THE INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

THE EXPERIENCE OF NEVER-MARRIED WOMEN IN THEIR THIRTIES

WHO DESIRE MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

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During data collection, I was consistently in awe of the willingness and courage of the participants in this study to be so forthcoming with their experience of being single in their thirties. I am greatly indebted to them for their willingness to share their truth, their hurdles, and

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The question for inquiry in this study concerns the experience of heterosexual, never-married, childless women in their thirties who desire marriage and children. This interest was born out of both my clinical observations in my private practice and my personal experience.

Through my professional experience with clients seeking individual treatment, it became apparent to me that nearly half of my practice had been young women in their late twenties or thirties, struggling to come to terms with their single status. These women often enter treatment with a variety of presenting complaints, including: anxiety and depressive ridden symptomotology, a sense of isolation, and low self-esteem. The precipitant to seeking treatment has often been subsequent to a break up of a relationship, or has revolved around their frustration with being single; propelling them into a state of panic about their future.

These women live in an age when the majority culture and the traditional psychoanalytic/psychodynamic psychologies focus on a primary relational model, which directs attention on finding fulfilling and committed romantic relationships in order to emerge into wholeness. Every literary source cited in this document acknowledged that singles in our society are still perceived by the majority as deviating from the "norm." When one is single and outside of the societal family structure, there is often question as to what may be wrong with them. This often affects the individual, who can experience a defective sense of self, accompanied with feelings of shame and embarrassment about their single status.

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As a clinician, I also became aware of the infinite possibilities for this issue to be addressed in treatment, as a catalyst for the development of greater awareness, insight, and constructive changes in these women's lives. It has been of great inspiration and a privilege professionally to consistently bear witness to many women emerging from this "other directed" state to a more "self-directed" one. This growth yields a consistent sense of well being and pride in themselves, despite the presence or absence of a romantic love interest.

This issue personally resonates with me as well. I enjoyed being single and sometimes longed for it, during my twenties. In my early thirties, I was unhappily married, terrified about the prospect of divorce and singlehood in my thirties. I had led myself astray by not trusting enough in my own intuition. I was overwhelmed, disappointed and shamed by the notion that my blueprint was so far off from what I had planned and expected. Feeling caught in a flurry of fear about my future, I felt immobilized for years with indecision. My most pervasive fear was of giving up my marriage for an unknown future, which could not promise or guarantee me the finding of a compatible lifetime partner. The idea of possibly not being able to experience motherhood, a life long goal that I had assumed to be inevitable, felt unacceptable and paralyzing.

Clarifying and executing the decision to get divorced required a cognitive and psychological shift. I eventually discarded my belief that my general well being and experience of self was dependent on being married and having children. I chose the path of defining my desires and making choices. I allowed myself to believe in and embrace my desire for love and companionship, while also emancipating myself from the reliance on such longings to be the sole creator of my happiness. I was then able to: reach a decisive resolution; access the courage to let go of a long lasting but faulty marital attachment; perceive and approach singlehood in my thirties as an opportunity rather than as a misfortune; take the time to look inward, while opening my heart, rather than guarding it ferociously. Hence, I found myself, and a relationship with a wonderful man, sooner and more effortlessly than I had ever imagined.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The available and published data concerning women's issues is numerous. In the adult

development arena, there is a great deal of information written about professional development,

marriage, parenting, gender, divorce, dating, sexuality, and single parenting as well. However,

not until the 1980s has the experience of singlehood been recognized as a subject of serious

research (Stein, 1981). Much of the data found to date describes life challenges for women post

divorce, usually during mid-life. There is also a fair amount written about the experiences of the

never-married older adult female. Stein (1981) provided a thorough overview of the variance

inherent in the literature regarding singlehood: "The unmarried population varies with respect to

age; previous marital status; former marital termination as a consequence of divorce, or death;

living arrangements; sexual preferences; education, occupational, and income levels; class

background and identification; ethnic and racial identification; religion; and parental status (p. 9).

Singlehood as it applies to the "thirty-something" cohort has been addressed in recent

years, yet the information derived is still minimal compared to other important women's issues.

Various authors have identified singlehood in the thirties in the context of broader subjects, rather

than the exclusive focus being on this particular decade in women's lives. At present, there is no

other research which explores the experience of heterosexual single women who meet the criteria

of being in the thirty-something age bracket, without a current significant relationship, and who

carry the desire for marriage and children. Clearly, there is a void in the literature about this

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particular phenomenon for women in our society today, especially given the extent to which it is pervasive, challenging, and opportunistic for so many.

This literature review will first cover the subject of singlehood from a historical and cultural perspective. Developmental and theoretical perspectives about women in their thirties will be covered, followed by the issues and affective experiences singlehood evokes for women in their thirties. The review will conclude with a detailed description of the theoretical framework used for this proposed study.

Historical Overview

Single women have faced the expectation and pressure to marry for hundreds of years. During the Victorian and Elizabethan eras, single women were labeled "old maids" and perceived to be preoccupied with daily trivia. (Penman & Stolke, 1981). In New England during the 1600s and 1700s, there was immense stigma and overt violence, sentencing many single women convicted of witchcraft to death (Karlsen, 1987)! By the mid- 1800s the threat of execution had dissipated, but the intolerance remained strong. In an article entitled "The Spinster," published in 1911, unmarried women were described as: unobtrusive, meek, soft-footed, silent, shamefaced, bloodless and boneless; our social nemesis, entering the secret recesses of the mind, siting at the secret springs of action, molding and fashioning our emasculate society (Jeffreys, 1985).

Moving forward, the political and economic post- World War II era continued to influence marriage trends and, therefore, singleness. During the 1950s, the postwar economy set in motion women leaving the workplace in order to accommodate soldiers who needed to regain their jobs. The "family wage system" was intended to promise that the man's salary alone could support the entire family. The need to be supported by a man's salary, certain to be substantially higher than her own, served as further incentive for women to marry, drop their educational ideals, abandon their careers, tend to the home and raise children (Lang, 1991).

During this time, "none but the most rigid picture of home and intact family life was considered proper" (Schwartzberg, Berliner & Jacob, 1995, p. 26); "patriotism, prosperity, and parenthood reigned" (Lang, 1991). So it's no wonder that in 1957, 96% of age-appropriate people were married (Eisler, 1986). Normality was considered the pursuit of a traditional family life style, consisting of marriage, family and consumerism. "Becoming a bride, a wife, and later a mother confirmed a woman's worth and defined her status, her limits, her life style, her very identity" (Anderson & Stewart, 1994, p. 53). Marriage even substantiated a women's patriotism, according to Mrs. Thomas Edison, who was quoted as saying "the woman who doesn't want to make a home is undermining our nation" (Gordon, 1987).

Even the psychological material and psychoanalytic literature of the time, influencing the popular culture, supported the notion of home and family as "developmental tasks" (Schwartzberg et al., 1995); marriage was viewed as a woman's "principal rite of passage into adulthood" and the "pinnacle of her development" (Anderson & Stewart, 1994, p. 52). "Marriage and motherhood was every girl's dream; it was the 'Holy Grail' of female development. Other achievements were considered secondary to this goal" (p. 53). Even renowned pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock supported this notion, having stated that "Biologically and temperamentally, women were made to be concerned first and foremost with child-care, husband care, and home care" (Deckard, 1975). Hutton (1960) agreed with this supposed norm by her contention that the single woman must "forgo what should normally be her main preoccupation," leaving her "unfit to tolerate" the loneliness that is predicted to follow (p. 18). A woman's life was viewed as incomplete without bearing children: "a women's sexual experience, to be complete, on the physical as well as the emotional side, should extend to the conceiving, carrying for nine months and bearing the child, to fulfil itself finally in what should be the happy and physically enjoyable function of suckling her baby" (p. 46). Sublimating needs into the professional arena were thought to be inappropriate and ineffectual. "For an unmarried woman, though her professional

work may satisfy many needs of her nature, it can never be her natural fulfillment, day by day, as marriage and children are (p. 5).

This ideal of the "good wife" was equated with the highly valued quality of selflessness, teaching women two lessons: "to wait and to accommodate" (Anderson & Stewart, 1994, p. 53). Accompanying these sanctions, Heilbrun (1988) adds that, "Above all other prohibitions, what has been forbidden to women is anger, together with the open admission of the desire for power and control over one's life" (p.13).

A pathological interpretation was made about those who deviated from this imposed expectation (Ehrenreich, 1983). Dr. Paul Popenjoe, a frequent writer for "The Ladies Home Journal," was cited by Ehrenreich (1983) as referring to unmarried women as discarded psychological and biological inferiors who are not good prospects for matrimony. Coontz (1992) reports the consequential judgments, from a 1957 Poll, reporting that 80% of the respondents labeled those who chose not to marry as "sick, neurotic, and immoral." Ehrenreich and English (1978) described the single woman of the time as "maybe being: brilliant, famous, visibly pleased with herself, successful in every way - but the judgment hung over her that she had failed as a woman" (p. 287).

The 1950s decade placed an emphasis on life satisfaction being dependent on the nuclear family like no other time in the history of the United States (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). Family represented the moral integrity of the nation at that time (Schwartzberg et al.). People evaluated themselves based on the criteria of this larger social system, which had a strict conformity code and rigid notions of psychological correctness. Consequently, single people felt particularly disadvantaged and acutely peripheral to mainstream society (Schwartzberg et al.)

During the 1960s decade, the influence of the Vietnam War, the assassinations of political and religious leaders, The Women's Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the sexual revolution had a profound effect on American society. It marked the first time since

World War II that the government's judgment, morality, and the status quo were in question.

With the entire nation's reliability and ethical structure under scrutiny, family values and gender

roles came under a rebellious attack by the counterculture, which condemned the hypocrisy of the

older generations' code of previously enforced familial and societal "ethical" standards. Many

were disillusioned and stifled by the rigidity and facade of the 1950's marriages (Coontz, 1992).

Pervasive cynicism swept the nation, with antiwar slogans like "Make Love Not War"

challenging the previous generation's example of promoting violence rather than the preached

chastity. Many young adults dropped out of middle class mainstream society, partaking in open

sex, drugs, and choosing other avenues than marriage (Schwartzberg et al., 1995).

With the "holy grail" of family life now being challenged, the rise in women in the

workforce, and the development of more widespread birth control methods, many young adults

began to move away from their families, choose singlehood or delay marriage, increasing the

singles population. Those in the latter category experienced alienation from mainstream society,

with no guidelines, expectations, or role models leading the way. (Schwartzberg et al., 1995).

The underpinnings of the basic values of American life were threatened in this decade,

loosening the gender role structure of the traditional family (Schwartzberg et al.). During this

time of the maturation of the first baby-boom generation, the trend toward postponement of

marriage increased. Sheehy (1995) describes what she refers to as the "Vietnam Generations

(1946¬55)" as having "set a new style for remaining transient throughout the twenties, resisting

any adult commitments and keeping all possibilities open" (p. 48).

Relevant events effecting women's singlehood included: the women's movement,

women pursuing higher education and professional careers, questioning of government judgment

and morality, the stifling marriages of the 1950s, the sexual revolution, and contraception

(Doudna & McBride, 1981; Schwartzberg et al., 1995). The Supreme Court legalized abortion in

1973, making possible out of wedlock sexual relations, with the "choice" over whether to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

Early feminists, schooled in the anti-war and civil rights movements became overtly skeptical of the gender-based social structure (Schwartzberg et al.). They began to "demand their rights as individuals and question the feminine virtues of selflessness and self sacrifice" (Potuchek, 1996). Ehrenreich and English, (1978) add that, "the immutable maternal instinct, the sanctity of 'vaginal orgasm' as representative of female emotional maturity, the child's need for exclusive mothering, the theory of female masochism, all the shibboleths of mid-century psychomedical theory, shriveled in the light of feminist thinking" (p. 315). Kegan (1982) identified the women's movement as providing a counter-culture for women, which "recognized and held the emergence of a personally authored identity" (p. 213).

Most of the increase in delayed marriages for women occurred after 1970 and has continued through the most recent year (Bureau of the Census, 1996). The Watergate Crisis of the 1970's evoked the loss of yet another President and continued the country's dismay over the lack of a safe and reliable government. The move into this decade also was troubled with a series of recessions, which increased unemployment and poverty, and made a two-wage income in the family a necessity. Between the years 1960 and 1978, women doubled their numbers in the university and labor force setting (Doudna & McBride, 1981). The feminist movement was further strengthened by the increase in selfhood for women finding another arena for themselves outside of the home. This also promoted changes in the power structure between men and women in the home and in the singles arena (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Schwartzberg et al., 1995). Gender roles in flux and economic pressures played havoc in families during this decade, almost doubling the divorce rate and significantly lowering the birth rate (Ehrenreich, 1983; Lang, 1991). Thus, the single population grew with once- married individuals joining the single ranks, normalizing singlehood status and bringing it out of shame and hiding.

This era brought forth themes, represented in popular sitcoms of the day, reflecting the societal conflict between women and men, tradition and modernity, and between classes, social groups and generations (Taylor, 1989). Women became depicted on television (i.e., "Mary Tyler Moore," and "M*A*S*H") as competent, independent, strong and capable of surviving happily on their own and developing surrogate families (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). Having sexual relationships before marriage also became an accepted part of normal life.

During the 1970s, a new class of single professional women emerged which created what sociologists called the "opposite marriage gradient" (Schwartzberg et al., p. 24). Educated, professional men were statistically shown to marry earlier and stay married longer than other men, while their female counterparts were noted to marry later and have a higher probability for divorce. The outnumbering of men in the 35-39 age bracket, 135 to 100, and the "marrying up/marrying down" syndrome (the tendency for women to want educated, successful, older men; while men pursued the reverse), that faced the female "elite," exacerbated the demographic chances for women to successfully find a suitable life partner (p. 232).

Economic recovery began after the 1982 recession, eventually creating huge financial inequality amongst the masses. The political swing to the right encouraged a return to traditional family values, reinstating the sacredness of married status for women (Anderson & Stewart, 1994, Schwartzberg et al., 1995). The infamous and sensationalized Harvard-Yale marriage study created a flurry of panic amongst the single female population of the time. Its reports claimed that college-educated women at age 30 only have a 20% chance, and woman at age 35 a 5% chance of marrying (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Bennett & Bloom, 1986).

Despite the conservative tide, divorce, single-family homes, and alternative lifestyles remained. But in the late eighties, the return of economic hardships laid way for blaming the country's ills on the deterioration of the family, directed by so-called deviant populations, singles included (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). The moral confusions of the day, pulls between career and

home life, inspired the unprecedented success of "The Cosby Show," representing the national

longing for structure, normalcy and the return to an "intact" family.

Sheehy (1995) views singlehood during the 80's and 90's as follows: "Because gender

roles and sexual orientation were so much in flux when the Me's (born 1967-65) passed through

their "tryout twenties," many delayed declaring a fixed sexual identity by simply avoiding

commitment altogether" (p. 41). "Romance scarcely had a chance in the sexual bartering that

engaged the energies and egos of this post-women's liberation generation" (p. 41). The author

categorizes those born between 1966-1980 (women now between ages 18-32) the "endangered

generation." Her interviewees portrayed a "safety-obsession about sex, money, relationships,

marriage, street violence, and job security" (p. 44). Sheehy believes that this fear based

preoccupation is rooted in the "corridor of epidemics" they have had to dodge, such as divorce

and sexually transmitted diseases.

> Their views on marriage are somber. Many are haunted by their parent's mistakes and
> determined not to repeat them. Having grown up with one broken promise after another,
> they are reluctant to make any but the most carefully weighted, realistic commitments.
> Thus, singlehood is growing as never before. Fears are often voiced that they cannot
> sustain the intimacy expected in a monogamous relationship, and resistance is raised
> against the stifling of a hard-won sense of personal identity. (p. 43)

The last two decades have provided for a reexamination and interpretation of singles life.

In the 1990s, families "are no longer seen as idealized containers of civilization" (Schwartzberg et

al., p. 26). The single community's growth and visibility, mostly in large urban areas, have

brought forth recognition of its viable status in American culture today. As a result, some studies

have reported that it is no longer a fixed belief that it is unnatural for women to remain single

(Yankelovich, 1981). Doudna & McBride (1981) state "women have acquired unprecedented

expectations--they want terrific careers, egalitarian relationships and usually families. And they

don't want to compromise" (p. 31). However, Schwartzberg et al. (1995) emphasize a strong

reminder that, "Single people continue to feel alienated from the larger society, and those who enter therapy in the 1990s still feel acutely aware of their differentness" (p. 27).

The Cultural Influence

General Description

Scutt (1995) reminds us that we are all effected and constrained by the current political and economic system, and by cultural and social expectations. Our culture and society have enormous effect on how we perceive various sociological phenomena. An understanding of wider cultural issues informs our understanding of any issue, including singleness.

Social changes and trends have broadened the landscape as to what is an acceptable life-style, and made singlehood more commonplace. However, "remaining single beyond a certain age is still extremely uncomfortable for many men and women in America" (Schwartzberg et al.,1995, p. 6). Couplehood remains the normative and desired goal for the culture as a whole (Staples & Johnson, 1993). Anderson and Stewart (1994) identify our culture's "most widely accepted and deeply cherished beliefs about women and families:" "The family, traditionally defined, is the only healthy, satisfying, and ideal state in which a woman can live. Marriage is and should be every woman's dream. Bearing children is every woman's highest calling, her most sacred duty and most rewarding accomplishment. A good woman is a selfless woman who does not put her own needs first in any situation at any time" (p. 15).

Schwartzberg et al. (1995) described the "problem" of singlehood as emanating from lack of available partners, deviation from family expectations, and the marginalization by society (p. 9). Rucker (1993) also attributed the typical single state to be a direct result of unacceptable opportunities, rather than from an intentional choice.

Margaret Adams (1971) wrote:

single women are still the victims of quite outrageous stereotyping in regard to their ascribed characteristics, and their unmarried status is popularly attributed to personal failings, such as lack of sexual attractiveness, unresolved early psychosexual conflicts,

narcissistic unwillingness to be closely committed to another individual, latent lesbianism. It is interesting to note the frequency with which psychological reasons have been adduced to explain singleness, rather than equally cogent social causes. (p. 778)

Analyst Person (1988) acknowledged the scarcity of men as:

one of the major problems that confronts women today, and contributes to the transformation of a perfectly healthy longing for love into a kind of deadly preoccupation. The frequent female obsession with love is in part the result of a demographic imbalance with profound psychological ramifications; unlike men, women live in a scarcity economy; there simply aren't enough men to go around. This problem is compounded by the fact that men often consider women less desirable as they grow older. After a certain age women know their chances of finding love and sex are greatly reduced. (p. 284)

Since our culture promotes marriage as an expected and inevitable event in the life cycle, singlehood is often regarded by the larger society as unfortunate, deviant, and hopefully temporary (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Cejka, 1993; Dalton, 1992; Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Stein, 1981). Many authors point out destructive myths about being a single woman: "Single women lead lonely, depressing, and incomplete lives. Their unhappiness increases exponentially with each passing birthday, because past a certain age a woman is "used up." All women are desperate to marry or remarry because marriage is their only real chance for security and happiness (Anderson & Stewart, 1994, p. 64).

Hite (1987) posits that while society seems to continue to place much value on a woman's marital status, the same issue does not seem to apply to men. Men are less likely to be regarded as "unwhole" or "unfulfilled" by not being married (Cejka, 1993, p. 6). Penman and Stolke (1981) agree: "Single men are men who simply have not married. Single women are women who have not fulfilled their role or found their identity. Single men are not the antithesis of what it conventionally means to be a man in our society; single women are the antithesis of what it conventionally means to be a woman."

What predictably follows, then, are the many pejorative stereotypes about single women, including: the old maid, sinister spinster, irresponsible, damaged, traumatized, immature, selfish,

unfit, avoidant, pathological, and "evidence" of a dysfunctional family experience (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Schwartzberg et al., 1995). The larger cultural criticism and ambivalence about the single state is thought to be traced to general intolerance of those outside of mainstream society, and from conflict over what constitutes a healthy adult. Single women are led to believe that their single status is the result of some defect, deficiency, or diagnosable psychological disorder in them (Anderson & Stewart, 1994). Thus, the choice to become or stay single often remains a badge of failure, rather than a respectable and valid choice.

The often written/talked about "failure" for women is that they "love too much," "can't say no," "make foolish choices," or are naturally "ambivalent" or angry. (Anderson & Stewart, 1994). What then follows are hyped pop-psychology books such as The Rules by Fein & Schneider (1995), spelling out the do's and don'ts of how women should be and behave in order to attract and "capture Mr. Right." The implication is to change one's natural authentic self in order to get what she wants and to satisfy her man.

These cultural mores affect how women perceive themselves while living an untraditional lifestyle. Anderson and Stewart (1994) contend that:

> Women's feelings about themselves and their lives have been contaminated by antiquated cultural values that romanticize and idealize youth, beauty, and marriage. Chances are high that they have internalized the myths of our culture at face value, leaving themselves vulnerable to self-denigration simply because their lifestyles do not emulate the cultural ideal. (p. 37)

Schwartzberg et al. (1995) posit that the cause of some singles' lingering distress also comes from the substantial lags in the establishment of institutional structures that truly support a lifestyle deviant from the mainstream culture. Some examples they cite are as follows: the media still primarily portrays single women as neurotic, silly, lonely, vulnerable or predatory (i.e., "Single White Female," "Seinfeld," "Allie McBeal," etc.); versus offering role models who are thoughtful, autonomous, and well developed people (i.e., "Murphy Brown"). Institutions around

work, spirituality and community are still focused and organized around marriage and family,

leading singles to feel shame and blame for not having meaning and connection in their lives.

In the professional arena, singles "still perceive themselves to be on the outside of

informal work structures", that are important as a source of livelihood and socialization

(Schwartzberg et al., p. 28). Factors influencing some to feel exploited and dispensable are as

follows: lower salaries for women puts them in the position of having to marry in order to make

ends meet or raise their standard of living; the judgment in the corporate world that singles are

"less stable" than married people (Stein,1981); excessive demands placed onto them, by the

perception that their single status makes them more transient and mobile (Stein, 19981).

Schwartzberg et al. (1995) also point out that few religious institutions "are aware of

what single people require to feel included" (p. 28). "When the rhythm of formal religious life is

centered around marriage and birth, single people experience themselves on the outside of life's

important events" (p. 28). These authors write of the pervasive devaluing of social networking

for the single adult:

> The societal view of a single person as outside the normal social frame of reference is
> furthered by the devaluation of a single person's social network. Dismissed as part of a
> single scene and therefore merely transient, it is seen as less important than family as a
> source of social definition and of long term support. This lack of validation from the
> mainstream culture imparts a sense of deviance, which may seriously limit the single
> person's ability to feel life is, at present, authentic or envision other options for creating a
> rich, and rewarding life. (p. 7)

Scutt (1995) also points out the additional burdens placed on members of the single

community who are not recipients of benefits awarded to their married counterparts. Examples

include tax benefits for families, maternity benefits, subsidies for family discounts in schools,

public libraries, student travel, etc.

At a presentation to the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley college in 1996,

Jean Potuchek declared her contention that the enduring stigmatized status of singlehood in

American society today is still based on the nineteenth century ideology of the family as a "moral preserve." The continuing concern about the decline of the family positions single women as "a threat to a social order that is based on the hegemony of heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family." Potuchek believes that "mechanisms of social control" are in place to apply counter pressures to prevent further breakdown of the family system in this country. A few of the examples she presented are the "gender wage gap that makes it difficult for women to survive without access to a male wage," and the persistent painted images of the "alternatives to marriage as bleak, undesirable, unhappy, lonely, and miserable."

> What has happened is, as those more concrete constraints on singleness have eased, stigma has become more important as a social control mechanism. We've changed from direct social controls which make it very difficult for women to live independent lives, to ideological social controls that make women feel as though it would be a disaster to try to live a single lifestyle.

