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Socially Shared Mourning: Construction and Consumption of Collective Memory

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Abstract

Social media, such as YouTube, is increasingly a site of collective remembering where personal tributes to celebrity figures become sites of public mourning. YouTube, especially, is rife with celebrity commemorations. Examining fans’ online mourning practices on YouTube, this article examines video tributes dedicated to the late Steve Jobs, with a focus on collective remembering and collective construction of memory. Combining netnography with Critical Discourse Analysis, the analysis focuses on the user comments where the past unfolds in interaction and meanings are negotiated and contested. The paper argues that celebrity death may, for avid fans, be a source of disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1999), a type of grief characterised by inadequate social support, usually arising from lack of empathy for the loss. The paper sheds light on the functions digital memorials have for mourning fans (and fandom) and argues that social media sites have come to function as spaces of negotiation, legitimisation and alleviation of disenfranchised grief. It is also suggested that when it comes to disenfranchised grief, and grief work generally, the concept of community be widened to include communities of weak ties, a typical form of communal belonging on social media.

Keywords: Disenfranchised grief; digital memorial; collective memory; public mourning; fans; social media

1. Introduction

Social media has become a popular space for public mourning and memorising, ranging from commemorations of a more personal kind to tributes dedicated to public figures and celebrities. Online memorial sites come in various forms; there are more formalised, corporate-controlled memorials, like the Facebook memorialisation pages of the deceased users, and more personal memorial sites set up by family members in commemoration of loved ones; however, an argument persists that no matter the nature of the platform or the purpose of the site, it is still maintained, managed, and controlled by a corporation as the platform owner (e.g. Lagerkvist, 2013). Similarly, platform affordances greatly affect the characteristics of the memorial site and how well (or not) it facilitates interaction and social sharing, and in which ways. In addition to shaping our social interaction, the ever-spreading digitalisation of our existence has resulted in the rise of new digital memory ecologies (Lagerkvist, 2013). Where
modernity cleared death away from the public sphere, modern media in its ubiquitous nature has brought death back into our lives; death, dying and commemoration are increasingly mediated by various media (Lagerkvist, 2013; Sumiala, 2013) and, to some extent, also mediatised (e.g. Couldry, 2008).

Social media provides ample opportunities for the mediation and sharing of experiences of death, dying and memorising, and even the anticipation and speculation of these; it is an environment built on the very idea of social interaction and sharing of affect. Social media is rife with commemorative productions, especially those of avid fans. This paper focuses on social media as a space of socially shared and spontaneous remembering in the context of fandom and the loss of a celebrity, Steve Jobs. The death of Steve Jobs in 2011 was a tremendous shock to the fan community worldwide. From temporary memorials set up at Apple stores to social media sites, the fans expressed their personal feelings in public displays of loss. Social media, such as YouTube, rendered what initially were personal acts of remembrance into public property, into public memorials.

Focusing on YouTube as the social media platform and commemorative video tributes, this paper examines the fans’ mourning practices and the discursive struggles present in the public memorising and mourning by analysing the user comments of a video tribute that together serve to collectively (re)construct the past and thus the memory socially shared online. While there exists more established online communities that host a myriad of bereavement support groups with a particular focus, for example the loss of a child, social media as a diverse hub of social interaction caters for expressions of grief of a more transient nature: anonymous, less structured expressions of grief are increasingly frequent. YouTube is one such social media platform, where interaction revolves heavily around the video’s content, where this serves as the point of orientation. It is the content that also dictates the ethos of belonging by inviting the like-minded for communion.

The spontaneous remembering of this kind is a form of temporary memorising. Unlike temporary offline memorials, such as roadside memorials (e.g. Doss, 2002; Klaassens et al., 2013), online spontaneous memorising is temporary as it emerges in fleeting, serendipitous encounters, often in anonymity and unplanned. Theoretically removable and erasable at any time, yet the digital environment imposes on this temporary character by retaining traces of such communion, and by enabling sharing and copying of content. In this way, digitality grants a continued (and often transformed) existence even after the deletion of original content.

Communal sentiments of grief may come up in community forums, such as fan sites. Such dedicated online spaces allow expressions of grief that fall outside our normative realms of acceptable grief or extended public mourning. This type of grief, over a loss that is not widely socially sanctioned or openly acknowledged, has been termed by Doka (1999) disenfranchised
grief. Disenfranchised grievers typically feel alone in their grief, as their loss is not openly acknowledged by the society and, therefore, support may be lacking.

A sense of loss felt by fans upon the death of their object of fandom may also go unacknowledged, particularly on a long term basis: social media offers fans a space for public mourning and a welcome sense of belonging at the moment of grief. More often than not, intense fandom is treated in our culture as a marginal phenomenon, often as subversive in nature (Sandvoss, 2005). Some fandoms are seen as more legitimate than others; the degree of social acceptability of relationship affects how mourning is treated: public mourning en masse for Princess Diana in 1997 was socially and culturally sanctioned – although, even then, only for a limited period of time, as Doka (1999, p. 38) points out – whereas publicly mourning the death of a less popular, or even controversial figure, is likely to be less sanctioned.

As globally marked as the death of Steve Jobs was, publicly commemorated on many fronts from newspapers to company executives to governors as well as the regular public at large, still there is a consensus of the limits of acceptable public mourning. Doka (1999) calls these the social ‘grieving rules’ (p. 37) and notes how even in the context of a public death of a public figure there is a notion of how much is acceptable and what counts as excessive amount of mourning. Doka (1999) says that “[t]he concept of disenfranchised grief recognises that societies have a set of norms – in effect, ‘grieving rules’ – that attempt to specify who, when, where, how, how long, and for whom people should grieve” (p. 37).

Doss (2008) observes that temporary memorials are also governed by certain cultural and social grieving rules, and in their spontaneity they still exhibit structure and organisation. We see, then, that not only is grief work socially and societally regulated, but also the ways in which grief is memorialised. Doka emphasises that the loss felt by the griever does not necessarily have to be another human being; people may grieve for the loss of a pet, or losing their job, or getting a divorce. When it comes to fandom, what often goes unnoticed, and therefore unrecognised, is the level of intimacy and degree of importance of the fan relationship as experienced by the fan: I argue that it is this level of intensity that, in part, leads to disenfranchisement as fans face lack of empathy toward their grief.

