

Open Windows to Widows:
Long-Term Widowhood as Expressed and Manifested in an Online Group

A THESIS

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of IDF Widows participating in the online group, in conjunction with my own experience as a participant and as the creator and facilitator of the group. The study sought to identify the major themes brought by the women to the online group (a) regarding their lives and (b) regarding the online group. It also aimed to explore the meaning behind the themes, behind the experience. As all activity explored in this study is in a group context, certain typical group processes and phenomena revealed themselves during the quest of the experience and meaning.

Intuitive Inquiry, grounded in Heuristic research was the overall framework for this research. Thematic analysis was employed to collect, organize and analyze the text that IDF Widows wrote in an online group, an Internet forum open to the public, through a year and a half. The women wrote about their lives, about the way they see the society and the way they feel regarding the expectations from them, as IDF Widows. They also wrote about the online group itself and how they feel about it. They related to each other, shared the pain and the joy, the destruction and construction of various life and self parts. They cried together, laughed together and encouraged each other in cyberspace.

The magic and power of face-to-face groups revealed itself in this online group, enabling participants to discover themselves through the contact, connection, holding and resonance with others.

Dedication

I dedicate this work in memory of my husband, Rami Katz, who was killed while serving his country.

I dedicate this work in memory of all the fallen soldiers that gave their lives to protect the state of Israel for so many decades.

I dedicate this work to their brave families, widows and orphans whose stories inspire me for many years. Encountering death at young age is not easy. Living, not just surviving, afterwards, requires huge strengths and a huge spirit.

I dedicate this work to the living, to life itself, to happiness and health to all.

ולתפארת מדינת ישראל

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I know it wasn't always fun around me, but the way you accepted it all, was also inspiring.

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I would like to thank my classmates in Lesley University for their acceptance and support at times when I was deep in my sorrow while writing this study, while going through my own parallel processes. Trust the process, my dear friends.

Most importantly, I thank all the women that participated in the online group we all created together. Your words activated in me almost every emotion I can think of. I cried with you, laughed with you, got angry at you and at others you were angry at. Your desire to share your worlds, the ways you related to each other and offered so much support and compassion (among other things) were inspiring.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My husband, Rami, was killed during an army reserve service in 1990, on a Friendly Fire incident. He was 32 years old when he died.

The pain was enormous. My world was destroyed, my beliefs shattered, what once had been obvious was now in ruins. People around me told me that I have to be strong, that I must live for my two children. They told me that I would return to life after some time, after the grief process was completed. Yes, I returned to life, realizing that I have to recreate a meaning to my life. I chose life, but I had no idea that my life has been changed forever. I had no idea that the journey I had started on summer 1990 would take me to so many places. I had no idea that this was the starting point of a journey into the depth of my soul. The journey started with a struggle to survive daily life, and over the years became a psychological and spiritual journey. Many of my friends, also Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Widows, are going through their own journeys, each on her own unique journey, her own unique path, meeting others on the way. One of those meeting points was the online forum that was created in an unofficial internet site on November 2005 for all IDF Widows.

When the years passed by, I made time in my daily race to study at Lesley University (2005). While writing papers, I found that no one talks about many issues regarding long-term widowhood. I realized there is almost no writing or research that tries to describe the world of women who were widowed young. Especially no one tries to explore their world many years after their loss. In numerous conversations with widows, I discovered that even after 30 years and more, many were still struggling to 'keep their heads above the water', and to find a meaning to their life and their loss.

I discovered that many events bring up the memory of the loss, the feelings of sadness and the realization, yet again, of what he missed, and what the family has missed following his death. The strongest emotions and memories come back on anniversaries, Memorial Day, the special events in children's lives, like Bar Mitzvah, joining the army, the birth of a their child (the widow's grandchild). I discovered many cases of illness and many cases of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) among my friends. I also discovered many brave women who did the unbelievable.

In this study, I want to tell the story of so many powerful women that found themselves in an unbearable situation and found inside them the power to live, not just to survive, found the power to create, not just to keep things as they are.

I worked for more than 20 years in the software development industry. With my mastery of computers and technology, I found myself using this knowledge to create a place for IDF Widows to meet, without even leaving home. When I created the site, I had no idea what would evolve. At the time, I had started to study Group Leadership at Lesley University. When the first term ended, I was astonished to realize that a working group had been created in cyberspace. Theories I learned, episodes I encountered in class, have all appearing in cyberspace. I started to ask myself many questions concerning this group, regarding the experience and behavior of its participants, about its existence without the basic setting defined as a basis for the containment of the group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). I was wondering whether the online group had influence on participants, whether it contributed to their empowerment, to their lives. Writing this study has helped me integrate my vast interest in groups, my knowledge and expertise in technology and with my own experience as a widow for many years.

I found myself looking at the world and at the wonder of human existence with mixed emotions of deep sadness, enormous happiness and compassion. All of these brought me to the importance of studying the unspoken world of long-term widowhood.

Topic and Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study was to explore the experience of IDF Widows participating in the online group, in conjunction with my own experience as a participant and as the creator and facilitator of the group. Unfortunately the original site no longer exists (2008). I created a new site, which does not replace the original one, but can give an idea of what it was. The new site can be found at <http://www.w-groups.com>. The study sought to identify the major themes brought by the women to the online group (a) regarding their lives and (b) regarding the online group. It also aimed to explore the meaning behind the themes, behind the experience. As all activity explored in this study is in a group context, certain typical group processes and phenomena revealed themselves during the quest of the experience and meaning (Weinberg, 2001; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Exploring them was also part of the purpose of this study.

The death of a spouse is overwhelming (Bonanno, Wortman, & Nesse, 2004; Gentry & Shulman, 1988), scaled second only to the death of a child as a stressful life event (Miller & Rahe, 1997). Widowhood influences many life aspects: functional, emotional and spiritual. In many cases throughout history, when a woman loses her husband, her economic, legal and social position is immediately changing (Buitelaar, 1995). Despite the recognition of the magnitude of the event in one's life, most studies focus on the first years post loss (Bonanno, Wortman, & Nesse, 2004; Carnelley, Wortman, Bolger, & Burke, 2006).

From my own experience, I felt that the expectations from family and friends and from wider circles around me were to leave my widowhood behind, to go on with my life. The prevailing myth in society is that the grief process is limited in time for most people, especially for widows. Bereavement should unquestionably be over when the widow has a new life partner. Through this study, I found that it is not just my own view that those myths are erroneous, that the reality of widowhood is very remote from myths and expectations. I saw that these feelings and thoughts are common among many long-term widows.

This research explored the experience of IDF Widows participating in an online group. The research questions this study explored are: (a) what are the main issues that widows deal with regarding their lives and widowhood many years after the event, as manifested in the online group; (b) what is the meaning of meeting each other in an online group. The research explored group phenomena found in the online group and tried to reveal group processes as well. The online group was the container that enabled the widows to bring upfront issues from their lives and to explore the traces and influence of being widowed at a young age on their lives. The group also enabled many participants to join the activity that was organized and communicated mainly through this group, an activity that aimed at changing the proposed change of the law and at changes in the IDF Widows and Orphans Organization.

Background and definitions

Grief and Bereavement Process (Psychological Aspects of Loss)

Many articles and books use the terms bereavement, grief and mourning interchangeably. According to Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe & Schut (2001) bereavement

describes the objective situation of the loss, grief is the emotional reaction to the loss, and mourning describes the activities and the way the grief is expressed, based, mainly on the social and cultural context of the bereaved. In the Israeli culture the use of the term bereavement is connected with loss in a national context, for example *Family of bereavement* is meant to say that families that lost their beloved one during army service are part of one big family. These terms will be used throughout this document.

Through the years, psychologists created many theories in order to understand bereavement, grief and mourning experiences better, and to help support and treat people who are suffering due to a loss. Freud (1917/2002) was the first to describe the mourning as a process containing phases, which the bereaved should follow. When the process is completed, and the entire libido is retrieved from the lost object, the person is free again. This concept influenced many researchers to further enhance and develop the field, describing the process and the stages one should follow in order to cope, or to come to terms with the loss. A new wave of researchers has developed a different concept with a more complex description of the process, while realizing that empirical data could not support the concept based on stages or phases (Bonanno & Kaltman, 1999; Rubin, 1999; Stroebe & Schut 2005). The new concept emphasized a personal and personality difference that affects the diversity found between people in regard to their grief and bereavement process. Bonanno and Kaltman (1999) proposed "four components of the grieving process context, meaning, representations of the lost relationship, and coping and emotion-regulation processes" (p. 760) and raised questions regarding the concept of 'grief work' that was recommended as part of the process of relinquishing the bonds with the deceased. Rubin (1999) added an important observation, focusing on both domains of

response to loss: (a) the way people 'manage' to live their lives following a death of a significant other and (b) the way in which the uniquely relational and interpersonal aspects of the connection with the deceased are maintained in the minds and hearts of the bereaved. In the literature review chapter, I describe the theories in detail.

Being a Widow

Widowhood research is naturally influenced by general grief and bereavement research. Before 2006 there was almost no longitude research about widowhood beyond 5 years (Carnelley et al., 2006), based mainly on the assumption that at some point in time the bereaved completes the process, and symptoms disappear. Derman (1999) explored young widows up to 38 years post loss, while mean age when widowed was 38. Results from the statistical analyses have found that level of grief did not diminished significantly until the 5th to 10th years of bereavement, never diminished completely. "Grief and attachment were found to be positive and significantly correlated within the first 10 years of widowhood. This relationship deteriorated after the 10th year, suggesting that other relationships between these variables may exist in this phase of widowhood" (pp. iv-v). Derman concluded the interviews by describing that "widows maintain emotional attachment with their deceased husbands, regardless of the length of time widowed. The widow was found to relate to her husband on a more symbolic and abstract level" (p. v).

Mastekaasa (1994) argued that existing literature has not demonstrated yet whether the changes in well-being are short termed or more permanent. He summed up his review by saying that "most studies agree that the effect of marital dissolution and partner loss are al least in part temporary" (p. 668). Buitelaar (1995) explained that the

Latin term for 'widow', *vidua*, is related to a root meaning 'to place apart'. Introducing anthropological and historical studies about widows and widowhood, he explained that "in most cases widows are, in fact, placed apart from much more than just their husbands" (p. 1). Mastekaasa, (1994) stated that losing a spouse is a highly stressful event by itself, and adds the fact that losing a spouse may require major changes in one's life, in addition to the emotional loss. Carnelley et al. (2006) summarized past research regarding the continual cognitive and emotional involvement with the deceased and the resolution with the reality of the loss, concluding that the bond is felt for many years. They also discussed growth as a potential outcome of the loss and present data of decades postloss, showing, for the first time, that the widowed continued to think, talk and feel emotions for their deceased husband, affected also by anniversaries, decades after the loss.

Carnelley et al. (2006) cite Janoff-Bulman who argues that:

Individuals have three core assumptions to their inner world: (a) They are worthy, (b) the world is benevolent, and (c) what happens to them makes sense. The death of a spouse can shatter these assumptions, leaving the individual to rebuild his or her assumptive world and reestablish meaning. (p. 477)

Stroebe and Schut (2005) described the history of theories and studies in the field, describing variations in grief and bereavement processes between individuals, based on the nature of death (sudden or natural), age of being widowed and other variables, which will be discussed in the literature review. Personally, I could find parts of the process I have gone through from the time I was widowed in some studies, but the full experience was not there. The long nights alone, looking at the children sleeping, feeling their endless pain, my pain, the emptiness inside, the feeling of being lost in a meaningless world, the endless pain of the dreams that were lost forever, the longing for even a small hug, and the feelings and thoughts years after the loss, cannot be described in quantitative

research. This study may complement the current research from this aspect. This study did not focus on the first period after the loss, but on the long-term experience of loss and specifically widowhood, not described or researched much in current literature (Carnelley et al., 2006).

Long-term widowhood has not been defined in literature yet. Time related definitions concerning bereavement or grief usually deal with a pathological state. I assume that women, who were widowed young, in a national context, carry their widowhood for life. I cannot determine whether this is normal or pathological, but I know, from personal encounters with many widows that this is the case. Trying to figure out *long-term*, I would argue that more than 10-15 years postloss may be defined as long-term widowhood.

IDF Widows

In Israel today there are about 4000 people defined by law as IDF Widows and Widowers. Official public data that reveals the correct numbers and distribution of the widows and widowers population do not exist. The widows, come from all parts of the country, representing all socio-economic levels and sectors of society. From my personal knowledge, it is safe to say that most IDF Widows are Jewish women, but one can also find Druze, Bedouin and others. Some of these women are holocaust survivors; many were born in Israel and others are immigrants. Most were widowed at a young age. Many women lost their spouse during a traumatic event, either a war or an accident. Many others lost their spouse, military personnel, due to disease. Surprisingly, there is almost nothing written about IDF Widows in Israel, either in literature or in academic research.

By law, if an IDF Widow is officially remarried she loses the recognition and the

benefits given by the State of Israel through the Ministry of Defense. For that reason, many women choose to live with a partner, but without official marriage. The population most affected is religious women, who are not allowed to live with a life partner without getting married. There are some initiatives to change the law, created in 1950.

For me, being an IDF Widow is more than a marital status. It defines a part of me that will stay forever, as long as I live, no matter how my life will progress. I feel that this has meaning that transcends the mere fact that I had a husband who was killed during army service. The term IDF Widow will thus be used in this study to describe all women who lost their spouse during army service, no matter what their official marital status is at present.

Online Group

There are many different types of online groups and communities with a variety of technologies supporting games, role-playing, and discussions of hobbies, politics and any other subject. There is information and knowledge sharing, psychological therapy, counseling and much more. Internet sites differ in many aspects. Some keep the site open to the public; others open their gates only to registered users. Some allow anonymity, others insist on revealing the real identity of the user. Life in cyberspace is rich and contains a place for any interest one can think of. Cyberspace is in constant process of development, changing and enhancing possibilities for communicating online. Many consider cyberspace as a virtual world. One can find terms like virtual group, virtual community, or as Weinberg (2001) called it, a virtual space. As the term *virtual* implies non-real, I prefer to use the term online. Yalom & Leszcz (2005) found that self-help support groups online are important as face-to-face groups in many aspects. An online

support group has advantages, disadvantages and many challenges, which I will describe in chapter 2. Suler (2000a) suggested the hypothesis that text talk is an expressive art, and stated that people differ in their ability to express themselves in writing, but it is a skill that can be learned.

There are many self-help support groups for widows in cyberspace. They differ in language and target audience, including for example, young widows, elderly widows, army personnel widows, young widows with small children etc. In Hebrew there are now several groups and forums, in the leading forum sites for the general population widows and widowers. Until November 2005, there was no continuous online site for IDF Widows. During 2006, three forums existed, and now (2008) there are two; the forum analyzed in this study does not exist anymore.

The online group in this study is in the form of a web-based a-synchronous text based forum. The forum is part of an internet site, enabling participants read the messages openly. Participants can post messages only after registration. The site's policy allows registration with a nickname, without the need to specify the real name. Participants can either add a main message in the forum, or add a reply to another message, creating a thread, or a tree of messages. A thread is defined as all messages that appear under one main message, like a conversation. Sometimes messages are intended to be part of a thread, but either by lacking attention or because of participant's technical difficulty, are entered alone, as a main message. For this study, threads were selected for deeper analysis, while the basic units of meaning are parts of sentences, regardless of their place in a thread, as described in Grounded Theory research. The relevant text may, therefore, be out of context (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Main messages that are entered during

the same period of an active thread and that contain similar content will be considered part of the thread.

Research method

The online forum was established in November 2005. Since then, all messages were copied into word documents and are available online. Threads from different periods were examined and analyzed to explore the issues brought by the women to the online group. The threads were selected using selection criteria described in chapter 3, based on the Intuitive Inquiry research method (Anderson 1998, 2001, 2004). The selected threads were organized and analyzed to find the main issues the women talk about, and to find what they say about the online group itself. Group processes and group phenomena that enable or prevent sharing and growth within the group were exposed during the analysis process and will be described in chapter 4. Important issues not discussed, but expected to be talked about, will also be mentioned, following Foulkes and Anthony (1984) idea about the holes in the group Matrix.

The overall research process and its framework are based on Anderson's (2004) Intuitive Inquiry method for qualitative research. The Intuitive Inquiry research method is based on the Heuristic research method (Moustakas, 1990). The method proposed five interpretative cycles of research process, designed mostly for dissertations. Due to time and scope limitations of this study, only basic ideas of Anderson's concept were used. Data was organized using organization methods taken from Grounded Theory (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998). Data was analyzed in a process described in chapter 3, to identify issues, patterns, themes and categories, for deeper understanding of the experience of long-term widowhood and the experience of some aspects of living in

cyberspace. Following the research method, the researcher went over the data repeatedly, organizing it, until the best method for analysis became apparent. The basic concept of working with smallest units of meaning, regardless of the context they appeared in, was the best way to extract unfamiliar issues, to start building themes and categories.

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the intersection of several elements to achieve its results: (a) a close look into the content and dynamics of an open internet forum expressing the thoughts and feelings of IDF Widows; (b) the application of group processes and dynamics perspective to an online group; and (c) using the Intuitive Inquiry research method in exploring experience in a technological universe, seems to be very remote from other studies conducted with Heuristic philosophy. Those combinations contribute to the significance of this study.

The results of this study have significance for three areas: (a) group dynamics and application in cyberspace; (b) understanding of long-term widowhood and (c) personal and national consciousness of IDF Widows. The study demonstrates the potential of online groups for enhance self-empowerment, and therefore should encourage the development of such groups for self-help on a more professional basis. This study follows other studies (Weinberg, 2001; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) that expand the definition of groups and provides examples of group and individual processes in cyberspace. While managing the site and the online group I asked myself many questions regarding long-term widowhood on one hand, and the online group dynamics, on the other. This study enabled me to try and answer some of those questions; it also opens the door for further research in this integrated field.

The study has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of the grieving processes and experiences associated with grief and long-term bereavement, by complementing aspects not found in quantitative research and by prolonging the time researched since the loss. By deepening the understanding of the experience, the study may help develop better therapeutic modalities and services for this population, either in individual sessions or in support groups, traditional or online. Many widows and therapists in Israel are bound to old theories of grief and to old unifocal or stage bereavement models (S. Rubin, personal communication, January 2006). They are not fully aware of relatively new theories and models that explain differently the complex life lasting effects of widowhood. This study has the potential to help widows understand themselves better, by meeting themes and stories of other women. The study has the potential to enable widows find lost parts of themselves when connecting to other women's experience through the online group as it will be described in this study. It also has the potential to support the new bereavement models and to encourage more research of long-term widowhood in general and of IDF Widowhood specifically.

The study reveals the stories of the women participating in the online group and brings their stories to the national consciousness. This is important today as many women feel they do not get the recognition they feel they deserve. It is important to us as a nation to recognize the hidden suffering of many women in our society. I also believe that this study has a potential to reveal stories of personal quests, or parts of them, that has the power to empower other people, not connected with the national bereavement in Israel. The study has a potential to encourage more research of this composite field, a deeper dive into the data, into the themes that will be heard here, publicly, for the first time and a

deeper understanding of their meaning.

For me personally, the significance of this study is that it enabled me to explore in a legitimate way my own experience. For many reasons, not explored here, people expect widows to leave widowhood behind them, to let go of the past and live the present and the future. Going through the phases of the Intuitive Inquiry, as part of this study, was an unforgettable experience of going deeper and deeper into my soul, into my feelings. It was an experience of diving back to the trauma, re-living the past, going again through past events, but differently. Now, during the Intuitive Research process, I had the strength needed to feel it all fully, as I could not have felt in the past, when daily life was the focus and the overwhelming forces of emotions threatened to sweep me off my feet. During this research, I was going back in time. I was visiting again the time I was sitting with my son, telling him that his father would not be back from the army reserve service, being aware of the huge welcome sign on the door. I was going back in time to the military cemetery, looking again at my son on his seventh birthday saying Kaddish at his father's new grave. I was going back in time to the open-heart surgery my daughter had 3 years after her father had been killed. This time I enabled myself to feel the full spectrum of emotions. It was painful in ways words cannot describe. It was also healing.

Furthermore, coming from the rational world of computers and technology, the other extreme seems to be the Intuitive Inquiry research method. Going through the process, I feel that this is an opportunity for me to develop within myself other ways of knowing, to develop intuitive ways of knowing, and understand the human experience in a very different way than ever before.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review contains three major issues: (a) bereavement, grief and loss theories and models; (b) specific widowhood research and theories; and (c) Groups and online groups, self-help support groups online.

Bereavement, Grief and Loss: Psychological Effects

This section will describe the history of the field, starting with Freud (1917/2002) and his followers, looking at stage theory and relinquish bonds theories. Following those theories, researchers developed the continuing bonds theories (Rubin, 1999) that will be described as well. Stroebe and Schut (2005) attempted to build a synthesis between the relinquish bonds theories and the continuing bonds theories, an attempt that will be summarized as the current state of bereavement research. Research on the influences of trauma and loss on well-being will follow. The question regarding the fact that most longitudinal empirical research goes to 5 years post-loss will be raised.

Bereavement Models

Theories that focus on relinquish bonds with the deceased and theories that focus on continuing bonds, tried to explain the complex human experience of bereavement, to find ways to understand and to minimize the long-term effect of bereavement, examining, among other things, the impact of "grief work". The current theoretical pluralism (Stroebe M. S., 2001) brings both confusion and new understanding into bereavement research.

A brief history of the field starts with Freud (1917/2002). Freud in his famous essay *Mourning and Melancholia* describes mourning as a painful withdrawal from a loved object, accompanied by symptoms of melancholia, or depression, as it is more

commonly called. When the staged process of mourning is over, and the entire libido is withdrawn from the lost object and returns to the bereaved, he is free again, and can invest his libido in other objects. This basic concept meant that the focus of the process is on relinquishing the strong affective bonds to the deceased person, in order to come back to life while coping with the loss, coming to terms with it, and avoiding long term health consequences.

The relinquish bonds theories followed Freud (1917/2002), who "conceptualized love as the attachment of libidinal energy to the mental representation of the loved person (the object)" (Stroebe, 2005, p. 478). This libidinal energy remains attached to the object even when the loved person dies, and subtracts from the limited pool of energy one has. The process of grief is the process of freeing those attachments, freeing the libidinal energy, neutralizing emotions, not forgetting the dead. Stroebe (2005) reviewed the history of the bereavement theories, and the path that took other psychoanalytically oriented writers to emphasize the detachment part of the grief process, the need to work through relinquishing bonds, breaking down the attachments in order to integrate the irrevocability of the loss, to come to terms with the loss, and to recover from the loss. When evidence of continued attachment and symptoms of grief were evident beyond several years, pathological or chronic grief were discussed (Derman, 1999).

Aspects of change and development were part of the theories describing stages, or phases, that every bereaved goes through, or should go through, in order to come to terms with the loss, to cope with bereavement. Grief work was the concern of grief and bereavement researchers during the 20th century, as the major theoretical construct explaining coping patterns. "Traditional bereavement theorists have suggested that a

prevalence of negative thoughts and emotions early in the grieving process are essential to the work of mourning and that talking about these painful experiences is necessary for eventual recovery" described Capps and Bonanno (2000, p. 1). "Failure to express severe upset has been assumed to indicate pathology and to lead to long-term maladjustment" (Capps & Bonanno, 2000, p. 2). Kramer (2004) described Kübler-Ross' stages of responding to dying as (a) denial; (b) anger; (c) bargaining; (d) depression; and (e) acceptance. The theory is based on the idea that one should go through the stages in order to accept the death of the loved one, to come to terms with it and to go back to life. The detachment process was considered a predictable course, lasting between one to two years (Rubin, 1981). Rubin (1993) described the contribution of Bowlby's attachment theory and research to bereavement understanding. Bowlby's four phases, numbing, searching, disorganization and reorganization describe a complex process aimed to deal with the attachment to the deceased. During the last 2 decades of the 20th century, the research questions began to change, and included personal differences, the circumstances that create extreme reaction to loss, the impact of social support. The research began to cover more years after the loss, not only the first one. Intervention methods were also questioned, but still, it was all about symptoms, functioning, and the behavioral aspects of bereavement. The emotional aspect, connected to the mental and emotional internal relationship with the deceased was mostly ignored (Rubin, 1993).

However, during the 1980s, there was no empirical support for the stages theories (Bonanno & Kaltman, 1999) and new theories emerged. Rubin (1981) suggested the two-track model of bereavement. The model acknowledges the affective attachment to the deceased as well as the extent of behavior and personality change, combining the two

tracks into one framework. Rubin (1993) emphasized that the process of adapting to loss is influenced by the two aspects described above. Aspects of coping, intrapersonal, behavioral, physical and intrapersonal homeostasis will be reached, not necessarily at the level before the loss. Still, those dimensions, or even new relationship, are not the only valid dimensions that indicate that the process has ended. Organizing the internal relationship with the deceased is as important; maybe even the target of the process. Years after the loss, the two tracks will reach a level of homeostasis, some level of balance, but they may change during the years to follow. The two-track model actually displaces the dead from the past and enables them to be part of the here and now, as continuing bonds that not only exists, but are also being developed throughout the bereaved life (Rubin S. S., 1993).

