blog reported that they maintained a connection with their mother because they felt her presence at certain times and/or locations. For example, one daughter wrote,

I think of how she will never see me married, and never get a chance to be a grandmother to my future children. It's hard to get past those thought, but I have to tell myself that somewhere she's out there and watching over me, and really she IS here. (05062007_1)

In this instance, the daughter believes that Mom is not gone because she knows she is right there.

Another daughter wrote,

I saw Lorette Lynn play a couple months ago, and all I could think as she played was "I wish my mom was here... she'd love this." I thought this over and over, and during "Coalminer's Daughter" I felt a squeeze on my shoulder. I looked at my boyfriend and his hands were in his lap. (04122007_2)

Not only do some daughters believe that her mother's presence surrounds her, but some also believe that they feel her presence.

Feeling or believing in their mother's presence allowed them to stay connected with their deceased mothers. If they believed that their mothers were still available all around them, it means that their mothers were not gone. Feeling or believing in their mother's presence is another private way to maintain that connection and does require the assistance of anyone else.

Sharing Similar Illnesses. Although this category did not necessarily bring happy feelings to a bereaved daughter, some daughters reported staying connected to their mothers because they experienced some of the same illnesses that their mothers experienced. Some daughters in this blog reported having illnesses that their mothers battled with all of their life, while other daughters reported dealing with illnesses that ultimately killed their mothers. Regardless of the scenario, both allowed the daughters to stay connected to their mothers.

For example, one daughter wrote,

I have the exact same problems my mum had which ultimately led to her death, I've been in and out of the hospital all year and its just so hard to look around and remember. She was always with me through all the tests, the scans, the everything, and now I'm alone... and so very scared. (04202007_3)

In this case, the daughter was struggling with the same illness that ultimately killed her mother. Although her mother was not there, she was thinking of her mother very often. She had recurring memories of her mother helping her and memories of her mother struggling with the illness. All of these memories allowed her to remain connected to her mother.

As mentioned, not all of the ways in which a daughter can stay connected to their deceased mother are positive. In fact, the daughters that struggle with the same illness as their mothers reported sadness and fear. Nonetheless, though, the connection to the deceased mother remained clear in those scenarios.

Maintaining Connection with Her: Conclusion. As repeated throughout the analysis, it appeared that most of the ways that a daughter remained connected to their mothers were very private events. Although many disclosed about those forms to other daughters in the blog, the act of staying connected was usually kept to oneself and did not usually require the help of other individual. When I speculate about why daughters seem to maintain the connection privately, I conclude that it has everything to do with societal implications regarding bereavement communication. As many researchers have shown, communication surrounding the bereavement topic is complicated and woven with many unhelpful comments. Because of that, there is a “conspiracy of silence”, that is, an avoidance of discussion about the topic (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Range, Walston, & Pollard, 1992). Because of this societal implication, it seems bereaved daughters chose many private ways of maintaining a connection with their deceased mothers.

Additionally, many daughters seemed to maintain connections with their mothers in ways that they could control. For example, when a daughter has the ability to walk away from a place where she feels her mother’s presence, put away a stuffed animal that reminds her mother, or turn off a song that might bring her to tears, she has more control over the situation. This control might be a comforting feeling in a time that where a daughter is struggling to create meaning of the event. She understands that her mother is not gone and she has the power to visit her mother, whether it be in song, in a physical object, or in a coffee shop, whenever she needs to.

Ultimately, however, daughters maintained connections with their mothers in a variety of ways. Some of the ways that emerged from the analysis of this blog are consistent with previous research. Others, however, are brand new. It is unknown at this time whether the newly

emerged categories are distinct to this dyad alone, so future research with these new categories would be very helpful.

Chapter 5: Discussion

There is information in the research literature about the mother-daughter dyad generally and also a certain amount of information in the research literature about the broadly conceived population of “mourners” or “grievers.” However, there is little information about the intersection of these areas of study such as grief communication for motherless daughters. In this current study, my goal was to investigate the experiences of motherless daughters; specifically, how momless daughters seek support, what support they are provided, how momless daughters experience typical mother-daughter turning points, and how they maintain connection with their absent mother. My goal in this thesis was to fill the gap in the research literature specifically addressing grief communication for motherless daughters.

