Article

Grief Universalism: A Perennial Problem Pattern Returning in Digital Grief Studies?

Mórna O'Connor

School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, 8000 Aarhus, Denmark; mornaoc@gmail.com

Abstract: The year 2024 marks one decade of scholarship in the new interdisciplinary field of Digital Death, concerning the study of death, dying and grief in the digital age. This paper addresses one key subfield of Digital Death Studies, here termed Digital Grief Studies, which centres on theory, research and design concerning grief in today's digitally saturated contexts. It argues that a classic grand pattern in scholarly treatments of grief—Grief Universalism—with a long, problematic history in Grief and Bereavement Studies, is reappearing in Digital Grief Studies. The Continuing Bonds theory of grief and its application in theory, research and design in Digital Grief Studies is used to demonstrate Grief Universalism in action in our field via hypothetical and fictional examples. This builds toward this paper's big aim: to illustrate what we as an emerging field stand to gain from positioning the established field of Grief and Bereavement Studies as a veritable goldmine of advances—as well as pitfalls, wrong turns, and recurrent problem patterns to be avoided—generated over a hundred years of scholarship concerning human grief. Harnessing this wealth of prior learning and leveraging it toward the furtherance of our field in the coming decade and beyond becomes more crucial as we repel the seemingly perennial magnetism of Grief Universalism, as we operate within an interdisciplinary field vulnerable to Universalism and as yet unaware of its perils, and amid contemporary digital cultures and environments that may preserve and reinforce universalist grief framings.

Keywords: grief; grief theory; universalism; digital grief; digital mourning; continuing bonds; grief norm; technology for grief; digital death; digital afterlife

1. Introduction

The year 2024 marks ten years since the inaugural International Symposium of the Death Online Research Network (DORS 1), which took place in 2014 at Durham University in the United Kingdom. One decade on from DORS1, an event that arguably launched and established the interdisciplinary field of Digital Death (Pitsillides et al. 2009)[1], this paper offers a reflection on one of its major subfields. This subfield is concerned with theory, research and design efforts centred on grieving in today's digitally saturated contexts. For ease of reference, this subfield—and the diverse interdisciplinary activities in theory, research and design relating to digital-age grief within it—is here referred to as Digital Grief Studies.

This paper argues that, in this first decade of Digital Grief Studies, several broad, grand patterns are appearing and recurring in theory, research and design concerned with grief in contemporary digitally saturated contexts. These grand patterns, it argues, appear both in the foundational conceptions of grief that underpin work in this field and in the research approaches and design forms that flow from these root conceptions. To make this case, this article first outlines one of these broad patterns evident in Digital Grief theory, research and design to date: Grief Universalism. To illustrate the Universalism pattern in action, this paper looks at the Continuing Bonds theory of grief (Klass et al. 1996) and its use in Digital Grief theory, research and design in ways that, I argue, frame the posthumous continuation of bonds with the dead as a universal fact of grief.

In an air of invitation rather than critique, instead of identifying specific instances of theory, research or design in the field that exhibit this grand pattern, this article offers hypothetical illustrations of the Universalism pattern in action in fictional Digital Grief theory, research and design efforts, using the Continuing Bonds example.

It then establishes that this Grief Universalism grand pattern is not new. Rather, it is a long-standing and familiar configuration, which the field of Grief and Bereavement Studies has identified as recurrent in scholarship centring on grief, whether digitally related or not. I outline why this pattern has been identified in Grief and Bereavement Studies as problematic, incongruous with lived grief, and leading to downstream harms for the bereaved. I then detail principles and insights developed in Grief and Bereavement Studies in response to, and in avoidance of, this recurring problem pattern in grief-focused scholarship.

Last, I offer a positive example of Universalism in Digital Grief Studies; that is, an instance of recent work in our field where the Grief Universalism grand pattern is not in evidence and where, instead, an approach is taken that echoes Grief and Bereavement Studies insights and principles to counterbalance the pattern. This, it is hoped, will exemplify the possibilities and benefits of conducting work in this space without resorting to universalist grief discourses and framings.

Drawing the above three strands together, this text builds a case for the field of Grief and Bereavement Studies as a rich resource with enormous untapped potential for our nascent field of Digital Grief Studies. This paper hopes to kindle our field's inquisitiveness in the merits of harnessing more than a century of Grief and Bereavement Studies and leveraging the knowledge gained in this established allied field toward strengthening and finessing our endeavours in the next decade of Digital Grief Studies and beyond.

2. The Grand Pattern: Grief Universalism

2.1. Grief Universalism in Digital Grief Studies

Grief Universalism is the grand pattern I argue is evident in treatments of grief in the first decade of scholarly activity concerning grief in contemporary digitally saturated contexts. This pattern can be traced in the conceptions of grief that underpin theorising, research and design in this space and can be seen in the methodologies and outputs of research and design endeavours that emanate from these underpinnings.

In work where this Universalism pattern is evident, grief is commonly framed either as a phenomenon experienced in the same way by most or all bereaved people or as having a form, pattern or goal applicable to most or all bereaved people. Let's call these framings, respectively, Universal Experience and Universal Form.

Grief Universalism—in either of the two above framings—may appear in implicit or explicit ways. Universalism is implicit when, for example, a conceptual piece, research endeavour or technology design aimed at the bereaved contains an unstated a priori assumption that it will address, explore or evoke a particular type of grief experience. In such instances, it is assumed or expected that a particular grief experience is at play in a given theoretical, empirical or design endeavour, and priority is given to one particular grief form without justification or argument as to why.

In such cases of implicit Grief Universalism, this assumption of a universal grief experience is generally not directly stated, but it can be traced in research and design methodologies that prioritise, are sensitised to, or designed around particular grief experiences or forms. Though there is nothing wrong with such efforts in themselves, a problem arises when this is done without recognition that alternative grief experiences and forms are possible and without developing a justification for why a certain grief form is taken as the focus over others. Whether intended or not, the implication is that the form of grief being focused on is the default, expected or most likely grief experience. Thus, whether intentional or not, a universalising assumption underlies such work.

Grief Universalism may also be explicit, such as when a certain grief experience or form is deliberately stated as what a theoretical piece is centred on, what a research study aims to explore, or what a grief-centred technology seeks to induce in the bereaved. Again,

we might not take issue with such efforts in themselves. The issue of Universalism arises when this occurs without acknowledgement of other grief theories or paradigms, without stated awareness that other grief experiences and possibilities exist, or without justification for why the grief experience or form in question was chosen as the focus of the endeavour. This can result in the implication that the specified grief experience or form is how we, as a scholarly community, mostly or always expect grief to look and is the manifestation of grief that we view as most important to theorise about, study and design for.

2.2. Universalism in Digital Grief Studies—The Continuing Bonds Example

For a hypothetical example of Grief Universalism in action in the field of Digital Grief Studies to date, we can look to how the Continuing Bonds theory of grief is oftentimes used.