Stroebe (2001) introduced a classification of bereavement research, spanning from "scientific understanding of coping with bereavement", as one major theme in the field, to research of "the nature and significance of normal versus complicated grief and related disorders". Questioning the concept of grief work, based on previous writings and on empirical data, Stroebe argued that confronting some aspects of loss, like "restructuring of thoughts, feelings and expectations are necessary part of grieving in our own culture" (p. 861). The rest of the story are more components that builds up the complex phenomena of grief and bereavement. Those components are some times avoidance, some components that are part of the microlevel analysis of cognitive and emotional processes. Attachment theory can still contribute to understanding of continuing bonds, cognitive stress theory can contribute to the understanding of the influence of meaning on the process, and trauma research has its own contribution to

understanding grief and bereavement.

Bereavement Effects

A contemporary model of grief has tried to put "sense-making acts as an intermediate factor that explains the relation between an objective mode of death and symptoms of complicated grief (CG)" (Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2006). The researchers defined CG as a "form of bereavement marked by elevated and persistent separation distress, seriously impaired functioning, and difficulties 'moving on' with life following the loss of a loved one" (Currier et al., 2006). The researchers concluded that their study offered "support for a model of bereavement whereby the complicated grief (CG) that follows violent loss is conceptualized as stemming from one's inability to make sense of the experience" (p. 419). They also claimed that the nature of violent deaths makes it difficult to make sense, and this is one of the reasons for greater distress. They found their research conclusions consistent with newer models of bereavement.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) defined Posttraumatic growth as "the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises" (p. 1). They describe the various ways that posttraumatic growth can be manifested "including an increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, and an increased sense of personal strength. Changed priorities and a richer existential and spiritual life" (p. 1). They provide empirical data that supports their concept. The concept of Posttraumatic Growth is most important in the context of this study, as it is very difficult for a posttraumatic individual to recognize the fact that suffering can bring good results. It is more difficult when the trauma is about loss. It is not easy to admit that loss of a loved one can improve well being in the long run. The

literature in this section can help individuals recognize this part of their process, give it legitimacy, and enjoy consciously and openly things people usually do not admit. A connection between PTG's exposure in the context of this study and groups can be made when one notices Yalom and Leszcz (2005) group's therapeutic factors. The mere recognition of a group participant that he or she is not alone with an issue has a therapeutic influence. Yalom and Leszcz were referring mainly to pain and problematic issues, and here I want to expand it to issue of improving well being, while admitting good outcome as a result of painful situation.

Different aspects have been added at the beginning of the 21st century. Bonanno (2004) wrote about the option to talk about resilience instead of recovery from loss. He stated that resilience is common, and that another dimension linked to resilience is self-enhancement. Searching for resilience rather than recovery can enhance the ability to go with the bereavement process. Sandler, Wolchik and Ayers (2008) described a contextual resilience framework to explain the processes by which bereaved individuals change over time. The model focuses on adaptation to the changes that occur in the post-loss environment, "like the two-track model and the dual process model" (p. 64). The model assumes that both interpersonal and intrapersonal processes are "anchored in cultural belief systems, roles, and rituals" (p. 64). The notion of self-transformation following loss is the single feature that consistently reflected (Paletti, 2008). Reframing and relearning one's place in the world is an opportunity that follows loss. Paletti cited Heidegger, saying that being itself is a process, which takes place in a community, and Carl Rogers, saying that man himself may be regarded as a process of becoming. He also cited Campbell's description of the archetypal hero, "transformed through his trials into a new

being, having derived valuable knowledge from the experience" (p. 22). Those descriptions seem to fit well my own experience and many of my friends' journeys after the loss. Those descriptions also legitimize growth after losing a husband at a young age.

Widowhood

This section will describe research done on widowhood worldwide, including Israel. Current theories regarding spousal loss will be described when they have variations from general bereavement theories. A new research from 2006, dealing with long-term widowhood, beyond five years, will follow.

Death of a spouse is an overwhelming event (Bonanno, Wortman, & Nesse, 2004; Gentry & Shulman, 1988), scaled second only to death of a child as a stressful life event (Miller & Rahe, 1997). Despite the recognition of the magnitude of the event in one's life, most studies focus on the first years post loss (Bonanno et al., 2004; Carnelley, Wortman, Bolger & Burke, 2006).

The First Years

This section will describe the process a woman is going through in the first years after the loss of her husband. The difference between expected and unexpected loss will be addressed.

Golan (1975) described the bereavement process, aiming to form a new relationship when it is complete. Golan cited Bowlby's three-stage process: (a) protest and denial; (b) despair and disorganization; and (c) reorganization, to support her theoretical framework. To further support the stages theoretical framework, Golan brings evidence from Silverman's research on widowhood. The first phase declared by Golan can take from one day to six months or more. This stage involves sense of being lost,

suspended from life, in ability to concentrate, and a feeling that life will never be worth living again. The second phase can overlap the first one, ranging from a month after the loss to a year or longer. This is a period of acute loneliness, when deep desire to talk about the deceased, to review the facts about his death can become an obsession. "The final recovery stage" said Golan "can occur from three months after the death to two years and marks a time of looking at the future." (p. 370). Finding meaningful emotional and social life, learning to be both mother and father to the children, becoming more independent are the main issues for this stage. When a widow goes through the grief process, her sense of self is changed, the outer world becomes different. Adjustment to the fact that her life will never be the same is a major point of change.

An inventory of daily widowed life was created by Castera and Lund (2007), offering list of features derived from the dual process model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). The inventory describes the two concurrent processes: the loss-orientation (LO) and the restoration-orientation (RO). The research examined each item and the relationship between the two processes. Research participants were months from the loss, and the researchers plan to enlarge the lengths of time since widowhood in further research.

Long-Term Widowhood

Most widowhood research deals with elderly population, and covers few years post-loss. Some researchers tried to find coping strategies that will contribute to minimize the pain and hardships that come with widowhood. Gentry and Shulman (1988) examined the "consideration and use of remarriage as a response to cope with the death of a husband" (p. 191). Although period of widowhood was no longer than 5 years, they suggested that "remarriage can be an effective coping response to the concerns of

widowhood, and it seems to be more effective in handling specific concerns or problems that widows experience than emotional distress" (p. 196).

Derman's (1999) research covered women who were widowed between the ages 23 to 50, from 2 months up to 38 years post-loss. "Over time, grief did not completely diminish. Attachment also declined over time, but not significantly until the 5th to 10th years of widowhood" (Derman, 1999. p. v). The researcher found that widows "maintained emotional attachment with their deceased husbands, regardless of the length of time widowed". Derman added, "The widow was found to relate to her husband in a more symbolic and abstract level" (p. v).

Bar Nadav (2007) examined widows up to 15 years post loss. His research was based on the two-track model (Rubin, 1981; 1999) examining reactions to loss related to the bio-psycho-social functioning on one track, including self esteem and meaning sensing in life. On the other track, he examined processes related to the deceased, his representations inside the inner world of the widow and the widows' behaviors and emotions related to remembrance and memorialization of the deceased. Bar Nadav also examined the widows' feelings regarding the support and understanding they receive in their close environment and from the Israeli society, and its connection to their coping process. Bar Nadav concluded that the missions a widow encounter on her way are complex, that time serves many widows, being a beneficial factor. The process following widowhood cannot be described as linear. Most evidences in his research supports a spiral process as a more accurate metaphor. Many years post-loss one can find references to the pain, and terms like rehabilitation or recovery seemed to be incorrect. Bar Nadav suggested using the term processing and growth instead, alongside sensitivity and

vulnerability as forming and meaningful experiences that accompany widows for years. Young widows have difficulties to sense the meaning of being effective, thinking and productive in life, to enjoy work or studying. Creation of second partnership with men seems to be a more complex and a longer process for widows than for bereaved girlfriends, added Bar Nadav (2007). He also claimed that women who were widows with young children experienced differently the coping with their own loss. Being a mother to children who lost their father, having more complex daily tasks, effected they way the could deal with their own loss, compared to young widows without young children. Those challenges are different for widows that had no children or for bereaved girlfriends. Bar Nadav also compared between widows and bereaved girlfriends as a group to women who did not suffer spousal loss. The women did not experience spousal loss seem to report more meaning in life, more satisfaction from life than the bereaved. They also report a better daily functioning in many life aspects, their thinking of their spouse is more calm and pleasant. The loss has long term influence on the bereaved spouse, with or without a second meaningful relationship with a man, and accompanies the women for many years, many events throughout life.

Following the understanding that most studies of widowhood have focused on reactions during the first few years post-loss, Carnelley, Wortman, Bolger, and Burke (2006) investigated whether widowhood had more enduring effects using a nationally representative U.S. sample. "Results indicated that the widowed continued to talk, think, and feel emotions about their lost spouse decades later. Twenty years post-loss, the widowed thought about their spouse once every week or 2 and had a conversation about their spouse once a month on average" (p. 476). They found that it took the bereaved as

long as 50–70 years to reach their lowest level on certain variables. For example, "It takes about 53 years for the frequency of anniversary reactions to nearly disappear" (p. 489).

Carnelley et al. (2006) examined continued involvement with the deceased spouse, emotional resolution, meaning finding, and feelings of personal growth. They have shown evidence "that the widowed continue to talk, think, and feel emotions about their lost spouse many years (sometimes decades) later" (p. 489). Their general conclusion is that:

The present results suggest that the grieving process following the loss of a long-term spouse can continue for many years. Even after decades have passed, it is common to have memories and conversations about one's spouse, to sometimes become sad and upset as a result, and at times to experience distress when reminders, such as the date of the spouse's death, are encountered. Hopefully, greater awareness of these findings can lead to better interventions and a more compassionate view of those who are attempting to come to terms with the loss of their spouse (p. 491).

IDF Widows

In a rare article, Golan (1975) examined how young Yom Kippur War, which happened in 1973, Widows go through the process of bereavement. Following the theories of Lindemann and Bowlby, Golan (1975) described the stages a young widow should go through when her soldier-husband is killed. The widow must struggle with the "crushing emotional and physical loss of her husband, but she also must pass through a complex, two-stage transitional process that may take months or years" (p. 369). The transition is from being a wife to being a widow, and then to being "a woman, ready to engage in future personal involvement with others, including another man" (p. 369). This role transition takes a long time to accomplish. Golan (1975) described the bereavement process, aiming to form a new relationship when it is complete. I know personally many

of Yom Kippur War widows. Thirty four year later, I hear their stories about new relationships they created after the war, with another man. They believed that they have completed the journey, only to realize many years later that those marriages are broken, that they got married too soon, sometimes from the wrong reasons. At the time they were let to believe, by professionals and by social expectations, that new relationship is a sign of healthy recovery from bereavement. Decades later they saw another picture.

Groups and Online Groups

Focusing on Web based textual forums and their participants, this section will start with a general look on the psychology in the internet, followed by an overall description of the variety of online groups and virtual communities. We will have a look at self-help support groups and will dive into self-help support groups online. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) have found growing interest in Self-help support groups and growing number of people joining them. They described both self-help support groups and self-help support groups online.

General Psychology of the Net

This section describes the special phenomena and psychological aspects of Internet usage in order to sketch the effects cyberspace have on people, forming a different life form, maybe not so different from what we know in the "real" world. Suler (1999) explored the new dimension of human experience, as develops in Cyberspace. According to Suler, the Cyberspace is a psychological 'space', an array with meanings and purposes, a 'place' people feel like traveling in. While looking at the spatial metaphors and descriptions of the net, Suler pointed out that it can be observed as a kind of transitional space between self and other, describing users who "often describe how

their computer is an extension of their mind and personality – a 'space' that reflects their tastes, attitudes, and interests". While traveling in this transitional space, users throw "fantasies and transference reactions to be projected into this space". Users can use the opportunity to "better understand themselves, as a path for exploring their identity as it engages the identity of other people". Others "use this psychological space to simply vent or act out their fantasies and the frustrations, anxieties, and desires that fuel those fantasies". Suler (2005) described the features that consists a conceptual model that can help in understanding human behavior on the Internet, the *Cyberpsychology Model*. People's behavior on the Internet results from these features and their complex interaction with their own characteristics. Among those features one can find reduced sensations, as seeing, hearing and the tacit combination of all other senses do not exist; Texting is a "powerful form of self expression and interpersonal relating", combined with an ability to present one's identity in a unique way; with this comes Identity Flexibility, choices one can make of parts he or she wish to reveal in various encounters on the net. One can choose to be almost unseen, or to keep himself anonymous. Suler concluded that:

Anonymity has a disinhibiting effect that cuts two ways. Sometimes people use it to act out some unpleasant need or emotion, often by abusing other people. Or it allows them to be honest and open about some personal issue that they could not discuss in a face-to-face encounter.

Other features are altered perceptions, equalized status, transcended space, temporal flexibility, social multiplicity, recordability, and media disruption. This last feature, demonstrated in frustration and anger we experience in reaction to hardware or software failures says something about our relationship to our machines and the internet, something about our dependency on them, our need to control them. Suler emphasized that "lack of response also opens the door for us to project all sorts of worries and

anxieties onto the machine that gives us no reply. I call these the black hole experiences of cyberspace".

Suler (2000b) examined the online identity management in cyberspace. The variety of places one can choose to participate in on the net, enables him or her to expose multiple aspects of his or her identity, to decide which parts to expose and even to play with false parts of himself, including even one's gender. These aspects may be dissociated, enhanced, or integrated online. While managing, or playing with, different parts of himself, one can act out or work through the negative aspects of his identity and can express and develop the positive parts. Questions regarding the essence of our real identity were raised by Suler, questions' regarding the meaning of what is real and what is fantasy on the net and in real life. He also stated that "People differ in how much their unconscious needs and emotions surface in their online identities" (Suler, 2000b). Suler claimed that choosing a specific media to express who one is, can give a clue about him or her. He claims that "people who rely on text communication prefer the semantics of language and perhaps also the linear, composed, rational, analytic dimensions of self that surface via written discourse." (Suler, 2000b). Sometimes people do not have the choice, as the subject they are interested in has only one form, like a text based forum in one case or an advanced graphical interface, on the other.

Another important issue is the question of presence in cyberspace. Here and now seems to be the way of "how to form meaningful relationships and experience life fully" (Suler, 2003). But what is the meaning of here and now in cyberspace? Suler analyzed this issue from two aspects, the personal feeling of presence and the feeling of others' presence in cyberspace. The personal feeling of presence is influenced by factors of

sensory stimulation from the environment, change in the environment, interactivity with the environment, and the degree of familiarity. Those aspects are developed by software developers, designed in different ways to invite people in, to make them feel their presence, and to enable them to interact within the site. Suler concluded this part by saying that "Balance is important. Settings that effectively blend the familiar with the novel - reality with fantasy - can be very powerful in engendering the feeling of fully being there." Interpersonal presence on the net is more complex, but has similar characteristics. When people act, react, do things on the net, they operate in environments that differ in the level those acts are presented to other people. The differences are technological but may have been created out of a concept. In chat rooms everyone can see when someone enters; in an online forum, in many cases, such information does not exist. Many people can read the message one posts on an asynchronous forum, and no one else knows. People can see that you were there only when you post a message, reply to another message. The way a specific technology enables other to see one's acts on the net, influences the ability to see and experience different levels of presence.

Beside the technical availability of various signs of presence, we can see on the net, like in life, that presence with the other can be complex and have full range of feelings, from acceptance by the other to feeling that no one sees you, when you are ignored. When one is ignored, it can lead to "feeling lost, powerless, frustrated, angry, lonely, or depressed" (Suler, 2003). Individual differences interact with those variables, creating a unique experience of presence, during the encounter between self, other and the environment. Other variables like "empathic attunement to the identities and expressive styles of other people plays an important role in sensing presence, as does the

need and desire to connect to another person" (Suler, 2003). The here and now are multidimensional, demanding some practice to shift between the different online worlds we participate and our physical setting. In a bit of philosophical tone, Suler concluded that "The worlds and relationships of cyberspace remind us that the being, here, and now of presence resides in the human mind." Understanding this new social realm and its psychological effects can help us explain better what we see in online groups and communities.

Weinberg (2006) adds aspects of the ability the internet provides for creation of different characters, playing several roles, change personal details like age, gender and so on. "It seems that without being connected to their bodies people can explore more possibilities of the self and their subjective experience in ways that were blocked for them before the Internet era" (p. 36). The internet revolution "changes our ways of thinking not only about the self but also about relationship, intimacy and human connectedness" (p.36). Asking what presence is, Weinberg includes the concept of being present with one's body, as being the covert norm in western societies. Weinberg adds the concept of the Foulkes' matrix describing it as the thing that "connects people together in various situations. It is the communication web in a group, but also the connectedness of people in society" (p. 37). The outside unembodied matrix is not based on bodied presence, so it can serve us while looking into interpersonal connections on the internet.

Weinberg (2006) added that "The existence of an observer is what differentiates between an object and a subject. Actually this sets up the boundary between the object and the subject" (p.39). So how can the boundary exist on the internet, without voice and look? He described philosophical and psychological aspects of presence, and all point to

the existence of unembodied presence on the internet.

Online Groups and Communities: The Variety

Different online group types and online communities will be described briefly. This section will include a short comparison of face-to-face groups and online groups, regarding characteristics, advantages, disadvantages and challenges.

Participation patterns on the net are very interesting, and daily phenomena are found. The following articles will explain some of them, relevant to the forum used in this study. Soroka and Rafaeli (2006) found that "most of the forum's visitors never post, debate or discuss. They may be there, reading every posting and every discussion, but they keep their opinions to themselves. This kind of behavior is called lurking."

Text Based Online Group

Text based relationships exists in many cyberspace encounters, synchronous and a synchronous alike. Suler (2000a) offered hypotheses, divided into seven categories, of how and why text relationships work. The first hypothesis, under the subjective experience category, is that text talk is an expressive art form. The skill of self expression via text is sophisticated, and differs between people. Later, Suler (2007) expanded his writing on the subject, declaring the new age of text relationship. Focusing on text talk as a tool for online clinicians, Suler analyzed the characteristics of this ancient skill and art, enhanced using computers and networks. For people who enjoy writing, the asynchronous communication may offer the opportunity to "enjoy the zone for reflection where they can ponder on how to express themselves."

Is the Online Group a Group?

One of the pillars this study is based on is the assumption that an online group is

considered a group. The next section will explore this issue. According to Weinberg (2001), the online group is in many aspects a 'real' group. Weinberg sees the online group as a large group, behaving like a small group. In the online group, one can see group dynamics and phenomena that appear in face-to-face groups; processes and phenomenon mentioned in the classical group literature. Weinberg also adds Winnicott's concept of the potential space between the individual and the environment, as describing the space of the online group, more focused, though. Suler (2005) describes in detail various aspects of psychology in cyberspace, including group activity on the net, supporting the idea that a group in the internet is a group.

One can identify group process as well as other characteristics and attributes of face-to-face groups in the online group. Among others, Yalom & Leszcz's (2005) therapeutic factors can be found in an online group, Foulkes' (1984) Matrix and its functions of containment and resonance can be explored. The process of changing group's norms, roles in a group including the famous scapegoat, splits, aggression and intimacy are part of the transpersonal network in an online group. Following observations made by Foulkes (1984) for a face-to-face group, one can find that they all exist in the online group, although time and space are different from those known to Foulkes.

Self-Help Support Groups

Support groups and self-help support group in the world outside the net were studied for many decades. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) claimed that researching the effectiveness of self-help support groups as many participants are anonymous, the outcomes are difficult to track and in many cases there is no documentation. Yalom and Leszcz report that with all the difficulties, studies do exist and reveal the effectiveness of

such groups. Participants report that they highly value those groups; they report improvement of their coping abilities and their personal well-being. Participants also report that their use of other help services has been decreased. One can find self-help support group almost in any area of interest, almost for any sickness or mental disorder.

In self-help support group we can find almost all the therapeutic factors defined by Yalom and Leszcz (2005). The main difference is that interpersonal learning is not as strong as with a skilled group therapist. The main reason for that is that the group does not deal with the here and now. Among other reasons that empower the self-help support group, described by Yalom and Leszcz, is the fact that participants use internal resources, personal resources and group resources, rather than professional, external, resources. The participants are both providers and receivers of help, a process that contributes to their empowerment.

Self-Help Support Groups Online

This section describes what a self-help support group is on the net. A brief description of different typical areas of self-help support groups. What is working, what is not working online?

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) devoted a discussion to self-help support groups online. They try to explain the massive usage of such groups. They claimed that online groups can provide a solution for people with disabilities or other physical constraints, for people with social phobia and more. The fact that this support system is available all time, and participants have time to think, write and rewrite whatever they want to say, also provides drive to use the online group.

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) described some of the problems the online groups face.

The technology has limitations, the trustworthiness is limited, and the means to ensure privacy are not good enough. Identities and stories can be made up. Non verbal cues are missing from the conversation, so wrong interpretation can be higher than in a face-to-face group. Yalom and Leszcz added that an online group is a group, and destructive processes can be seen. Destructive norms, anti-group behavior, unhealthy group pressures, over stimulus and scapegoat phenomena are part of an online group.

Many questions and issues are still open for more research, added Yalom and Leszcz (2005), explaining that the fact that all conversations are in writing, those groups are easy to research. They ask question about the therapeutic method most appropriate for such groups, while reviewing several researches on the issue of online groups. They also distinguish between professional therapy on the net and self-help support groups, that are bound for less professional ethical restrictions.

Studies describing advantages, disadvantages and challenges found regarding online support groups exists especially for medical related issues. White & Dorman (2001) review research of a variety of health related online support groups, some are open to the public and others closed to research participants only, some are synchronous, and other are not. From personal knowledge I can add that some online groups have a limited time span, others exist without any time limit. Some groups are open for reading and writing all the time, others impose rules like a face-to-face group and limit writing for specific, predefined times. Some groups use their own resources to run the group, others use a therapist, and other groups use a facilitator. Many combinations exist on the net, enabling people to join the type of group they feel comfortable with.

Nicholas, Huntington, Williams and Blackburn (2001) were interested in the

effect of health information on the Internet have on users. They cited Quick, who studied the role of online support groups for those suffering from kidney disease. Results did not yield clear evidence to support the hypothesis that users benefited from the contact with other sufferers, although the subjects did participate in discussions and remained members of the group throughout the duration of the fieldwork. They also brought the results of Bacon's study, described an Internet self-help group for widows with dependent children. Eighty-six per cent of the widows reported that coping with their grief was enhanced by having contact with, and receiving mutual support from, their peers, although this is hardly surprising given the nature of the group. The major weakness of online self-help, reported by 57.1% of the sample, was the amount of time required to read and answer e-mail. Thirty-three per cent also noted that occasional technical problems limited their participation.

Summary

Bereavement research is developing and the passion to understand grief, mourning and bereavement seem to expand in many directions. Research examines more aspects of the psychological and spiritual processes of the bereaved, while at the same time, examines the cultural influences on the individual process. At the same time, the internet is also developing rapidly and changing the ways we can communicate and connect with ourselves and with others. WEB 2.0 and social networks are evolving and psychological and sociological researches of those phenomena are growing in a much faster pace. Understanding and acceptance of self-help support groups online is developing, while debate on counseling and professional psychological services through the internet is also growing. This research aimed to understand the interaction between

the two areas of activity and research, understanding the meeting point of the two worlds.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Research topic and purpose

The main purpose of this study was to explore the experience of IDF Widows participating in the online group. This study searched for major themes brought by the women to the online group regarding their lives and regarding the online group. As all activity explored in this study is in a group context, some group processes and phenomena were also explored, as enabling or preventing thing to exist. The research questions this study explored are: (a) what are the main issues that widows deal with regarding their lives and widowhood many years after the event, as manifested in the online group; (b) what is the meaning of meeting each other in an online group.

Qualitative research: Intuitive Inquiry

The Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 2004) is grounded in Heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) and is based on different ways of knowing. The qualitative research approach seems most suitable for exploring human experience not fully researched yet, while generating hypothesis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003), in contrast with the quantitative approach that tests hypothesis. When searching the current literature in order to generate hypothesis regarding long-term widowhood, I found that research reaches 5 years post-loss. One doctorate thesis explored 38 years post-loss (Derman, 1999) and one (Bar Nadav, 2007) explored 15 years post-loss. Most studies deal with private loss and many study elderly populations. This research aims to explore the experience of women that were widowed as young women, most of them in national context. Actually, there

are no meaningful hypotheses that one can develop based on current literature regarding widowhood decades after the loss and regarding national context loss. Therefore, hypotheses have to be generated in this study and the qualitative research methods and philosophy seems more accurate and suitable.