Butler (2004; 2009), too, brings up the issue of ‘right to grieve’ as she problematizes our Western norms of what counts as a grievable life, whose death is worth mourning, and whose life worth remembering. While the scholarly aim and scope is vastly different between Butler and Doka, with Butler discussing war and politics and how victims are memorised differently depending on who is doing the memorising, and Doka focussing more on grief work on a more practical level, the same point remains: who gets to say whose grief is legitimate? Who gets to say which type of grief is allowed and socially sanctioned? Who gets to say when grief is real, or indeed, enough?
Furthermore, as Doss (2002; 2008) observes in her research on the contemporary commemorative culture, what does the absence of public commemoration reveal about a culture?

Memorials, commemorative practices and rituals, as well as temporary commemorative artefacts have been studied extensively, in particular, in the offline context, but more research is needed to shed light on the nature of online memorial culture. This is especially important from the point of view of anonymous participation and disenfranchised grief, and the enabling and disabling facets of social media as a platform for collective grief work. As this study examines the role of social media in atypical grieving context and the supportive role a community of weak ties may have in legitimising disenfranchised grief, it contributes to an extended understanding of disenfranchised grief generally and the role of social media in alleviating it. It also calls for a broader view of community when it comes to the support function of communal belonging.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Fandom

2.1.1 Fandom as consumption

When studying fans and fandom it is important to bear in mind that fandom is not a homogenous phenomenon, nor one with clear boundaries. Rather, fandom presents in a variety of forms and intensities and thus ‘fannishness’ is rather like a continuum. From the more peripheral position to an intensely lived and incorporated experience, fandom is a complex social and cultural practice. Sandvoss (2005, p. 6) suggests that in defining what ‘fandom’ means, we examine fan practices and other observable aspects of behaviour that might tell of the emotional investment and affect regularly associated with fan activities. Sandvoss states (2005) that “the clearest indicator of a particular emotional investment in a given popular text lies in its regular, repeated consumption, regardless of who its reader is and regardless of the possible implications of this affection” (p. 7). To account for the emotional investment, some scholars (e.g. Sanderson & Cheong, 2010) have adopted what is called a parasocial interaction model; however, this view in the context of fandom and the digital environment has also been criticized (Booth, 2010).

Consumption patterns thus lie at the heart of fannish behaviour (Kozinets, 2001; Booth, 2010; Radford & Bloch, 2012a; Sandvoss, 2005). Booth (2010) reminds us of the continuum between production and consumption (p. 22) and how fans are often producers as much as they are consumers, a view shared with Kozinets (2001). Within consumer culture studies, fandom is regularly viewed as ‘sacred consumption’ (e.g. Belk et al., 1989; Bonsu & Belk 2003; Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Muñiz & Schau, 2005) as it
gives fans an experience of something that is not ordinary. Literature on brand communities (e.g. Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Muñiz & Schau, 2005) relative to Apple has elaborated on the level of loyalty and intensity of emotion expressed by the community members. Fannish consumption patterns differ from regular consumption of products or texts in their frequency and intensity, as well as regarding the meanings attached to the activity and the object itself.

2.1.2 Fandom as Self-reflective Interaction

Fandom is regularly exercised in a communal setting, yet being a fan is very much an individual experience and tied to the sense of self (Sandvoss, 2005; Radford & Bloch, 2012a, 2012b). Many, but not all, of the fans of Apple are also fans of Steve Jobs. As Steve Jobs is associated with Apple to a greater rather than lesser extent, separating these two is at times difficult. However, it is important to make this distinction in order to clearly establish the locus of grief with the individual; they are mourning another individual, and how this grief is felt is over a loss of a relationship. The depth and intensity of Steve Jobs’ fandom has been established elsewhere (Harju & Moisander, 2014) in a study that elaborated on the sacralising tendencies of the fans’ memorialisation practices after the death of Steve Jobs. The study (ibid.) also highlighted the apparent need of fans to imbue Jobs’ death with meaning as they draw on the hero narrative to frame Jobs’ life as one marked by unparalleled genius and resilience; via rendering Jobs’ life, and even more so, his death as personally meaningful the fans frame their own lives in a meaningful way.

Fandom and fan practices occur on a scale. In this study, the view of fandom as an intense emotional relationship is adopted, one that has the capacity to shape the identity of the fan and whose effects are deeply felt. Characterised by Sandvoss (2005) as reflective by nature, fandom’s transformative qualities work as a two-way process: the object of fandom and the meanings assigned to the relationship is a reflection of fans’ values and ideals, and while this necessarily shapes the object, the object also has the capacity to shape the fan existence (ibid.). The character of the object of fandom is seen to be a reflection of the fan in that in the fan object, the fan’s identity, potential, idealized or actual, is constructed as a reflection.

Fandom has been conceptualised as an extension of the self (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 100); Sandvoss (2005) proposes conceptualising the fuzzy boundary between the fan and the object of fandom in terms of a duality of function the object of fandom has, explaining how “the object of fandom as experienced not in relation to the self, but as part of the self, despite constituting an external object” (p. 96, italics in original). Adopting this view the object of fandom is an intrinsic part of the sense of self. Adopting such a view of fandom which emphasises the emotional bond underlying the relationship
allows us to develop an increased understanding of both the depth of the loss experienced and the personal dimensions of fans’ grief in the context of celebrity death.

2.2 Death and Disenfranchised Grief

2.2.1 Disenfranchised Grief

Grief in our culture is generally confined to the loss of a close relationship (Doka, 1999), such as a family member. A deep sense of loss may result from events and incidents other than a loss of life, or from a loss of another kind of a relationship than a familial one. According to Doka (1999, 2002), disenfranchised griever are those who are denied the expression of loss and the related emotions due to their loss being of the type not typically sanctioned by society. Such a loss may be suicide of a family member, the death of a lover or work colleague, death of gay spouse where the relationship in life was already socially unsanctioned, to mention but a few.

Martin (2002) has applied the notion of disenfranchised grief in the context of marital failure, relationship loss and a broken heart. Doka’s definition of disenfranchised grief concerns grief that “is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned and/or socially supported” (in Martin, 2002, p. 240). In accordance to Doka’s (1989, in Martin, 2002) view, society fails to enfranchise grief for three reasons: 1) the griever is not recognised, 2) the relationship is not recognised, 3) the loss is not recognised (Martin, 2002, p. 241). Martin also discusses grief in conjunction with romantic loss, not necessarily even death; the fact that a relationship comes to an end is a loss in itself. The same mechanism is at work in the context of fandom when a celebrity dies, with whom the fan has developed a deep personal attachment. Indeed, Andsager (2005, p. 18) argues that celebrity death may also result in disenfranchised grief among fans, as their sense of loss and the ensuing grief may not be understood or seen as legitimate by the society, most likely because the qualitative aspects of the relationship are not understood in the first place.

