**Engagement as a Mediator of Loneliness and the Self-Disclosure Effect on Perceived Gratification: A Case Study of Closed Facebook Groups for Israeli Women**

**Abstract**

The study examines closed Facebook groups organized by women and appeals made explicitly to Israeli women through them. It maps the activities of members of these groups, identifying relationships between the patterns observed and the characteristics of the women participating in these online communities, and the role such groups play in their lives. Findings from questionnaires completed by 526 Israeli women who are members of at least one of these groups show that closed Facebook groups for women have considerable potential to satisfy their members’ needs, compensate for shortcomings in their lives, and provide them with alternatives to dysfunctional circumstances they experience.

*Keywords:* closed Facebook groups, engagement, women, self-disclosure, loneliness

**Engagement as a Mediator of Loneliness and the Self-Disclosure Effect on Perceived Gratification: A Case Study of Closed Facebook Groups for Israeli Women**

Social media have profoundly affected the lives of hundreds of millions worldwide, and the highly significant role they play has provided the starting point for abundant research. However, as Smock et al. (2011) indicates, it is usually wiser to examine particular social media platforms, such as Facebook, rather than social media as a whole. One of the most interesting phenomena on Facebook is the proliferation of closed groups, and, in Israel, women’s closed groups are particularly salient. Some of these have tens of thousands of members and a few in the 100,000–150,000 thousand range and more. This study focuses on the roles these groups play in their members' lives to shed light on this phenomenon.

***Theoretical Background***

***Social Media***

The term “virtual community” was coined in the 1990s when the “Web 2.0” online environment we are familiar with now was still inconceivable. Rheingold (1993) describes a virtual community as a social group found only on the internet, but asserts that it is formed only when enough people actively participate in their public discussions and express enough of their emotions within them weave a web of sustained interpersonal relationships. Rheingold emphasizes that there needs to be longer-term interaction between people who form emotional attachments to create a virtual community. Wellman (1998), however, calls them “online social networks,” avoiding using the term “virtual,” and suggests that they are no different from offline communities in that they foster exchange of information, socialization, and a sense of belonging and social identity.

The Web 2.0 era has been characterized by the growth of interactive, social networking sites (SNSs); (Boyd, 2011; Couldry, 2012; Jensen, 2010), and this phenomenon has attracted scholarly attention in digital communities and other social interactions. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define SNSs as online platforms that allow people to create a public or semi-public profile, share this profile with others, and form relationships. Riegner (2007) defines an SNS as a space created to connect people via web-based tools, such as email, chat applications, and blogs. Such participation connects participants with others who share like interests, such as hobbies and business-related activities. Similarly, Pallis et al. (2011) describe an SNS as a site where individuals meet to form relationships, with each user creating a list of others with whom they wish to connect, using a variety of tools to build a community, discuss and share knowledge, and participate in various activities.

Actively participating in an SNS usually entails “performing” (Goffman, 1959) in front of an unfamiliar audience. A now flourishing area of study strives to understand what Litt calls the “imagined audience” in the context of social media, defining it as “the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating” (2012, 331). Litt and Hargittai (2016) distinguish between an abstract and an imagined target audience and assume that most people have multiple imagined audiences that may vary from one posting to another. The imagined abstract audience is the user’s default when they wish to experience self-expression, while the imagined target audience applies when they wish to attract the attention of a specific group of people. Most scholars in this field analyze users of specific social media and their perceptions of their potential audiences (see, for example, Marwick and Boyd, 2011 on Twitter; Brake 2012, on blogs; and Jung and Rader, 2016 on Facebook). However, research on imagined audiences within the realm of women’s closed Facebook groups appears to be an underdeveloped area.

***Women in the Digital Sphere***

Women tend to self-disclose more than men (Dindia and Allen, 1992; Parker and Parrott, 1995) and to express and share their feelings to and empathize with one another (Ridley 1993). This has been reflected in research comparing social media user behaviour (McAndrew and Jeong, 2012; Rose et al., 2012). Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz (2014) found common acceptance of such patterns of gendered behaviour of Facebook users in their review of studies since 2008. Furthermore, Weiser (2000) provides a comprehensive study showing that women primarily use the internet to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships and as a source of knowledge, while men use it primarily for entertainment and pleasure. Other studies have also found that women are more likely than men to use the internet primarily for social interactions (Amichai-Hamburger and Ben-Artzi, 2000 and 2003), and McAndrew and Jeong (2012) found that women engaged in more activities, spent more time, and had more friends on Facebook than did men. The blurring of the line between the virtual and real worlds was underlined by Taddicken (2013), who suggests that women are more self-regulatory and risk-averse than men in protecting their privacy. That said, other studies have not found significant gender differences in patterns of SNS usage (Kim and Chock, 2017; Tang et al., 2016).