Another important drive to use qualitative research method was the feeling that current quantitative studies bring only a very small part of the human experience of long-term widowhood. Being there for almost 18 years, I could not find my experience in the articles I was reading for this research. It was as if the essence of the experience was missing from the theories, the findings and the conclusions.

During the first interpretive cycle of the research (Anderson, 2004), in addition to focusing on the research topic and questions, the researcher used the same tools to find the suitable research method for this study. Searching other qualitative research methods (Anderson, 1998; Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Mustakaas, 1990) for overall framework and design, the researcher knew intuitively that the framework for this study is Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 1998). During this phase, the researcher concluded that, any attempt to count words or to extract units of meaning (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998) as methods to discover themes and categories, without the context of the thread (the online conversation unit) they appear in, without my own resonance to what is written, will flatten the experience. As one of the tools in this study is my own resonance, feelings, thoughts and embodiment that are activated when I read online, it seemed more important to find themes using intuitive tools. The researcher used methods for organizing data based on Grounded Theory research (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998), while keeping the text and the context coupled. As opposed to face to

face group, on the internet one only has text and context and both should be coupled in order to find the clues to themes present in the group process context.

Anderson (2004) describes five iterative cycles as the framework for the Intuitive Inquiry research method, an in-depth, reflective process. Although the connection between a psycho-spiritual research method and the technological world of cyberspace was not trivial, many issues of presence and meaning revealed themselves in this research. Furthermore, intuition is a necessary part of being part of an online group, as most regular senses used in face-to-face encounter do not exist on the net, giving way to other senses to develop. Exploring widowhood, a complex and multidimensional experience, seemed to fit into Andersons' definitions of issues that Intuitive Inquiry can discover its inmost layers.

The five cycles (Anderson, 2004) include clarifying and engaging the research topic, questions and audience in the first cycle. The second cycle reflects the researcher understanding of the issue based on her own experience and on the literature, resulting in a set of preliminary lenses. Data was collected, organized and analyzed in cycle 3, resulting in summary report, as one can see in chapter 4. This study, unlike many of the studies described by Anderson, does not incorporate other people, so a unique form of summary reports will be created, based on the process of cycle 3. Cycle 4 creates the final set of interpretative lenses. Preliminary lenses created in the second cycle are transformed by the researcher's engagement with the data collected in cycle 3. Cycle 5 concludes the process by integrating the final set of lenses with empirical and theoretical literature. Interactions between cycles and iterations of cycles are expected during Intuitive Inquiry research process, in much a spiraling nature, and that was the case in this study. The

results of cycle 1 are the topic definition and research questions as described in the introduction chapter of this document. The results of cycle 2 are presented in this chapter. The results of cycle 3 are presented in the results section in chapter 4 and cycles 4 and 5 will be presented in the discussion section, as proposed by Anderson (2004).

Intuitive Inquiry: Tools Employed

The Intuitive Inquiry presents a set of intuitive tools employed during the research process, tools that every researcher should fit into his or her own research. Two sets of tools were employed to complete this research, the intuitive set of tools and the more analytical way of knowing, grounded theory based tools.

Intuitive Inquiry based tools. Intuitive Inquiry requires overall structure for the research, a requirement that is the first tool, a path to walk in. Using tools is dependent on the research and the researcher. Another tool employed in this study is my own resonance, feelings, thoughts and embodiment that are activated whenever necessary. A photographed dialogue with sculptures (Appendix B) was the main vehicle transporting me between conscious modes, helping me to focus. Another tool was embodied writing, defined as "seeks to reveal the lived experience of the body by portraying in words the finely textured experience of the body and evoking sympathetic resonance in readers" (Anderson, 2001, p83). Reading text can be emotional; can evoke reaction in the body, strange as it sounds. Delicate feelings arise during reading in the online group. Times of incubation were also part of the process, one of the tools employed.

Grounded Theory based tools. Grounded Theory has basic idea, but several ways to conduct the research (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998). The research employed thematic analysis using coding method, while modifying it to analyzing text

built differently than interviews, more like a group discussion. The process involved moving sentences between Microsoft Word files. The process is described in details in this chapter.

Research Participants

Group members

As in many other online groups, the population of the participants is not easy to identify, as many Internet users prefer to remain anonymous (Shaw & Shaw, 2006). The research did not expose group members, as it is a personal, in many cases hidden, decision of the individual. For this research, a group member is any person that submitted a request to be part of the forum and posted messages as part of the thread the researcher selected. From personal knowledge, coming from meetings outside the forum, phone conversations, email exchange, and from what people write in the forum, I know that most participants are actually IDF Widows, some are IDF orphans, and some are current spouses of IDF Widows. It is rare that other people, not part of the population defined above, post messages in the online group; although I know that other people log in to read (Ministry of Defense employees, friends, several lawyers, widows and others). In this study, the researcher used the material of what seems to have been written by widows, especially long-term widows, and not by others, knowing that other data can erroneously enter. From knowing many women personally and from what they post in the forum, in many cases I can confirm the fact that they were widowed many years ago.

Some participants sign-in with their name but many others use a nickname. As the forum manager, I have the technical tools and the ability to identify, in some cases, that people use both their name and in other cases use a nickname, interchangeably. The site's

policy is to allow anyone to register, without the need to specify real name, in the open to the public forums. There is also a closed forum, where real name and details are required by the forum manager, but are not published in the forum. The closed forum is not part of this study and data or knowledge from it will not be accessed during the study. During the course of this study, I tried to gather more information, to complete the knowledge about participants and their demographic details as far as possible on the net, for general description of the population. The information I used for this research was only the information openly available to the public, and not information obtained as the site and forum manager. An important characteristic of the participants in the forum is that many of them had almost no previous experience with the Internet and especially did not have any previous experience with online group or forum.

Demographic Details

The demographic details are mostly unknown, as the anonymity of online group is a solid basis for its operation. From personal knowledge, coming from meetings outside the forum, phone conversations, email exchange, and from what people write in the forum, I would say that many of them lost their husbands in Yom Kippur War (1973) when they were in their twenties or early thirties. Others lost their husbands during the years of the war in Lebanon (1982 and on). Others lost their spouse in accidents or because of sickness. I can assume wide distribution of ages and time since the loss. Examining the presence of specific people over time in the online group is almost impossible as people can change nickname any time they choose. This research will not relate to specific people, but to the group as a whole, to text appearing in specific conversation. For that reason, a detailed demographic description is not applicable.

Although data is available online, names and other personal details will be changed, not to expose any specific person or nickname.

Some of the online group participants had several meetings outside the forum. They met in events organized by the Ministry of Defense, by the army or as part of the election process, taking place those months, in the IDF Widows Organization. Women were also visiting each other, helping each other after meeting in the forum. The meetings were very exciting, but the fact is that the forum is not purely online and therefore the participants not purely anonymous.

Preliminary Lenses

The results of cycle two (Anderson, 2004) is a definition of preliminary lenses. Using tools like a dialogue with the sculpture (Appendix B), meditation and self-reflection at my own emotions, feelings and experience, after reading many articles on the subject, the preliminary lenses regarding widowhood are (a) widowhood has long-term effects; (b) external events influence the widows decades after the loss; (c) the national context of the loss influences the widows throughout life; (d) beside the pain there is an opportunity to psychological and spiritual growth from bereavement, there are waves of pain and growth; (e) when a widow has a new relationship, in many cases, it does not eliminate the internal relationship with the dead husband, nor it eliminates some of the influences of widowhood; (f) most IDF Widows are women, and the gender factor lowers their position; (g) there is a gap between the widows' expectation to be recognized and the reality; and (h) time effects on widowhood and it's influence is not linear as described in previous research.

The preliminary lenses regarding online group are: (a) an online group is a group,

and one can find group dynamics, group processes, group phenomena and therapeutic factors; (b) belonging to the online group empowers the connection to other IDF Widows, raises self esteem and empowers the power of the group; (c) group processes in the online group effects participation and sharing; and (d) there may be a link between the presence on the internet and the presence of the dead;

Data Collection

Cycle 3 of the Intuitive Inquiry research method (Anderson, 2004) focuses on the data. The researcher identifies sources of data; develops criteria for the selection of research information; collects the data and prepares summary reports. Data sources that were used in this study are: (a) the online group; (b) my personal journal documenting the entire research process; and (c) a photographed dialogue with sculptures, chosen as part of the intuitive inquiry research method. The personal process described in the journal and the photographed dialogue is presented in Appendix B. The online group is presented in chapter 4.

The final criteria for choosing the data from the online group was its relevance to the research questions, conforming to the idea that data should inform the essence of the research question. The strategy was to read the entire main forum from beginning to end, to select threads as a whole from the online group, moving them to one file. The next step was thematic analysis of each sentence included. In many cases, the context is the thread, not the single message. A thread is defined as all messages that appear under one main message, like a conversation. Sometimes messages are intended to be part of a thread, but either by lacking attention or because of participant's technical difficulty, are entered alone, as a main message. Main messages entered on the same period as an active thread

and contain similar content were considered part of the thread. Single messages were selected when they were related to a thread, active at the same timeframe of days.

Threads are important as they can reveal the resonance between participants and other group phenomena in a group context.

The researcher scanned all pages in the main open forum; went over the titles and partly the messages, posted since December 2005 until February 2007. A limited number of threads were selected for further processing. The criterion for thread selection was that it contains items regarding widowhood, regarding the group or both. This criterion led to threads that also revealed group process or phenomenon that enables the activity in the group or disturbs it. The selection criterion ensured that the focus will remain on widowhood, but did not ignore the group context. Other criteria are: (a) material of what seems to have been written by widows; (b) messages that are part of threads or connected to threads via timeframe; and (c) content regarding political issues or general issues will be excluded.

Data organization was the phase in between data collection and data analysis. The researcher used methods for organizing data based on Grounded Theory research (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998), while keeping the text and the context coupled. Essentially, selecting data from the online group and organizing it in the file was in small iterative consequence cycles, making sure that only thread containing data that is related to the research questions is inserted into the data organization file.

The meaning of this data to me was in the promise to find the online group as a tool that empowers participants, to find the essence of the long-term widowhood experience.

Data Analysis

Data analysis phase started after data organizing phase. The transition was not clear-cut, but involved going back and forth between those two stages. When the data was organized in one large file, containing 2323 lines, the coding started.

The data have been moved from the original data file into another file, according to the content, creating initial list of attributes, or repeated ideas as described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). The attributes emerged from the data itself, bottom up, changed repeatedly, until the structure seemed to give the right feeling that it describes correctly the essence of the data. Sentences, or parts of sentences, were coded according to Grounded Theory scheme, duplicated when they had more than one basic idea or thought in them.

The process of data analysis included several iterations and different interactions with the data in order to produce meaning. Empathetic identification was one of the tools that the researcher employed in this study. The process took several months, as the content was not easy to read, the emotions flooded me repeatedly. Trying to analyze the data from a researcher point of view, not from an IDF Widow point of view was not easy at the first iterations. It took me many cycles and iterations to feel that my emotions and feelings do not mask the data and do not influence the accuracy of the analysis. Only when I felt it is right to go on, I moved to the last iteration, going through both files again, and making sure all attributes are relevant and contain the relevant data. This phase was done in front of a computer screen, looking at the selected text and at the organized text on one computer, and many times finding the text in the online group itself, on another computer. This was done to ensure that context is not lost during the analysis

process. Self-dialogue using journal and interaction with the sculpture (painting it, photographing and photo editing) was an important tool employed in this phase.

Alternate consciousness modes in meditation, Qigong practice and imagery sessions were part of the process. The researcher reviewed all sources time after time, until substantial information emerged out of the data.

The second part of the data analysis phase was to extract the list of attributes from the file, create small cards with their names printed, and start looking for higher-level themes and categories. At this point, there were 120 attributes regarding long-term widowhood and the online group. The tools mentioned above were employed in order to find some logic inside the heap. The first step was sitting in front of the cards on the carpet, without trying to think. I was just looking at them, letting them come up with something. Going slowly with the cards, the structure described in chapter 4 was beginning to emerge. Several iterations were needed in order to feel right with the structure.

The third part of data analysis was the development of summary report, towards the end of cycle 3 (Anderson, 2004). According to Anderson, the summary reports may take many forms. I started with very structured report, describing the themes and attributes in tables, organize and summarize the data by using conventional thematic content analysis. As this method seemed pale and not flowing, I changed the report to be more like a descriptive summaries, a composite depiction (Mustakaas, 1990). Each theme was described in general, and each attribute contained explanation and quotes from the online group. Those depictions were created by tools of immersion and alternate consciousness modes in order to find a descriptive way to summarize the data.

The fourth part of data analysis is based on Anderson's (2004) fourth cycle. In this phase, the preliminary interpretive lenses are transformed and refined. Anderson emphasizes the importance of intuitive breakthroughs, the mysterious illumination moments when patterns reveal themselves to the researcher. Those moments could not be planned, but they happened. Together with pure moments of clear logical mind analyzing the data, some special moments of sudden and clear understanding of the meaning behind the data were part of the process.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) analyze the issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability and define the purpose of using those concepts as the need to convince other people, but using different concepts. Based on the assumption that subjectivity, interpretation and context are essential in qualitative research, they recommend new standards, "consistent with the qualitative research paradigm" (p. 78). They define "justifiability" as an alternative to reliability and validity, and "transferability" to generalizability. Justifiability includes transparency, communicability and coherence.

Following those terms, combined with the concept of Intuitive Inquiry, this study included detailed quotes from the online group, a clear definition of criteria and process of data collection, data organization and data analysis. Cycle 2 lenses were presented, revealing the preliminary understanding of the researcher, clearing issues of subjectivity and enables the reader to conclude whether or not the researcher described, summarized and arrived to the conclusions derived from the data. Data selection process was documented, including the processing of items selected intuitively, in order to increase transparency.

Ultimately, this study contains a coherent description of the phenomena, guided by Anderson's (2004) challenge to "tell the truth no matter what" (p. 325). Another major point is to avoid circularity, especially around the initial ideology the researcher starts with. Avoiding such circularity is a challenge in Intuitive Inquiry research. Comparing cycle 2 and cycle 4 lenses can help the reader decide whether the researcher remained bound to the initial ideology and understanding.

Resonance was part of the iterative process the researcher went through, to reach proper validity. Going over the data and all research reports, self-dialoguing over them, repeatedly, until the researcher feels, intuitively, the truth and resonance of the phenomena description are accurate, meaningful and valuable.

Procedure

Design

This study is based on data that already exists in an open online forum on the internet and on data produced during the study by the researcher. The researcher did not contact external organizations or other people during the research, and was working online, doing the process. Data organization and analysis were conducted using tools that created during the research, mainly using Microsoft Word. The overall framework is built according to Intuitive Inquiry 5 interpretative cycles.

The research process was conducted in the same way people are using the internet, the way people participate in an online group. When an individual participates in an online group, he or she is sitting alone, mostly at his or her home, communicating with others via the written text, either writing or reading. This is also the nature of the process of the researcher in this study. There was no plan for face-to-face interaction with other

people; no interviews were conducted, just the researcher and the laptop, connected to the net.

Process

1. Finalize definition of cycle 2 preliminary lenses
2. Post a message that declare my intent to conduct this research in the forum
(Appendix A)
3. Scan messages in the open forum (starting cycle 3)
4. define data selection criteria
5. Select data complying with selection criteria
6. Organize data in a file
7. Analyze data, while going back and forth to the data (ending cycle 3)
8. Build final set of interpretative lenses (cycle 4)
9. Write summary reports by integrating lenses with empirical and theoretical literature (cycle 5)

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this chapter was to integrate an extended conjugal bereavement experience with the experience of participating in an online support group, taking into account the meaning of group phenomena and processes. This was done through content analysis of writings on a forum dedicated to IDF widows throughout a period of a year and a half. Due to the fact that this study involved analyzing online forums that grant anonymity to their writers, it was impossible to determine the exact demographics of the participants. Nevertheless, through personal familiarity with the bulk of participants, I inferred that most of them were widows who lost their husbands starting from Yom Kippur War (1973) through Lebanon War (1982). It should be noted that a small number of the participants became widows earlier, during the Six Days War (1967). All participants were women who became young widows; most of them were mothers of small children. At the time of the study, many of them were in their 40's, 50's, and even 60's. An option existed on these forums to change the chosen nickname that was used for writing on the forum, so that any participant could use different nickname for different purpose, for example, using one nickname to convey support and another for attack. As the forum's administrator I had access to the information of nickname changing, but it will not be used, as it is not accessible on the net. The result was a collection of sayings from approximately fifty women; most of them had only one nickname.

The results of the thematic analysis are presented by four different categories, according to the study's questions. The extended conjugal bereavement experience manifested itself through the women's fragments of thoughts and feelings, and through their stories that they chose to share about their lives and about the meaning they drew

from the online group experience. The analysis revealed a number of categories that encompassed the experience and described the factors in the women's lives. Three out of the four categories deal with the widowhood life, the fourth category considers the accommodating ground for the widowhood discourse.

A Grounded Theory approach was applied to the coding, organization, and analysis of the data. The results indicated the presence of characteristics and themes that deviated considerably from the scope of this study, thus, were combined into rather general characteristics and themes. Many of the characteristics could become factors in and of themselves. Many of these themes could turn into categories. Therefore, the integration of some of these themes and characteristics was necessary, under the limits of this paper, which brought forth an efficient and simple model.

This chapter begins with a short introduction of the categories and the characteristics that were revealed in the analysis, including further elaboration later in this chapter.

The four categories discussed are (a) the internal world of an IDF widow; (b) the widow's attitude toward her environment; (c) intensified paradoxes that the widow dealt with; and (d) the online support group. The first category described the IDF widow's point of view to and on her internal world. The themes that were revealed within this category were: (a) emotions; (b) coping; and (c) memories. The second category examined the external world of the IDF widow and focused on: (a) overt and covert; (b) family; (c) the extended environment; (d) meetings with other IDF widows; and (e) the Israeli society. The third category revolved around existing existential paradoxes, however, were exacerbated among IDF widows: (a) life vs. death; (b) power vs.

weakness; (c) sadness vs. joy; (d) presence vs. absence; (e) linear time vs. present progressive; (f) the gender paradox; (g) internal vs. external; (h) Remembering vs. forgetting; and (i) together vs. apart. The fourth category portrayed the experience of participating in an online support group. It included themes such as (a) relations with group; (b) interpersonal dynamic, echoing in the group; (c) the individual's feelings within the group; and (d) in and outside the online support group. Each category was represented by a table consisting of organized information on the category, related themes, and a list of characteristics pertaining to each theme.

Category: The Internal World of the Veteran IDF Widow

The internal world of the widows included the feelings, the coping, and the memories. This world was not separated from the external one in which they lived in, the separation is somewhat artificial, however the intensity of its related themes that discuss internal world, justified a distinct category. Among the different feelings discussed on the forum, pain, by its different colors and variations, was most frequently spoken of. Coping was defined as tough and hurtful "...the aching everyday coping - is built in - within living, forever." Fragments of life were expressed in writing about the coping as a widow at the initial years following the loss, and at the present. Coping also brought up stories about rebuilding life, finding meanings, and attempts to find acceptance or, at the least, comfort. In many cases, memories were left with the statement "missing my past life", but were not broken down into specifics or details. It seems that the significance of each topic deserves special attention and further research. The particular topics are depicted in Table 1.

Due to the scope of this paper and the enormous amount of information, only selected discussions were explored. Quotes related to this category and others constituted only small part of the writing. By using these specific quotes, I intended to demonstrate the spirit of the discussions, and to voice the sayings of some of the widows. My heart aches for all the quotes and details that could not be represented in this paper.

Nevertheless, I believe that one voice could represent the voice of the group. It should be noted that the quotes were in the context of a conversation.

Table 1

Category - The Internal World of the Veteran IDF Widow

Theme	Characteristics	Times mentioned
Feelings	Hurdles and distress	202
	Pain, sadness, and sorrow	176
	Alone / loneliness	55
	The feeling of missing out	22
	Difficulty watching life go on	21
	Pitying the next generations	19
	The feeling of missing out due to not having children	6
	Coping	Rebuilding – continuity
Struggle and strengthening		102
World-view of choice, life, and optimistic		87
Survival, difficulty to cope		47
Crying		46
Repression as part of coping		44
World-view of external destructive force		42
Comfort and acceptance		37
Humor		27
The physical affect of dealing with the loss		15
Finding meaning in life		4
Memories	Remembrance and longing	60
	Recalling the deceased	29
	Memories from the time of becoming a widow	28
	Reliving the past	27

Theme: Emotions

Diverse and different emotions were brought up in the writings of the IDF widows in the online support group. Most frequently mentioned was pain which related to many different other feelings.

The prominent characteristics in the emotions theme are: (a) the feeling of missing out; (b) the feeling of missing out due to not having children; (c) difficulty watching life go on; (d) pitying the next generations; (e) hurdles and distress; (g) feeling of loneliness; and (h) Pain, sadness, and sorrow.

The feeling of missing out. The widows wrote about distressful feelings of missing out “he gave me my life, but my life came to a halt. Even since that day, nothing is like it would have been for me, for us.” One of the widows told the forum that “despite the fact that it’s been 33 years, the feeling of missing out is terrible and frustrating.” Some of the widows mentioned the plans for the future they used to dream of, which also disappeared “about a feeling of missing out and the terrible lack of actualization, of the beautiful life that was taken at its peak, of the big love that would never be attained.”

The pain of missing out for not having children before becoming a widow. Only a small number of the forum participants became widows before having children. One of them wrote “after the loss of my husband, I realized that we would never have children. That realization was an experience of yet another loss, one loss on top of another, losses and grief that never end.” A different widow shared “my husband filled my world, in every sense possible, and this world, that was full and happy that fulfilled every possible dream I ever had, was lost forever and I have nothing left that can carry on our internal

compassion. And so it remains, sealed in my heart, carved on my body, reluctant to find comfort”.

Difficulty watching life go on. The life of those who were left behind continues. Life formed a constant reminder for the loss. From the first moment of leaving the house, after the seven days of mourning, after the astonishment of the realization that everything was just the same as before, from gatherings with friends through observing the children throughout the years. Thoughts about “the loss of a person with whom we hoped to grow old and experience the little joys in life such as bar-mitzvah, the wedding of your child, the birth of a grandchild, a simple cup of coffee and a quiet conversation between a husband and a wife” appear on the forum. It was a reflective thought that interweaved an observation of the life that move on, with the husband who was killed in action, who never got to experience the rest of his life. Another widow spoke about social gatherings, about the pain involved in observing others whose lives go on, uninterrupted. She wrote “every now and then I meet his friends, one who recently retired from the military after 30 years of service and another who founded his own company. Each one of them has beautiful and happy family, and they all continue with their lives.” The pain experienced by a widow included also the pain for everything the deceased husband never got to experience while others did. How hurtful it was “to watch all his friends grow old, have their children getting married, become grandfathers... and he never got to have that...”

Pitying the next generations. He (the deceased) “will never know the children who became adults, grandchildren who were born” and the pain became stronger. Again, the pain rose when thinking of the children, of the grandchildren, and how they all missed out on experiencing their father, on the pain they feel “for his daughter that did not know

him, did not have the privilege to grow with his compassion”. The pain experienced by the bereaved wife was blended with the pain of the children. She said, “as the children grow up, come these certain moments and experiences related to their development. And he was never there to share those moments with them. The right to enjoy his children was taken away from him; they grew up without him.” Another widow added that “the most painful experience for his children is when they have children of their own. It is then when the pain breaks through, full forced, along with the realization that their father is not there with them to share this moment of great joy. It hurts them deeply that they cannot experience the pride of presenting their children to their father, his grandchildren.”

Hurdles and distress. The distress manifested itself in a variety of ways, part of them involved talking about it directly, and others through the feelings it elicited by reading passages widows wrote, such as in the sentence “love and longing do not die, there’s no cure, no comfort”. As the reading progressed, it became clear that widows dealt with a wide range of emotions that contributed to the general feeling of distress, starting from their living in a “constant anxiety over separation and loss”, through the sensation that “I’m alive, I am living and my wounds bleed all the time”. Many strong and negative feelings were expressed by the forum participants; among them one could find fear, anxiety, exhaustion, surrender, misery, weakness, wretchedness, despair, frustration, and guilt. Within the scope of this paper, only some of these feelings were discussed. One of the widows wrote sarcastically “a widow, a single mother, wretched, vulnerable, pitiful, exposed, unloved, without a man, lonely, alone, miserable!” within the different writings, different approaches of coping were brought up, discussed in the next theme.

