

LOSSES AND SUPPORT IN THE GRIEVING PROCESS – PASTORAL AND MEDIA CONTEXT

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Анотация

Хедвига Ткачова. Загуби и подкрепа в процеса на скръбта: пастирският и медиен контекст. Загубата на близък човек е съпроводена с различни емоционални, когнитивни, поведенчески, физически, духовни и социални реакции. Така че процесът на скръбта засяга не само хода на скърбенето и възприемането на загубата, но и човека като цяло. Експертите казват, че скърбенето за любим човек, който е починал от вируса, причиняващ COVID-19, е специфично. Повечето случаи се характеризират с липса на личен контакт с тежко болен човек поради инфекция и карантинни мерки по време на хоспитализация, а по-късно се характеризират със забрана за лично сбогуване или докосване поради потенциална заплаха от инфекцията. В допълнение, тази специфика е придружена от мисли за това как изобщо се е случила инфекцията или гняв към изгубения човек, че не е бил достатъчно внимателен, или гняв към здравната система, която е осигурила грижи за болния близък човек. Статията разглежда всичко изброено по-горе като отправна точка за изразяване на скръб и загуба, което се случва и в социалното медийно пространство по време на пандемията. Авторът има за цел да допринесе за общата концепция на пасторска подкрепа при тежка загуба и съвременна цифрова подкрепа при скръб и загуба чрез представяне на възможностите за онлайн подкрепа на опечалените в контекста на релационния модел на смъртта на френския философ Владимир Янкевич (1977). Този модел впоследствие беше приложен от Рабател и Флореа към проучването на съобщения за смърт в медиите, за да покаже, че докато основните медии се фокусират върху далечни смъртни случаи, които „не ни засягат“ (т.е. „смъртни случаи от трето лице“), новите технологии осигуряват възможност и пространство да говорим за смъртта на близки (т.е. смърт от "второ лице"), както и за собствената си смърт (т.е. "смърт от първо лице"). Текстът представя онлайн пространството като място, където пасторската грижа и подкрепа в скръбта са не само възможни, но и полезни.

Ключови думи: съпровождане на скърбящите, смърт, скръб, COVID-19, социални мрежи

Анотація

Гедвіга Ткачова. Втрати та підтримка в процесі скорботи – пастирський і медійний контекст. Втрата близької людини супроводжується різними емоційними, когнітивними, поведінковими, фізичними, духовними та соціальними реакціями. Отже, процес скорботи впливає не лише на перебіг горя (втрати) та сприйняття втрат, але й на людину загалом. За словами експертів, горе за коханою людиною, яка померла внаслідок вірусу, що викликає COVID-19, є специфічним. У більшості випадків характеризується відсутністю особистого контакту з важкохворою людиною через інфекцію та карантинних заходів під час госпіталізації, а пізніше характерна заборона на особисті прощання чи дотики через потенційну загрозу

інфікування. Крім того, ця специфіка супроводжується роздумами про те, як взагалі відбулося зараження, або злістю на втрачену людину за недостатню обережність, або злістю на систему охорони здоров'я, яка надала допомогу хворій близькій людині. В документі це враховується як відправна точка для представлення скорботи та жалоби, що також має місце в просторі соціальних мереж під час пандемії. Стаття має на меті вести внесок у загальну концепцію пасторальної підтримки втрат і сучасної цифрової підтримки горя та втрати, представляючи можливості онлайн-підтримки для сумуючих у контексті реляційної моделі смерті французького філософа Володимира Янкелевіча (1977), яку Рабател та Згодом Флореса звернувся до дослідження оголошень про смерть у засобах масової інформації, щоб показати, що в той час як звичайні ЗМІ зосереджуються на смерті віддалених людей, які "нас не стосуються" (тобто "смерть третьої особи"), нові технології дають можливість і простір для розмов про смерть близьких людей (тобто смерть від "другої особи"), а також власну смерть (тобто "смерть від першої особи"). Текст представляє онлайн-простір як місце, де душпастирство та супровід скорботних чи скорботних є не тільки можливим, але й корисним.