***Closed Facebook Groups***

Launched in 2004, Facebook is the world’s largest online social networking platform. One of Facebook’s most popular features is its online group facility. Anyone opening such a group must choose one of three privacy settings: public, closed, or secret. These categories involve multiple distinctions regarding participation and exposure to content, and Facebook frequently revises them. It then updates its users, but it is not certain that all users always notice subtle changes in privacy clauses, and there has been widespread criticism that these frequent changes affect users’ ability to guard their privacy (see, for example, D’Arcy and Young, 2012). A public group is open to all Facebook users without limitation, while a closed group enables members only to participate, although viewable by all users. Finally, a secret group is for select users only, with only they having access to its content and even knowledge of its existence.

The existing literature on women’s closed Facebook groups tends to focus on those groups concerned with maternal-related issues (Gleeson et al., 2021; Johnson 2014; Grimes et al., 2014). Younas et al. (2020) examines women’s closed groups in Pakistan, where women seek mutual support in a conservative, patriarchal society. Pruchniewska (2019) examines professionally oriented, women’s closed Facebook groups. However, the current study examines the membership of women’s groups devoted to a variety of issues, not just one.

Among the multitude of virtual communities operating in Israeli cyberspace, a significant number of closed Facebook groups have been founded and operated by women, some with tens of thousands of members and a broad range of activities. In addition, there are those designed for members who know each other in their daily lives, for example, through sharing a living environment, while others have members who do not know each other outside of that online environment. However, despite women’s closed Facebook groups being a growing phenomenon within the Israeli digital landscape, no study has yet examined it in the current context.

***Engagement***

Since the emergence of social media, scholars have focused on engagement with and within social media platforms (Brodie et al., 2013). Being engaged “is to be involved, occupied, and interested in something” (Higgins 2006, 442). Jacques et al. (1995) conceive of engagement as a cognitive-behavioral and affective construct, whileMollen and Wilson define online engagement as “a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website” (2010, 923). Porter et al. (2011) define engagement as behaviour that reflects online-community members’ willingness to participate and cooperate with others.

Users contribute to social media content by contributing comments and following posts. By contributing to these posts, they facilitate interaction and engagement within the user community. In this context, engagement is defined as referring to the frequency of activity in which users participate in closed Facebook groups (see, for example, Shu-Chuan, 2011). Participants in the current study indicated how much reading, sharing, commenting on posts, and uploading their own they did. Van Doorn et al. (2010) show that social media engagement originates from motivations consistent with the uses and gratification theory discussed later. User engagement is related to user satisfaction and is often viewed as positive human-computer interaction (Quesenbery, 2003).

***Perceived Gratification***

The long-established theories of “uses and gratification” remain among the most influential theory in media studies (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 2002; Ruggerio, 2000). Classic studies of this ilk typically identify five distinct types of social and psychological needs that media can fulfill: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and diversion (Katz et al., 1973; Katz et al., 1974). Ruggerio (2000) argues that studies have provided several alternative cluster categories, but most studies still utilize those originally recommended in Katz, et al. (1973).

Uses and gratification studies probe the primary needs of audiences potentially fulfilled by new media (Lin, 2002; Rafaeli and Ariel, 2008; Ruggerio, 2000; Stafford et al., 2004). This approach has been employed to study numerous types of media, including video cassette recorders (VCRs) (Lin, 1993), the internet (Song et al., 2004), MP3 players (Ferguson et al., 2007), YouTube (Haridakis and Hanson, 2009), and smartphones (Ariel et al., 2017; Joo and Sang, 2013; Malka et al., 2018; Sanz-Blas et al., 2013).