Feeling of being alone and lonely. The widows talked about a feeling of loneliness after the loss. “I didn’t share my feelings with anyone” wrote one of them, and another added “there were many moments that the lack of support and loneliness colored my approach”. Another widow confessed that “I have gone through bereavement in utmost loneliness”. And another said with pain “the yearning, the longing, the crying, the sad moments, and the anxieties, these were all mine alone.” Part of the loneliness was explained by the widows as related to the fact that they used to hide significant parts of their internal world from others. The inability to share is explored in detail, in the theme of the overt and covert within the next category.

Pain, sadness, and sorrow. The pain was mentioned and was part of many different contexts. On the “deep sorrow that accompanies every single event” wrote many of the widows. Some of them described their situation as a place of “continuous sadness”, others saw it as “delayed grief experience”, and I went even beyond that to portray it as “never ending grief” because it would be part of our lives until our very last living moment. Some women used the phrase “a pain that penetrates the heart”, others talked about “dealing with hardship and pain”, and some described it as “we were left with a hole in our heart.”

Theme: Coping

Coping, as viewed by some of the women, was part of the rest of life. It took many different colors and shapes, went through many different transitions, accompanied the bereaved in every day of her existence, and yet “so little has been said about the widow who was left behind to deal with the everyday tasks and challenges with the void and with the orphans...” Coping comprised of: (a) survival; (b) the physical effect of

dealing with the loss; (c) repression as part of dealing; (d) crying; (e) rebuilding – continuity; (f) comfort and acceptance; (g) humor; (h) finding meaning; and (i) struggle and strengthening.

Survival. A feeling of survival appeared at the very beginning of the mourning process. It was a powerful feeling that forced the bereaved to hold onto everything that was living. This feeling became less prominent throughout the years. The veteran widows described coping at the beginning of the way as “a wish for life and a need to survive, probably intrinsic to the human soul, were the reason I kept going”. As they recalled the way they have gone through, starting at the very first moment, they recalled “a crisis point where each of us tried her best just to survive.”

The physical effect of dealing with the loss. Some of the forum participants wrote that they were affected by the loss physically as well as emotionally. A Yom Kippur widow wrote that “ever since my love has been taken from me 32 years ago, there was not a single night where my sleep was not disturbed and longer than 4 hours.” Even without directly discussing sleeping patterns, one could infer their existence by the time posts were made on the forum, and understand a problem existed. Other widows discussed Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that had accompanied them, and perhaps still did, throughout the years. In some cases, suffering from PTSD enabled a different approach for coping, as one of them said “I needed a trigger such as PTSD.”

Repression as part of coping. Repression as a way of coping came up in the discussions numerous times. In a discussion about crying that was overwhelmingly emotional, one of writers noted that “in my opinion this (overwhelming crying) was a symptom of repression, which is now resurfacing.” As the widows attempted to

understand their underlying emotions they said “Indeed. We received legitimacy to get in touch with that part in us that was in denial.” Perhaps even legitimacy to get in touch with the self, parts of the self that were latent for many years. In contrast to the trend of exposure and search for hidden parts of the self, one of the women mentioned that “In retrospect, I know I am the same person. I found out that I am the same today as I was before. The traits and attitudes I had before were the ones that helped me through this. For better and worse, my weaknesses and strengths kept functioning on my behalf, sometimes against me, because I’ve never been perfect and I certainly didn’t become perfect after his death.” The component of detachment and repression sometimes came up along with some cynicism “Within only 10 days I was able to just start my life over! All I had to do was to get rid of the ‘lump’ in my throat, be able to breathe and swallow... and that’s how I learned to obsessively escape, I concealed souvenirs, letters, and pictures, I changed addresses, every time I got ‘burnt’ in a particular neighborhood where people started knowing too much about me”. Some parts sometimes stayed covert, sometimes overt, but they always influenced life, as it appeared in retrospect “and the denials destroyed my soul”. Another widow told that “there were certain subjects I did not dare to touch and admit they existed... for example, the life with the dead husband and life with the husband who is alive”. Through writing, the women attempted to look back and understand all that they went through and their reasons for repressing. Through writing, they tried to figure out which changes they could cope with throughout time. “The truth is that I never had the time and capability to mourn, and after a while, I just moved on with my life, for the sake of my family and his”. The widows recalled the moment where they knew a change must come: “It is pain that is impossible to hide. I’ve

hidden this tearing pain for a year, didn't shed even one tear, not even on my pillow. I almost lost my sanity because of this pain that was trapped in my soul, and then I said – no more”.

Some of the women found themselves surprised by the process they have been through, as one of them noted “now, everything starts to overflow and come out, after 33 years...weird”. Some of these transformations followed changes in external circumstances such as the supplement law to the 2006 budget that, “got me overwhelmed by many memories that started to resurface after so many years”. Others were interested in a change, as they wrote: “perhaps it's time to scream publicly, the pain, rage, and frustration that have been accumulated within us”. About coping again with familiar places from the past, wrote another participant “...but the truth is that I quit writing because I felt overwhelmed by feelings every time one of my friends here tells about wrongs that were done to her such as [name], about difficult problems such as [name] experienced, and many different other hurtful things that are brought up in this forum that force to deal with, difficulties I thought I overcame already. Apparently not!!!” Other topics brought up in the context of the forum and its effects on the widow's life are discussed in the fourth category.

Some widows wrote about the pain that was entailed in the coping itself as they spoke about “the hardship of the veteran widows” and sometimes about their own difficulties “accept me the way I am, it is hard for me as it is”. They hardly ever talked about receiving assistance from others. Two of the widows brought up pain that was involved in asking for help, one wrote “even the senior ones don't ask for help, perhaps

feeling ashamed of their misery, exhausted, surrender...” and the other one added “sometimes the difficulty to ask is mine.”

Crying. Crying accompanied the widows throughout every step of the way. Some widows spoke about crying in the context of family gatherings “at these moments, tears still flow. The crying stopped, but the tears keep flowing without control!!!” others maintained their posture but “I held back, didn’t cry at all” at the son’s bar mitzvah. One was trying to explain the reasons for holding back the crying “try to explain others why you cry...” admitting that it continued to exist years after the loss.

Rebuilding, continuity. Observing life with a somewhat optimistic outlook, and perhaps even hoping for a change, brought one of the participants to consider “perhaps open our old wounds that never really healed up, and only today we understand why.” The feelings of optimism and continuing with life had many faces in the forum. In a poetic manner they expressed the way through which they viewed coping “sometimes, from the darkness of the pain, a light breaks through, light that we have never seen before, because lights, as everyone must know, are easier to detect when being in the dark” and another one wrote “it doesn’t matter how deep in I go, my head will always be above water, and so the rest of my body is bound to follow.” After a series of stories about difficult coping, one of the widows wrote that “deep sorrow is described here that I have to admit does not represent my life. There’s a lot doing, joy, and creation in my life, side by side with the longing, and ever lasting memories.” Another widow talked about “the things I find encouraging in family gatherings are that every year there are more and more participants. That no one forgets. That his brothers’ children, and the children of their children, and my children, and the grandchildren that dance around the grave and

the monument statue in the Golan Heights... all this creates a family gathering, surrounding a sad event, but one that also contains happiness and hope and continuity..."

Comfort and acceptance. Acceptance of reality existed on the forum "but this is our reality, we learned to live with it, it is part of us", and there were also stories about construction that held consummation "after all, we did build a new lives, different of what they used to be or could have been." At times, sarcasm accompanied sayings such as "I wanted normal life, therefore I invented a whole new self, and I created myself a big and happy family." Elicited smiles at the online support group "I tell myself, there you go! I am no longer alone, and that makes me a normal woman, normal in my eyes... and it provides me with comfort." "But I take comfort in that this is exactly how he would have loved me to be, and I loved him"

Sometimes excitement was getting across, through the writing, such as in the words of a widow living in the northern part of Israel, "when I, my children, and my grandchildren arrive on memorial day to this amazing place, and hear the siren that penetrates the air of Hachula's valley, and off in the distance the flickering lights of the Golan Heights, all this view at night time, the view that he fought for, so that we carry out the command, in their death they commanded us life..."

Humor. Humor appeared every now and then at the online support group. Sometimes in casual comment such as "what happened that you stop writing? Or do I have a virus!!!!!!!!!" Other times humor was used for especially challenging topics, such as second marriage "all year long wearing a mask of a married woman." Other times dark humor was used to relieve coping with the pain.

Finding meaning in life. Finding meaning in life was not a subject that frequently came up. Every now and then one of the widows said that “I’ve made both conscious and unconscious decisions to take this terrible disaster that happened to me and try to live, and try to grow, and give meaning and content to my life and my daughter’s.”

Struggle and strengthening. War and peace with the loss, a freedom to make a decision within the chaos was expressed in the words of one of the women “I am one of the people who didn’t let the loss control me, and to most extent, I tried to be the one in control. Sometimes I was successful, others, not so much.” “Every day, I struggle to get up, and not give up my life as sometimes I wish I could, sometimes more than others.” During the second Lebanon War (2006), one of the widows took upon herself to help another woman who just became a widow. Her friends expressed their worried for her wellbeing, but she said “Friends, thank you for your concern, I am a ninja, I must continue to function as normal, there’s no other choice.”

There was very little writing on forcefulness, on changes in priorities, on significant changes in their lives as part of, or following coping with the trauma of the loss. One of the women hinted that a process of this kind indeed existed, saying “Today I am in a place of doing what I want, not what I need.” Along the same lines, many women wrote about their experiences throughout the years, describing it as “Today, we are different women”, saying that “as soon as a woman becomes a widow, she would never be the same.”

The women also told about searching for places of healing and relief. Parts of these places were related to actions such as the story of one of the widows “my therapy was to repair the law that gave rights to widows whose second marriage expired.” Other

places of healing and relief could be found as part of just being, places that afforded some alleviation from the pain, as one of the widows wrote “my only relief was at the cemetery, being alone, just him and myself.”

Two world-views manifested themselves in the widows’ writings, two opposing approaches, each influencing the way of dealing. One group presented a world-view of external destructive force, and the other group presented a world-view of choice, life, and optimism. The world-view of a destructive force was expressed in words such as “my other world, the one that was destroyed back in 1973”, or “have to make sure the widows, whose world was destroyed in a single message delivered by the town officer, would receive the appropriate place and respect.” On the other hand, the world view of choice, life, and optimism was expressed in words such as “our future depends on our own actions that we choose to take after the loss”, or “but I am who I am, I’ve decided that this is my life, and I live it to the best of my understanding.” On a different level, another widow wrote “first and foremost the important thing is the decision to keep living.” Many spoke about coping as a lifelong phenomenon, describing coping as “built in - within living, f o r e v e r” or noted that “It is a fact that second marriage does not stop the pain of the loss and coping.”

Theme: Memories

This theme was comprised of memories that were brought up and the following characteristics: (a) remembrance and longing; (b) reliving the past; (c) memories of turning into a widow; and (d) recalling the deceased.

Remembrance and longing. Participants in the online support group brought up memories and longing, and stories from their lives. Sometimes participants could not

speak of them unless in a causal manner because these memories tended to elicit pain. Retrospection could sharpen their thoughts about memories, each time illuminating a new idea “as time goes on, the longing increases, becomes more and more difficult to bear with each passing year.” Not only did the longing not diminish, but continued to exist, dozens of years post loss “and I very much miss the old times.” Coping with the yearning for the dead husband, to a different era in life, forced the widows to face novel situations “I tried to cope with longing and yearning that I never knew before, feelings that burnt the living flesh. These were especially hard because I realized they would never end.” Anniversaries of the husband’s death stimulated the longing, just like wedding anniversary. One such wedding anniversary brought up memories for one of the widows “tomorrow is my first wedding anniversary, I have a lot of trouble with this day, and each passing year it becomes harder. Despite that it’s been 41 years, the memories don’t let go.”

Reliving the past. The law to the 2006 budget, the second Lebanon War (2006), and other events that took place throughout the time of this study, introduced a common phenomenon of re-experiencing pain, memories and longing following a related event, even if it did not contain a personal relevance. Discussions surrounding this subject arose several times during the time of this study. Each time, distinct sentences rose in discussions, such as “each time there’s war or an incident involving our soldiers, each of us experiences memories and sadness from the past.” One widow identified with the happening and wrote “indeed the flashbacks return. I still hear the sirens of all past wars. Everything blends together.” Another said that “it is so sad, so painful, never ending, everything resurfaces, the memories, the tears, the loss.” Occasionally, even the seasons

changing brought back old memories. One of the widows wrote a passage which brought the rest of the readers to tears “autumn is here again. Autumn comes again, and along with it comes the feeling of heavy burden. It is same every year...the strongest memory of that war was the full moon. It was full when we sought shelter in Tivon, and it was the moon which lit up the sky, the battles, and the bodies left behind in the field. For many days.”

Memories of becoming a widow. The moment of becoming a widow, who they were at that particular and crucial moment, young women, most of them had young children; this moment was a frequently discussed topic at the online support group. “I was left a young 23 year old widow, caring for two young toddlers, a four year old daughter, and a two year old baby boy” said one of them, and the pain that was shared by all widows brought up hurtful memories from the time of becoming a widow “I remember the tearful night and days of constant crying, of utter despair and depression, both for myself and for the children as well. We could not accept the death of the husband and father whom we loved so dearly. These were days full of sadness and tears.” A Yom Kippur War widow told “I escorted him to the jeep, having this bad and horrible feeling filling me. He patted my belly gently, asking me to take care of myself and of our unborn baby, and then he left”

Recalling the deceased. To some of the widows, despite that it had been years since the loss, letting go of the dead husband was still difficult. He was still occupying a significant part of their everyday lives. On the first years after the loss, one of these widows wrote, “I wanted to keep him alive so bad that I insisted on talking about him constantly everywhere I went.” Another grievingly wrote “he was such a good soul and

it's so sad what has happened to him.” Another widow wrote toward the anniversary of his death, “everyone who knew him was familiar with his compassion to food and how he used to diet before a medical board examination...”

Category: The Outside World

The widows participating in the forum also acknowledged the external environment, as depicted in table 2. They described the way they see their relationship with the world outside themselves, the way they see what the society is expecting from them and how they reacted to those expectations. They were writing about their families, the larger society they live in. they reflected on their past and current involvement with other IDF Widows, and related to the Israeli society and its establishment, values and ceremonies relevant to fallen soldiers.

The reaction to the proposed change in the budget law for 2006 was a major issue in many threads throughout the entire time the site operated. Many of those threads were not selected to be part of this research as they were talking mostly about subjects that were defined excluded from the research, like organizational politics. We have to keep in mind that the site was created as one of the responses to the above mentioned law, and most writing were done under the shade of it.

Table 2

Category - The External World

Theme	Characteristics	Times mentioned
Over and Covert	Responding to societal demands to be like everyone else	91
	The need to act	18
	Time to stop pretending	10
	Reluctant to be a burden	5
	Hiding feeling to protect the children	4
Family affairs	Life with a partner	48
	Raising the children	32
	Familial events	29
	The fragility of the second relationship	26
	Children in the military	14
	Grandchildren	12
	Second generation of bereavement	6
	Familial support and relations with the deceased's family	NA
Lack of familial support and difficulties with the family	NA	
The extended environment	Unsupportive and discouraging environment	88
	Environmental support	31
	Finding a place to live after residing in a military base	14
Other IDF widows	Widows fellowship/sharing the same fate	72
	Distancing from other widows	34
	Changes throughout time relating to distancing/closeness	NA
The Israeli Society	Commemoration Day	77
	The supplement law to the budget 2006 (direct reference)	65
	Uniqueness and sacrifice	40
	Legacy and values	33
	Ministry of defense	16
	Israel's moral obligation to the IDF widows	11

Theme: The Overt and Covert to the World

Each widow chose to share only parts of her internal world with her environment, and keep to herself other parts and emotions. This theme includes the following characteristics: (a) the need to act; (b) responding to society demands; (c) reluctant to be a burden (d) wanting to be like everyone else; and (e) hiding feeling to protect the children. The first characteristic described the phenomenon, and the following ones provide explained it, through the widows' point of view.

The need to act. There were many feelings the widows chose not to share with their environment, such as pain and loneliness. The online group provided a comfortable place for them to examine the reasons which led them to the decision to keep these feelings to themselves. It was the need to act out as if everything was alright in order to please others, to not be a burden on others, to feel 'normal', and to not feel alone. One of the widows concluded with a sort of acceptance "so we act too... the world is a stage..." After a memorial or commemoration day, many of them ask "how is it possible to resume the routine? Again, need to gather the energies, suppress the pain and the tears, get dressed, and pretend that everything is normal and just fine, that's the way it goes. Year in and year out, season after season." "We are the masters of wearing a peaceful image, of disguising and masking" summarized another widow her position about the subject. Years of acting, as if everything was alright, brought up certain realization. Loneliness was one such realization, as illustrated in the following words: "for years I have been feeling the burden of not sharing my secret thoughts and emotions even with the people who are close to me." Currently, widows would like to change the approach of pretending, they expressed their interest in letting out "everything that was suffocated all

these years, that was hidden, and the silent crying. We thought that it was inappropriate to cry and talk about our hardship.” “My bereavement was my deepest secret; I lived in a giant secret. For years people came into my home and didn’t even really know who I was” was the story of a Yom Kippur War (1973) widow, who no longer hid her emotions. Some of the widows spoke about “the ability to let the withdrawnness go, because there is no point to hide”.

Responding to societal demands. Discussing the need to act and to hide provided some of the widows an introspective opportunity through which they tried to compare and contrast their past approach to their stance today “today I can say with some cynicism that I used to be such an ‘exemplar widow’ ...an ‘ideal coping’...” and another widow told about the way she interpreted societal demands as “get a grip, recover fast. This is the unwritten command given to you by society, and there’s no other choice for you but to comply. Otherwise, you’d never survive in a society.” A third widow discussed a remote memory, where a close friend said to her “don’t show your tears to everyone. If you do, they will all run away from you. And so I didn’t cry anymore.” Lastly, a different widow added “I was a hero, because that’s what was expected of me.” The wish to be just like ‘everyone else’ was found as common among many of the forum participants. One of the widows described an era where “I wanted to be ‘normal’, live ‘normal’, have a married status, an ordinary person.”

Reluctant to be a burden. To some of the widows, the need to not be a burden on others dictated their behavior and the suppression of their internal world “we respond to the request of our surrounding. Not burdening with our pain. Hide it well, and with that, prevent others’ discomfort and having them ‘tolerate’ our true presence” or, “people who

have a friend who experienced loss very much want to know that you ‘manage.’ It relieves them from their helplessness.” One of the widows confessed “I always preferred not to tell people I was a widow. Just as others wrote here, I felt that it burdened and terrified, and people don’t really know how to respond or act.”

Hiding feelings to protect the children. Protecting the children was found as a significant element in the life of the widows. Despite the chaos, despite the instability of their own existence, the widows expressed their need to protect the children, the need to give the children normal life. One of the widows pondered “who didn’t deal, month after month, event after event, with difficult feelings, and yet had to demonstrate otherwise, so the children would not be affected, so they don’t suffer, so at they could have ‘normal’ life as much as possible?” during a conversation about relevant events. “I functioned both as a mom and a dad, smile to my little children, love them, provide them security, and show that despite of it all, everything is just fine with us” told another.

Another widow offered an integrated explanation to the acting and pretending to the outside world: “did we really want to comfort them? Or did we choose to hide our pain so not to burden our children with our pain? Why are we doing this? It’s because of the fear of being rejected, so that people would not categorize us as pitiful.”

From their writings it appeared that widows chose to hide their true feelings so they would not end up alone. Yet, despite these attempts, those widows still found themselves very much alone, in a place “when I’m alone, the tears flow from my eyes, the dark thoughts come to mind, and there’s no one I can turn to talk to.” The possibility that the online support group provided them with some consolation is explored later in this paper.

Theme: Family Affairs

Family related issues have been one of the major concerns in the online support group. Conversations about the children, about the parents of the deceased husband, and about the extended family appeared consistently during the whole duration of this study. The following subjects were included in the family affairs theme: (a) raising the children; (b) children in the military; (c) second generation off bereavement; (d) grandchildren; (e) familial support and relations with the deceased's family; (f) lack of familial support and difficulties with the family; (g) familial events h) life with a partner; and (i) the fragility of the second relationship.

Raising the children. The children, so it seemed, were the most significant part of the widows' lives for whom they were willing to do many different sacrifices. "I was 'strong' for the sake of my son, despite feeling that my life was frozen" told one of the widows. Sometimes it was through the stories, through the pain of having no one, with Memorial Day as an exceptional event, to ask "how do the children do in school? How are they doing in life in general? Do they have a father figure with whom they can go play soccer or who can take them to the beach? Having a kid go through bar/bat mitzvah without a father there" that the sensitivity to the subject surfaced. In retrospect, one of the widows told about "the most important thing to me was raising my children, and that they would not lack anything"

Children in the military. When children got to enlisting age, new challenges arose, unfamiliar challenges, ones that widows discussed between them during meetings and joint holidays. IDF widows are required to sign a notarized approval that their children, whether they are IDF orphans, to serve in a combat related unit. In situations

where the widow does not sign such approval, the children would be assigned to a non-combatable unit. Children whose mother is an IDF widow but who are not IDF orphans can choose to serve in a combatable unit, even without the mother's approval. Either way, this situation elicited great resentment among the IDF widows, forcing them to be responsible, to some extent, for their children's fate. This subject was prone to many debates and quarrels among families, when the enlisted child wanted join a combatable unit, but the mother refused to sign, especially when the child wanted to continue the father's path "my daughter wanted to serve in a brigade, so after her basic training I had to go to a lawyer and sign, while having to hide from her the tears that were in my eyes." The enlisting process of the children brought up painful memories and a new pain, a pain of "a son getting enlisted and not having his father there with him." One can find humorous and cynical and descriptions of such conflicts, carrying one single solution "my son, an orphan, was enlisted a year and a half ago, he used to dream, like the rest of his friends, of a heroic service in the line of fire, ambushes, and yelling 'after me!!!' ... and me, I arranged for a frontier service, the frontier of Eben Gvirol St. in Tel Aviv... I got over his anger with me within a year. I got off cheap, didn't I?? "Another widow whose children were not considered IDF orphans told about her experiences "when my children were enlisted I had to deal again with the fear and anxiety... when the 'it's not going to happen to me' apparatus has been damaged, life is ten thousand times harder."

Second generation off bereavement. "You know, we're raising the second generation, probably even the third – off bereavement – anyone ever gave it a thought? What is the price that our children, even the ones who were not orphans, pay for our widowhood?" One of the widows decided to shed more light into this subject by sharing

her story about her daughter “yesterday she told me that she wished she would have known him because if I loved him so much then he must have been a truly special person.” Another widow expressed her pain, saying that “my children live with my late husband’s presence all the time, always. One of my daughters told me once, when she was only a small child, that she felt so sad that [...] was killed, because I loved him so much, but that it was very difficult for her because otherwise she would not have existed, she was sad, but also happy. And I just wanted to cry because it how must have been so terrible for her, growing up feeling that your life were conditioned in the death of your mother’s love-of-her-life?”

Grandchildren. Having grandchildren brought feelings of both sadness and joy. Their birth provoked memories as well as the pain of having the deceased missing out “the biggest pain, and I would know from experience, are the grandchildren he never got to see, [...] but the pain only gets stronger when the grandchildren are born, the grandchildren that will never know their grandfather, the grandfather who would never get to hold them in his arms.” The excitement surrounding the grandchildren was great, and sometimes provided comfort to the widow “the only thing that makes me happy is my one year and three months old adorable granddaughter [...] who is coming to visit me today”

Familial support, relations with the deceased’s family. The extended family and especially, the family of the dead husband were often brought up in the online support group. Some widows received immense support from their families “I received an amazing support... of course, first and foremost from my own amazing family, and also from [...]’s family” told one, and another described “the family members of my husband

are part of the new chapter of my life.” The familial relationship lasted many years, and even 20 years later, one of the widows described the memorial day for the husband who got killed as “in the evening, my greater-than-life mother-in-law, the mother of [...] invites everyone to a new amazing restaurant, to sit there and talk about [...] in an atmosphere that was so like him.”

Lack of familial support, difficulties with the family. In contrast to the above, there were also many stories of getting hurt, quarrels, and great difficulties “I received so much grief from his parents and brother, and its effects last to this very day. I regret to say that I have tried to patch things up with them, unsuccessfully.” Many stories about misunderstandings were brought up “I knew they didn’t really understand me (not even my own family members.)” Pain was experienced because “my father-in-law even thought that I should remain a widow to the rest of my life, because I was married to his son.” Another widow added about her status that “I identify with you the painful experience of the parents, my late mother and father in-law, who were upset with my mere existence, and made my life miserable, following the lead of his sister.” A lot of pain came up from these descriptions, leaving the bereaved women mourn not only for the loss of a husband, but also for the loss of his family as well, dealing with unnecessary hardships.