Familial Influence

The literature on singlehood seems to be split into two distinct camps: those perspectives that view singlehood as an anomaly and pathology to explain and cure, and those perspectives which normalize and support the single status as a viable and sustaining state for many. One exploratory study by Dougherty (1993) researched, from an etiological standpoint, the association between single status and object relations functioning based on early life experiences. She interviewed 26 never-married, multi-ethnic middle class women, between the ages of 30-50, who sought marriage as a conscious goal. She interpreted, from both a questionnaire and interview format, that "the greatest factor influencing these women to remain single was unsatisfactory relationships with fathers on either the oedipal or pre-oedipal levels (or both)" (p. 38). The respondents applied their perception of father's unavailability as "uncaring, hostile, and rejecting" to all men, expecting them to be "unreliable, uncommitted, and unsatisfying objects" (p. 52). Most of the respondents reported experiencing:

significant difficulty in resolving symbiotic ties to mother or in establishing and maintaining supportive relationships with fathers. Problems in trusting others caused these respondents to maintain distance consciously and unconsciously from others, frequently manifested in a need to control relationships, repeatedly recreating ungratifying relationships, or inability to invest in relationships with others--especially, but not exclusively, in relationships with men. (p. 50)

The most glaring limitation to this study, however, is that without a comparison group (e.g., married women) it was "not possible to hypothesize that single, never-married women differ from marrieds in object relations functioning" (p. 50). The researcher described the respondents as "successful high achievers who expressed gratification in most factors in their lives." Yet, his interpretation of the data seems to pathologize their involuntary single status, by implying an inevitable and pessimistic correlation between their experiences with parental object deficiencies and their ability to form satisfying heterosexual relationships.

Similar to larger cultural mores, the family of origin system also has great impact on how singleness is experienced. Schwartzberg et al. (1995) state that:

> The filters of ethnicity, class, race, and gender expectations, as well as the unique multigenerational processes that have shaped the family, all contribute to the particular way the family responds when a family member remains single beyond young adulthood. Most families define the eventual marriage of the children as part of the natural evolution of the family. Within the family, the shift from child to adult can be more difficult to negotiate without the boundary making ritual of marriage and the creation of the new nuclear family. (p. 7)

The friendship system is seen by most families as secondary--one that should be sacrificed if a blood relative is in need. Parents, emerging from the more rigid value structures of the 1950s and 1960s, continue to believe that their job has not been completed until their children are "safely married." Their children's ability to form loving and committed friendship systems is not enough evidence of their successful negotiation of the adult world. (pp. 28-29)

Given the pervasive and potent negative cultural and familial judgments and concern about single versus marital status, it's no wonder that the experience of being single is often articulated as one of the presenting problems in therapy (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). "Single

adults get messages from all around that their lives are incomplete" (p. 29). In turn, many "use marital status to evaluate their lives and, based on this measure, wonder if there is something lacking" in them (p. 4). "The more single people feel that their needs are not reflected by the institutions in which they participate, the more they feel peripheral to society. People may not be immediately aware of how much this sense of marginality affects their well-being" (p. 28).

<u>Ethnic Influence</u>

The aforementioned cultural/familial influences hold true for mainstream white Anglo-Saxon America. It is imperative to note that ethnic differences within American society can create a variance as to how singlehood is viewed and the degree to which marriage is expected and considered the norm.

To illustrate a few examples, we can begin looking at the African- American community. Legal marriage was a status symbol after slavery ended (Staples, 1981). However, the urban and ghetto condition impact of the 1960s weakened the black family and created a steady decline of the proportion of blacks living with a spouse. "According to the 1992 census, the black community now has the largest percentage of single people of any racial group (Schwartzberg et al., 1995, p. 42)." Influencing factors include: (a) Marriage rates are highly affected by educational status, working conversely between the sexes: higher income black males, likely to marry, tend to choose women with less education or marry outside of their race, while college educated black women are least likely to marry because the largest number of eligible black men are of a lower socio-economic/educational status and considered less desirable (Staples, 1981, 1988,1993); (b) The imbalance in the sex ratio, with black women outnumbering black men; (c) "marriage may well mean sacrifices, compromises, and sharing. As modern-day capitalism has shifted its emphasis from production to consumption, materialist values have been promoted in pursuit of an individualistic, distinctly non-sharing lifestyle. Some blacks, having ascended into the affluent middle class, acquired these values" (1981, p. 46); (d) The divorce rates, twice as

high as whites, are thought to stem from the disenchantment with life caused by poverty and racism; (e) The rise of feminism for black females gave rise to the desire for more egalitarian marriages, while the institution in the black community and in the minds of most black men still promotes more traditional segregation of gender roles.

Thus, the number of singles in the African-American adult community, which far outnumber the single statistics for whites, is caused by what Staples (1993) refers to as "structural restraints" for the lower classes. In addition, an "ideological preference," is present, whereby "a troublesome singlehood is preferred rather than a compromise of standards for a mate" (p. 49). Therefore, it makes sense that for black women in their thirties, the expectation and wish to marry is not as culturally imposed or desired. Many experienced their mother and mothers before them raising their children alone.

Another example of how the meaning of marriage and singlehood in a minority culture can reflect history and religion is in families of the Jewish faith. Within this sub-culture, there is a strong presumption of marriage as a prelude to the central role of "family" in Jewish life (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). From the threat of persecution and genocide throughout history, the intense focus on the importance of marriage "reflects a cultural consciousness regarding the need to perpetuate the community" and "preserve its existence and expansion" (p. 44). Marriage, as an institution, creates the structure to secure a sense of connection and continuity throughout generations (Farber, Mindel, & Lazerwitz, 1988). Given this strongly embedded agenda, marriage is often perceived and experienced as the culmination of parental responsibilities, and a critical step toward finding one's place in the adult community (characteristic of the Italian culture as well) (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). This powerful cultural, religious and familial imperative both complicates the issue of achieving adult status, and of finding an acceptable and valued role as a single person in this community as well.

Many immigrant families face difficulty sorting through how much of their culture of origin to preserve and how much influence from the host culture to acquire. This often creates a multi-layered context for the meaning of marriage and influence of dual cultures. Schwartzberg et al. (1995) cite an example of a single 30 year old Japanese-American woman, who wondered if "her anxiety about succeeding in relationships had to do with not knowing where she belonged" (p. 48). For her, issues of culture and gender converged in the dating experience. To marry another of same ethnicity "brought honor to the family" and "to all the generations that have come before it" (p. 48); to not adhere, meant the risk of betraying her own assimilated values and threaten familial "support of her pursuit to be a fully developed woman" (p. 48).

<u>Female Adult Development In The Thirties</u>

Theories on adult development have certainly evolved throughout the years, affecting the consciousness of each generation. In order to understand current theory, it is important to look back to some earlier historical theories on young adult development.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalytic theory, developed a psychosexual model for development throughout childhood. The traditional Freudian view (1914) conceptualized infantile narcissism as gradually maturing into object love. According to this theory, gender-role identification arises from the Oedipus conflict during the phallic stage of development. Between the ages of three and six, children view themselves as rivals of their same-sex parent for the affections of the opposite-sex parent. Anxiety develops when the child recognizes that their wish for exclusive possession of the opposite-sex parent will not be fulfilled. To reduce anxiety, children internalize, through super-ego development, socialized sanctions for what are acceptable behaviors, identifying with the same-sex parent and adopting that parent's behaviors.

Adult psychopathology was interpreted as conflicted sexual and aggressive drives, stemming from unresolved resolution in earlier stages of development, resulting in developmental

fixations/arrests at a particular stage. Neurotic conflicts are thought to be manifested in contemporary relationships as the repetition of childhood patterns of conflict.

Applying psychoanalytic developmental theory to the topic of singlehood, Lieberman (1991) reviewed traditional psychoanalytic interpretations about the etiology of involuntary single status in females; namely, as the result of unresolved infantile fantasy and conflict, including pre-oedipal attachment to mother or father. Those who wish to marry but who remain single are thought to: "suffer from unconscious guilt over sexual and aggressive wishes toward parents and siblings. The debt to the superego is paid off by depriving the individual of success and happiness" (p. 81). "Other means of expressing unconscious aggression toward one or both parents take the form of unconscious spiteful rebellion in the refusal to comply with the perceived parental demand to marry" (p. 81). "Current thinking about the dynamics underlying prolonged single status might include, the possibility of strong preoedipal pathology, fear of intimacy and merger, inability to separate and individuate and severe pathology in the integration of the self and object" (p. 182).

This author proposed another perspective which postulates that unwanted single status can in itself stimulate unconscious conflicts and regression to less mature levels of development; if prolonged, it can be "internally experienced as a chronic traumatic state that is emotionally depriving, narcissistically wounding, and an impediment to the further psychological growth and development of the adult" (Lieberman, 1991, p.177). She believes this "single too long" state leads to an "adult developmental arrest" (p. 78). Case examples were described to illustrate the symptoms: low self-esteem, depression, poor body image, eating disorders, proneness to humiliation and shame, psychosomatic complaints, lonesomeness, envy, alienation, and polar behavioral extremes such as social withdrawal versus frantic man hunting, work inhibition versus workaholism, and frigidity versus promiscuity (Lieberman, 1991). In addition, the "prevailing chronic, nagging sense of unfinished business, uncertainty about the future, and the increasing

probability of failure to reach their goal of marriage and motherhood has a major impact on these women's sense of identity and inner stability" (p. 184). These symptoms are distinguished from the broader society in that these author's patients are reported to believe their symptoms to be directly related to their single status.

Lieberman's (1991) sensitivity to the unique intra-psychic challenges and difficulties single women face in their thirties is interpreted from her psycho-analytic position. It maintains a psycho-pathological lens, which views the locus of the problem "in person" versus "person in environment." This is manifested in the perspective which universally assumes that "unwanted single status is the result of unresolved neurotic conflict" (p. 177). However, she did acknowledge that the "problems faced by single women over 30, who wish to marry, are not just intrapsychic" and highlights the scarcity of suitable men available (p. 179). She also clarifies that "getting married in and of itself cannot be considered to be a sign of health, growth, integration, or an indicator of readiness to terminate treatment, since pathological females do marry" (p. 190).

Erikson (1959) initially proposed the concept of the life cycle. While Erikson drew deeply on psychoanalytic theory and understanding, he veered from it in focusing on the social factors in personality development. His theory also contrasts Freud's in that Erikson viewed development as a process that continues throughout the life span. Furthermore, he believed in the human spirit's "capacity to unify his experience and his action in an adaptive manner" (1950, p. 15). Erikson's model presupposes stages in which a person develops intrapsychically. Each stage is characterized by a psychosocial crisis that represents a conflict between the individual and society. Every stage presents essential life tasks that must be experienced in order to successfully continue to grow and move through the various stages.

Erikson identifies the adult years between age 21-65 as the "Generativity vs. Stagnation" stage, in which the essential tasks include the achievement of a stable new family and productivity in the vocational arena. He views generativity as primary to psychosexual as well as

to psychosocial well being. "Where such enrichment fails altogether, regression to an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy takes place, often with a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment" (1950; 1963, p. 267). Though this perspective appears to imply that one must be married with children to "generate" healthy living, he does state that generativity is not achieved by the "mere fact of having or even wanting children" (p. 267).

Other adult developmental theorists followed the pursuit of identifying "normal" expectations for successful achievement in adulthood. Ehrenreich (1983) reviewed psychologist Havinghurst's (1953) eight tasks of early adulthood: (1) selecting a mate (2) learning to live with a marriage partner (3) starting a family (4) rearing children (5) managing a home (6) getting started in an occupation (7) taking on civic responsibilities, and (8) finding a congenial social group. Levin (1981) reviewed Neugarten's (1968) "executive processes of personality in middle-age:" self-awareness, selectivity, manipulation and control of the environment, mastery, competence, heightened introspection, structuring and restructuring of experience, increased control over impulsivity, no longer "driven," but now the "driver," "in command" (p. 12).

Developed from his studies of married men, Levinson (1978) promoted a model in which development occurred in predictable, hierarchical, and chronological segments. Stein (1981) reviewed the implications of Levinson's life stages: (1): every "normal" adult must pass through the stages; (2): each stage has distinctive tasks that must be accomplished during that stage; (3): an individual is more or less successful in negotiating these crises; (4): successful resolution of a prior stage is necessary for the successful resolution of subsequent stages; (5): each stage is tied to chronological age (p. 12). This framework implies that specific issues are dealt with in stages. Developmental issues are assumed to be universal, and continual throughout the life course.

George Valliant's (1977) conceptions of adult development came from his reconstruction of Erikson's model. One of his conclusions from the Grant Study of men is that "adults change over time" (p. 372). He viewed symptomatic distress as "outward evidence of inward struggles to

adapt to life," rather than as an independent defect" (pp. 369-370). His identified list of "mature defenses" which better equip the individual toward achieving satisfaction in "work and love" (p. 86) were as follows: sublimation, altruism, humor, suppression and anticipation (p. 84).

Contrary to the aforementioned stage- specific perspectives, Stein's data (1981), from his 1976 interviews of 60 middle-class unmarried men and women, aged 25-45, suggests that adulthood issues "are not symbiotically linked to age stages" (p. 17). Less traditional and varying lifestyle configurations, such as singlehood, may be more accurately represented by the contrasting "spiral model" by Etzkowitz and Stein (1978), offering a "nonlinear definition of the life span." This model, accommodating a pluralistic universe of adult lifestyles, suggests that chronological age does not necessarily dictate development stages, which are thought to overlap. This perspective positions life as an evolving process with patterns and themes that repeat themselves and continually offer reevaluation and resolution. It assumes that once basic needs are satisfied, what is of central importance throughout the adult years are human needs such as "work, intimacy, vocational activities, and social communality" (Stein, 1981).

Presenting life cycle development as expansive and fluid, versus narrow and orderly, Colarusso and Nemiroff (1981) view it as an "ongoing, dynamic process" influenced by past experience, and physiological changes (p. xxi). Cohler and Galatzer-Levy (1990) also uphold the belief that life review can occur at various crossroads, with the possibility for change and the reclaiming of power.

The expectation persists that first marriages are a "natural" step, which should take place in early adulthood, as an initiation into this life cycle phase. Despite modern shifts in sociological thinking about marriage, Anderson and Stewart (1994) contend that there is still an underlying belief that a woman has to have a man to have a chance of being happy and fulfilled. To deny this supposed instinctual need (a powerful generational myth), is to go against nature (pp. 40-41). According to Schwartzberg et al. (1995):

marriage is a marker for the culture, family, and self in the expected progression from dependency to adulthood. Its presence or absence becomes a comment on how far along we are. If the milestone of marriage has not been achieved by a certain time, it can have a profound impact on our sense of place in the surrounding social milieu, our position in the family, and our evaluation of self. (p. 4)

In response to societal and family pressure to marry and the sense of deviance, one may make marital status an organizing feature of one's life, and then view the rest of one's life through this lens. A standard of adult development that emphasizes marriage and a traditional family only reinforces marriage as a gate to adulthood and does little to inform us about what makes a good life for single people. This lack of information can make it difficult to move out of a reactive position to the "standard" and find a comfortable definition of self as a single person. (p. 5)

Gail Sheehy (1995) has contributed one of the few published, comprehensive and optimistic adult developmental models in recent years. In her first book, Passages (1976) she proposed that "we continue to develop by stages and confront predictable crises, or passages, between each stage of adulthood" (1995, p. xi). Then, she viewed the mid-thirties as "the halfway mark, the prime of life" and the years between 35-45 as the "Deadline Decade," as if we had only until our mid-forties to resolve the crisis of midlife (p. xi).

Sheehy's latest book, New Passages (1995), presents an even more optimistic and realistic map of adult development, conveying her opinion that we possess the ability to customize our own lives. An important caveat to describing her recent work is to point out that her model, based on the findings from numerous group and individual interviews, national surveys of professionals and working class people and U.S. Census reports, seems to be based on classbound inferences focusing on middle class to upper middle class women in America.

Sheehy (1995) refers to one's twenties as the "prolonged adolescence" phase, the "turbulent thirties" as "catch 30: passage to first adulthood," while the "second adulthood" begins in one's forties. The change in her perspective is rooted in the following recognition about those born between 1966-1980 (age 18-32):

today, in the absence of any clear road map on how to structure their lives, facing an economic squeeze, their terror of unlimited choice, many members of the 'endangered'

generation have a new goal: stay in school as long as you can. The twenties have stretched out into a long provisional adulthood. Most young people don't go through the "Pulling up the Roots" transition until their mid-twenties and are still in Provisional Adulthood until close to 30, thus moving all the other stages off by up to ten years. (p. 48)

She supports research showing dramatic shifts in psychological maturation at around twenty-nine and thirty:

Before the shift, women feel unable to make clear choices or cope with life's vicissitudes without expecting some help from parents. After the shift they feel confident enough in their own values to make their own choices and competent enough in life skills to set a course - even if that course clashes with a parent's wishes. Prolonged adolescence ends, finally, when we are not afraid to disappoint our parents. (p. 52)

Sheehy describes women of today in their thirties as part of the "me generation" born between the years 1956-1965 (ages 33-42). Her model includes a description of characteristics common of this cohort: a sense of entitlement, high expectations of having it all, prolonged semi-dependency on parents, and materially driven (p. 38). It is important to note that a limitation of Sheehy's model is that it is classbound, primarily describing characteristics of the more educationally and financially privileged.

Carrying higher educational degrees and more professional titles than the generations before them, the "Catch-30" phase is defined as a "crisis of contradictions." Their "career suits suddenly feel unbearably confining," while they "find themselves poring intently over bridal magazines they disdained only a year before," feeling like they've "double-crossed" themselves (p. 41). She details today's transition into one's thirties:

The Turbulent Thirties marks the initiation to First Adulthood. Everyone wants to be something more. It is natural to become preoccupied at this stage with crafting a false self, a public self that will showcase our skills and talents and, we hope, win us approval and success. We want validation, and in seeking it, we rely heavily on external measurements, that become showcases for proving our worth. The thirties are a serious dress rehearsal for how we will perform if, and when, we are given the leadership roles. There is nothing wrong with projecting this false self to the outside world during these early striving years, so long as it isn't too distant or disconnected from who we really are. Later, in the forties and fifties, it becomes imperative to find our way back to the truest things we know, composing a more authentic self. (p. 53)

Biologist and psychologist Joan Borysenko (1996) writes of another perspective with which to view the thirties decade. She believes that the road to authenticity is garnered, for many women, before the decade of their forties. "The gift of the age thirty transition is a values clarification, the first of several that occur throughout the feminine life cycle. What is important? What is the measure of success? What is our legacy to ourselves, our children, and the world?" (p. 117). "The cyclic periods of questioning that women go through lead to periodic reassessment of priorities, another important feature of the thirties" (p. 133). Because of the search for meaning and happiness, Borysenko asserts that, "The hope is that by the end of her thirties a woman has clarified her values, adjusted her outer life to be in accord with them, and done whatever emotional healing was necessary to live a happy, productive life" (p. 137).

However, when the developmental milestone of achieving marriage in early adulthood is not reached, it can shape the manner in which other adult developmental markers are approached (Sheehy, 1995, p. 8). Many of life's steps, tasks, and goals are put on hold by many that hope for their single status to be temporary. Schwartzberg et al. (1995) identify purchasing a home and having children as two of the postponed markers of adulthood. "When marriage is viewed as one of the primary indicators of adulthood, accomplishments may be delayed, called into question, devalued, or dismissed as compensatory" (p. 9).

With marriage as the standard goal, adults who are single are relegated to the margins of a married world, without a blueprint on how to live as a single person (Schwartzberg et al., 1995, p. 5; Simon, 1987). "While marriage and parenthood provide many automatic structures and rituals to locate one's life along a fairly predicable life course, singlehood has very few signposts to mark the trail" (Schwartzberg et al., 1995, p9). "The absence of marriage leaves the adult in undefined territory, where there is no legitimate social role beyond a certain age" (p .6). Anderson and Stewart's (1994) interviews with single women showed that, while many of the

respondents were encouraged to be independent, "few of them received any concrete, practical directions about how to forge a non-traditional kind of future" (p. 63).

There are some theoretical models of female psychology which propose that a woman's identity is relationship-based. "Women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 17). The ability to accommodate and nurture is often viewed as an instinctual and meaningful feminine strength. Borysenko (1996) agrees with this notion that, "A women's core essence is defined by relationality, specifically by the concept of self-in-relation, which means that we feel most at home in our skin when relationships are characterized by each partner bringing forth something new in the other" (p. 127). "We are happiest when the opportunities for experiencing self-in-relation are greatest" (p. 136).

Psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller, founder of Wellesley College's Stone Center for Women's Studies, points out that some women stay and continue to grow in relationality even in suboptimal relationships. She attributes this to the female inclination to "struggle to create growth-fostering interactions within the family" (p. xxxiii). Anderson & Stewart (1994) point out that this often commendable quality can be exploited, to the detriment of women in society, in the work place, within families, and in romantic relationships: "Rather than serving as a tool for building equal and satisfying relationships, accommodation has been a tool for cultivating women's selflessness. And yet, this ideal of selflessness expected by the mandate was so unattainable that guilt and fear of disapproval and rejection became a basic staple of most women's daily diets"(p. 59).

Thus, with the aforementioned influences facing single women in their thirties, it becomes easier to acknowledge and understand the reported difficulties and conflicts many of them experience and report. Their struggle exemplifies how life cycle developmental

arrests/conflicts can occur when a major milestone, such as finding a life partner and having children, is not experienced within the expected and desired time frame.

What breeds an optimistic stance, however, are the theories that normalize rather than pathologize the struggle which persists for so many women around this issue. This struggle is largely rooted in sociological external factors that influence women's experience of their singlehood. Theoretical models which promote ongoing opportunities throughout the lifecycle for transformation and self-actualization have contributed new paradigms which promote and present infinite possibilities for discovery and growth. One of these adult developmental/clinical theories, which will be used as the framework for this study, was formulated by Robert Kegan. His model will be detailed and discussed in the final section of the literature review.

The Experience of Singlehood for Women in their Thirties

The wish to marry

One of the criteria for participation in this study was the wish, amongst heterosexual women, to marry. Consequently, the literature reviewed intentionally did not include the experiences surrounding voluntary single status, or the experience of lesbian women.

Research indicates that an overwhelming majority of women expect to marry sometime in their lives (Nadelson & Notman, 1981). Because of the aforementioned cultural dictates to marry, women's socialization prepares them to place disproportionately greater importance on marriage than does the socialization of men (Greenglass, 1982).

The women in Hite's study (1987) reported their reasons for wanting to marry as including the following: (1) The hope that marriage will provide the intimacy, emotional security and closeness that previous fleeting and disappointing non-committed relationships of the past did not deliver; (2) Social pressure--still very powerful, assuming "a woman is nothing without a man"; 88% reported that this pressure intensifies after age 30; (3) Internal pressure: the judgment

that if I don't marry "something must be wrong with me;" (4) The wanting of children/reproductive time pressures; (5) The wish to be "taken care of" (pp. 302-315).

As far as seeking marriage as the antidote to loneliness, Weiss (1981, p. 152) quoted Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, from her book Loneliness, "Loneliness is such a painful, frightening experience that people will do practically everything to avoid it." Sullivan (1953) describes this condition as "the exceedingly unpleasant and driving experience connected with inadequate discharge of the need for human intimacy" (p. 290).

Doudna & McBride (1981) found from interviewing women in their thirties that, "having children was clearly the most pressing issue, many of them were obsessed with the looming biological deadline. One woman feared her 'statute of limitations' had 'about run out,' asking her doctor, 'How long do I have?' as though she had a terminal disease" (p. 31).

In their study of never-married men and women between the ages of 20-30, Inglis & Greenglass (1989) found that women had, "significantly stronger motivations for marriage than men" (p. 1035). They also concluded that women "accorded greater importance to the benefit of "legal security" in marriage" (p. 1035). This finding "supports the idea that the institution of marriage provides women with security through legitimate legal status" (p. 1040).

The Challenges and Difficulties of Singlehood in the Thirties

Sheehy (1995) predicts that many singles in their thirties today will never marry and cites statistics which relay the probability that as high as 17% will never have children. Levinson (1978) suggests that both men and women may experience this period with great difficulty; reporting considerable turmoil in struggling with pressures from society, family, and work to reevaluate their lives.