Neimeyer & Jordan (2002) theorise disenfranchised grief as an empathic failure, and propose that often disenfranchisement emerges from “the interaction of self and others, rather than from deficits in either party taken alone” (p. 100). This insight on interaction as the source of disenfranchisement is useful when we examine fans’ reaction to celebrity death. After the initial public mourning period, the length of which is socially determined as much as it is socially sanctioned, when the media attention fizzles, the fans still experiencing grief or expressing emotions relative to the loss tend to be marginalised, even ridiculed.

Neimeyer & Jordan (2002) point out that individuals may disenfranchise themselves, knowingly or unknowingly, when they recognise
and/or internalize the stigma or lack of social sanction related to the loss. Furthermore, they (ibid.) observe that disenfranchisement is a process that occurs in most grief experiences (p. 97, 114) to some degree: the process involves emphatic failure occurring “among the elements of the system of self and between the self and others at various levels of social organization” (p. 114). Within the context of fandom, the breakdown of empathy most visibly occurs at the interface of self and the others, the non-fans.

It is natural that when faced with a loss or death people mourn and enter a grieving process: a successful grieving process guarantees the continuing wellbeing of the bereaved. A successful grieving process is crucial in many ways as it enables the bereaved to continue with their life and accept their new social role and adapt to life without the deceased. In addition, a successful grieving process ensures a continued, unproblematic relationship with the deceased in newly acquired ways (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). As fans regularly form an affective relationship with their object of fandom, and particularly as this type of devotion is typically deemed socially questionable, they are a group of grievers that may become unwilling disenfranchised grievers.

2.2.2 Disenfranchised Grief and Celebrity Death

In our cultural, normative grieving framework intense relationships, and thereby intensely felt grief, is restricted to family members. Fan scholars (e.g. Sandvoss, 2005) have noted the level of intensity of the relationship fans form with and around their object of fandom. Often, this is imagined to be reciprocal on the part of the fan, which adds to the emotional investment of the relationship and to the importance of the fan object in the life of the fan. It is this dimension of fandom that is often ignored or not socially sanctioned, and this is also where the disenfranchisement arises when the intensity of the loss felt is not recognised. Fan relationships can be seen as affect-based, emotional relationships the fans form with and in relation to the object of fandom. When a celebrity dies, it is a shock to fans and the loss is deeply felt.

The death of Steve Jobs was covered by the media and commemorated around the world both online and offline. And despite what, on the face of it, may present as enfranchised grief (as the death is both publicly acknowledged and publicly mourned and commemorated), fans and other individuals alike may still harbour grief, dimensions of which can, over time, become disenfranchised. There are unwritten rules regarding the time limit on public grieving, so called social ‘grieving rules’ (Doka, 1999, p. 38) we are expected to adhere to. Similarly, there is also a limit to the intensity in grieving, and the object of grief. Social grieving rules regarding the time and intensity of grieving for a non-family member, such as a celebrity, may result in disenfranchisement. The roots of this disenfranchisement lie with the personally experienced, emotionally charged relationship with the celebrity
that shapes the sense of self, and in the deeply affective dimensions of this relationship not understood by others, but often ridiculed.

The bereavement process has three necessary dimensions: the intrapsychic, the psychosocial, and the communal (Romanoff 1998, p. 699). These relate to the sense of self of the bereaved, social status (pre-death and post-death) and the communal and symbolic connections with the deceased in a communal context (ibid.) respectively. How these relate to the complicated bereavement process of fans is linked to the complexity of the fan relationship: not fully socially and culturally sanctioned, fandom is nevertheless a factor that shapes fan identity. Therefore, one’s identity as a fan will have to undergo transition as a prerequisite for continued fandom as, because of death and the imminent change that results, the nature of fandom and the meanings contained in and by it will also undergo transformation.

Social status transition may also be problematic in fan context. The fact that the importance of fandom to identity may go unrecognised is likely to result in difficulty in finding an appropriate social status; ever more so after death, yet this is a necessary stage in a successful bereavement process. As for the last dimension, continuation of an unproblematic relationship with the deceased, that is, being able to move on with one’s life while still being able to draw meanings from the relationship in a communal context, a reworking of the fan relationship itself is required.

Rituals help in bereavement as they serve moderating, mediating, and connecting functions (Romanoff 1998, p. 699; Doka, 2002, p. 135) and facilitate the aforementioned transformations. The emergence of new death rituals in the online sphere around, for example, celebrity death, is understandable viewed in the light of their importance in a successful grieving process. These rituals bring about, invite and mediate communal sentiments and form a focal point around which a sense of belonging and identity can be negotiated.

2.3 Memorial Culture

2.3.1 Memorials as Cultural Memory

Memorials have throughout time been a manifestation of cultural, social, and national memory and identity. Memorials carry meaning(s) on an individual level, too. As material expressions of past events, cultural values and history, as it is represented and embodied in the very structures and practices, memorials harbour not only collective memory, but also conflicting emotions and attitudes, and at times even promote a political agenda (Jacobs, 2011; Butler, 2004). In the context of Web 2.0, new memory cultures are emerging (Lagerkvist, 2013) and we see new commemorative practices, adaptations and amalgamations of the old in new environments. As a consequence of new forms of sociality brought on by technological changes and digital affordances,
death rituals are also undergoing change, not only relative to the location of these practices but also regarding the structure and content of this ritual behaviour.

Memorials as a way of marking and remembering death(s) are integral in rituals relating to death. Maintaining a link to individuals who have passed away is both personally and culturally important, and ensures a continued remembrance and inclusion of the deceased in the present. In this sense, memorials are like windows to the past, glimpses of shared cultural and historical inheritance. However, the question of who gets to decide how this shared history is represented and which meanings are privileged and which obscured is an issue pertaining not only to questions of democracy, freedom, and individual expression, but also to the way history is done (or undone) and identities shaped by these very discourses controlled by those controlling what is memorialised. History is (re)written in and by memorial structures, spaces and practices, by acts of remembrance.