Familial events. Familial events occupied the widows’ minds, sometimes years before the event took place, other times, years after: “when my daughter was little, during every family event I would think to myself ‘what am I going to do for her bat mitzvah? How am I going to get through the evening without her dad? What am I going to write in

the invitation?” in the context of a discussion about the invitation, and the meaning of including the father’s name as inseparable part of the child and of the occasion.

Life with a partner. Life with a partner, in the past or present, evoked intense discussions that brought up many thoughts and emotions to the surface. The discrepancy between the Israeli society’s assumption that the widow was ‘rehabilitated’, and in fact, no longer a widow, and reality, was great. From the writings of the widows came a completely different picture. Anger surfaced over society’s perception, and even beyond that, immense difficulties rose within the new relationship, a feeling of loneliness within the new relationship “the longing, the crying the sad moments, the anxieties, are mine alone... because if one didn’t get killed, then the other would never been in the picture, and nobody wants to be in this position.” Others stories were shared about second relationship that fell apart “I got married 3 years after I became a widow and we used to talk very openly about the husband who got killed and about my wish to continue to go to the cemetery have memorial days, keep in touch with his friends, there was not special problem with that, but I felt that I couldn’t really share with him my thoughts and my private memories. I was always on guard that nothing would be emitted which I considered personal.” The combination of the second relationship with dealing with the influenced of the loss, resulted in complicated situations, as described by one of the widows “when I met my partner, I remember that every time we met, I talked constantly about my late husband, and I was astonished that my partner didn’t run away, and in fact insisted on staying as well as saw a future with me. Nevertheless, despite having him listen to me, he was not a professional, and so I returned to repress, because how much could you talk his brains out. I always did what I had to do, putting my interests second,

although, within this stressful framework, I afforded myself have almost anything with the support and encouragement of my husband.” There were also stories about good friendships, of hopeful partnership, “this person is a good and close friend to me, who ease my loneliness, and relieves my painful life, and I know that he would stand by me at times of crisis and need. He is the person I hope to grow old with, with comfort and respect, and would not be a burden to my children.”

Fragility of the second relationship. “Nothing is decided or taken for granted in new relationships” told one of the widows, and another added “so complex, intricate, and delicate is this new tissue of life, so much, that sometimes I feel like it is too fragile, that any jolt or tiny shaking could scatter its’ particles in all directions... every passing day is yet another day for its resistance.” Many of the widows shared stories about the failure of this relationship “I married a widow who had three children of his own. In retrospect, this marriage turned to be a bad bargain. Very quickly, life at home turned to hell, both for the fact that my children did not compare to his, and because of the cessation of the compensation money I received from the ministry of defense following the marriage, resulted in financial difficulties, and we reached poverty since my partners’ job could not afford supporting both his and my children. The situation eventually got impossible to keep on, we got divorced, and each carried on with his or her life. Again, I found myself dealing with loneliness and the exhausting life coping of raising children dealing with hassles.”

Theme: The Extended Environment

The environment is composed of many different social circles surrounding the widow. This theme describes the complex relationship between the widow and her

environment: (a) environmental support; (b) unsupportive and discouraging environment; and (c) finding a place to live after residing in a military base.

Environmental support. At times, the environment provided the widow with a lot of support, who wrote that “till this very day, there are a many people who would stand by me and help me whenever I need it” and another widow added and said that “I was given a magnificent support I shall always remember.” Another remembered that “I felt warmth and like a big hug, enormous really. I felt embraced.” “Perhaps I have had good luck and those who were supposed to stand by me, were indeed there for me” recalled one of the widows. And another, whose husband served as active duty, described that “the military was home for us, and there too, we were hugged and embraced, in Golani and in general.” Memorial Days to the husband’s death brought up stories about his friends, “it’s amazing how even 19 years after his death, they keep coming, even without an explicit invitation...”

Unsupportive and discouraging environment. Others felt different barriers with their surrounding environment, some barriers seemed external, such as social expectations, other barriers appeared internal, such as the confession of one of the women: “I myself, didn’t always feel, as a widow, free to speak about certain subjects, for example, relationships between men and women, feminine issues, sex, and in general, speaking with people who know me as a widow, and they are not. I also knew they didn’t really understand me (not even my own and closest family members), they were lacking that special point of view.” “The state treats us as a burden and society views as exploiters and greedy...” expressed one of the widows the hardship in the way in which she interpreted society’s approach. “It isn’t how it used to be, a time where you felt that

the whole town shared with you the mourning of the loss” described another widow in retrospect. “I noticed that people’s response to widowhood and orphanage was as if these were contagious diseases and they should be careful to stay away” described one of the widows.

Finding a place to live after residing in a military base. Living in a military base brought up another issue of having to relocate. Widows of the Air Force dealt with this topic quite frequently, in an attempt to understand and accept the need to look for a new place to live. Along with the need to leave, to disrupt friendships, disconnect their children from their familiar environment, after dealing with one loss already, the widows understood that they didn’t have a choice “I didn’t mean to stay there anyway, I had nothing to look for in that place anymore... from the moment I was notified about the disaster, I didn’t feel belonging any longer.” “Every pilot’s wife knew back then that she would not stay to live in the base after the loss.” “After the seven days of mourning, I didn’t want to go back there, observe how life goes on as if nothing happened, as if the sky didn’t fall on me from above, to view what used to be my home, staying there in desolation, and the little colorful garden I’ve worked so hard on, wilted.”

Theme: Meeting Other IDF Widows

The widows described the ambivalence of meeting other IDF widows and the possible change of the perception of such occasions. The ministry of defense and the IDF organized meetings for the interested widows. The ministry of defense holds support groups for widows, for widows with children, and other groups. Once a year, IDF organizes summer camp, for the widows and their children, which takes place in the campus of the Association for Life in Givat Olga. Even after the children are all grown

up, the widows continue to show up for this summer camp. But not everybody comes. Some of them choose to avoid these meetings, not wanting to be with other widows. Seldom, they may change their mind after a few years, and reappear for these meetings often following the persuasion of a close friend or casualties-officer that manages to 'drag' the widow to the meeting. In the summer of 2006, I met a widow from the War of Independence (1948) who arrived for the first time to Olga. In addition, each branch of the military organizes, once every year, a trip or a vacation for widows whose husbands served in the same branch. For some, meetings with other IDF widows could be a source of empowerment and hope, however, for others, they present a threat. The online support group opened this subject for discussion, perhaps even led to some changes (further elaboration in the fourth category.) Characteristics in this theme are: (a) distancing from other widows; (b) widows fellowship/sharing the same fate; and (c) changes throughout time relating to distancing/closeness.

Distancing from other widows. Some widows, from the moment of becoming a widow, did not initiate any contact with other widows "I didn't have any contact with even the 'tail' of a widow. The reason was fear of drowning. And I mean, drowning in the depth of depression, in the club of the 'fucked up.'" Others felt discomfort with the circumstances of the husband's death "one of the things that always made me feel some discomfort in meetings with other IDF widows, was the difference in the circumstances of the loss. The support group that was organized by the ministry of defense was the first time where I got this discomfort. I couldn't speak of a heroism or special act of war, a dangerous and intense situation, military atmosphere or anything that related to it – just a car accident. Such an unnecessary way to die." Another one comforted her by saying

“we’re all widows of men who died in their uniforms, doesn’t matter the cause of death that brought this disaster on us” bringing them together some.

Widows’ fellowship/sharing the same fate. “Sisters of the same fate” wrote one of the women, and another one told about the summer camp in Olga “there I can laugh, dance, cry, whine, dress up, get pampered, slow down, get lazy, laugh again, cry again, and so on and so forth.” Another one added that “I am glad with the existence of this form, of the unit’s meetings, of Olga... wherever I can be free with the pain...” described one of the women the contribution of such meetings.

Changes throughout time relating to distancing/closeness. Widows admitted that their attitude toward meetings with other IDF widows has changed throughout the years “and just as I stayed away from any contact, today it is just the opposite.” Some identified the potential of uniting with others and receiving, through them, insights about themselves, as one of the women, who never showed up to summer camps, wrote “this year I hope to make it to the vacation in Olga, meet other widows, and try to find out what I feel exactly.” “And the feeling that you are not alone in your pain, that there are others just like you who deal with these intense feelings” appeared as providing some comfort to the widows who wrote in the forum.

Theme: The Israeli Society

The relationship between IDF widows and the Israeli society is a complex one. Their husbands died defending the country, but many of the widows felt that their sacrifice was not acknowledged, their hardships, their special difficulty of coping with the loss that in some cases was unexpected, at times related to a national tragedy. This theme is a complex one, deserving its own independent study. The characteristics

included in this theme are: (a) Commemoration Day; (b) legacy and values; (c) uniqueness and sacrifice; (d) Israel's moral obligation to the IDF widows; (e) the ministry of defense; and (f) the supplement law to the budget 2006.

The perception of the IDF widow image in the eyes of the public evoked anger and a feeling of an insult, as expressed in the widows' comments "I preferred not to reveal that I was an IDF widow, because even before I became one, I knew all about the image we had in the public eyes, and it wasn't exactly flattering or leading to feel identification."

Commemoration Day. The upcoming Commemoration Day evoked internal turmoil for the widows, which found its way to the online support group. Diverse and different opinions demonstrated the complexity of the widows' lives on such day. Anger, cynicism, a sense that hypocrisy was in the air, rose to discussion "out of sight-out of mind, with the exception of Commemoration Day. Suddenly everyone remembers us and the contribution of our husbands. We become a national ethos, brought up from the mothballs for one day while being concealed for the rest of the year, until the next time." Another one shared her story "at least I found a solution for myself, so I don't have to deal with the hypocrisy and the lie. On Commemoration Days I do my best to stay abroad and refrain from being overwhelmed. Unfortunately, I have no faith in the bereavement industry in this country. The ceremonies and the words are empty of content." Nevertheless, many other widows recognized the importance of this day for the Israeli population, for the sake of the heritage for which their husbands sacrificed their life "they have one Commemoration Day, we have 365 of them." "Indeed, we do not require this week alone to remember, we remember all year long, yet, at least, during this one day, all

Israel remembers with us.” There was a small discussion about making the connection between this day and Independence Day, which also manifested ambivalence among the women. Some of them experienced a hard time with such connection “perhaps there are people who think that we should install a switch button in our brain, act as robots on Commemoration Day’s eve, cry until the following day, and within an hour to rejoice at the sound of firework.” Others, despite the difficulty, tried to accept, with the understanding of the need in the value of making such connection “I don’t see another way, to unite us all, the bereaved families and the rest of the Israeli nation, except of this one.”

Legacy and values. Sensitivity and emotionality related to Commemoration Day brought up long term and practical issues: “we are, yet another link of an ancient nation. Their will, that with their death they ordered us life, we need to mold into the content of life.” Others attempted to understand the meaning of this day: “The words told in the ceremonies receive meaning to my personal pain and the pain of many others of my friends. This is indeed a day of meaning where each and every one of us performs own self-scrutiny and knows that many of the achievements in this country are credited to our beloved ones who were lost in war, and in order to keep our national strength of our children, our grandchildren, and of all Israel, we have to remember that along the side of those who fell in war, there are those who remained to keep their names and memories of the sons, the husbands, and brothers.” “A tradition that has been kept for dozens of years, one that I believe would continue to exist forever. It is legacy that has been passed on from one generation to the next preserved for many years. Against the inscription in the stone...’it’s worthwhile dying for our country’.” One of the widows said “following your

words, all of a sudden I found the connection, between my mourning to the public's, to our roots, to our legacy. Perhaps it's strange, but it came out from my gut feeling."

Another widow brought an opposite perspective "unfortunately, nothing holy was left, and all the values on which we grew up to believe in went bankrupted."

Uniqueness and sacrifice. "We experience widowhood differently than other widows, we are the country's widows, and a foreign would not understand it" wrote a widow in an attempt to exemplify the difference between IDF widows and other widows. Another added and requested that "so that no one would ever forget that we, too, sacrificed for this country!"

Israel's moral obligation to the IDF widows. A painful subject for the widows to deal with was the Israeli's society attitude toward them that was expressed in a variety of different ways including legislations. This lack of understanding coming from the government, and possibly, from the Israeli society as a whole, that the life of the IDF widows was colored by the pain of the loss, elicited tremendous frustration and anger "I would like that this country, the one that my loved one had defended with his life, would compensate me for the price I had to pay, for the life I never had." This pain and anger cumulated with the pain of the loss "all of us here were scared to demand what we deserve, because in one way or another we felt guilty." "All of us widows should demand compensation and acknowledgment for the shock and the loss!!!" Within this constellation composed of widowhood at young age, a feeling of neglect, a dissonance between the values on which the loss has occurred to the value system at the present, and society's behavior.

The ministry of defense. The ministry of defense, as well as the service it provided the widows often appeared on the forum, yet was not included in the data collection for this study. Alongside with criticism, there were many praises and gratitude for the given treatment. A project initiated by the “families and commemoration” department to visit homes, evoked anxiety and fears among the widows who were concerned about being questioned with regard to whom they were living with. This subject requires a separate study, which unfortunately cannot be covered in this paper. Nevertheless, a few comments were mentioned, including ones concerning the dependency the women developed on the ministry of defense “I have developed a complete dependency on the ministry, receiving compensations for 33 years, ever since Yom Kippur War, I have never developed skills to earn money”, as well as “there’s a huge fear and difficulty in disconnecting from a body, that substitutes the one that crashed, which is the ministry of defense and the minimal financial security.” “I was erased from their consciousness. Only in the past few days I found out, for example, that a widow receives a certain amount of money for the memorial service...” wrote another widow who got married for the second time. Her words exemplified the integration of the need in recognition with dependency.

The supplement law of budget 2006. Frustration, anger, and anxiety were the result of the proposition to change the supplement law of budget 2006, which was perceived as representing the attitude of the whole Israeli society toward the IDF widows, as well as an eminent threat to those who lived with common-law husbands “the fundamental sense of security that is required for everyday functioning is now gone, and was replaced with existential wariness that paralyzes me” described one of the widows, and others identified with her words. The women expected that the ministry of defense

would fight for preventing this law from taking place “a huge group of women who found shelter under the ministry of defense, lived in an existential concern state these days.” The anger, fear, despair, and helplessness gave birth to cynicism that was hard to read “No [...]. They would not touch the dead who are the silver platter on which a Jewish country was given. However, some of them would try to turn us, the ones who remained wounded, into a carpet for the nation to wipe its feet on.” The cynicism rose again and again “in case their ‘obscene suggestion’ would not be removed from the supplement law, the law should be expanded to kill the widow along with her husband, in the depth of dirt and memory, and if the deceased left orphans as well, they should be adopted if less than one year old, and if over one year, they should be killed as well, so god forbid and they would not become a burden on the public funds, because lets be real, that’s exactly what they would want. Send the husbands to their death and owe nothing to their relatives.” “(I am a Yom Kippur War widow). I live with a common-law husband who is, too, a retiree, and if they cease the compensation payments, the only solution would be to leave home and start all over again. Is that the government and the ministry of defense’s intention? That we would become hostage of the state?” “I have a feeling of being betrayed by the country, by turning me into a burden, and beyond that, exacerbating this feeling, especially when a heavy problem stands at our doorstep such as the terrible ‘supplement law’, that forces us to ‘reopen our wounds’, which is a terrible wrong that is done to us, the widows community.” The pain becomes stronger as the decision deadline approaching “he always used to tell me that I had nothing to worry about, and in case something happened to him the country would support me and the children ... so how exactly does it support, how ... it’s what my daughters and I deserve,

to remain without a father and a husband..... and they would decide how I should keep on living.” Eventually, the clause was removed from the supplement law of the budget 2006, but the damage of its impact on the widows remained, along with the pain of the wounds that were reopened, and a fear that such threat would happen again.

Category: Paradoxes

Paradox, in contrast to conflict, cannot be resolved. It can either be in or out of balance, and not is it possible to view and accept each and every one of its aspects simultaneously. “The paradox is a main part of the attempts of the Eastern philosophy to find the truth that is beyond our perception, which tends to abridge reality” (p. 66) wrote Briggs and Peat (1999), a sentence that echoed inside me while I was reading some of the veteran IDF widows’ writings in the online support group.

The Western perception, which tried to differentiate good from evil, right from wrong, intensified the feeling of a split. A perception of conflict is more common than a perception of a paradox.

Something about the portrayal of time in the text widows were writing, their description of the ability to remain simultaneously with the joy and sadness, with life and death, demonstrated to me that something existed in these words that were more than what is revealed at first sight. Yerushalmi (2007) wrote about the existence or the lack of balance in internal paradoxes relating to the different experiences of the ‘self’. He explained that this is the common axis for crisis processes.

Descriptions of paradoxes that came up in the forum would be explored in this category. In each of the descriptions, it was possible to find examples of acceptance along with integrating the poles as well as reluctance to accept. Table 3 shows the paradoxes

found in the text widows wrote in the online group. Conflicts seem to be more popular in the online group, and are easier for the western eye to catch. Encountering sentences that revealed a balanced paradox was a surprise to me, a different light that was in the text.

Table 3

Category - Paradoxes

Theme	Characteristics	Times appeared
Sadness – joy		24
Life - death		14
Conscious – unconscious		14
Presence – absence		11
Time paradox		11
Internal – external		10
Weakness - strength		7
Boundaries paradox		3
Remembering - forgetting		2
Together – alone		NA

Life – Death. The life and death paradox seemed to have especially strong influence on the women who became widows at young age, often unexpectedly. Even the common perception that ‘life is good’ and ‘death is bad’ didn’t always seem to apply. Life was not always life the better choice, as one of the women wrote “my husband lies there, relaxed, quiet, and I am here, dealing with all this shit.” The widows coped for many years with the fact that their husband was gone and they remained to live their lives, “he is dead and I’m going on vacation” or hurting because “he is dead and I’m alive”, as if they carry death along with their living, at times “bereavement interweaves with routine.” “We are alive and dead at the same time...” wrote one of the widows. “I am alive, wounded, and bleeding every single day” wrote another.

Weakness – strength. “I was ‘strong’ for the sake of my son, despite feeling that my life was frozen” described one the widows a state of being in one of the paradox’s

poles. The widows talked about weakness, noted strengthening and empowerment, and yet mentioned that they were “strong and weak at the same time.” The process of change within and between the poles of this paradox was best noted in the words of one of the widows who told that “at the beginning I constantly heard ‘you have to stay strong’... and yet, when you actually become strong and don’t need anyone’s assistance, the gossiping behind your back begins”

Sadness – joy. Women discussed their lives, described it as “a lot of doing, joy, creativity, alongside with constant longing and memories.” Another said that “everyday life contains so much beauty and joy, and mostly, there are lots of longing.” The widows also described their own response to reading each others’ writings “so much pain in [...] story and how laughing and pain get all mixed up together, makes me feel like crying.” “At some point people called me ‘the jolly widow’” recalled one of the widows in her attempt to find her way between the poles. And another widow said that “this is the way I live my life, between tears and happiness.” Another one added “I hurt and I ache, but very much alive and present.”

Presence – absence. This subject touched on the widows’ experience of presence and absence in the online support group. What was the meaning of presence when it wasn’t a physical one? What was the meaning of physical absence? Did it cancelled out the spiritual presence? The answer is likely to be – no. One of the women described that during a family gathering “I felt my [...] walking not walking next to me.” She recalled the even more remote past “when my children and I left my and [...] house, I thought...what if he returned? Would he be able to find me? And who’s going to tell him where we were?” About her daughter’s wedding, one of the widows told that “I looked

up to the sky, and I talked to my late husband. I cried throughout the whole wedding, and it was very difficult. During the whole wedding, my husband was right by me, I talked to him in my heart. Everybody asked me ‘are you here?!?!?!?!?’ the truth was, not at all!!! No. I connected to my husband who didn’t get to see his daughter getting married, he loved her so much.” Such encounters with the deceased were often described “we have another meeting on his birthday, the first day of our relationship, wedding anniversary, and the day of his dying in battle.” Special days carried special meaning even years after death “still indicating 33 years of marriage, even though 32 years of it I wasn’t physically with him. We never even got to celebrate one wedding anniversary together” demonstrated the physical absence along with the internal presence in a widow’s life.

Time Paradox. The time paradox presented a challenge to the widows. Society’s expectation that “time would do its course” was discussed in the online support group. “It’s been 24 years already, and I have felt every passing year. Every year is harder, time doesn’t dull the pain.” The meaning of time coming out of this writing demonstrated yet another dimension of time. Apparently, time was not as linear as one might think. Sometimes this realization came through the widows responses to others, to those who joined the bereavement circle during The Second Lebanon War 2006. Through the joining of these widows, others were able to connect to their own internal experience “thinking about the young widows, the new ones, about the new young orphans, who are yet to understand the meaning of ‘daddy is not ever coming back’, about my crying, of the crying of my orphan children, in past times, as if it hasn’t been 24 years ago. My heart is torn apart, and it never ends, the sorrow that never ends.” Ten years after the loss, the sensation that “ten years are like eternity and at the same time, time stopped moving,

and the loss just happened.” This feeling, a feeling that despite all this time that went by, it was as if the loss just happened yesterday accompanied the widows throughout their lives, as one of them described “indeed it has been 33 years, but it feels as like it was yesterday.” The longer it has been since the loss, the stronger the sensation became that all this time was unreal, “this week I turned 62. I can’t believe it. It’s been 24 years since the loss.” A widow added another angle to this paradox by comparing the life that continued versus the ones that stopped “he would always remain young, even when you have grandchildren and you become a grandmother. He will be a young grandfather” directed to another widow, younger than she was.

Gender paradox. This paradox addressed two meaningful aspects. The first examined the need of the widow to function both as a mother and as a father to her children: “I had to be the mother and the father of these girls.” The second aspect described the disparity created between the perceptions of the dead soldiers as heroes to the widows as pitiful. “The Israeli generations are raised on the values of ultimate sacrifice of the soldiers in the battle fields, warfare legacy is taught every time people want to bestow values, on which they base the rise of the Jewish nation... in its country...’for our motherland’.” The widows brought another facet to this paradox, one that addressed coping and heroism in their own lives as widows “so little has been said about the widow who was left alone to deal with everyday life, the void, the orphans...”

Internal – External. The discrepancy between the two worlds, the internal and the external, was great “we act as if we’re fine, that we’re strong, for everyone’s sake. And at night time we cry into the pillow”, “gather energy, pretend, suffocate the tears and the pain, dress up, put makeup on”, “to the outside viewer, I was smiling just like always,

hearing them speak about grandchildren, etc, but inside, my heart, everything was weeping...” wrote the widows, examining the gap, trying to find ways, perhaps through the online support group, to make the discrepancy smaller.

Conscious – unconscious. Life journey after losing a partner at young age was consistent of ingredients and processes concealed from the eye, unconscious. Life events, as well as the online support group experience, have allowed these parts to surface, permitting them to write that “we were legitimized to connect to the part that was in denial.” “And the most exciting, perhaps also the hardest thing about this conversation is the mirror that was placed in front of us. We can suddenly touch, see, and observe, something that we refused to do thus far.”

Remembering - forgetting – remembering and forgetting co-existed in the widow’s soul, present in her life. Memories have greater impact on her life, perhaps easier for conversation, perhaps influenced by everyday life, by the husband’s death anniversary day, by Commemoration Day. “The brain refuses to accept the fact that he is never going to open the house door and walk in like ever before...” Forgetting seemed more difficult to bring up in a conversation, harder to admit that “on one hand, wishing to forget a little, so I could allow the soul with some happiness, on the other hand, exists a fear of forgetting, lest his image would disappear, bring out memories from hiding, the sounds, the images...”

Together – alone. Despite wishing not to be alone, frequently the widows wrote that indeed they were. Commemoration Day had exposed the widows to yet another challenge, relevant to this paradox, expressed in the words of a widow “I am all so familiar with the feeling of loneliness, against the ‘collective bereavement’.” Another

widow brought up additional facet to the feeling of loneliness within a crowd “something in the crowd detached me from myself. And yet, something in the crowd links everyone together.”

Category: The Online Support Group

The online support group, as a container, afforded the examination of the categories that were discussed thus far. In addition, it provided opportunities to examine the online support group itself, as a container, offered opportunities for its members to write their responses to individuals in the group, and addressed similarities and differences between them. Throughout time it was possible to view certain human behaviors that usually appear in groups such as identification, echoing, closeness and alienation, of ‘us against them’, in different variations. Conflicts were also part of the group, aggressiveness, and mostly, compassion, among its members. Participation frequency changed in waves, sometimes more, other times less frequent. Sometimes it was possible to trace the reason for the change in the widows’ participation. External events also affected participation, sometimes “fueling” the writing, such as in the case of the supplement law to the budget 2006, legislation processes related to IDF widows and orphans organization, the Second Lebanon War (2006), organization elections (2007), Commemoration Days, etc. Aggressive behaviors on the forum caused some widows to respond by addressing the topic on the forum, others chose to quit their participation. Some widows found the topics discussed in the online support group as too challenging and hard to connect, while others became more attached, and their participation increased.