In our theoretical, empirical and technology design efforts concerning digital-age grief to date, as we deal with grief as a concept or object of such research, theory or design, I argue that it is common for the Continuing Bonds theory of grief (Klass et al. 1996) to be used interchangeably with grief, as though Continuing Bonds *is* grief. This is most often without acknowledgement of alternative grief theories, without the development of justification for why Continuing Bonds was the chosen paradigm for the theoretical, research or design effort at hand, and without recognition that, though perhaps fitting for the endeavour in question, that grief experiences other than bond continuation exist, are possible and are equally valid. Put simply, in the Digital Grief literature to date, I contend that the Continuing Bonds theory of grief is oftentimes used as an unqualified synonym for grief.

In such uses, the Continuing Bonds theory of grief loses its designation as a theory. Instead, it is framed as a universal fact of grief: that all bereaved people are universally engaged in bond continuation (Universal Experience) and that all grief takes the form of bond continuation (Universal Form).

A fictional example of this is when bond continuation is identified in scholarly work as what is at play in the hypothetical use of a given technology geared toward the bereaved, such as, for example, simulated interactions with the dead via generative AI, VR, deepfake, or holographic technologies. That the continuation of the bond between the dead and the bereaved user is what is going on and all that is going on in the use of these technologies is oftentimes stated as a given, without empirical data or conceptual grounding offered to substantiate the claim. It is simply stated as self-evident. This claim is oftentimes also made without recognition that bond continuation is one grief possibility amongst or alongside a multitude, without justification for why Continuing Bonds was chosen as the focus of the analytic or theoretical endeavour at hand, nor why it has been given priority over other griefways.

Imbricated in such efforts, consciously or not, is the suggestion that bond continuation is the standard grief form that we expect. In such framings, the continuing of relational bonds between deceased and bereaved is treated as a grief universal—a fact of grief that applies to most or all bereaved people, most or all of the time, and a dominant or sole component of all grief experiences.

At the time of writing, to my knowledge, there is no grief-focused primary empirical research exploring the role of these resurrective technologies within grief experiences, and how—and indeed whether—they function within the contextual specificities, dynamism and complexities of lived griefs. In the absence of such data, it seems we are jumping the gun and dealing in an unsubstantiated grief universal when we suggest that bond continuation, or indeed any other griefway, is at play.

2.3. Alternative Readings Using Alternative Grief Paradigms

What else, besides or alongside the continuation of relational bonds, might be going on when bereaved people engage with digital simulations of their dead? In the following, I playfully speculate about this, using a sample of key grief theories and paradigms to experiment with readings other than Continuing Bonds.

First, a critical point. None of the alternative readings offered below are truths applicable to all griefs. Grief theories are just that: highly contingent theoretical conceptions of what it may be like to grieve within the particularities of situated lives rather than universal or definitive accounts of what grief is. There is no one-size-fits-all, off-the-shelf grief theory or model that we can use as default and apply as standard in our research, theorising or designs. The alternative framings offered below represent an invitation to think differently about grief in this space by showing a small flavour of the great breadth of theories at our disposal as Digital Grief scholars and attuning us to what we stand to gain from a fuller engagement with this broad spectrum of scholarly approaches to grief. By looking beyond the Continuing Bonds theory of grief, how might we open out and strengthen our thinking, research and designing in this space?

For instance, if we were to apply Walter's Biographical Model of Grief (Walter 1996) to our technologically enabled deceased–bereaved interaction, we could interpret that a bereaved person might engage with a simulation of their dead as part of the formation of what Walter termed a 'durable biography' of their deceased. This durable biography is a story of the life of the dead, their relationships, and their death, which is co-constructed and arrived at through the medium of conversation amongst those who knew the dead.

Or we might look at it through the lens of Árnason's extension to Walter's Biographical Model (Árnason 2000), which contends that grief is just as much about the bereaved constructing narratives about themselves as it is concerned with constructing biographies of their dead. Applying this approach to our example, we could suggest that engaging with the digital simulation is done within the bereaved person's construction of a post-bereavement narrative about themselves, their in-life relationship to their dead and their post-death identity.

It might indeed be that a bereaved person engages with a technological simulation of their dead to continue relational bonds with them. However, taking into consideration the often-forgotten emphasis in the Continuing Bonds theory (Klass et al. 1996) highlighting how social, cultural and temporal contexts modulate how, whether and which bonds are continued, we might posit that the bond continuation in this simulated engagement is also substantially tied into the bereaved person's social, cultural, temporal, religious or ethnic setting. For example, it may be a context where the grief in question is not sanctioned or is taboo (e.g., in contested griefs, such as peri-natal, ex-partner, or same-sex partner grief in certain settings) or where the continuation of a relationship post-death is unsupported by social, cultural or religious systems. In such contexts, continuing the bond via the given technology may not be solely driven by a wish to maintain relational bonds with the dead but also done in defiance of, or deference to, the expectations and norms at work in the bereaved person's setting. In such cases, bond continuation may indeed be at play, at least on the surface, or to an extent, but the bereaved person's use of the technology may be substantially rooted in compliance to, or challenge against, context-specific influences and norms that modulate how, whether and which bonds are continued.

Lastly, from the perspective of Neimeyer's and colleagues' Social Constructionist Account of Grief (Neimeyer et al. 2014), grief is conceived as an "intricately social" narrative process, where the bereaved seek and interpret meanings on personal and familial levels, formed within and influenced by broader community and cultural contexts (p. 485). Looking at our example through this lens that accentuates grief's relational and narrative facets, we might suggest that a grieving person might be motivated to engage with a digital simulation of their dead not only because they themselves wish to but because others in their grief network have done so. Perhaps feeling their narrative about their in-life relationship to the dead is threatened by other grievers' engagement with the technology, a bereaved person might use (or indeed not use) the simulation as a means of fortifying their narrative about having had a closer in-life relationship with the dead than others in their grief network.

These alternative readings, based on just a small sample of alternative grief theories and approaches, offer a taster of how we might think differently about this hypothetical digital interaction. By offering these multiple readings of this one example and unfolding the differing interpretations that flow from them, I hope to demonstrate the narrowing effect of the blanket and default use of Continuing Bonds in our field to date, not only with respect to this particular example but in our conceptions of grief in Digital Grief Studies more broadly. I hope it illuminates how much this universalist thinking restricts us and how it eclipses a diverse palette of alternate grief framings, and the possibilities that might flow from engaging with them.

2.4. Grief Universalism—The Quest for Universals in Grief and Bereavement Studies

When it comes to grief, thinking in universals is nothing new. Indeed, one-size-fits-all approaches have a long history in grief research, theory and practice, with the first near century of modern Grief and Bereavement Studies marked by attempts to squeeze grief into a universal shape applicable to all who grieve. Such "universalism" (Valentine 2006, p. 59) and an assumed "psychic unity of mankind" (Huntington and Metcalf 1979, p. 18) are characteristic of Western modernity.