Scholars (e.g. Butler, 2004; 2009; Doss, 2002) have drawn attention to the problematic nature of public memorial artefacts and practices, underlining the fact that these serve to privilege and thereby sustain certain ideologies over others, some of which can be politically or economically driven (e.g. Butler, 2004). Our affects in today’s memorial landscape (or memorialscape, as per Doss, 2008) have changed as public mourning has become increasingly widespread, with social media feeding into this public memorial frenzy. Doss (2008) points out that this ‘memorial mania’ tells of our current obsession with memory, history and memorising, but also that grief is becoming an acceptable public emotion. Death, as much as it is a part of life, has also become a part of our shareable online lives.

Doss (2008, 8) sees the meaning(s) of public temporary memorials as residing in their affective dimensions, and “in particular, in their cultural negotiation of public grief”. At the same time, they are private acts of mourning in the public sphere (Klaassens et al., 2013). Klaassens et al. (2013, 146) also note that “establishing private memorials in public spaces brings death in to the public sphere”. In the relative absence of adequate death rituals in our contemporary society, rituals surrounding death and bereavement have evolved to exist online as well as offline, the online space being where the public sphere is negotiated and in constant shift.

2.3.2 Memorials as Collective Remembering

Death is increasingly circulated in and mediated by various media (Sumiala, 2013; Couldry 2008). The mediatisation of death has brought death into the everyday: death is all around us, in images and increasingly in our imaginary. We see death in the news, in social media in scenes of war, in fiction, in video games, to name but a few (Lagerkvist, 2013). The emerging memorialisation practices and rituals reflect these communicative, social and attitudinal
changes: spontaneous and temporary memorials are found everywhere, from in-game graveyards and virtual world memorial services to roadside memorials and viral commemoration feeds on Twitter, for example.

With online memorial culture expanding rapidly, we observe changes in the way memorials are constructed and how they come to mean. Social media offers a more democratic space for memorising and commemoration, and digital memorials tend to be open to disagreeing voices and representations. Intended for social sharing, digital commemorative artefacts invite participation and engagement, resulting in collective acts of construction and negotiation of meaning(s). In his examination of the 9/11 online commemorations, Jarvis (2011) emphasises the discursive nature of remembering and how memory is discursively constructed after the fact in and by the very acts of remembrance. Jarvis (ibid.) also points out that the acts of remembrance, rather than being reflections of past events, discursively reconstruct the past and, thereby, help constitute the very acts and events they claim to commemorate.

Online memorials can be classed a temporary due to the inherent eraseability of online digital content. Interestingly, death and dying are frequently absent in temporary memorials (Doss, 2008) due to their emphasis on the lived life rather than the discontinuation of it. Doss (ibid.) interprets this as an indicator of our reluctance to accept death or indeed the limitations of our lives generally. Temporary memorials commonly focus on the life of the deceased (Doss, 2008), to that which once was; Barthes (1981, quoted in Doss, 2008, p. 29) has called this type of visualisation that testifies to that which has been ‘certificate[s] of presence’ (p. 29). Memorials help the community come to terms with a loss by assigning it meaning by way of anchoring meaning in the materiality of the memorial; this is not without issues as the memorial itself guides and constrains the possible emotional responses and interpretations (e.g. Doss, 2002).

Spontaneous memorials have also been interpreted as expressions of the need for new forms of ritualized mourning (Klaassens et al., 2013), and via that, as signals of the inadequacy in our times of traditional mourning rituals that take place within religious practices. These new rituals have a role to play in mourning typical of our day, but at the same time they expose a shift in our emotional and affective landscape as to who we grieve and in what ways, who we grow emotionally attached to in the first place as well as who will be remembered and why. Sumiala (2013) stresses the central role of media in creating and sustaining rituals, but media undoubtedly has a role to play also in the creation of celebrity in the first place.

In their work on organisational memory, Feldman & Feldman (2006) and Bell (2012) note that conceptualising organisational memory in terms of remembering (a practice) instead of memory (object, cognitive construct) would better serve theoretical development and help explain the practices that contribute to memory creation. This view of active remembering allows us to
see memory as an ongoing, active process (e.g. Feldman & Feldman, 2006), collective in nature that emerges as a result of multitude of remembrances, rather than being a static object to be recovered. Thus, through this active process of remembering, the members of a collective come to share an understanding of the past (Bell 2012, p. 4). Bell (ibid.) sees memory “as a socially organised process that is reliant on language and cultural practices as the means through which people express their attitudes and relations to the past” amounts to more than a collection of individual memories.

This view of memory as an active social process is similar to that of Jarvis, discussed earlier, and both underline the constitutive nature of acts of remembrance. Collective memory, then, can be conceptualised as a result or a product of participatory, active remembering that members of the relevant community engage in, thereby (re)creating the past in a collective, negotiatory fashion. Memorialisation is a process of signification. The performance gives rise to the new identity of the deceased, reflection of fan identity and ideology. Memorials act as a connective bridge that ensures continuation of both the relationship and the meanings drawn from it. In that way, memorials and remembering are sustaining activities and not least in terms of identity. Social media itself can be viewed as a site of contested memory as all events and lived lives are constructed after the fact. The role of the media platform in facilitating, enabling and co-constructing the rituals and mourning practices cannot be ignored (e.g. Sumiala, 2013).

3. Empirical Study

3.1 Material

This study focuses on YouTube as the platform where fans’ public mourning for the late Steve Jobs was observed, and later analysed. Other virtual spaces exist where fans of Steve Jobs and/or Apple convene and post commemorations and tributes, but this paper focuses on fan interaction on YouTube as it takes place in the user commentary of a video tribute. These interactions are for the large part anonymous; even if a username can be linked to a comment, it is usually unrecognisable as the real individual behind the username.

YouTube was chosen because the platform affordances which enable sharing of multimodal productions, in this case, commemorative videos. Because video sharing is the main function and purpose of this social media platform, and because commemorative artefacts have an important role in the process of mourning and in grieving rituals, YouTube with its vast array of commemorations was considered to be the most suitable site for examining fan interaction as it takes place in the context of mourning in and around a memorial artefact.
The different affordances of various social media, and computer-mediated communication generally, enable different social practices (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010, p. 315). As a video-sharing site, YouTube privileges the auditory and visual experience over the verbal. Music has an affective dimension lacking in many other forms of communication and can be deployed to evoke strong emotions and memories. Similarly with emotive imagery, the video creator is able to tap into the sentiments of the viewers in a different way than with text alone, triggering an emotional response to the video artefact. As Doss (2008) has pointed out, the meanings of memorial artefacts lie in their affective dimensions: that is also the case with YouTube memorial artefacts. Not only is the affective dimension a meaning-making resource, it is also a community building resource.