One of the widows summarized with the following words “this forum is unique; it presents a mixture, like a salad that we blend together, spicing it up with moving and hurtful stories, that come from our bleeding hearts”.

Table 4 presents the themes and characteristics under this category, which are: (a) Relationship with the group; (b) Interpersonal interaction; (c) The self within the online support group; (d) Inside and outside the online support group; and (e) The practical facet of the online support group

Table 4

Category - The Online Support Group

Theme	Characteristics	Times appeared
Relationship with the group	Healing factors of the group	42
	Expressing feelings toward the group as a whole	28
	Conflicts	21
	The need to share	19
	Apprehensions / difficulties to share or read	19
Interpersonal interaction	Responding and answering back	128 together
	Responding and referencing the author	
	Emotions evoked by the writings	15
The self within the online support group	About forum participation	66
	Not alone / similarities within the group	53
	Diversity within the group	24
	Belongingness	22
	Addiction to the forum	7
	The individual self experience within the group	5
	The virtual advantage	NA
Inside and outside the online support group	After meetings outside the group	10
	Sharing with the partner about the group's activity	10
	Relations outside the group	1
The practical facet of the online support group	Calling for action / the activity	13
	Sharing information / giving advices	5

Theme: Relationship with the Group

The characteristics of the relationships between the writers and the group are: (a) expressing feelings toward the group as a whole; (b) the need to share; (c) healing factors of the group; (d) apprehensions / difficulties to share or read; and (e) conflicts. The

numbers of the readers was greater than the number of writers. Those who wrote shared with the others their experiences about reading and writing on the forum. Sometimes, the women took a pause to observe the forum, examine its dynamics. At times they would comment about the group “I must note that the dynamic created here in this forum evokes a lot of curiosity and wonderment.”

Expressing feelings toward the group as a whole. The women addressed each other individually through the forum, yet at times, they addressed the group as a whole “I love you all!!!!”, “Yours, your sister”, expressed feelings toward a general exclamation “excited... every time I log onto our site and ‘read you’, I get tearfully excited all over again.” They made general requests “accept me the way I am, it is hard for me as it is. Thank you, you bring light into my life”. Thanked the members “thank you dear friends, for your participation and for supporting one another.” Responded to replies they received “your reactions truly warm my heart.”

Healing factors of the group. Beyond the relief experienced from letting out their stories, other healing factors (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) have been observed, as well as a change that occurred from the mere existence of this forum. As one of the women wrote “things have changed since this forum started, and for that I am thankful for the initiators of its idea. It serves me as the best support group I could find.” Another wrote about the significant contribution, in her eyes, of the online support group, in the sentence “and the most exciting, perhaps also the hardest thing about this conversation is the mirror that was placed in front of us. We can suddenly touch, see, and observe.” Another described the forum as “a calming influence, thanks to the constant informative stream.” Another searched for contact through online support group “perhaps with the help of this site, I

could let my guards down, clarify things, perhaps could ‘touch’ one another.” During one of the online debates, one of the widows described that “...that question was in place. Ever since the topic was brought up I felt that I was working on myself, and the need to write about it (because it’s a media), forced me to think in an organized fashion. Thanks!” Another wrote that “I must tell you, [name], and everyone is welcomed to this information, that my participation in this forum, the writing, responding to others, the jokes, the feedbacks... make me feel good, better than any therapy with a psychologist.” Another wrote that “entering and surfing forums stimulate and strengthen – visual enforcement.”

The need to share. Just like in any other support group, participants acknowledge their need to share, just as one of them wrote “I would like to share a story with you about my widowhood.” Another noted that “perhaps I was a bit lyric, but I felt the need to share.” “I got to admit” wrote one of the widows, relating to writings on the forum “spilling my guts out is really out of character for me, but you’ve touched soft spots.” During the investigated time of this study, there were some widows who shared their personal stories with the rest of the participants, felt the need to share, and explained the reasons that stood behind their motivation “I felt the need to write down my story.” Some expressed their opinion, regarding the digital media “it’s great that we can have this site, where we can tell stories, spill our guts, it really helps to gain relief.” Some of the writings demonstrated the contributions of this site to its individual members “I sit here next to my screen, entering and exiting the forum. Never before have I felt drawn to a computer and what it offers, was even disgusted and turned off by it. I think it provided many of us with a solution. I assume that many here, myself included, kept things to

themselves.”

Apprehensions / difficulties to share or read. Difficulties to participate and to share were often discussed as well “the natural influence of the interactions of this forum, drive us, the widows, to think, to recall, to re-experience the pain.” Apprehension rose, stemming from mere exposure “I also was worried before I shared with you.” There was reaction to the notion of either revealing full name or keeping anonymity, and their effects on the writing “since the beginning of my participation I appear by my full name, and yet, perhaps because of it (don’t really know) I find it very difficult to share my personal story, and about my family.” Other difficulties to share were related to the intensity of emotions elicited by the writings of other participants “it’s really hard for me to write now, words refuse to come out, but it’s very important that I share the sensation, feeling your great pain for the children that didn’t get to be born and those who were born after.” Another described the process of being able to share “I wanted to badly to share but couldn’t, until now.”

Conflicts. Conflicts that took place at the online support group were not simple, at times reached levels of actual aggressiveness. Certain examples of aggressiveness were not included in this paper as many of them were related to topics beyond the scope of this paper, such ones involving bodies that were not IDF widows, or institutional elections. In some cases, conflicts were addressed and discussed, questions were asked, and participants debated around them, as reflected in the words of one of the widows, “I am not sure how you would like the forum to be, [...], there’s always a choice to respond or not.” Another widow wrote that “the tone of the writing (instead of voice) here saddens me, in a place that supposed to be safe for sharing, for ‘listening’, for responding, for

helping and encouraging one another.” Some attempts were observed trying to calm the spirits down “with trying to refrain from instigating a ‘storm in a tea pot’, truth to be told is that the amounts of poison accumulating under the surface, made me feel ‘yucky.’ I cannot understand, truly, the levels of emotionality created here at times.” Other attempts to explain that was going on appeared too “since the site is open to anybody, and the right to maintain anonymity is reserved, sometimes bring about uncontrolled provocations, and shameful expressions”, or “a small attempt to smooth things out, perhaps what is missing in this forum is the ‘music’ in which things are said written down.”

Theme: Interpersonal Interaction

Beyond the relationship with the online support group, a number of the participants developed some individual interpersonal interactions among themselves. Characteristics in this theme are: (a) responding and answering back; (b) responding and referencing the author; and (c) emotions evoked by the writings.

Responding and answering back. Personal responses, of thoughts, feelings, or stories, elicited by the reading of a post, identification or a call for expanding on the original writing, often took place in the forum. In some cases, the application was to the original post author “[name] I know with certainty how difficult this must be for you, I got no doubts” or “well written, thank you for sharing your doubts with us.”

Responding and referencing the author. In other cases, a direct response to another response manifested an opportunity for self discovery, “I identify with the writing of [...], I identify with every word.” Another described that, “it is as if all the things I have felt for years are now flowing from the keyboard - through you...” In relation to Commemoration Day, one of the participants discovered her own feelings

through the writing of another participant, “me, who is usually so detached from everything on this day, feel a total blackout, following your words, all of a sudden, I found the connection, between my mourning to the public, to our roots, to our legacy. Perhaps it’s strange, but it came out from my gut feeling.” A sad story shared by one of the widows stimulated a response from another, “[...], my heart is with you. I have been through similar experiences.”

Emotions evoked by the writings. The online group members shared their feelings which were evoked by reading others’ stories, directly addressed the author, “when you wrote about the second generation to bereavement, I felt the blow to my stomach”, and another one added, “I share your pain, for remaining with no children from your late husband, and I feel strong need to hold you tight” or, “dear [...], was fun reading your story and feel your positive energies.” One of the writers shared with the others saying, “truth is that I used to think that in the past few months I have exposed myself to all the pain, burden, trauma, and chaos that is experienced by anyone who had lost a loved-husband-father to children, however, when I read the story of ‘things from the heart’ I felt the blow to my stomach again.” The pain in which the stories were written, elicited pain within the readers, “a lot of pain in what you wrote, the words truly touched me”, as well as, “reading your words that touch on the very soul, I couldn’t help not to sink in, and dive into my own thoughts and feelings, and I felt intense identification with you.”

Theme: The Self within the Online Support Group

The theme described the sensations of the writers of the online support group: (a) the individual self experience within the group; (b) not alone / similarities within the

group; (c) diversity within the group; (d) about forum participation; (e) the virtual advantage; (f) addiction to the forum; and (f) belongingness.

The individual self experience within the group. One of the widows described the feelings she experienced while writing her stories, “when people say ‘time would do its course, dull the pain’, it’s not true. I have been waiting for 35 years, yet the pain keeps slashing, the tears keep flowing, even right now, as I write these words, tears suffocate my throat.” Another widow, introspectively, commented about her place within the group “truth is that I don’t feel comfortable about writing constantly, and responding to no end.” Another wrote that she “write and expresses her feelings in her personal stories.”

Not alone / similarities within the group. Many widows, especially those who did not have any contact with other IDF widows, discovered many similarities between themselves and others, wrote that, “what is fascinating about this forum is that because, all of a sudden, we started communicating with one another, we found many similar characteristics of being injured by bereavement: the mourning that is frozen, the existential fear, the damage to our professional career, staying away from the pitiful stigmatizing, wearing masks, and more.” Being able to share, through the online support group, afforded many women to realize they were not alone, and allowed them to discover that, “there are others like you who cope with these intense feelings.” One of the widows described that, “I was happy to find out about the site. Suddenly, I felt I was not alone, and every written word reflected me to myself.” Widows who wrote their stories in the forum, compared it to those of others who wrote about their stories too, “and just like many of you experience, my mourning started suddenly after 25 years”, wrote about “the feeling that you are not alone in your pain, that there are others like you.” Revealed to

one another how much in common they had “if you only knew, how familiar all of us are with this alienating feeling that you speak of”

Diversity within the group. There were also stories dissimilar to others. The women afforded writing that, “[...], my experience is a bit different.” Even wrote that, “I think there’s a little competition here about who’s hurting more, who is sadder, who needs more comfort... someone who lost a husband twice, someone who lost a husband and then a brother... someone who lost just... a tad childish?” and a response, “I do not think there’s a childish competition. There are confessions, which minimize your sadness, in comparison.” Some accepted the disagreement as part of the conversation, “I love you, especially when you try to think differently than me...” Sometimes they explained one another with, “there are those who have courage in their hearts to expose, to be open for sharing, and to receive compassion, sympathy... there are those who prefer not to.”

About forum participation. Many widows felt that the mere existence of the forum, and the ability to include many widows facilitated change, “and the most exciting, perhaps also the hardest thing about this conversation is the mirror that was placed in front of us. We can suddenly touch, see, and observe, something that we refused to do thus far. Part of the process is that we stopped hiding.” The women’s perception was that, “the forum is a place for safely release emotions, it’s a place where we don’t need to apologize for being widows with everything that relates to that, with all its applications, a place where we are exempted from feeling shameful of being afraid, of the anxieties that accompany our lives, here we can expose our wounds, and no one is feeling disgusted.” Told about, “our opportunity, in this forum, is to share sadness and joy, doubts, frustrations.” Another widow added that, “only recently I opened up and started talking in

this forum and only with you. It comes from the sensation of communion of this pain that never lets go despite the years.”

The virtual advantage. The online support group afforded anonymity that did not exist in face-to-face meetings, and the members acknowledged this anonymity as an advantage. They said that, “today, we afford ourselves, under this anonymity, to reopen the old wounds, that seemed to never heal really, and only today we realize how hurt we are.” Another advantage of the online support group was described in the words of another participant, “another fun thing about the forum is that we can log on whenever we feel the need to, and to disconnect when feeling overwhelmed, and all that without having to report to anyone.” A direct discussion about their place within the group was not common, and yet one can infer about this from general comments made about the topic such as, “but one of the things that impresses me about it that it provides us with space, even if we don’t like each and every one of the things being said here”

Addiction to the forum. A wide known phenomenon related to groups available to their members at any given time, is addiction. “I am addicted to our website, read every single word, share my pain.” They reported that, “Ayala, at last I have the computer to myself, and I can get my daily fix, straight to the brain.” They also ‘warned’ a new participant that, “this virtual reinforcement is addictive. Be warned.” Every now and then they attempted to grow distance, “I am trying to kick the habit during Friday-Saturday.”

Belongingness. Expressions such as “our site” reflected a strong bond, a feeling of belongingness. Sayings defining the site as ‘home’ stimulated excitement, “when everything else is so coerced and hypocritical, I prefer to stay here in our home.” Some members specifically addressed the writing on the forum which “bestows a feeling of

belonging to an organization, to a group, that has a common mechanism which unites everyone together.” This statement addressed the belongingness to the IDF widows group in general and not necessarily the online support group in specific. “The site is a bond and belongingness” wrote one of the women. The newly created bond through the website, the reading and writing on the forum, evoked observations on past perceptions related to bonding with other widows, especially among women who refrained from such connection before. One of the women summarized by saying that, “the most important thing is that instead of feeling being pulled ‘down’, I found support, encouragement, and willingness to listen to things I couldn’t share with anyone before.” The place that allowed openness, sharing, elicited something from the widows, something that was unfamiliar to them before, as described by one of the widows, “I think that many of us, just like myself, following the participation in the site, opened up to share with our fellows sisters, our story”

They attempted to understand the essence of the forum, the place for it in their lives, its contribution to the IDF widows in general, “this forum allows the widows to become active, to take part in action from which they can benefit, as it functions to provide support by itself.”

Theme: Inside and Outside the Online Support Group

Seemingly, the internet has no boundaries, and yet it was not hard to detect the difference between online events and world outside of them. This theme described the link between inside and outside the online support group: (a) relations outside the group; (b) after meetings outside the group; and (c) sharing with the partner about the group’s activity.

Relations outside the group. Relationships created between the women were formed through personal messaging on the website, by emails, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings, sometimes between individuals, sometimes as small groups. Within the supported activity of the website, volunteers were recruited to call widows and inform them about activities. Through these calls, new relationships were formed, as well as the willingness to assist one another. Few of these calls found their way to the forum pages, however, were not included in this paper due to having them involve third parties, and not necessarily individuals' stories. The relationships created, often brought additional participants to the forum, "personally, this forum provided me with an opportunity to meet wonderful girls, with whom I keep in touch by phone and beyond."

After meetings outside the group. An event organized by the ministry of defense before Commemoration Day 2006, invited IDF widows to participate. This was a heartstring event. For the first time, people could put a name to a face, "real" women "at last we met. "It was fun to meet and get familiar with the girls behind nicknames"; "I was happy for the opportunity to meet again and get to know a few more virtual acquaintances, who are now real." The widows who came to the event were happy to share their experiences with everyone else, "even beyond the fun of meeting the girls and getting to know new ones as well, I have to admit that this meeting strengthened and encouraged me." The widows shared their observations with others, "really, I think that were not ordinary at all. I was looking at you, thinking about what each and every one of us has been through, and about everything each of us copes with. We are very special, and should be proud of ourselves, raise our heads up high, show up, be present at every such event for ourselves and for our children". Enthusiasm in the meeting was great.

Acquaintances deepened, and to a certain extent, influenced the forum in general. Significant research could be invested in examining the influence of the evaporating anonymity. Other face-to-face events took place throughout the investigated time of this study, such as a gathering in Olga, and trips organized by different branches of the military, but were not included.

Sharing with the partner about the group's activity. During one of the evenings, one of the widows brought up an issue that was bothering her at the time, “does any of you shares her addiction to the forum with her partner? Does he read your sharing, your most intimate thoughts and feelings? Do you let him into your own thoughts and feelings? I have to admit, I do not.” The discussion which followed that question brought some responses of not sharing, for example, “this sharing is impossible, and even the most enlightened partner would have difficult time accepting this.” The discussion took a different turn when the women began to examine the possibility of including their partner in their internal world surrounding the loss that was beyond the online support group. “All my thoughts about my past, about my precious who died, do not come up in our conversations. I feel that if I was to share these with him, he would ask himself, perhaps ask me too, ‘where am I in all this?’” another widow described that, “... me, with all my liberality about this subject, don't find myself willing to talk about him, openly, with the outside society, not even at home, the longing, the crying the sad moments, the anxieties, are mine alone... because if one didn't get killed, then the other would never been in the picture, and nobody wants to be in this position. It's so very hard, which is the reason I am glad to have this forum, the unit meetings in Olga... where I can be free to be with my pain..” “The partner knows about everything that happened, perhaps he wishes to be

included, but waits till you make the move?" asked one of the widows who wasn't in a relationship at that time.

Theme: The Practical Facet of the Online Support Group

This theme describes the practical aspect of the group's activity. This theme deserves its own separate research as well. This paper addresses some of the writings about this topic: (a) calling for action / the activity; and (b) sharing information / advices.

Calling for action / the activity. The website hosting the investigate forum was designed to bring about societal change. At the beginning, this website was the action center for widows who gathered together to prevent from applying the section of the supplement law to the budget 2006, and later it became a center of activity for creating change in IDF widows and orphans organization. Both goals were achieved. Parts of the storm in which the website was created still live within the forum, and a lot of the angry words written at that time are still used every now and then. Most of the related quotes were not brought into this paper as they were not directly related to this investigation. Nevertheless, it was important to include some of these quotes because of the example these made as to how a change can be created through using the internet media, a technology that can be distant on one hand, and yet bear positive influence on people's lives on the other. Women were recruited into action following words such as, "I hope that together we can do things that otherwise we couldn't do as 'loners'" or, "this forum allows the widows to become active for their own sake." There was some acknowledgment regarding the leadership of the struggle "a movement has been established here, a strong one, and they show us the way, see how we used to look like before having such strong leadership... but we need to bring our strengths together and

act as one for the benefit of us all.” A different perspective drove one of the widows to write that, “Perhaps it’s time we mobilize ourselves to affect this content as well.”

Sharing information /giving advices. Another aspect of the practical side of the online support group was through passing on information between the participants, and giving advices on different subjects. Mentioned before in this paper, were the discussions, on different forums on the website, concerning privileges granted by the ministry of defense, where people asked questions and were answered by others according to personal experience. This research focused on advices given regarding the loss only. A veteran widow wrote, “one of the phases of rehabilitation, according to my experience, is the ability to ask for help. One of the problems people who experienced loss deal with is feeling guilty, and the desire not to burden anyone. These are the reasons for our fear of demanding what is rightfully ours. Because one way or another, we felt guilty.” Another veteran widow wrote in response to another widow, “[...], I have an advice for you, you might already doing it, but if not, sit down alone, every now and then, bring his voice back from your memory, recall his movements, his smile, his laughter, his smell, the feeling of his body, despite the pain, do it. Close your eyes, imagine he is there next to you, it’s likely to make you cry, but these are your memories, it’s the intimacy of the two of you, the moments that no one can take away from you, they took your sweetheart, but no one can take away your memories.”

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research explored the experience of IDF Widows, participating in an online group. The research questions were: (a) what are the main issues that widows deal with regarding their lives and widowhood many years after the loss, as manifested in the online group; (b) what is the meaning of meeting each other in an online group. The intuitive research Cycle 4 (Anderson, 2004) creates and presents the final set of lenses. The lenses are based on the preliminary set presented in chapter 3, the research results and the processing done intuitively combining both. Cycle 5 integrates the lenses with the literature review. Both cycles, 4 and 5, are presented in this discussion. ???

Final Set of Lenses

Starting with 2 sets of lenses, one for widowhood and one for the online group seemed right when the research was at its first stages, before data analysis. Following the complex process of data collection and analysis, the outcome is 3 sets of lenses: (a) online group dynamics and phenomena; (b) long-term widowhood; and (c) integration. The integration is where the interaction of the widows in the online group created the personal contact that brought the issues of long-term widowhood and the meaning of meetings in the group to the open air.

These final sets of lenses were built on the data, described in chapter 4, that have been processed using the Intuitive Inquiry tools (Anderson, 2004). They also contain my own understanding as emerged out of the process. Being a qualitative research, this study does not aim to describe cause and effect lenses. The lenses describe associations, or links between related issues as were revealed in the data. Those links should be further researched in order to understand the whole issue better.

The Online Group

Writings concerning the participation in the group, its personal and collective effects were discussed in the group alongside the personal writings, and were described in the fourth category in chapter 4. The meaning of the encounter in the online group, for the participants as they wrote about it, will be presented in this section, alongside general perspective of the online group as a group.

The preliminary lenses, presented in chapter 3, were revisited to reflect the data presented in chapter 4. The only lens that had no specific reference in the text was the lens that anticipated a link between presence in the online group and presence of the deceased in the widows' life. There were parallel quotations, talking about the dead husband "walking not walking next to me" while feeling the strong presence in the online group, calling it "a real support group", which implies presence. The issue of the link, or the resemblance, in a way, came through, but was not spoken. Weinberg (2006) described the existence of unembodied presence on the internet from diverse points of view, as described in the literature review. The widows described the presence of their dead husbands in a much similar way to Weinberg's description of presence in the cyberspace. Bennett and Bennett (2000) argued that the sense of presence does not occur at a single stage of bereavement and that it lasts for much longer than the literature has previously suggested. They presented various ways of interpreting the experiences of the presence of the dead, by researchers and by bereaved people. For example, they claimed that "the view that dominates scientific discourse is that these experiences are illusory—symptoms of broken hearts and minds in chaos, or part of the futile searching for the deceased that characterizes the early stages of grief" (p. 139). They proposed an

alternative interpretational framework which allows the phenomenon to be seen as both 'real' and 'natural'. This complies with the data presented in chapter 4 of this research and with Rubin's (1993) two track model. Bennett and Bennett argued that "both these discourses are cultural artifacts, equally 'rational' and equally 'traditional'" (p. 139). The narratives they identified, from stories told by women who have been widowed up to 20 years, included being observed, hearing a voice, smelling a particular odour, seeing the dead, sensing the dead man in bed. They concluded that bereaved have access to two cultural traditions to help interpret what has occurred, the 'materialist' and 'super-naturalist' discourses. They observed that people choose between the two interpretations at any given moment, according to the context. In the current study we could see widows referring to the phenomena of the presence of the dead, but there were no interpretations for it.

The final set of group related lenses contains the following: (a) an online group is a group, and one can find group dynamics, group processes, group phenomena and therapeutic factors; (b) online group participants associate participation to self empowerment and to enhanced social connection with other members of the virtual community (IDF Widows); and (c) social change and community strength are associated, by the participants, with online group participation.

An online group is a group. Group dynamics, group processes, group phenomena and therapeutic factors shown in this research on chapter 4 are consistent with writings of Yalom and Leszcz (2005) and Weinberg (2001, 2006). Each support group on the Internet develops its own norms and dynamics, wrote Yalom and Leszcz. Looking at the participants' style of writing, the tempo of the online communication, and the

interpersonal references, we can see diversity alongside norms and dynamics which were developed mostly without words. Resonance and reflection can be seen when participants relate to each other in the online group, as described in category 4 in chapter 4. Conflicts and their resolutions can also be seen there. Going deeper into group processes and dynamics is not a natural outcome of a thematic analysis. A content analysis that takes a thread or a group of threads related to the same time or issues can reveal more meaningful issues. This is beyond the scope of this research, but recommended for further research.

Participation is associated with self empowerment. Participation in the online group is connected to enhanced social connection with other members of the virtual community (IDF Widows). Among other factors that empower self-help support group participants, described by Yalom and Leszcz (2006), is the fact that participants use internal resources, personal resources and group resources, rather than professional, external, resources. The participants are both providers and receivers of help, a process that contributes to their empowerment. We can see evidence to that when we read “thank you dear friends, for your participation and for supporting one another”, or “my participation in this forum, the writing, responding to others, the jokes, the feedbacks ... make me feel good, better than any therapy with a psychologist”. When a widow was referring to connections with other IDF Widows, fearing from such a connection prior to her online group participation, she found out that “the most important thing is that instead of feeling being pulled ‘down’, I found support, encouragement, and willingness to listen to things I couldn’t share with anyone before”.

Social change and community strength are associated with online group

participation. Focusing on the contribution to the community as a whole, in this case the IDF Widows community, we can see a link between online group participation and a change in that community. The research did not include the threads dealing with the elections in the IDF Widows and Orphans organization and the discussions around this issue, but the fact is that it occupied the widows very much in the online group. Another fact is that the group, connected with the site under this research, won the elections with large majority. Participants wrote many times that change should take place, and that the Israeli society is unaware of what they go through in their lives. The writings that supply evidence to this lens include things like “this forum allows the widows to become active, to take part in action from which they can benefit, as it functions to provide support by itself” or “this forum allows the widows to become active for their own sake”. Another writer valued the contribution of the online group to the political activity surrounding the IDF Widows and Orphans Organization by saying: “I hope that together we can do things that otherwise we couldn’t do as ‘loners’”, raising the issue of the power of the group, the community, to change their social environment connected to their widowhood.