This quest for grief universals began with Freud's now-famous 1917 essay Mourning and Melancholia, which depicted grief as a "work of severance" of relational links between bereaved and deceased; a predictable, universal process of withdrawing psychic energy from the "love object" and its redirection elsewhere (Freud [1915] 1917, p. 255). Despite describing grief only very briefly in a short essay, and indirectly—as a non-pathological comparison to melancholia (depression) (Granek 2010; Bradbury 2001)—the comparison Freud made between grief and depression placed it in the remit of psychiatry and psychology and rooted it firmly in the institution of medicine and its universalising "disease model" (Granek 2010, p. 59; Valentine 2006; Hedtke and Winslade 2016; Jakoby 2012).

In this disease model, grief, like physical or mental illness, was conceived as a pathology with a generalisable manifestation and predictable course. Within this medical framing, in order for grief to be diagnosed, recovered from, and scientifically studied, its 'normal' course and 'symptoms' needed to be specified, and its expected duration and features demarcated (e.g., Lindemann 1944; Engel 1961; Faschingbauer et al. 1977).

2.4.1. The Standard Model of Grief—A Near Century Seeking Grief Universals

In the years following its publication, Freud's brief and indirect sketching of grief was extrapolated from by a host of scholars and theorists, spawning a lineage of neo-Freudian approaches to grief that sought to identify grief's universal form and duration. These efforts grew into a neo-Freudian "standard psychoanalytic model of mourning" (Hagman 2001, p. 14), leading to a "psychologising of grief" in the West (Bradbury 2001, p. 59) that "brought grief under the regime of science" (Hedtke and Winslade 2016, p. 31). Contributions toward understanding, addressing, and studying grief over the next seventy or so years were dominated by the disciplines of medicine, psychology and psychiatry, with prevailing positivist knowledge paradigms that framed grief in pathologising, standardising and universalising ways (Valentine 2006; Hedtke and Winslade 2016; Stroebe et al. 2001).

This dominance cast a long shadow visible throughout twentieth-century grief theory, research and practice, with the ill effects of universalist approaches well documented (for a detailed history, see Valentine 2006; Hedtke and Winslade 2016). The notion of a universal grief form experienced by all has been established as creating normative expectations that people ought to grieve in particular ways and durations and undermining, invalidating and stigmatising experiences that do not accord with the supposed grief universal (Valentine 2006; Wortman and Silver 1989; Hedtke and Winslade 2016).

For example, in the neo-Freudian standard grief model, the phenomenon of bereaved people sensing the presence of their dead was not considered part of grief's normal, universal course and was, therefore, considered abnormal (e.g., Bowlby 1980; Lindemann

1944; Parkes 1983). As a consequence, studies show bereaved people with sense-of-presence experiences not disclosing these experiences to others for fear of ridicule (Rees 2001), being thought insane (Datson and Marwit 1997; Parker 2005) or "mad or stupid" (Hay and Heald 1987, p. 22), and made to feel "abnormal" when disclosing this to therapists (Taylor 2005, p. 60). Studies of grief counselling interactions also show universalising discourses at work, with therapists undermining and discouraging interpretations that do not fit the expected experience and steering clients toward grief responses aligned with supposedly universal grief norms (examples in Stroebe et al. 2017; Wambach 1986; Broadbent et al. 1990).

A second example of the quest for universals in grief scholarship, and a classic illustration of the dangers associated with Grief Universalism, is the idea that grief involves a series of stages. The Five-Stage Theory of Grief is attributed to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and her 1969 book On Death and Dying (Kübler-Ross 1969), in which the Swiss American psychiatrist proposed that the terminally ill cancer patients she interviewed experienced five stages in response to the knowledge that they were dying: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance (DABDA). Though On Death and Dying addressed dying, not grieving—two connected but entirely different phenomena—in the decades since, Kübler-Ross' stages were transplanted wholesale from dying to grieving despite a lack of credible supporting evidence. Five stages later became seven, and the model is now so widely recognised, so professionally entrenched and so culturally ingrained as to have become "practically folklore" (Volpe 2016).

Not only did the so-called stages of grief originate in a study about dying rather than grieving, more problematic was the model's widespread oversimplification and misappropriation as universally applicable to all grief and occurring in a fixed, linear sequence. Evidence of the dangers attending this universalist grief framing abound; its prescriptive structure places rigid and unrealistic expectations on bereaved people (Konigsberg 2011), requires that all grief end in acceptance (Wortman and Silver 1989), renders social supports and healthcare interactions ineffective, unhelpful or stigmatising (Silver and Wortman 2007; Hall 2014; Doka and Tucci 2011; Stroebe et al. 2017), and a mistaken belief in the model having "devastating consequences", as bereaved people can feel they are grieving inappropriately (Silver and Wortman 2007, p. 2692). Grief counsellors Friedman and James (2008) report the "horror stories we've heard from thousands of grieving people who've told us how they'd been harmed by them [the stages]". The ultimate rebuttal came from Kübler-Ross herself when, thirty-six years after On Death and Dying, she took issue with the model's misapplication as a uniformly experienced sequence of linear, rigid steps:

> "The fact is, no study has ever established that stages of grief actually exist, and what are defined as such can't be called stages. Grief is the normal and natural emotional response to loss. Stage theories put grieving people in conflict with their emotional reactions to losses that affect them. No matter how much people want to create simple, iron clad guidelines for the human emotions of grief, there are no stages of grief that fit every person or relationship" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2005, p. 41).

It is now widely accepted in grief research and practitioner circles that there are no set grief stages; grief does not happen in a linear, orderly sequence of tidy experiential parcels, nor does it always come to a clear or absolute endpoint. However, our tendency to look for universals in grief is tenacious, persisting despite such forceful contestation. Research suggests that the model continues to be cited with low criticalness in academic and professional textbooks (Corr 2018, 2020, 2021); is routinely taught in medical and nursing education curricula (Hall 2014); is found to be widely believed in United States-based surveys of the general public and mental health professionals (Sawyer et al. 2022); and continues to be prescribed in healthcare settings (Stroebe et al. 2017).

The two above examples serve to illustrate the recurring appeal of Grief Universalism—how we repeatedly strive to identify a universal shape for grief and repeatedly run into the harms and dangers known to attend such universalist efforts.

2.4.2. A New Dawn in Grief and Bereavement Studies: Griefs Steeped in Particularity and Context

Following eighty or so years of universalist efforts in the neo-Freudian tradition, in the 1990s, the field of Grief and Bereavement Studies underwent a paradigm shift, following which it arrived at an understanding that universalist grief efforts do not accord with the idiosyncrasy, dynamism and diversity of lived grief and have harmful downstream effects for the bereaved. Therefore, in contemporary Grief and Bereavement Studies, the quest for grief universals and universalist discourses has been largely abandoned[2]. In its place is a general understanding that, though grief following the death of a significant other is one of life's universals, how we grieve is so steeped in context, so interpretive, so intimately social, and so fluctuating as to be wholly incompatible with such universalist approaches and framings (key texts in paradigm shift: Klass et al. 1996; Walter 1996; Neimeyer 2001).

