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To cite this article: Niina Keskinen, Marja Kaunonen & Anna Liisa Aho (2019) How Loved Ones Express Grief After the Death of a Child by Sharing Photographs on Facebook, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 24:7, 609-624, DOI: [10.1080/15325024.2019.1586186](https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2019.1586186)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2019.1586186>



Published online: 06 May 2019.



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How Loved Ones Express Grief After the Death of a Child by Sharing Photographs on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Photographs offer a way to preserve the bond to a deceased child, and encourage those who grieve to create stories to share with others. The aim of this study is to capture the thoughts that loved ones want to express when posting photos and captions on a Facebook. The research data was collected from a discussion board on Facebook and consisted of 229 photographs and their captions. The loved ones of a deceased child shared photographs and captions to express their emotions about the grieving process, their adjustment to loss, and the importance of memories and thoughts aroused by special days.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 January 2019
Accepted 11 February 2019

KEYWORDS

Photographs; Internet; death of a child; grief

The death of a child is one of the most stressful and traumatic experiences in the lives of parents (Aho, Paavilainen, & Kaunonen, 2012; DeGroot & Carmack, 2013). The death of a child can, however, have a devastating impact on other family members and loved ones, and disrupt the stability of the family. This great loss is experienced not only by parents, but also by the siblings and grandparents of the deceased child (Wender, 2012).

The ways of expressing grief have changed over time. The phenomenon of Web-based memorializing has grown (Foot, Warnick, & Schneider, 2006), grief has become more public, and in the 21st century, Facebook has enabled grief to become more communal. The Internet has changed the way in which we mourn, and social networking sites bring death back into everyday life (Walter, Hourizi, Moncur, & Pitsillides, 2012). With the Internet, loved ones have found a new way to create and perform death rituals, to memorialize, and to maintain bonds with the deceased child (DeGroot, 2012; Irwin, 2015). Web-based memorializing provides a remarkable new way for loved ones to post their feelings, in a way conversing with the dead and enabling their ongoing presence (Walter et al., 2012).

Today, many resort to memorial blogs and websites as a way to analyze their thoughts and seek out peer support (DeGroot & Carmack, 2013). Internet discussion groups allow for a richer, more robust dialog for participants, and provide a simple way to share emotions with the group (Egnoto, Sirianni, Ortega, & Stefanone, 2014). Today, the Internet is widely available, and a growing number of people with similar problems are seeking out its social networks. Facebook, for example, hosts several pages that serve as an important source of information and support for people in similar circumstances (Thoren, Metze, Buhrer, & Garten, 2013). Loved ones utilize Facebook during a bereavement because they want to share information and discuss matters with other people that can empathize with their state of mind. Loved ones also find these Facebook platforms to be very therapeutic, because there they can see how others are struggling in their grief by way of social media. (Moore, Magee, Gamrekidze, & Kowalewski, 2017.) The members of online discussion groups are able to interact anonymously, privately, or publicly, depending on the rules that the founders of the group have agreed on. Participants in online discussion boards can discuss sensitive topics irrespective of their geographical location and the time of day (Convery & Cox, 2012; Moore et al., 2017). Grieving people also seek out places on the Internet to post glorifying writing, to portray conversations with the deceased, and to share stories with others (Irwin, 2015; Musambira, Hastings, & Hoover, 2007). Loved ones publicly show their emotions on Facebook (Irwin, 2015) and have reported experiencing less psychological distress, and also feeling psychosocial benefit that increased over time if they were members of an online grief support group (Hartig & Viola, 2016). Additionally, several mourners have noted that sharing their stories, photos, and videos of the deceased via social networking sites helped them to begin a healing process (Moore et al., 2017).

Photographs are one of the easiest ways to remember a loved one who has passed away (Harris & Edmonds, 2015). From a historical perspective, mothers have long relied on photographs to assist their grieving (Mander & Marshall, 2003). Photographs of a deceased child enable the parents to create new identities for themselves, and may even provide the only concrete memento of the lost child (Alexander, 2001). Many loved ones want to preserve their emotional bonds with the deceased child, and photographs offer a way to both preserve the bond and also remember the deceased child. Facing a reality without the one who is deceased is important for the grieving process (Egnoto et al., 2014), and photographs may encourage loved ones to accept the death of a child (Blood & Cacciatore, 2014). In addition, photographs allow parents to create stories to share with others, which is important in various stages of the grieving process and in accepting death. Photographs can also alleviate the fears of parents that they may

forget the appearance of their child and that their memories may become clouded (Blood & Cacciatore, 2014). There are no previous studies about the presence of photographs and feelings on Facebook that relate to grief, despite the significance of photographs in processing grief, and that their positive impact on parents trying to cope with the death of a child has been recognized in previous literature (Alexander, 2001).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to capture the thoughts that loved ones want to express when posting photos and captions on a Facebook discussion board, and asks the overarching research question: What do loved ones want to tell others when posting photos and captions on a Facebook discussion board?