Data based on measurements of outpatient psychiatric care and mental institutions show that single people have a higher rate of mental illness than their married/coupled counterparts (Bastide, p. 54). Stein (1981) quoted Dr. James Lynch's discovery that "individuals that live

alone are more susceptible to physical and emotional illnesses because they lack the tranquilizing influence of human companionship during life's stresses" (p. 47). Pearlin and Johnson (1981) interviewed 2,300 people representative of the Chicago population, to explore the correlation between marital status and depression. The findings indicated that depression was least frequent in the presently married, most prevalent for the divorced and somewhere in the middle for the never-married. The unmarried were thought most vulnerable to the three persistent problems said to have "deleterious psychological effects over time:" social isolation, economic hardship, and parental role overload (Stein, 1981).

Many statistical reports have shown single women outnumbering single men, making the chances to find a partner seemingly remote for some women in their thirties. However, one report in 1992 from the Census Bureau challenged this statistic by showing a reverse ratio of 121 unmarried men to every 100 single women age 30-34. Many women also report feeling "out of the market" by this age, fearing that the age 30-45 year old male they seek may be looking for a younger woman (Stein, 1981). Psychologist Florence Kaslow's (1992) interviews with single career women in their thirties conveyed their dual experience of taking pride and pleasure in their freedom and accomplishments, while also feeling the absence of "a partner with whom to share intimate feelings in a committed, durable relationship," conflicted about the possibility of not having children, and defending against loneliness by staying busy (p. 92).

Certainly women of this era have learned and been emancipated from much of the oppression imposed on them in past decades. As previously stated, however, culturally based conflicting pressures and mixed messages continue to create fear and confusion for some women over appropriate gender roles and life choices (Hite, 1987; Schwartzberg et al., 1995). Anderson and Stewart (1994) also point out the "gender lag" phenomena, whereby those women who are trying to eliminate submissive gender roles from their repertoire are faced with some men still socialized to expect these very same traditional behaviors.

Potuchek's (1996) exploratory interviews with single women illuminated how much of their discomfort with being single is rooted in other's dubious perceptions and reactions to their singleness. Two reactions were found to be most problematic. One was feeling pitied by others, "who insisted that you must be unhappy and if you said you weren't, they thought you must have some psychological problem of denial." The other problematic reaction was with people who romanticized their lives, assuming, "You've got this perfect, carefree life. And you must not have any problems, or responsibilities."

Hite (1987) relays that many single women cannot enjoy the abundant opportunities in their lives because being married remains the ideological norm. What hovers over the experience of being single for a woman over thirty is the judgment and expectation that being single is a transitory and undesirable state. Stein (1981) adds that many women, spurred on by intense parental and societal pressure to marry, work hard during their thirties to find a prospective life partner. He found, however, that they derive "little intrinsic satisfaction from the search for a mate" and sometimes report a decline in self-esteem (p.14).

Specifically on the subject of singlehood in the thirties, Anderson and Stewart (1994) state that, "Single women past the age of thirty are frequently confronted with the question, 'Why aren't you married?' - a thinly veiled version of the question, 'What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?'" (p. 69). "The woman in question is both odd and hopeless because, at midlife, she is simply the victim of her own aging body, 'dysfunctional' childhood, or dubious priorities. Once women are past thirty, their single status becomes suspect. Once they are past thirty-five, their singlehood is regarded as a chronic and depressing problem" (p. 70).

Images of single women as "desperate" have also spurred the cultural assumption that her unmarried status is the direct cause of inevitable bouts of discontent (Anderson & Stewart, 1994). Women who take to heart the barrage of this cultural message can experience guilt, shame, and a

painstaking struggle to analyze and identify the inadequacies in them that have caused this "abnormal state."

Schwartzberg et al. (1995) point out common negative experiences, expressed by their single, female, thirty-something clients: a "not quite adult" position in their family, romanticizing of marriage, assumption that singleness is a "personal failing," feeling in a "marginal limbo" state, "out of step" with the wider society and norms of the family, a "sense of being stuck."

Potuchek (1996) spoke of the "difficulties of being socially integrated into a couple's world." Some of the tales in her sample told of being "dropped by married friends" or of the more subtle changes in the nature of their friendships. Some singles relayed their impression that their married friends felt threatened and envious of their single status, particularly if they wanted to break free from a relationship but were afraid to do so. Potuchek framed this challenge to be about "how single women and married women maintain relationships in which each doesn't see the other's life as a personal affront or personal criticism."

In Hite's study (1987), many thirty-something women reported that they felt they had "less status" than married women their age, and did not feel as valued or sought after by society as their male counterparts. Thus, many conveyed a sense of urgency to get married before age thirty-nine to lessen their chances of remaining alone or a misfit (pp. 306-307).

Most of the women who responded to Hite's study reported "disturbingly rough and upsetting relationships with men, emotional roller-coaster rides, exaggerated by the 'marketplace' atmosphere prevalent in the 'singles' world" (p. 52). On this subject, Anderson & Stewart (1994) contend that:

> The negative cultural images spawned by the marriage and motherhood mandate can affect not only women's feelings about themselves, but also their feelings about their relationship with men. Women may assume that they must be pliable, deferential, and ever accommodating in order to increase their chances of snaring a member of the ever-shrinking pool of eligible bachelors. (p. 74)

Doudna and McBride (1981), interviewed 25 professional women age 29-56 and posited that the "emotional landscape of these women's lives ranged from desperation to resignation to confusion" (p. 25). "The inability of men to make commitments and to tolerate women"s success were often repeated themes" (p. 25). In Anderson and Stewart's study (1994), many women echoed the perception that their sense of independence was an attribute that attracted few men.

These authors also point out the conflict, for many women, between their wish to marry and their fear of marriage, scared of compromising and forfeiting their sense of self in order to preserve the joy of companionship, security and intimacy. On this issue they state:

> It isn't just the attitudes and behavior of men that some women don't trust. Women also question their own ability to stay centered. They worry that their own instincts, instilled by their early training, will betray them; that they will be sabotaged by that old urge to merge. These women fear their own tendencies to revert to "automatic pilot," to accommodate and defer, eventually metamorphosing into some stranger they hardly recognize and certainly don't like. (p.195)

In her book, Lifeprints, Psychologist Rosalind Barnett declared that, "Many single women are upset, not because they feel miserable without a man, but because they don't! What does it say about their femininity, they wonder, that their lives are going well without a permanent intimate relationship? Is there something wrong with them? Are they less than complete?" (p. 273).

Others report feelings of loneliness, "a condition that can vary from the barely perceptible to the overwhelming" (Weiss, 1981, p. 160). Potuchek (1996) relayed to her audience that loneliness for single women ranges from those who "grieve for the dream of finding a partner," to those who miss the emotional, physical, and activity oriented companionship, to those who suffer more acutely because of being more socially isolated. This speaker and Dalton (1992) found that loneliness is also related to the burden of self-reliance. Some of their research participants reported feeling overwhelmed with the sole responsibility of daily tasks and decision making.

Ortega (1969) differentiated loneliness from depression by noting that a depressed state is one in which there is a surrender to the distress; loneliness evokes the drive to relinquish one's distress by regaining a past/lost relationship or by connecting with a new one. Weiss (1981) supports the notion that loneliness is a response to a relational deficit, the absence of some particular relational provision. From the case study materials he collected he concluded, "loneliness is caused not by being alone but by being without some definite needed relationship or set of relationships" (p. 157). He differentiates between the "loneliness of social isolation," remedied by access to an engaging social network, and the "loneliness of emotional isolation" only remedied by re-accessing the provisional closeness of an emotional, intimate attachment. The symptoms associated with social isolation are feelings of aimlessness, restlessness, boredom, marginality and difficulty concentrating (Weiss, 1981). Those who report experiencing the loneliness of emotional isolation exhibit symptoms stemming from "a re-experiencing of the anxiety produced by childhood abandonment" (p. 59). This central theme then gives rise to feelings of pervasive apprehensiveness, a vigilance to threat, inability to relax, sense of utter aloneness, oversensitivity, and feelings of anxiety and emptiness (p. 59). Weiss also referred to the Maisel Report's telephone survey study, which found loneliness more prevalent with the poor. This finding indicated a positive correlation between social withdrawal and low income (p.162).

So many single women, wanting children, are burdened with the pressures of the "biological clock," feeling dependent upon finding a mate within the biological time frame to make this possible. Hite (1987) points out the culture's insensitivity by the "desperate women in their thirties" stigma, partially fueled by a lack of understanding or empathy for this type of biologically imposed reality for women. With the idea that "independence" is a virtue in our society, Hite's (1987) data also reported some women's ambivalence and guilt over wanting to be somewhat dependent and "taken care of" by a male partner as economically dependent homemakers and mothers.

The time frame expected for marriage, combined with the urgency created by biological limits of child-bearing years, cause many women to regard their single status as a hurdle to cross before they can address any other developmental issues. Rather than broadening the definitions of self, the life story becomes about the single status (Schwartzberg et al., 1995).

Without the responsibilities of a husband and children, singlehood may afford a woman more time to devote to professional goals and development, but there is still unequal pay because of her gender (Holder & Anderson, 1998). This is consistent with some of the exploratory research findings that have highlighted financial concerns to be a major disadvantage of being single (Potuchek, 1996). Furthermore, many women are still subject to the assumption that they are less committed to work because they are waiting to be married (Holder & Anderson, 1998).

Anderson & Stewart (1994) point out many women's struggle to create and maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. For many, work becomes all consuming in terms of hours and focus of energy and attention, allowing their support and social networks to atrophy. For some, work is the outgrowth of the internalized, compensatory, self-reliant pressure to succeed. For others, it can serve as a way to avoid the possible sense of isolation, loneliness, and inadequacy from singlehood. Their successful professional status then can defend against any negative stigma of their single status (Anderson & Stewart, 1994).

This finding was also supported in Nero's study (1984), when she interviewed 30 MBA childless women in their thirties, using qualitative content analysis. The two thematic alignments between single women and their work she categorized as "Brides of the Corporation" and "Women on Hold and Waiting." The two most significant findings of this study were that unmarried women experienced more conflict between their personal lives and work than the married and coupled women did. Secondly, subordination of relationship and family was traced to socialization in graduate schools of business, which was later reinforced in the work force. This pressured expectation from the corporate world can reflect and communicate an agenda to

support the maintenance of a single lifestyle for female employees, so as to insure that loyalty remain with the corporation (Levin, 1998).

As far as living arrangements, various literary resources noted the pervasive tendency for women to view their living situation as temporary. The hesitancy to invest in a permanent "home" was based on the expectation of someday replacing the often same-sex roommate with the life partner whom they anxiously awaited (Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Stein, 1981).

The Positive Experience of Singlehood in the Thirties

Within the current literature, there is a substantial body of data focusing on some women's positive experiences of being single, even if their single status is not voluntary. Anderson and Stewart (1994) contend that their research neither glorifies singlehood nor undermines the institution of marriage. Rather, it conveys the legitimacy and potentiality of singlehood to provide an array of unrecognized benefits and advantages, versus it being perceived as a disadvantaged catastrophic state.

According to Gordon (1994), "It is possible that single women today have more independent possibilities in the context of diversification of family forms, and increased flexibility in the social construction of gender" (p. 56). Schwartz (1976) wrote about how, as singles approached 30, many become critical of unproductive patterns and begin to reevaluate their lives, realizing the possibility that they might never marry and that they themselves hold the responsibility for designing meaningful lives. They often reexamine earlier occupational decisions, consider the option of continuing their academic education, reassess and improve their living situations, develop new interests and activities, and expand and reinforce circles of friends

Stein's data (1976, 1981) conveys the attraction of singlehood to include "freedom, career opportunities, developing friendships, economic self-sufficiency, enjoyable sexual experiences, and personal development" (1981, p. 17). Adams (1976) also cited economic, social and psychological independence as factors which make singleness a viable life style.

Witzel (1991) conducted a qualitative study, interviewing 25 Caucasian, heterosexual, highly regarded and socially active never-married women between the ages of 36-83. Contrary to the author's original expectation, a preoccupation with intrapsychic conflict about emotional intimacy issues did not arise from the data. Instead, she found unanticipated high levels of adjustment and fulfillment. Over half of the sample reported substandard emotional support from their families of origin. Yet, there was a unanimous response displaying healthy levels of self-esteem, autonomy, altruistic focused energy, and successful and satisfying levels of connectedness to others.

Gigy (1980) compared self-concept amongst a large sample of married and single women. She found that single women defined themselves in terms of their goals and ideals versus the married women's ascribed roles of kinship and household activities. There was no significant difference between single and married women in their evaluations of their lives in terms of success. However, single women emerged as having higher self-esteem, describing themselves as energetic, assertive and poised; while the married women's descriptions of self were of being "dull" or "lazy" (pp. 332-333).

Hite's (1987) numerous and diverse essay questionnaires conveyed that most women do enjoy the freedom to "defire one's own life." There is great satisfaction reported in the ability to pursue and make independent choices regarding social and professional pursuits, interests, and personal goals (Anderson, 1994; Dalton, 1992; Gubrium, 1975; Hite, 1987; Potuchek, 1996). Scutt (1994) compiled thirty accounts of never-married women of various ages who write of the "pleasure and splendors in singularity of life" that come with being "your own person" and making choices independently. It is this author's contention that the most important aims for women should be the striving for "economic independence, the right to say and do what one wants, and to live an autonomous life" (p.10).

Scutt (1994) also attempted to dispel the "narrowness of cultural ideology" through her

definitive belief that "women alone are not women lonely" (p. 13). Margaret Adams (1981) also

challenged the popular notion that "by virtue of their solitary style of life, single people are

conspicuously isolated, lonely, and therefore vulnerable" (p. 222). Anderson and Stewart's

interviewees, even those who have experienced "forced liberation" (never choosing to live

singly), reported that "the anticipation of loneliness is far more powerful and terrifying than the

reality of being alone" (p. 283). O'Brien (1993) adds, "loneliness is not limited to being single or

to being alone" (forward). Several women discover that once they worked through the initial

stages of being single, they were far less lonely than times when they were in unsatisfying

marriages or relationships (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; O'Brien, 1993). Others had to seek

solitude in order to find and know themselves, while often discovering talents and interests that

had previously gone unnoticed or dismissed (O'Brien, 1993).

Family therapists Anderson and Stewart (1994) set out to challenge the popular culture's

negative images of single women, perpetuated through media and literary sources as "deficient,

depressed, lonely, and desperately unfulfilled" (p. 14). They believe this to be a "cultural myth"

and deem the stereotyped portrayals of single women to be "grossly exaggerated and largely

fictitious" (p. 15). Their conclusion, from the sociological and psychiatric literature they

reviewed, was that "being single was seldom a negative experience for women and definitely not

one that was harmful to their physical or mental health" (p.14).

In their qualitative study, Anderson and Stewart (1994) interviewed "successful" single

women with diverse demographics, ages 40-55, focusing on their satisfactions and productivity as

opposed to their "alleged depressions and pathologies" (p.15). Some themes that emerged from

their data were the many "unexpected joys of flying solo," such as: the ability to focus and

succeed professionally without family responsibilities and distractions; the capacity for resiliency,

perseverance, and self-reliance in the face of adversity; tales of adventure; the choice to "turn

away from the roles society had prescribed for them to define what they wanted and what they could create for themselves. They had made peace with their old dreams and illusions and had let go of the ones that had not fulfilled their promises" (p.15). "Their stories tell of freedom, adventure, self-satisfaction, ease, and an increased capacity to appreciate moments of joy and discovery--a gift so rare and unexpected that many experience it as a feeling of spiritual regeneration or transformation" (p. 32).

The women these authors sampled dispelled the notion that a man, marriage, or prosperous financial means brought happiness and security. Rather, they found the most compelling indicator for personal "success" was feeling good about oneself and about one's life (Anderson & Stewart, 1994). They describe these women as having "learned to feel comfortable swimming upstream against the current of popular opinion, which dictates, as surely as if there were an eleventh commandment, 'Thou shalt not be single, over thirty, and happy'" (p.16). Rather, what is revealed is the "universal qualities of the single life that some women find extraordinarily valuable: freedom, independence, and most of all, self-determination" (p. 35). This positive identity stems from "finding their real authenticity and rootedness within themselves rather than searching outside themselves for approval and authority, either in a male partner or in the many social and religious institutions of society" (O'Brien 1993, foreword).

Hite's (1987) and Dalton's (1992) interview results imply that going through the "crisis" of being a single woman in one's thirties can lead to self growth. Potuchek (1996) also found that singleness provided personal growth through greater opportunities for solitude, which was said to be critical to the process of self reflection and becoming psychologically centered. For those who may experience periodic bouts of loneliness, Moustakas (1961) reminds us that one's separateness from others can offer "a way back to oneself" (p. 22). Weiss (1981) concurs with this theme:

> This sort of loneliness refers to a time in which one is able to use one's aloneness to
> recognize with awesome clarity both one's ineradicable separateness from all else and one's
> fundamental connectedness. It is a time of almost excruciating awareness in which one

sees clearly the fundamental facts of one's small but unique place in the ultimate scheme, after which one can recognize one's true self and begin to be that true self. (p. 155)

Stein's research (1981, p. 18) suggested that "singlehood contributes to a developed personality. Singles are highly adaptive. Without the clarity of role models or the support of a partner or of society as a whole, they shape their lives by taking risks and forging into uncharted territory."

From their interviews, Anderson and Stewart (1994) reported that women's high level of satisfaction came from an "internal shift" and change of perspective. They came to transformative realization that they were the best judge of what was important for them and that they could determine their attitude about their single status. The passage from one frame of mind to another was described as gradual and "rarely smooth" (Anderson & Stewart, 1994). For many, it is an arduous and painful process to overcome the obstacles imposed by traditional expectations (Anderson & Stewart, 1994). The process entails questioning previous projected and distorted beliefs, assumptions and judgments that proved to be emotionally disabling (Kaufman, 1991), "Women need to examine their own attitudes for signs of unconscious prejudice against themselves" (Anderson & Stewart, 1994, p. 37). Then comes evaluation and reformulation of expectations, clarifying their authentic desires and make choices about how they can use their personal power to create the happiness they seek.

This process entailed the "crucial developmental task for single women," which Anderson (1994) referred to as "giving up the dream," meaning the fairy-tale promise of "happily ever after" (p. 83). Relinquishing the dream also involves overcoming the fear of judgment and the feeling of being fundamentally flawed (Anderson, 1994). One interviewee reported that, "giving up the dream is not acceptance of deprivation but rather an affirmation of the self" (p. 84). This concept supports the maintenance of the "dream" of eventually finding a loving partnership, while emancipating from the psychological handicap of depending on its manifestation for happiness. Finding the man then becomes "icing, not the cake" (p.189). The

authors of this study convey that most of the never-married women interviewed "never consciously struggled to give up 'The Dream' until they approached forty and saw their chances to have children begin to disappear" (p. 93). Of women in their late thirties, they state that:

> Midlife gives women a loud, sharp wake-up call, focusing their attention on the need to take charge of their own life journeys and find deeper meaning in their lives. There is an increasingly urgent existential need to examine the meaning of decisions and behaviors. When postponing dreams no longer makes sense, priorities change. Everything goes up for grabs--relationships, careers, previous decisions, and outdated commitments. (p. 136)

One example they used were the instances in which some women decided to have children anyway, without a spouse. Anderson & Stewart (1994) highlight the medical and social changes that have influenced this new trend. Example cited included: the high divorce rate, normalizing single-parent homes, new and accepted reproductive technologies, and the increasing acceptance of some adoption agencies to choose single women for parents. These all have set a more viable stage for women to have and choose the option of single parenting.

> Midlife adds urgency to women's decisions about children, but it also gives them the strength and wisdom needed to make such decisions . . .The single women we interviewed who chose to become mothers in midlife wanted this experience with a passion--much more than they had ever wanted the experience of being a wife. Many openly declared that it was far easier to do without marriage than to do without a child. They were determined not to give up their dreams simply because they did not have a man by their side. (p. 229)

From their qualitative data, Anderson & Stewart surmised that "having leaped or been pushed into the abyss, these women discovered that they could fly" (p. 84). Enormous rewards and satisfaction were reaped in the ability to "custom tailor" their lives (Anderson & Stewart, 1994). If marriage is on the horizon for some, Sheehy (1995) agrees that the delay of this event until later in life, along with heightened selectivity, "bodes well" for a "personal security" (p. 52). Norton and Miller (1992) reported official statistical data which predicted that there would be lower divorce rates for those thirty-something persons who married later. Their assumption is that there is a correlation between higher age for first marriages and lower divorce rates.

Thus, in the face of struggling against many of the aforementioned daunting stereotypes, more recent research conveys that many single women gain a sense of renewed independence, strength, and self-esteem by creating and preserving their sense of identity, power, and direction. No longer bound by societal prescriptions of how they should live their lives, they are freed to write their own life script, experiencing a thrilling time of renewal with a diversity of options and opportunities available to them (Anderson & Stewart, 1994).

What's the Difference?—The Defining Characteristics

For the purpose of this study, it is also relevant and important to look at the factors cited which help to differentiate the women with a general sense of well-being from those who feel debilitated by fear and despair over their single status.

Starr and Carns (1972) believe that forming supportive relationships and successful adjustment to the professional arena enhance a positive sense of self and provide a crucial sense of connection for singles. Many women who are satisfied with their single lives have reported the importance of having close friendships (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Dalton, 1992). "For single women, friendship networks provide a sense of being connected to a community of people who care about one another. This net of security and community offsets the sense of vulnerability that otherwise accompanies living singly" (Anderson & Stewart, p.176). The studies conducted by Keith, Braito, & Breci (1990) and Perlman & Peplau (1984) suggested that it is not the degree of sociability or isolation that makes a difference, but rather the level of discrepancy between one's preference and need for interaction and the degree of actual affiliation with others.

Adams (1981) described her interview sample as having a "very substantial image of themselves as socially independent people, regarding their home setting and the life style it embodies as being very essential components of their social identity" (p. 232). She stresses the importance of commitment to a particular living plan with "accessible neighborliness" and a

supportive and interactive living arrangement. She views this as a "stabilizing influence," a

"prerequisite for social security" (p. 221). And for singles it is a: "categorical imperative to

compensate for their lack of formally ascribed companionship", permitting them "to live with the

degree of solitary privacy, without compromising their safety or leaving them too vulnerable to

the emotional, social, and practical dangers of total isolation" (p. 221).

Anderson & Stewart (1994) also surmised from their collected data, that "flying solo

successfully is very much a question of attitude." They conclude that the way their sample

developed the level of confidence that fuels their self-worth and ability to redefine and live

"happily ever after," is based on three components:

> 1): Accept Who You Are: coming to terms with the past, getting rid of excess baggage, as much unfinished business, as possible. One of the most powerful and self-affirming steps we can take is to forgive ourselves for what we have and haven't done. (p. 288)
> (2): Dare to Dream of a New Destination: allowing us to chart our future along a new course; it provides the inspiration that keeps us moving. (p. 290)
> (3): Take Action: Passivity is the enemy of a woman's heart and soul. Two factors must be addressed by women in their plans to make their dreams more attainable--money and time. Women need to start viewing themselves as independent economic entities. Second only to creating a financial safety net, investing time in herself will provide a woman with the best flight insurance she can have. (p. 292)

Axelrod (1986) used quantitative and qualitative methods in studying the influence of

mother-daughter relationships on women's sense of self and their role choices. She studied

married women with children between ages 28-38 and found that it was not the mothers' primary

roles or their satisfaction with these roles that affected their daughters' role satisfaction. Rather,

it was the women's perceptions of their relationships with their mothers and their mothers'

messages to them which proved to be the single most important factor associated with the

women's current satisfaction with their primary roles. The women's reported self-esteem and

primary role satisfaction were enhanced by a relationship with the mother that was perceived as

loving and accepting with low hostility and low psychological control. This study is relevant to

women's perceptions of their single status as well, for its implication is that self-esteem and

relational mother-daughter dynamics seem to have noteworthy influence on many women's

issues, both on an intrapsychic and interpersonal level.