The video tribute examined in this study was uploaded to YouTube on 13th October, 2011, eight days after the death of Steve Jobs. The video (titled 'In Dedication: Thank you, Steve!') has attracted 360,059 views and 842 comments, as well as 3,675 likes and 198 dislikes (at the time of writing). It has been shared via other social media platforms, for example Google+. The visual representation in the video focuses very much on Steve Jobs' life: the video features Steve Jobs in the form of collated photos made into a video format, with a compilation of music featuring only Apple product sounds mixed with sections of Steve Jobs' speech he delivered at Stanford in 2005.

The meanings(s) constructed in the video, by way of Steve Jobs' own voice and his words recontextualised from the Stanford speech (2005), focus on the life advice Jobs offered others: he is represented as a giver of wisdom, as well as someone who never compromised but rather followed his heart. The video elicits contestation and negotiation over the representation of the celebrity, recoverable from the disparate ideologies discursively constructed as the fans and the non-fans clash. The user commentary linked to the video exhibits a myriad of fan and non-fan sentiments and interaction, and thus offers rich material for analysis. The user comments were manually extracted and organised in a chronological order. The code given to each comment reflects the date of the post and where in the order of all posts the post occurs. The order number is not a sequential running number, but rather reflects the line number on the data sheet.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Netnography

As the study examines fans' collective mourning in a social media context, a suitable method would cater for the fluid, even transient nature of anonymous online interaction. Thus, the chosen method for the collection of empirical material is netnography (Kozinets, 2010) of online communities. In addition to collection of the empirical material, netnography allows for observation of
practices and discourses taking place online as the researcher spends time in social media sites observing the communities and their interactions. While this method also allows participation, in this study the researcher remained an observer only.

Over the course of 2012-2014, fan interaction and fan posts on various social media sites were followed and observed: sites include, for example, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Apple fan pages, various newspaper article commentaries (on articles published on Steve jobs’ death. Apple's company website runs a memorial page at http://www.apple.com/stevejobs/ with over a million messages sent (according to Apple). These commemorative messages were followed at length in order to gain a deeper understanding of what Steve Jobs meant to the individuals mourning him.

Various fan productions were examined ranging from YouTube video farewells dedicated to Steve Jobs to other fan productions, such as images of Apple products or slogans carved out of Steve Jobs’ keynote speeches or his Stanford speech posted on, for example, Instagram. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the fans ideology and what lies at the ‘core’ of fandom; what the fandom entails and the meanings it holds for the fans, which values are attached to the fannish activities and the object of fandom, Steve Jobs.

During the netnography, numerous YouTube video tributes were watched until it was possible to choose a video that would be representative of many: that is, it is similar in content (i.e. the video as text, meaning both the visual and verbal representation combined with the auditory communication in the form of music; the ideological stance taken in the video; and purpose of the video, meaning it is a fan tribute instead of a documentary clip) to many others, but has more views and shares, as well as a more extensive commentary. The size of the available comments relates to the interaction between fans, but more so between fans and their critics (in this study termed ‘non-fans’ for the sake of clarity).

3.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

The material was analysed on a macrolevel using Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA) approach (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1995, 1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). The general interpretive framework adopted in this study is a social constructivist one. As CDA sees the role of language as central in social construction, it is therefore a suitable method of analysis for the current study. CDA was chosen as it provides tools for uncovering different, even competing, ideologies underpinning the discourses prevalent in the memorising that unfolds in interaction in the video commentary.

Discourse analysis provides tools for analysing sentiments and emotions as they are verbally expressed (often implicitly) as evaluation: in this paper, evaluation, the way people, things, events or relationships are
described and evaluated, either in a positive or a negative light, is interpreted as revelatory as to the ideological tendencies and underpinnings of the community members, the fans. Thus, this study adopts what Martin (2004, p. 321) calls the ‘interpersonal perspective on discourse’. The Appraisal framework (Martin & White 2005; Hunston & Thompson, 2000) offers tools for analysing the interpersonal semantics, the resources used to communicate attitudinal stance and evaluation both toward the content of the utterance and toward the reader/hearer. Based on systemic functional linguistics framework (SFL) (Halliday 1994/2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), Appraisal analysis seeks to explore attitudinal evaluation on a microlevel. However, despite the detailed grammatical analysis made possible by the framework, evaluation is seen as something that runs through the text at all levels of analysis. In the SFL framework, language is seen as “meaning-making potential” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 162), and constrained by the social context, any given text employs only a fraction of this potential for meaning(s).

CDA informed with Appraisal analysis offers powerful tools for disinterring not only ideological stance, but also interpersonal relations and the tensions and evaluative positioning therein. Evaluation can be positive of negative; however, informed by the notion of dialogism proposed by Bakhtin, the underlying premise in the Appraisal approach is that “all utterances are seen as in some way stanced or attitudinal” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 92). Appraisal, then, offers a “systematic account of how such positionings are achieved linguistically” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 93).

The contents of the video tribute were analysed to recover which meanings were privileged and which left out in the memorial tribute. User comments were analysed to examine what kinds of meanings emerge (for example, positive affect lexicalised as the verb ‘love’, or negative judgement and disdain), what kinds of values are represented, and what kinds of ideological undercurrents could be uncovered as those upholding the collective ethos. The user comments include both fan and non-fan commentary: these were examined for their attitudinal stance toward Steve Jobs, mourning for Jobs, and the fandom and fans of Jobs.

3.2.3 Research questions

The paper aims to answer the following research questions: 1) How, using discursive mechanisms and attitudinal alignment, is the memory of Steve Jobs collectively (re)created and negotiated; 2) what kinds of meaning(s) the fans assign to the emerging memory (i.e. the representations of Steve Jobs), the act of collective remembering and the community that follows; 3) the role of social media as a space where communities of weak ties may come together in support, and the role of commemorative digital artefacts in mourning and in
inviting such a community are critically examined in the context of disenfranchised grief and fandom.

4. Findings

4.1 Community of Weak Ties

Social media networks are mostly based on weak ties (term from Granovetter, 1973, 1983) as opposed to strong ties we find in our more intimate relationships, such as family and close friends. In grief literature, the role of community and the support it can provide the bereaved has long been established (e.g. Doka, 1999, 2002). Also, relative to community, the lack of communal support has been named as one of the principal sources of disenfranchised grief: the emphasis has mainly been on the community and communities one belongs to, such as family, relatives, friends and coworkers. The dispersal and fragmentation of community (e.g. Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002) in today’s society has been noted by grief scholars as one reason why “emphatic failure is compounded in our postmodern world” (p. 98).