Method

Data collection

The research data was collected from an open discussion group on Facebook for people who have experienced the death of a child. All of the photos ($n = 229$) and captions ($n = 229$) were collected from the discussion group between 2010 and 2015. The focus of the study was the collection of images (mostly photographs) and captions shared by people on the discussion group. The group had been established approximately five years earlier and had a total of 2,561 members at the time of data collection. The number of active members cannot be estimated because members visit the site on an irregular basis. The discussion group was comprised of different individuals who posted photographs, and some of these photos could have been posted by the same person over a period of time. The group was open to anyone who had experienced the death of a child, including the parents, siblings, grandparents, godparents, nurses, friends, and colleagues of the deceased child. Most of the active participants in the discussion group were the parents, siblings, and grandparents of a deceased child. In this study, we refer to the people who have experienced the death of a child as “loved ones.” No attempt was made to distinguish the different ages of children, and in particular, no comparison was made between children who were born dead (stillborn) and children who may have been adults when they died. The public nature of the discussion group was made explicit in the group description. The researcher did not participate in the discussions of the site.

Data analysis

Inductive content analysis was employed to analyze the photograph captions. This method has previously been widely employed in the analyses of

online texts (Burla et al., 2008), and has been viewed as being well-suited for the analysis of multifaceted and sensitive phenomena (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

The analysis began with an examination of the photographs and captions published in the Facebook group. The following questions were asked: (a) what does the image (e.g., a photograph of a tombstone or a deceased child) depict; and (b) how do the loved ones describe the image in their captions, or what do they want to tell others when sharing the image. Data reduction was conducted simultaneously on the image and its caption (Table 1) in order to answer the aforementioned overarching research question (Burla et al., 2008).

The research data was encoded numerically to ensure the content and description of each image could be revisited during the analysis. The thematic nature of the photographs and the number of images in each of the thematic categories were in this context regarded as background information describing the research data. The results of the data reduction process were grouped (Table 2) into subcategories with shared characteristics (Burla et al., 2008). The subcategories were seen to be mutually exclusive. Each of the subcategories was then named after its content, and grouped into larger categories that were also named after their contents. The abstraction process was continued as far as was reasonable and possible (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Overall, the data produced 229 abstractions, with 20 subcategories and four main categories. The study counted the images that loved ones had shared, and the meaning of the photographs was discerned from the captions loved ones appended to their posted images.

Results

The images shared by the loved ones featured photographs of the deceased child before their death ($n = 69$), photographs of the tombstone of the child ($n = 60$), photographs of various mementos ($n = 33$), pictures drawn by the

Table 1. An example of the reduction process.

Photograph	Photograph caption	Reduction
A photograph of a butterfly drawn in sand (104)	<i>"All children are miracles, even the ones that couldn't stay very long. Love, you'll always be in my memories." (104)</i>	A photograph of a butterfly drawn in sand is shared to tell that the memory of the deceased child will not fade (104)
A photograph of the seaside (44)	<i>"Here I can remember you and you are strongly present." (44)</i>	A photograph of the seaside is shared to tell about a personal memorial (44)
A photograph of a tombstone (174)	<i>"This is where I go to 'chit-chat' with my child. I've felt many stares in my back, I don't care. Here lies my first-born, those staring behind my back surely just don't understand." (174)</i>	A photograph of a tombstone is shared to tell that the grave site is an important place for talking to the deceased child (174)

Table 2. An example of the analytical progression.