Ключові слова: супровід скорботних, смерть, смуток, COVID-19, соцмережі

Abstract

Hedviga Tkáčová. Losses and support in the grieving process — pastoral and media context. The loss of a close person is accompanied by various emotional, cognitive, behavioural, physical, spiritual and social reactions. The process of grieving therefore has an impact not only on the course of grief, bereavement itself, and the perception of losses, but also on the human being generally. In accordance with experts, grieving after a loved one who died of the virus that causes COVID-19 is specific. In most cases, it is characterized by a lack of personal contact with a seriously ill person due to infection and quarantine measures during hospitalization, and later a characteristic ban on personal farewells or touching due to the potential threat of infection. In addition, this specific is accompanied by reflections on how the infection occurred in the first place, or anger at the lost person for not being careful enough, or anger at the health system that provided help to the sick loved one. The paper takes into account the aforementioned as a starting point for the presentation of grief and bereavement, which also takes place in the space of social media during the pandemic. The article seeks to contribute to the overall concept of pastoral bereavement support and contemporary digital support for grief and bereavement. It can be achieved by presenting the possibilities of online support for mourners in the context of the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch's (1977) relational model of death. Rabatel and eventually Floréa referred to this issue and started the research on the announcement of death in the media. The goal of such studies was to show that the conventional media focuses on the death of distant people that "doesn't concern us" (i.e., "third person death"), whereas new technologies give the opportunity and space to talk about the death of close people (i.e., "second person death") as well as one's own death (i.e., "first person death"). The text presents the online space as a place where pastoral care and accompanying the mourners or grieving men is not only possible but also beneficial.

Keywords: accompanying the bereaved, death, grief, COVID-19, social networks

Introduction. In modern Western mourning practices, the dying and the dead are isolated in special places, such as hospitals or hospices, where they do not disrupt the daily flow of modern life (Walter, Hourizi, Moncur, Pitsillides, 2012; Matuščáková, 2021). Like death and dying, grief is also isolated (Moore, Magee, Gamreklidze, Kowaleski, 2017; Oláh, 2021). In the words of Matuščáková, it is a sadness that is not allowed to say goodbye; the time needed to end the relationship and other important things. In the past, the body of the deceased was at home for three days and nights,

and loved ones had a chance to say goodbye to him. Mourning people did not go to sleep, but mourned by the body. "For the dead, it was a dignified farewell, and for the survivors exactly the time when they could fully realize his death, accept the new reality, express their sorrow. It was a painful but healthy beginning of grieving, thanks to which the entire healing process could begin" (Matuščáková, 2021). In the case of grief in the context of the loss of a loved one as a result of the SARS-Cov-2 virus, grief and bereavement were isolated. The first reason was the relatively common, voluntary isolation of the mourners, who wish to live their pain for the loss of a loved one in silence, or in a narrow circle of those closest to them, and/or those closest to them leave them in their pain, in the idea that they need to be alone (and often do not know how to talk about death); 2) the second reason for the isolation of the mourners was isolation due to the virus.

The process of grieving the consequences of the SARS-Cov-2 virus seems to be specific in a sense. Slovak psychiatrist Jozef Hašto defines the nature of grieving for the victims of the global pandemic through several specifics that distinguish it, for example, from grieving for other causes of death of loved ones. According to him, we experience grief and the loss of a relative due to covid-19 differently. Many missed personal close contact with the seriously ill person due to infection and quarantine measures during hospitalization, and later they also had a hard time not being able to see him or touch him even after his death and thus say goodbye to him. According to J. Hašto, grieving over covid is often complicated by one's own fear of infection, thoughts about how the infection happened in the first place, irrational feelings of guilt for one's own survival, or anger at the lost person for not being careful enough, or anger at the health system for perhaps not getting enough good help (Oláh, 2021). Let's add that the SARS-Cov-2 virus has already killed almost seven million people worldwide, and the number of survivors and mourners far exceeds this number (World Health Organization, 2023).

In general, Kacianová and Dobříková also describe the dynamics of mourning very similarly. The authors point out that the course and dynamics of the bereaved person's grief are largely related to the form in which he has to face his grief. They distinguish:

a) Anticipated grief: In the event of the expected death of a loved one, the individual has the opportunity to prepare and gradually come to terms with the loss of a loved one (i.e., he has time to say goodbye, resolve conflicts, prepare for tasks that he will have to handle alone, etc.). He is at the same time protected from shock and partially ready to come to terms with the new reality;

b) Sudden grief: In the case of an unexpected death, a loved one dies suddenly and unexpectedly. It is a traumatic recognition of loss, because the survivors do not have the opportunity to say goodbye or resolve potential conflicts; for this reason, the course of sudden grief can be complicated by feelings of guilt and self-blame (Kacianová, Dobříková, 2015, p. 16-17).