This new understanding undergirds contemporary grief theories, research efforts and therapeutic forms, which, rather than dealing in grief universals, emphasise, study and support grief's diversity, specificity and changeability. Dennis Klass, an American theorist at the vanguard of this new turn in Grief and Bereavement Studies, suggests that even the word 'grief' is a misnomer, as it contains the suggestion of a singular, unified phenomenon. Instead, he suggests the use of the term 'griefs' to carry through into our language the difference, distinctness and change that lived griefs entail and as a bulwark against the inexorable pull of universalist framings.

> "the search for the universal must proceed carefully and not create a concept that we reify in a way that blocks, rather than carries forward, our understanding of human experience. As a heuristic device it might be useful to stop using the word "grief" as a universal description or category of response." (Klass 1999, p. 173)

2.4.3. Drawing on Grief and Bereavement Studies History and Learnings in Digital Grief Studies

I argue that this history—the identification and rejection of problematic universalist grief framings in Grief and Bereavement Studies—represents an important insight and one which we might capitalise on in Digital Grief Studies. Returning to our use of the Continuing Bonds theory of grief in Digital Grief Studies to date, we might apply this insight to see that treating the Continuing Bonds theory of grief as an unqualified one-to-one synonym for grief and doing so without due justification or acknowledgement of alternatives bears the hallmarks of this old universalising pattern.

Looking to the history of this pattern in Grief and Bereavement Studies, we can see that, when repeatedly framed in this way, certain forms and experiences of grief can harden into universal benchmarks against which all other griefs are judged, calibrated and policed. This same history shows us how these hardened orthodoxies requiring grief to manifest in certain ways are harmful for bereaved people whose experiences do not align and whose griefs are consequently questioned, condemned or denounced as downright wrong. In this way, grief's great distinctness and alterity can be collapsed, and the Continuing Bonds theory of grief becomes an oppressive homogenising force; a monolith rather than a plural possibility.

This is quite a paradoxical application of the Continuing Bonds theory, which originated as a challenge to such monolithic universalist renderings of grief. When it comes to grief, we seem perennially drawn to universalist thinking, with even the theories that arise in the challenge against universalism becoming recruited and subsumed into the effort.

2.5. Universalist Framings of Continuing Bonds in Digital Grief Studies

Such universalist treatments of the Continuing Bonds theory are themselves not new. The Continuing Bonds theory of grief proposes that posthumous relational continuity with our dead is a possibility rather than something universal, expected, normal or ideal (Vickio 1999; Rosenblatt 1996). Yet, owing to the popularity and widespread uptake of the Continuing Bonds theory in diverse academic and practitioner circles, this vital

nuance often goes by the wayside. Universalist treatments of Continuing Bonds are often accompanied by certain universalising features, which commentators in Grief and Bereavement Studies have identified and which I suggest are also in evidence in work in the Digital Grief field. In the following, I outline two such features in the hope that these more concrete examples of universalist treatments of Continuing Bonds will help us to identify how universalism might manifest in our work and in our field.

2.5.1. Example 1: Continuing Bonds Cause Good, Healthy Digital-Age Grieving

The first feature of universalist framings of Continuing Bonds identified in Grief and Bereavement Studies, which I suggest is recurring in Digital Grief Studies, is the idea that to continue bonds with the dead is to have good, healthy griefs and that the bereaved should therefore be guided toward and facilitated in bond continuation. Of course, bond continuation *can* be positive for some at times, but the universalist extension of this is that maintaining bonds always leads to 'better' grieving and that engaging in it indicates good survivorship for all. Klass (2006) terms this "the causality thesis".

"As the idea of continuing bonds has made its way into the clinical lore, some clinicians and lay authors have mistaken a description (that survivors do maintain bonds) for a prescription (that it is helpful for survivors to do so). I have seen workshops advertised that promise techniques by which therapists and others can help the bereaved continue the bond with their deceased as if that were the sine qua non of good survivorship. My work is often cited wrongly as claiming that continuing bonds support better adjustment. . .I will call this the causality thesis—that continuing bonds cause healthy adjustment" (Klass 2006, p. 844).

To pick up on the hypothetical example above of the bereaved person engaging with a digital simulation of their dead, I suggest that we routinely draw on similarly causal treatments of grief in such bereaved-focused designs and our theorising about them. That is, we can suggest that engaging with technology X will create opportunities for bond continuation and that this will lead to good, healthy or positive grieving. In such renderings, bond continuation via the technology in question becomes a universal royal road to 'good' grief for all bereaved people. The grief occurring outside the technology-enabled bond continuation is oftentimes consequently depicted (either implicitly or explicitly) as less good, healthy or positive, and bond continuation via the technology is portrayed as the solution to the problem of this less-than-ideal grief.

In such moments, the bereaved are positioned as passive and in need of guidance by the technology toward 'better' grief via bond continuation. Such treatments depict grief as subject to the adjudication of parties outside of particular grief experiences, parties who decide what constitutes healthy, positive, good grief and what does not. This gives rise to what has been termed the "cult of the expert" (Small and Hockey 2001, p. 116), so prevalent in universalist twentieth-century treatments, where grief was framed as a problem to be outsourced to medical and psychological experts, and in which the bereaved were passive enactors of externally approved, universal and highly normative grief forms.

2.5.2. Example 2: Bonds Continued Are Always Positive, and to Continue Bonds Is Always Positive

Feature two of universalising treatments of Continuing Bonds, identified in Grief and Bereavement Studies, which I contend is also present in much work in the Digital Grief field to date, is the idea that bonds continued between deceased and bereaved are always positive. That is, that continued bonds are universally based on a positive type and quality of deceased–bereaved relationship, and the continuation of this bond is universally and enduringly a positive thing for bereaved people.

Given that bonds continue on from in-life relationships, and given that not all in-life relationships are positive—or not as simple as that—it is easy to imagine that continuing a bond with the dead is not always purely or enduringly positive. To suggest that all bond continuation is good reflects an overly simplistic representation of human relationships

and has the effect of flattening out the diversity, complexity and subtleties of interpersonal bonds, whether in life or after death.

That continued bonds may not be solely positive, or that continuing them may not always be positive for the bereaved, is well-trodden ground in the Grief and Bereavement Studies literature. In the original 1996 edition of Continuing Bonds, two empirical chapters showed ongoing connections between grieving people and their dead that could be intrusive, disturbing, and even frightening (Normand et al. 1996; Tyson-Rawson 1996; Packman et al. 2006). These negative examples of continued bonds prompted Silverman and Nickman to write "as we develop a model of grief that includes continuing interactions with the dead, we need to be open to both the positive and negative consequences of this activity" (Silverman and Nickman 1996, p. 72). Dennis Klass has also noted the historical, cross-cultural precedents of troubling and disturbing ongoing relationships with the dead: "the histories in many cultures of the dead returning as hungry ghosts, wandering spirits, other sorts of dangerous beings to haunt or harm the living" (Klass 1999, p. 844).