O'Brien and Christie (1993) addressed the role of faith and spirituality in a compilation

of essays written by single women. One woman expressed feeling "saved by faith." Through the

affiliation with her church was "where I learned about respecting diversity, inclusivity,

reciprocity, the celebration of life, wonder, mystery, passion and the vision of a caring earth

community" (p. 31). Another woman wrote, "To be a complete person is not dependent upon a

lasting marriage relationship but upon a well-developed sense of self-esteem, a personal strength

of integrity. Wholeness, or authenticity, is integration of mind, body, and spirit (p. 50).

Kegan's (1982) Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theories of adult development in the field of social work and psychology are

underdeveloped and scarce. Relevant concepts such as Erikson's "generativity," for example,

spans over a thirty year cycle, leaving it too broad and lacking a sense of depth.

Robert Kegan's lifecycle developmental model offers a current, innovative, and

comprehensive theory to conceptualize women's struggles and triumphs in coping with their

single status in their thirties. Kegan is a therapist, researcher-theorist, and teacher. He is a senior

lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a senior faculty member at the

Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, chairperson of the Institute for the

Management of Lifelong Education at Harvard, and a Fellow at the Clinical-Development

Institute.

In his book, The Evolving Self--Problem and Process in Human Development (1982), he

outlines his "empirically grounded speculation" model, based on his own life experience, clinical

practice, and research. He attempts to integrate: developmental, existential, and object relations

theories; the relationships between cognition and affect; and between the individual and the social

milieu. At the level of practice, he attempts to combine preventive-supportive psychology and a

meliorative-clinical psychology (p. 288). He suggests that his framework is biological in studying the notion of "adaptation" of how the organism relates to the environment; psychological in the "ego" sphere of relationship of the self to other; and philosophical in studying "the relationship between the subject to the object" (p. 293). He credits his major influences to have come from the works of Piaget, Social Cognitivist Lawrence Kohlberg, and Object Relations Theory.

To convey his theory, the following section will review the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings which lay the foundations of his work, the characteristics of his stages of development, the central mechanisms for development, the clinical interventions to facilitate stage movement, and how his theory can be applied to the subject of this research.

Theoretical and Philosophical Underpinnings

The construction of Kegan's theory was motivated by his opinion that:

> ...the field of ego or personality development is somewhat encumbered by a number of poorly constructed meta-psychological questions: "Which is to be taken as the master in personality, affect or cognition?" or "Which should be the central focus, the individual or the social?" or "Which should be the primary theater of investigation, the intrapsychic or the interpersonal?" or even "Which is to be taken as the more powerful developmental framework, the psychoanalytic or the cognitive-structural?" (preface ix)

Kegan reconstructs these questions by focusing away from the "dichotomous choice to the dialectical context" (preface ix). He presents a "theory of interpersonal and intrapsychic reconstruction" (p. 95) suggesting that what he calls the "evolution of meaning-making," is "philosophically prior to and constitutive of these polarities" (preface ix). He relates his framework to that of Erikson's psychosocial developmental model as far as the integration of that which is part of the individual ("psyche") and part of the "social" (p. 257).

Kegan reviews the psychological traditions which have been most significant to clinical psychology and social work as the neo-psychoanalytic, including ego psychologists Anna Freud, 1936; Hartmann, 1939; Erikson, 1950; Kris, 1975; object relations theorists Fairbairn, 1952;

Jacobsen, 1964; Winnicott, 1965; Mahler, 1968; Guntrip, 1971. The existential-

phenomenological tradition include: Lecky, 1945; Maslow, 1954; May,1958; Binswanger, 1963;

Angyal, 1965; and clinical psychologist Carl Rogers, 1951. Kegan attempts to develop a third

psychological tradition, which he calls the "constructive-developmental." He states, "As the idea

of construction directs us to the activity that underlies and generates the form or thingness of a

phenomenon, so the idea of development directs us to the origins and processes by which the

form came to be and by which it will pass into a new form" (p.13).

This theory attempts to integrate the wisdom of both the psychoanalytic traditions

dominant in clinical settings, with attention in academic environments on the cognitive-

developmental approach to origin, development, and process. Kegan supports the need for a

meta-psychology, which will be explicitly attuned to the biological, philosophical, and

psychological. The biological (the developmental) and philosophical (the constructive theme)

components of his theory originated from the "genetic epistemology" of Piaget, whom he refers

to as an "unrecognized genius" (p. 26).

Kegan paraphrases Schachtel's (1959) point that "growth always involves a process of

differentiation, of emergence from embeddedness" (p. 31), toward what ultimately and optimally

follows which Kegan refers to as the "reintegration" in the world. This movement is consistent

with Piaget's concept of "decentration," "the loss of an old center," and what he refers to as

"recentration," "the recovery of a new center" (p. 31). Kegan refers to development as "a history

of transformations, each of which is a better guarantee to the world of its distinct integrity, a

history of successive emergence from it (differentiation) in order to relate to it (integration)" (p.

31). He elaborates on the concept of growth as a "new construction of self and other," involving

the distinction between "where I stop and you begin," permitting a qualitatively new guarantee of

distinctness between the two, allowing a "larger you with which to be in relation" (p.131).

Kegan believes his model (p. 109):

offers a corrective to all present developmental frameworks which universally define growth in terms of differentiation, separation, increasing autonomy, and lose sight of the fact that adaptation is equally about integration, attachment, inclusion. The net effect of this myopia, as feminist psychologists are now pointing out (Gilligan,1978; Low, 1978), has been that differentiation (the stereotypically male overemphasis in this most human ambivalence) is favored with the language of growth and development, while integration (the stereotypically female overemphasis) gets spoken of in terms of dependency and immaturity. A model in pursuit of the psychological meaning and experience of evolution --intrinsically about differentiation and integration--is less easily bent to this prejudice.

Kegan specifies his tie to Piagetian philosophy (pp. 43-44):

Piaget's principal loyalty was to the ongoing conversation between the individuating organism and the world, a process of adaptation shaped by the tension between the assimilation of new experience to the old "grammar" and the accommodation of the old grammar to new experience. Piaget's work has demonstrated--that this conversation is marked by periods of dynamic stability or balance followed by periods of instability and qualitatively new balance. These periods of dynamic balance amount to a kind of evolutionary truce: further assimilation and accommodation will go on in the context of the established relationship struck between the organism and the world. The guiding principle of such a truce--the point that is always at issue and is renegotiated in the transition to each new balance--is what, from the point of view of the organism, is composed as "object" and what is "subject." The question always is; To what extent does the organism differentiate itself from (and so relate itself to) the world?

Kegan posits that, "this understanding is crucial to our being of help to people in pain" (p. 44). "Loss and recovery, separation and attachment, anxiety and play, depression and transformation, disintegration and coherence--all may owe their origins to the felt experience of this activity, this motion to which the word "emotion" refers" (p. 44).

Kegan considers Lawrence Kohlberg's study of the development of moral reasoning to be the "single most significant extension of the Piagetian framework" (p. 50), and another influence on Kegan's theoretical formula in the way it "addresses the development of the personal construction of the social world, taking account of development in meaning-making beyond adolescence into adulthood" (p. 50). He believes Kohlberg's most celebrated claim is that "by carefully studying the development of a person's moral meaning-making, one can be led to a solution in the two-thousand-year-old quandary of the relation between the individual and the group" (p. 67). Kegan relates to this work with his firm position that development is a matter of

differentiation and reintegration. He states that this shift "is a consequence of meaning-evolution, which is not a matter of increasing differentiation alone, but of increasing relationship to the world" (p. 68). This involves a "better recognition of what is separate from me so that I can be related to it, rather than fused with it" (p. 67).

Kegan's framework studies the evolution of meaning construction, connected to both the psychodynamic and existential personality psychologies. He attempts to integrate the ideas of constructivism ("that persons or systems constitute or construct reality, with perception being one aspect of our constructivism") and developmentalism ("that organic systems evolve through eras according to regular principles of stability and change") (p. 8).

About the meaning-making notion, Kegan states:

> the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning making. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context because we are the meaning-making context. "Percept without concept is blind," Kant (1969) said. "Experience is not what happens to you," Aldous Huxley (1972) said, "it's what you do with what happens to you." Human being is the composing of meaning, including the occasional inability to compose meaning, which we often experience as the loss of our own composure. (p. 11)

Kegan quotes Herbert Fingarette (1963, pp. 62-68)," ... the idea that we are constitutive of our own experience crosses philosophy, theology, literary criticism, and psychology. In psychology, it is an axiom of existential, phenomenological, Gestalt, and Piagetian approaches."

Psychoanalytic object relations theory traces basic life cycle themes to the events in the first years of life. Kegan's "neo-Piagetian" theory does not view the recurrence of distinctive issues, in different form later in development, as later manifestations of infancy issues. Rather, he understands them as contemporary manifestations of meaning-making activity, which repeats and extends itself throughout the life cycle (p. 78). Examples of the human struggle to recognize oneself in the midst of conflicting and changing feelings are: a man's difficulty acknowledging his need for closeness and inclusion, a woman's acknowledging her need for distinctness and

personal power, and a ten-year-old's need for privacy and self determination (p.16). All of the

aforementioned illustrate Kegan's assertion in the continuous effort to create meaning through

connection to others and through forming a separate identity as well. "Our survival and

development depend on our capacity to recruit the invested attention of others to us" (p. 17); "the

attention-recruiting infant is doing something he will try to do all his life (recognize and be

recognized)--and at bottom it is the same thing: the activity of meaning" (p.18). "The capacity

to recruit another's invested regard, so uniform at birth, becomes a various affair as people grow

older: some people have a much greater ability to recruit people's attention to them than other

people do" (p. 19). "Who comes into a person's life is in large part a matter of other people's

ability to be recruited. If the capacity to be recruited is educable and depends in part on our

ability to see, then perhaps the kind of exploration we undertake in a book like this one can

enhance our recruitability" (p. 19).

This model incorporates Rogers' existential approach to evolutionary biology which

attends to the "intrinsic processes of adaptation and growth" (p.19). Kegan quotes Rogers' (1959,

p.196) explanation of the principle of "actualizing tendency," which he deems the sole motive of

personality:

> ...the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to
> maintain or enhance the organism. It involves not only the tendency to meet what Maslow
> terms "deficiency needs," but it also involves development toward differentiation and
> expansion in terms of growth and effectiveness. It is development toward autonomy and
> away from heteronomy or control by external forces. Angyal's statement could by used as
> a synonym for this term: "Life is an autonomous event, which takes place between the
> organism and the environment."

Kegan maintains the Rogerian conviction that there is a basic unity to the personality. It is best

understood as a process rather than an entity, giving rise to the "self" as a meaning-making

system (p. 19). "Anxiety, defense, psychological maladjustment, and the processes of

psychotherapy are all understood in the context of the efforts to maintain, and the experience of

transforming the self-system" (p. 19). However, the exclusive emphasis Roger's concept of adaptation has on separation (development toward differentiation and autonomy) is challenged by Kegan, who supports the biologists' notion that "adaptation is a matter of differentiation and integration" (development toward inclusion and attachment) (p. 5).

Kegan's model attempts to join the object relations and ego psychologies in the effort to understand the processes and stages of development in our self-other constructions. He borrows Schachtel's (1959) notion that the "dawn of an object world is the consequence of the organism's gradual 'emergence from embeddedness' (p. 78). He then contrasts this view with the psychoanalytic concept of object relations as an "energy redirection or an object choice" (p. 78).

Regarding the understanding of affect, Kegan views it as, "essentially phenomenological, the felt experience of a motion (hence, 'e-motion'). In identifying evolutionary activity as the fundamental ground of personality, I am suggesting that the source of our emotions is the phenomenological experience of evolving - of defending, surrendering, and reconstructing a center"(p. 82).

Kegan views the experience of "separation anxiety," as stemming from the "evolutionary transformation--an emergence from embeddedness--not so much a matter of separation from the object as separation from myself, from which I am not yet sufficiently differentiated to integrate as other" (p. 82). He concluded that the affective experience of depression and anxiety is rooted in the "wrenching activity of differentiation" (p. 82). "Emergence from embeddedness involves a kind of repudiation, an evolutionary recognition that what before was me is not me" (p. 82). Out of a lifelong process of development, Kegan's notion of "subject-object" (or self/other) relations emerge from a "succession of qualitative differentiations of the self from the world" and "successive triumphs of 'relationship to' rather than 'embeddedness in'" (p. 77).

While recognizing the differences between persons who look quite "sick" and those who are higher functioning, Kegan's model conceptualizes them in a "similar evolutionary

predicament" (p. 212). He elaborates, "After their own meaning-making and judgmental relatedness to the world is understood, the state of their balancing, and how well they are able to preserve their balancing (defenses), can be considered" (p. 77).

Characteristics of Stage Development

Kegan developed six levels of subject-object relations throughout the life span:

Stage 0: The Incorporative Balance

The infant is embedded with the world surrounding him/her; the self is egocentric verses distinct.

Stage 1: The Impulsive Balance

The infant experiences the transformation of emerging from embeddedness through the process of decentration (Piaget, 1937); a process of adaptation, "a differentiation from that which was the very subject of my personal organization and which becomes thereby the object of a new organization on behalf of a new subjectivity that coordinates it" (p. 85). "In Mahler's terms, we are 'hatched out'—over and over again," vulnerable each time to a qualitatively new kind of separation anxiety (p. 85). Here, "the child is able to recognize objects separate from herself, but those objects are subject to the child's perceptions of them (this is, I suggest, the underlying structure of Piaget's preoperational stage). If the child's perception of an object changes, the object itself has changed in the child's experience" (p. 88). The preschooler has poor impulse control (organized by needs, wishes, and interests), expresses distress through the tantrum and lacks the capacity for ambivalence. He attributes this to the "system overwhelmed by internal conflict because there is no self yet which can serve as a context upon which the competing impulses can play themselves out; the impulses are the self, are themselves the context" (p. 88).

Stage 2: The Imperial Balance

The child is differentiated from, rather than embedded in impulses, able to integrate them into a new self more capable of self-containment. From the previous stage's shared reality with

the environment, the child now has a private world that she knows cannot be read by her parents; the ability to control one's impulses ("to have them, rather than be them"), bringing a newly won sense of agency, freedom, power, independence, stability and control which emerges (p. 89).

Kegan points out the vulnerabilities and risks that accompany the liberation in each developmental stride. The child/adolescent begins to note their sense of responsibility connected to having control. The development of conscience and creation of guilt may feel like a loss and burden; but it can also bring liberation from having to exercise control over a radically separate world (p. 91). "Without the internalization of the other's voice in one's very construction of self, how one feels is much more a matter of how external others will react, and the universal effort to preserve one's integrity will be felt by others as an effort to control or manipulate" (p. 91).

Stage 3: The Interpersonal Balance

During this stage, one emerges from an embeddedness in one's needs (having them versus being them). From the interpersonal consequence of moving the structure of needs from subject to object, "a new evolutionary truce is struck," promoting the capacity to coordinate needs within self and with an "other," becoming empathic and capable of reciprocity (p. 95). Yet with this transition comes a "perplexing complexification of one's inner experience, the most common expression of which is adolescent moodiness" (p. 95).

Kegan correlates this stage with Kohlberg's "conventionality" and Piaget's "formalism" (p. 235). In this balance, the "self" is derived from "other," with both interacting as "partners in fusion" (pp. 104-105). The external forces serve as the instrument used to "satisfy my needs and work my will" (p. 100). This movement "enables a person to regulate her working with another, to construct the meaningfulness of shared agreements, to integrate her own authority with that of an other" (p. 182).

The limit is in the inability to consult oneself about the shared reality that lies within, "because it is that shared reality" (p. 96). If one lived in this balance as an adult, popular literature would depict this person as: lacking assertiveness, unable to express anger (experienced as "a risk to the interpersonal fabric, which for this balance is the holy cloth," dependent on others for approval, and suffering from low self-esteem (p.97). Because persons in this stage "cannot know themselves separate from the interpersonal context," they are likely to feel wounded, incomplete, or sad rather than feel angry if taken advantage of (p. 97). Kegan elaborates, "This balance is "interpersonal" but it is not "intimate," because what might appear to be intimacy here is the self's source rather than its aim. There is no self to share with another; instead, the other is required to bring the self into being. Fusion is not intimacy. If one can feel manipulated by the imperial balance, one can feel devoured by the interpersonal one" (pp. 96-97).

Kegan also writes of a new "projected ambivalence" in stage three whereby, "You are the other by whom I complete myself, the other whom I need to create the context out of which I define and know myself and the world" (p. 100). "The era of the growth and loss of the interpersonal balance evokes early childhood themes of oedipal resolution, internalization, and superego formation" (p. 207).

Stage 4: The Institutional Balance

During this phase of development, the meaning evolution authors a self which claims "having relationships versus being my relationships." Its hallmark is the newfound sense of self-ownership, personal authority, ideological participation, and greater control over the present..

The difference between balances is "how other people" are known (p. 101). "The institutional balance does not leave one bereft of interpersonal relationships, but it does appropriate them to the new context of their place in the maintenance of a personal self-system" (p. 101). In transcending the embeddedness in the interpersonal sphere, Kegan maintains that a more coherent and distinct other is found, not lost.

The support one needs during this stage is "recognition as an independent person in one's own right, admission to a societal arena, adult group participation, publicly recognized achievement, entry to a "career" rather than a "job," etc. (p. 211).

Stage 5: The Interindividual Balance

To depict this phase, Kegan uses the image of the self who runs the organization versus the self that was the organization; "there is now a source before which the institutional can be brought, by which it is directed, where before the institution was the source" (p. 103).

He associates this stage with Kohlberg's moral stage 5, whereby the self dislodges itself from the societal perspective. Finally, there is an ego stage that has passed through the fused comingling of stage 3, and evolved toward one which "guarantees distinct identities" (p. 105).

> This new locating of the self. . . brings about a revolution in Freud's favorite domains, "love" and "work." If one no longer is one's institution, neither is one any longer the duties, performances, work roles, career which institutionality gives rise to. One has a career; one no longer is a career. The self is no longer so vulnerable to the kind of ultimate humiliation which the threat of performance-failure holds out, for the performance is no longer ultimate. (p. 103)

A capacity for intimacy springs from the capacity for the self "to be intimate with itself," and for emotional conflict to be formulated, tolerated, and used toward the advancement of self-knowledge (p. 106). "The self surrenders its counter-dependent independence for interdependence. Having a self, the hallmark of stage 5, now has a self to share," permitting emotions and impulses to be experienced, integrated and resolved between one self-system and another (p. 106). This stage allows for a connected, shared experience while maintaining distinctness.

This balance guards what Kegan considers the "two greatest yearnings in human experience": a precious sense of differentiation, separateness, and autonomy, and the sense of inclusion, integration, and connection" (p. 107). He recognizes the "equal dignity of each yearning" and contends that "our experience of this fundamental ambivalence may be our

experience of the unitary, restless, creative motion of life itself" (p. 107). In comparing this

perspective with those before him he remarks:

> Wherever one looks among developmental psychologists, from Freud at one end of a spectrum to Carl Rogers at the other, one finds a conception of growth as increasing autonomy or distinctness. The yearning for inclusion tends to be demeaned as a kind of dependency or immature attachment. Only a psychology whose root metaphors intrinsically direct an equal respect for both poles (and orient to the relation between them) can hope to transcend this myopia. (p. 209)

He extends and further clarifies his model's distinction from psychoanalytic theory (p. 188):

> While constructive-developmental theory is less inclined to perceive an identity between childhood and later lived phenomena, it is more inclined than psychoanalytic theory to see the unity and continuity of such phenomena. The evolutionary model permits one to observe recurring phenomena of similar color and tone throughout the lifespan without having at the same time to regard such similarities as regression or recapitulation.

Kegan summarizes his identification of stage balances (p. 108):

> Every developmental stage is an evolutionary truce. It sets terms on the fundamental issue as to how differentiated the organism is from its life-surround and how embedded. . . every evolutionary truce—each stage or balance is a temporary solution to this lifelong tension between the yearnings for inclusion and distinctness. Each balance resolves the tension in a different way. The life history I have traced involves a continual moving back and forth between resolving the tension slightly in the favor of autonomy, at one stage, in the favor of inclusion, at the next. We move from the overincluded, fantasy-embedded impulsive balance to the sealed-up, self-sufficiency, overdifferentiated imperial balance; to the overincluded interpersonalism; to the autonomous, self-regulating institutional balance; to a new form of openness in the interindividual.

Kegan summarizes the nature of stage movement (p. 294):

> The framework suggests a demonstrable conception of development as the process of "natural philosophy," later stages being "better," not on the grounds they come later, but on the philosophical grounds of their having a greater truth-value. Each new evolutionary truce further differentiates the self from its embeddedness in the world, guaranteeing, in a qualitatively new way, the world's distinct integrity, and thereby creating a more integrated relationship to the world. Each new truce accomplishes this by the evolution of an evolution of lesser subjectivity and greater objectivity, an evolution that is more "truthful."

Central Mechanisms for Development

In any thorough clinical/developmental theory, there lie the central mechanisms which

foster movement from one stage to another. Kegan considers this movement to connote when the

"terms of our evolutionary truce must be renegotiated. These terms are the self. Their

renegotiation is a natural emergency" (p. 110). Again, his assumption is that the individual,

throughout the lifecycle, is in constant motion of titrating and developing by way of striking an

evolutionary balance between psychological embeddedness with the environment and

maintenance of the self's distinctness from it. Constructive-developmental psychology upholds

the idea that development is intrinsically about the continual settling and resettling of this very

distinction.

According to this model, intrapsychic growth occurs by way of the person's interactive

and "embedded" involvement with the environment.

> This psychosocial environment, or "holding environment," in Winnicott's terms is the
> particular form of the world in which the person is, at this moment in his or her evolution,
> embedded. Since this is the very context in which, and out of which, the person grows, I
> have come to think of it as a culture of embeddedness. (pp. 115-116)

"There is not one holding environment early in life, but a succession of holding environments, a

life history of cultures of embeddedness. They are the psychosocial environments which hold us

(with which we are fused and which let go of us and from which we differentiate)" (p. 116).

These holding environments carry the "capacity to nourish and keep buoyant the life

project of their 'evolutionary guests' (p. 257). He lists what he deems "naturally therapeutic

contexts" as the mothering one, the family, role-recognizing institutions, school, peer groups,

intimate adult "love" relations, and work relations (p. 257). Important to access, according to

Kegan's model of life's development, is whether the "individual's culture of embeddedness is

performing its functions of confirmation, contradiction, and continuity" (p. 258).

Therefore, the part of the world in which the person is embedded, according to his/her

life stage assists in aiding and delivering him/her to a new evolutionary balance. This

embeddedness culture is "the most intimate of contexts out of which we repeatedly are recreated"

(p. 121). He maps out the three functions it must provide for the individual to predictably and

successfully thrive and grow: "it must hold on. It must let go. And it must stick around so that it can be reintegrated" (p. 121). A detailed description of these three functions are as follows:

Holding On

Using the analogy of the infant (but not exclusive to), this function looks at if and how a baby is "held" and nurtured. Kegan uses the example of how the caregiver responds to anxiety. If the mother responds by trying to relieve or fix the anxiety the baby is experiencing, it may unintentionally create "a dependence on the host (caretaker) to solve or manage the experiences of disequilibrium, communicating a basic lack of trust and moving from holding the infant to holding onto the infant, an impediment to the process of separation" (p. 126).

The "good host" quality of the embeddedness culture is identified to be the providing of "careful attention, recognition, confirmation, and company" in the experience of the other (p. 126). Here the response is to be present with the person in the experience of pain, rather than with the agenda to relieve it for them. This testifies "our faith in the trustworthiness of the motion of evolution" and in "life itself" (p. 126). "The mother who can hold her infant unanxiously when the infant is itself anxious is giving her child a special gift. She is holding heartily at the same time that she is preparing the child to separate from her" (p. 126).

Kegan proposes that "we are 'held' throughout our lives in qualitatively different ways as we evolve" (p. 256). He suggests that the circumstance of being held "reflects not the vulnerable state of infancy but the evolutionary state of embeddedness. However much we evolve, we are always still embedded" (p. 257).