What the study shows, however, is that communal support may be found in a community of weak ties, such as social media, where the affiliation is based on a narrow set of interests or minimal amount of communication. What seems to be a determining aspect of communal support found in a community of weak ties is mutually recognized and shared affect. As the mourners recognize each other as ‘the same’, that is, as belonging, to the same community, their feelings are mirrored, recognized and thus legitimised.

Andsager (2005) has noted how webshrines function to magnify the celebrity. Social media amplifies affects, and affect, together with rituals, provide a basis for community. Memory, in the acts of remembrance and the acts themselves, as an experience gain a qualitative difference. Collective memorising changes the nature of fandom as well as the object of fandom.

‘All of the things I just mentioned, which for most people who have ever heard of Mac/Apple or Steve Jobs needs no elaboration. If you aren't a fan, thats your right, but trolling a post someone put up to honor another human being who has passed, regardless of their accomplishments, is just shallow and immature. If you don't like it, go +1 Bill Gates’ posts or something.’ (YT20111113_5834)

Sense of community manifesting in a strong sense of ‘us’ is strong in the online memorial site examined here: shared affectual relationship and mutually recognised rituals and behaviour regarding the artefacts has a bonding effect. In memorials meaning(s) get condensed - materiality anchors meanings and provides a point of orientation and frame of reference. The deceased is immortalized (Andsager, 2005) and in a way, this allows consumption of what once was, yet the online environment has its own
implications. Shareability of content, recontextualisation, and new audiences mean new appropriations and new meanings.

4.2 Affective Alignment

The communal belonging on YouTube is based on affectual alignment. In the case of memorial artefact, such as commemorative videos, the emotional response to the memorial is usually shared with and by others, creating a sense of community of like-minded people:

‘made me a little teary-eyed.’ (YT20111016_4426)
‘i had goose bumps this whole video and a bit of a teary eye’ (YT20111017_2853)

In addition, sharing of commemorative content online gives a sense of mourning together:

‘Get the Kleenex out. Tear-jerker. Tribute to Steve Jobs’ (YT20111016_3619)

Emotional responses to the video are not the only source of affective alignment. How Steve Jobs is represented, how and what he is conceived as being like, and how his influence on the lives of the fans is experienced all contribute to the construal of alignment. Although social construction of the past and also of emotion is common in memorials of any type, what is being mourned in the online commemoration is an emblem, a representative, rather than a person in their wholeness. What is being mourned is in fact being constructed collectively in the acts of remembering (e.g. Jarvis, 2011) and the meanings attached to the emblem arise from the fans themselves:

‘YOU SYMBOLIZE HOPE’ (YT20111018_2109)

‘This was amazing! Im going to miss you so much Steve Jobs. You we're the most important person in the world.’ (YT20111014_5515)

It emerges from the comments that the participants feel they need to have a rightful claim to the grief being shared in this particular community. In the fan comments, this is usually made explicitly by reference to Apple products, by expressing love and admiration towards Steve Jobs, or by recycling Jobs’ quotes. So, too, the fan below is confessing to not owning any Apple products, by claiming their right to grieve in the presence of the others by making reference to Jobs’ Stanford speech (2005) and the ‘clearing of the old’. This type of insider knowledge builds the community and strengthens the sense of ‘us’ among the fans:

WONDERFUL TRIBUTE!! I never purchased anything from Apple, but feel deeply saddened when the clearing of the old happens - bye Steve’ (YT20111016_4162)
The same discursive mechanism is used here, a Steve Jobs quote used as a signal of being one of the in-group:

‘Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life’ (YT20111016_3451)

The quote above is one of the most recycled quotes in the memorial videos dedicated to Jobs. It also reflects the shared ideology that binds the fans together, and which Steve Jobs has come to represent; individualism and aspiration for self-betterment, at its best, and uncompromising self-centredness at its worst. However, inspiration for change is what the majority of fans draw from the speeches Jobs gave:

‘I need to change’ (YT20111016_3421)

‘Thank you [video uploader] for helping to spread Steve’s inspiring messages in this awesome video. And to all those who make negative comments about this video, keep them coming. You’re generating a great spam list to anyone wishing to market something that would appeal to assholes and idiots.’ (YT20111016_3811)

The source of Steve Jobs’ popularity seems to lie with his ability to inspire people. The following comment comes from a ‘semi-fan’, someone who used to watch Jobs’ speeches but does not recognise themselves as a fan:

I’m not the biggest fan of Steve Jobs or Apple, but I have to say, his speeches were some of the most inspirational. (YT20111014_5348)

‘need some encouragement? its right here.’ (YT20111016_3592)

In the fan discourse, the figure of Steve Jobs is elevated to a status higher than the ordinary user. His achievements and his working life at Apple are constructed to be beyond the reach of the ordinary. This type of elevation is typical idolizing behaviour.

@ [user] I agree with you wholeheartedly...however, despite the amazing things Mr. Jobs has done, there will always be those who will mock and vilify him. But they can't deny that his life, and ultimately his death, have impacted the world. I think I speak for many when I say that Mr. Jobs had as big of an impact, if not bigger, than many politicians. He was inspirational. A visionary. A genius. He changed everything about the tech world. So let the haters hate and the crazy ones thrive.

Again, we see the discursive strategy of recycling insider information, used to communicate meaning beyond: ‘the crazy ones’ is a phrase from one of Apple’s ‘Think Different’ campaign’s TV adverts known as ‘Crazy Ones’ which Steve Jobs narrated. By using this phraseology the fan communicates his/her level of knowledge and interest in Apple and Steve Jobs. As has been shown, the relationship the fans have with the celebrity is an emotional one:

‘We all love you Steve! Be happy wherever u are...’ (YT20111014_6057)
The range of emotions often attached to a celebrity, from inspiration to love and adoration, speaks of a symbolically deeply important relationship, and thus, the loss of such a defining relationship and the emotional state that results from it can be correlated to what Martin (2002) terms “broken heart” (p. 240-243). Not being recognised or socially sanctioned, the broken-hearted may easily face disenfranchisement in their grief.