In order to begin looking at grief communication for motherless daughters, I started with the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure. This model provided an excellent representation for why a daughter might disclose in this blog, but I wanted more. I wanted to know *what* they were saying. This led me to four research questions. To answer my research questions, I did a content analysis of an online blog called “Momless Daughter”.

For RQ1, I found that both emotional and informational social support were requested implicitly and explicitly by bereaved daughters in this blog. Similarly, in RQ2, emotional and informational social support were provided. These types of social support exhibited particular characteristics, many of which were unique to this online format. Regarding RQ3, I found that there were many turning points that were difficult to daughters and that these turning points were experienced very differently than daughters with living mother-daughter dyads. Additionally, I found that part of the reason why the turning points were so difficult was because they violated the expectations of the daughter. Lastly, in RQ4, I found that daughters maintain a connection

with their mothers in ways that have been previously indicated by bereavement research and in other ways that have not been noted yet. To conclude this thesis, I will consider the implications of the results in reference to the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure, directions for future research, and the strengths and limitations of the study.

Motherless Daughters and the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure

The Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure was an excellent starting point for this study. It taught me that an individual might be drawn to disclose to relieve distress and to ultimately lead to self-understanding and catharsis. In the analysis of the blogs, this certainly did seem to be the case.

Daughters often expressed on this blog that they had a difficult time finding an avenue in “real life” where they felt comfortable disclosing their thoughts and feelings. They expressed that people in “real life” either did not want to talk about the bereavement or did not understand their personal experiences. Because daughters were limited in their avenue of disclosure, they felt as though they needed to find a different place to express themselves. The weblog provided the avenue where they could release their feelings and thoughts. However, the need to search for an avenue to express their thoughts and feelings indicates that the daughters were feeling the pressure of needing to disclose. This supports the claim of the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure that individuals can feel “bottled up” and feel the need to disclose when they are feeling distressed.

Additionally, many of the daughters, after disclosing on the blog, described feelings of relief and gratefulness for having someone that understood. After writing a post about their feelings, some daughters would explicitly write something similar to, “I am so happy to have you guys here. I feel better”. As the conversation flowed throughout the community, many

daughters encouraged each other to continue writing, as they described that writing to each other helps and makes them feel better. It was clear that the experience of writing to each other was a cathartic experience, as many of the daughters clearly described the relief that writing to each other gave them. This also supports the claim of the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure that disclosure aids in catharsis.

Finally, as the daughters wrote to each other on the blog, the daughters were able to make sense of their mothers' death and understand their feelings better. They asked each other questions and provided feedback which might have been perceived as taboo in "real life". Many daughters discussed thoughts of suicide and asked how they were supposed to cope with losing their mothers. As advice and feedback flourished, daughters were able to make sense of the situation surrounding them and cope more effectively. As they described their thoughts and feelings and received feedback and advice from others in similar situations, they were able to better understand themselves and the situation and learned new ways to cope with the experience. This supports the claim of the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure that disclosure aids in self-understanding.

The results of this study illustrate the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure. It was clear that daughters felt pressure to disclose and, when they disclosed to each other, it was a cathartic experience that increased their self-understanding. However, the Fever Model of Expressive Disclosure does not describe what the expressive disclosure might look like. In this study, I added to the Fever Model by illustrating expressive disclosure when a daughter was distressed and in need of disclosure.

Social Support

First, it is clear that the social support process is complex and can be extremely emotional, even in online communities. I acknowledge that it is very difficult to capture the entire social support process, especially as the dynamics shift in the online environment. The online social support process for bereavement consists of many dimensions, which cannot be fully understood in a single study. However, it is clear that social support is an integral part of the grieving process in this online forum. This study discovered that both emotional and informational social support are requested and provided implicitly and explicitly in this forum.

As expected, most of the support I saw in this blog was emotional support, which goes along with what previous research has reported about online support communities (Wright, 2002). As Wright (2002) expressed, nonverbal cues are drastically altered or completely removed in computer-mediated communication. We saw this happen as bereaved daughters explicitly stated the nonverbal actions (such as hugs or nods), while others used emoticons to articulate their facial expressions. Nonetheless, they used these forms to convey their emotional support. As expected, we did see a great deal of in-depth emotion and well described experiences in these comments. It is possible to attribute this at least partially because of the anonymity of the contributions, however, without asking the community members, it is not possible to be sure.