Letting Go

This function highlights the embedded culture's support in encouraging the individual's natural emerging steps toward independence; the shift from embeddedness to differentiation. Kegan normalizes the natural discomfort during the transition for both the "host" and the "guest," that "something is leaving, being lost" (p. 127). He quotes Erikson (1968) on this theme: "The

kind and degree of a sense of autonomy which parents are able to grant their small children depends on the dignity and sense of personal independence they derive from their own lives" (p. 113). The mother, for example, who has difficulty encouraging this transition and tolerating the separateness implicit in it, is then thought by Kegan to lack capacity for her own opposition and otherness. Thus, she encourages the prolonging of the child's dependency, in an effort to "ward off her own abandonment depression" (p. 113). The child then learns that being fused and embedded leads to gratification, while separation is unfulfilling and unsafe:

> The implication is that this kind of experience while the child is in the midst of separating, a project to which some part of the person must remain loyal, leave the young child compromised. She must purchase her differentiation at the price of integration. She comes to experience closeness and being taken care of highly ambivalently - they are her fondest wish and her gravest nightmare (p. 113).

Remaining in Place

The third function for the culture of embeddedness is to remain in place during the period of transformation and re-equilibration. This time of growth involves the "reconciliation, the recovery, and the recognition of that which before was confused with self" (p. 129). Kegan elaborates by quoting Niebuhr (1941, p. 81): "We understand what we remember, remember what we forgot and make familiar what before seemed alien" (p. 129).

The transition from one stage to another is for some an "extremely positive, literally 'ecstatic,' transcendent experience" (p. 231). For others the "philosophical crisis" emerging from every stage shift can precipitate experiences of "boundary loss, impulse flooding, a not knowing and sense of meaninglessness" (p. 231). Kegan does not embellish on what factors seem to make the difference between how various individuals experience the movement from stage to stage. However, he assumes that for most, the transitions do inevitably carry some discomfort; via a working-through process, coupled with helpful support from the cultures of embeddedness, a person's distress can be transformed into a liberating and gratifying growth experience.

During these periods of transformation, the person can experience a loss of self. Yet Kegan teaches that "the normal experiences of evolution involve recoverable loss; what we separate from we find anew" (p. 129). The exception is that if the embedded culture neglects the child/adult during this time, it can arrest the capacity for the planned task of detachment. "The result seems to be a sense of unrecoverable loss, the very experience which separates mourning (or grief) from melancholia (or depression)" (p. 130).

The emergence from the embedded in every developmental transformation involves the "throwing away of that in which I have been embedded" (referring to the word "object" as well) (p. 132). "When the embeddedness culture disappears, at just the moment we are beginning to emerge from it, it may feel as if the evolutionary motion of separation is more a matter of our being thrown from, or being rejected, or our being made object" (p. 132).

Kegan's Clinical Theory

Kegan's clinical theory has integrated concepts from the phenomenological, object relations, client-centered and Kohutian schools of thought. He deems the clinician's most fundamental activity to be "conveying to the client that they understand something of his or her experience in the way he or she experiences it" (preface viii). He elaborates on the clinician's involvement in meaning-making activity (p. 3):

> The filters and lenses we use in listening to our clients bear periodic inspection. In part, it is a professional helper's persistent recognition that her own meaning for a set of circumstances might not be the same as her client's that leads us to call her a sensitive listener; her understanding of what goes into the way her client makes meaning and what is at stake for him in defending it that leads us to call her a psychologist; and her understanding of what to do with her understanding that leads us to call her a therapist.

Kegan connects David Balkan's (1966) notion that the yearnings for "agency" and "communion" is "the duality of human experience," illustrated within the therapeutic milieu. "I am often listening to one or the other of these yearnings, to the fear of being completely

unseparate, of being swallowed up and taken over; or to the fear of being totally separate, of

being utterly alone, abandoned, and remote beyond recall" (p. 107).

One of Kegan's departures from traditional ego psychologies is his clinical perspective on

symptomotology and goals for treatment. He does not operate from basic assumptions of

pathology, with the orientation striving to treat and cure an illness. Instead, his constructive-

developmental perspective upholds the viewpoint that . . . "the reason persons summon the

extraordinary courage to come and talk with a stranger about the intimate details of their lives is

that they are experiencing an evolutionary upheaval" (p. 203), "signaling that the natural

facilitation of development has somehow and for some reason broken down" (p. 256). This

illuminates what he believes to be a "universal on-going process (call it 'meaning-making,'

'adaptation,' 'equilibration,' or 'evolution')," which he surmises to be the "fundamental context

of personality development" (p. 264).

Clinical problems "are all about the threat of the constructed self's collapse" (p. 275).

Symptoms such as anxiety and depression are thought to stem from the "disequilibrium or threat

to the balance of a given evolutionary truce" (p. 268).

> Theorists agree that the substrate of depression is loss. Ego psychology looks to loss of the self; object relations theory to loss of the object; existential theory to loss of meaning. When equilibrative activity is taken as the grounding phenomenon of personality, and depression is understood as a threat to the evolutionary truce, then depression must be about a threat to the self and the object, and (since it is the relationship between the two which constitutes meaning) a threat to meaning, too. (p. 269)

> Common to depressions is the self's experiencing of assault, either from the outside ("threat-to"), in which the self anticipates its defeat; or from within ("questioning of"), in which the person, dislodged from self, is caught in the imbalance between the old self's repudiation (as subject) and its recovery (as new object) . . . there lies a tension between a feeling of self-anger (critiquing the old self) and self-loss (the old self not yet recovered as object, the new self--not yet reconstructed). (p. 272)

Regarding the therapist's functional role, Kegan states:

> Developmental theory has a long-standing appreciation of nature as the source of wisdom; it exposes the child's "natural curriculum," an active process of meaning-making informing

and constraining the child's purposes. Rather than seeing the child as a passive receptacle to whom appealing curricula must be brought in order to initiate the learning experience, the developmentalist urges curriculum designers and teachers first to recognize the agenda upon which the child is already embarked, which the teacher can only facilitate or thwart, but not himself to invent. (p. 255)

What follows naturally then, is the style in which Kegan relates to his clients, seeing them as "persons evolving" rather than as "patients," "persons with problems" or "sick" (p. 264).

His concept of "natural therapy" is designed to encompass "all those relations and human contexts which spontaneously support people through the sometimes difficult process of growth and change" (p. 256). This framework recognizes the clinical therapeutic context as another "culture of embeddedness in the facilitation of a troubled person's evolution" (p. 262). Longitudinal support is deemed absolutely necessary, since symptomotolgy is viewed as psychological developmental disruption, arising from a natural process of growth and transition, often bringing painful and costly separations from old meanings and from persons and commitments representing them.

The psychotherapeutic relationship will "not consist of the counselor's curing or solving the problem" (p. 273). From Kegan's point of view, the therapeutic function is to "know and hold persons before, during, and after their transitions," "to acknowledge and grieve the losses," "to acknowledge and celebrate the gains," and to "help the person (or family) to acknowledge them, herself, itself" (p. 261). "The goal of psychotherapy is the development of this equilibrative activity" (p. 273).

Kegan correlates treatment interventions with the functions he stated to be necessary to provide for growth and transition through the evolutionary stages of development: "holding on," "letting go," and "staying in place." He borrows from Winicott's notion of the "holding" environment, for Kegan upholds the conviction that the therapeutic environment needs to provide confirmation, safety, and predictability, particularly in the first stages of therapy. "The ability to

remain present for another when he is anxious, to recognize and accept his anxiety, without ourselves becoming too anxious or immediately trying to relieve the anxiety, has long been understood to be a feature of competent professional psychological help" (p.126). In a poetic way, he described it through a case example: "The therapist is used as a chair, her chest as a backrest; she is leaned on, fallen into; her arms are used as an extension to obtain things otherwise out of reach. She has been accepted as a psychologically amniotic environment in which her client can float, her life project given a degree of buoyancy it has never had" (p. 264).

The "letting go" function of the therapist emerges as she/he offers contact as a separate other, aiding the client's growing edge as she comes to recognize herself and therapist as discernable from one another.

The "staying put" function of the therapist assists the client in the arduous struggle to regain a sense of equilibrium; remaining stable, steadfast, and reliable, in the face of the client's predictable irritability, as the "old balance can experience this change as an unwelcome intrusion upon the more independent world of personal control and agency" (p. 95,105). "The hallmark of every rebalancing is that the past, which may during transition be repudiated, is not finally rejected but reappropriated" (p. 104). The therapist remains through this transition, later able to reflect upon the client's evolutionary movement, and inspired by and celebrating the fact that "every re-equilibration is a qualitative victory over isolation" (p. 106).

The techniques used are client-centered in nature. The clinician does not seek to change or control the client's actions or decisions, nor to solve the problem or ease the pain. The choices and power lie within the client. The loyalty of the phenomenological perspective is to "the person in her meaning-making, rather than to her balance or stage" (p. 274). Instead of offering only assurance, resolution, or interpretation, the therapist joins the client in participating in the process of meaning-evolution together, "prizing the person-as-meaning-making, even at its most painful" (what "unconditional positive regard" means constructive-developmentally) (p. 274). The

therapist's primary function is "to protect those opportunities for consciousness & meaning-evolution" disguised as painful and shameful "problems" which can serve to be used as resources in growth work (p. 274).

Depending on the developmental precipice, the clinician determines how and in what way to be present for the client (p. 282). Transference develops via the reconstruction of the client-counselor relationship, which naturally emerges from the evolution of meaning-making (p. 274). "The particulars of this alliance are different at each stage, and the counselor is helped in the process by knowing with which emerging balance he is seeking an alliance, and with which defensive balance he is seeking to avoid becoming a co-conspirator" (p. 282).

Evaluation of the progress in the therapeutic milieu comes from "the unequal validity of the various evolutionary truces." While the therapist does not impose movement into the next balance, she/he "addresses the experience of the new voice emerging, noticing, sharing, and promoting the opportunities presented, helping one to transition from a less evolved state to a more evolved one" (p. 292).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Strategy

This research endeavor addresses the question, "What are the experiences of never-married, heterosexual, childless women, between the ages of 29-39, who desire marriage and children? The study used a qualitative research method to explore and develop an understanding of the subjective and multi-faceted experience of these women. This research design integrated the philosophical underpinnings of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic inquiry approach, with Corbin and Strauss's (1990) methodological procedures for data collection and analysis.

Lincoln (1992) states that qualitative methods are preferable for any kind of research that emphasizes broad understanding and deep insight over short hand or reductionistic data (p. 376). This type of research methodology attempts to grasp phenomena within its holistic context, in order to comprehend the full range of human meaning embedded in such phenomena (p. 376). It is an experience near, empathic approach, enabling the interviewer to understand the phenomenon being studied from the point of view of the respondent (Kohut, 1982).

The qualitative method offers the most useful technique when there is an inadequately described population (Cole, 1976; Witzel, 1991). This methodology, chosen for this exploratory study, reflected the nature of the research problem, providing descriptive data to help fill the gap in the literature of self-reported experiences of this specific cohort of single women (Witzel, 1991).

The grounded theory approach to qualitative analysis employed in this study was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the early 1960's, and elaborated by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998). The term was derived due to "its emphasis on the generation of theory, and the data in which that theory is grounded" (Glaser 1978, Strauss 1987). "The goal of this methodology is to construct theory that is grounded in observed data" (Shelby, 1992, p. 41). Its style of analysis is "based on the premise that theory at various levels of generality is indispensable for deeper knowledge of social phenomena" (Strauss, 1987, p. 6). Strauss elaborates, "Grounded theory is a detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analyzing data, sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field note, or interview; ; by constant comparison, data are extensively collected and coded--thus producing a well constructed theory" (p. 23).

Procedural guidelines are outlined by Strauss's (1987): "concept-indicator model." The process entails: "data collection" during the process of interviews; "coding," involving the discovery and formulation of core categories; "theoretical sampling," offering comparisons of data to elucidate meaning from consistent differences and similarities embedded in the material; "theoretical saturation" reached when analysis discontinues yielding new relevant categorical data; "theoretical memos" which track coding results, leading to the final operation of "theoretical sorting" and the "integration of the theory."

Compatible with this methodology is Lincoln and Guba's (1985) postpositivistic, constructivist perspective, which they define as a "naturalistic paradigm." From this lens, apriori theory is not used as an integral part of the methodology. Hypotheses are not generated prior to the data collection, in order to control for preconceptions about the subject matter. This allows for the "discovery of phenomena whose existence was not known prior to the research" (Witzel 1991, p. 46). Theory emerges, rather, from the researcher's immersion in, and interaction with, the data.

Another necessary element is the identification of from whom and where the data will

be collected, while the naturalist interviewer maintains a "not knowing what is not known"

stance. Planning data collection, determining instrumentation, recording memos, data analysis,

logistics and trustworthiness are also required in this research design.

The five beliefs/axioms that Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe, which govern this

approach, are as follows (pp. 37-38):

1): The ontological nature of reality is multiply constructed, and to be studied holistically; while understanding can be achieved by inquiry of multiple realities, control and prediction are unlikely.
2): The epistemological relationship of knower to the known, always influentially interacting with one another, is inseparable.
3): The possibility for generalization is not certain, since the aim of inquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge in the form of "working hypotheses" that describe the individual case.
4): The statistical correlation identifies influential linkages, rather than causal.
5): The role of values in inquiry is addressed by the presumed fact that inquiry is value bound; corollaries supporting this are that: Inquiries are under the influence of the inquirer, the paradigm guiding the investigation, the substantive theory used for data collection, analysis and interpretation, and the values that are inherent in the context. In order to produce meaningful results, inquiry must be congruent and reinforcing (value-resonant) versus conflicting (value-dissonant).

<u>Characteristics and Recruitment of Study Participants</u>:

The participants in this study consisted of 25 single women between the ages of 29-39.

For the purposes of this study, "single" was defined as: never-married, childless, and without a

current intimate relationship. Participatory criteria included the desire to get married and have

children. The sample was recruited through referrals from colleagues, friends, clients, and

participants of the study. In addition, three participants were recruited through a flyer describing

the nature of the study, posted in a few residential buildings in the Chicagoland area.

An essential feature of research grounded in data is the judgment about when a sufficient

amount of data has been accumulated. Glaser and Strauss (1967) defines this process as reaching

"theoretical saturation," when no additional data is being found to extend the properties of the

identified categories (p. 61). In order to achieve this goal, a search for variance amongst the

sample is necessary, "to make certain that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category" (Witzel, 1991, p71). A diverse population sample created the opportunity to identify both the commonalties and contrasts in the data. Elements of variance were taken into consideration while selecting the sample for the study. There was a fairly accurate distribution within the age range of 29-39. While most of the participants reside in Chicago, two of the women live in New York, one in Florida, one in Germany, one in Boston, and one in Washington, D.C. As for ethnic diversity, two participants were of mixed ethnic backgrounds, two were Jamaican, one Hungarian, one Greek, two Hispanic, three African-American, and fourteen Caucasian. Four of the participants graduated from High School, eleven from college, eight from graduate schools, and two had medical degrees. Approximately 20% of the participants came from an impoverished upbringing. The sample's self-reported current socio-economic level ranged from mid to upper middle class in status. Religious affiliations included one Greek Orthodox, five Jewish, two Lutheran, one Baptist, six Catholic, and ten unaffiliated. 60% of the interviewees had been, or are currently involved in a therapeutic process. The modality was individual therapy, primarily, while one participant is currently involved in a group as well.

Most individual interviews were conducted in the researcher's office, in Chicago, Illinois. On a few occasions, the interviews were conducted at the participant's place of employment. For the participants living outside of Chicago, interviews were conducted at their home, or office. A few of the long distance participants were interviewed over the telephone for the final hour of data collection.

Data Collection

The grounded theory methodology guidelines formulated and detailed in Strauss (1987) and Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998) were used for the data collection, organization and analysis in this study. Consistent with a constructionist paradigm, data analysis is inductive, rather than deductive, since it maintains that theory follows, versus precedes, data (Corbin & Strauss 1990).

A phone screening initially determined the participants' eligibility for the study. "Participant observation," referring to the role the researcher inevitably plays during data collection, is another source of data. The researcher presented herself to prospective and actual participants as a clinician and researcher, interested in what they are experiencing as single women in their thirties. An appointment was made for a recorded, transcribed interview, the primary method of data collection. Time and place were agreed upon, as well as a contract to meet for up to three times, which was to be determined at the point of theoretical saturation.

The interview format, conducted by the researcher, was utilized for instrumentation. The interviews began with the open-ended question: "What has been and is your experience of being single?" Further questioning was "derived from the content, questions, and answers of previous interviews" (Shelby, 1995, p. 9). All interviews took place over a four-month period. The interviews ranged from one to two hours in duration. Most of the participants were interviewed twice. The out of town participants were interviewed, in person, for approximately two hours, with a follow up one hour phone call. A few of the participants only met once, due to lack of availability. The researcher collected a total of 51 hours of recorded and transcribed interviews. In order to inform and establish rapport with each participant, each interview began by reviewing the nature of the study and responding to participants' questions. A release of information was signed by both researcher and participant. In appreciation for their participation, these women were assured a copy of the results of the final document, if they were interested. All of the participants were very cooperative during the interview process. They were also forthcoming about their experience of being single in their thirties.

Data Analysis

In order to elicit open disclosure of the respective experiences among the participants, a semi-structured interview approach was implemented. "In accordance with the Grounded Theory method, data collection, organization, and analysis occurs simultaneously" (Shelby 1995, p.10).

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) "Constant Comparative Method" was incorporated into the process

of data collection (p.5). According to this method, the taped interviews were collected and

systematically broken down and analyzed sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase. Quotes

were then coded into categories, representing a conceptual idea. Categories evolved from the

researcher's immersion in, and interaction with the data (Shelby 1995). Constant comparison of

the data and the coding process then informed further questioning in subsequent interviews.

About this method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) comment: "the constant comparative method is not

designed, as quantitative methods are, to guarantee that two analysts working independently with

the same data will achieve the same results; it is designed to allow, with discipline, for some of

the vagueness and flexibility that aid the creative generation of theory" (p.103).

The process of coding facilitated the formulation of theory, providing written records of

analysis which integrated the researcher's impressions and abstract thoughts about the data and

the process of data collection. Theoretical ideas and questions were placed in theoretical memos,

containing the researcher's thoughts about the relationships emerging between categories (Glazer,

1978; Shelby, 1992, 1995; Strauss, 1987). "Operational notes" provide reminders for the

researcher regarding follow up on sampling, questions, and comparisons (Corbin & Strauss,

1990). These ideas were then incorporated into the interview process.

The essential procedure of coding conceptualized the data by discovering and naming

categories based on their respective properties and dimensions. Through raising questions and

provisional answers about category relationships, thematic meaning of the data emerged. There

were three coding procedures utilized, beginning with "open coding," used initially to scrutinize

the recorded interviews, in order to closely examine, compare, and conceptualize the data (Corbin

& Strauss, 1990). At this stage, broad general categories, and the properties which characterized

them, were identified. "Axial coding" followed, which ascertained the relationships between

categories and properties, noting their causal and intervening conditions. Finally, "selective

coding" became increasingly dominant, as it systematically related core categories with others, in an effort to refine and develop the coding procedure. Through this procedure, the story line of the emerging theory became more distinct, elaborating and confirming influential relationships between core categories and properties. "Theoretical sampling" followed as relational variations in the data emerged, with the quotes refining and illustrating the theory. It was evident that theoretical saturation had been reached when the data revealed in the interviews became repetitive. Lastly, member checking was utilized to: check for quote and contextual accuracy, integrate the theory, and enrich the text (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

<u>Sources of Error</u>

Terms which serve as the criteria for trustworthiness in naturalistic epistemology are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility (conventionally termed "internal validity") addressed the question of truth value. The techniques used to establish this were: "prolonged engagement" and "persistent observation" which provides a broad understanding of the multiple facets of the subject being studied" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304); "triangulation," which refers to the use of validating multiple sources (i.e., research team and diverse group of respondents); and "peer debriefing" which entailed the crucial function of objective and knowledgeable others (i.e., dissertation committee), "for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" and to "test working hypotheses that may be emerging" (p. 308); as well as helping keep check on any emotional aspect for the researcher which may cloud her judgment and perceptions.

Transferability ("external validity") was embraced by applicability, and implemented by way of detailed description; dependability ("reliability") was defined by consistency; and confirmability ("objectivity") was dependent on neutrality. The two latter criteria were enabled by the technique of auditing. Lincoln (1992) also emphasizes the importance of the "authenticity criteria," which includes fairness, ontological authenticity, and tactical authenticity.

A primary source of bias in this study were any of the researcher's realized or unrealized preconceptions, which could have affected the observations, recordings, and interpretation of the data. The researcher's personal experience, former clinical experience, and the theoretical lens with which the data is viewed, all contribute to potential biases about the explored phenomenon. These factors could have influenced the questions asked of the participants, the manner in which they were asked, the respondents' impressions of what the inquirer was seeking, and the way in which the interviewer received and perceived the responses. The bias, then, lay in the potential for interference with the accuracy of data collection and analysis. In order to lower the impact of this potential intrusion on the data, the researcher made a consistent and concerted effort to remain aware of any biases or assumptions, not disclosing any personal or professional experience with the subject matter to the participants.

The participants' level of willingness and ability to accurately convey their experience and the depth of their affective experience in an articulate manner also carries a potential source of error (Shelby, 1992). The 25 women who participated in this research endeavor did so voluntarily. They were eager and enthusiastic to share their experience.

Analytic strategies and data collection methods were used to counter-act identified sources for error. The population sample was chosen with variance in mind. Data collection was recorded for accuracy, helping to control for any researcher bias. The development of theory, grounded in data regarding the experience of single women in their thirties, was ensured by consistent and repeated comparison of concepts and ongoing analysis of categories. The procedure of member checking was employed to help establish the trustworthiness and credibility of the results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shelby, 1995). This gave participants the opportunity to review and critique the draft of the study's conclusions, checking for the accuracy of their experience. Their feedback contributed to the process of revision and was integrated into the final document. Meetings with members of my dissertation committee helped to control for

researcher bias as well. The "debriefing" with these advisors allowed for objective feedback

about the collection, organization and analysis of data (Glazer and Strauss, 1967).

<div align="center">Limitations of the Research</div>

The primary limitation of this study involves the sample size and its generalizability. The

research, data, and results will only apply and be valid, with certainty, for the study's sample,

reflecting only a small number of the thousands of single women in their thirties living in

America today. It is important to convey, however, that the purpose of this research was not to

generalize its findings to populations beyond its scope. In addition, the intention of achieving

theoretical saturation was to offset the potential limitation for this study's theory to reflect only

the experiences of a quantitatively limited sample.

Despite the relatively small number of participants in the study and the representation of

a limited geographical area, the methodology of choice is intended to help ensure the

development of a theory that, by virtue of its thoroughness and proximity to the data, is readily

applicable (with potential modifications) to women in a similar position in other locations

(Shelby 1992). The extent of this comparison will be subject to the clinicians' judgments about

the "utility of the conceptualizations" (Kennedy 1979).

The theory generated by this study embellishes on a phenomenon of women's experience

scarcely explored in our existing body of psychological literature. The goal of this investigation

is to apply this practice research method to construct a dense and tightly woven integrated

explanatory theory, which "closely approximates the reality it represents" (Corbin & Strauss,

1990, p .57). Its aim is to create rich theoretical understanding, which will expand and enhance

current knowledge and thinking regarding this subject matter, and to potentially contribute to the

growing body of literature available on this topic, so as to assist those women whose predicament

applies, as well as the therapists who work with some of these same women in their clinical

practices. The theory which emerges from this study will generate useful new ideas, while raising further questions relevant for future study.

<center>Protection of Human Rights</center>

This research study was conducted in accordance with the Institute for Clinical Social Work's Policy for Protection of Human Subjects, and the Institutional Review Board's Research Protocol. Participation was completely voluntary with informed consent. Participants were explicitly informed of the study's purpose, the expectations of them as participants of the study, and of their right to refuse to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time. They were given adequate time to read and question the contents of the written consent form, kept on file by the researcher.