Reduction	Subcategory	Category
A photograph of a painting made of a baby blanket and pacifier is shared to tell about memories of the deceased child (8)	Loved ones shared photographs to tell how they cherish memories of the deceased child	
A screen capture of the front page of a grief blog is shared to share memories of the time spent together with the deceased child (106)		
A photograph of a seagull flying over water is shared to share memories of escorting the child on their final journey (33)		
A photograph of a butterfly drawn in sand is shared to tell that the memory of the deceased child will not fade (104)		
A photograph of a summer landscape is shared to tell about memories of the deceased child (125)		
A photograph of the deceased child before death is shared to tell about memories of the child (91, 100)		
A photograph of a tattoo of a bird is shared to pay tribute to the memory of a sister who passed away (47)	Loved ones shared photographs to tell how they pay tribute to the memory of the deceased child	Telling about the importance of memories
A photograph of a candle is shared to pay tribute to the memory of the deceased child (23, 25)		
A photograph of a headstone is shared to tell about the desire to erect a tombstone for a stillborn child (207)		
A photograph of a porcelain angel is shared in memory of the deceased child (25)		
A photograph of a tattoo of an angel is shared to pay tribute to the memory of the deceased child (200)	Loved ones shared photographs to tell about their personal memorials	
A photograph of a child's picture imprinted on a tile is shared to present a personal memorial painting of the child (137)		
A photograph of a candle holder made of pitchforks is shared to tell about a self-made memorial (82)		
A photograph of a boy on the cover of a book is shared to tell about a self-made memorial book (166)		
A photograph of the face of a boy painted on an old window is shared to present a personal memorial painting of the deceased child (138)		
A photograph of the seaside is shared to tell about a personal memorial (44)		
A photograph of a tombstone is shared to tell that the grave site is an important place for talking to the deceased child (174)		

loved ones ($n = 13$), landscape photographs ($n = 10$), photographs of candles ($n = 10$), photographs of porcelain angels ($n = 9$), photographs of writings ($n = 9$), photographs of tattoos taken by the loved ones ($n = 7$), photographs of the deceased child ($n = 5$), and photographs of the closed casket ($n = 4$).

By sharing their photographs in the discussion group, the loved ones told in their captions about the emotional states experienced during the grieving process, their adjustment to the loss, the importance of their memories, and the thoughts aroused by special days (Table 3).

Table 3. The grief expressed by loved ones who have experienced the death of a child by sharing photographs.

Category	Subcategory
Telling about the emotional stages experienced during the grieving process	Longing for the deceased child Strong negative emotions Hopes Gratitude Pride Joy
Telling about adjusting to the loss	Personal loss Keeping the deceased child close also after death Coping with grief
Telling about the importance of memories	Cherishing memories of the deceased child Commemorating the memory Personal memorial
Telling about thoughts aroused by special days	Wishing happy birthday to the deceased child Wishing merry Christmas Wishing happy Valentine's Day Mourning the anniversary of the child's death Commemorating the day dedicated to deceased children Remembering the burial day Commemorating All Saints' Day Commemorating the UN International Day of Prayer for Peace

Telling about the emotional states experienced during the grieving process

The loved ones told about the emotional states they experienced during the grieving process, such as longing, strong negative emotions, hopes, gratitude, pride, and joy, expressed through the photographs and captions they shared in the discussion group. Photographs of tombstones, candles, porcelain angels, and tattoos taken by the loved ones, as well as drawings of angels and clouds, were shared to tell about feelings of longing for the deceased child. Feelings of longing were also depicted with photographs of sky lanterns, a closed casket, and photographs of the child before and after their death.

Strong negative emotions such as feelings of resentment toward death and the difficulty of visiting the grave were expressed with photographs of tombstones and floral wreaths. The hopes of loved ones, such as the hope that they would be able to meet the child again or hear the child's voice again, were expressed with drawings of the sky and paintings of angels.

A shared photograph of a painting of an angel with the caption: "Hopefully we can see and hug each other again someday."

Gratitude associated with the happiness of the child and the time spent together with the child was expressed by sharing photographs of the child before their death, tombstones, heart pendants, and paintings of angels. Feelings of pride such as pride in tending to the grave site, bringing children together for a photograph, the national way of honoring deceased children, and updating a grief blog were expressed with photographs of

tombstones and the front page of a blog. Feelings of joy, such as the joy experienced after other family members had decorated the grave site, were expressed with photographs of headstones.

A shared photograph of a tombstone with the caption: "I'm glad that I finally managed to tend to the grave."

Telling about the adjustment to loss

The loved ones shared photographs and captions representing their own successes, the desire to keep the deceased child close after death, and their ability to cope with grief, in order to tell about their adjustment to the loss they had experienced.

The loved ones told about their personal loss with photographs of the child both before and after death, and also with photographs of closed caskets. Photographs of porcelain angels, candles, paintings of birds, tombstones and tattoos, as well as newspaper clippings of charity events, were similarly shared to tell about their personal loss.