In the context of the pandemic, the survivors certainly encountered both variants of grief. Unfortunately, the nature of the virus, especially in the early stages of its spread, suggests that the majority of the population faced sudden grief, which may have affected their willingness to share their sadness, anger and other emotions with others, including through social media. Correlated with this assumption of ours is the repeated observation of experts who talk about the increasing willingness of people to talk about death, dying or bereavement and the change in the ways we talk about death, dying or bereavement in the last decade. According to several experts, both of these changes are taking place in connection with the discovery of new types of media (Bisceglia, 2013; Rauch, 2017; Phillips, 2017; Fingerhood, 2020). Experts note that with the ongoing process of the digital revolution¹, social media is increasingly proving to be an appropriate tool for communicating the grief, pain and suffering associated with the death and dying of a loved one.

Moreover, studies and empirical research increasingly confirm that human death, the dying

¹ The term "digital revolution" can also be found under other names, most often it is referred to as the 4th industrial revolution, scientific revolution, technological revolution or digital revolution.

process, and mourning have a clear place in certain types of (new) media (Julliard, Georges, 2018; Brubaker, Hayes, Dourish, 2014; Massimi, 2012; Brubaker, Hayes, 2012). This study is framed in the context of social media and their possibilities of helping in the process of grieving the loss of a loved one. The text offers a brief presentation of the specific grief caused by the disease virus COVID-19 to create a space for a brief presentation of the essence of the pastoral context of grief and loss that occurs at the moment of the potential death of a loved one. The aim of the paper is to introduce the concept of "deprivatization of grief" in the context of social media, by which we understand the process by which previously private perceptions of death, dying and mourning are moved back into the public sphere; this process represents the opposite of the "privatization of grief" that has been part of our culture for a long time. In the post, we talk about the "deprivatization of grief" in the context of the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. The text continues with the presentation of the possibilities and typology of support for the bereaved in the space of social media. The article seeks to contribute to the overall concept of digital support for grief and bereavement by raising awareness of the deprivatization of grief in the current online environment, which it presents as a space in which grieving is not only possible but beneficial.

1. Grieving and losses in the mourning process – pastoral context

Bereavement is first mentioned in Western literature in the 8th century, in connection with the loss of personal property (Knott, 2001). Later, the word "bereaved" became associated with death and grief over the loss of an important relationship or important person. Today, the word "bereavement" means grief, which causes and provokes the death of a very close and loved person (Kacianová, Dobříková, 2015, p. 7). The grieving process from the point of view of the circumstances of the death of a loved one – in this case due to a virus – affects not only the course of grief (bereavement), but also physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioural, spiritual and other aspects of grieving. For example, in the case of widowhood, there is not only a loss of the marital relationship, but also a loss of identity and social role (the partner ceases to be a wife and becomes a widow), a loss of identity or social status, which in many cases is related to a loss of material security, a loss of intrapsychic or a loss caused by a complete change of the "usual system" (Kacianová, Dobříková, 2015, p. 7; Špatenková, 2004).

The SARS-Cov-2 virus potentially attacks the human past, present and future. Among other things, at least because:

- a) It creates past losses: it threatens our past experiences with a loved one in that these experiences no longer have to be repeated;
- b) Forms present losses: loss of certainty or loss of control over the situation is associated with the disease;
- c) Forms future losses that occur at the moment of the potential death of a loved one: for example, abandonment, the composition of a social network, a change in lifestyle, new life tasks, etc. (Corr, 2001).

Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, when the mortality rate from COVID-19 was the highest, many people lost their closest person and with them, among other things, help in raising children (that remains in the past), expressions of care, love and friendship (present, ongoing loss) and also hope for a common old age (future, anticipated loss). The grieving process (including the process of acceptance and adaptation) varies from one culture to another (Robinson, Pond, 2019) and also from person to person; a significant influencing factor, regardless of culture or personality, is the "type of loss relationship" (Guitton, 2012, p. 451).