The Grief and Bereavement Studies literature is clear: not all deceased–bereaved bonds are purely or enduringly positive, and the continuation of bonds is not always positive for the bereaved. I contend that, in the Digital Grief literature to date, we too often assume a simplistically positive in-life relationship between deceased and bereaved and, consequently, theorise and design around bond continuation as something purely positive and desirable for all bereaved people at all times.

I argue that this can lead us in the Digital Grief scholarly community to underrepresent and underserve post-death relationships other than the purely positive or comforting. In so doing, we can suggest a false universality and create a grief norm-in-waiting, i.e., that all the digital-age bereaved should wish to continue bonds with their dead and that these bonds should be of a quality that is unilaterally comforting, loving and positive. I wonder where this leaves those for whom a continued bond with their dead would be painful, frightening, disruptive or abusive? Or those for whom bond continuation is not a central feature of their grief or not a feature at all? We might question whether this creates a taboo for digital-age grievers for whom the continuation of the bond is a minor facet of their experience, for whom *dis*continuing the relationship with their dead is more appropriate, or for whom there may be a continued bond, but it is messy, nuanced, or changeable rather than singularly and statically positive. Might our focus on the continuation of bonds via new technologies in the Digital Grief field leave those with deviating experiences feeling that their grief is less ideal, unhealthy or wrong?

2.6. Digital Grief Studies Example of Non-Universalism

An example of recent work in Digital Grief Studies that does not invoke Grief Universalism is offered here to illustrate how we might avoid universalist discourses in this space and instead fold a commitment to grief's diversity and alterity into our work. Though Wallace and South's 2022 book Enabling Ongoingness centres on fostering relational continuity after deaths via bespoke digital designs and therefore takes the Continuing Bonds paradigm as a foundational theory, the authors deliberately set out bond continuation as one griefway amid other possibilities. Great care is taken to offset any universalist suggestion that continuing bonds is the only, right or expected response or that it reflects the experience of all bereaved people.

"Is it important here to emphasise that we are not saying that we think continued bonds are 'good' and detachment approaches are bad. Grief and bereavement is a personal thing and what feels right for one person won't be the same for another. Equally, our relationships with other people are also different and therefore being able to healthily detach from one deceased person might be the more positive thing, whilst continuing a bond with another person who has died is the right thing for that relationship" (Wallace and South 2022, p. 21).

3. Discussion

3.1. Grief Universalism: Why Does It Recur and Why Might It Be Recurring Now?

Why are universalist grief treatments so tenacious, and why might they be recurring in Digital Grief Studies? A weave of factors is likely at play. The following outlines some possibilities.

3.1.1. Time Since, and Timing of, the Paradigm Shift in Grief Understandings

Though the iron grip of universalism in twentieth-century Western Grief and Bereavement Studies is no more, the field still wrestles with universalist discourses and recurrent attempts to revive them. This is so despite voluminous evidence of their associated harms and problems. The endurance of universalist ideas may be owing, in part at least, to the passing of a mere few decades since the turn-of-the-millennium paradigm shift that dislodged the universalism that so dominated a near century of Western grief theory, research and practice. Perhaps the hangover from universalism, which for so long permeated our social, professional, academic and cultural understandings of grief, will take time to more thoroughly shake off.

We might also look to the dawning of the digital age and its coinciding, roughly, with this paradigm shift around the start of the new millennium. Has this timing meant that universalist discourses were carried through into digital-age understandings of grief before the plural and egalitarian approaches sparked by the paradigm shift could gain traction and truly take hold?

Timing may also play a part in what this paper has argued is the frequent framing of Continuing Bonds as a universal grief form and experience in Digital Grief Studies to date. Continuing Bonds was the prevailing grief theory at the time when the Digital Death field came into being and throughout the field's first decade, with extensive uptake, application and endorsement within Grief and Bereavement Studies and beyond. The prominence of this grief theory as our field came into being may have had the effect of eclipsing alternative theories and creating the illusion in Digital Grief Studies that Continuing Bonds is the only grief theory of note with universal applicability to all griefs and grief-related scholarly efforts.

3.1.2. The Enduring Allure of Grief Universalism

The appeal of universalist grief framings may also relate to something more elemental, unrelated to their validity or the evidence for or against them. The notion that grief, or indeed any difficult experience, might involve a universally experienced paint-by-numbers progression from darkness into light is an enticing and abiding one. Perhaps the complexity, diversity and unpredictability of grief is what makes the fantasy of one universal path through and past it all the more seductive.

When it comes to grief, humans seem justifiably drawn to the promise of uniformity and predictability and to the potential of whittling down our and others' suffering (via technologies, in this case) into something known and therefore subject to our control. Though we know these efforts are based on a false and harmful standardising of grief, what Kasket (2019, p. 40) termed a "comforting fiction", the effort toward it is no less understandable—even laudable—as it is born of a wish to marshal grief into something manageable. Amid the volatility, chaos and suffering that can attend grief, the soothing falsehood of a universal path through it seems to lure us in time and time again with a fundamental charm that may make it impervious to debate or data.

3.1.3. Contributing Factors in Digital Grief Studies and Contemporary Digital Contexts

There are several factors, features and influences particular to our contemporary digital environments and to the field of Digital Death and Digital Grief subfield that may also be creating conditions for Grief Universalism to revive and flourish.

Inter-Disciplinarity of Digital Death and Digital Grief Fields

Our burgeoning field boasts a wonderfully rich variety of scholarly disciplines, in full evidence at the 2023 6th International Symposium of the Death Online Research Network (DORS6), Northumbria University, UK. Though this interdisciplinarity is our great strength, bringing about unexpected junctures and exciting meetings of minds, disciplines and ideas, it also makes our field a confluence point for diverse disciplinary drivers, methodologies and epistemologies and understandings of key concepts, such as grief. As disciplines mix and mingle, and as grief becomes the focus of endeavours that may not have a robust basis in contemporary grief understandings (as not all work can), universalist renderings of grief can be unwittingly folded back in. When the tide of Grief Universalism is hard to hold back even in Grief and Bereavement Studies, where there is awareness of and vigilance about this problem pattern, it is little wonder that we are seeing universalism crop up in Digital Grief Studies, where I suggest we are—as yet—largely unaware of its associated harms and problems.

As scholars whose work crosses disciplinary lines, it is impossible to be masters of all the fields, methods and concepts touched by our endeavours. We can, however, capitalise on our hybridity and difference by seeking out and sharing discipline-specific insights about our work and our field and committing to helping and being helped by our interdisciplinary peers. I hope this paper represents a first strand in this effort, to which others will add their own discipline-particular insights, learnings and perspectives, not only concerning grief but about other concepts key to our field.