The researcher used clinical judgment to guide and regulate the interview process. At no time did the interviewer have to stop an interview due to participant distress. The names of the participants were not identified, in order to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality. The recorded interviews on tape will be destroyed after the research is completed.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESULTS

The information in the following chapters conveys the experience of never-married, childless, single women, age 29-39, who desire marriage and children. The development of a multi-dimensional account of these women's experiences was the goal of this research endeavor, with the data supporting and bringing to life the observations reported. The theory generated from the data analysis, suggests that this experience for women is not simply singular in nature; rather it is complex and multi-faceted.

The data analysis revealed seven categories of the participants' experiences. These categories, or concepts, highlight the most pronounced and commonly expressed aspects of being a woman who is involuntarily single in her thirties. They are as follows:

(1): Time Warp

(2): Interpersonal Dynamics

(3): The Dating Gerbil Wheel

(4): "How Does It Feel?"

(5): Status or Stigma

(6): "You Go Girl"

(7): Lessons Learned

The experience of singlehood begins with the "Time Warp," category; describing the predominant feeling of time "flying by," without the expectation of marriage and children having manifested itself. Many women feel alarmed by this reality, particularly given the expectations they had for this to have occurred in their lives by the time they reached their thirties. Along with this expectation, many young women of this era have also put a great deal of time and effort in learning to provide for themselves, both emotionally and financially. The expectations to get married, have children, and to become self sufficient, through the pursuit of academic and career goals, is greatly influenced by cultural and familial messages.

Most of the women who are still single in their thirties find themselves being in the minority when comparing themselves to their family and friends, most of whom are married. The "Interpersonal Dynamics" category addresses how one's single status can affect many of her interpersonal relationship dynamics and roles within familial and friendship circles. Within their familial matrix, these women are sometimes not perceived or treated as an adult, or relied on to be the caretaker, because of the assumed availability as a single person. It is also a common phenomenon to go through transformations with married friends, who have less time available and who are focused on different family oriented life issues. Many single women experience a surplus of emotions, as they face some disappointment and envy about what others in their life have come to have.

The single experience can feel like a "Dating Gerbil Wheel" of repetitive patterns in their experiences with men. Many report the scarcity of suitable men available in this age bracket. There is also continuous thought about finding new and enjoyable ways in which to meet potential candidates. Some feel cumulative frustration with this, while others take a proactive approach. By the time women are in their thirties, they have more spent time getting to know themselves, and have had years of experience being single and dating men. As a result, they

come to know the traits in a partner and the functions of a relationship that they desire to find. Also reported is the array of emotional challenges women have faced in former relationships.

The "How Does it Feel?" question emerges as women explore the multi-faceted range of their emotional experience in coping with this phenomenon. The central finding in this study is that there were three distinct groups which emerged. These groups are explained in the form of properties, including: "The Sinkhole," which elucidates the experience of those who feel acute distress about their single status; "The Sine Wave" features those whose experience with being single is volatile and ambivalent, often influenced by the activity level on the dating field; "The Free To Be Me" group of women are comprised of those who have a consistent sense of well being. Their single status does not impact their sense of self, nor does it negatively impact the quality of their lives. These women anticipate finding a loving relationship while maintaining their commitment to leading a fulfilling lifestyle as a single woman.

The "Status or Stigma" category inventories the circumstances in which many of the participants feel stigmatized by their single status. These instances include: cultural and ethnic expectations to marry; familial agendas and pressure to marry; being in a minority group amongst married peers; fielding questions regarding their single status; facing issues of aging; and attending social and celebratory events alone.

"You Go Girl" captures the strategies employed by women to successfully adapt to and cope with the challenges they may face with being single in their thirties. Many women focus on attending to their basic needs of diet and exercise to improve their overall sense of well being. Others focus on cognitive methods such as "staying present," challenging distorted beliefs about themselves, using humor to gain perspective, and paying attention to having gratitude for what is abundant in their lives. All the women stressed how it helped to reach out for the supportive resources of friends and family. The majority of women have and are using self help methods or

a formal therapeutic process to gain insight about and resolution over unresolved issues that have obstructed their way.

Finally, women conveyed the many "Lessons Learned," about themselves and about what constitutes a healthy relationship. With time and self-reflective work, authentic and self-directed goals and desires gain more clarity. Many of these women have learned about self-responsibility and to trust themselves as their own best expert, recognizing the individual's power to create, internally, the happiness and fulfillment they seek. They have also come to learn the ingredients that help nurture a healthy and potentially long lasting relationship. Some of these identified ingredients include: emotional and sexual intimacy, trust and dependability, honest and direct communication, and shared values.

Each category will be identified by chapter headings. Several distinct properties within each category convey its unique and varied characteristics. These properties will be centered and underlined. Under many of the properties, various dimensions are described, which specify the range in which properties of a category may vary; this helps to detail a category and show variation within the experience. Dimensions will be underlined and placed at the left margin. The participants in this study did not all relate to the experiences in each category, property, or dimension; nor did they express it in the sequence presented in the findings of this study.

CHAPTER V

TIME WARP

> I've wanted a committed relationship for a long
> time, but I thought "whenever it happens," or
> "later on." All of a sudden I look back and
> think, "I'm 32. Where did the time go?" A lot of
> my friends are married with kids, some on their
> second; I'm like, "Oh my God!"

Central to most of the single women in their thirties who participated in this study is the

feeling of being in a "Time Warp," whereby the passing of time seems to have sped by very

quickly. This often intensifies the recognition that desired life events such as marriage and

children have not yet come to pass.

The properties within this category are: "What's To Be Expected," which reviews

women's expectations for themselves and their lives as they entered their thirties; "Late

Bloomers," which voices how some women experience the realm of love and romance later in life

than many of their peers; and the "Wake Up Call," which brings to light, then, the sense of

urgency for marriage and children.

What's To Be Expected?

I had this whole timeline worked out that after you graduate from college, you work, then
you meet Mr. Right, and then you settle down and have kids. That seemed logical, and the
normal way of doing things.

The "What's To Be Expected" property is a reflection of the prevalent expectations women

had, or were told to have, about the events that were supposed to occur for them by the time they

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reached their thirties. The dimensions within this property are: "Settled by Thirty" which relays most women's expectation to have been married, with kids, by now; "Doin' My Strong Woman Number," which conveys the expectation to be economically and emotionally self-reliant; and "Potent Messages," which notes the influences of culture, as well as family directives and identifications, which helped to create these expectations.

<u>Settled by Thirty</u>

> I think in the back of most of our heads is this expectation that we will or should want to try being married and having kids.

With few exceptions, the women who participated in this study expected themselves to be married and having children by the time they reached, or during their thirties. "I definitely set lots of goals for myself. I thought I could be a millionaire by 25, with my Harvard degree, husband and children." "All my life I've been choosing names for my baby, just like I've been choosing where I'm going to have my big wedding party." Even some of those who suffered painful childhoods dreamed of marriage and children manifesting itself in their lives. "Even without role models, for some reason, I did see myself married when I was growing up. I knew that it existed and I wanted it, in spite of what I knew." Consequently, most women do not expect to be thirty-something and single. "I never expected to be in this spot, 37 and single. I had different expectations." "I was where I didn't expect to be, at 30: single, no husband, no prospects, no children, in a job that I wasn't very happy with."

Many women carried fantasies about how they would come together with the right partner, and about how this relationship would function in their lives. "I always had this grand, romantic idea and vague notion that I'll meet somebody and magically, things will work out, with no problems, and we'll live happily ever after. Now, I think that's unlikely." " The expectation is that you can walk away from all the things that were wrong in your family life by creating a new, idyllic life with a man. You can have what you've never experienced. There is a sense of

hope." While the women voiced these expectations that marriage would have already occurred, they continue to carry a strong desire for marriage. "I desperately want to marry and find my soul mate." "I want to go away with my husband on the weekend for that romantic weekend and do those things my parents didn't do."

Besides the wanting of a lifetime partner, nearly all of the women who took part in this research endeavor expected, and still uphold, the desire to have children. "I want to have kids; I have a lot to give, and what better way to give, than to give to a child?" The desire for marriage and children often is rooted in what women may or may not have experienced or witnessed in their own childhoods. Some are motivated by the fond memories they had as a child. "I'd like to have a big family. I've always enjoyed being the sister and having brothers. It made me feel complete." "I want my child to feel as loved and as fortunate as I did." This desire for children is also accompanied with the intention to learn from the "mistakes" from generations before them, breaking old negative patterns of parenting and replacing them with new, healthier ways in which to raise their children. "I want to be a more positive role model than what I had." "If I consciously bring children into the world, I need to know that the father wants to have the children and to be in their life, because I didn't have that. It's very important for me to have the close knit family unit." The wish for children is also closely tied with how many women feel they can derive meaning in their lives. "I imagine that what would give my life the most meaning would be to have a family and have someone who understands me." "It would be nice to have this whole family thing going on; more meaningful, I think."

"Doin' My Strong Woman Number"

I feel like I've gotten stronger in my desire to be out on my own, have my own place, be my own person, do what I wanted to do, without having anyone else watch over me.

Women also discussed the externally and internally imposed expectation to do their "strong woman number." Currently, both the variety of opportunities available for women and the growing single population have been on the rise. These factors, along with the unmet expectation of marriage and children, inspire many women to learn how to best take care of themselves, encouraging them to work to identify and meet their basic needs for shelter and financial security. This sets the stage for continuing the process of independent living and individuating from one's family of origin.

Women do their "strong woman number" in several ways. They learn to set clearer and more appropriate boundaries between themselves and their families. "I'm more at peace since I realized that I have to really make a life for me. The turning point was when I entered my thirties and let go of my obligations to or expectations from family and really stood up for myself." "My parents represent to me a different phase in my life, that nuclear family that I grew up with."

Another means through which they grow confident in their capacity for independent living is by creating a comfortable and secure living arrangement. Quite prevalent is the tendency for women in their twenties and early thirties to put living independently and investing in residential property on hold, hoping for the day when they can live or purchase a home with a significant other. "I figured the timeline was that you rent an apartment, and maybe have roommates, until you meet Mr. Right and then the two of you settle down and you buy a house." "I was engaged and still living with my parents. The relationship was on and off. I didn't think about moving out because there was always a possibility that the marriage thing would still happen." "When I was younger, I bought stuff that only a man would like because everything was for planning when I would have a husband."

As women move into the thirty-something years, they begin to re-evaluate and challenge these former expectations and assumptions, reformatting the old blueprint of waiting for a partner, and focusing more on their present day needs. "I'm thirty-something years old, and

marriage hasn't happened. I love making a nice home. So, I figured, 'Do it now.' Why wait for someone to come into my life?" "It took me until I was 34 to finally realize that just because I'm not married doesn't mean that I shouldn't have a home that gives me warmth, so I decided that I'm not going to wait any longer." A great deal of pride and joy is derived by the ability to financially manage themselves through such an investment, and take pleasure in the freedom to truly make their living space their own. "Purchasing my place was part of being financially responsible. There's a lot of security in it. My biggest asset is my job and what I do, but I know that if things fall through, I can always sell my place to cover me as a reliable investment."

In addition, living with others seems to "get old" for many single women in their thirties, who tend to "outgrow" the experience and develop a desire to live alone. "Months ago I moved out of a roommate situation because everyone was just significantly younger than me, like mid-twenties. I just felt like I was becoming their mother." "After I ended that intense relationship, I was at a place where I felt like I just needed to be on my own. I needed to live in the adult world and get my own place."

Another milieu in which many single women in their thirties are doing their "Strong Woman Number" is in the professional area. Defining, pursuing, and succeeding in the development of their professional lives is the means by which they are able to be self-supporting and maintain financial security--a necessary expectation and imperative for many single women in their thirties. Achieving a state of financial self-sufficiency brings, for single women, a great sense of relief from having to depend on others. "My mother was so funny. She was saying, 'I'll never have grandchildren at this point,' because once I got this career, I make more money than any boyfriend I ever had!" "I'm happier now being independent, being able to afford things. It's a huge issue for me, knowing that if, God forbid, I were to lose my job, I'll be able to take care of myself. It's a really good feeling that I don't have to run home, or to a man."

Some women attributed the intensity of their professional ambitions to be rooted in part by a compensatory need to provide financial security, in the event that the desired goal for marriage and children does not occur. "It comes from the fear of, 'What if I don't meet this person?' I don't want to be one of those women who do meaningless jobs they don't like, waiting for that man to come and sweep them off their feet." "I wonder if I'm so much into money and having a career because deep down I feel that I might not have a husband to give me that kind of stability, and so I need to do it on my own, and am more in control of that."

Potent Messages

> There are so many influences that make us who we are and that affect our choices. I got a lot of messages about who and what to be when I was growing up.

This dimension captures some of the influences conveyed, which were said to have promoted the expectation to be "Settled by Thirty" and to have had impact on the desire and need for "Doin' My Strong Woman Number." As for the expectation and wish for marriage and children, many women gave credence to the power of expectations inherent in one's national or ethnic culture. "Marriage is a worldwide institution; a choice that everyone on the planet can make, and that "everyone" can do; unlike going to college or buying a house, which in some countries is a privilege." "It comes from American culture. We live in a heterosexual world, with movies, TV, and commercials; you're just bombarded with this barrage of love and marriage as an ideal. It's a goal that everybody around you has, and that people always talk about."

Many ethnic cultures that have fixed gender roles that are patriarchal in nature, have more rigid expectations for what a woman is supposed to be or to do. "In the Latino culture, there is this thought that a man and woman marry, and the man is the head of the household, and the woman's primary responsibility is to take care of the kids." "In my Hispanic culture, coupled with having to lead a "Christian" lifestyle, they instilled the importance to get married young, because if you're out there, there's a higher probability that you'll have pre-marital sex."

Most of these women also experienced some form or degree of familial expectation for them to get married and to bear children. "It's ingrained in our heads by our families as we grow up, that we are going to get married and we must find someone." "There was this expectation that you're going to get married when you're young, because they all did and they were my role models." Birth order, too, can drive familial expectations to marry off their first born and so forth. "They had the expectation that you get married and have grandkids in the birth order that you were initially given." "I had always hoped that I would get married first, and then my sister would." Some women got very strong messages from their mothers that they needed a man and husband to take care of them and make their lives complete. "For her it's, 'You have someone. He's there. You're not always happy, but go ahead.'" "The whole idea that you had to find a rich man to help you and protect you was instilled in me by my mother."

The familial role model that one grew up with also serves to influence a woman's expectations for marriage and children. A positive family experience was a strong motivating factor, encouraging many women to emulate and perpetuate this lifestyle choice. "It's because of how I was raised, with a traditional 'family' lifestyle as such a huge part of my upbringing, and of such high value." "I always pictured that I would have a long marriage, and be home, focused towards the kids, because that's how my mom was. She contributed to my expectation of what my life is going to be like." For others, the motivation toward the pursuit of marriage and children was a compensatory wish, rooted in what they never experienced as a child. "In junior high, I would fantasize about this perfect life, where there were two supportive parents, living in a nice house, where the kids didn't live in fear. I would fantasize about being 40, married with kids. I could just see this kind of perfect world out there for me for when I was an adult."

Among the influences for the women doing their "Strong Woman Number," reactions to parental directives and identifications with mothers and sisters were noted as most significant. For some, the capability for emotional and financial self-sufficiency came from the high parental

expectations that were instilled in their daughters regarding what they were capable of achieving, which motivated some of these accomplished women to rise to this occasion in hopes of making themselves and their supportive parents proud. "My parents had high hopes for my sister and I. They raised two female bodies, but they raised two sons in certain respects, because it was that you're supposed to be a success." "Both my parents have very high standards. I always wanted to please them and do better to get their approval."

> I attribute my ability to trust my intuition and stay on track to my parents, because they raised both of us to be very strong people. At adult conversations at their dinner parties, I would hear declarations of who we were. "These are our daughters, and they are going to be successful and do wonderful things. They're going to be people who will make us proud. But more importantly, they'll be proud of what they do."

Part of the relentless drive toward self-sufficiency was the challenge to defined gender roles and a way out of oppressive childhood environments. "As girls, we were constantly fighting for any little piece of independence. I had to work twice as hard for the same thing he had. It was not fair, and actually what made me leave home was that I wanted to go to college." "My typical Jewish grandfather says, 'What do you care so much about your career? If you got married, you wouldn't have to work.' That's how I was raised. I rebelled against it, like 'I'm going to show them. I'm going to make something of myself and I don't need that.'"

A significant number of the women in this study were raised in homes where positive and consistent parental reinforcement and support were lacking. This emotional unavailability gave them the message that they had to be on their own and could not depend on anyone else but themselves. "Sisters, aunts, uncles filled in periodically but basically, man, you just took care of yourself." A basic mistrust in others was formed within some of these women, molding their ambition into serving a compensatory function. "There's a part of me which might actually be driving the self sufficiency, because I don't believe that anybody can take care of myself as well as I can." I get criticized a lot, especially from being in a relationship with guys, that there's that

whole independent thing that I don't let them in. That has a lot to do with growing up the way that I did. You took care of things yourself."

There was noteworthy emphasis on women's identifications with their mothers, as well. Many women have cultivated their drive and their success toward creating a stable and fulfilling independent life for themselves, in part, as a result of their positive regard for their mothers as inspirational role models. These adult daughters have great admiration for their mother's sense of self and independence, and describe them as strong and self-advocating women. "My mother raised us all by herself, while she was completely exhausted and depleted. She had courage. She was strong."

These "strong" maternal role models with whom some women identify have helped those women to elicit trust in their own capacity as well. "On the flip side of how hard it was to be a child of divorced parents, it's made me who I am. Seeing how strong my mother is has definitely given me the strength to take care of myself and not be afraid to take care to stand on my own two feet." "She was very independent, had to do everything on her own. From her example, I moved here from another country, not speaking the language, and was able to do it. I realized that, I can definitely live out on my own and figure it out too!" Besides being influenced by their mother's example, direct advice from them also was taken seriously and valued. "The part that I did take from her is the independence, the 'Make for yourself. Deal with – don't go get married just to have an extra income.'" "My mother has been my role model that I could do anything, be anything. She empowered myself and my sister to believe that whatever we wanted to do in life, we could do. There was never this issue of because we were women we couldn't do it."

For many women, watching their mothers evolve set the stage for their own development, as they bore witness to the infinite possibilities that all women are capable of, throughout the life cycle. "I introduced my Mom to the self help workshop I attended, and she really connected with it; she got it! She began seeing possibility in her life. Her dream was to be a music teacher, so

she's been building a music workshop. It hasn't been easy, but she's doing it; and it's been very inspiring for me to watch."

> My mom is definitely a role model in terms of my growth. When she got married at 19, she was an absolute mouse. It was the "Leave It to Beaver" father, gone all the time, doing whatever he felt like doing. When we were in grade school, she definitely evolved. She walked into the house one day and said, "Guess what, If you want dinner, it's in the freezer. And I'm going back to school at night and I'm going into therapy." I really believe that's what kept their marriage together, because she stopped living through him.

Many of these motherly "words of wisdom" are rooted in their own lessons and unmet desires. In these cases, the mothers' influence stems from a "do as I say, not as I do" philosophy; which is often just as powerful for their daughters to hear and adhere to. These mothers, whose beliefs have not yet impacted a call for action in their own marriages, make bold efforts to encourage their daughters not to make the same mistake. "She was the typical mom who got married without a whole lot of skills, and became the housewife. I think she always felt very angry and threatened by it, in case the marriage didn't work out. She was right and always instilled in me to have my own job and not depend on anyone else." "Men had this bad rap, for the most part, especially with my mom. She really stressed that whole independent thing. I think that's because of the rotten relationships that she's had with my sisters' dad and with my dad. It was almost as if the message was 'You'll do better without. You don't need a man.'"

While some of the women were influenced to do their "strong woman number" by the advice and positive examples of their mothers, others attribute part of their drive toward independence to not wanting to be like their mothers, taking great measures not to adopt the characteristics they deem unappealing and unhealthy, not wanting to follow in the footsteps of the reality that their mothers created for themselves or "settled for." "I definitely don't want to emulate the part of her life that I don't like." "I learned from her mistakes--definitely not from her example." These mothers are sometimes viewed by their daughters as "weak" and "insecure," characteristics that these adult daughters work hard not to adopt. "Deep down inside

she's very insecure." "I've seen my dad hold her back, and she didn't fight back; I don't want that." Feelings of "powerlessness" and "unhappiness" in those mothers, who never exemplified the capacity to overcome the adversity or take back the control of their lives, was evident to and expressed by their daughters. "That's partly why I originally was attracted to the medical profession. It was a power thing, because I saw my mom, at times, feel so powerless." "She was angry and bitter most of the time about the decisions she made and how hard her life was."

Many of these accounts relay the perceptions of mothers marrying for the "wrong reasons." "Because she didn't believe kids should be raised without a father, she married this man in the church that she'd only known for like six months." "She married because she wanted to be able to retire. She was sick of financial responsibility, really stupid reasons; and just not thinking. She's still married to this man she's unhappy with." Many women viewed their mothers as blindly following, to their detriment, societal norms and expectations of their generation and culture. "My mom was in a very programmed kind of community. She was supposed to get married, and (she) married a man who was very opposite from her and they were unhappy." "My Mom was raised in a big family, one of twelve. The women went to vocational school in Puerto Rico, to send my uncles to go to college. This double standard was definitely prevalent in her life, and she bought into it in a big way. I think she was very unhappy and it played out on all of us."

Women in this group shared the wish not to contend with the "dysfunctional" quality that they observed their mothers having with their male partners. A primary theme for these women was disdain for what they witnessed as a high degree of dependence upon a man for happiness. "I remember, in high school, I worried about my mom lying on the bed because I thought maybe she was depressed. She said she was sad because she didn't have a boyfriend."

> I look at my mother and I think, "That is not going to be me." She grew up not educated, raised to be domestic. At the age of 45, she gets divorced and has to work for the first time in her life. She had two kids and just wasn't equipped to know how to deal. To this day

she's still a total victim. I'm not going to be so dependent on a man that, if it doesn't work, I don't know who I am, and can't support myself.

As a consequence of this dependence, these women also report having negative memories of how difficult it was to watch their mother struggle with the sole responsibilities of being a single parent. "Raising us kids by herself, I thought to myself, 'No thanks. Don't want that,' because it was extremely stressful." "I learned that it was important for me to be able to support myself and stand on my own two feet; in the event that I ever got divorced, I didn't want to work at the grocery store, like my mom. It's almost stereotypical how a man feels that it's important for him to establish his career. I felt that was important to me too."

Many women in the study also discussed the influence set by their sisters' examples. Sometimes, this identification is a positive one whereby women describe wanting to emulate what their sisters have shown them, by their example, to be true, possible, and advantageous. "Seeing my sister go to college while I was really young was just sort of like this different life. And I was like, 'Oh, so I don't need to get married right away.'" More often, however, women learned, from their sister's example, what they did not want for themselves. Lifestyle, role choices, and the balance of power within marriage, were but a few of the factors that some women mentioned as significant differences between themselves and their married sisters. "My sisters both married very early on and had kids, and put themselves in very vulnerable situations. One doesn't work at all. She's a homekeeper and the husband takes care of everything. I couldn't just go home and just have nothing else to do but raising kids; that's boring as hell!" "Her husband didn't pay a bill and the insurance company called her and said, 'Where's the bill?' She felt stupid because she doesn't know anything about her finances. I couldn't put myself in that situation, with someone having control over my livelihood. To me, it's just a powerless situation."

The perception of sisters who are overly dependent on their relationships with men elicited a vehement reaction, as well. "When my sister was in her twenties, she just became like

this thing for men, and I just detested it. She would work at places for the purpose of meeting a man and marrying him. I couldn't stand that. It was completely against my feminist views." "I didn't want to rely on someone else for my stability and my happiness, because I saw my sister doing it, and it was so obvious to me that she had no sense of independence."

Late Bloomers

I always felt different because I had skipped a grade and was never one of the popular kids. I really focused on academics and was very sheltered and close to my family, not even dating until my mid-twenties.