We can see that several types of losses play a role in the process of grieving and bereavement over the loss of an important relationship or person. A person is aware of these within himself, although part of this awareness are also visible manifestations, on the basis of which

a person is recognized by society as a survivor (Doka, 2003). The loss of a close person ends the physical bond between people, but does not end another type of bond that is related to the emotional side of the individual; i.e., love, fantasies, dreams or hopes do not end. Today we see that visible expressions of grief are also part of the expressions presented online; primarily in the social media space (Julliard, Georges, 2018; Brubaker, Hayes, Dourish, 2014; Brubaker, Hayes, 2012 and others). Social media, however, seem to shift the level of the previous "privatization" of individual grief due to the death of a loved one, and from isolated social contexts (for example, school, workplace, religious group, etc.) or from isolated physical spaces exclusively dedicated to dying, death and bereavement (for example, hospital, hospice, cemetery, etc.), they place grief in an online environment, where mourning subsequently also takes place in real life.

2. Grieving and the deprivatization of grief in the context of social media

Statistical research confirms that at the end of the 20th century, infants stopped dying most often. The increase in the standard of living – mainly under the influence of the so-called third industrial revolution¹ – had the effect that most people began to die of old age. Parents and siblings no longer became the main mourners, but widowers and their adult children, who already have their own families and live separately from their aging parents (Walter et al, 2012). This newest demographic of mourners is fragmented, experts say, and their daily social interactions are often with people who may be close to mourners, but on the other hand, who never knew mourners' deceased loved ones. For this reason, those who mourn are alone in their grief. Walter adds that for this latest demographic group of mourners, he also began to define grief as "a private experience that others (friends, classmates, colleagues, etc.) can 'support', but rarely share" (Walter et al., 2012). This fact, naturally, leads to the potential possibility of using social networks, among other things, as tools of contact that can bring comfort, understanding and participation in grief to the bereaved. etc. It is a support that seems to make social media tools that cancel the previous "privatization" of grief due to the death of a loved one. In the context of this consideration, we talk about the deprivatization of grief in the space of social media and, at the same time, the deprivatization of grief with the use of social media.

Together with other experts, we share the opinion that as the Internet is becoming more and more popular and more ubiquitous, this evolution of mourning practice to digital settings is no longer considered at the margin but is "likely to become the new norm" (Beaunoyer, Hiracheta Torres, Maessen, Guitton, 2020). Thus, the online environment replaces hitherto isolated social contexts for grief and mourning, such as until recently for example a school, workplace or religious group, and at the same time also cancels isolated physical places, which until now were exclusively dedicated to dying, death and mourning (bereavement) (for example hospital, hospice, cemetery, etc.), i.e., in the context of social media we talk about the deprivatization of grief. In the question of the representation of death (dying and grief) in the media, the relational model of death of the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (1977, p. 48-55) is key for us, which Rabatel and Floréa subsequently applied to the research of death announcements in the media to show that while conventional media focuses on "death in the third person" (i.e., the death of distant people that "does not concern us"²), new technologies give the opportunity, offer space and completely new

¹ The third industrial revolution dates back to the last third of the 20th century. The most important change was the automation of production and the introduction of computers and information technologies, which enabled perfect control of production and also contributed to speeding up and making communication cheaper. The global market is entering, and overall, we are talking about improving the quality of human life and improving people's living standards thanks to technology.

² A person is confronted with the death of third persons (seen in the media) to a much greater extent than with the death of close people. In addition, in the media die "they", i.e., third persons, who are distant from us. For us, their death is a mediated death experience that takes the form of a media

channels to talk about death in "second person" and "first person". In other words, new media is a space in which the presentation of the death (dying and grief) of a loved one and the presentation of one's own death (dying and grief) that is expected to occur in the near future (Rabatel, Floréa 2011, p. 7-28) mostly occurs.

According to Walter, the reason for the "deprivatization" of grief in the social media space is that these media are based on communication models that allow viewers to become producers. Users have become the main creators and spreaders of content that depicts grief. Walter links this phenomenon to one of the many modern risks on the Internet. Those who produce content and express themselves online often feel that the content they create is private. Walter states that this is a false and dangerous assumption of the vast majority of users. He therefore points out that social media is not a "confessional" but is actually a "wider audience" that other users look at (Walter et al, 2012, p. 275).