Feelings related to the desire to keep the deceased child close after death were conveyed with expressions such as the feeling that the child remains part of life, is in the hearts of loved ones, is watching over them from heaven, and is sending greetings. These were expressed with drawings of angels, photographs of the child before death, rainbows, and tattoos of angels.

The loved ones told about coping with grief, for example by sharing their means to cope, and sending best wishes to others who are grieving with photographs of the deceased child, birds, newspaper clippings, and literary quotes that had given them strength to face their own grief.

A shared photograph of a bird with the caption: "My sisters in mourning . . . there are too many of us. I wasn't able to comment on everyone . . . Give us all the strength and faith to face tomorrow."

Telling about the importance of memories

The loved ones shared photographs to tell about the importance of memories by cherishing the memory of the deceased child, honoring the memory of the deceased child, and telling about their own memorials. Memories of the deceased child, such as the time spent together and sending the child on their final journey were expressed with photographs of summer landscapes, a painting comprising a baby blanket and pacifier, and also photos of the child before their death. The loved ones also told about their

memories by sharing photographs of the front page of a grief blog, a seagull, and the drawing of a butterfly.

A shared photograph of a butterfly drawn in the sand with the description: "All children are miracles, even the ones that couldn't stay very long. Love, you'll always be in my memories."

Gestures that honored the memory of the deceased child, such as buying a tombstone, visiting the grave, and making a memorial, were expressed with a variety of photographs of tattoos, tombstones, candles, and porcelain angels. The memory of the deceased child was also honored with photographs of a handmade memorial book, a memorial painting, a candle holder, and the seaside.

A shared photograph of a tombstone with the description: "This is where I go to 'chit-chat' with my child. I've felt many stares in my back, I don't care. Here lies my first-born, those staring behind my back surely just don't understand."

Telling about thoughts aroused by special days

The loved ones shared photographs and captions to tell about the thoughts aroused by special days, such as the desire to wish the deceased child a happy birthday, merry Christmas, a happy Valentine's Day, or also to mourn the anniversary of their death, honor the day dedicated to deceased children, recall memories of the burial day, and to commemorate the All Saints' Day and the UN Day of Prayer for Peace.

The desire to wish a happy birthday or merry Christmas to the deceased child was expressed with photographs of tombstones and the child before their death. A collage of photographs consisting of a wooden heart, glass angel, and the deceased child was used to wish one child a merry Christmas. Photographs of candles were used to celebrate Valentine's Day, while photographs of the child, tombstones, and drawings of the child were used to express the grief associated with the anniversary of their death.

A shared photograph of an Easter decoration with the description: "The Easter holidays were really depressing and long. We didn't get to see our son in the chapel until the next weekday. I still hate Easter."

The day dedicated to deceased children was commemorated by sharing photographs of candles, loved ones lighting candles, memorials surrounded by candles, and loved ones gathering on the day dedicated to deceased children. The loved ones also told about the day by sharing photographs of a T-shirt, and brochures and newspaper clippings about the day. Photographs of porcelain angels, the child before their death and tombstones were also shared on the day. The loved ones also shared

photographs of the sunset, landscape paintings or drawings, and of a feather to give strength to people grieving on the day dedicated to deceased children.

Memories of the child's burial day, such as how hard it was, were expressed with photographs of tombstones and closed caskets on the anniversary of the memorial service. Photographs of tombstones were shared to offer greetings on the All Saints' Day, while a photograph of a hoisted flag was shared to commemorate the UN Day of Prayer for Peace.

Integrity of the study

The Internet allows for the collection of a wide variety of data, based for example on the online content, online discussions, or Facebook status updates (Laaksonen & Matikainen, 2013). The systematic collection of data from the users of a discussion board does, however, prove difficult because users may not visit the discussion board on a regular basis. The discussions also constantly evolve, so an analysis conducted at a particular point in time may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the activities and discussions the users engage in on the particular forum, or group discussion board (Swartwood, Veach, Kuhne, Lee, & Ji, 2011).

The data analysis was carried out manually, and the researchers referred to the original data when faced with uncertainty, thus enhancing the integrity of the analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The reflexivity of the study was reinforced by reviewing the original premise of the study and the influence the researcher may have on it at all stages of the project. However, it was felt that the data collection process had no influence on the participants because it was conducted passively without any participation in the discussions. This approach has been seen as valid, in that collecting research data on the Internet minimizes the risk of human error and eliminates the possible influence of the researcher (Emery, 2014). This detached approach to collecting Internet data reduces the possibility of source influence or bias; however, when reporting such findings, the influence the researcher has in their interpretation remains similar to that seen in other qualitative research approaches.