The "Settled by Thirty" expectation of the "Time Warp" is often exacerbated for those who consider themselves to be "late bloomers." This property highlights the accounts of women who feel they were emotionally and sexually developmentally delayed in the dating and intimacy arena. "I was a late bloomer. The sexual piece was on hold until I found someone I was really comfortable with." "I was just a late bloomer and immature and not thinking about that." Many believe this "late blooming" to be, in part, responsible for time passing while still bereft of the companionship they seek, leaving them to face singlehood later in life than they desire. They point out what they consider to be a "late" start in the dating arena. "I was a little bit of a late bloomer, so I didn't start dating young." "Most people start dating as teenagers. I started dating more like low thirties. I was just a little socially retarded; going through the similar phases that people go through probably ten years earlier, of not necessarily dating the most appropriate people or not mentally thinking, 'What do I want long term? Who would I like to be with?'"

There were several explanations hypothesized by these women as to why and how this came to be. Some have come to understand it as just part of their unique developmental route in life. "I think there are some women who mature earlier and are more ready to date earlier. I was not one of them. I don't think there's anything wrong with me. I think there is a bell shaped curve of when people are ready to date and when they're not. I just started late." "It's taken me a

little longer to get to know myself." Others attribute being a "late bloomer" to the influence of familial and cultural directives.. "My curfew was always earlier than my friends; and I couldn't have a boyfriend until a certain age; my parents were just very smothering." "I was also affected by the fact that my older sister didn't date at all." "I went to a private school without that many Jewish kids." An extended period of living at home with parents also played a role in delaying some life experiences. "After college, I wanted to move out, and that was like a big family uproar because, being Hispanic, that was something that was unheard of. 'You don't move out until you get married. What's the matter with you?' To keep peace, I put up with it for a little bit, thinking, 'I'll move out in a year or two, when I get married.' I ended up living at home until I was 32!"

Upon reflection about the decade which preceded their thirties many women spoke of prioritizing independent living and career advancement in their twenties. As a result of this focus, the social agenda of many other women in their twenties took a backseat. "Obsessing about finding someone in my twenties just wasn't important. I was trying to get my self secure in my career and probably more secure with who I am." "Through my twenties, I was always so focused on a career and making money, which were my goals and my priorities. I didn't want anything to stand in the way, and I was scared that if I get involved with somebody I would lose my focus." Time for self-reflection, helping to define and clarify goals, also was said to have been compromised. "In my twenties, I was not overly introspective. My career was my focus, so I didn't think about what I wanted in life. 'Would I like to meet somebody?'"

Rigorous and monopolizing academic and professional demands intensified the lack of available focus and energy. For single women in the medical profession, for example, the grueling demands on their time has further delayed their ability to prioritize being inwardly focused, work on their relationships, and formulate what they are wanting in their lives. "The

combination of being a bit socially delayed and in that setting, just makes time fly by. You're

constantly tired, and on call. It's too hard to be tuned in to dating, or looking for a partner."

> There was clearly a general deprivation during medical training of just life, and being in relationships. I got out of medical school at 26, residency was 26 to 29, and fellowship was 29 to 31. During this time, it is all consuming. Before you turn around, you're already past 30 and you're just finishing your training! Medicine's all about putting everything else on hold.

While some women remembered being too distracted to focus on relationships with men,

others really just began dating in their twenties, with the focus more on the present experience

than the long term implications. "I had really just started to date, because I dated so minimally in

college and law school. So a lot of the tumult was tied in with relationships, having sex for the

first time, etc.," "I was not particularly focused on 'Are they appropriate?' It was more focused

on 'Are they attractive? Do I enjoy being with them?'" Often, during this era in women's lives,

relationships with men were characterized by an overly enmeshed attachment, also contributing

to women's lack of self focus. "My twenties was a time when I was promiscuous, exploring my

sexuality, and proving to myself that I was sexy." "I was looking for anyone, any boyfriend. I

lived through them and looked to them to take care of me. So during that time, I never took the

time to figure who I was or what I really was looking for."

Disturbances or unanticipated life events, such as health problems, can also contribute to

the "late bloomer" syndrome. "I've been at a disadvantage with my whole social situation in

dating men because I had that six years of my life taken away that I couldn't date. It was just too

difficult of a time. I was trying to maintain my health." "I lost a whole year being sick."

Some women struggle with feeling "behind" as a result of perceiving themselves as "late

bloomers." "I feel like I am so behind the times as far as practicing. What I lost track of was the

whole dating scene and the high school, the college, all that is practice for real life. You practice

your getting along skills, your connecting with people skills. I don't feel like I've done that. I

don't feel like I've put in my time." "I feel like I have this delayed self-insight." "I sort of think, 'Life is passing me by.'"

The Wake Up Call

I was completely out to lunch until 35. It was just more of a wake-up call, a reality check. It's really only since then that I have come to the realization of, "Oh my god. What happened?"

I have this fear that my life is passing me by, that I'm running out of time. I want to be able to celebrate a long anniversary with a spouse. I want to be able to enjoy my kids before I'm 75.

Some single women in their thirties pinpoint the "Time Warp" phenomenon as a trigger in creating "The Wake Up Call" experience. This property consists of the elevated urgency to more directly recognize and address the unmet goal for marriage and children. As discussed in the "Late Bloomer" property, many women attribute their lack of having reached the expected goal of marriage and children to their preoccupation, in their twenties, on other tasks. Thus, there was a laissez-faire attitude about their age and the urgency to think about marriage during that time. "There was no such thing as a time line to get married and have kids. I didn't feel, 'Oh my God. Time is running out.' I just felt like I had all the time in the world." "In my twenties, it absolutely did not occur to me that I was going to run out of time."

Once women reach their thirties, the focus and concern about marriage and children can become heightened. "It actually didn't dawn on me that I was getting older and unmarried until I was in my early thirties." "It's only been in the past couple of years, it's like, 'Man, how did I get here? What happened to the past decade?'" "There is more stress when you realize that relationships take time. I'm 37. 'How much time do I have?'" Mid-life issues of mortality and child bearing concerns begin to hit home. "Time speeds up as you get closer to something? In this case, it's my fortieth birthday approaching. It seemed so distant, but now it's starting to hit." "In my twenties, I was really young and the life was forever. You get to a point where one day

you wake up and you say, I can see myself at 80, and can imagine life being done as we know it on this earth. I got there in my mid-thirties. And when you get to that point, life looks different from when the standpoint of 'I'm omnipotent; the world is my oyster.'"

The "shock value" in this experience, for some women, triggers some panic about the passing of time and negative judgment along with it. "I'm just starting to explore this single thing and deal with it. And my concern about my biological clock ticking really only started this past year; and it seems to be ticking faster." "Being 37 sounds and feels ancient!"

Several factors were reported to elicit the "wake up call" experience. Often, the transition from the twenties to the thirties promotes a lessening of intensity in the former academic and career embedded focus; having more time available can trigger the "wake up call" task to ponder and define, more directly, what one wants in their life. "Everything was all planned out before. You know what you're doing for the next four years. It gave me a sense of structure, with no decisions. Now I need to look at what I want to do with my life!"

Birth order expectations, that marriages will occur in sync with chronological age, also can trigger the enhanced urgency to follow suit, after witnessing siblings marrying. "The impact of having my younger brother marrying before me is that it points more to my sense of, 'I've got to hurry up and do this. It's my turn.'" "My friend is very up and down about all of this, and said, 'I got panicked and am going after this with a vengeance. I want to get married.' She's my age, 38. Her siblings both married this summer. It threw her into a 'Gotta do this' mode."

Birthdays, representing the passage of time, define one's chronological age, and can also be a catalyst for many women to take stock in what has and hasn't happed in their lives. "The zero birthdays are always difficult ones. Each one has its own image that people have. But the mid-birthdays are times to look even more closely at where you are or where you aren't. I take birthdays seriously as a time to really look at things." "I just didn't feel like things were happening the way I wanted them to, and here I'm turning 30 already." The anticipatory

experience of turning forty was referred to by one of the participants as the "turning forty freak out factor." For some women, this arbitrary age is a powerful reminder to what desired events have not yet occurred in their lives, and the fear that they may never manifest themselves. "It's an artificial thing, because really, how are you different at 39 and ten months vs. 40 and one month? You're not at all. It is a just an artificial mark. But on some level, at least psychologically, it's real." "I'm trying to figure out, like, how can I not wake up on that day and all of a sudden have it all descend on me and go, 'Oh my God! I'm not ready.'"

As time passes, with each birthday, concerns about the viability of having children is on the rise for many women in their thirties. "I'm 37. I have endometriosis. It's going to be hard for me to have kids anyway. The longer I wait, the harder it's going to ever be, and that's what scares me." "It sucks when I start thinking about not having kids and I'm going to be 35. You can have kids up until you're 40, and you might be able to have them after. But it's a high-risk zone. That is just a fact of life." If this biological child bearing issue concern was not present, many women attest to the fact that they do not feel they would be as fearful about their single status or have the sense of urgency to mate and procreate quickly. "If I knew that the man was going to come into my life at 47, that would be just fine, but I want to have a child, and that creates a sense of urgency, tension, frustration and fear that I'm feeling." "There's a lot of people that, they think about the babies before they think about the marriage."

The urgency of the "the wake up call" is also embedded in responding to the familial agenda and wish for generational overlap and connection. This brought tearful affect to many of those women, who expressed this experience. "We've got this deadline. They want to be able to see me in a happy, secure environment, with a family, while they're still alive." "The clock's running. It's not just the biological clock. Their clocks are ticking, too. I want to be able to have grandchildren that know their grandparents, kids that know their grandparents."

Feeling the "wake up call" toward pursuing marriage and children can also be heightened by women noticing the increased levels of urgency and concern of others about them finding a life partner. "Since I am in my thirties, my parents started to push me and ask me, and even my father made a comment that it is harder to have a child over age thirty. So, I feel their pressure that I have to find a significant one in a certain period of time because I am running out of time." "I do sense that people now are worried about me. They're getting more aggressive about asking, 'What things are you doing to meet people?' 'Why don't you answer ads, or get on the Internet?' Which are valid ideas, but until recently, I didn't sense an immediacy." In addition, watching peers who struggle with their age and their single status also tends to exacerbate the urgency and anxiety within the "wake up call" experience. "My friends that are over 40 and single seem a little more devastated." "I don't know many women approaching forty or in their forties who really are at peace with this issue."

CHAPTER VI

INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

> When you're single into your thirties, it can also affect a lot of your relationships; some stuff with friends and family seems to have shifted and changed.

Many of the women spoke of how their single status impacted their relationships with others. Since being single in their thirties has set them apart from the mainstream "norm," interpersonal dynamics with family and friends are often affected. The properties within this category are: "The Family Focus," which describes the ways in which some of these women feel their single status has affected their role within their family of origin, and "On A Different Page," which focuses on the interpersonal shifts within their peer group.

Family Focus

> When the expectation was to be married by the time I was in my thirties, and I'm not, there's definitely a lot of stuff that gets played out in my family about it.

Some women report their single status to have had noteworthy impact on their position within their family of origin. Many reported their single status to have influenced the roles they are expected to play, and the way they are perceived and treated within their family of origin. The dimensions which exemplify these dynamics are: "Not A Grown-up Yet," which describes what an infantilizing experience being single can be in the family setting, and "Role Reversal," which applies to the switch in caretaking responsibilities between single adult daughters and their parents.

Not A Grown-up Yet

> I feel as though if I were married, they would treat me more as an adult. It's like they think I'm not a grown-up yet!

Some of the women in the study mentioned that the absence of a spouse had kept them in a childlike position within the family system. They have not felt that they have been treated as a "grown-up," whose good judgment is acknowledged and respected. "They still expect me to check in and run things by them when it comes to major life decisions, and they are not as doubtful or intrusive in my married brother or sister's lives." "They're still questioning my decisions! They are questioning my decision of how to observe the holiday, for example, and I just chose not to observe it the way they want to observe it!" Some single women who have lived at home with their parents into their thirties, have felt a lingering susceptibility to feel beholden to parental norms and expectations. "Being home to start the new year with family was an absolute requirement. I always hated that, and had to live with it. When I was engaged, my ex-fiancée confronted me with 'Why do you have to be home?' I realized, 'Yeah, I'm an adult now and I guess I could do what I want.'"

Since these women are without a partner and new family system of their own, there is also a facet of still feeling and being perceived as "dependent" on parents and the family structure for emotional and financial security. Some express discomfort and shame about this, especially when they know other family members feel burdened and judgmental of it. "My brother contributes to that in his battles in being a part of the family business. In a heated moment, when he's unguarded, I've heard him say, 'I don't want to be like you, Dad. I don't want to have to take care of my two unmarried sisters like you had to do when you were growing up.'"

When a crisis strikes, such as a debilitating health problem, it can prolong this undesirable dependence on parents, and feel regressive and humiliating. "Just this past June, I had surgery on my foot and was on crutches. Mom had to come and stay with me. Again, it's all related --

because here I am, 35 years old, and there's no one to take care of me except my parents." "I had to become very dependent during my illness, where I had to recuperate for three months at my parents' house and have my wound changed four times a day. It's like reverting back to childhood. It felt horrible."

Role Reversals

> I feel like we've switched roles. My mother comes to me for advice and guidance and help a lot. I feel like the caretaker now.

Other single women in their thirties find themselves in a role reversal switch with their parents, being looked to as the primary caretaker because of the perception that they are single, unattached to a family of their own, and therefore more available. This added responsibility can create a struggle within some women trying to juggle and negotiate feelings over split allegiances. This role expectation can also create a distraction from them having the freedom to live their own lives. "I told my boyfriend that I just had to go and help my parents for a while. He was probably scared that every time they called, I'm going to run home and I'm going to take care of them. He said to me that he needs me now, and 'If you go, we break up.'" "My married older brother said I'm responsible for the parents because I'm not married and I don't have a family. My response was that maybe I will have a family one day, and how can I be responsible for them alone? We should share the responsibility. There are expectations, because I'm single, to take care of them. If I let this guilt get to me, I will never have a family!"

As parents age, facing bodily ailments, loss, and their own mortality, their dependence on their adult single daughters often increases. "My mother called me from overseas and said, 'Your father cannot handle this and I cannot bear another winter without heat.' I knew that I had to be there to fix this problem." "My mom was very close with her older sister who was like a mother figure to her. The death of her sister coincided with our relationship switching completely. That

loss was so overwhelming for her that I was the one who was making arrangements and taking care of her. We switched roles."

On a Different Page

A lot of my friends got married and moved to the suburbs; my whole social structure has changed. It's taken a lot to get used to.

This property concerns the challenges many single women express, because of feeling "On A Different Page" from their peer group and friendship circles. The circumstance these women now face is a departure from the days past when their network of friends was more homogeneous, functioning as their social outlet. "I remember being in my early twenties and all of us were single, and were one big group." "A lot of my friends got married, and are now dispersed all over. My whole social structure has changed." The loss of this single network can be a difficult adjustment. "I found myself with no single friends left and in a totally different world." " I have two different worlds, the world with my married friends, and my single life."

Differences in marital status amongst friends often evoke shifts in the dynamics and quality of these relationships, as well as the range of feelings it elicits from both ends. A commonly reported complaint from single women was about the increased unavailability of their married friends. "It's hard because I want to do things where I'm going to maybe meet somebody, but it's difficult because I know that my married friends can't do those singles kind of things on a regular basis with me." "I still keep in touch with them, and still spend time. But, it's just weird. It's different. They have kids. They're busy and have responsibilities. It's not like I can call them to go away for the weekend or go out to lunch."

As life choices and directions diversified, some women reported that they had less in common with their married friends. "I have more in common with the husbands. They were the ones with careers, whereas my girlfriends were giving up their careers or their roles shifted considerably." As a result of this lack of common ground, some friendships can become more

"distant." "Sometimes I wanted to just hang out with my girlfriend and go shopping or something. Then we would do that, but there was always a distance." "I've had a number of conversations with friends of mine where it's been difficult to acknowledge the fact that our friendship has drifted because they're in that phase right now and I'm so completely opposite." When formerly single friends find a life partner, there is also an adjustment expressed in incorporating this third party. Some of the single women interviewed have had a positive experience with this, while others find the transition challenging. "I'm kind of the cherished third wheel." "I feel lucky because I felt like through their union, I made another friend." "It's been hard to maintain the closeness with my male friends who got married. There aren't so many of them where wives are OK with that."

The experience of being "on a different page" from their married friends carries a feeling of "envy" for many single women in their thirties who desire marriage and children. "I see all my friends moving on to the next phases of their lives with marriage and then children, that so far has eluded me and sometimes I feel very envious." "It's very difficult when 90 percent of your friends are married with kids. You see them on a Sunday and they're all hanging out, ordering in pizza with their little girls and watching the Walt Disney special and you're home alone. I would love to have that family feeling."

The feelings of "envy" are often mutual, experienced by some of their married friends as well. "They love being married, but they've given up their career and their whole life; they want to be single, too, sometimes." "Some of my friends got married very young. I think there's a bit of jealousy, like they wish they had the freedom to do things. Some of them went right from college to their husbands. They never really had their own life first." There is also a perception, amongst some single women, that they pose a threat to their married friends who are not yet comfortable, secure, or satisfied enough with married life. "You are a threat because you are the single woman with the great career, and that can be very attractive to someone who's in a rut, or

who has decided to shift their lives." "A friend of mine recently said to me, 'You were a threat, and that's how that's perceived. You're single, you're out there, you're successful, you're doing all of this other kind of stuff.'"

When married friends have children, it can exacerbate many of the aforementioned emotions and reactions their single friends express. With the new demands of motherhood, their available time invariably decreases, as they become even less accessible to their single girlfriends. "When you're a mom, that is your life. So, it's also harder to get together with your friends who are married with kids. They just can't go and do something on the weekends. They have to ask their husbands, and that gets really hard." "There has been a drifting away because of marriage, and especially because of children. Because once you have kids, your schedule is not your own." Due to their distraction with their children, some single women have a particularly difficult time adjusting to the lack of quality and focused time with their married friends, sometimes feeling neglected and jealous of their friends' new familial attachments. "I went to visit my friend out of town, who just had a child. We've been the closest of friends since junior high school. We talk weekly. But seeing her with this child, who is the most important thing to her, was intense and disappointing. I'm like, 'What about me?' I was really angry about it in the way it took away from her attention on me." It's hard to concentrate with the friend and have quality time together." The lack of common interests between single women and their married friends can also increase as children enter the picture. "My married friends with young kids in the suburbs, I don't have much in common with them anymore, because their whole focus is on their children, which is great, but I can't relate to that."

> I find it really hard to relate to them because they're distracted; and it's just not like it was, because we don't have things in common. Their life is no longer individual or about them and their partner, so it's really hard to connect, because their kids are their whole world. We've grown so far apart. I'm still talking about blind dates and they're talking about Mommy and Me classes, and there's nothing in the middle.

Many of the women in this study also gave voice to their envious feelings when they see their friends having children. "She was talking about her children, and I had this overwhelming sense of resentment over feeling that I don't even have time for relationships because of my schedule." "Even though you get to do stuff with your friend's kids, you're still not the mom. So there are many times when I just wish I had my own child to be doing this with." At times, these feelings of envy and discomfort with the present single status makes it even more painful and challenging for some single women to spend time with their friends and their families. "I don't like doing it. It kind of reminds me of where I'm not." "I just came back from spending five days with my best friend from college and her husband, their four and a half and nine year old daughter; it's hard, because our lives are so different. I'm still single."

The differences that arise between single women and their married friends can sometimes bring out deeper resentments as a result of the lack of mutual understanding of their respective realities. The experience of feeling that their married friends expect more from them, because they correlate being single with increased availability and flexibility, is frustrating for many women. "I don't like going out to the suburbs to my friends, who have kids. It's inconvenient for me and I only do it because I have to." "I had a falling out with one of my friends, because she would always use her kids as an excuse. She expected me to cater to and accommodate her, because, 'I have children, so my life is busier than yours.' I'm like, 'Just because I'm single doesn't mean that I don't have a life. You don't work; I do. I'm tired, too. I have pressures and things to do too.' It's just different."

There are situations that arise, as well, that cause such disconnection and conflict. Sometimes it can threaten the very foundation of the friendship and may lead to a parting of the ways. "I've had some difficult 'break ups' with women as well, though no one likes to speak of these; it happens a lot when one gets married, and one remains single." "It really hits home when you have a friend who's 35, married, and already has a child, going, 'Oh my god, I'm getting so

old, I've got to have another child soon. Can you believe I'm 36?' I want to slap her. I'm like, 'Hello. You're married. You have one child. I'm not even in a relationship, and you're saying this to me.' There's a lot of very insensitive married women."

Many of the women interviewed also felt "on a different page" with their single friends as well. Feelings of envy strike again for some, when and if they witness their single friends dating fluidly and successfully during a time when they are not. "During the period when I couldn't date because of my health, it was always very difficult for me because my friends would be out dating and I would be just home alone." "If my friend has a great date, I'm really excited for her, but yeah, I definitely feel a little bit of that twinge of jealousy. We're all human. We try and really take joy in that, but we can't help thinking on a selfish level, too, 'That's happening to them, and it's not happening to me.'"

Attitudinal differences between these women and some of their single friends were also identified. "I'm very aware of these sort of very angry, bitter women, and I look at them and think, 'Who would want to be with you? You're a pill. You're horrible.' I think that about one friend in particular, because I don't know what man would really want to be around her." "I do feel alone, because most of my girlfriends still want someone desperately and are working towards it, while I've started working on myself. I wonder if other women are experiencing what I'm experiencing or if I'm the only one who thinks, 'You know, this isn't really that bad.'"

The age factor can also impact how single women relate to one another. "Some of my single friends are younger and that's a difference. They're in their mid-twenties, with a lot of financial preoccupation and just getting into the world."

> Some women do have issues and insecurities with themselves being single, who are maybe in their forties. You sense that even more when you're younger than them. I've seen bosses like that at work, who are bitter and hard-edged, because they have a lack of a personal life, or they've made their career their life. When they see younger women having a good time, it's, "I don't feel good about this. You shouldn't either." Instead of empowering younger women, they make their lives more difficult by projecting their unhappiness onto you.

CHAPTER VII

THE DATING GERBIL WHEEL

> It's become what I call the gerbil wheel of
> dating, because that's what it feels like. It's just
> this cycle of doing it. It's just round and round
> and you don't really get anywhere.

Many women who are thirty-something and single, describe the dating process to be

somewhat like a "Dating Gerbil Wheel." This category encompasses many of the repetitive

experiences they report in the dating arena, as well as in their more substantive past relationships

with men. The properties incorporated are: "How Do I Meet Thee?" which discusses the

constant struggles some women face in finding ways to meet eligible partners; "The Dating

Game" relays some of the unspoken "games" that are played out between men and women in the

dating field; "Keepers and Tweeners" distinguishes the differences that motivate women to "just

date" some men, while seeing long term potential with others; "Ouch, That Hurts" conveys

emotional wounds incurred, during past dating or love relationships with men.

"How Do I Meet Thee?"

> I think probably what you'll find through this research is that women have tried every
> possible type of avenue to meet someone or get dates.

Women who are thirty-something and single and who desire marriage, inevitably explore

viable means through which they can meet eligible men. This property captures the difficulty

experienced in the quest to find ways to meet prospective partners. The dimensions listed are:

"The Shrinking Talent Pool," regarding the lack of men available; "It Ain't Easy," referring to the challenges women face in confronting this task; "Been There, Done That," which under-scores some women's repetitious and unsatisfying efforts to meet men; and "Methods To Meet The Man," which describes the pro-active stance many women adopt in their pursuit of finding opportunistic means through which they can potentially meet appropriate partners.

<u>The Shrinking Talent Pool</u>

> It seems like pretty slim picking. . . the guys are just not matching up. Now that I'm ready, it just seems like all the reasonable and eligible guys are gone.

Some of the women who have been actively seeking ways to meet and date, relay their impression of, and frustration over, "The Shrinking Talent Pool" of men available. A prevalent claim is that, in terms of sheer numbers, there are too few single men out there to meet. This perception was related to the belief that "the older you get, the harder it is to get married." "Frankly, just in terms of supply and demand, there just are not that many single men in the 37 to 43 range to choose from." "The first thing, when I'm traveling and I'm on a plane, I'll look at their hand. I'm like, 'Everyone is married!'" "I will say it's a little scary dating in my thirties since I feel like there aren't as many guys." "I feel like everyone's 'taken.' Like, is there anyone really out there?"

