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STARS Citation

Baker, Sunshine, "Blogging Love After Loss: How Widows Use Facework When Revealing Their New Relationships Online" (2014). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 4492.
https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/4492

Blogging Love After Loss: How Widows Use Facework When Revealing Their New
Relationships Online

by

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B.S. University of Central Florida, 2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Nicholson School of Communication
in the College of Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2014

ABSTRACT

Expressions of identity are increasingly occurring in online communication as a variety of social media have emerged. People establish and manage identities online, and experience challenges when changing their online image. Widows experience this challenge in a dramatic fashion, especially when they begin to date and reveal new relationships online. The purpose of this study was to examine the expressions of facework in the online writings of widows regarding their new romantic relationships. This illuminated the ways in which one population, young widow bloggers, deals with the challenge of online identity management. A systematic thematic analysis was conducted to describe how posts on widow blogs address the positive face needs of remarrying widows. This study discovered evidence of preventive facework, face threats and face attacks, and corrective facework used in online blogs written by widows.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Expressions of identity are increasingly occurring in online communication as a variety of social media have emerged. People establish and manage identities online, and experience challenges when changing their online image. This can be understood in terms of Goffman's (1955) theory of face, whereby an individual is expected to 'keep face' by maintaining the initial impression that they have made on an audience and 'live up to it.' Widows experience this challenge in a dramatic fashion, especially when they begin to date and reveal new relationships online.

Dating and remarriage is considered a sign of effective coping in people who have suffered from the death of a spouse. However, when widows and widowers find new love, they often face societal pressures and judgment. Rather than expressing their unadulterated joy like any other newlywed would be expected to do, remarrying widows must balance honoring the memories of their previous spouses with rejoicing in their new relationships. One way they do this is through managing their face, or public image.

The purpose of this study is to examine the expressions of facework in the online writings of widows regarding their new romantic relationships. This will illuminate the ways in which one population, young widow bloggers, deals with the challenge of online identity management. This study contributes to conceptualizing facework online as identity work, and to investigating what happens when people enact identity change online.

This study is structured as follows. I first introduce the theoretical foundations of social constructionism, identity management, and face upon which the analysis rest. Next, I apply these theories to blogging, bereavement, and remarriage. The data are introduced next, including

excerpts from the widow blogs and interviews. The analysis examines and theoretically conceptualizes the face threats and attacks that widow bloggers experience and the facework strategies they employ. The concluding remarks point to the necessity of further examining the identity challenges of widows, especially as it pertains to online self-expression. I also discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of the study.

As someone who lost a spouse to suicide while still in my mid-thirties and remarried less than two years later, I am intimately familiar with the responses of both family members and strangers to this issue. When I became a young widow with two teenage children, my interest in other widows facing these circumstances led me to find several online blogs. These blogs, written by widows, are like daily diaries expressing their feelings of loss and bereavement when their spouses died. They offer an intimate window into the lives of women, showing day by day how they coped with spousal loss. The widow bloggers struggled with finding new identities for themselves as single adults rather than as part of a married couple. Widow bloggers often express "that the death of their spouse contributed to wanting to create a better life for themselves or to want to make a difference in the world, a positive shift in identity" (Haase & Johnston, 2012, p. 218). Thus, blogging can be seen as a positive form of action for widows seeking to form new identities and grow through their losses.

As the widows created new identities, they expressed their transformations through narratives on their personal blogs. "Profound loss necessitates the task of relearning the self and relearning the world; we do this by fitting the troubling transitions in our lives into a meaningful story" (Haase & Johnston, 2012, p. 205). Each of the widow bloggers eventually re-entered the world of dating and formed long-term relationships, which led to engagement or marriage. The

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widows announced and celebrated their new relationships while honoring the memories of their former spouses. In a series of blog posts, the widows expressed that they felt rejected and judged by the widow community, and that some people were judgmental towards them as they began their new relationships. This study focuses specifically on the blogs of female widows, rather than widowers, because they are of greatest interest to the author and women are the most frequent authors of these types of blogs.

I analyzed these blog postings to identify expressions of face management by the widows. As the widows entered new relationships, they sought to project a public image as loving and faithful partners, both to their former husbands and to their new partners. They received face attacks in the form of negative comments and messages, which caused them to defend themselves and their choices. Through this process, they were protecting the positive face needs of each party involved.

This study fills a void in communication literature by revealing some of the ways widows in new romantic relationships experience threats to their public image, or face, when expressing themselves online. The application of facework is important because it addresses the theme of how women socially negotiate creating a new identity. Any person who has established one identity online and suddenly changes to a new identity may experience the need to manage and protect his or her face. Widow bloggers in new relationships provide an excellent illustration of the challenges of identity management online. Holm and Severinsson (2012) describe the struggles of widows: "their identity appeared to be stripped away, and they were forced to see a different self" (p. 115). Although bereavement research frequently addresses issues of identity management of the bereaved, little attention has been directed toward the identity management

of widows. The question posed by the present study is "How do widows engage in facework

strategies online during new romantic relationships?"

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of social constructionism and the concept of identity management forms the foundation of this research study. These two concepts were applied through studying the activity of facework and face threats/attacks online within the specific context of bereavement and remarriage.

Social Constructionism

This study considered the ways widows explain their new relationships online as part of a bigger picture, post-bereavement growth. Young widows are forced to create their own new reality as a single person, often as a single mother, and identity construction is a big part of this. As a widow expresses her own post-bereavement growth, she may also experience a new romance, which she must make sense of given her new post-bereavement reality.

Social constructionists seek to "address the question of how it is that we come to experience ourselves, our world, and our language, in the particular ways that at that moment we do, and how we might come to talk about ourselves differently" (Shotter, 1993, p. 19). Social constructionists focus on the ways we construct reality through conversation. Carey (1975) defined communication as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (p. 7). Social constructionists emphasize that communication between people is the way that reality is brought into existence. "To study communication is to examine the actual social process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended, and used" (Carey, 1975, p. 12). Thus, communication scholars in the social constructionist realm seek to understand the ways in which we create reality by communicating with others.

Communication is pervasive, which means that it occurs at all times. People are unable to not communicate, because even silence, blank stares, and withdrawal send signals to other people. Pearce (1987) argued "that communication is both crucial and basic; that selves, intentions, and objects do not exist for human beings per se but achieve their existence from the process of social construction" (p. 100). For bereaved women, whose very identity and view of the world has been shattered, the task of reality creation becomes imperative. Therefore, they must communicate with others to shape and create a new reality for themselves. This task can be very difficult due to the emotional chasm that exists between those who have lost a spouse and those who have not. Talking and expressing their experience and their new reality can help widows to form an understanding of the new self and new world they live in. This makes the social constructionist viewpoint very helpful when considering the struggles of widows.

Social constructionist methods are often applied in the study of bereavement. Umphrey and Cacciatore (2011) applied social constructionism to their study of narratives in a bereavement support group. They found that bereaved people socially constructed their new perceptions of reality based on the experiences of others. These researchers noted the social constructionist assumption "that knowledge is co-constructed within communities of knowers" (p. 153). In their study, they found that shared story-telling helps bereaved people handle their emotions and cope with their new reality. They considered the dialogue between bereaved persons to be transformative as it helped them to make sense of their experiences and shape their own reality. The social constructionist approach is therefore very helpful in expressing how people who have suffered loss create and communicate their new social realities.

Identity Management

Identity management, in the view of social constructionists, is done collaboratively between communication partners, and identity develops as we socially construct it through communication (Spencer-Oatey, 2007). Simon (2004) identified three functions of identity that relate to the study of face. It helps provide people with a sense of belonging, it helps people 'locate' themselves in their social worlds, and it provides people with self-respect and self-esteem (pp. 66-67). Arundale (2005) argues that face is not the same as identity, but "both relationships and identity arise and are sustained in communication, but a relationship, and hence face, is a dyadic phenomenon, whereas identity is an individual (and much broader) phenomenon" (p. 10). Spencer-Oatey tied theories of identity to face and made this clear distinction: "a person's identity attributes include negatively and neutrally evaluated characteristics, as well as positive ones, whilst the attributes associated with face are only positive ones" (2007, p. 643). We see as we explore the concept of face how closely it is linked with identity construction.

Face

One question posed by social constructionists is, "Why do we feel impelled or compelled to talk about ourselves as we do?" (Shotter, 1993, p. 19). One of the answers to this question lies in the concept of face, which is an aspect of identity management. Goffman (1959) created the concept of face, which is compatible with the social constructionist viewpoint. He thought that there was no one overarching society that influenced people. In his view, individuals gained their concepts of self through the interactions they engaged in during everyday life. Goffman

(1967) defined face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5).

Face is a socially constructed concept, it involves self-presentation and is only relevant during social interaction (Holtgraves, 1992). Goffman (1955) also created the concept of frontstage and backstage behavior. When we are in public, we put on a socially acceptable frontstage face, which reveals only the parts of ourselves that we want to comprise our public identities. In private, with family and friends, we are more relaxed, and less conscious of face, which Goffman calls backstage behavior.

Two aspects of face have been identified in the current literature, through the expansion of face theory known as politeness theory. Lim and Bowers (1991) described the two types of face needs that emerge in most interactions. Positive face refers to the need to be included and the need to be respected by others. Negative face is also called autonomy face; this refers to the need to have a sense of self apart from others. Politeness theory emphasizes that there is a face-threat potential in every communicative act. Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced the idea that both positive and negative face can be threatened through face threatening acts (FTAs). Due to the centrality of these concepts to the study, each has been elaborated in greater depth.

Positive Face

Positive face refers to our desire to be respected and admired for our personal attributes. "Face is the positive social persona that a communicator desires and that is implicitly established through a partner's conversational actions" (Tracy & Tracy, 1998, p. 226). We want others to provide affirmation that we are acceptable and attractive human beings, and we seek to present ourselves in a way that will cause other people to admire us. People support others' positive face

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by showing "approval of their personality, attributes, accomplishments, appearance and so forth, as well as to show that they are considered likeable and worthy to be a friend and companion" (Metts, 2000, p. 84). By the same token, people can threaten the positive face of another by criticizing their actions and their own positive face by excessive self-disclosure, for example. Lim and Bowers (1991) identify two components of positive face. Fellowship face is our desire to be seen as worthy companion, while competence face is our wish to be respected for our personal traits or accomplishments.