4.3 Judgement and Moral Superiority

Grieving publicly is governed by unwritten normative grieving rules. Mourning or commemorating a celebrity publicly over an extended period of time falls outside the normative grief framework. In addition to temporal restraints, certain types of commemorations attract ridicule:

'This is retarded. He died, get over it. People die.' (YT20111016_4226)

One type of critic is the social and moral critic, whose judgement on public mourning of a celebrity is based on the existence of despair, poverty and inequality elsewhere in the world:

'why 1 dies 1 million cries? why those in africa 1 million dies and no 1 cry?' (YT20111015_4840)

"Steve Jobs? More like Sweatshop Jobs (YT20111016_4106)

These critical, judgemental comments appear to be incremental in sentiment and tend to cause solidarity and alignment among the non-fans:

'Careful buddy, you might piss off the people who worship Apple like it's a religion.' (YT20111016_4295)

The commentators who join the denigration of the fandom and the on-going memorialisation bring in new dimensions for criticism: first it was poverty and inequality, then capitalism, now religious devotion. Trolling sites in this manner has interested scholars for some time; one effect it has is strengthened alignment among those under attack:

'Maybe remember if you don’t have something nice to say you should go back to your "better product" and keep it to yourself.' (YT20111016_4265)

The same fan goes on to justify his/her comment as based on the values of sympathy and cultural code that guide us to regard death with respect:

P.s. I own nothing made by apple. Just saying, out if respect for the deceased. critics(YT20111016_4249)

Using Appraisal analysis we can see evaluation of people and things unfolding in interaction. We can detect a stance of moral superiority being constructed, interestingly by both parties, but by mobilising different ideologies. The non-fans resort to critique of capitalism in constructing a position as the ones who
judge what kinds of lives are those worth remembering, and what kinds of individuals are worth commemorating. The fans, on the contrary, construct their moral superiority in values based in the humanities, in sympathy and the cultural tradition of respect for the dead:

‘guys, i’m no fan of steve jobs or apple, but making a joke out of his death is just plain disrespectful...’ (YT20111017_3203)

‘@[user] Disrespectful for the dead guy or for the exploited Chinese that work for Apple?’ (YT20111017_2944)

We see this interplay of fan – non-fan commentary unfolding from the very early days after the video was uploaded. Sites of online mourning are as contested as they are liberatory: we witness an on-going struggle as the grieving fans defend their right to grieve in the face of ridicule from the non-fans. These two groups engage in an ideological conflict as the non-fans invade the fans’ memorial space by discursively positioning themselves as judges of what and who is worthy of public (or private) grieving and whose memory is worthy of remembrance. However public the video tributes on YouTube are, the intended audience is written into the representation, and by recognising themselves as the audience-in-the-text, the fans come to hold the space as their own.

Mixed with the non-fan discourse of superiority is Microsoft as the preferred product; an opposition to Apple also constructed by the fans:

‘Why does everyone have such a boner over Steve Jobs? He was just another CEO intent on making money for his company. He hardly even advanced the computer industry. He just sold overpriced products to retards with a grudge against Windows or without any awareness of other, better products.’ (YT20111016_4311)

The strict ‘black-and-white’ nature of these representations ignores the fact that Microsoft, too, is a business aimed at gaining profit, or that an individual can be many things at once, a businessman and a inspirational leader, or even spiritual as a person. These are not views based on rational thinking; these are views based on and guided by emotions. The view of Neimeyer & Jordan (2002) of disenfranchisement emerging from lack of empathy in interaction is adopted here to account for the fans’ need to defend their space and their grief, and indeed, to establish fans as disenfranchised grievers.

**4.4 Social Media as Legitimating Space**

The post death rituals fans engage in on social media sites serve to alleviate disenfranchised grief that results from experiencing a loss of a fandom object. As these rituals are seen as building a community as well as presupposing one (Kollar, 1989, p. 275, in Andsager, 2005, p. 18), when mourning fans gather
on online memorial sites for collective commemoration, they are at the same time carving out a legitimate space for fan bereavement and refusing the role of disenfranchised grievers typically granted to them.

Central in the communality examined here is the digital memorial artefact, combined with the fact that it exists and is shared in social media. It is around the artefact that the mourners gather as it is the memorial that comes to carry meaning(s):

‘This is a very beautiful Video, Steve would be proud R.I.P’ (YT20111016_3641)

‘I have been a believer since my first Macintosh 512K in 1986. This is tasteful and respectful. Thank you.’ (YT20111017_2608)

The memorial creates a shared emotive landscape. The memorial artefact invites to the community by appealing to those who read it as if it were addressed to them:

Awesome song. He is such an inspirational man, and I say is because his inspiration lives on even after his death. (anonymous)

Fan relationship and celebrity death is akin to a loss of relationship and a broken heart, as investigated by Martin (2002). Be memorising together the fans make sense of Jobs’ life and death. They engage in collective action to reconstruct the past in a personally meaningful way. Negotiating the meanings together gives a sense of acknowledgment, which is essential in alleviating disenfranchised grief.

4.5 Materiality and Rituals

As a material object that allows revisitation and the evocation of affect, the memorial video, together with its audience as community, helps alleviate grief by providing a space for the legitimisation of disenfranchised grief. By constructing a representation of that which has been lost, and by socially sharing it, an individual remembrance becomes a site of collective remembering and negotiation. This negotiation concerns not only the identity of the deceased, the object of fandom, but also that of the fan and of the community generally.

‘Something to be listened to every day!’ (YT20111017_3684)

‘Can listen this song forever... It's so good! Steve Jobs, when I hear this I really miss you! (and no, I'm not gay, he was just... Steve! :-))’ (YT20111020_1465)

Fans are an especially productive and active group of mourners online. Commemorative YouTube videos are not uncommon, nor dedicated memorial
webpages. Andsager (2005, p. 20) sees online memorial pages dedicated to musicians functioning as webshrines, built for and around the celebrity. According to Andsager (ibid.), they serve three functions: 1) they build a community among and for the mourners; 2) help negotiate conflicting feelings over the death; 3) immortalise and magnify the celebrity. This conceptualisation of the functions of memorialisation webpage can be extended to apply to the video tributes on YouTube: as memorials, the videos exist primarily for the relevant community, usually the fans.

