

Theoretical Framework draft

Our research is primarily focused on the new and different situation that occurs after the death of an individual; that is the so-called post-mortem phase. As such, the theoretical framework used in this paper has also been built from other researchers' work with this phase of death and dying and the theories herein will reflect this. Having said this, part of the framework is of course also based on larger theories that are not chained to any particular thanatological phase as such but rather makes itself applicable to all phases connected with death.

The reason for this choice of researching the post-mortem phase rather than other related phases (peri-mortem, ante-mortem) is due to our basis of the research as whole; as previously mentioned, AfterCloud is a service in particular for the bereft, to help ease the digital aspect connected with the process of the passing of a close relative, romantic partner, or friend. Researching any other thanatological phase in connection with AfterCloud, and their very specific focus, would, at best, make hardly any sense with little to no useful conclusions or correlations. It should, however, be stated that the phases of death mentioned in this paper are not immovable in relation to each other and should rather be viewed as a single continuum with inevitable overlaps.

One essential, phase-pervasive, pillar used in terms of theoretical framework is the one of *Continuing Bonds*, initially presented by Klass, Nickman, and Silverman in "Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief" from 1996. The Continuing bonds theory states that people, children as well as adults are better at coping with and processing the loss of a loved one by continuing the bond with the deceased (reference forthcoming); the relationship is redefined by the new and different way the bereft choose to maintain this bond with their deceased loved ones.

Although this could be considered fairly dated by now, especially in terms of how the digital aspect of our existence has changed by now, it is still used today by other researchers. Getty's et al (2011) research on Facebook with the continuing bonds theory and a bit of Goffman's stages (front and back) theory provides an excellent overview of how people have found a way to utilize social media, and the internet in general, to further access the very particular need for continuing a relationship with a deceased loved one. This not only signifies the essential need for this element in the grieving process for the bereft but also shows how much of an impact the digitalization of our everyday lives has had. This is also further documented in the recent research by Nielsen et al (2014), who further shows the underlying need for maintaining a bond with a deceased in a unique process of being able to let go by continuing the bond.

Working with the digital aspect of death, in the particular post-mortem phase, having the continuing bonds theory as a solid base for our own observations helps to present a research paper that is in close relation to the existing research in the thanatological field of study and research. Additionally, the continuing bonds theory has been shown to be highly applicable for the online, digital aspect of death and dying; this makes the theory even more relevant for this paper, as its focus happens to be on the digital part of thanatology and how we are able to use digital media to create online havens or spaces in which to mourn the deceased in different, personal ways.

Another work of research this paper looks to is Brubaker's et al (2014) research into the concept of *stewardship*. The concept revolves around how to treat a deceased online legacy after the death has occurred – once again dealing with the post-mortem phase. Testing the idea of stewardship by assigning individuals as stewards for a deceased person's Facebook profile in different fictional scenarios, several potential conflicts of interest become evident: Should the deceased's wishes overrule those of their family? And to what extent can the steward exert their authority?

As the research is very closely related to a certain who-decides-what issue, as well as an exploration of the needs that surface from the involved parties as a situation arises when a loved one passes away, it is immensely relevant for our own research. Concerning our focus on AfterCloud and their services, Brubaker's et al research of the stewardship concept is quite similar when looking at the needs of the bereft and how they may differ in terms of what needs to be or should be done with the deceased's online legacy.

They advocate that the importance of stewardship should be kept in mind when designing systems that deal with post-mortem data, or at least facilitate such. In connection with this conclusion, it would be relevant to examine AfterCloud's role as a steward or a facilitator of user-based stewardship to different extents and in different contexts, in order to uncover what needs they meet or don't meet.

In terms of entities similar to AfterCloud, the overview and explanation of the website known as GriefNet (www.griefnet.org) by Lynn and Rath(2012) offers a unique insight into the life of GriefNet, a webpage dedicated to different support groups for bereft persons as well as online memorials for loved ones who have passed away. Their overall closing is that. Although it does not present a theory of its own as such, it does, however, touch upon the needs of the bereft, which is the central focal point of this paper. For this reason, it's mentioned here with a short presentation so the reader will be aware of what exactly is referred to later on in this paper.

Finally, Hensley (2012) touches upon Doka's (2002) idea of disenfranchised grief; examples include,

"unacknowledged relationships, a significant loss that goes unrecognized, underestimation of an individual's need for ability to grieve, uncomfortable circumstances of a death, or grief expression that is regarded as inappropriate." (Hensley, 2012, p. 120)

Generally, disenfranchised grief occurs when the need for grieving exceeds the commonly perceived validity of the need to process the grief connected with the loss of a loved one. As such, the online space in which many find, and use, the opportunity to create a digital memorial for someone they have lost – an opportunity that could perhaps help fill a certain void for bereft individuals who are met with the issue of disenfranchised grieving. That is, the digital space may facilitate a way for the bereft to counter this problem connected with their grieving process and subsequently offer a way for them to process their grief in a healthy, unchallenged manner.

Once again, looking at AfterCloud, the relevancy here lies in the question of valid grief; is disenfranchised grief a concept that needs to be addressed in digital thanatology or is a potential, digital grieving space enough to counter this? And does AfterCloud directly or indirectly touch upon this with the service they provide?

In general, the theories and concepts presented in this section are picked from those believed to thoroughly address and explore the question of what needs arise for the bereft in the post-mortem phase, and subsequently how those needs can or should be dealt with – and how this plays together with how AfterCloud offer their services to the bereft.