Moore et al. states that in connection with the deprivatization of grief in the space of social media, the use of two communication models can be seen in recent years: (1) One-to-many form of communication for broadcasting information and (2) two-way form of communication, which is a dialogue with others (Moore et al, 2017, p. 231-259.). In addition to the informational function, on the basis of which the Internet is a source of information about, for example, how to manage a funeral, authorities, estates and other obligations, the world wide web also brings individuals the freedom to express their grief outwardly and according to their own ideas. In this case, social media allows a) to share information with family or friends and thus start a dialogue – a discussion about the death of the deceased with other loved ones and b) to discuss the death with a wider community of mourners who are also experiencing the loss of a loved one. Current research also confirms both uses of social media in the grieving process.

According to the researchers, private online groups are very often used as a meeting place for close survivors. They are a place of sharing and support between the closest relatives, who are united by a common grief and yet divided by distance. Equally popular are public online groups where different individuals who may not be related to each other meet. In the content analysis of posthumous virtual profiles, experts confirmed the repeated occurrence of comments from individuals who were not in a deeper relationship or close contact with the mourners. In fact, they were only peripheral friends, i.e., those who are in the outer circle of the deceased's social network or are even complete strangers (William, Merten, 2009, p. 67-90).

Social media, it seems, is shifting the level of "privatization" of grief associated with the death of loved ones. We can see that both previously isolated social contexts (e.g., a religious group) and isolated places (e.g., a hospital) can be not only interconnected through social media, but also visible (for example, through a public group of mourners or through a profile of the deceased on a social network). The process of deprivatization of grief is further supported by the fact that online communities can rely on email lists, chat rooms, forums, or social media applications. Private online groups in which survivors meet and public online groups in which various individuals meet who do not have to be in a relationship with the bereaved are defined as "examples of technology-related social support for grief" (Beaunoyer, Hiracheta Torres, Maessen, Guitton, 2020, p. 2515-2524).

3. Possibilities and typology of online grief support options

All of them – although already dead in our human present – reappear in the human presence through social media at the click of a button (Brubaker et al, 2013, p. 153). This is because social media creates an "infrastructure for a new relationship with our social past" in which all the deceased are forever present.

spectacle and has little, if anything, to do with genuine pain and grief. In the context of the topic of this text, we can talk about the peak of deprivatization of grief due to the death of a person.

Let us remind that based on Vladimir Jankélévitch's relational model of death, the media theorists Rabatel and Floré state that in the space of social media there are potentially present a) those with whom we had no relationship but whose death, dying and grief we know about from the media ("third-party grief"); b) those who were close to us ("second-person grief") and c) those who talked to us about their own death, dying and grief ("first-person grief") (Rabatel, Floréa, 2011, p. 7-28).

Within this primary classification of forms of death and grieving in the media, several online options for grieving support can be distinguished:

- Grief of "third persons" in the online space – potential interest of the public: In the context of V. Jankélévitch's relational model of death, we talk about the death and grief of distant people, as the death and grief of "third persons" (with whom we are not connected by a relationship and whose death and grief basically "does not concern us"). Rabatel and Floréa connect the death and mourning of distant people with conventional media (Rabatel, Floréa, 2011, p. 7). In the online space, however, it is confirmed that the personal feelings of sadness of "third parties" become the subject of potential public interest through social media (William, Merten, 2009, p. 67-90). With the use of some illustration, one of the main differences between graveside flowers and online memorial posts is how many people can see the grieving process.

- Grief of "second persons" in the online space – the grieving people's accompaniment: In the traditional (offline) space, grief is experienced only by those who participate in specific mourning events or farewells. These events take place in specific locations such as memorials, hospitals, hospices or cemeteries. During the period of COVID-19, these options were narrowed and hospitals or hospices were not available for grieving relatives due to the potential spread of the disease. In view of this, social media provided a new and welcome space, which certainly did not fully replace personal contact, but could be a certain help. A virtual profile of the deceased who was more or less close to us could remain online and people could continue to "communicate" and "interact" with the deceased long after they died. Social media provided a space for personal feelings of grief and for expressions of "enduring attachment" (William, Merten, 2009, p. 68).