Detailed descriptions of the analytical methods and results are provided to further enhance the integrity of the study, and to ensure readers are able to develop an understanding of how the study has been conducted (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The correlation between the research data and the results has been illustrated using authentic quotations. The results have also been reported carefully and in detail to ensure the presented information is based on the accounts of participants, rather than representing the views of the researcher. As a further measure, as much background information as

possible has been presented to enable readers to assess the applicability of the study and the transferability of its findings to other environments. (Cope, 2014.)

Research ethics

The research data was collected from a public Facebook page, the content of which was available to all Facebook users. Data collected from an online source is, in principal, treated similarly to any other data collected for research purposes, and in a way that respects and protects the dignity and privacy of the participants (Convery & Cox, 2012). Participants in an open discussion board may not necessarily regard their activities as being fully public (Pierson, 2014), and as a result, researchers must be careful not to disclose any identifying details, especially if the participants represent a vulnerable user group (Convery & Cox, 2012). The author of this study safeguarded the privacy of the participants by refraining from disclosing the full name of the discussion group (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). Efforts were also taken to ensure the identities of the participants could not be deduced based on the reductions derived from the original utterances (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The researcher collected the data in a way that even she could not identify the participants after the data reduction process had taken place. No permission to use the data for research purposes was requested from those who shared photographs on the discussion group, because the website was public and the loved ones were aware that the material they shared was also public (Convery & Cox, 2012).

Discussion

The participants shared a variety of photographs and captions, which were representative of the many different emotional states that people go through during a grieving process (Blando, Graves-Ferrick, & Goecke, 2004; DeGroot, 2012). Loved ones go through a bereavement process by expressing their emotions to others (Moore et al., 2017). Similar photographs, such as those of a tombstone, may be embedded with different meanings. Woodthorpe (2011) observes that a cemetery evokes many different thoughts for loved ones. So, the photographs of tombstones may signify feelings of longing for a deceased child, and evoke strong negative emotions such as the resentment caused by their death. In this study, loved ones shared photographs also to express positive emotions, such as pride, hope, and joy, that they experienced during the grieving process. The participants also expressed, via photographs, hope that they would meet their deceased child again someday (Irwin 2015), and bereaved mothers also

wrote about the positive issues and joys related to daily family life on the discussion boards (Aho et al., 2012).

The participants in this study shared photographs and captions to tell of their adjustment to their loss and their life after it. Loved ones' accounts of the death of a child have also been previously described as detailed and wide-ranging. Previous studies show that loved ones go through the bereavement process by sharing stories and pictures, and by making meaning of their loss (Moore et al., 2017). In this study, loved ones describe the time preceding the death of the child, the death itself, of saying goodbye, and the memorial service, as Moore et al. (2017) has described. In previous work on the topic, they also describe themselves, their families, and the pain inflicted on them by the death (Aho et al., 2012). Swartwood et al. (2011) and Musambira et al. (2007) conclude that grieving people want to continue to analyze their personal loss and their reactions to it on websites. Loved ones also want analyze their grief and how it has changed them (Moore et al., 2017). Relatedly, in this study loved ones utilize photographs to describe and discuss the circumstances and events associated with the moment when the photograph was taken (Blood & Cacciatore, 2014).

The photographs examined in this study were also interpreted to indicate that adjusting to the loss is facilitated by keeping the deceased child close after their death (DeGroot, 2012; Klass, 2006). In the study, loved ones mentioned feeling the deceased's presence around them, which has also been observed in previous literature (DeGroot 2012). They were also utilized to signify that the deceased child remains part of the loved ones' lives also after their death, and is watching over them from heaven (Irwin, 2015). Moore et al. (2017) also wrote that mourners continue their connection to the deceased, and they felt their loved one was still there and they were still able to interact with them via social networking sites. In this study, loved ones also thought the deceased was watching over them, and they believed the deceased were listening them. The participants shared photos of signs or reminders of the deceased child. Loved ones also told in their picture captions what they thought these signs or reminders meant in relation to the deceased child. These findings concur with previous studies where loved ones have felt the deceased child in their daily lives, and have experienced the deceased's presence (Irwin, 2015; Moore et al., 2017). They express a belief in the paranormal, manifested in messages and visitations from the deceased child, guidance from beyond, and conversations with the deceased (Irwin 2015). Previous studies have also found that loved ones continue to search for ways to preserve an emotional bond with a deceased child, for example, by means of spiritual concepts (Van Humbeeck et al., 2013; Irwin 2015).