Contemporary Digital Contexts

The digitally saturated cultures in which most modern griefs occur[3] and which provide the backdrop to Digital Death and Digital Grief Studies may also play a part in preserving and enhancing universalist grief framings. The following briefly sketches how and why this may be. See O'Connor and Kasket (2022) for further exposition.

Technology Companies and Designers Framing Grief

As technology companies design for grief and refine existing platforms in response to grieving users, they are becoming major players in framing grief and shaping our cultural understandings and imaginings of grief. To date, Big Tech and social media companies have tended to frame grief in universalist ways. For instance, in 2019, Facebook launched AI to identify deceased user profiles not yet reported as deceased or memorialised. This was done to "help keep content from showing up in places that might cause distress, like recommending that (the dead) person be invited to events or sending birthday reminders to their friends" (Sandberg 2019). This decision, and the consequent sweeping changes in deceased user profile functionality, were rooted in the universalist idea that birthday reminders and event invites mentioning the dead are unanimously negative for all grieving people and, on this basis, should be deactivated without their knowledge or consent.

Commercial Backdrop

Such universalist grief treatments may be linked to the commercial underpinnings of Big Tech companies designing for grief as well as the burgeoning ecology of entrepreneurial platforms and services aimed at the grieving (e.g., grief games and apps, grief coaches and influencers, digital séances, post-death communication services, and an arms race in resurrective technologies offering to simulate our dead via holographic, VR, generative AI and deepfake technologies). These efforts exist within a digital capitalist backdrop, in which the players have profit-driven agendas where awareness of, or fidelity to, contemporary grief understandings is not always the first or only priority. In such environments, it is unsurprising that players may reach for simple one-size-fits-all grief formulae, which promise to attract and cater to more users. In this rapid-growth, profit-driven landscape, universalist grief framings may simply be more expedient and cost-effective and promise a wider customer base than plural grief approaches that resist such generalised treatments.

Technological Solutionism and Utopianism

The confluence of grief and new technologies may also be sparking classic narratives about what technology can do for us, giving rise to universalist grief treatments. Technological solutionism and utopianism are classic discourses about human–technology relations that recur with successive technological advances in which technology is held up as a panacea for complex human and social phenomena. This is often without robust understanding or debate about the issue we are trying to solve, whether it can be solved, or even needs to be solved (Sturken and Thomas 2004; Anderson 2005; Baym 2010; Morozov 2013; Kneese 2023).

Tech-solutionist and utopianist narratives have an extensive history of becoming particularly animated at the intersection of death and technology and in the face of the great unsolvable human problems of illness, death and grief (Sconce 2000; Bollmer 2013). When it comes to grief, these narratives translate into depictions of grieving as a problem that technology can solve and which, necessarily, reduces grief to something with a uniform, generalisable structure apt to solving. This has clear echoes of twentieth-century Western treatments of grief as a pathological deviation from ideal functioning, with a single form that could be 'fixed' through the application of science. Though grief poses exciting new frontiers for design, theory and research in the digital sphere, it may also trigger classic techno-fantasies about emancipation from human suffering in which we may fetishise and overstate technology's power to 'fix' grief. In doing so, we falsely frame grief as a problem to be solved and as manifesting universally across all who experience it.

As Grief and Bereavement Studies history shows us, such universalist framings evolve into harmful norms dictating how grief ought to look, act and feel. Moreover, by depicting human problems as fixable via technological solutions, tech-solutionist and utopianist approaches also posit a compatibility between the economic interests of private commercial actors and the public good. Thus, a techno-solutionist ethic dovetails with the spirit of digital capitalism: one can make money while 'making the world a better place' (Morozov 2013; Nachtwey and Seidl 2020). This constitutes fertile ground for Grief Universalism to grow and thrive and is a formulation about which we might be understandably critical.

Online Grief Information

There may also be an echo chamber of grief disinformation online, where universalist falsehoods about grief are spreading regardless of their veracity or status in current thinking. For instance, at the time of writing, Kübler-Ross' debunked universalist five-stage model of grief is cited and endorsed as contemporary thinking on two of the world's top three highest-ranking health websites, Healthline.com (Healthline 2024) and WebMD (WebMD 2024). On Healthline.com, currently the world's highest ranked health website with monthly traffic averaging about 250 million (Scripted 2024), an article titled "The Stages of Grief and What to Expect" states that "Kübler-Ross wrote in her book 'On Death and Dying' that grief could be divided into five stages" and lists the stages without reference to their contestation. Similarly, in an article entitled 'Grieving and Stages of Grief' on WebMD, currently the world's third ranked health website with around 130 million monthly visitors (Scripted 2024), states that "Kubler-Ross [sic] identified five stages of grief", which it then cites without reference to critiques of the model (WebMD 2024).

A 2021 systematic narrative review of this same phenomenon by Avis, Stroebe and Schut used Google Search to examine how the five-stage grief model attributed to Kübler-Ross is presented online. The authors report that 61% of eligible websites analysed mentioned the stages, indicating the model's continued popularity online, with sites offering low criticalness of the model, neglecting evaluative commentary or including definitive statements of endorsement, and with over a third of sites devoting 50% or more of their word count to describing the so-called stages of grief.

This effect may be linked to the spreadability of information online and in networked cultures and the ease with which information is replicated across spaces, irrespective of its truth value (Jenkins et al. 2013). However, when major health websites, organisations and

trusted authorities cite contested and harmful universalist grief models as uncontested and up-to-date thinking, and as we increasingly seek health information online, an environment is created for universalist grief framings to spread.

The above affordances and infrastructures of today's digital contexts and the values, discourses and commercial underpinnings of contemporary digital culture may play a part in reanimating universalist grief framings, which then percolate down into our social, cultural and professional understandings of digital-age grief. Against this backdrop, it is perhaps unsurprising that universalist grief framings may be on the rise in Digital Grief Studies.

3.2. What Is the Problem with Using Continuing Bonds in Digital Grief Studies?

It is vital to note that this is not an anti-Continuing Bonds paper. Neither is it a critique of the Continuing Bonds theory of grief or the potential for its use in the Digital Grief space, per se. Indeed, Continuing Bonds is one of our principal contemporary grief theories, with widespread multi-disciplinary application and a robust evidence base for its manifestation in cross-cultural grief contexts, and its conceptual power and therapeutic applicability are firmly established.

Rather, this article is critical of universalist framings and applications of Continuing Bonds in Digital Grief Studies, in which bond continuation is framed as, to borrow Klass' 2006 phrase quoted above, the sine qua non of grief: without which, grief could not be, and without which, there is nothing else in grief. In such universalist framings, the tentative, anti-universalist Continuing Bonds grief theory becomes canonical and axiomatic: an automatic, dominant, and required component of all digital-age griefs.

Crucially, a takeaway from this paper should, therefore, not be that using Continuing Bonds in our work in this space is somehow negative or problematic in and of itself. A better takeaway would be that, when it comes to grief, history tells us that our perennial tendency is to treat human grieving as a phenomenon with a universal form universally experienced by all and that this tendency leads to well-documented problems and harms. In the Digital Grief field to date, taking the Continuing Bonds theory as an example, I have argued that this persistent universalist tendency is recurring.