<div align="center">Negative Face</div>

Negative face is also conceptualized as freedom of action. When a person seeks to maintain their negative face, they desire autonomy. Metts (2000) defined negative face as the drive to be free of imposition and restraint from others. Communicators can respect each other's negative face by being careful not to impose upon the other's time or resources, to protect their privacy, and to avoid intruding. Negative face is the desire for personal freedom, to have one's actions unimpinged by others. At the most extreme level, negative face would require total isolation from other human beings since simple human interaction can constitute a threat to negative face. Face threatening acts will be defined and discussed in a later section. Thus, there can be negative face threats to speaker face and also to hearer face. When people express an intense desire to be alone and to not have to deal with other people, they are seeking to fulfill their negative speaker face needs. When they complain of the imposing demands of other people, they are referring to their own negative hearer face needs.

<u>Facework</u>

Positive and negative politeness strategies are the ways that speakers manage face threats in every interaction. Facework is another term for this concept, and it describes the ways that people maintain their own and other's face, both positive and negative. Domenici and Littlejohn (2006) defined facework as "a set of coordinated practices in which communicators build, maintain, protect, or threaten personal dignity, honor, and respect" (pp. 10-11). Face threats are anything that can damage a person's positive or negative face. Individuals respond to face threats by using facework both to manage their own face, and also to help manage another's face. When a person seeks to avoid or minimize face threatening acts before they occur, they are engaging in preventive facework (Cupach & Metts, 1994).

Scholars such as Dalsgaard (2008) have expanded facework theory into the online realm, and have determined that the theory is applicable in this new communication arena. Papacharissi (2009) noted that online communities like Facebook and blogs can be termed a "loose" community, based on Goffman's writings. In these loose communities, people make efforts to present a positive image of themselves. West and Trester (2012) said that "such careful creations of show and tell and mindfulness of others' signals create a large amount of work for members trying to respect both their own positive and negative face wants and those of other members" (p. 137). Facework online presents a whole new set of challenges to speakers and hearers, and the ability of others to witness this facework in action provides rich fodder for communication research.

Research shows that requesting and offering social support brings potential for face threats (Goldsmith, 1994). In a bereavement context, the bereaved may want help dealing with

loss but also wants to avoid looking socially undesirable because of the grief. She also may want

to avoid being obligated to take the other person's advice. Hearers may want to make comments,

ask questions, or give suggestions, but may fear threatening the privacy of the bereaved. The

need for social support inherent to bereavement points directly to the potential for threats to

negative face.

<center>Face Threatening Acts</center>

Goffman describes face threats as the consequences of not engaging in facework, both for

oneself and for one's conversational partner. "Communicators typically work to maintain both

their own and their partner's face; on occasion, however, they do not do this work, and a threat to

one or both parties' faces occurs. According to Goffman (1955), threats to face can arise from

innocent actions such as a faux pas or verbal gaffe, or inadvertently as a result of a person

pursuing a certain course of action, or as a result of personal maliciousness and spite. Brown and

Levinson (1987) identified threats to a person's face as Face Threatening Acts (FTA's). They

suggested that the way to avoid face threats is to anoint the face of another, emphasizing the

speaker's awareness of and respect for the hearer's face needs. One way of anointing the

hearer's positive face is to point out the ways that the speaker and hearer share the same likes

and desires (West & Trester, 2012), which is also called solidarity.

Goffman emphasized that people seek cooperation in many areas, but sometimes people

eschew cooperation and politeness, and decide to attack others. Tracy and Tracy (1998) define

face threats that are deliberately nasty as face attacks, and as a form of social judgment. Tracy

criticizes politeness theories as insufficiently addressing the ways in which people are impolite to

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one another. "If absence of politeness is the sole domain of impoliteness, then impoliteness is a communicatively limited and uninteresting concept (Tracy, 2008, p. 172).

Tracy introduced the concept of face attack, which is defined as a face threat that occurs intentionally. Face attacks are "communicative acts that are intentionally rude and mean for which 'impolite is too tame a word" (Tracy, 2008, p. 173). A communicative act can be labeled a face attack when the target assesses it as intended to disrespect and insult. Thus, face attacks are in the eye of the beholder, with the receiver's perception making the difference.

Graham, in her 2007 ethnography of an online community, found that something is more likely to be interpreted as impolite by a hearer when the speaker is perceived to have intended to attack the face of the hearer. Tracy (2008) points out that face attacks can vary in force from actions that display mild disrespect to severe contempt and are an evaluative judgment of a situated communication.

Tracy (2008) gives the following guidance for judging a communicative act as a face-attack. The researcher must ask: "What desired identities does a communicative practice make relevant for its different categories of participants?" and "What did people actually say and how might the content and form of utterances have implicated an absence of a desirable identity or the presence of a disvalued one?" (p. 176). This illuminates the definition of a face attack, it is something that both challenges a person's identity, and is perceived as intentional by the hearer.

Blog readers sometimes write comments that can be construed as face attacks. DeGroot and Carmack (2012) attribute this effect to online disinhibition. "They can leave hostile messages and 'run away' from them without having to see the emotional repercussions of their messages" (p. 169). Widow bloggers often face unexpected face attacks by people who do not

agree with the way they are handling their lives as widows, and for this reason, they engage in face management strategies to protect their public images (Tracy, 2008). I personally received this type of face attack after revealing my new relationship, when one of my late husband's relatives posted this on my Facebook profile for all to see: "you didn't deserve to even shake his hand...it's all your fault. it should have been you". This type of overt, direct, and public attack is extremely painful and is one of the things that prompted me to begin this study.

When a speaker (or in this case, blogger) attempts to maintain or restore face loss, they are often using facework. Facework before a conflict situation is called preventive, whereas facework during or after a situation involving conflict or attack is considered restorative (Ting-Toomey, 2004). Zidjaly (2012) identified the responses of Arab bloggers to online face attacks as restorative facework. This would also apply to widow bloggers responding to face attacks.

Restorative facework (also called corrective facework) involves communication used to restore or uphold face in an attempt to repair face that was lost by a threat or an attack. Corrective facework strategies identified by Cupach and Metts (1994) include excuses, justifications, direct aggression, humor, physical remediation, passive aggressiveness, avoidance, and apologies. Blogs also offer the unusual and very useful feature of deleting unwanted posts. "Because bloggers have the administrative rights to delete rude or inappropriate blog comments, many of these comments are no longer publicly available" (DeGroot & Carmack, 2012, p. 169). These are some of the tools that bloggers can employ to defend themselves against online attacks.

Widows and Widow Blogs

This study will analyze personal blog postings by widows entering new relationships. The word "widow" as a socio-cultural term is "has very negative connotations. Many widows feel as if it implies they are damaged, a second class citizen. The same associations are not true for the word "widower" (Silverman, 1975, p. 95). In addition, media portrayals of widows usually show them as either lonely and stuck in the past, or as a 'black widow' archetype of a femme fatale. This means that widows experience very real identity concerns as they are involuntarily labeled with a stigmatized term.

Because young widows are more likely to remarry than older ones (Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1990), I focued on blogs written by widows under the age of fifty. Blogging began in the late 1990's and millions of people write and read blogs. Blogs are defined as "frequently modified web pages" (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004), and most are available to the general public for anyone to view. Personal blogs are focused on the experiences and feelings of the writers, and serve as a public form of a traditional journal or diary (Chen, 2012). Large amounts of intimate self-disclosure are what differentiate personal blogs from other types (Hollenbaugh, 2010). Many bereaved people, including widows, start writing blogs as a way of processing and of expressing their experiences of grief with others.

Blogging in general has been found to have several motivations and concurrent benefits for women. Chen (2012) discovered that "women with a high need to self-disclose will see blogging as a way to express their own voice" (p. 177). Stavrositu and Sundar (2012) found that blogging increases a woman blogger's sense of agency, which they defined as "the feeling of having a competent, confident, and assertive voice" (p. 371). They noted that the commenting

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feature of blogs allows bloggers to feel that "she is part of a larger community of like-minded individuals" (p. 377). Their study concluded that feedback gained from blog comments and having a successful blog increases bloggers' psychological empowerment. Ko and Kuo (2009) asserted that the increased self-disclosure and social integration provided by blogging improves bloggers' subjective well-being. Hollenbaugh (2010) called blogging "masspersonal communication, or communicating interpersonally to a mass audience" (p. 1659). Thus, widow bloggers face the challenge of writing for people that they know while also sharing with strangers.

<div align="center">Blogging and Bereavement</div>

The feelings and emotions of people going through the process of grief are increasingly expressed through blogs, a fact recognized by communication researchers. Various studies on grief blogs have analyzed topics including facework and identity management in the blogosphere, but none have focused on widow bloggers and their new relationships. DeGroot and Carmack (2012) noted that bereaved individuals are communicating their grief experiences through blogging "to mourn the loss and craft a new identity in the absence of the deceased" (p. 162). Moss (2004) found that grief blogs reveal a tension in the grieving process between holding on to the deceased while at the same time letting go. The grief blogs they studied manifested a repetition of the various stages of grief, and often included a search for meaning and new identity following the death of a loved one.

DeGroot and Carmack (2013) highlighted the ways that blogging transitions a private experience into a public experience. "This blurring is especially poignant when discussing death as it continues to challenge our cultural understanding of death as a private experience" (p. 465).

Blogging, and especially grief blogging, is an excellent example of the new interconnectedness of mass and interpersonal communication.

Identity Management & Facework Through Blogging

The concept of identity creation online is looked at in varying ways by communication scholars. Some scholars have argued that online identities are split from the offline self, and that people perform and present different identities, or personas, when expressing themselves online (Baptista, 2003). Others such as Baker (2009) conceptualize a blended identity, whereby the offline self and the online self are mutually reinforcing, building upon each other. Most scholars today agree that, for personal bloggers, online identities are not personas they create, but rather a reflection of their actual selves (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Therefore this study looked at blogger identity as it expressed the actual selves of the bloggers, not as an artificial persona that the bloggers created.

People are increasingly using personal blogs to create and develop online identities, and compared to other forms of computer-mediated communication, blogs are uniquely suited to enable the creation of an online presence (Bronstein, 2013). Numerous communication studies (see for example Papacharissi, 2009, Zidjali, 2012) confirm that blogs represent an ideal medium for self-representation and the creation of an online identity.