Long-Term Widowhood

The other set of lenses concerning long-term widowhood, as was discovered in the online group: (a) widowhood is part of life for long time, with varying levels and effects; (b) besides the pain there are opportunities to build and to grow; (c) time effects are not automatic nor linear; (d) several paradoxes are an inherent part of widowhood; (e) there are gaps in the widows' life; and (f) the national context is part of being an IDF Widow.

Widowhood is part of life for long time, with varying levels and effects. The main

theme that continuously appeared during the research period was that widowhood is for life. The main issues were: (a) processes of repression and discovery change along the years; (b) coping, pain and sadness accompany the widow throughout life; (c) feelings of missing out exists in varying levels and angles throughout life; and (d) new spousal relationship is fragile and does not eliminate the pain.

These findings are consistent with the two-track model that actually displaces the dead from the past and enables them to be part of the here and now, as continuing bonds that not only exist, but are also being developed throughout the bereaved life (Rubin, 1993). They are also consistent with Derman's (1999) research and with others who found long-term influence of spousal loss (Bar Nadav, 2007; Carnally et. al. 2006). The term *spiral*, offered by Bar Nadav (2007) to describe the process a young widow goes through in her life, as opposed to the stages or phases models offered before, seems to fit onto each issue included in this lenses set. One of the widows described her discovery: "[...] and many different other hurtful things that are brought up in this forum that force to deal with, difficulties I thought I overcame already. Apparently not!!!". She, and others, described the feeling of 'going back' to places she already visited, thought she has already processed and got over. Realizing that 'old wounds' were never really healed for some, one widow could have seen the opportunity to "perhaps open our old wounds that never really healed up, and only today we understand why", bringing up with her words this spiral concept.

The findings raise more questions relevant to the debate on 'grief work' (Bonanno & Kaltman, 1999), questions regarding the concept of working through the grief in order to 'recover', a process that was recommended as part of relinquishing the bonds with the

deceased. Although the debate has changed during the years, some widows mentioned the face that they thought they have already been through the process, and now find out that they have some more work to do. Others mentioned the repression and more intentionally hiding processes they were going through when they were widowed young, many cases with young children they had to take care of, a society to comply to. Others pointed to their feeling that in the online group they "received legitimacy to get in touch with that part in us that was in denial", going back and forth throughout life, into the loss and out of it. Following other writings in the field, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) claimed that "the sense that for most people the loss is always an issue, and that missing loved ones, and remaining connected to them, is part of the bereaved person's typical experience throughout life" (p. 28) is normative. They also raised the question whether the process of bereavement leads to a conclusion, or should lead to a conclusion, pointing to the possibility that it may be a lifelong process. The options to change and grow, discussed in the following section, suggests as a hidden assumption, that a loss has long term effects.

Besides the pain there are opportunities to build and to grow. As can be understood from reading participants writings in the online group the processes of rebuilding their lives and the processes of growth and transformation exist alongside other effects of their widowhood. They write about their path to growth, mainly when they describe coping, as demonstrated in the first category in chapter 4. Many widows wrote about rebuilding their lives, continuing to be happy with all the pain and the sadness. Some wrote about finding meaning in life, finding reasons to continue, like the widow that wrote, "I've made both conscious and unconscious decisions to take this terrible disaster that happened to me and try to live, and try to grow, and give meaning

and content to my life and my daughter's". Some widows mentioned the way they found comfort and acceptance, and humor was present in the online group.

Widows were describing 'real world' moves and action to build and re-build. Many were telling the online group about children that were born years after they were widowed, about second relationship with men. They also described a more abstract notion of growth and transformation. "Sometimes, from the darkness of the pain, a light breaks through, light that we have never seen before", wrote one. Another widow described that "there's a lot doing, joy, and creation in my life, side by side with the longing, and ever lasting memories", emphasizing the side by side way of life that represented other widows as well, and is further described in the section that handles the paradoxes.

Growth following a huge pain, a trauma or a crisis can be viewed from several angles. One such angle can be the debate over the term *recovery*. The term *recovery*, used throughout the years to describe the outcome of the bereavement process is challenged. New terms enable a wider variety of ways to handle loss. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) defined Posttraumatic growth as "the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises" (p. 1). While Bonanno (2004) offered the term *resilience* instead of *recovery* from loss, he stated that *resilience* is common. One dimension linked to *resilience* is *self-enhancement*, something that can be seen in the results of this study. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) also claimed that the term *recovery* is inadequate, as among other reasons, it "does not easily allow for transformative outcomes in bereavement" (p. 27). They prefer the terms *change* or *resolution*. The term *change* coined by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) to describe both struggle and positive personal

transformation as possible outcomes of bereavement can contribute to the understanding of widows describing growth. It can contribute to understanding the paradoxes described below. They claimed that most people change following a loss of a loved person, "and these positive and negative responses tend to coexist" (p. 29). Their term seems to open broader space to transform, as described in the data of this research, as well as in other studies (Bar Nadav, 2007). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) described the situation where the "pain of the loss can persist, it does so alongside deeper and more satisfying understandings of the individual's place and purpose in the world" (p. 35), giving us another perspective on a process that may follow loss. However, not all bereaved go through the process of posttraumatic growth. This should not become a new expectation from all, they warned.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) described five general categories of growth experiences: "the experience of the emergence of new possibilities, changes in relationships with others, an increased sense of personal strength, a greater appreciation for life, and changes in existential and spiritual orientations" (p. 32). All five can be found throughout chapter 4 in this research. The widows describe various ways of coping, raising children, bringing new life to the world, building second relationship with a man, celebrating familial events and much more. They also describe changes in the way they see themselves, changing over time.

Time effects are neither automatic nor linear. The time issue was a major concern for the widows. This lens contains two parts: (a) some things change, others stay as they were; and (b) external events bring back to the loss, "as if" it is happening now. Many years post-loss one can find references to the pain, and terms like rehabilitation or

recovery seemed to be incorrect as could be seen in the previous section. Bar Nadav (2007) suggested using the term processing and growth instead, alongside sensitivity and vulnerability as forming meaningful experiences that accompany widows for years (Bar Nadav, 2007). Many widows referred to the time that passed by and to changes happening to them during that time, but in many cases, they also wrote that “indeed it has been 33 years, but it feels as like it was yesterday.” Bar Nadav (2007) uses the metaphor of a spiral while talking about time and its effects on the process of widowhood. Time serves many widows, being a beneficial factor, but not all.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) described the "concept that major losses lead to major emotional distress for most people and this distress tends to persist for some time, and for a few this distress can last many years" (p. 31). They added that at the same time "it is also true that for many persons, the struggle with loss and grief can be accompanied by the experience of positive change, that is, posttraumatic growth" (p. 31).

Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder can follow "exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor" (Russell, 2002), like "learning about the sudden, unexpected death of a family member". "The traumatic event can be re-experienced in various ways" and in rare cases "components of the event are relived and the person behaves as though experiencing the event at that moment". Russell added that "intense psychological distress or physiological reactivity often occurs when the person is exposed to triggering events that resemble or symbolize an aspect of the traumatic event". Some widows wrote about being diagnosed with PTSD, other mentioned symptoms, one of them describe the concept of time related to the event of the loss, as mentioned above. Levine (2006) described the fact that "a single brief exposure to an overwhelming event can throw a

normally functioning individual into an abyss of emotional and physical suffering". Death of a spouse is overwhelming (Bonanno, Wortman, & Nesse, 2004; Gentry & Shulman, 1988), scaled second only to the death of a child as a stressful life event (Miller & Rahe, 1997). I am not arguing that all IDF Widows suffer from trauma or PTSD, but I do say that it may exist, in varying levels for many women. I do think it can explain issues like the way widows experience the time and its effects, to explain the widows' emotional reaction during the Second Lebanon War (2006) and the wave of emotions inside and outside the online group after the budget laws have been proposed (2005). The data provide evidence to this concept. The triggers that seemed to be re-traumatizing for the participants included the events mentioned above, but widows also mentioned the autumn as a trigger. Autumn, as being the season of Yom Kippur War (1973), reminded the event to widows who lost their husbands during that war. The widows wrote that "each time there's war or an incident involving our soldiers, each of us experiences memories and sadness from the past". Another widow responded "indeed the flashbacks return. I still hear the sirens of all past wars. Everything blends together." Another said that "it is so sad, so painful, never ending, everything resurfaces, the memories, the tears, the loss". Realizing that this may be part of the process women go through during decades after the loss can change the way the widows themselves and the society interpret and treat those times of stress. I believe that this issue should be studied further in the future.

Not only an unusual event, but also a usual event can create a traumatic undesired effect, weakening like the original traumatic event, sometimes years or decades after the actual event (Levine, 1999). Levine (1999) stated that the results of the trauma can be

dormant and accumulate in the body for many years, even decades, and can appear suddenly at times of stress or when another event happens. For many widows, according to their words, the proposed law may have been such an event, opening and creating a crisis, which can be seen in the online group. Crisis can also break the balance of life paradoxes, as we can see in the next section.

In addition, Levine (2006) added that "whether or not a person rebounds from this dark edge of near insanity or tumbles more deeply into the 'black hole' of trauma remains a mystery". His concept is that the threatened "must discharge all the energy mobilized to negotiate that threat or it will become a victim of trauma". A hint to connect his theory to IDF Widows can be found in text like "get a grip, recover fast. This is the unwritten command given to you by society, and there's no other choice for you but to comply. Otherwise, you'd never survive in a society". Some widows described the way they had to act, to comply with societal expectations and to be strong, to be a hero, move fast forward. These remarks, together with reference to time in the widows' text can be an indication for the inability to be a hero and discharge the traumatic energy at the same time.

Several paradoxes are an inherent part of widowhood. This issue revealed itself during the data analysis phase of this research. The third category described in chapter 4 described existing existential paradoxes, however, were exacerbated among IDF widows: (a) life and death; (b) power and weakness; (c) sadness and joy; (d) presence and absence; (e) linear time and present progressive; (f) the gender paradox; (g) internal and external; (h) Remembering and forgetting; and (i) together and apart. Looking at the paradoxes found in the online group, several ways for organization various parts of the

self can be seen. There are women who accept contradicting parts inside themselves; they can see that they can be both strong and weak, happy and sad, relate to life and death at the same time. Others used mechanisms of repression or dissociation, as they told each other in the group, talking about various periods along their lives.

The data in this research reveals that some widows have the ability to remain simultaneously with joy and sadness, with life and death, with strength and weakness. The existence or the absence of balance in internal paradoxes relating to the different experiences of the 'self' is the common axis for crisis processes (Yerushalmi, 2007). He added that when the balance of a paradox gets undermined during a crisis, man's capability to regain balance is the key to the ability of containment, to the ability of sustaining changes, and to growing out of a crisis. Paradox, in contrast to conflict, cannot be resolved. It can either be in or out of balance.

Yerushalmi (2007) claimed that relating to reality is influenced by internal concepts of reality, each representing self-definition, which may contradict each other, co-existing in the mental structure of the self. They can represent a different truth about 'myself relating to the world'. In many cases one of these definitions is hidden, as a coping mechanism, or a way of adaptation. Paradoxical self experiences exist as different self parts, sometimes disconnected, while changing self experiences are related to varying circumstances, situations and context. An explanation based on conceptualization of 'paradoxical self experiences' means that in the same mental structure may coexist contradicting 'self' experiences. They both may have expressions in daily life, in varying situations. Usually one will not be in the focus of consciousness, as it does not comply with the main narrative of that person. In time of crisis, this hidden 'self' experience will

surface, and the balance will be disrupted. What changes is the level of consciousness to the hidden 'self' experience and the mental uneasiness that arises, while the person finds the contradiction with other 'self' experiences. The paradox can stay stable for many years, but certain conditions can lower the ability to sustain the stable structure. The ability to hold and contain the contradictions and to contain paradoxes within the self experience, will force the person to look for new balances and solutions (Yerushalmi, 2007). When the paradox balance is disrupted and the contradicting parts are both conscious, an internal conflict can erupt, and should be solved in order to regain a consistent concept of the self.

One aspect of the ability to hold contradicting internal parts, or opposites, can be tracked by watching nickname usage. Very few widows created more than one nickname. One was used for being nice, polite, and supportive. The other nickname was used for being aggressive and hostile. This issue was not part of this research, as the information about nicknames and their holders was not publicly available. This behavior seems to manifest different self parts by using different nicknames, and can also be an interesting further research, although technically difficult to perform. This behavior can also be linked with the ability to hold opposites.

Holding or resolving opposites was discussed by Jung (1934/1971). He described the subjective unconscious demands of the inner world, as opposed to the objective demands of the culture, the outer world. Out of the conflict between the two, a possibility to handle the necessary and the optional arises. The way to find this middle way is best described by the concept of *Tao*, without a proper western equivalent definition. One way to enable the union of opposites is to make the unconscious known and objective. The

major change following the process of dialoguing with the unconscious can be found in the transcendent functioning; the essence of the alchemy philosophy, the essence of the process is mixing and connecting noble and cloudy matters, of specific and lower valued functioning and of conscious and unconscious (Jung, 1934/1971). Being in a higher state of consciousness, being able to see the big picture, without identifying with the contents of the conscious part alone, seems to be known by a few widows in the online group.

Sentences that can describe this idea are "I'm alive, I am living and my wounds bleed all the time" and "there's a lot doing, joy, and creation in my life, side by side with the longing, and ever lasting memories". Those widows do not feel bound to one side of the picture. They can hold both sides. Many others are on their way, or not. The ability to hold paradox is considered a higher state of development by psycho-spiritual theories, as well as by Jungian and alchemy philosophies and psychology theories (Marrone, 1999; Netzer, 2004; Jung, 1934/1971).

Netzer (2004) described the unconscious as being paradoxical in its nature, beyond the logic and the legality of time, space and reason. The alchemy is the language of the unconscious. It tries to settle the paradox of the contrast of life and death in super-unification. Based on Jung's theories, Netzer raises the question whether the recognition of the paradoxical nature of existence in the world and the soul is the destination of the alchemy process. Accepting the essential oppositeness of the human nature means accepting the fact that the soul is in a state of cross-checking intentions with itself. In life, added Netzer, everything contradicts itself. The Self is a paradoxical wholeness that binds all the opposites. She defined the union of opposites as the process in which at first the person is thrown between various opposites and emotions. Gradually, out of the chaotic

feeling that can cause restlessness or paralysis, a new position is created during the process of alchemy, a position that allows the opposites to co-exist, side by side, to be experienced at the same time. This position, found in some of the women's words written in the online group, can be a relief, but at the same time it is also a burden. Being continuously aware to the opposite forces inside, living with the conflicts and with unresolved events is not easy. However, in a paradoxical way, this is also the solution. It is the recognition that the opposites complement and balance themselves and establish fruitful dialogue. The union of opposites is an archetype and as such, has power. Discussing this is beyond the scope of this work.

Many widows preferred to present one part to the world by acting, while feeling others inside, as we can see in the next section.

There are gaps in widows' life between the internal world and the façade. Two issues were discussed in the online group on that matter (a) an effort was invested in hiding parts of life from the surroundings; and (b) a huge gap exists between the social expectation and the emotions. Gaps between internal self parts and the façade to the world exist for everyone; it is a universal human experience, explained by sociological and psychological theories. Gaps between the internal world and its demands and the outer world's demands were presented by Jung (1934/1971) as discussed above.

Some of the gaps described by the widows are created intentionally, and some as an unconscious defense mechanism like repression or dissociation. In many cases IDF Widows described an active effort to hide things they think or feel from their children, in order to protect them. Other times they were hiding it from family and friends, in order to protect themselves.

Several women described places where they could freely show those hidden parts, where they could be 'themselves', like vacations organized by the army especially for IDF Widows. Some could find a safe place in the online group to reveal those parts, according to what they wrote. Others found, after establishing relationship with other widows in the online group that those relationship can be of comfort and help, and started meeting others outside the online group.

Social expectations influence the bereavement process (Bar Nadav, 2007) but for young IDF Widows, according to their own writing in the online group, it is an issue looked at various aspects, including the gap between the way they feel the society looks at them and what they are actually going through. As one widow wrote, she "knew all about the image we had in the public eyes, and it wasn't exactly flattering or leading to feel identification". This opened another discussion regarding the gap between the general societal concept and the specific image of the widows themselves. Many felt the "lack of understanding coming from the government, and possibly, from the Israeli society as a whole", is an issue the IDF Widows community should deal with.

There are many ways this issue can be analyzed, with sociological and psychological theories. Some gaps can be linked to the conflict between the private loss and bereavement on the one hand, and the collective, national context of the loss, resulting in societal and cultural expectations, as we can see in the next section.

The national context is part of being an IDF Widow. The national context exists throughout IDF Widows' life. The context this issue came up in the online group was: (a) a gap between expectation for national recognition and reality; (b) attraction and rejection to memorial day and independence day; (c) national context of values and the Israeli and

Jewish heritage; and (d) feeling of uniqueness and self-sacrifice.

The national context of the loss on the one hand, and the private parts of living with the consequences of the loss throughout life on the other were part of the conversation in the online group. These issues were loaded with emotions, with a deep sense of belonging for some and with deep feelings of exclusion and rejection for others.

Ceremonies and rituals take place every year, throughout the year. Memorial Day is the day before Independence Day, to symbolize the contribution of the fallen soldiers and their families to the existence of the state of Israel. Each war or major event has their own commemoration day. Ginzburg, Giron and Solomon (2002) described the possible effects the official commemorating ceremonies and rituals have on bereaved parents. Ceremonies and rituals "represent the society's obligation to the dead heroes and mourning family. This approach attaches social and national meaning to the death but also may encourage a never-ending, eternal grief" (p.129). Reading the words of the widows in the online group, we can see that parents are not alone and that many widows find this kind of national meaning to their own loss, and live with the eternal feelings connected to the loss, while going on with their lives. Ginzburg et al. (2002) cited Malkinson and Bar-Tur who suggested that the "Israeli society may encourage the persisting mourning among bereaved parents who lost their child during his military service" (p. 129).

Russell (2002) wrote that "Stimuli associated with the trauma are persistently avoided. The person commonly makes deliberate efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations about the traumatic event and to avoid activities, situation, or people who arouse recollections of it". With all the above mentioned commemoration events it is

difficult, almost impossible, to avoid the loss related stimuli. The wish to avoid reminders of the loss may be related to some of the rejection women expressed to the national Memorial Day and its ceremonies; it may also be linked to the isolation many IDF Widows feel. It may also be linked to the unwillingness expressed by some widows to meet other widows. Nevertheless, IDF Widows are part of the Israeli society, in which a 'bereavement culture' was developed (Ginzburg et al., 2002). The death of a soldier in a military action is viewed "as a symbol of heroism, and his bereaved parents as a symbol of sacrifice in the battle of defending the People and Homeland" (p. 129). Some women in the online group wrote about being "the country's widows", thus "we experience widowhood differently than other widows". The notion of sacrificing was also present in the online group, although not much. Some women took another look at the national context of their loss as one of them wrote "following your words, all of a sudden I found the connection, between my mourning to the public's, to our roots, to our legacy". Understanding that and finding a broader meaning to her loss, made her feel better. The quest for meaning was found in several discussions in the online group, as described above in this study. Here we add the national context that broadens the meaning to one's personal loss and life.

Long-term Widowhood and the Online Group: The Integration

The final lens which represents the integration between long-term widowhood and the online group connects space, time and movement. The *virtual* world seems to be something which time, space and movement are different than in the *real* world. Conversations are mostly asynchronous; a reply can be written hours, days or weeks after the original message was written. The content of the conversations stays on the net for

long time, so people can read text long after the writer had posted the message. The physical presence is always in front of a computer, not in front of other people, but people feel they are *somewhere*, being present in various environments each time they connect to another site, and may feel they "prefer to stay here in our home" as one widow wrote. Cyberspace is a psychological 'space', an array with meanings and purposes, a 'place' people feel like traveling in (Suler, 1999). The online group can be seen as a potential space, between self and others (Suler, 1999; Weinberg, 2001). This intermediate potential space between inner and outer reality, the space which is the overlapping space between individuals, is the space where we can find transitional objects and transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1971). While managing, or playing with, different parts of himself, one can act out or work through the negative aspects of his identity and can express and develop the positive parts (Suler, 1999). Playing in this potential space opens the door to movement, to transitions.

Using written words in the online group is actually using symbols, playing with symbols, to create something new. Suler (2000a) suggested the hypothesis that text talk is an expressive art. Following his hypothesis, we may link the use of art to the strength of the container that enabled the discussions. While adding the option to stay anonymous, we maybe were strengthening the container. One of the women wrote "today, we allow ourselves, under this anonymity, to reopen the old wounds, that seemed to never heal really, and only today we realize how hurt we are". Women shared pieces of their lives, thoughts and emotions in the context of the online group, to relate to transformations that have happened in association to their participation in the online group, as can be seen in chapter 4. The online group was the platform for process of discovery. Internal

discoveries as well as discoveries that each widow is not alone can be seen in chapter 4 of this study. There are also remarks that acknowledge those discoveries. Some widows mentioned the fact that they have never talked about some of those issues before.

Understanding the triggers that enabled so many widows to bring forth the long-term widowhood issues is beyond the scope of this research. The online group was created as one of the tools intended to deal with the anxiety presented by the proposed law. The proposed budget law for 2006 presented an option of new reality for many IDF Widows, a reality of discontinuity of the recognition and the pension they receive by law from the Ministry of Defense. This new reality has seemed horrible for many, terrifying and unthinkable for many. This might be associated to the mass of widows turning to participate in an online group at the same time. It might also be associated with the bond which enabled sharing and exposure. The online group may have provided a safety valve for the widows in time of crisis. One aspect of a paradox mentioned earlier is that it can stay stable for many years, but certain conditions can lower the ability to sustain the stable structure. The inability to hold and contain the contradictions and to contain paradoxes within the self experience, will force the person to look for new balances and solutions (Yerushalmi, 2007). The online group helped participants to hold and contain the different 'self' experiences that came to conscious at the time of crisis.

The activities to battle the law, and later to change the leadership of the IDF Widows and Orphans Organization, have provided also a sense of 'doing'. The site under this study connected the active group with the majority that provided support and help. Feeling hope and strength to change things in both levels (national and organizational) created a unique experience for many widows, an experience not familiar to many

widows up to that time.

Practical implementations

Old wounds were opened during the time the online group was operational. Widows brought up front many emotions, feelings and thoughts that were hidden for many years, hidden from others, hidden many times even from themselves. On the one hand opening up and becoming aware of emotions and expressing them is healthy and may be beneficial for many, but on the other hand it could be that the group triggered negative emotions and difficulties due to the exposure. As some women described, the online group broke their repression mechanism, helped them to see things they didn't want to see before. Some wrote that this process gave them more power, more strength to go on. While running an online group this important issue should be considered. Ways to build enough powers in the group to hold all that and to build enough group power to build new powers inside each woman while old defense mechanisms are weakening is an important issue. There are many self-help support groups online. Facilitators are not aware to group dynamics that one should monitor and hold. One practical recommendation would be to get the group facilitators trained to understand benefits of such groups and optional fallbacks and processes that may occur. The training will show them how to undertake measures to handle this issue. Another recommendation in this aspect would be to join forces with a professional therapist, to at least monitor the activity.

When the online group was created I had just started my group leadership studies. When I noticed that the forum is forming into a group I asked a professional therapist to look at it, see if it is not dangerous to keep it going. Later I asked another professional

therapist to join me in a closed forum, which was not part of this research, to co-lead and create an online forum that became more like a support group than the open forum. This closed forum was also based on anonymity, but each participant had to expose her real identity to me. Participants could write freely, knowing that I know who they are, who others are. That I know they are all IDF Widows, and that no one except them, can read what they write. I would say that the combination of open forum and the opportunity to join a closed and private forum creates, as a whole, a place where free will and choice enables people to find the proper way for them to join, read, write and share their world with others, and seek for the help they need.

Other measures were taken during the time course the site operated. The closed forum had a permanent title, saying that the group should not be considered as a therapy in any way. In the open forum I wrote many times that the forum can bring up difficult issues, and in case of distress, people should seek therapy or other means to help themselves. Pointing that out enabled participants to react according to their own judgment, their own free will, to chose whether to stay or leave, to seek help in other places or not.

The statements about the online group and its power to serve the individual, the group and the whole IDF Widows community are illustrated in the forth category in chapter 4. Collecting and analyzing those statements brought me to realize that online groups have power and this power should be handled with care, with a lot of thought, compassion and patience.

One practical conclusion is that a self help support group online should be managed according to the vast knowledge that already exists today, knowledge from

research efforts. Managing and leading online groups today, in many cases, does not comply with this conclusion. Developing courses that will teach that new and vastly growing field is a must. Knowledge based on face-to-face groups alone is not enough. The unique setting of the internet as a whole and the support group online are influencing factors that change the way the group leader think and act, although there is common ground for online and face-to-face groups.