Moreover, if we look a little closer at the nature of grief "the grieving people's accompaniment" (as a representative of the grief of "second persons"), we find interesting research findings. In his research, F. Georges, for example, asks how relatives reconstruct a digital identity on Facebook after the death of a family member. Georges also starts from V. Jankélévitch's relational model of death, through which he examines fifteen French memorial pages on Facebook. He concludes that this social network mainly features "second person" forms of grief – these are profiles created by users during their lifetime and subsequently transformed by the mourning procession after the user's death. According to research findings, the most frequent expressions of relatives focus on the deceased in order to pay respect and emphasize their own grief (Georges, 2014, p. 82-84). Similar research is being carried out by Castro and Gonzales, who examined the differences between what the online profile of the profile owner looks like during his lifetime and after his death. Research confirms that within a few weeks after death, the activity of the mourning procession is more pronounced, but from a longer-term point of view, it appears to be temporary (Castro, Gonzales, 2012, p. 355-360).

- "First-person" grieving in the online space – Grief and the presentation of one's own death, which will occur in the near future: In the context of the so-called "first-person" death (Jankélévitch, 1977), more and more people confide their illness, distress and grief in connection with the impending death. They use multiple possibilities of the web simultaneously to build their "individual identity" in the online space (Georges, 2014, p. 82-83) and to talk about their experiences with life-threatening and fatal diseases (Walter et al., 2012, 276-279).

As we could notice, the relational model of death was developed by Vladimír Jankélévitch in the eighties of the last century (1977). Twelve years ago, Rabatel and Floréa applied his knowledge to the research of announcing and talking about death in the media (Rabatel, Floréa, 2011, p. 7-28). We believe that currently both typologies presented above can be supplemented by at least two more options for mourning, as they are present in the social media environment.

- Grieving using online bereavement socialization – As the foundation of social media is the building and maintenance of social relationships (Whiting et al, 2013), not only are the terminally ill (i.e., 'first-person death') giving something to the world, but the world is giving something to them. Online networks often help those suffering from serious illnesses to face death. An example is Kate Granger, a British doctor who, after five cycles of chemotherapy, decided to give up cancer treatment and "offered" her dying to social networks. She showed the last stages of her illness on social media and described the whole process as "really therapeutic". K. Granger also confirmed that social media support networks allow for more frequent and less important conversations about dying than traditional hospital support groups, helping to avert the sense of isolation that usually accompanies life-threatening conditions (Bisceglia, 2013). The virtual community allows those sick people a certain "return" to everyday life.

- Collective coping with grief in the online space – As a significant novelty, it turns out that the presentation of impending death and grieving over the impending death is a new phenomenon for the online space – even if ordinary users of social media do not engage in grieving practices themselves, in the course of their daily use of social media, they are more and more often confronted with the grief of other people. We can therefore talk about a kind of "collective coping with grief".

4. Discussion

The media has the power to shape the way the public thinks about death and dying. Their influence is shown, for example, in pointing out what is the cause of death and moderate, what the problem of dying is related to, or what should be done as a solution to remove or eliminate the problem that is related to dying or directly causes death. It is important to say that not only the representation (image of the event) but also the reconstruction of the event is shown to be significant in the media. It is a well-known fact that the media reflect less and create and shape reality much more; i.e., the media tells us what to think, what to think about and even how to think about it (Iłowiecki, Zasepa, 2003). In the context of media theory, this idea is well-known and well-documented today. Among other things, it proves that the media play an important role in influencing and interpreting the event. It seems that the grieving process is not an exception and is gaining not only its space but also popularity in social media (Bios Urn, n.d.; Park, Kee, Valenzuela, 2009; Burke, Marlow, Lento, 2010; Gulino, 2021; King, Carter, 2022 and so on).

The use of social media also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fullerton, 2021; Pandya, Lodha, 2021; Aldrich, 2022; Dixon, 2022; Snyder, 2023). Not only the rich media coverage of COVID-19, but also the voluntary sharing of users about the course of the disease but also about dying as a result of the virus, brought many emotions to the social media space; we venture to say that in this case the deprivatization of grief from the loss of loved ones proved to be inherently harmful. Social media contributed to the fact that people could perceive the disease even more intensely as an ongoing deadly pandemic that can affect anyone. This internal negativity naturally grew in relation to the media coverage of the pandemic situation, which affected millions of recipients on a daily basis. Moreover, it can already be said today that the intensity of negative coverage of COVID-19 was disproportionately high to the research (un)interest that would be focused on finding ways to mitigate media negativism and the consequences of media coverage of COVID-19 on people, their perception of dying and/or death.

We can already see today that the way we perceive events, how we communicate or how

we live in an offline and online environment has changed mainly due to the digital revolution, or otherwise, due to the digital transformation and its effects on people. Naturally, along with the digital phenomena just mentioned, the ways of representing death and dying have also changed, but also how we mourn and talk about mourning. Social media has become a space where many people go to remember their dead loved ones; they fill the online space with memories, photos, and videos, and therefore it becomes a "certain social cushion" that allows users to share with a wider audience (Bios, n.d.). In the context of "self-disclosure" in the online space, an interesting paradox today is one of the biggest fears ten years ago – that fear was the fear of losing privacy on the Internet. Today we see that many voluntarily reveal their privacy in the online space. This is also why the consensus seems to be that as social media-savvy generations age, grieving the death of loved ones will increasingly find its way onto social networking platforms. It can be estimated that another significant trend will be the growing enthusiasm for sharing personal information in connection with death, suffering and grief in the space of social media. At the same time, the willingness to share about one's own sadness from the loss of a loved one will open a so far rare "window" into the originally private dimension of life; in the online space, death becomes a part of everyday experience. In the context of this issue, social media will soon become – and today we already see that it is becoming – not only an extension of life, but also a natural extension of dying.

As we present in this article, social media have largely disrupted the until recently valid privatization of grief. This was fully confirmed even during the pandemic. We consider it necessary to have a discussion not only about the new norms of "self-publication" in the media context, but also about the place of social media in the grieving process, or about the advisability of making mourning a death a public matter. Second, in the question of deprivatization of mourning in the space of social media, the question of the authenticity of mourning also appears to be essential. Clearly, social media allows survivors to avoid face-to-face emotional conversations and vulnerability, which can, in fact, actually "privatize" the grieving process by providing people with a depersonalized online alternative. This can be a more consistent and easier way for someone than dealing with their own grief; i.e., hiding behind a Facebook profile can be easier than actually telling the people around you how you feel.

The question of who has the right to grieve on social media further supports the "privatization" of grieving due to online grieving; i.e., who has the "right to grieve" in the social media space. Experts remind that mourners who perceive that they do not have the "right to grieve" may have feelings of sadness after the death of a loved one, and yet at the same time a feeling of doubt, shame or uncertainty. The latter feelings may discourage them from expressing their grief online, which again leads to the privatization of grief. In this context, however, we must note that feelings and perceptions of one's own "right to grieve" exist regardless of social media. In other words, in this case, the properties of social media do not actually support the further privatization of grief, although they are part of a kind of maintained status-quo (Fingerhood, 2020). In short, the duality of the (de)privatization of grief in the space of social media that has just been indicated certainly calls for further research.

5. Conclusion

During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media and its possibilities have indeed proven to be convenient tools for millions of people to communicate the pain and suffering of the death of a loved one. Although grieving death and dying (as well as death and dying) has long been taboo in Western culture, the demand for open conversation in the online space and the demand for social media options suggest that social media has indeed been sought after as a space for grieving, i.e., in this manuscript we conclude that social media has "deprivatized" grieving during the pandemic. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that social media could, on the other

hand, also be a space that provided the bereaved with the opportunity to avoid personal emotional conversations and to better deal with their own grief in secret (behind their own profile on the social network), i.e., social media privatized grief. As we indicated above, both phenomena require their own empirical research, which should have its own quantitative and qualitative level.

We believe that the increased intensity of the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the level of the previous societal "privatization" of grief associated with the death and dying of loved ones. This is a significant change, as grief due to dying or the death of a loved one was, until recently, a very private phenomenon. The reason for the privatization of grief was isolated social contexts (for example, school, workplace, religious group, etc.) and fragmented social groups of mourners (we gave the example of widowers and their adult children living in a separate household). Other reasons were physical spaces that did not disrupt everyday life but were, on the contrary, isolated and designated as places for dying, death or bereavement (for example, hospital, hospice, house of mourning, church, cemetery, etc.). The times of the COVID-19 pandemic confirm that people have migrated towards using social media to display their private concerns about death and grief. In addition, in search of support and social connection, mourners met through social media, and thus the grief associated with the death and dying of loved ones broke geographical and social barriers to spread and perpetuate itself in the online space. In the online space, this phenomenon, in parallel, confronted the "non-mourners" with the mourners, whose grief over the loss of a loved one, but also private fears about death (extended socialization, information and expression about the process of dying and death) pass into the public sphere.

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