There are other examples of Grief Universalism in our field that might have served to illustrate this article's point. Continuing Bonds was strategically chosen as the illustrative vehicle, not only because it effectively highlights it in practice, but because Continuing Bonds is widely recognised and extensively utilised across the many disciplines and activities in our field, spanning theory, research and design. It, therefore, represents an example with broad application and appeal to the many rather than the few. It is hoped that its use as the illustrative device in this paper will help us to recognise how universalism might be at play in our own work and in our field; to identify concrete examples of universalist framings and features in action; and, ultimately, to envision how we as a field might profit from harnessing and capitalising on the advances made within mature allied fields with which we share substantial topic overlap, such as Grief and Bereavement Studies.

4. Conclusions

This paper built a case for the scholarly field of Grief and Bereavement Studies as a veritable goldmine of insights and refinements—as well as pitfalls, wrong turns and recurring problem patterns to be avoided—from a hundred years of scholarly activity concerning human grief. By arguing that Grief Universalism, an old problem pattern with a long history in Grief and Bereavement Studies, is finding its way into our work in Digital Grief Studies, I aimed to highlight what we might gain from opening ourselves out to the learnings of this more mature, topically germane field. I contend that we only stand to nuance and advance our work in this space by viewing our overlap with this established field as an immense opportunity and bountiful resource to mine in the decade ahead and beyond. Harnessing this prior learning and history to our benefit

and leveraging it toward the betterment of our field becomes all the more crucial as we repel universalism's seemingly inherent magnetism, within an interdisciplinary context vulnerable to universalism and as yet unaware of its perils, and amid contemporary digital cultures and environments that may enhance and promote universalist grief framings.

As the field of Digital Death and the Digital Grief subfield turn one decade old, this paper invites us to step back from the coalface of primary research, theory-building and design. It calls on us to reflect on the fundamental principles and underlying conceptions of grief that inform and drive our activities and stream down into our scholarly endeavours. It seeks to open a space for us to become curious about alternatives. Using the Continuing Bonds theory of grief as a vehicle to illustrate the evergreen pattern of Grief Universalism in action in our emerging field, this paper holds that, in much design, research and theorising to date, we have been framing grief in monochrome.

It then begs the question: what could our field look like in the coming decade and beyond—what fresh avenues, forms and possibilities in design, practice, research and theory might become available to us—if we were to instead reimagine grief as something that "comes in technicolour"? (Skoglund et al. 2023).

Notes

[1]   Though scholarly activity in this space predates 2014, and The Death Online Research Network (DORN) was founded in Copenhagen in 2013, DORS1 represents the first convening of international scholars around the topic of Digital Death and is, therefore, taken here as the field's point of origin.

[2]   Though universalism's dominance of the field ended with the paradigm shift, pockets of universalism persist in Grief and Bereavement Studies, and the field ongoingly battles universalist tendencies, as noted by Klass (2006) and Hedtke and Winslade (2016), examples in Stroebe et al. (2017) and Avis et al. (2021).

[3]   Most contemporary griefs occur in digitally saturated societies. Therefore, modern griefs happen within and can be influenced to varying extents by digital culture (its architecture, affordances, discourses, values and meaning systems), even when digital technologies are not directly or explicitly used within grief experiences.

References

Anderson, Janna Quitney. 2005. *Imagining the Internet*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Avis, Kate Anne, Margaret Stroebe, and Henk Schut. 2021. Stages of Grief Portrayed on the Internet: A Systematic Analysis and Critical Appraisal. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12: 772696. [CrossRef]

Árnason, Arnar. 2000. Biography, bereavement, story. *Mortality* 5: 189–204. [CrossRef]

Baym, Nancy. 2010. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bollmer, Grant David. 2013. Millions now living will never die: Cultural anxieties about the afterlife of information. *The Information Society* 29: 142–51. [CrossRef]

Bowlby, John. 1980. *Attachment and Loss: Loss: Sadness and Depression*. London: Hogarth, vol. 3.

Bradbury, Mary. 2001. Freud's mourning and melancholia. *Mortality* 6: 212–19. [CrossRef]

Broadbent, Margaret, Prue Horwood, Jenny Sparks, and Gillian de Whalley. 1990. Bereavement groups. *Bereavement Care* 9: 14–16. [CrossRef]

Corr, Charles. 2018. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and the "five stages" model in a sampling of recent American textbooks. *Omega—Journal of Death and Dying* 82: 294–322. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Corr, Charles. 2020. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and the five stages model in selected social work textbooks. *Illness, Crisis & Loss* 30: 320–32. [CrossRef]

Corr, Charles. 2021. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and the "five stages" model in a sampling of recent textbooks published in 10 countries outside the United States. *Omega—Journal of Death and Dying* 83: 33–63. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Datson, Susan, and Samuel Marwit. 1997. Personality constructs and perceived presence of deceased loved ones. *Death Studies* 21: 131–46. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Doka, Kenneth, and Amy Tucci. 2011. *Beyond Kübler-Ross: New Perspectives on Dying, Death, and Grief*. Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America.

Engel, George. 1961. Is grief a disease?: A challenge for medical research. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 23: 18–22. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Faschingbauer, Thomas, Richard DeVaul, and Sidney Zisook. 1977. Development of the Texas Inventory of Grief. *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 134: 696–98. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Freud, Sigmund. 1917. Mourning and melancholia. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 237–58. First published 1915.

Friedman, Russell, and John James. 2008. The Myth of the Stages of Dying, Death and Grief. *Skeptic* 14: 37–42. Available online: https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA182976246&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=10639330&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=anon~6b75ac5b&aty=open-web-entry (accessed on 20 February 2024).

Granek, Leeat. 2010. Grief as pathology: The evolution of grief theory in psychology from Freud to the present. *History of Psychology* 13: 46–73. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Hagman, George Allen. 2001. Beyond decathexis: Toward a new psychoanalytic understanding and treatment of mourning. In *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*. Edited by Robert Neimeyer. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp. 13–32.

Hall, Christopher. 2014. Bereavement theory: Recent developments in our understanding of grief and bereavement. *Bereavement Care* 33: 7–12. [CrossRef]

Hay, David, and Gordon Heald. 1987. Religion is good for you. *New Society* 80: 20–22.

Healthline. 2024. The Stages of Grief and What to Expect. Available online: https://www.healthline.com/health/stages-of-grief (accessed on 20 February 2024).

Hedtke, Lorraine, and John Winslade. 2016. *The Crafting of Grief: Constructing Aesthetic Responses to Loss*. London: Routledge.

Huntington, Richard, and Peter Metcalf. 1979. *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jakoby, Nina. 2012. Grief as a social emotion: Theoretical perspectives. *Death Studies* 36: 679–711. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. 2013. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Kasket, Elaine. 2019. *All the Ghosts in the Machine*. London: Robinson.