One salient use of blogs is self-presentation, which refers to how people tailor the images they convey to others in a variety of ways. While most bloggers identify themselves using photos and biographies, they are still physically invisible to their audience, which offers a degree of freedom and disinhibition (Papacharissi, 2002). Even though their physical appearance in the moment is not displayed, bloggers express that their blogs are "a part of me" or "a reflection of

myself on the internet" (Bronstein, 2013, p. 173). Thus personal blogs have become tools for establishing online identities.

The facework aspect of identity management online has become a focus of study for communication researchers. Goffman (1959) describes a metaphorical play, with a person managing self-presentation as an "actor," playing in a scene on the stage and managing what the audience sees. The actor takes respite "back stage" where the behind-the-scenes living occurs, when he or she is not on stage. Papacharissi (2002) tied this to blogs when she asserted that blog authors "stage an online performance through which the individual's personality or aspects of it are revealed" (p. 654). Much of the content in blogs provides a "behind the scenes" look into the blogger's "back stage" (Papacharissi, 2004). Trammell and Keshelashvili examined prominent blogs and found more evidence of Goffman's front stage and back stage behavior:

> The intimacy and personalized tone that create the impression of an uncontrolled, spontaneous flow of feelings and thoughts allow readers to look far beyond the stage into a person's "back stage." On the other hand, blogging is a deliberate process and allows bloggers to convey the qualities of themselves, creating the impression that what the reader sees is the author's "real self" or "back stage"—all the while performing in public. (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005, p. 978)

By examining self-presentation in blogs, scholars are able to find modern applications for the traditional constructs set forth by Goffman.

<u>Bereavement Blogging and Identity Management</u>

One of the major tasks of grief, and one of the markers of a successful passage through the initial stages of grief, is the formation of a new identity. Neimeyer (2005) counsels that

identity and grief are interconnected, with identity transformation playing a major role in the bereavement process. This is because the loss of close relationships "undermines our self-narrative, and with it, our identity" (Neimeyer, 2000, p. 552). Silverman (1986) states that in society, the identity of widow has "no standing and no personal meaning" (p. 24). Therefore, young widows must create new identities, and some choose to do so through blogging.

Haase and Johnston (2012) studied young widows and found that many of them struggled to separate their identity from that of their deceased partners because they had become so integrated. While an older widow, having lived her entire adult life as part of a couple, will certainly struggle with her new identity, young widows face the issue of identity in a very powerful way:

> This is especially significant for young widows, who in a relatively short amount
> of time went from being single, to married, to widowed, to single again. It is not
> hard to imagine why young widows suffer greater consequences following the
> death of their spouse – their identities have been severely altered and indeed may
> not have been well established to begin with. (Haase & Johnston, 2012, p. 206).

This statement shows how imperative and central the task of identity reconstruction becomes for a woman who loses her spouse at a young age.

For young widows, the role of widow should be only a temporary stage of their identity reconstruction (Lopata, 1979). No twenty-five year old woman should live the rest of her life primarily identifying herself as a widow. One widow expresses the negative stigma that goes along with the term 'widow':

I am a woman whose husband died, yes. But not a second-class citizen, not a

lonely goose. I am a mother and a working woman . . . and a vital woman. I am a

person. I resent what the term widow has come to mean. I am alive. I am part of

the world. (Golan, 1975, p. 370)

Therefore, for young widows, widowhood should be a passage of their lives that they must

integrate into their new identities. The many struggles of identity formation are often addressed

through writing, especially blogging, which widows use "as a creative way both to release

emotion and thought, and also to connect with friends and family and to impact others" (Haase

& Johnston, 2012, p. 214). As Hastings (2000) pointed out, "Opportunities for some healthy

disclosures are necessary for healing a fractured identity" (p. 359). Young widows write blogs to

work through the many identity-related challenges that they face in their new and unusual

circumstances.

<center>Postbereavement Remarriage</center>

Half of all marriages in any given year will involve at least one partner with previous

marital experience (Ozawa & Yoon, 2002). Remarriages occur more quickly than first

marriages, often within months after beginning the relationship (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine,

2000). While most remarriages come after divorce rather than widowhood (James & Shafer,

2012), there are still a large number of marriages formed after the death of the first spouse.

Worden (1996) found that two years after the death of a spouse, 17% of surviving parents were

either living with someone, engaged, or remarried. These numbers go up for younger widows

and widowers. In their study of surviving parents aged 31.7 to 41.6 years, Bishop and Cain

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(2003) found that 45.7% of them were cohabiting or remarried three and a half years after spousal death.

Widows tend to remarry later than divorcees (James & Shafer, 2012). In fact, the peak time after marital dissolution for a divorcee to remarry is at 1 month after divorce, while widow remarriages peak at 13 months after bereavement (Coleman et al., 2000). Clarke and Wilson's 1994 study of divorce rates found that of the thousands of remarried persons in the study, one-fifth of their previous marriages ended in widowhood rather than divorce. This population of remarriages is under-studied, since most of the literature over the past thirty years has focused on divorced and remarried individuals.

This study described one unique feature of bereaved remarriages, the facework actions that are enacted by remarrying widows to balance the face needs of themselves, their previous spouses, and their new partners. Widows are faced with the task of new identity creation when they lose their role as a wife. Many form a new image of themselves as independent, powerful, and self-sufficient women who are thriving without the aid of a spouse. This image changes when a new partner enters the scene, driving widow bloggers to explore and remake their identities once again through their self-expressions online. No other studies have examined the ways that widows enact facework through personal blogs, both before and after entering new romantic relationships. This study illuminated the struggles that widows go through in managing multiple audiences and expressing their changing identities when communicating online.

<u>Facework in Widowhood</u>

Widows form communities, both in person and online, in which they engage in facework strategies together. Underwood (2011) studied a triad of elderly widows to identify the facework

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strategies they used. "The identification of self with positively evaluated attributes is facilitated by shared norms and values that are fundamental to effective narration, and provide a foundation for effective facework" (p. 2216). The widows in Underwood's study told stories of their lives and of their happy marriages, and she found that they engaged in facework as self-heroization through this process. The widows verbally idealized their marriages, and their own dedication and love of their husbands, as examples of their shared values of "self-sacrifice, devotion to family and husband, hard work and frugality" (p. 2225). This finding agrees with that of Van den Hoonard (1999), who observed that older widows identified themselves strongly as their husband's wives, often recalling their husbands in a self-affirming way. Bennett and Vidal-Hall (2000) explored the ways that widows discussed their husbands' deaths to present the marriage in a good light, as a way of gaining positive face for themselves. Facework theory has not yet been applied to younger widows, so it is not yet known if this pattern is also reflected in this group.

<div align="center">Facework Online</div>

Facework scholars have studied how the theory applies to online communication for quite a while, and in recent years, blogs have become a focus of study for facework scholars. Scholars such as Miller (1995) have advanced facework theory as an effective lens for studying computer-mediated communication (CMC). More than other forms of CMC, blogs and social networks allow people to present a wide range of identity indicators, which introduces 'richness' to their communications (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

Facework also plays out every day through online interactions on social media platforms such as Facebook. West and Trester's (2012) exploration of Facebook norms revealed "a high

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degree of positive facework and Facebook-specific communication practices, which speaks to users' awareness of their posts' vulnerability to interpretations of impoliteness" (p. 137). They also noted that "doing positive facework in posts is a bit of a balancing act; it can easily tip in to a threat to a member's positive face – painting them as a braggart—if done incorrectly" (p. 137). West and Trester found that in many cases, sharing positive information about oneself resulted in disapproving reactions on Facebook. Facebook users mitigated this effect by using self-deprecating statements and emoticons, in an effort to appear more humble.

<div align="center">Bereaved Persons' Facework Online</div>

The data collected in this study is from online blogs, which are considered a form of social networking. For this reason, I am including an overview of the ways that bereaved people manage facework in this particular environment. Bereaved persons have unique reasons to manage face, both online and offline, and many have used a Social Networking Site (SNS) such as Facebook to express their identities. The concept of facework and bereavement online is consistent with the social constructionist approach, especially because of the ways widows use online services. Mitchell et al. (2012) noted that "meanings and social relationships are being actively constituted through Internet technology" (p. 417). With this in mind, scholars are now seeking to understand the ways that facework is enacted in the online environment.

Scholars have recently begun studying the concept of facework as it is expressed on SNS such as weblogs, forums, and Facebook. It is a natural application of the theory, since every action a person takes on these forums is broadcast to a wide audience. Because many young widows feel alone and do not have anyone else in their communities that share their circumstances, they often communicate online through blogs and social networking websites. It

seems likely that SNS provides a valuable setting for the grief work and advice that widows seek.

Bereaved persons' online expressions of grief clearly express both the social construction of a new identity and facework. Hoover, Hastings, and Musambira linked these concepts in their analysis of online postings by bereaved parents:

> We view the fragments of people's lives found on this website to be construction materials for such a social formation. Readers and posters will take the fragments that contain the most meaning for them, incorporate them into their own experience, and thus create the social identities they find most beneficial. (2009, p. 88)

The concept of identity construction is closely tied to facework, and both can be clearly seen in the ways bereaved persons express themselves online.

While not explicitly studying face, DeGroot and Carmack (2013) identified several themes in the work of a bereaved blogger that reflect negative face. Ambrusko (2013), a bereaved parent, withdrew from society, choosing instead to stay in bed, "because it was easier to hide from everything than to talk with others" (p. 460). The researchers also revealed a positive face benefit of bereavement blogs. Due to their asynchronous nature, blogs allow writers to "articulate their thoughts in a socially desirable manner" (DeGroot & Carmack, 2013, p. 464). "Users have more time for message construction and less stress from ongoing face-to-face interactions, which provides for self-awareness, reflection, selection, and transmission of preferable interaction (2013, p. 464). The current study extends the understanding of facework,

because facework theories have been applied to bereaved parents, but never to widows expressing themselves online.

<p style="text-align:center">Facework in Remarriage After Bereavement</p>

Young widows may struggle with transitioning from their newly formed identities as widows into a new identity as part of a newly formed couple, both internally and in their public self-presentation. Haase and Johnston (2012) noted that many of the young widows in their study "still felt married to their husbands, even while in new relationships" (p. 213). This feeling is further complicated by the need to explain it to others online.

When a new partner is added to the family after bereavement, there are many people affected by this event. Widows expressing themselves online seek to maintain both positive and negative face for themselves and their families. Bloggers often write for more than one audience at a time, with the recognition that strangers may also read their blog posts (Hollenbaugh, 2010). They must continually negotiate "the balance of self-presentation to friends and strangers in a public forum" (Bortree, 2005, p. 34). Goffman (1959) explains, in his discussion of front and backstage behavior, that people will change behavior depending on who is watching them. The groups of people that widows engage in facework with include their own children, the widow community, family members, friends, and in the case of a blog, the reading public.

If there are children involved, their opinions will be given great weight. One important finding of Bryant's (2003) study was that the stepparent holds a more central role in families formed after the death of a parent as opposed to after divorce. With no nonresidential parent present, the stepparent's role becomes more vital. Bryant also emphasized that all of the children in the stepfamilies wished to communicate openly about their deceased parents, however this

was difficult for some of the remarried couples. Thus the opinions and feelings of their children are one issue that remarried widows must consider when publicly presenting their new partner.

The widow community would seem to be a safe place for widows going through remarriage to express their feelings and experiences (DeGroot & Carmack, 2012). However, many widows have expressed quite the opposite. There are a number of widow discussion groups and blogs online, and some of these have members who are very harsh and judgmental towards widows who remarry. Ye Olde Widow Board is a large widow discussion group, and when widows discuss their new relationships on the site, they are frequently attacked (Anniegirl1138, 2012). As van den Hoonard (1999) noted, widows often identify themselves as still married to their late husbands, and gain their personal self-worth from the memories of their successful marriages. Some widows feel that a widow's duty is to live the rest of her life in her late husband's memory, to focus exclusively on her children, and to find fulfillment and gratification in those things. Underwood (2011) found that "solidarity by inclusivity" is nurtured through narratives between widows, and a widow in a new relationship is no longer included in the in-group (p. 2223). When a widow finds renewed joy and happiness with a new partner, and shares this news with other widows online, it contradicts the other widows' belief that they should find happiness in themselves alone, without a new partner. Therefore, the other widows often make harsh and critical remarks towards widows who remarry. Remarrying widows must engage in facework strategies to protect their own and their late husband's image when introducing their new relationship to this type of group.

Family members and friends are often supportive of widows who remarry, wanting them to find happiness and the security of a new life with a loving husband. However, some people

have different ideas of what timetable is appropriate for widow remarriage, and they feel justified in making judgments of remarrying widows. One participant in Haase and Johnston's 2012 study of young widows expressed her fear that if she didn't still wear her wedding ring, people would think "Well she's just moved right along" (p. 216). Former in-laws can be especially harsh (DeGroot & Carmack, 2012), as they may feel that their son has been replaced by an interloper, or that the widow is ignoring their grandchildren while seeking a new relationship. When I revealed my new relationship on Facebook, I received this message: "I hope that if you think people that knew him are ok w/ this behavior & are in agreement that it is in any way close to appropriate that you go on about your life the way you are in front of his children that you think again." My in-laws were very upset and took it as a personal affront when I entered a new relationship, and they very clearly expressed this online. When these concerns are expressed, widows may choose to engage in facework to defend themselves and assert their rights to find new love.

When a widow blogs, she opens up her life to an entirely new audience of people, including the general public. For all the benefits of blogging, Bortree (2005) also found that "risk of exposure and loss of privacy are threats to the world they have created" (p. 38). Many widows start blogging while in the depths of grief, to express their journey and memorialize their late husbands. But as time passes, widows grow and recover, and seek to find a new life, which sometimes includes a new love. Many individuals have strong opinions about what constitutes appropriate behavior for a widow. They may feel that widows should only focus on their children, or that appearing happy is an insult to the former partner. "It is evident that blogging one's grief can be beneficial to the bloggers and the audiences. However, numerous problems

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can plague the sharing of an emotional topic, such as death online" (DeGroot & Carmack, 2012, p. 168). Some of these include becoming open to attacks from others.

A widow who blogs can become the target of attacks if she violates the expectations that her readers have for a grieving wife.

> Online disinhibition, present in all online contexts, can lead to audience members leaving inappropriate comments on blogs. Blogging also blurs the line between public and private issues, which might be precarious to the blogger if too much personal information is disclosed (DeGrott & Carmack, 2012, p. 168).

Widow bloggers can then engage in facework to protect their reputations in the face of such attacks. My interest in this topic as a researcher stems from my own experience of communicating online after widowhood. I have personally experienced such attacks from relatives of my former husband, when I posted photos of myself appearing happy online. Sometimes through private emails, and sometimes through comments on my Facebook profile, these relatives made it clear that I should not appear to be enjoying life now that my first husband was deceased. One time I posed a smiling, happy profile photo and received this comment from my late husband's cousin: "You are the world's biggest narcissist. May God have mercy on your children." Other bloggers have expressed through postings on the Facebook page for their blogs that they had been attacked by people who thought they should not express their happiness in their new relationships online. These attacks online can clearly be categorized as face attacks, which Tracy defines as "communicative actions that deliberately seek to insult" (1998, p. 229). To prevent and address such face threats, widows expressing themselves online can use facework strategies.

The present study was designed to explore widows' online explanations of their new romances and marriages, with particular emphasis on what widows perceive to be the reactions of others to their remarriages. "The boundaries between mass and interpersonal communication are blurred and bent in the blogosphere, which provides a context ripe for testing our traditional ways of thinking" (Hollenbaugh, 2010, p. 1995). By illuminating some of the ways that remarried widows have managed their face while describing their new relationships through blogs, this study showed how identity management and Goffman's facework theory apply in this rapidly growing realm of communication.

Research Questions: Facework In Postbereavement Remarriage

1. What preventive facework strategies are employed by remarried widows online?

2. What face threatening acts and face attacks do widow bloggers experience when announcing new relationships online?

3. How do widow bloggers respond to these face threats and face attacks with corrective or restorative facework?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The present study focuses on widows re-entering romantic relationships by studying a unique population – widows who authored blogs about their experiences. I chose to conduct a systematic thematic analysis to describe how posts on widow blogs address the positive face needs of remarrying widows. Textual analysis of public texts, such as blogs, emphasize the individual's voice, allowing researchers to examine ongoing discursive phenomena (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). By using a thematic analysis of the stories of remarrying widows, I sought to describe the intersection of facework, bereavement, and disclosure of a new romantic relationship as expressed online.

Like other bereavement researchers, I grounded the study "in the qualitative/interpretive tradition in order to privilege the voices, grief experiences and stories" (Toller, 2008, p. 308) of remarried widows. I used both an inductive and deductive approach to data analysis. Inductively, I used the facework terminology of preventive facework, corrective facework, positive face threats and negative face threats. I then went through a deductive process of identifying patterns in the kinds of facework strategies and corrective facework approaches used by the widow bloggers.

Participants

This study will use unsolicited blog postings as the site of analysis, to obtain an uncensored view of the experiences of remarried widows. The sample includes three blogs written by widows who entered into new relationships. Criteria for eligibility in the sample included: 1)the blog was written by a woman under age 50 whose former husband had died;

2)the woman had publicly described her new relationship or remarriage on her blog; 3)the blog was publicly available for any person on the internet to view. For each of these blogs, the primary audience, as evidenced by comments on the blogs, is other widows and widowers. Purposive sampling was used to select the blogs based on my personal knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study.

Three different blogs were selected for data collection. One of them, One Fit Widow (www.onefitwidow.com) describes the journey of a widowed mother of two young children currently cohabiting with a divorced father of two. She lost her first husband to an airplane crash in 2009 and announced her new relationship in April 2013. The second is Annie Girl (www.anniegirl1138.com). She was a widow with one daughter who sought support on the widow's support group, where she met a widower and they married each other. The third, Out of Deep Waters (www.outofdeepwaters.com) is written by a woman with one teenage daughter who lost her husband to suicide. This blogger remarried two years after the death of her late husband.

While the widow blogs' subject matter is highly personal in nature, each blog exists in the public domain. "Institutional Review Boards have determined that in these instances, human subjects consent and blogger consent is not required" (DeGroot & Carmack, 2013, p. 455). Walther (2002) noted that archived blog content is publicly available and behavior in public places is not protected from recording for research, as there is no expectation of privacy. Therefore, as public texts, these public blogs are available for research use, and I have provided citations of the blogs and given credit to the bloggers. In addition to analyzing the public blog posts, I emailed each widow blogger to obtain further information. The research proposal was submitted to the university's Institutional Review Board, who deemed the research "exempt."

Procedure

I accessed each blog online and copied all content verbatim from the beginning of each blog to the present time into a document for analysis, yielding 467 pages of data. In addition, I accessed the Facebook pages for the blogs to view comments and responses related to new relationships. These comments and responses were copied verbatim into a document, yielding 160 pages of data. Because bloggers frequently delete negative or inflammatory posts, which are the subject of my study, I requested information from each blogger. I sent each blogger an email explaining my project, and asking them if they had ever been attacked on blogs or social media when they revealed their new relationships. I asked them to share what kinds of things people wrote or expressed to them online. Their email responses totaled 4 pages of data and were included in the thematic analysis. Two bloggers, One Fit Widow and Out of Deep Waters, responded to the interview request. The other one, Anniegirl, did not. However, Anniegirl's blog contains numerous reports of face threats and face attacks, so I was able to analyze these concepts for all three bloggers.

Rather than counting repeated words, I sought to identify themes that were related to the concept of new relationships and facework. I highlighted any blog posts that were related to finding new love and remarriage into separate documents for each widow blog analyzed. I read over the blog posts and emails three separate times and then began to categorize the statements into groups. These patterns were then fashioned into themes.

First, discourses involving positive speaker face were selected for study, because when friendliness is emphasized, as on blogs and social networking sites, "the reflex of social closeness is, generally, the reciprocal giving and receiving of positive face" (Brown & Levinson,

1987, p. 77). Positive speaker face was also the primary area of facework that McBride and Toller (2011) identified in their similar study focusing on bereavement and facework in general. I found examples of preventive facework by the widow bloggers, as they attempted to establish their desired identities in the face of a relationship change. I also noted disconfirming instances of the phenomenon of positive facework online. Schegloff (1972) notes that scholars should look for "deviant cases" that go against common communication practices. These occurrences are revealing because they assist in better understanding the rules in place, and the consequences for ignoring them.

Next, I selected writings that referred to face threats, face attacks, and the bloggers' use of restorative facework in direct response to them. Much of the written evidence of face threats and face attacks is not available online, because it had been deleted from the blogs. Degroot and Carmack (2012) noted that inaccessibility of such data, saying "this type of emotional rubbernecking may be difficult to document since bloggers are able to remove any offensive or hurtful comments" (p. 169). This motivated my decision to contact each widow blogger directly to obtain information about negative comments and attacks they had received. In the following section, I name and describe the themes and subthemes that emerged from my analysis of the remarried widows' online communication.

Data Analysis

My analysis of the postings on widow blogs seeks to draw out emergent discursive themes to further an understanding of widow remarriage, face threats and face attacks, and facework expressed online. My approach examined the individual posts on each widow blog using thematic analysis.

In general, thematic analysis involves three primary stages: identification of broad themes, identification of subthemes, and naming of themes. Researchers focus on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness to identify themes. After recognizing the emergence of broad themes, researchers then identify subthemes that emerge when multiple meanings appear within a given theme. Finally, researchers name these themes and subthemes (Wahl, McBride, & Schrodt, 2005, p. 284).

As noted, the facework terminology was used for identifying the broader categories, and then thematic analysis was used to identify subthemes. My thematic analysis looked for three elements: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). Recurrence "is present when at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning" (Keyton, 2006, p. 296). Repetition involves "the explicit repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences" (Keyton, 2006, p. 296). Forcefulness would be identified by "vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses, which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from others" (Owen, 1984, p. 276). In this case, because the data was written online, no vocal inflections could be observed. However, online communicators sometimes use emoticons and other symbols to express emotion and emphasis. For this reason, each post reply is presented verbatim, as it was written by the poster. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of all persons referenced in the blog postings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study's findings will be presented to reflect the usual order in which they occur chronologically in interaction. First we will look at preventive facework, then restorative facework as expressed in response to face threats and face attacks experienced by widow bloggers revealing new relationships online.

<u>Preventive Positive Facework</u>

Positive face wants were explored in terms of the experience of widows announcing new relationships online. Three categories of positive speaker facework were observed. These categories can be seen as preventive facework, because the widow bloggers are seeking to establish a desired identity prior to, or to avoid face threats and attacks. Widow bloggers performed preventive facework by expressing loyalty, humility and gratitude, and sadness. All of these expressions of preventive facework show solidarity, both with the deceased spouse and with the widow readers of the blogs.

Preventive Positive Facework Through Loyalty: Honoring Past Marriage

The widow bloggers wrote positively about their previous spouses, and in doing so, promoted their identities as loyal wives to the deceased, even though they had entered into new relationships. This preventive facework strategy pre-empts attacks by pointing out that the first spouse has not been forgotten. Throughout her blog and Facebook page, One Fit Widow (OFW) continually mentions her first spouse, Mitch, in an almost reverent manner. These statements are positive facework in that they promote an image of OFW as a loving and devoted spouse, even after her husband is dead. Here, OFW asserts that everything she does is for the sake of Mitch,

her late husband, and for her children. This affirms her identity as a loyal, faithful good wife and mother:

> Nearly everything I have done since his death, and continue to do with my life, is to teach them who he was. I chose to live a BIG life as an honor to his spirit and a tribute to his place in our hearts. They will hear stories, see photos, watch videos, see their mom take on the world and hopefully say..."I can do the same."

She describes how she honors Mitch by actively celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and other special days they shared, even after starting a new relationship. She is affirming her identity as a loving spouse to her deceased husband, and showing how that identity can co-exist with her new love.

> This weekend, to celebrate what would have been one of our special days, I take my time on this earth and I make it count. I honor his life by living mine in the most meaningful way I can. Every year on our wedding anniversary I do something that makes me smile. I do something that makes me remember all the reasons I love this life and all ways I can make a difference. This year I am heading to Sedona with my chapter 2, several very close friends, and our Quest group to take photos for our new website. These photos will do so much more than just represent One Fit Widow, they will represent Mitch and who he was at his core. We will hike in one of his favorite spots and show that living a full and happy life means getting out and being ALIVE.

The above examples demonstrate the continuing influence and importance of the deceased husband in OFW's life.

Even when announcing her new relationship, One Fit Widow always makes a point to honor her deceased spouse. She claims for herself the somewhat unusual identity of a loyal wife to two men, one deceased and one living:

I wasn't looking for love and I stopped feeling like I needed it. I felt blessed to have been loved and cherished as deeply as I was for as long as I had been. I believe from the bottom of my heart the love I shared with Mitch was special and a gift not given to everyone on this earth.

In the widow world we refer to love after loss as Chapter 2. It takes a very special person to walk into a widow's life post loss. There is pain, there is fear, there is family, in-laws, children….history. However, there are also gifts given to a survivor of great loss and those who dare to walk that path with a widow/widower can become recipients of such gifts. Gifts of perspective, gifts of deep love, gifts of cherishing the moment, and the gift of knowing the little things are all that really matter. These gifts are priceless and will often take the next chapter to a place of peace never known before.

OFW initially frames the new relationship as something she "wasn't looking for". Actively looking for a new relationship could be seen by others as perhaps disloyal to her deceased spouse. She further acknowledges the continuing importance of the relationship of her late spouse in her memories and in her "chapter 2".

One Fit Widow claims that her first husband, Mitch, is fully supportive of her new relationship with Keith. This reinforces her identity as a faithful and loyal wife to two men:

I'm 100% convinced that Mitch is looking down on my current state of happiness and saying, "that's my girl" oh and a little "I told you so". I've been preaching it for 2 years but this living in the moment thing rocks!

By living her life if a way that her deceased husband would approve of further demonstrates her loyalty to her husband even while pursuing a new romantic relationship.

Throughout the writings of One Fit Widow, we see examples of positive preventive facework by showing continued solidarity with her late husband. She repeatedly asserts her identity as a loving and faithful spouse to her deceased husband, and demonstrates how she enacts that identity by taking action with her new love to honor her late spouse. This positive facework strategy of honoring her past marriage appears to be well received, because One Fit Widow's blog shows very little evidence of face threats or face attacks.

The second blogger studied, Out of Deep Waters (ODW), also expresses loyalty to her deceased first husband, Chris. She shares that her new fiancé, Joel, joins her in honoring Chris's life. She describes their marriage using the imagery of a relay race, with her new husband carrying on the mission of the first. In this way, she promotes her identity as a faithful and loving widow even after remarriage:

As my long-time readers know, the anniversary of my husband's death was on May 4. On that day, I went, along with Chris' two sisters, out to the site where he took his life. My sis-in-laws invited Joel (my prince and husband-to-be) to come with us, which I thought was not only sweet but a precious gesture of their acceptance of him into my life. Joel has simply "picked up the baton" and is planning to finish the race that Chris began with me.

As demonstrated in the excerpts above, Both OFW and ODW talk about how their new husband carries on traditions to honor their late husband. OFW has something called "Team Mitch" where they run races and climb mountains in honor of her late husband. ODW has a "Chris Tree" in her house each Christmas to memorialize her late husband. Both of them took physical action, involving their new partners, to actively demonstrate their continued devotion to their late husbands. Their descriptions of these actions are positive facework in that they support the widow bloggers' desired identities as a faithful, loving wife to both their deceased and their new husbands.

Unlike OFW and ODW, Anniegirl actively chose to put aside her memories of her late husband when she remarried, thereby providing a disconfirming example of the pattern of portraying oneself as a loyal wife to the first husband. She positions herself as a good wife to her new husband, who has made the best choices to promote and protect her current marriage. Anniegirl rejects the idea of a Chapter Two as an assault on her individual identity that exists outside of her marriage:

> I am not much of a fan of the term, or the idea even, of a Chapter Two where life after being widowed is concerned. It implies that I didn't begin my life until the day I met my late husband,Will, and that everything and everyone who preceded him was but a prologue to actual living.

Anniegirl's positive facework is more about herself as an individual (promoting her negative face wants), not as a wife to either her deceased or her current husband. Anniegirl's discourse privileges her negative face over the positive facework of displaying the positive facework of solidarity with the deceased husband and with other widows who use the term "Chapter 2". She

promotes a positive image of herself, but in a more independent way. It is interesting to note that

this bluntness and lack of a positive focus on the previous spouse appears together with the high

frequency of negative remarks that we will discuss in the face attacks section. Much of

Anniegirl's blog consists of defending herself against critics in the widow community who feel

that the late spouse should be an enduring part of a new marriage. It appears that the positive

facework strategy of honoring the first husband worked well for One Fit Widow and Out of Deep

Waters. Anniegirl, who did not use this positive facework strategy, received more face threats,

as we will see in the later analysis.

Preventive Positive Facework Through Humility: Expressing Gratitude

The widow bloggers I studied presented a positive face to the public as a humble and

grateful person, by expressing their thanks to God, the Universe, or some other higher power for

the gift of a second chance at love. One Fit Widow frequently writes that she is blessed to have

found a wonderful new partner, as seen in this excerpt:

> I have this guy in my life who is instrumental in helping to bring 1FW Training to life.
>
> He supports my TEAM MITCH adventures, he loves the One Fit Widow Foundation, and
>
> he is pretty darn cute. This weekend he is staying and loving on my babies so I can go
>
> speak to and spend quality time with a bunch of wonderful widow sisters. Yep, blessed
>
> does not even start to describe my life.

OFW expresses gratitude, in this segment, to her new partner. She also provides further evidence

of her partner's role in maintaining her loyalty to her deceased spouse, Mitch.

Out of Deep Waters also expresses gratitude, however hers takes the form of writing

about her gratitude to God. The theme of her blog is restoration and rescue, and she expresses

her belief that God mercifully saved her from a dark struggle and brought her into a new and better life. She wrote this post about the first anniversary of her first husband's death:

In my mind, I began talking to God…

Thank you, Father, for such deep healing. Thank you, Father, for restoration. Thank you, Father, for new beginnings. Thank you, Father, for breathing life back into me. Thank you, Father, for making something beautiful out of something so ugly…much like you've taught me through your beautiful butterflies.

These expressions of gratitude by OFW and ODW are a form of positive preventive facework because they reveal the positive character traits of humility and gratitude. Readers responded to these posts about gratitude online with joy, saying that the widow bloggers gave them hope and renewed their faith in a higher power that worked all things out for good.

In her announcement of her new relationship, which took place less than a year after the death of her first husband, ODW attributes her good news to God, and writes of her humble gratitude. This post also introduces the theme of forfeiture of agency, seen in the writings of both OFW and ODW:

In short, I'm dating a man named Joel. God crossed our paths in only a way that He could do. I was looking for companionship, but God created something so much deeper.

One Fit Widow also demonstrated a forfeiture of agency through her claim that her deceased husband brought her and her new spouse together. Both can be seen as preventive facework because they are removing the writer from the role of agency, stating that the new love was something that happened to her rather than something she chose. If someone wants to challenge their "decision" to find a new partner, their respective discursive moves pit the person presenting

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the face threats against either God in ODW's case or the deceased spouse in OFW's. Both widows are also expressing gratitude toward sources that would be respected by many potential widow readers.

Out of Deep Waters uses positive preventive facework, presenting herself as a humble servant of God who has been blessed with a new love:

I knew I had to trust Him. He's carried me through so much pain and heartache in my 40 years, especially this last year. And so I did. As a result, a miracle ensued.

Joel and I fell in love rather quickly! Yes, I used the "L" word. Neither of us could believe how quickly it happened, but it did, and who were we to stop what God had obviously birthed? We've allowed God to direct our steps no matter how "crazy" it may seem to the world.

ODW acknowledges that her fear of misperceptions of others, what her friends and family would think, presented concerns for her. In the end, however, she states that God is the one who caused her new relationship to take place, and that she had given the issue over to Him. She attributes all of her decisions and beliefs about her new love to the work of God in her life. This is a very powerful facework strategy, because anyone who now objects to her decision is challenging the will of God. .

The above data demonstrate how One Fit Widow and Out of Deep Waters presented themselves as women whose relationships were caused by an outside force, either by the will of a late husband or of God. They expressed their feelings of humility and gratitude for what had happened to them, always reinforcing that they did not seek or deserve the new love that came into their lives. The third blogger, Anniegirl, is very different from OFW and ODW in many

ways. Her writing style is more practical and definitely less religious. She rarely expresses any form of gratitude or thanks, except for this one post shortly after her remarriage:

> Although I was recently reminded that I have been widowed for less than two years and only married again for about five minutes, I want to take a moment to recognize my wonderful husband, Rob, and be grateful for our life together and bask in the glow of our love and happiness for all the world (a small world indeed as there are but a few loyal readers here) to see.

Anniegirl does not express gratitude to any higher power, and she is much more pragmatic and less humble when describing her new relationship in this passage. She takes all the credit for herself and her new husband, saying that their happiness is the result of their smart choices:

> Whenever I speak with someone about Rob, the wedding or going to live in Canada, the conversations reference words like "fairy tale" and "dream". People will tell me that they are so happy for me because I deserve to have some happiness after all I have been through. I don't see my life now as dream like or Disneyesque, and I know of people who suffered far more than I ever did and are not contemplating nearly as wonderful a future. I am not really much different than anyone else. We all have opportunities come up over the course of our lives and some are seized and others let by. The opportunity for love came along in Rob and for him in me and we were optimistic enough, and smart enough, to recognize it and accept.

Anniegirl embraces her own agency in the development of a new relationship and celebrates her new relationship without celebrating the relationship with her first husband. In short, she simply appears to engage in less preventive facework of this type.

All of the widow bloggers expressed their gratitude for their new relationships. One Fit Widow frames hers as the result of her late husband's wishes. Out of Deep Waters claims that God brought her new love into her life. These two bloggers managed their positive face through preventive facework by removing themselves from agency, and by presenting humble and grateful image. Anniegirl shares her happiness at her new life, but gives the credit to her own choices, not to any higher power. Anniegirl's positive facework focuses on herself as a smart individual who makes good decisions, not as a humble receiver of good fortune or blessings.

Preventive Positive Facework Through Sharing Sadness: Reflecting on Loss

The widow bloggers often reflect upon their loss and the many ways it continues to affect their lives. This expression of sadness can be seen as facework because it expresses solidarity with their readership, most of which is widows who are struggling with the same issues post-loss. The three bloggers write of their sadness in very different ways, but all of them arouse sympathy and affirm their identity as a grieving wife. One Fit Widow speaks of her sadness when sharing a post about the love between fathers and daughters with this commentary:

> I cried when I read this tonight. I cried because I wish Mitch was here to give Addy all
> of these things - what an awesome daddy he was. I cried because Keith is here and gives
> Addy all of these things and she loves him so. The life of a blessed widow. Crying for
> what is lost, and crying for all the blessings that are. #doubleedgesword #blessed
> #deathsucks

In the above data, the blogger blends both the feelings of gratitude as well as that of sadness. OFW balances the shared experience of loss with her readers and clearly labels herself a "widow" while also acknowledging the new romance. By creating solidarity with the readers, she places herself in a better position to then also discuss aspects of her life which may differ from other widows.

One Fit Widow writes of the difficulty of dating, and that her new love must coexist with her lasting love for her late husband. Sharing this intimate information builds solidarity with her widow readers, and reinforces her identity as a good wife, even while dating a new person.

I'd already figured out that dating a widow was not for the faint of heart. I was still in love with my late husband, and there would always be a part of my heart that belonged to him. That's a big obstacle for most guys to deal with. There are emotions, memories, songs, inside jokes, circles of friends, but above all else there is a bond and history that was not completed. A history cut short not because someone decided it was over, but because death called long before either one of us were ready.

The writings of One Fit Widow show how her sadness at losing her first husband mixes with joy in her new relationship. This establishes her positive face, claiming her identity as a loyal wife who can feel solidarity with other grieving widows.

Out of Deep Waters speaks of her sadness and pain in another way, by revealing the pain and fear that she feels, and her anxiety and fear of losing her new husband. By sharing this pain, she can build solidarity with her widow audience, as she shares ways that her loss has ongoing impacts on her life.

I'm deeply anxious whenever I don't hear from my husband after a few hours. I know

this sounds silly, but in all honesty, after dealing with Chris being "missing" for over 24

hours prior to discovering that he had died, I panic now when I'm unsure of Joel's

whereabouts.

She goes on to explain some situations when she could not contact her new husband, and how

she lives in fear of losing him. Although her experience of a romantic relationship may differ

from some of her readers, sharing the ways that the death continues to affect her life is something

that many may be able to relate to.

In another post, ODW addresses the question of whether she is still grieving the death of

her first husband. In the following segment, she talks about how the pain she went through

empowers her to help others. She also effectively deflects possible criticisms about forgetting her

husband by affirming the depth of the loss. She uses quotes from the Bible to provide advice and

comfort to other widows, asserting her role as a leader for widowed women.

I often get asked the question (especially since I'm remarried and appear to most to have

healed from Chris' death quite completely)…do I simply put him out of my mind? Is it

easy to just forget?

As long as I have a mind that remembers, I'll never forget. Sometimes, I remember the

great times we had together…from all the silly moments to the fun adventures to

laughing hysterically. But, there are other times, I remember the worst day of my

life…the day Chris' lifeless body was recovered. Unfortunately, I can't forget that either.

While the easy way out would be to simply forget, I know it's in the remembering God is

most glorified. It's in the remembering that I can comfort those with the same comfort

that I've also received from Him (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). It's in the remembering that I can

rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). It's in

the remembering that I can see how very near God has been to me all the days of my life,

from the tiniest of celebrations to the greatest times of pain (Hebrews 13:5).

God reached for me when I was in a pit. He rescued me from very deep waters, and He's

been restoring me ever since! And for that reason alone…I choose not to forget.

In the above excerpt, Out of Deep Waters defends her identity as a grieving widow, asserting her

fellowship face with other widows even now that she is remarried. And she promotes her

competence face by offering advice. While she acknowledges change and growth in her life

through her advice and subsequent relationship, she makes it evident that she has not forgotten

her first husband's life and death.

On this issue, as with the others, the blogger Anniegirl expresses herself differently from

the other bloggers. She rarely mentions sadness over the loss of her first husband. The only time

she did that was with this post, about moving away from her home to live with her new husband:

It's silly to let all these endings drag me down when I have so much love and life

surrounding me and so many happy events and happier days and nights to look forward

too. But the past must be bid a proper farewell and tucked in to rest for a while. I want to

meet the future with my heart and mind fully present and that means letting certain

memories and regrets have their moment when they come knocking. Acknowledge the

past that could have been while remembering that you never were meant to live there.

The above excerpt may also build solidarity and fellowship face with other widows who are facing their sadness and trying to move on with life. As with the previous excerpt, Anniegirl points to some of the challenges that accompany change.

In another post, Anniegirl expresses her pain in a different way, since she married a widower who has fond memories of a happy first marriage. She bemoans the fact that she can never be called "the love of his life." By sharing this pain, she can build her identity as a person who understands both sides of the widow remarriage issue:

> Though one may get past the need to be prettier, smarter, better in bed, nicer, and the fact that one didn't get here first, most still harbor a secret – usually never spoken – need to be THE love. The one that can't be topped or surpassed by anyone EVER.
>
> So I cornered him the bedroom one day while he was putting away his socks. His back was to me as I casually asked him, "Isn't it odd that if we end up staying together that you'll go down in history as the love of my life?" He stopped putting his socks away and turned around and stared at me with what looked like sadness in his eyes and said "Awwww. That's so nice". He had said it to me like he pitied me. Like he'd turned around and found a little baby bird with hearing aids lying on his bed. At that moment I realized that he couldn't say it back to me and I was devastated. It took me months to stop telling every friend and taxi driver how I was with a man who would never be able to tell me that I'm the love of his life.

While the source of Anniegirl's pain here is not the death of her husband, it does point to one source of sadness that can be entailed in remarriage after widowhood.

Each widow blogger shares different aspects of the pain and sadness she still feels after the death of her first husband. The three women all lost not only their first spouse, but the life they had lived and the future they had planned together. By acknowledging and sharing the pain of these losses, the widow bloggers perform positive preventive facework. They are supporting their identities as widows who can share the pain of other widows, and as wives who have not forgotten their first husbands.

<p style="text-align:center;">Face Threats, Face Attacks, and Restorative Facework</p>

The widow bloggers in this study all received some negative feedback from their readers when they revealed their new romantic relationships. These negative comments ranged in intensity and scope, and can therefore be classified as either face threats or face attacks. The face threats and face attacks experienced by widow bloggers included unwanted advice, reader abandonment, negative comments, and personal attacks. Widow bloggers responded to these face threats with restorative, or corrective, facework, including responding to defend themselves and deleting the negative comments. In this section, the face threats or face attacks and the restorative facework will be presented together, so the reader can observe the specific facework strategy that each widow blogger used to respond to the face threats and attacks she received.

For this analysis, I used Goffman's (1967) original definition of a face threat, which is anything that calls into question the identity that a person is trying to convey. Both positive face threats and negative face threats were selected for analysis. "Positive face is threatened when one's fellowship is devalued or one's abilities are questioned. Negative face pertains to the desire to be free from constraint and imposition" (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 5). Each face threat is analyzed in relation to face, and the restorative facework that the blogger used to respond, if

any, is identified and analyzed immediately following the excerpt. Face threats received by widows included challenges to their rights to move on, unwanted advice, and ceasing to read the blogs. They performed restorative facework by appealing to religious faith, to individual freedom, and by using humor.

<center>*Face Threats*</center>

One common type of face threat identified in the data involved threats to negative face in which the widow's freedom to move on to a new romantic relationship is challenged. Her positive face is also called into question insofar as her decision to form a new romantic relationship is questioned. Some reading the blog responded with anger or distress to the mention of a new romantic relationship. An example of this can be seen in Out of Deep Waters' post which says.

> I've received countless (literally too many to count) notes, phone calls, cards, emails, comments, and words of support in response to my news of new love and engagement to Joel. However, I've received less than five comments of disapproval, concern, shock, or disdain.
>
> It seems to be the 3-4 comments I've received from complete strangers that do not know me at all that are choosing to rip me apart with their words. It may only be a sentence, but one sentence can be heart-shattering.

ODW's blog reveals the hurtfulness of the threats to her face as she enters a new relationship. The way that she presents the information about the face threats, however, points to one strategy. She provides a context for the criticisms by first pointing to the unique nature of her critics. The

critics are a minority in the responses. This may indirectly point to the public consensus about her decision to date as a positive one.

Out of Deep Waters defends herself in terms of her religious faith. This can be seen as a form of corrective facework, by putting the agency for her actions away from herself and onto a higher power:

> The enemy, however, wants me to dwell on the lows from well-meaning people who really do not know me, my heart, my background, or my life story other than the snippets I choose to reveal. It can be those types of comments that make me want to withdrawal from ministry all together – that make me want to stop blogging – that make me want to quit sharing from the depths of my heart – that make me want to remove myself from the life of social media and go back into my shell and "hide" where it's safe.
>
> I can't do it friends. No matter the few painful looks and out-of-line comments, I press on. As I've said before and choose to say again, I live my life for an audience of One!

Out of Deep Waters uses restorative facework by citing her religious beliefs. She claims that the Enemy (referring to Satan) wants her to dwell on bad things like the negative comments. But she chooses to focus on the One (referring to God) whose opinion really matters to her. She is defending her negative face, or freedom from unwanted advice and negative commentary, by claiming that her actions are right because God approves of them.

Another way a widow blogger's negative face was threatened as through advice-giving. One Fit Widow received the following face threatening comment on her blog's Facebook page. This response was written on her page after she posted about her new love, calling him her Chapter 2:

I am Chapter 2....and it's no easy place to be. I struggle with it every day....my partner has

no idea....I love him with all my heart but it's difficult. Please never take him for granted

or make him feel like a consolation prize. I feel like I'm just the next best thing and not

what he really wants. I wish you all the best.

This is a threat to One Fit Widow's negative face, because it is uninvited advice. When this

commenter offered advice, he/she could cause the hearer (widow blogger) to feel imposed upon,

as if she had an unwanted obligation to comply with the others' advice. The desire to make

one's own decisions is an example of negative face, because it seeks to avoid the imposition of

others when they announced their new relationships. She did not respond to this comment, but

decided to ignore it, declining to use restorative facework in this instance. As we can see from

the examples above, many face threats can threaten both positive and negative face

simultaneously, and the widows' responses usually address both their desired identity and their

freedom to make their own choices.

Threats to Positive Fellowship Face and Restorative Facework

The widow bloggers received threats to their fellowship face, which is one aspect of

positive face. Some readers stopped reading the widow blogs, feeling that the bloggers no longer

represented them as widows because they had entered into new relationships. Out of Deep

Waters wrote this blog post after announcing her new relationship:

On the one hand, there are several of you that I still converse with regularly…some are

still widowed (and we'll forever share that bond – married or not), some are newly

married as well, and some of you…well, you're probably not even reading this, because

you dropped me like a bag of flour as soon as my life didn't line up with yours anymore.

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Some of ODW's readers abandoned her blog and didn't read it anymore after she announced her new relationship. This shows a threat to her positive face, or fellowship face, as a person worth listening to and spending time with.

> ODW used corrective facework to respond to this threat to fellowship face as follows:
> That's okay. As I've learned on more than one occasion, our lives are constantly changing, and I now welcome each season and all of the blessings (and not-so-blessed times) that go with it.

This widow blogger responded to the face threat of readers abandoning her blog with calm acceptance. She did not seek to defend herself, but gave a pleasant and rational response to the changes in her readership.

> Anniegirl reported several face threats when she announced her new relationship online. Several of her widowed readers thought that she should integrate her first husband into her new relationship rather than leaving her first marriage behind. One person commented the following when Anniegirl wrote a post about moving on with a new partner:

> If you truly love us, you would embrace our lost love as much as we do.

Anniegirl responded defensively, asserting her right to move on and not to live in continual grief:

> And if you loved them, you'd not expect such a thing because though a new partner can be understanding, sympathetic and even feel bad for what you've been through – grieving isn't a date night activity. They can't feel what you feel and to ask them to periodically put the brakes on their romance to cater to your heartbreak over someone else is cruel.

Here she is using corrective facework to respond to the face threat, claiming that her choices are in the best interest of her new relationship. In essence, her loss of fellowship face with other

widows is eclipsed by her concern with fellowship face for her new romantic partner. She reveals her frustration at being judged, making it clear that the comment on her blog was perceived as a face threat:

> And frankly, I feel misunderstood and judged. Not a positive or negative? My ass. It is the same old tripe message that implies that those of us who move on must not have had good marriages or loved our spouses. And don't get me started on the whole "soul mate thing". One widow's comment on the post actually put forth the self-serving notion that people who move on never experienced real love. That their marriages were inferior and lacked the special magic that allows them to "get it". They were to be pitied.

In the above excerpt, Anniegirl performs corrective facework by addressing the negative claims that she did not really love her first spouse. She complains about those who attack widows who have moved on, saying that the claim that they did not experience real love is unfair. In the following post, she dramatizes the negative face threats by comparing them to the Hindu practice of widow burning:

> There can be a certain amount of resentment from those who believe that the widowed person's love for their departed one was not quite up to Romeo & Juliet standards – it's not just Hindus who think a crispy fried widow is the best kind of widow but, by and large, the sense that all is now "normal" and "okay" again is palpable.

By using humor, Anniegirl makes those who attack her seem ridiculous, and establishes her identity as a woman who is doing the right thing in the face of unfair cultural standards for widows. In the face threats above, we see threats to the widow bloggers' fellowship face as a worthy companion for other widows, and also to their identities as good and loving wives.

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Face Attacks and Restorative Facework

Although the literature suggests that a face attack occurs when a person intentionally tries to challenge a presented face of another, for the purpose of this study, instances where the widow perceived an intentional direct attack on a desired identity were coded as face attacks. The face-attack moves reported by widow bloggers can be categorized as positive impoliteness, which Culpeper (1996) defines as "strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants" (p. 356). Therefore, in my analysis of face threats, I identified the specific situated face wants that widow bloggers possess. When the widow bloggers were attacked, they used the corrective strategies of defending themselves and also deleting posts. The blog excerpts below are examples of face threats and the bloggers' responses. The face threats experienced by widow bloggers included accusations of moving on, of beginning a new relationship too quickly, and of causing harm by offering bad advice.

One face threat that widow bloggers received was the accusation of "moving on." This implies that the blogger no longer can claim the identity of a widow because she has entered a new relationship. One Fit Widow announced her new relationship 4 years after her first husband's death. She responded to my email interview, stating that she had received a negative public comment from a stranger on her blog after posting about her new love:

> Yes, I had lots of positive responses but one very negative woman tell me that she had lost all respect for me since I "moved on."

This is a face attack because it intentionally maligns the receiver and One Fit Widow interpreted it as such, as she explained when responding to my questions:

I did consider it an attack at the time and I got pretty upset. Later I realized it was her issue, not mine and I let it go. I can't control how others feel about me.

It made me very sad and angry. It's my life and like most widows I don't like to be judged for my choices post loss.

When her positive face was attacked, OFW asserted her conclusion that her negative face, her ability to make choices, needed to prevail. She responded privately to the person through email and deleted the public negative post. One Fit Widow responded to the attack with a private email as she describes here:

I responded that it was my life to live and my choices were not relevant to her. Later I looked at her Facebook page and realized that she was 7 years post loss and very sad and stuck in her past. That's when I toned down my response and let her be. She has to walk her own path in her own time.

This widow blogger used restorative facework, defending herself in a message to the attacker, asserting her right to make her own decisions. She also questioned the source who was making the face attacks, concluding that her attacker lacked credibility. She then deleted the negative post, which is another form of corrective facework.

Out of Deep Waters revealed her new relationship eleven months after the death by suicide of her first husband. In her response to my interview, she reported some negative feedback:

Yes – I received a couple of negative responses…mostly from women who thought I was jumping into another relationship too soon. However, none had ever been widowed themselves.

ODW appeared to dismiss the face threats readily by noting that the unwanted opinions came from unqualified sources: those who had never been widowed.

The corrective facework strategy ODW used was to respond and then delete negative information from her blog:

> I don't have the negative responses anymore. Most came in the form of a message via the Contact Form on my blog, and I responded and then deleted. I did have a few come in as comments, but I never "approved" then, so I ended up sending them to my trash folder eventually.

One advantage of managing face threats in a blog situation is the opportunity to compose one's responses, and to delete those comments when the blogger chooses to do so.

Anniegirl did not reply to my interview questions, but her blog contains several examples of face threats she received and her responses to them. Anniegirl announced her new relationship on her blog just over a year after her first husband's death. Unlike the other bloggers, Anniegirl posted one of her face attacks, and her responses to it, in a single blog post. The face attacks are presented below in italics, along with Anniegirl's response in regular text. Each face threat and restorative facework strategy is identified. The commenter's first attack questions Anniegirl's credentials to write a widow blog (attacking her competence face):

> *I read your bio and I see no qualifications for counseling or psychology or any credentials whatsoever. So this is just opinion.*

Anniegirl responds by saying she is sharing from her own experience and from published research, thereby defending her competence face:

In the widowosphere, there are only those who have "been there" possibly "done that" and I am fairly certain that I referred to the post you objected to as "advice". My "sampling" as you call it includes widowed of both genders and those who date and/or are married to widowed and that includes widowed remarried to widowed, which includes me and my husband. I also have bothered to read the latest research by George Bonanno and not just steep myself in anecdote or the rather shoddy pseudo-science of Kubler-Ross on which much of widow/grief culture is based. But, you are correct in that I have no formal training – no more than just about everyone else who claims to be "helping" widowed or those who date them.

Anniegirl's response is rather thorough in establishing what she perceives as qualifications. The logical tone of her response suggests that Anniegirl does not find the threat very upsetting.

Next, the commenter claims that Anniegirl is causing harm to other widows, which challenges her positive face as a helpful and caring person:

You need to take responsibility for your posts and the harm it may do. There is already ALOT of misinformation on this subject written by well meaning individuals, even widowers. But they do what everyone does with this issue. They bring their own playbook and act like it is THE playbook.

Anniegirl responds with a defense of her beliefs, defending her competence face and her intention to help others. She defends her belief in personal responsibility and that moving on sends a positive message to her children, which defends her positive face as a good mother.

The commenter then attacks Anniegirl's positive face as a believer in marriage by saying that she treats marriage as disposable, because she has moved on to a new marriage that does not revolve around her previous spouse:

My wife IS a part of me an always will be. You seem to treat our loss like much of America treats their marriages… as disposable. Ask yourselves this. Would you want your Significant Other to put away pictures of their late father or mother? Why is this different? If you feel that you are a replacement, well..maybe it's time to take a look in the mirror! More importantly, who is the one who is insecure? If you are offended by a piece of paper with an image on it, perhaps you need to look at your OWN insecurities.

This post vividly demonstrates the type of face attacks that widow bloggers receive. The commenter is calling into question Anniegirl's identity as a loving wife to her first husband, as a competent advisor, and as a caring person.

This harsh face threat is met by a vigorous response that effectively serves to define aspects of her identity that were threatened and to invoke her deceased husband as a rationale for her actions.

You don't know how I treat my loss because I choose not to wear my loss on my sleeve all that often. And I am a huge believer in marriage. Anyone who knows or even just follows me knows that. Photos can rest in books or on screen savers, but frankly, my husband is more important to me than a photo of my late husband (who was the son of a young widow himself and often told me that he'd be greatly disappointed in me if I let his memory stand in the way of my living and loving again – fyi).

Anniegirl responds eloquently to each attack, using restorative facework that defends her right to her own opinion and the fairness and reasonableness of her own beliefs.

The above excerpts and responses exemplify the types of strategies used for corrective facework by the widow bloggers. They responded to face attacks by deleting, pointing to the large consensus approving of the blogger's actions, responding privately, questioning the credibility of the person doing the attacking, and by asserting that the widow is only doing what her deceased husband would have wanted. The widow bloggers in this study were attacked for announcing their new relationships, and they used corrective facework to respond gracefully but firmly to their critics.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Discussion

This study sought to discover evidence of preventive facework, face threats and face attacks, and corrective facework used in online blogs written by widows. The positive facework seen in these accounts aligns with Spencer-Oatey's (2007) definition, whereby facework is seen as self-association with attributes that are positively valenced. I found that the two widows who used certain preventive facework strategies experienced fewer face attacks. OFW reported that she had only one face attack after announcing her new relationship. This may be due in part to the time (four years) that had elapsed following her husband's death. The way she announced and continues to discuss her new relationship, frequently mentioning her first husband in an honoring way, may also help defuse any aggression that people may feel. According to Goffman (1959), couples form a "joint identity" or linking of individual identities. OFW and ODW continued to protect this joint identity of their previous couplehood by supporting the positive images of their first husbands. This appears to have helped to repel face threats and face attacks by blog readers.

In contrast, Anniegirl made it clear that she was moving on and starting fresh, and she received an outpouring of negative feedback. This is an example of a "deviant case" as explained by Schegloff (1972), and the responses to Anniegirl's lack of positive support for her deceased husband's identity online shows that she violated a norm for the widow community.   It appears that certain preventative strategies, such as honoring the late husband and expressing gratitude and sadness, are helpful in avoiding face attacks. Awareness of the example and

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experiences of these widow bloggers can help other widows who write online to better understand their own experiences.

This paper set out to discuss the applicability of Goffman's work to the analysis of the presentation of self and of facework in the online world, particularly in the blogging context. It extends the work of both scholars studying widow facework, such as Underwood (2011), and also DeGroot and Carmack's (2012) research on bereavement blogs and identity online. The widow bloggers in this study had created identities for themselves online as grieving widows, as empowered women, and as good wives and mothers. When each announced her new relationship, there was a change in her public identity, or face. Whether the bloggers were defending their behavior to online critics before or after receiving face threats, they clearly employed and described strategies to neutralize the disparagement of their new relationships. Each widow blogger used facework in her effort to explain her new relationship and her own new identity.

Face threats are a necessary component of all kinds of human communication, and the widow bloggers experienced some threats to their public image when introducing their new relationships. But the blog commenters went beyond mere unintentional slights and offenses to the level of face threats and face attacks. In keeping with Underwood's (2011) findings, the widows in this study reported that the attacks they experienced came from other widows, who felt that a widow in a new relationship is no longer included in the in-group. Other widows attacked the widow bloggers, accusing them of being insensitive and of abandoning the widow group. These attacks were perceived by the widow bloggers as intended to disrespect and insult. In response to the attacks, they employed restorative, or corrective, facework.

The results of this study indicate that announcing a new relationship impacts how widows express their identity through facework online. Positive face was represented in three ways. First, widows depicted themselves as good wives both to their late husbands and to their new partners by honoring their past marriages. Second, widow bloggers expressed humility and gratitude, by acknowledging that their present circumstances were controlled by forces outside themselves. Thirdly, widow bloggers shared their sadness over the loss of their first husbands. These positive facework expressions appeared to be helpful in reducing face attack and face threats. Even when they reported their new relationships sensitively, with respect to their former husbands, widows in the present study reported experiencing face threats and face attacks online as they sought to protect their own positive face needs.

This paper contributes to conceptualizing facework online as identity work, and to investigating identity construction through the lens of face as conceptualized by Goffman (1967). This study uses different aspects of the Goffman framework in understanding the negotiation of online identities. The online blogs explored here, like those in Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013), demonstrate that "Goffman's original framework is not only still applicable, but also of great usefulness as an exploratory framework for understanding identity through interaction and presentation of self in the online world" (p. 110). Facework and identity theory form a powerful lens through which we have been able to reveal and understand the challenges faced by widow bloggers.

<u>Limitations</u>

This study was limited by the fact that the communication practices were examined in only one context. Bavelas (2002) pointed out that online written dialogues present many

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limitations, including a lack of knowledge about timing, a lack of context, and the absence of nonverbal cues. The online postings did not lend themselves to interaction by researchers, resulting in a lack of opportunity to pose follow-up questions. I was able to identify themes that addressed face issues, but not to ask participants to elaborate upon them further. And as one of the participants, Anniegirl, noted in her blog, "The Internet is a small place and the blogosphere smaller still. It could be argued that those who populate it aren't really representative of the larger population or even what is considered "normal".

The experience of bereavement in an online setting inherently has limitations. People posting online may experience "trolling" or people who find pleasure in making harsh statements, or in this case, face threats and attacks. Widows may experience fewer of these kinds of face threats in face-to-face interactions. The types of face threats and attacks may differ in face-to-face interactions and in social media such as Facebook may differ from those found in the more public setting of blogs.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of information about the larger group of widow bloggers beyond those being studied. Future studies should examine bloggers through more direct means, such as a survey. A survey would allow widow bloggers to provide a self-reflexive account of their facework strategies. The widows would also be able of identify how face threats varied in different settings.

By only focusing on positive face, this study excluded many negative face themes that could be found in the data. Metts noted that "attempts to enhance one type of face can threaten the other" (2000, p. 84). Widow bloggers may have been attempting to defend their negative space, or need for privacy and freedom from imposition, by positive facework. Discovering the

interactions between positive and negative face needs and threats in the online writings of widows would be very enlightening.

<center>Future Research</center>

The emergence of facework as a concern of the widow bloggers in this study raises another question: why is there so much criticism of widows who remarry? What image does our society wish for a widow to portray? A future qualitative study into the experiences of widow bloggers and their audiences would further illuminate this issue. Interviews could be conducted with widow bloggers and separately, with their readers. Questions would focus on the facework issues noted in this study, to obtain more expanded descriptions of the ways in which widows managed face when announcing new relationships online. Readers of widow blogs would be able to express their expectations and reactions to these announcements.

When reading the widow bloggers' writings, I was often struck with the intense focus on the first husband, with the second husband often seeming like an afterthought. It would be helpful to interview the husbands of remarried widows to find out how they feel about how they are described online, and the extent of the role the first husband plays in their current marriage. Terms like "Chapter Two" and "Second Chance" seem to me a bit demeaning to the new husband's value and place in a widow's life. I wonder if the new husbands are pleased with the ways they are described online. Grinwald and Shabat (2008) studied the ways that new partners are impacted by the invisible presence of the deceased spouse in a remarriage. "Despite the tendency to turn the dead partner into something 'hallowed,' and very difficult to live up to, the new husband or wife needs to be patient with regard to the 'invisible' figure" (p. 112). It would

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be interesting to find out how the new husbands feel about the way that widow blogs publicly heroize the former spouse.

Reading blogs written by widows offers a window into the complex lives these women live, both in their private lives and online. Many young widows are forced unexpectedly into new identities, for which they may have no example or norm to follow. Some turn to the internet to express their struggles as they try to find a new place in the world. Because reality is socially constructed, widow bloggers' view of their own reality results in their manipulation of face. This study contributes to conceptualizing facework online as identity work, and to investigating identity change through the lens of face as conceptualized by Goffman (1967). It enriches the field of communication by shining light on one small group of women. The ways that these widows manage face and online identity expands our understanding of these concepts and how they apply to all human beings.

APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

University of Central Florida

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
            FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Sunshine J. Baker**

Date: **December 18, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 12/18/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Title of Project: Blogging Love After Loss: How Widows Experience Face Threats and Use Facework Strategies When Revealing New Relationships Online
Investigator:	Sunshine J. Baker
IRB Number:	SBE-13-09869
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 12/18/2013 04:30:54 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

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