Turning Points

Through this analysis, several relationship turning points emerged as salient for motherless daughters. Many of the turning points perceived as difficult were similar to those salient to daughters with living mothers. Some of the turning points that are salient to daughters with living mothers include having children, getting married, and graduating from school (Fischer, 1981). Many of these turning points emerged as salient to the momless daughters in

this study. For motherless daughters, the theme of “unfair” and disbelief came up often, as though daughters felt as though they were being cheated by not having their mother with them during these times. It seemed as though daughters had an expectation that their mothers would be there for certain life events, that they *should* be there for these events, and that they are somehow being cheated by life when this does not happen.

Although the results of this study identified salient turning points momless daughters perceive as challenging, I do not have clear reasons as to why these turning points are perceived as more difficult than other events in daughters’ lives. Are the expectations affected by media messages, through imitation of other mother-daughter dyads, or through some other mechanism? More research is needed to understand this more fully.

Maintaining a Connection

Through this research, I identified myriad ways daughters report maintaining a connection with their mother. Previous research has indicated that grievors maintain a connection with their deceased loved ones by holding onto the deceased person’s belongings, visiting them at a cemetery, talking to them, etc. (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Silverman & Worden, 1992). Many of the ways in which these bereaved daughters maintain a connection with her deceased mothers align with that previous research. What I noted, though, was that most of these ways are private and do not require the help of other individuals. There were very few instances described in the data where daughters came together to collectively remember their mothers. Why is this not happening more often? Why are the connections so private? Could it be because the daughters choose to keep the connections private, or because they are forced by societal factors?

Many of the ways in which bereaved daughters reported maintaining a connection with deceased mothers aligned with previous research (i.e., daughters visiting a cemetery or feeling the presence of her mother). However, new information emerged in this study that had not been identified in previous research. For example in this study I learned that sustained feelings of guilt tethered mother and daughter to one another. Some daughters expressed that they wished they could have done more to help their mother's before they passed away. Whether these thoughts caused them anguish or not, those reoccurring feelings of guilt connected them to their mothers often. As many of them reflected about different things they could have done to keep their mothers alive, they were reminded over and over of their mother. Reoccurring thoughts of "what if" kept the mother present as she ruminated about different scenarios and whether or not her mother would still be alive.

Another novel finding was the salience of the daughter's desire to meet her mother's expectations. Despite her mother being physically gone, many daughters still felt as though they had expectations to meet and goals to achieve because it was what was expected by their mothers. By striving to accomplish certain goals, daughters are keeping their mothers present. As they write "This is something she would have wanted me to do", they are acknowledging the hopes and dreams their mothers had for them. Pushing onward to succeed in these ways allows the daughter to continuously remember her mother and maintain the connection with her.

These have not arisen in previous research and I am inclined to wonder if it is because previous research has focused too broadly on both sons and daughters and this finding may be unique to daughters. More research is needed to uncover what, if any, of these experiences differ for motherless sons.

Directions for Future Research

Additional research is needed to examine different relational dyads when examining bereavement. In this analysis, I found very unique results that have not emerged in previous research. I absolutely believe that this is because samples in previous studies have been inclusive of sons *and* daughters. Studying “children” that lost a “parent” is too inclusive to reveal the uniqueness of relational grief communication. We need to continue studying relational dyads, including the father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, and more research on the mother-daughter dyad. Additionally, we need research to describe the grieving process for other family members, including aunts, uncles, grandparents, and pets.

There is also more research to be done to more completely understand the role of social support in bereavement. Although I found that informational and emotional support are requested from others during bereavement, it would be of use to find why a person decides to request support generally, and what factors influence how the request is made--in an explicit or implicit fashion. Also, it would be of use to find out why certain pleas for support are responded to in certain ways.

This study identified the mother-daughter turning points that remained salient even in the absence of living mothers. This information contributes to the mother-daughter literature, revealing that turning points can be enduring even in the absence of a living relational partner. More research is needed to understand why these life events are particularly challenging for momless daughters. I also suggest that future research apply Expectancy Violations Theory to the turning points and see how daughters’ expectations impact her experiences of a turning point.

Lastly, more research needs to be done to more fully understand the communication strategies daughters use to maintain a relational connection with absent mothers. These data suggest many ways in which a daughter may maintain a connection with her absent mother.

Many of these were very private and the inclusion of other people was not necessary. I speculate that the private nature is because of how the taboo topic of bereavement is. More research needs to be done so that we can further understand how the taboo nature of bereavement affects how daughters maintain that connection. I strongly believe that societal expectations impact how a daughter feels she can connect with their mother, and I would like to see future research explore that.

Overall, this research analyzed a very small sample of individuals. More research needs to be done in a “real life” scenario and in mother-daughter dyads where there are low levels of closeness and/or satisfaction. Most of the women in this blog had positive relationships with their mothers. Because this is not the case for every dyad, more research is needed in troubled relationships.

Strengths and Limitations

The findings reveal that analysis of communication on blogs is valuable. Blog entries, as communication data, are accessible and provide a wealth of messages for the examination of social support and relational communication. Blogs contain a significant amount of rich data and are easy to read and analyze. The information collected from this online community is valuable for those who are grieving and those conducting social support and grief research.

There are a few limitations to this study. First, the use of online blogs prevented me from gaining any demographic information. I chose not to become a member and post questions on this community for several reasons. Asking them to post any demographic information would compromise the confidentiality of the information. A loss of confidentiality would be a significant problem because some users may use this community as a way to grieve without being identified. Examining these messages as public documents in a public space allowed me

to gain insight into naturally occurring communication. The disadvantage is that by using this naturally occurring communication I was unable to probe participants for additional insight.

Second, because I could keep track of daughters using their screennames, I noticed some daughters had periods of inactivity. Daughters wrote to this community when they wanted or felt they needed to. In some cases, daughters wrote once a week, while others wrote once a year. Some daughters would write frequently for a month, but then not write for one year. This makes following any particular daughter difficult, thus, not allowing for in-depth longitudinal work on this blog.

Third, most of the women in this blog had an in-tact and positive biological relationship with their mothers. However, many other mother-daughter dyads exist, including troubled mother-daughter biological dyads, positive and troubled lesbian mother-daughter dyads, adopted mother-daughter dyads, etc., and all of these warrant future research. Because I am dealing with only a subset of a population, the results can be transferred but not generalized to other motherless daughter relationships.

While there are certainly limitations, this study gives significant insight into bereavement communication in computer mediated situations and it provides a framework for future research.

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Appendix

Codes	Brief Definition	Complete Definition	When to use	When not to use	Example
Requested emotional support	Requesting emotional help	A unit of data in which a daughter directly or indirectly requests help and discussion regarding her problems, concerns, and feelings	When a daughter directly or indirectly requests emotional help	When a daughter directly or indirectly requests for advice or denies support	This is the only place I could say that, and you guys understand, I'm afraid in the world of women with mother's it would sound like "whew I'm sure glad she died and I didn't" ya know? (04032007_1) *Hug* I'm so sorry :((05052007_1)
Provided emotional support	Providing emotional help	A unit of data in which a daughter provides help and discussion regarding another bereaved daughter's problems, concerns, and feelings. The goal is to support the bereaved daughter in a time of hardship	When a daughter provides emotional help to another bereaved daughter after she posts about her feelings	When a daughter provides no support or response	
Requested informational support	Requesting advice, guidance, or feedback	A unit of data in which a daughter directly or indirectly requests advice, guidance, or feedback that are helpful in addressing her problem	When a daughter directly or indirectly requests advice or feedback	When a daughter is not directly or indirectly requesting advice or feedback or denies support	So I'm moving. I decided about two weeks ago and I leave in 1.5. My mom died a little over a year ago and I decided to stay around for my dad after the death. ... I'm extremely emotional, but I know I'm making the right choice. Did anybody

else have
trouble
leaving?
(04262007_1)

Provided
informational
support

Providing
advice,
guidance, or
feedback

A unit of data in
which a daughter
provides advice,
guidance, or
feedback to another
bereaved daughter
that are helpful in
addressing the
problem

When a
daughter
provides
similar
experiences,
advice, or
other feedback
to a daughter
after she posts
about her
feelings

When a
daughter
provides no
support or
response.
When a
daughter is
providing
emotional help,
but not giving
any advice or
other solution-
oriented
feedback

Take time to
write down
any positive
memories
you can.
You'll need
that list when
she's gone.
Secure
yourself into a
support
system, and
put safe,
strong people
around you.
You'll have
more to latch
onto when
you start
missing the
relationship
you could
have had.
(05042007_1)