The participants shared photographs and captions, including photographs of the deceased child and of places and objects related to them, in order to tell about the importance of memories. Loved ones may use social networking sites to memorialize the deceased whenever they want (Moore et al., 2017). Previous studies have found that loved ones posted memories of the deceased (DeGroot 2012), and that mothers are eager to cherish positive memories and concerned that their memories will fade (Aho et al., 2012; Blood & Cacciatore, 2014). The family members and friends of a deceased child have also been shown to hold on to memories, and search for a concrete link such as cemetery, a piece of clothing, a memento or an object that belonged to the child, in order to remember the child (Kohut, 2011; Van Humbeeck et al., 2013; Savolainen, Kaunonen, & Aho, 2013; Bergstraesser, Inglin, Hornung, & Landolt, 2015; Irwin, 2015). The participants in this study also shared photographs of the front pages of grief blogs to share memories of time spent together with the deceased child. Savolainen et al. (2013) similarly identified a tendency to create websites as a means to cherish memories of a loved one who had passed away.

The results of this study indicate that loved ones share photographs and captions to tell about thoughts aroused by special days—particularly, the birthday and day of death of the child, Christmas, and the day dedicated to deceased children. Previous studies have shown that loved ones took note of dates that continue to be important to both them and the deceased (DeGroot, 2012). Also, mothers encourage other members of discussion boards to help them cope with these special days. Participants help each other cope with feelings of longing and depression that are stirred up by saddening days (Aho et al., 2012), and Bergstraesser et al. (2015) concluded that acknowledging the birthday, anniversary of death, or other special days related to a deceased child facilitates the grieving process. Swartwood et al. (2011) have also observed that special days are among the themes that grieving people want to discuss on the Internet, and which prompt loved ones to visit the graves of their deceased (Klass, 2006; Woodthorpe, 2011). Previous studies also show that social media constitute a more accessible and everlasting means to conduct conversations with the deceased, especially on birthdays, anniversaries, special events, and the day on which they died (Moore et al., 2017).

This study has produced new information about the photographs shared by loved ones in order to express grief, the emotional states experienced during the grieving process, and various ways taken to adjust to the death of a child. The grieving process, adjusting to the death of a child, and the continuing bond with the deceased also change over time (Klass, 2006). This study confirms that an emotional bond with a deceased child can be preserved also with the help of photographs. Several studies have demonstrated

that often loved ones utilize technologically situated ritualized spaces (such as Facebook) for continuing bonds with a deceased child (DeGroot, 2012; Irwin, 2015). This study shows that Web-based memorializing enables the expression of personal grief (Foot et al., 2006). Via Web-based memorializing, loved ones can perform different actions simultaneously, and they can post a message to the deceased and share their emotions with other mourners separately or in parallel (Moore et al., 2017).

Loved ones should be allowed to process their grief in whatever way they want. Care professionals should encourage loved ones to remember the child with the use of photographs (Alexander, 2001) and remind them that Web-based memorializing gives an opportunity for them to communicate with other mourners in similar circumstances (Foot et al., 2006). Thus, in agreement with Moore et al. (2017), posting to social networking sites could also provide a first step for loved ones to talk about their grief.

Conclusions and further research

Facebook and photos have permanence, and provide an easy way to maintain a virtual bond between loved ones and the deceased child. Internet-based discussion groups have become an important channel to share experiences of grief for people who have experienced the death of a child. The results of this study indicate that sharing photographs is one of the easiest ways to remember a deceased child, and that photographs can also serve as concrete mementos of the child. Photographs allow loved ones to create stories on online discussion boards that may help them cope with their grief and accept the reality of their situation.

The results of this study can be utilized in nursing by presenting different ways of dealing with grief, and encouraging loved ones to express their grief through the use of photographs. The study may also provide valuable information for the future development of the Internet-based photography intervention protocols, and various types of photo intervention could be developed to support grieving people. Also, future studies can use the evidence gathered in this research to explore whether photography has a therapeutic value during bereavement. Such studies should examine the effectiveness of photography for the grieving process of the parents and loved ones of a deceased child, and investigate in more detail the real-life experiences of how photographs can alleviate grief.

Disclosure statement and funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

Notes on contributors

Niina Keskinen, MSc, is a PhD student and a lecturer at the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Finland. She is writing a dissertation about coping with grief with the use of photographs.

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