This perspective considers the audience as active and goal-oriented in its media consumption (Rubin, 2002). The choices of media depend on the selections and facilities that the various media offer. Boyd (2011) claims that social network users see these as spaces where they may, for example, initiate and maintain social relationships with friends and acquaintances, flirt with friends of friends, form romantic relationships, establish business relationships, and discuss sociopolitical issues. The users’ motivation is to share information with others, interested or not, especially to see and be seen. Young (2009) also discusses the benefits of sharing information on SNSs, such as increasing social capital and enhancing perceived social support. Taddicken (2013) uses the term “perceived social relevance” to refer to the relative importance of various SNSs to users’ lives. The current study applies the concept of perceived gratification to describe the subjective ways in which online groups are perceived or experienced by their users in the context of providing gratification.

***Self-Disclosure***

Self-disclosure serves several purposes, such as increasing mutual understanding and building trust between partners in a relationship (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Disclosure enables a person to recognize and interpret meaning from processes and experiences (Frattaroli, 2006). Turn-taking or reciprocity in disclosure is common in interactions (Dindia, 2000; Rubin et al., 1980) and fosters a commitment to respond with a similar level of intimacy to others’ disclosures (Rotenberg and Chase, 1992). Furthermore, reciprocity in self-disclosure is vital in the early stages of a relationship (Won-Doornink, 1979). Finally, self-disclosure is a means of achieving interpersonal intimacy, with the sharing of personal information is essential for creating intimacy through dialogue between romantic partners (Greene et al., 2006).

Scholars have studied online self-disclosure ever since social networks have become part of our lives. Online platforms provide a space where people are more willing to open up and expose their intimate feelings than they would without computer mediation (Suler, 2004). The nature of SNSs encourages self-disclosure (Mazer et al., 2007; Walsh et al., 2020). The Facebook status update box, for example, asking “What’s on your mind?” invites participants to share personal information. Online social networks provide a user-friendly platform that makes sharing photographs, status updates, and other information easy (Schumaker and Van der Heide, 2011).

Lai and Young (2015)’s study of self-disclosure patterns on SNSs, particularly on microblogging platforms, found that popularity and interpersonal needs significantly affect self-disclosure. Chan and Cheng (2004) find that people report a greater degree of self-disclosure online than offline relationships. The asynchronous nature and the lack of nonverbal cues in most SNS activity affects people’s level of intimate disclosure (Suler, 2004; Walther, 1996). One of the most attractive features of online social networking is that users can share updates about their status, feelings, thoughts, and actions with friends and strangers (Jones et al., 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2009). On the other hand, public disclosure of personal information can be problematic in relation to identity theft, stalking, and harassment (Gross and Acquisti, 2005; Nosko et al., 2010). As Taddicken points out: “Self-disclosed information on the internet is therefore persistent, replicable, scalable, searchable and shareable” (2013, 250).

 Studies have shown that SNS participants are cautious about their privacy and are aware of the dangers (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Jones et al., 2008; Young, 2009). Nonetheless, intimate self-disclosure in cyberspace is quite common (Jones et al., 2008; Taddicken, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2009) due to users’ inability to refrain from sharing personal information (Edwards and Brown, 2009). In addition, the anonymity of online social networks enables lonely people to share intimate information (Bonetti et al., 2010).

 In this regard and based on our understanding of the extant literature reviewed above, we hypothesize the following:

H1: A positive correlation will be found between self-disclosure and perceived gratification.

This is to say that the greater the degree of self-disclosure, the more positive the perceived gratification.

H2: Group engagement will mediate the correlation between self-disclosure and perceived

gratification: self-disclosure will contribute to group engagement and, in turn, perceived gratification.

***Loneliness***

Existing studies of the relation between solitude and the online environment are inconclusive and contradict one another (Nowland et al., 2017). Some studies show that internet users frequently report higher levels of loneliness (Kalpidou et al., 2011; Lou et al., 2012). At the same time, other studies contend that SNSs reduce loneliness by providing socializing opportunities and controlling interactions (Valkenburg and Peter, 2009; Vergeer and Pelzer, 2009). Skues et al. (2012) also found that the larger a person’s social network, the less lonely they feel.

Research on online activity and loneliness offers two competing perspectives on these conflicting findings (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007): The “displacement hypothesis” posits that users take advantage of the medium to substitute online relationships for the relative lack of offline relationships. Conversely, the “stimulation hypothesis” posits that the internet succeeds in reducing loneliness because it expands the possibilities for creating new relationships online.

Deters and Matthias (2013) found that the frequency of posting Facebook status updates, regardless of the comments received, significantly reduces the sense of loneliness users feel. Furthermore, in a meta-analysis of thousands of papers on Facebook use, and loneliness, Song et al. (2014) found a positive correlation between Facebook use and loneliness. More specifically, lonely people use Facebook rather than Facebook causes its users to feel lonely. Finally, DiTommaso and Spinner (1993) and DiTommaso et al. (2004) propose a social-emotional loneliness scale, a multidimensional scale for measuring loneliness for adults used to assess loneliness in the present study.

 Based on our review of the literature mentioned above, we hypothesize the following:

H3: A positive correlation will be found between social-emotional loneliness and perceived

gratification: the higher the level of social-emotional loneliness, the higher the perceived gratification will be from participation. A positive correlation will be found between perceived gratification and the two subdivisions of social-emotional loneliness: social loneliness and family loneliness.

H4: Group engagement will mediate the correlation between social-emotional loneliness and

perceived gratification. Thus, social-emotional loneliness will contribute to group engagement, contributing to a more positive perceived group gratification. This will be found in relation to perceived gratification and the two subdivisions of social-emotional loneliness.

***Methodology***

*Participants*

This research utilized a structured survey that included 70 closed questions. The respondents first answered a screening question to confirm that they had participated in at least one closed Facebook group for Israeli women. The final sample comprised 526 Israeli women. Each respondent provided sociodemographic data. Respondents were aged 18 and over, with a mean age of 39.2 (SD = 13.2). Most respondents were married (61%), had at least a high school-level education (60%), and identified as secular (55%). The sample of respondents was obtained from Midgam Project Web Panel, a company that specializes in providing infrastructure services for internet research. The company uses the stratified sampling method based on the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics data in 2019 and determines quotas by age and gender. Participants were paid $1.20.

*Independent variables*

Self-disclosure was measured as an independent variable using the Self-Disclosure Index (SDI) identified in Miller et al. (1983), a 10-item scale measuring self-disclosure on a range of personal issues. Using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (not discussing the issue at all) to 4 (fully and completely discussing the issue), participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each of the statements (for example, “Things I have done which I am proud of”; “What is important to me in life”). The internal reliability of the scale was high (α = .915).

Social-emotional loneliness was measured as an independent variable using the SELSA-S identified in DiTommaso et al. (2004), a 15-item multidimensional scale for measuring loneliness, which is the short version of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (DiTommaso and Spinner, 1993). We extracted two relevant subscales/dimensions of SELSA: social and family loneliness. Using a 7-point scale, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with the statements (for example, “My family cares about me”; “I can depend on my friends for help”). The internal reliability of the general social-emotional loneliness scale was α = .881. The social and family loneliness subscales’ reliabilities were α =.81 and α = .85, respectively.

*Dependent variable: Perceived gratifications*

Perceived gratification was measured as a dependent variable using an 18-item scale to assess the degree of gratification an online group provides to each user. In addition, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with the statements (for example, “I am willing to write about any topic in the group”; “The group is a source of comfort and support”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The internal reliability of the perceived gratification index was high (α = .84).

*Mediating variable*: *Engagement*

Engagement was measured as a mediating variable using a 4-item index assessing the frequency of activities users engaged in within the closed groups. Participants indicated the extent to which they engaged in each of the following activities: reading, sharing, commenting on others’ posts, and uploading their posts. The scale ranged from 1 (never) to 6 (every hour). The internal reliability of the engagement index was high (α = .73). Statistics on the research variables are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | SD |
| Perceived gratifications | 1 | 5 | 2.65 | 0.71 |
| Engagement | 1 | 6 | 2.62 | 0.80 |
| Self-disclosure | 0 | 4 | 1.43 | 0.86 |
| Social-emotional loneliness | 1 | 7 | 2.88 | 1.25 |
| Social loneliness | 1 | 7 | 3.02 | 1.35 |
| Family loneliness | 1 | 7 | 2.06 | 1.32 |

***Results***

It was found that 90% of participants surveyed used Facebook at least once a day and 78% several times a day. Of the participants, 75% reported that they were members of women’s closed groups, and the average group membership was 4.9 (SD=5.37). Furthermore, 80% reported that they read posts at least once a day and 54% that they did so several times a day;15% commented on posts at least once a day, 3% wrote posts at least once a day, and 7% shared links at least once a day. Most of the women (74%) reported that they either did not know any or only a few other group members beyond online activities. For more than half the women (52%), the main motivation to join these groups was stated as “seeking help and advice from other women,” while the rest said it was “having fun” (41%) or “relief from boredom (38%).”