The mourning practices show signs of ritualistic engagement with objects. Fans engage with their Apple products ritualistically, but also, after the death, with the commemorative videos and other productions. In their repeated visits they are overcome with emotion, yet that is part of what they are seeking. Watching the video marks the death, marks the transition, so visiting the site by watching it becomes ritualistic, a rite of passage. Sumiala (2013) argues that mediatized rituals have the ability to create a shared experience, and this in turn is a preamble to the existence of a community. Collins (2004, p. 15) shares this view that ritual lies at the heart of community and then, via rituals, a common reality emerges.

5. Discussion

Social practices of mourning are changing: social media is transforming what used to be private into a public, networked, and social activity. Digitality offers eternal existence, even if symbolic, and allows continued consumption of what once was. Social media is a space that hosts memorial sites that are best described as networks and hubs of affectually aligned relationships. This study set out to shed light on the functions digital memorials have for mourning fans and fandom. The aim was to demonstrate that social media sites have come to function as spaces of negotiation, legitimisation and alleviation of disenfranchised grief, which celebrity death can be for devout fans. In terms of social media as a space for mourning, the study also set out to demonstrate the need for broadening the notion of community when it comes to grief research and communal support.

Disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1999) can be a personally debilitating and socially alienating experience. It was shown in this paper that fans, as disenfranchised grievers, are creating a space of mourning by engaging in productive modes of public mourning in social media sites. By taking the initiative and by deliberately, if spontaneously, co-constructing a space of mutual solidarity and community, they render their grief legitimate and make their sentiment visible to others. This way, while struggling to come to terms with the new situation, fans are actively fighting against and forcing their way out of the disenfranchised place allocated for them by others.

Examining fandom as an emotionally invested relationship, one that is not socially sanctioned, and celebrity death as a loss of such a relationship, it
is easy to see the disenfranchising elements at play in the context. The capacity of social media and digital memorials to have a legitimating role in disenfranchised grief is based on their ability to invite and build community around affect. Memorial spaces offer an opportunity for enactment and alleviation of disenfranchised grief as they are collectively produced spaces where disenfranchised griever may find support in each other. They are socially (co)constructed sites of active remembering where meanings are negotiated, contested and (re)constructed in and through social interaction and sharing. In this study, the struggles over meaning can be witnessed in the interplay between non-fans’ discrediting and trivializing comments and the fans fierce rebuttals of defence.

Positioning oneself as morally superior regarding the legitimation and appropriateness of death, grief and public mourning was interestingly found in both the fans’ and the non-fans’ conceptions of the mourning and memorialising taking place in the user commentary: however, the discursive mechanisms and the ideologies mobilised are different. In their attacks on the communal sentiment of explicit adoration and feelings of sadness and loss upon the death of the celebrity, the non-fans resort to a critique of capitalism as the basis of their argument regarding what counts as a grievable life (e.g. Butler, 2004, 2009). In this view, a CEO operating in the computer industry pursuing profit does not warrant public mourning or digital memorials. The fans mobilise a different ideology, one based on humanistic conception of sympathy and the cultural tradition of respecting the dead. In this view, it is acceptable to mourn a public figure like Steve Jobs as an innovator, as Buddhist, as an inspirational leader, as a man of wisdom. While the non-fans use discourses of blame evoking guilt, the fans employ discourses of proper conduct and due commemoration for those who do “great things for humanity”.

There are no grey areas between these opposing representations; after death, individuals are often either idealized or vilified. The same dichotomy dominated the media coverage surrounding the death of Steve Jobs. Doss (2008) notes that offline temporary memorials often contain seemingly conflicting features. This arises from the mourners bringing to memorial sites commemorations and mementos reflective of their own personality or type of alignment they had with the deceased. It seems in this respect the online practices are informed by those offline: the digital artefact and what it stands for is read and understood by each participating viewer against his or her own background and ideology.

Another notion that has been adopted from offline to online realm is the sense and conceptualization of virtual spaces as limited and purposeful, or purpose-built, to borrow construction terminology. While this may at times be the case, as in dedicated sites, the Internet is open to all, trespassers included. The fans frequently bring up their proprietary right to mourn in their space: having a sense of space that has been created for them, for the purposes of
mourning and collective memorialising of their object of fandom, is indicative of a sense of collectivity. It also signifies that public mourning of a celebrity, in this space, is acceptable, even invited, implying that there are situations when this is not welcomed. This is taken as showing how social media sites can function to alleviate disenfranchised grief by providing a supportive space, even if it is based on weak ties and anonymous interaction.

The paper argues that social media can function as a site of mourning where disenfranchised grief can become acceptable in a context of communal, affective expression and solidarity. This study emphasises the social dimension of grief and practices of mourning, and sees grief as a socially constructed (e.g. Howarth, 2006) emotion. For the purposes of alleviation of grief and a collective experience of fandom, a collective memory is discursively constructed into being, into existence. It is argued that construction of a collective memory is a prerequisite for an emerging communality in the context of mourning, which again is made possible by the digital memorial artefact. Artefacts are central in practices of mourning, not only due to their symbolic and restoring function, but because they allow continuity and revisitation, and the emergence of ritual behaviour so important in the grieving process. Online public mourning, then, is a sequence of acts of remembering; it is a performance aimed at both alleviation of grief but also at solidifying and ‘making real’ the fandom now undergoing change upon the death of the fandom object. As Booth (2010) notes, “[f]ans use digital technology not only to create, to change, to appropriate, to poach, or to write, but also to share, to experience together, to become alive with community” (p. 39). Never is experiencing together more important than at times of loss.

While memorials in their materiality may be static, their meanings never are: socially and historically situated and (re)produced, memorials stand to represent different things to different people, and they mean differently in different times, too (Jacobs, 2011). With its constraints and affordances, social media platforms shape how public, collective mourning does and can take place. Communities of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) online have proven to possess the capacity to compensate for the loss of community physically surrounding us that is said to have resulted in an increase in disenfranchisement in situations of loss. It is thus proposed that the notion of community in the context of disenfranchised grief be broadened to include non-traditional, contemporary forms of community and communality online.

Online memorials harbour as many meanings as their offline counterparts. However, their shareable and modifiable nature means they emerge in new contexts and in new formats, acquiring new meanings and new audiences. The meanings they embody are rich and in constant shift, but even then, they offer a snapshot of the current memsryscape and the cultural values reflected therein. Understanding online spaces as temporary social and cultural constructions that come to existence in and through interaction may
help us further understand the many ways grief work can be carried out online. It may also help us to understand the many facets of grief in contemporary celebrity culture and ritualised, online mourning practices in new ways.
References:


