

Online dating can benefit widows, professors find

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Online dating profiles may serve an important role in the grieving process, say two University of Delaware communication professors. Their new study, published in the August issue of the journal *Death Studies*, chronicles how widowed online daters use their profiles as a place to make sense of the past while articulating a vision of a future life.

Assistant Prof. Dannagal Young and Associate Prof. Scott Caplan collected more than 500 online dating profiles from divorced and widowed individuals of both sexes between 18 and 40 years old. They examined the profiles for evidence of healthy approaches to loss, such as describing the backstory behind the [divorce](#) or death of the spouse, and any attempt to make sense of the past experience, an act called “cognitive reappraisal.”

They found widowed daters are more likely than divorcees to:

- Mention the backstory;
- Try make sense of/find meaning in it; and
- Articulate a vision of their future partnership.

In addition, those who include a backstory are significantly more likely to describe how the experience changed them for the better. The profiles of widowed daters contained numerous references to life lessons learned, life as a fleeting experience, and the most important thing in life being

love.

“Many surviving spouses point to a shift in priorities and a new appreciation for the fragility of life after their spouse dies,” explains Caplan. “Think of it as a post-loss enlightenment.”

In addition to meaning-finding and sense-making, there is another factor that correlates strongly with life satisfaction among widows and widowers: repartnering.

“Online dating seems like a way to bring these healthy behaviors together,” says Young.

Young, widowed in 2006, and Caplan, divorced in 2007, came up with the idea for the study after entering the online [dating](#) pool themselves.

Their results suggest creating an online profile could play a beneficial role for widows and widowers.

Provided by University of Delaware

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