***Hypothesis Testing***

A Pearson Correlation calculation was made between self-disclosure and perceived gratification (H1). Table 2 shows that a significant positive correlation between self-disclosure and perceived gratification (*r* = .274, *p* < .001) was found. The greater the self-disclosure, the more positive the perceived gratification.

To examine the mediating role of group engagement in the relationship between self-disclosure and perceived gratification (H2), we used Hayes’s (2018) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations (Model 4). The analysis treated self-disclosure as a predictor variable, group engagement as the mediator, and perceived gratification as the dependent variable. Results show that the indicated a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of self-disclosure on perceived gratifications through group engagement did not include 0 (95% CI [-.007, -.012] with 5,000 resamples). Moreover, results showed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of self-disclosure on perceived gratification through group engagement did not include 0 (95% CI [.067, .180] with 5,000 resamples, *F* (2,289) = 36.93, *p* < .001, Rsq=20.36%). In short, analysis through the model identified indicated a significant indirect effect for self-disclosure on perceived gratification through group engagement (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Model of Self-Disclosure Mediating Perceived Gratifications*

Perceived gratifications

Engagement

Self-disclosure

.27\*\*\*

.46\*\*\*

.09\*

*Note.* \**p* < .05, \*\*\**p* < .001

Pearson Correlation calculations were also made to examine the correlation between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratification (H3). Table 2 shows no significant correlation between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratification (*r* = -.070, *p* > .005). Significant correlations were also not found between perceived gratification and social loneliness (H3a) (*r* = -.051, *p* > .005) or family loneliness (H3b) (*r* = -.065, *p* > .005).

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlations between Research Variables*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Engagement | Self-disclosure | Social-emotional loneliness | Social loneliness | Family loneliness |
| Perceived gratifications | .545\*\*\* | .258\*\*\* | .070- | -.051 | -.065 |
| Engagement  |  | .289\*\*\* | .013 | .029 | .159\*\* |
| Self-disclosure |  |  | .022 | .035 | .005 |
| Social-emotional loneliness |  |  |  | .749\*\*\* | .711\*\*\* |
| Social loneliness |  |  |  |  | .468\*\*\* |

*Note.* \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

Hayes’ (2018) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations (Model 4) was used to examine the role that group engagement plays in mediating the relationship between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratification (H4). The analysis treated social-emotional loneliness as a predictor variable, group engagement as the mediator, and perceived gratification as the dependent variable. Results indicate that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of social-emotional loneliness on perceived gratification through group engagement did include 0 (95% CI [-.1225, .043] with 5,000 resamples). Moreover, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of social-emotional loneliness on perceived gratification through group engagement did include 0 (95% CI [.070, .029] with 5,000 resamples). In other words, the model did not indicate an indirect effect for social-emotional loneliness on perceived gratification through group engagement (see Figure 2).

 **Figure 2**

*The Mediating Model of Loneliness on Perceived Gratifications*

-.020

Engagement

Perceived gratifications

.019

.485\*\*\*

Social-emotional loneliness

Social loneliness

Family loneliness

.104\*\*

*Note.* \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

The same results were found using social loneliness as a predictor. In contrast to this trend, results showed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of family loneliness on perceived gratification through group engagement did not include 0 (95% CI [-.205, -.046] (with 5,000 resamples). In addition, results showed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of family loneliness on perceived gratification through group engagement did not include 0 (95% CI [-.084, -.017] with 5,000 resamples; *F* (2,289) = 55.60, *p* < .001, Rsq = 27.79%). In other words, the model did indicate an indirect effect on family loneliness on perceived gratification through group engagement, as Figure 2 shows.

***Discussion***

By analyzing data from questionnaires distributed to Israeli women, we sought to learn about members’ characteristics in closed groups for women, their activity patterns within these groups, and their perceptions of them.