Klass, Dennis. 1999. Developing a Cross-Cultural Model of Grief: The State of the Field. *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying* 39: 153–78. [CrossRef]

Klass, Dennis. 2006. Continuing conversation about continuing bonds. *Death Studies* 30: 843–58. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Klass, Dennis, Phyllis Silverman, and Steven Nickman, eds. 1996. *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. Oxford: Routledge.

Kneese, Tamara. 2023. *Death Glitch: How Techno-Solutionism Fails Us in This Life and Beyond*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Konigsberg, Ruth Davis. 2011. *The Truth about Grief: The Myth of Its Five Stages and the New Science of Loss*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. 1969. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan.

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth, and David Kessler. 2005. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*. New York: Scribner.

Lindemann, Erich. 1944. Symptomatology and management of acute grief. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 101: 141–48. [CrossRef]

Morozov, Evgeny. 2013. *To Save Everything, Click Here: Technology, Solutions and the Urge to Fix Problems That Don't Exist*. London: Penguin.

Nachtwey, Oliver, and Timo Seidl. 2020. The solutionist ethic and the spirit of digital capitalism. *SocArXiv* 1–53. Available online: https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/sgjzq (accessed on 20 February 2024). [CrossRef]

Neimeyer, Robert, ed. 2001. *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss*. Washington: American Psychological Association. [CrossRef]

Neimeyer, Robert, Dennis Klass, and Michael Robert Dennis. 2014. A social constructionist account of grief: Loss and the narration of meaning. *Death Studies* 38: 485–98. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Normand, Claude, Phyllis Silverman, and Steven Nickman. 1996. Bereaved children's changing relationships with the deceased. In *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. Edited by Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman. London: Routledge, pp. 87–111.

O'Connor, Mórna, and Elaine Kasket. 2022. What Grief isn't: Dead grief concepts and their digital-age revival. In *Social Media and Technology Across the Lifespan*. Edited by Tanya Machin, Charlotte Brownlow, Susan Abel and John Gilmour. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 115–30. [CrossRef]

Packman, Wendy, Heidi Horsley, Betty Davies, and Robin Kramer. 2006. Sibling bereavement and continuing Bonds. *Death Studies* 30: 817–41. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Parker, Julie S. 2005. Extraordinary experiences of the bereaved and adaptive outcomes of grief. *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying* 51: 257–83. [CrossRef]

Parkes, Colin Murray. 1983. *Recovery from Bereavement*. New York: Basic.

Pitsillides, Stacey, Savvas Katsikides, and Martin Conreen. 2009. Digital Death. Paper presented at the IFIP WG9.5 Images of Virtuality: Conceptualizations and Applications in Everyday Life, Athens, Greece, October 23–24.

Rees, Dewi. 2001. *Death and Bereavement: The Psychological, Religious and Cultural Interfaces*, 2nd ed. London: Whurr.

Rosenblatt, Paul C. 1996. Grief that does not end. In *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. Edited by Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 45–58.

Sandberg, Sheryl. 2019. Making it Easier to Honor a Loved One on Facebook after They Pass Away. Facebook Newsroom. Available online: https://about.fb.com/news/2019/04/updates-to-memorialization/ (accessed on 20 February 2024).

Sawyer, Jacob, Lindsey Wilner, and Melissa Ertl. 2022. Grief and bereavement beliefs among U. S. mental health professionals and the general public. *Death Studies* 46: 2346–53. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Sconce, Jeffrey. 2000. *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Scripted. 2024. Top 10 Health Websites by Traffic. Available online: https://www.scripted.com/content-marketing/top-10-health-websites-by-traffic (accessed on 7 February 2024).

Silver, Roxane Cohen, and Camille Wortman. 2007. The stage theory of grief. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 297: 2692–94. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Silverman, Phyllis, and Steven Nickman. 1996. Bereaved Children. In *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. Edited by Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 71–72.

Skoglund, Johannna, Inger Benkel, Daniel Enstedt, Stina Nyblom, Yvla Hård af Segerstad, and Joakim Öhlén. 2023. On grief in contemporary Sweden. Paper presented at The 16th International Conference of Death, Dying and Disposal (DDD16): Learning from Suffering and Dying. New Languages from Sciences to the Humanities, Padua, Italy, September 7–9.

Small, Neil, and Jenny Hockey. 2001. Discourse into practice: The production of bereavement care. In *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*. Edited by Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz and Neil Small. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 97–124.

Stroebe, Margaret, Henk Schut, and Kathrin Boerner. 2017. Cautioning Health-Care Professionals: Bereaved Persons Are Misguided Through the Stages of Grief. *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying* 74: 455–73. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Stroebe, Margaret, Robert Hansson, Wolfgang Stroebe, and Henk Schut. 2001. Introduction: Concepts and issues in contemporary research on bereavement. In *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping and Care*. Edited by Margaret Stroebe, Robert Hansson, Wolfgang Stroebe and Henk Schut. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp. 3–22.

Sturken, Marita, and Douglas Thomas. 2004. Introduction: Technological visions and the rhetoric of the new. In *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears That Shape New Technologies*. Edited by Marita Sturken, Douglas Thomas and Sandra Ball-Rokeach. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 1–18.

Taylor, Sally Flatteau. 2005. Between the idea and the reality: A study of the counselling experiences of bereaved people who sense the presence of the deceased. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 5: 53–61. [CrossRef]

Tyson-Rawson, Kirsten. 1996. Relationship and heritage: Manifestations of ongoing attachment following father death. In *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. Edited by Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman. London: Routledge, pp. 125–45.

Valentine, Christine. 2006. Academic constructions of bereavement. *Mortality* 11: 57–78. [CrossRef]

Vickio, Craig. 1999. Together in spirit: Keeping our relationships alive when loved ones die. *Death Studies* 23: 161–75. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Volpe, Andrea. 2016. The People Who Can't Stop Grieving. *Independent*, November 15. Available online: https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/people-who-can-t-stop-grieving-science-mourning-psychologists-a7416116.html (accessed on 23 February 2024).

Wallace, Jayne, and Josh South. 2022. *Enabling Ongoingness: Exploring the Potential of Newness in Continuing Bonds*. ISBN 978-1-861355-17-1. Available online: https://www.jaynewallace.com/ongoingness-book#1 (accessed on 1 December 2023).

Walter, Tony. 1996. A new model of grief: Bereavement and biography. *Mortality* 1: 7–25. [CrossRef]

Wambach, Julie Ann. 1986. The grief process as a social construct. *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying* 16: 201–11. [CrossRef]

WebMD. 2024. Grieving and Stages of Grief. Available online: https://www.webmd.com/balance/grieving-and-stages-of-grief#1 (accessed on 7 February 2024).

Wortman, Camille, and Roxane Silver. 1989. The myths of coping with loss. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 57: 349–57. [CrossRef] [PubMed]