While focusing on the practical implementation for IDF widows, this study shows that there is a need to discuss the issues presented in chapter 4 as themes that the widows themselves brought up. This study shows that there is room to initiate discussions in these themes, either online or in face-to-face groups. Formal face-to-face groups, designed and implemented by the ministry of defense were created during the past years. Creating a formal online group for older widows can enable more women to join discussions, create value for themselves, and get the help they need.

Initiating meetings outside an online group is popular and part of the culture in many forums. When a meeting outside happened, the excitement was high and the connection between the writers increased, as we can see in chapter 4. The fallback of meetings outside the online group is the change of the anonymity state. People are not anonymous any more. Each online group can create such meetings according to the will of its members. I don't think a ground rule can be derived out of the data in this study to conclude the best way.

The use of self-help support groups or any other form of an online group to initiate or empowering social change for the group or sector is fascinating. The data in this study shows that both processes fuel each other. An online group has the potential to

connect people from different parts of the country round a single purpose. People can stay home and have influence on their community. This is most valuable for people who are not mobile, can't afford much traveling or can find free time at nights, and still wishes to get help, get support, and support others or have influence over their community. The data in this study and other threads that did not enter the study show that online activity is important and contributing but it is not enough though.

Group dynamic type discussion on an online group is different for face-to-face group. The *here and now* is different. More interpersonal issues are not easy to be discussed when the eye contact is missing. Some trials to create such conversations did not work as they do in a face-to-face group. A discussion about a split between *them* and *us*, the bad and the good, resulted in much anger at the facilitator (me). Further research on this topic may contribute to the field of online groups and may enhance the power they have to enable participants transform.

Future research

Future research is encouraged in both areas of this study, long-term widowhood and self-help support groups online. Enhanced knowledge of both human experiences may contribute to develop better tools in order to improve well-being and enable access to support. Each issue is important for further research, but studying the interaction between the two and a deeper understanding of the integration can lead to a major improvement and contribution to other sectors as well. Further research of the integration can examine the group impact on sharing and types of sharing along the timeline the online group exists. Examining the group atmosphere and its impact can be done either by a quantities research, asking participants to answer specific questions, or by analyzing

the text already exists from the current group from a different angle, not by thematic analysis, but by looking at each thread in context of time, and analyzing the process and group dynamic phenomena.

Expanding the research to facilitated groups can also be derived from this study, as it can enhance the contribution of the technology. Adding professional leadership and intervention can empower participants and cover some of the limitations and fallbacks an online group can potentially have, as described above. Close professional monitoring of the group and participants can strengthen the individual and the group in ways that future research can reveal. Professional facilitation does not necessarily mean online therapy. Staying in the realm of support groups and researching not just their influence but also the meaning of the experience for participants can contribute. Understanding whether a professional leadership helps in creating a feeling of safety for participants, or make them feel that someone invades their space. The data in this study shows support to Yalom and Leszcz (2005) suggestion that when participants share the ability to help each other, they are empowered. A further research can connect this last concept with the question of professional leadership. An interesting research would add a comparison between online groups and face-to-face group for the same population.

Another interesting research is to understand the reasons to join an online group, understanding why some choose to post messages and many choose to read but not to post messages, even when anonymity is allowed. Understanding the reasons and the characteristics of the three groups can also have practical implications on facilitating online groups and especially self-help support groups.

Another research can examine, in a quantitative way what is the correlation

between joining an online group and the attachment to widowhood. Are those who write in an online group having higher attachment to their widowhood? Or is it too difficult for others to join because their attachment level is higher?

This study's results question many social myths and reveal a whole world of hidden life. This world should be deeply researched in order to honor all those women that their lives have been changed forever when they were widowed young. Further research can aid the Ministry of Defense to create better support for this population. The research can also be expanded to widows other than IDF Widows, women who has much less formal support, women that their voice is not heard at all.

About 50 percent of IDF Widows are over 60 years of age. Studying their physical and psychological status seemed to me very important. Understanding the widows better can be done by taking the themes that were revealed in this study, create assumptions based on those results and design a quantitative research that will examine them further. Researching the themes and their implications should be based, according to the results of this study, on new ways to measure the impact of the loss, maybe by adding variables that can measure the new issues, or a different angle to existing issues examined in bereavement research so far. The results of this study show clearly that many assumptions proposed by stages, or phases, theories were erroneous and misleading. The results are with higher correlation to the two-track models assumptions, with the concepts of posttraumatic growth and resilience. A further research can in turn improve the care and support for IDF widows and may change the formal and cultural viewpoint and social myths.

Limitations of study

The online group was operated in Hebrew. Hebrew words are loaded with meanings for the participants. During translation, words can lose meaning. Another limitation is the fact that there is only one researcher – all validity is done alone. There are no participants in the classical manner, that written reports could be submitted to, and that could check their resonance or completeness. Anderson (2004) describes many tools and methods to assure the reader that the research method delivers valid and reliable results and conclusions. The methods described usually fits a dissertation process, much longer than a thesis process.

The issues this study reveals may not be generalized to all IDF widows, and not to all widows, because participation in an online group can be anonymous, and there is no data or characteristics of the population. In addition, there may be differences between people that choose to join the group and post messages and others that choose not to join or not to post messages. Analyzing the differences is not part of the current research, but it is an interesting issue for further research. The bias of a self-selected group may be present here and differences between varying length of widowhood are not presented.

In this study, I used the material of what seems to have been written by widows, and not by others. Although I have been doing my best to identify messages by that criterion, it is possible that small number of messages, not written by widows but by an imposter will erroneously enter into the study. This is a general limitation to data collection on the internet, in cases when anonymity is an option.

Strengths of study

The research covered a year and a half of life in an online group. This period of

time enables the researcher to look at a wide array of group processes and phenomena. The rich data source enabled the researcher to get to saturation (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) in the data analysis phase of the research.

The qualitative research, which was looking into creating hypotheses, enables the researcher to stay open to whatever was there, only with some prior assumptions, described by the preliminary lenses in chapter 3. Some unthought-of ideas and conclusions were enabled out of this research method.

The integration between research methods, the intuitive inquiry and the grounded theory, enhanced the ability of the researcher to explore areas in a different way than traditional qualitative research in the field and to explore hidden aspects of the life process. Moving beyond logical and rational way of thinking by using those research methods enabled new things to emerge, things that influenced my personal journey during the research, and influenced the research itself, with mutual influence between the two. The processes of data collection and data analysis were meticulous, in order to make sense of the enormous amounts of text that was retrieved from the online group. The process itself was creative in a way that enabled the researcher to find patterns, themes and categories that revealed themselves out of the data. The creativity emerged out of a very structured process that kept the basic rules of an academic research.

Conclusion

Long-term widowhood of women widowed at a young age is a territory rarely visited. The online group enabled women, many cases decades after the loss, to revisit parts of their world, share and connect to their own internal parts through relationship with other widows on the net. This study found that an online group is a place full of

thoughts, feelings, emotions and relationships like any other place. Its power can be in its accessibility, anonymity and other technical and psychological characteristics that enable participants to share and create a support group "like a real support group".

This study exposed the hidden world of IDF Widows through text they wrote in an online group. Time, space and transformation were visited and revisited from various angles throughout this study, by means of organizing the widows' own words into 3 major categories, containing parts of their inner world, the way they look at and interact with the world outside and the paradoxes they live with, peacefully or not. Elements of death, pain and sorrow were mixed with elements of life, joy, rebuilding, growth and meaning construction. Change and transformation were present alongside stable and static attitudes, a continuous interplay between so many elements and attitudes of the individual, the community and the broader society they all live in. This study shows that the influence of losing a husband at a young age stays with the widow for life. Her journey leads to many places and positions. She may build a new family, give birth to more children, build a career and grow spiritually, but the loss is there, with her in various ways and intensity.

From the beginning of my own journey while writing this study I was looking for the story behind the story. I was asking myself many questions in relation to *meaning*: what is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of death? What is greater than the facts that we see? I was asking myself questions regarding groups and online groups. I was asking myself questions in relation to my 16 years widowhood and its influence on my life at that time and its meaning and place in my life. I was curious about the way technology and human needs meet each other on the web. I was curious of how the

technical web enables the creation of a human web of connections.

While getting to the end of writing this study I realized that there is magic in human beings touching each other in various ways, online and in person. I found my friends, IDF Widows, being the archetypal hero traveling in time and space both similar and different from other people. I found myself looking at my friends journeys as if they were going through Campbell's archetypal hero's journey. This journey enables the hero to transform "through his trials into a new being, having derived valuable knowledge from the experience" (Paletti, 2008, p. 22). The transformation may be happening while touching other souls on the way, meeting parts of one's self in others and discovering parts of others inside, as this study found possible on the net.

My personal conclusion is that having the courage to take the journey, to look, see, sense and feel, to transform and grow - is what our lives are all about. I believe that the answer for many of my questions lies with the journey itself, our values that guide us and our attitudes to the challenges we face. Growth and transformation coupled with the awareness that there is something superior to us, and that the universe contains more than we can see, are the reward.

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Appendix A – A message of intent

A message posted in the online, open, forum regarding the intent to perform this study. A translation will follow the Hebrew part.

No one wrote back to say she is not willing to be quoted.

שלום לכולכם,

אתן בוודאי זוכרות את חיפושי הנואש מראשית ימי הפורום אחר מחקרים פסיכולוגיים, סוציולוגיים או אחרים על אלמנות, כפי שבאה לידי ביטוי שנים אחרי האובדן. בתקופה ההיא אמנם לא מצאתי, אבל בעקבות פגישה עם פרופסור שמשון רובין מאוניברסיטת חיפה, נולד המסמך "אלמנות ארוכת טווח" והועלה לאתר. הסקרנות שלי הלכה וגברה. בינתיים התקדמתי בלימודי, והחלטתי לחקור את נושא האלמנות ארוכת הטווח כחלק מעבודת התזה לתואר שני. אמנם מצאתי, בחלקו הראשון של המחקר שלי, מחקרים רבים מספור על שכול ואובדן ועל אלמנות (widowhood), אבל כמעט לא מצאתי דבר על נשים שהתאלמנו צעירות, כפי שהן שנים, עשרות שנים, אחרי האובדן. מצאתי גם מעט מאד איזכורים במחקרים על אלמנות הנמצאות בפרק ב' בחייהן.

אחרי הרבה חשיבה וחיפוש הגעתי להבנה כי חלק מהמחקר שלי עוסק בעצם בנושאים אשר הועלו כאן בפורום לאורך קיומו. חשבתי להיעזר בכך כדי להביא את הדברים הכי אמיתיים שאפשר, כדי להשמיע את שנאמר כאן, את הקול הייחודי שלנו, במקומות נוספים. מאחר ואין דרך להגיע לכל אחת באופן אישי, הייתי רוצה לבקש ממי שאינה רוצה שאצטט את דבריה, להודיע לי במייל (ayalaks@gmail.com).

מובן מאליו שהשמות של מי שהזדהתה באתר בשמה, כמו גם כל פרט מזהה אחר, ישונו ויעוותו, כך שלא ניתן יהיה לזהות במי מדובר. ברור גם כי לא אעשה כל שימוש במידע שלא מופיע באתר באופן גלוי לכולם, ובוודאי לא במידע מתוך פורום התמיכה הסגור לקהל הרחב.

שני הנושאים לגביהם אחפש כאן ציטוטים הם:

1. ההתייחסות שלנו לאלמנות בכלל, לנושאים ולרגשות הקשורים לאלמנות, לשנים שעברו, לאירועי חיים המושפעים מהאלמנות, הרגשות העולים בתקופות מיוחדות, כמו יום הזיכרון, גיוס ילד, לידת נכדים
2. התייחסויות שלנו למקום הזה שפתחנו כאן, לאתר, לפורום, האם הוא תורם משהו למשתתפים, באיזה אופן (ואין הכוונה למתכונים או לבחירות: -)

מטרת המחקר היא בעצם לחקור את החוויה האנושית של ההתאלמנות בגיל צעיר, את החוויה של החיים שלנו עם, לצד ובעקבות החוויה הזו לאורך השנים. אני מקווה כי המחקר יביא להבנה טובה יותר של הנושא. העמקת הידע בתחום קבוצות מקוונות, יוביל אולי לשימוש רחב ומקצועי יותר בכלי הזה לטובת אוכלוסיות נוספות, לטובת העמקת הקשר בין ארגונים לאנשים העובדים מולם (במקרה שלנו, משרד הביטחון למשל) ולטובת העמקת הסיוע והתמיכה הענייניים (זכויות, אירועים) והרגשיים.

חשוב לי להראות, בעזרתכן, כי תהליך האבל אינו כמו שפעם תפסו אותו: כמה שלבים וחוזרים לחיים. כן, חוזרים לחיים, אבל אחרת. עם מטען נוסף, עם הסתכלות אחרת, עם פגיעות שנשארות לאורך שנים ארוכות וגם עם צמיחה כתהליך שנובע מההתמודדות עם כל מה שעלינו להתמודד איתו.

אני מאמינה כי הסיפורים שעלו כאן, סיפורי החיים, סיפורי ההתמודדות, יאירו את אלמנות צה"ל בדרך אחרת, יעמיקו את ההיכרות, שלנו ושל אחרים, עם אותם דברים שאף פעם לא דיברו עליהם. אני מאמינה כי הסיפורים והנושאים שעלו כאן יכולים לתת תקווה לאנשים אחרים בהתמודדות שלהם הן עם שכול ואובדן והן עם נושאים נוספים. עם כל הכאב והצער, הפגיעות והכעס יש כאן גם הרבה גילויים של עוצמה, של התמודדות, של תקווה.

את כל הקולות האלה הייתי רוצה שישמעו גם בחוץ.

אם יש לכן שאלות הנוגעות למחקר שלי, אתן מוזמנות להפנות גם אותן למייל.

אתן מוזמנות גם כאן להוסיף ולהשמיע את קולכן, את הקול המיוחד של כל אחת מכן, שראוי לו להישמע.

תודתי מקרב לב,

אילה

Hello all,

You probably remember my desperate search for psychological or sociological research regarding widows and widowhood as it is many years after the loss. At that time I didn't find much, but following a meeting with Prof. Rubin in Haifa University, the document "long-term widowhood" have been written and was uploaded to the site. In the meantime my curiosity grew, and I decided to study the issue of long-term widowhood as part of my thesis. I found many articles about grief, bereavement and widowhood. Almost none was talking about women who lost their husbands when they were young, decades after the loss. I also found very few researches about widows in a second relationship.

After lots of thinking, I realized that part of my research deals actually with issues that were brought here, in this forum, throughout its existence. I would like to get your help in order to bring the honest things written here, to make voice to things that had place here, to give our

voice space in other places. There is no way for me to get to each and everyone of you personally I would like to ask women who **do not want** to be quoted to send me a mail (ayalaks@gmail.com).

I will for quotes on 2 issues:

1. Widowhood. issues and emotions related to the subject, to years that passed by, life events colored by widowhood, emotions and feelings that rises in special times like memorial day, a child enlisting to the army and so on.
2. The forum. Quotes relating to this place we opened here, its contribution to participants and in what way (and I don't mean the elections or recopies : -))

The purpose of the study is to explore the human experience of being widowed at a young age, to explore our experience with and alongside the loss experience along the years. I hope that this study will bring forth a better understanding of the issue. Deepening the knowledge of online groups can lead wider and more professional of this tool, to the benefit of other populations, to deepen the quality of the connections between organizations and the people they serve.

I find it important to show, with your help, that the bereavement process is different than people used to imagine: that you go through several phases and you are going back to life. Yes, we go back to life, but very different. With another load, with another view point, with wounds that stay for life, but also with growth, as a process that is derived from coping with we have to cope with.

I believe that the stories that were written here, life stories, coping stories, will show IDF Widows in a different light, will deepen the acquaintance, ours and others, with all the issues that have never been talked about. I believe that our stories can bring hope to other people in their journey, either with loss or with other issues. With all the pain and the sorrow, the vulnerability and the anger, we can see here strengths, empowerment, coping and hope.

I want all these voices to be heard outside.

If you have any question regarding my research, please send me an email.

You are welcome to keep on talking here, in the forum, let your voice, your unique voice be heard.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart

Ayala

Appendix B – A dialogue with a sculpture and a diary

A journey from stone to emotions

My grandfather, Mr. Haim Schleien (1899-1991) began his artistic path after retirement at the age of 75. He inspired my life, claiming that age is not a limit, proofing by living his truth that "when there is a will there is a way". His wisdom and special spirit accompanies me throughout my life. While reading Anderson's (2004) description of using artistic items to dialogue with, I knew that my grandfather's sculpture would accompany me during the research process.



Figure 1. Mr. Haim Schleien

However, accepting this internal knowledge and accepting the idea of a dialogue with a piece of stone was not that easy. I have started with a clear focus on the online group as the subject and object of my thesis. The examples were supposed to come from the IDF Widows online group. The online group fascinated me. The art of writing, group dynamics, and the impact of the written words in the online group made me even more curious. During the second meeting of the thesis group, we created a collage from old journals. One sentence flooded my head and my body: "open the door to the unknown world of the widows, let all the beauty come out, let all the demons out. The clock is ticking ...". My head and body were talking to me, as if they were saying, "try to find the transformation, the transformation that will come out of this process, the transformation that the online group had created". The focus of my thesis has shifted that moment

from the online group to long-term widowhood as it is exposed and manifested in the online group. That was the moment I just knew I need to use my own resources differently, not to stay focused on my analytical and rational thinking alone. The fusion with intuitive inquiry empowered my ability to start this journey into myself, into the research, and out. Now I could accept the idea of a dialogue with a sculpture.

Two sculptures were my immediate choice. I called the first one "compassion" and the second was names "Ms. Sadness". Ms. Sadness was my first choice. As if the sculpture was describing my thoughts, my emotions, the way I was feeling at the time. "compassion will wait", I wrote in my diary.



Figure 2. Ms. Sadness



Figure 3. Compassion

I took Ms. Sadness with me around my home, taking pictures, processing them on my computer, suspending thinking, suspending planning. Memories came back, as if doors were opened somewhere inside my body and my mind, letting whatever was coming out to flow outside hidden places, see the world, breath the air around, look into

the open space around me and around my home.



Figure 4. the beginning

At the beginning, the colors were gray, gloomy and sad. The computer cooperated with my gloomy mood, while starting to go through Anderson's (2004) Intuitive Inquiry first and second cycles. "Will my external reality survive my diving into widowhood for a whole year?" I wrote in my diary, feeling fear and anxiety.

I was walking around with Ms. Sadness, probably looking like a fool. My head interrupted repeatedly, asking for attention. I focused my attention on my hands, my eyes and my heart, trying to find nice spots to take pictures. I was trying to train my mind, to calm it a little bit. A small logical voice did not stop whispering and laughing. I was so sad, I was in so much pain, that my whole body was in pain. The pressure inside resembled the pressure when Rami was killed. The pain went even deeper. Going into every cell of my body, being present at every breath I take. Time had no meaning. It was twisted all over again. The hours passed by and I was still walking around the house, taking pictures of Ms. Sadness. The feeling of presence in the present, in the moment,

was all over me. My body felt like there are no limits. The power of life mixed inside me with the powers of death. "Why is she so sad? Sitting there in the stone for ages, and nothing changes for her", I wrote at that time. "She is frozen in the stone, but she is so alive. The contrast cries out at me today. How can you live when there is so much pain? When there is so much sadness?". Every breath I take is life, when I exhale I feel the death. I was standing on my porch, looking at the wide-open space, at the lemon tree in my yard. "All the contrasts are now in the open", I wrote. "Life and death, technology and emotions, determination, optimism and joy of life facing fear, pain and sadness". I read on, amazed at myself "analytical thinking facing emotions and intuition, power and weakness, dependency is facing the strong feeling of independence. There are also some conflicts there: to see or not, to cry or not, to let go or to keep control, being technical versus creative, emotions and their expressions". It all goes to the point between the past, present and future. "The ability, in any given moment to feel the pain and the compassion" fills my body with warmth, makes me feel like every cell inside is bigger and meaningful.



Figure 5. the beginning, cont.

"Will I survive?" I wrote. I imagined the process as a long, dark tunnel. Like a cave that goes down into the earth. I had no idea what I will find there, no idea what I will lose there. "I feel it is right to put the sadness in focus now. At the same time, I should remember all the good that I have, all the good that I had. Eventually, I will get to the incredible energy of compassion, the compassion that was there, is there and will be there".

At that time, I started playing with reflections, external reflections and internal reflections. I wanted to see Ms. Sadness reflections during various hours of the day. Putting Ms. Sadness in various positions created new angles in my mind opened a way for creative look at the data.



Figure 6. Reflection



Figure 7. A new point of view

During data collection, organization and analysis the pictures began to have more light. I had a good feeling most of the time, even during phases of no progress, periods of incubation, periods I could not even look at my thesis while they lasted.

I tested many ways to present the data. Nothing seemed to fit. The word "meaning" came up into my mind repeatedly, throughout the process. "Open the door to meet new ways" was another combination that popped up many times. One of the difficult parts was when I realized repeatedly that I have to combine the analytic way of thinking with the intuitive way of knowing. Stopping to hold on to the familiar, to what I thought I knew, was an important step toward this fusion, toward the process of blending so different ways of knowing. There was real fear in letting go the familiar ways of knowing, without any knowledge of what will come, what will be the new way.

A trip to California (April, 2007), traveling alone, without any planning for 8 days in Sonoma County, enabled me to feel deeply the fear and the excitement of the journey into the unknown. Spending my days in a house inside a redwood forest, driving along the magnificent ocean cliffs and beaches, and staying for a day in Sonoma Valley, visiting vineyards, without knowing where I will stay the next day.

The wild nature connected me better to myself. I was feeling deeply the pain, the sadness and at the same time, I could feel gratefulness for being alive, for being able to be in all that beauty, to experience being myself, feeling the eternity of nature.



Figure 8. California, April 2007

Coming back home confronted me with many issues, putting many pieces of the puzzle together. I can remove some pieces for now and I can add new ones.

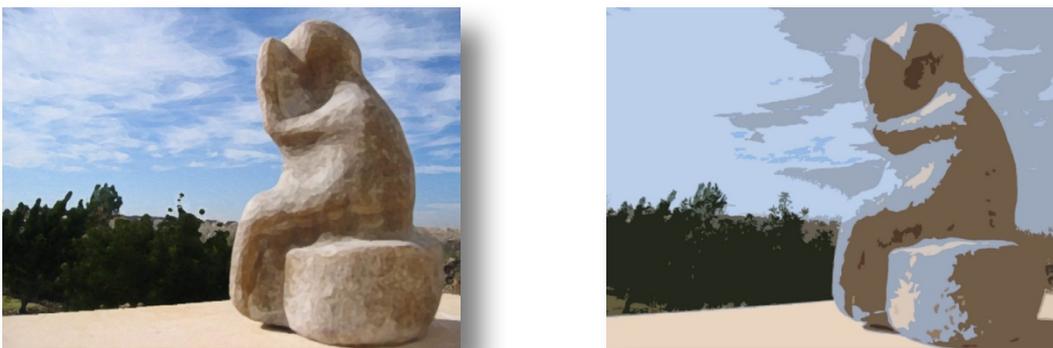


Figure 9. Data collection, organization and analysis phase

Little stories were written, different kinds of tables were created. Nothing seemed to be working. There was no way I could convey the experience of long-term widowhood. One form after the other did not work; the frustration was enormous. The recycle bin on my laptop was filling up. Looking at those pictures and putting the sculpture on my desk, staring at it, seemed to help. Or was it the reiki I was practicing on my dog? Snow's presence in my room while working was a blessing.



Figure 10. How should chapter 4 look like? *Figure 11.* Snow

Watching all the data collected and analyzed without any idea how to proceed was like standing in front of a blank page, in front of a void. Helpless as I felt, I knew that I will find "the courage to stand in front of the void, the courage to lose what I know, what I have". A year since I wrote this sentence in my diary, I could really feel inside the courage and not just the fear. I know now that the process of this thesis was a journey inside. I know now it is the beginning of a lifetime journey. There are no specific targets to this journey. My wish is to stay with open mind, open heart, to find myself and to be with my endless curiosity, desire for life and creativity. I know it is a journey leading me

to writing my book, a journey leading me to teaching, to working with groups. I have no idea how, where or when. Knowing without knowing feels for me like being at home now.

When chapter 4 was almost ready, I realized Ms. Sadness represented not only sadness, but also a hidden will to hide away from the world. At that moment, I could come back to the world ... finish my thesis. I know now that my personal journey will continue ...

On my last day at Lesley University (July, 2008) I think I realized what groups are all about, what the magic is ...