Our findings indicate that the more members exhibit openness and willingness to share, the higher the group’s significance in their lives. However, we may not be able to establish a direct causal relationship. We did find that women’s groups on Facebook are a significant arena of activity for women who tend to benefit from exposing various aspects of their personal lives within them. However, it was found that the relationship between these two variables is mediated by group engagement. This has a positive effect on the perception of each group as a significant factor in its users’ lives. Women who regularly respond within the group, write posts, and share content with other members reap more significant benefits than do members with a more passive presence limited to reading posts and sporadic reactions. These findings are consistent with what Taddicken calls “the reciprocity of self-disclosure” (2013, 251); that is, online gestures of self-disclosure will lead to like responses and deepen intimacy between participants.

The study also offers findings on the relationship between social-emotional loneliness and attribution of these women’s groups’ significance in members’ lives, although not comprehensively compared in relation to each variable. Contrary to the study’s hypotheses, no positive correlation was found between the level of the surveyed women’s social-emotional loneliness and the degree of importance they attributed to groups in their lives concerning the sense of social isolation. In other words, women’s groups do not adequately offset social experience of women’s loneliness. In addition, changes in group engagement did not affect the relationship between the two variables.

However, a positive correlation was found between family loneliness (a sense of loneliness in the family context) and assessing the group’s place in the participants’ lives. The more isolated the women were in this respect, the higher the group’s gratification in their lives. Additionally, it was found that group engagement mediates the relationship between the two variables. In other words, participants who experience feelings of family loneliness must participate actively to achieve the most benefit from these groups. The more active and involved women are in the groups, the higher the perceived gratification in their lives. This demonstrates the group’s potential to serve as an alternative, supportive framework for a failing family system.

The study’s findings indicate that women’s closed Facebook groups have considerable potential to satisfy needs, fill substantial gaps in members’ lives, and provide them with alternatives to the dysfunctional aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, at the same time, these groups are not a panacea, and Facebook groups are not perceived as an entirely valid way to obviate loneliness.

Oldenburg (1989) proposed the concept of “third place,” claiming that, in the modern world, people’s time is invested in the home (the “first place”) and at work (the “second place”). The “third place” comprises all the other sites where people can escape from the first and second places and gather for social activities, such as parks, cafés, street corners, and pubs. These places foster a sense of community, provide support, and promote equality among members. Therefore, it is very reasonable to consider online social networks a “third place,” although online communities also intersect with the other two places since the internet allows people to enter the third place even at work or home.

The contribution of closed groups to the lives of women suffering from family loneliness might be identified within the broader social context. The women’s online group activity may meet some of their needs, but it is no full substitute for offline engagement, face-to-face encounters, and communal recreation. The sense of support, solidarity, and belonging, and the fact that the group is a source of advice and assistance in decision-making processes, may explain their central role in the lives of women who experience family loneliness. The main functions associated with family relationships are adequately met by the closed group, particularly for women whose level of participation is high.

This research shows the high significance attributed to membership in women’s groups by members from different backgrounds and radically different personality characteristics and needs. The findings were similar for women who tend to be open – those who seek common areas of activity to satisfy their needs – and women who report experiencing social and emotional loneliness. While these contradictory characteristics may coexist (social openness may mask loneliness, for example), it is reasonable to assume that they represent different types of women in most instances.

The rapid cultural changes the internet and social networking sites have ushered in have created new social dilemmas and contradictions (Curran et al., 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2001). As a result, basic concepts explored for years in psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, such as privacy, disclosure, membership, collaboration, and intimacy, take on new meanings in relation to the online environment (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2013; Dalessandro, 2018; Joinson and Paine, 2007). Although in many situations, the online world seems to imitate and reflect what is happening in the offline world, thereby blurring the distinctions between the two, the present study indicates that, in situations such as the one we have analyzed concerning Israeli women’s closed Facebook groups, online activity meets needs that may not be fulfilled in the offline realm.

***Research Limitations***

The current study focused on large Facebook women’s groups in Israel, and, thus, its findings may not necessarily apply to the inner dynamics of smaller or more specifically focused women’s groups, for example, or those associated with a different culture. Future studies should examine a more varied set of women’s closed groups on Facebook. The complex nature of the findings on different kinds of loneliness and the role that closed Facebook groups may play in their members’ lives encourage further examination of the phenomenon. Particular attention should be devoted to more aspects of the interaction between online and offline spaces by examining activity patterns in closed Facebook groups and the users’ characteristics and perceptions.

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