Many women talked a great deal about their frustration in not being able to come into contact with many "normal" and "emotionally available" men. "I'm trying to figure out how the hell do you meet a guy who wants to be in a relationship with you?" "I've met a number of really bizarre men. I'm teased over being the one with the endless and best stories about the most dysfunctional men in the world; and I've dated every one of them." These women emphasized the primary desire to find the "right" and suitable match for them, feeling most of the heightened affect around this issue. "The challenges are meeting people who I would be interested in having a relationship with; it's rare to find someone that is even halfway appealing to me." "I've dated

more people than anybody in the universe. I never thought that I would have as much trouble finding the real one." "Out in the dating world, the "having faith" rule does not always seem to apply. I often wonder how I'm going to find someone that is a quality person." Some women find themselves skeptical of men who are thirty-something and still single. "When I get set up on these dates, I'm like, 'This is what's left? This is terrible.' I get set up with people who are like 38, and never been married, and I'm thinking, 'What is wrong with them?'"

Having specific and desired criteria can complicate easy access to a broader population of available men. "I've always wanted to date a guy that's taller than me. I'm 5'9," so that eliminates a lot of them." The talent pool shrinks further for those women who desire and seek a partner of the same religious faith or ethnicity. "Her family instilled that she's got to marry Jewish. It's so a part of her being, that she can't fight it. But, she resents it too, because she feels burdened by how much more difficult it is to find the right guy." "I don't get a lot of African-American guys asking me out. My world doesn't consist of them. In law school or at work, there aren't a lot of African-American men. When I go and do the things that I like to do, I just don't see a lot of African-Americans camping and hiking. So it's difficult in that sense."

It Ain't Easy!

> Meeting people, and especially men, isn't easy. You've got to put yourself out there; you've got to find the things that are right for you; and then when you're out there doing these things, you've got to make sure that you're at your best and friendly.

The property of "It Ain't Easy" reveals how and why the effort to meet potential life partners, at this stage in their life, feels so challenging. Opportunities for exposure and interaction with available men is reported, by some women, to have decreased. "I think it's harder to meet people, because I'm not in college anymore, with the proximity of guys around." "There isn't as much exposure. As you get older, if you're not out there all the time, you're not being social enough." Consequently, a sense of "pressure" and urgency to "be out there" follows

suit. "The experience of being in my thirties and single is really difficult, especially living in New York City, because the pressure and the competition is so extreme, and it is so difficult to meet people." "There's always the feeling of, 'gotta keep out there, gotta keep doing this.'"

Many women expressed their dismay at not meeting men in the ways in which they feel most comfortable. "I know what I like to do, and I've been doing that but that doesn't put me in situations where I meet someone, like going to dinner, a play, or a movie." "I've never met anybody through business." The unappeal of more contrived methods of dating can become another deterrent for many woman. "I'm definitely not comfortable with using the computer as a dating service." "I don't do any of that contrived and structured single event stuff. I'm just not a singles scene chick." "Blind dating is uncomfortable and unfamiliar. You don't know them, they don't know you. You're kind of interviewing each other, and checking each other out. It's very superficial. I'm not a bullshit, surface kind of person, so it's difficult for me. And in the time I do have, I really want to do yoga, work out and spend time with my friends and family."

Some women avoid certain methods of dating out of a sense of shame and embarrassment, related to their single status. "I would never ask somebody to set me up because it feels desperate." "I've just never been able to bring myself to do dating services. It does seem desperate to me. I'm very careful. I don't want to get involved in things that are scams or that are dangerous."

Some women attribute the development of higher expectations of the relationship they seek as another reason for the growing difficulty of meeting men. "Dating has slowed down significantly because I want something more than I used to when I was kind of promiscuous. When you're just doing the lust thing, you go to a bar, or you pick up on someone at a party. Now I'm reworking how to find more substantive relationships." "I think not only are professional women in high powered jobs getting married later in life because of the other demands and distractions of their time, but also because the more educated, sophisticated, and

emotionally evolved we become, the less men of comparable quality there are that are appealing enough to us." As some women reach their late thirties, there is often the assumption that their appeal to men has diminished as well. "If they're not gone, they're not interested in dating somebody who is 39." "Often times, men want a woman who's younger, or they want a woman who maybe isn't a professional."

<u>Been There, Done That</u>

> One of the things that my friends and I call it is, each time we go out on one of these dates and something happens, it's an AFLE, which is "Another Fucking Learning Experience."

The dimension of "Been There, Done That" in women's experience in the dating world highlights their frustrations over their repetitive and cumulative efforts to meet and date men. "The best way to meet people is through mutual friends, mutual interests, or through work. But I've tried all that. I've gone to charitable benefits, gotten involved in activities and classes, joined organizations, taken sailing lessons!" "Blind dating is hard because it's one more time, some new person. What really gets to me is when I have to look across at the table from someone that I have absolutely no interest in getting to know. You go through this script 1,000 times of, "What do you do?" and I go into automatic. It's only on the rare occasion that something slightly different comes out of it."

Disappointment gets regenerated as they report "hearing the same old thing" from many men whom they do meet along the way. "I know a lot of people meet their husbands in bars, but that's usually where I get the guys that come in and within the first 15 minutes are like, 'Oh my god, I've never met anyone like you. You're so incredibly beautiful.' And then you never hear from them again." "It's the times where I'll go through and meet guy after guy, and each one has his own weird story, and is emotionally unavailable."

A series of these emotionally deflating experiences can sometimes lead to feelings of depletion. Putting forth consistent efforts to date and find the appropriate partner can take its toll

as the years unfold. "For a long time, I took every opportunity to meet people. But at this point, I feel like I've hit a wall. I'm so tired of constantly putting myself out there to create all of those, 'Well, you never know, this might be the night when I meet somebody.'" "It's the same old girlfriend stuff. I love my girlfriends, but I've been going out to the bars with girls, being single and wild since I was probably 17, for 19 years! It's like, 'Oh my god, this is so old.' It just wears on you, and you think, 'I don't want to do this anymore!" "I was mid-twenties, and thought 'I'm never going to date if I don't get out and meet people. Let's see, what would Ann Landers say? She would say, 'Join your local church or synagogue.' So I did that, in every city I've lived in. If you do these things so many times, and keep getting knocked down, you get tired of getting up again. That's been the hardest thing to deal with."

Some women eventually relinquish exercising dating strategies or behaviors that are not satisfying. "As you get older, your tastes and needs change. I don't go out till three in the morning and party like I used to. Now, I just like going out to dinner and being with my friends." "We're all pretty much finished with the bar scene. That got old for me in my mid-twenties." "I haven't had sex in a while, so it would be nice; but is this the person that you would want to just go out to have sex with? I've done that before. It doesn't work for me."

<u>Methods To Meet The Man</u>

> What I have learned to do is to open up my avenues towards meeting people. I don't narrow it down any more, because I don't want to accuse myself of limiting anybody.

> Dating is a lot like looking for a job. You really have to be committed to it, and it's a process. You've got to do it.

Because of the aforementioned obstacles to meeting eligible single men, some women become more proactive in pursuing ways to create the potential for finding the relationship they seek. "I look at my transition over from 30 to 35, and I see how my attitude has changed and how I've become much more open minded about ways that I will meet people." "My growth of what

the concept of what dating has meant to me has in part come from slight desperation, and from just a loosening up about ways to meet someone." This decision is also largely based on the hope and faith that it is possible for them to find and have this in their lives. "I have a friend who says 'you're only one date away from bliss.'" "I try and maintain an attitude of lightness, going in thinking, 'You never know, there's always hope that it might be different this time.'"

Sometimes women feel called to more fully explore whether romantic potential exists with any of their male friends. "When you're single, you're constantly thinking about, 'Is this somebody I could be with? Would this work? And if we're such good friends, why aren't we dating?" "I have male friends I always wonder if something would ever happen with."

Methods of dating that previously may have been dismissed, often become options that many women begin to embrace. Uncharted territory of opportunities are explored, stretching the envelope of new, sought out ventures. "I never remotely thought I would do anything on the Internet, until my friend told be about Match.com. A mini-search came up with a couple guys who actually looked decent. So I thought, 'I really need to join this,' and felt like, 'OK, so there is something out there with possibilities.'" "I've started to initiate conversation with others and ask, 'Don't you know anybody?'" "I've taken the initiative to attend some single events sponsored by the church."

> Blind dating was so difficult for me to start doing. It was insulting to me almost, and couldn't get over the 'what a loser,' aspect of it. Now, it makes me laugh, because in this city, there is just no other way. Whereas I used to cringe about it, now I don't even think twice. People that I never would have considered before, if they are breathing, male and straight, then all of a sudden, they're a candidate.

While some women naturally have a very positive and lighthearted attitude about their efforts and experiences in the dating world, others have worked hard to cultivate it. "I've dated for 11 years. So for me, going out on a blind date, I look at as meeting someone new." "I love to flirt with the back and forth banter, the smarter the guy the better."

As a result of some of the challenges inherent in this process, many women devise strategies to make the experience more palatable and enjoyable. One example is putting limits on the amount of time they will devote to a first meeting with someone. "Lunch for our first date is a really nice thing to do." "At this point, I'll only go out with a blind date for a drink." Doing activities of interest, while lessening the result orientation of meeting someone, is another helpful strategy that many women consciously employ. "My friend says, 'We've got to go to the driving range. That's where all the men are.' I'm like, 'I have no interest in that. It's not worth it to me.' I'm taking some different classes that I'm interested in, and if I meet someone it will be a bonus." "I joined an organization where I can grow in the area of foreign relations, politics and worldly events. Since a lot of guys go, it's also something where I can better myself, with the possibility of meeting someone, too."

Dating behaviors, as strategies to more effectively meet and attract men, is another topic discussed. "I've been playing the numbers game. The more dates I go on, the more likely the right match will come along." While some women use a more covert approach, others try taking the initiative in creating desired interactions. "I played the rules girl, letting him pursue me, but still being communicative with him." "A girlfriend of mine who's very wise, says to try direct eye contact, because I tend to be very shy during that first look and attraction." "If men look like they're shy, or if it looks like they're trying to figure out a way to approach me, I just think, 'Why put them through that?' So I'll go over and start the conversation."

As some single women use the aforementioned pro-active approaches, others hold steadfast to the method of living their lives as naturally as possible, believing that this will set the stage most effectively for meeting the right person for them. "If I'm doing my own thing, at the right time, that's when I think I'll meet Mr. Right." "If I could do my traveling and go have my experiences and really enrich my life, which makes me more interesting, that's when and how I

think I would meet my person. It's not going to be some blind date with some nephew of somebody's Aunt Tillie, just because I want to be married now."

<center>The Dating Game</center>

My sister and friends told me, "Stay away. Why are you even doing this to yourself? He's arrogant, and wants you to be the one to chase after him. He's playing a game with you."

Many women refer to the experience of dating as a "game" which they abhor on one hand, and often finding themselves playing on the other. The message often conveyed is for women to withhold authentic desires in order to remain safe, in control, and attractive to men. "I try to be honest in dating, in relationships and how I feel, but it's like a huge game that you play, and I'm just totally not into it." The "Game" often begins at first meeting, when many women describe the struggle to converse with men. "It was hard to make that icebreaker." "To talk to a man is intimidating. It's the way the situation is set up to be very contrived, and so sexually charged. It's also hard because there's a lot of risk, and potential for rejection." Small talk at first meetings becomes awkward, and unsatisfying for many women, who try to act as if they are interested, when they are not. "I asked, 'So what's your story?' His response was all about his softball game. I did the flirting thing and I pretended to be interested, and asked him, 'What position do you play?' He said, 'the pitcher,' and I said, 'Oh, that's pretty pivotal,' and I'm like totally not interested in this discussion."

Other women find themselves feeling victim to the game, while they experience a sense of passivity and powerlessness as they wait for the man to "call the shots." "It's like in that "Swingers" movie. He marks on the calendar when he can and can't call. I run into that a lot, where he expresses to me how interested he is, yet you get called once a month. It's ambiguous as to what he wants out of the relationship. It's just left out there, me having no idea whether or not we're going to see each other again. It keeps you in the holding zone."

Some women lose their way by not advocating their authentic desires directly, as a defense against the fear of losing control and power within the relationship. They end up colluding and participating in the very "game" many of them say they want to avoid. "I'm trying to understand men, because I don't want to scare them away by being the typical woman who's like, 'We're together now so we do everything together.' At the same time, I want that. I feel like you have to play this little game." "I don't want to fall into the whole game thing, but you end up falling into it. I wanted to call him yesterday, but I couldn't because it's just too early. He started the game, and I don't want him to have the upper hand. I don't want to fall into the category of the 'little woman' kind of syndrome, with no power."

Another challenge to "the game" is how to get out of it. Being directly truthful with the man one is intending to break all contact with remains a difficult task for many women. "I've been trying to figure out how I tell him that I don't want to see him any more. I'm afraid that he would be terribly hurt by the truth; so why not leave him a shred of dignity and just say 'I've met somebody else and it's a relationship that I would like to explore.'"

Some women get "fed up" with the games, and learn to advocate for themselves through direct and authentic communication. "If I want to ask him out, then I ask him out. But, I remember my friend saying, 'Can't you see that he's winning because he has you interested in him now?' And I was like, 'But I am!'" "For a while I was just racking my brain, wondering 'Is he interested or not? Then it's like, 'Well, what do I want out of this relationship?' I realized that I'm not really sure, either." "Finally, I confronted him with, 'Why are you going out with me? Why not go and have a one night stand with somebody who wants the same thing and leave me alone, instead of doing this asinine playing games of pulling in, pushing away?'"

Keepers And Tweeners

I divide them into keepers and tweeners. A tweener is the person you date between keepers. This guy that I'm seeing tonight is definitely a tweener, because I just don't honestly feel that it's going to be anything major.

As a result of being single for a number of years, many single women in their thirties have come to know what they are looking for in a man, and have learned to distinguish between the men they want to date casually or not at all and the men they may want to marry. The property of "Keepers and Tweeners" highlights this very distinction.

<u>Keepers</u>

> I want somebody who is bright, and funny, who's interesting, creative and communicative. I just want a good guy.

This dimension illuminates the male traits and relational circumstances which motivate women to pursue long term marital commitments. The women who participated in this study were quite specific in describing the desired attributes in men that they find appealing. These traits, which many women correlate with "Keepers," are multi-faceted. Usually, it begins with the need to be physically attracted. "I've always had an issue about looks in the men that I date. I just like good looking men. I like men that are bigger. I've never had a long term thing with somebody who's been a slight person." Being emotionally available and attuned follows suit. "I want someone who is respectful, who is caring, who can love me and who is capable of sharing their emotions, feelings." "I want him to ask questions about what's going on, and how I'm feeling." Finding one who is "considerate" was a commonly expressed wish. "The three traits that I really like in someone is compassion, awareness, and kindness." I'd like to find a 'mensch,' one who is willing to take into consideration someone else's wishes and desires. It's being a person with a really good heart."

Many women want to be "intellectually stimulated" by their partner. This attribute gives rise to the hope that they can learn and grow from their partner's differences. "I would love him to educate and teach me about things that I may be shortsighted on, in a way that's gentle and respectful." ". . .someone that I can talk to about things and have an in depth, interesting

conversation, who can challenge me intellectually." The desire to find a partner with whom they can enjoy and have "fun" with accompanies this profile of a "keeper," as well. "What's really important to me is that I find someone who has a similar sense of humor and who likes to laugh." "The thing that really gets me going is if somebody's really smart and he's able to start playing with me with humor. I find that such a turn-on, I can't tell you."

The ability to trust in someone was a universal prerequisite for taking a relationship seriously. Finding one who is reliable, faithful, and honest remains crucial. "I want somebody who says he's going to call me and does." "Fidelity is extremely important to me." "I need to meet someone who is very up front and very honest." Possessing the ability to be fully committed to the relationship seals the possibility for women's trust in a potential future with someone. "It's very important that person is 100% committed to me, and to the relationship." "The ultimate goal between my partner and myself is that no matter what happens, we are committed for life."

When women speak of the aspects of what they want out of a primary life partnership with a man, they speak not only of desired male attributes but of also the function they would like the relationship with that man to provide. Many women seek a relationship with a partner that provides the potential for long lasting companionship. "On the most basic level, I want to be with someone who I just plain enjoy being with." "If there's true love there, then it is about support and a partnership, a teammate to kind of go through life with." The idea of "sharing" one's life, versus living alone, seem to be a powerful motivating force for a woman who seek a life partner. "I'm not looking for somebody to take care of me. I'm looking for somebody to share my life."

Due to the stresses inherent in single life for many women, the notion of partnering is also appealing given its helping function in the management of daily tasks. "I want somebody who will take out my garbage, fix the things that need fixing, because that is about as close as I can get to allowing somebody to take care of me." "It would be so nice to find somebody who

looks out for me, because I've been doing it alone for so long. Like, helping me move, signing the lease, or If I get sick, somebody who can take care of me and get chicken soup and juice."

Many women really feel attracted to the idea of a male partner being able to assist with or take over the financial responsibilities as the primary provider. "I need to be with a man who can offer some degree of financial security. There are enough challenges in life; I don't want the burden of money worries as well." "I need someone who's making a decent living. I am as shallow as the next person. I want a nice home and a nice car; it doesn't need to be extreme, but I don't want to have to be the sole provider of that." "This guy is 35 years old and he's in a career crisis right now. That is a real turn-off because at this point in my life, money isn't the key to happiness, but you can't really be happy without it." Besides not wanting sole burden of financial matters, having a partner to help support many women in their aspirations is quite attractive. "I see it as a financial partnership, to have someone to cover half a down payment on a house and pay part of the mortgage, so I could go to school." Having enough of a secure financial base from which to live also allows for the option for women to stay home with their children. "I do know that the older I get the more I don't want to be really suffering for money. If I want to stop working and have children, I need a man to be financially sound." "I would ideally like to stay home with my kids. I'd have to become vulnerable and let someone financially take care of me to count on someone else in that way, because I never have. Since I was 14, I started working and put myself through school."

There are a multitude of factors which, for women, separate friends from lovers. Most single women in their thirties seek a "lover" who can provide the deeper emotional intimacy and nurturing they seek. "I'm now wanting more of something, a friendship, something real." "I'd actually like to be in love." Many are looking for a romantic love which offers them a feeling of being loved "unconditionally." "I want to me madly in love, complete mutual respect; trusting

and loving each other at the deep soul acceptance level, in just who you are." "I love that concept of finding unconditional love and support with one another." A satisfying and passionate sexual life enhances this function of intimacy as well. "I'm attracted to men who are affectionate and attentive. I've come to realize that I really enjoy and need that." "Attraction is not always enough. There's got to be a sexual chemistry that works."

Tweeners

> There are some guys I've learned to stay away from, and sometimes there's no harm in dating someone without being serious about them.

This dimension describes the negative perceived traits in men that sway many women from wanting to date them, placing them in the group of "Tweeners," whom they will shun or date casually. It comes from a compilation of the frequent generalized impressions and complaints that frustrate women about some of the men they have met in the singles arena. Some women described many of the men they have met as "self-absorbed." "He never asked me anything about myself. He was there to talk about him. That was very disconcerting." "It's always me, me, me, when I meet guys." The level of maturity in men came up as another issue which fell short of the expected desires of many women. "A lot of the boys are just young and very insecure." "He's 40 something going on 13, and finally, I just gave up."

Poor communication and intuitive skills were mentioned as a common and unappealing trait. "Self expression in men is a thing I don't find as a common link. And insight is the thing I don't really find very often." "Women communicate with nuances and men need to be sort of banged over the head. It's a wonder why women and men get together in the first place."

The lack of reliability and follow-though is another disenchanting characteristic that some women report experiencing a lot. "They say they will call you and they don't." "This guy from out of town says to me 'We're going to work with this long distance relationship. You're incredible. I've never met anyone like you.' I went out with him every night for three weeks

while I was out there, and I never heard another word from him again." "If a guy comes up to me one more time, and says, 'Oh, my God, you're gorgeous! Can we go out for dinner Saturday night?' And then you never hear from him. I've been bombarded with that, where these guys come on really strong and then that's the end."

Dishonesty is a trait which most single women refuse to tolerate. "My biggest problem with the men that I have met has been a basic dishonesty, or a lack of responsibility in terms of their role in the relationship. They're not honest about what they want, need, or anything." "They say things and they don't mean it. That's something I will not put up with at all."

Some women expressed their dismay at experiencing the men that they have dated as overly critical and possessively needy. "He was trying to put me in this box. He was like, 'You don't like to wear jewelry, don't like to go shopping, you're different.'" "He could not take care of himself, and was somebody who expected me to be both the breadwinner in the family and also the demure woman who looked up to him. He really wanted me to get rid of all of my friends and only look at him, and I couldn't do that."

A great deal was said about the propensity of some men, to feel threatened by accomplished and assertive women. "I've been told that I'm very intimidating to men. I'm smart, I'm articulate, I say what's on my mind." "I think sometimes guys, when they hear I'm a doctor, feel threatened." "Sometimes I think men get scared that I am stronger than them, because I know what I want, and I stand up for what I want, and I don't have to play games. I don't try to be someone I am not." Some women speculate that men who feel threatened by women have competitive strivings, which are in place to overcome their fear of inadequacy and loss of control. "Power and control issues always seem to come up with men." "A lot of the guys want to have women who are not their equal, who are not going to make them feel that they're competing for the same kinds of things in life."

Many of the women interviewed question the motives of men they have met, particularly at the bar scene; they have come to assume that many men are primarily interested in a sexual or superficial encounter. "I finally realized what all the compliments in the bar scene are about. They just want to pick you up for the night and sleep with you, which I don't do." "I try to portray an image of myself, but I have something behind that image. It's not just an empty shell. Some men just want the image and they're afraid what's really inside. . . my fears, my drive to have a family. They just want a pretty face, and to goof around."

While some of the women experienced many men as commitment phobic, others have described them as more likely to pursue serial relationships, without proper transition time between them. "When I make it known that, 'I want a relationship. I want to be able to wake up on Sunday morning with you and stay in bed all day,' that's when they back off." "Women take the time to heal, take the time to deal; men don't. It's so annoying. There are so many guys I've dated that were not ready and definitely shouldn't have been dating."

Geographical distance and marital status are two examples of what some women characterize as "obstacles" to the long term potential for an intimate and long term commitment. "I went into it thinking this is not someone that I'm going to get involved in or I'm going to lose my heart to, because I don't want to do another long distance relationship." "He was separated when I met him, so I just didn't allow myself to get that close because I felt he still had lots of baggage to attend to."

A few of the motivations and criteria that engage some women to date men, even if they are not seriously interested or emotionally invested, were mentioned. Sometimes, women are drawn to date under these circumstances because of mere flattery and companionship. "Part of me is flattered by the fact that someone keeps asking me out, and doesn't want to give that up." "I'll admit that sometimes, even if I don't see long term potential, I'll go out with a guy just to go out; being wined and dined sometimes is fun and it's O.K." The desire for physical touch and sexual

interaction is sometimes an accompanying motivating factor. "Having casual sex once in a while is enjoyable; it makes me feel sexy and keeps me feeling attractive." I'm torn with the idea of just having sex casually. Maybe it will take the edge off of the loneliness, to where you can just go on with your life, because you need to be physically touched, even if it's not even particularly sexual."

"Ouch, That Hurts!"

After the last breakup, I was devastated. I was incapable of functioning. It made me question every single inch of my being. Was I smart enough, pretty enough, sexy enough? I mourned the loss of that relationship four times the amount it lasted.

The property of "Ouch, that Hurts," reports the variety of emotionally painful accounts that some women report during their years of experience in "The Dating Gerbil Wheel." The data incorporated in this property relates more to women's experiences when they have been in relationships with men for a period of time. The dimensions within this property include: "Heartbreak," about women's emotional plight after a meaningful love relationship ends; "Confidence Shakers," reporting the psychological effects of repeated disappointments with, and feelings of rejection from, past relationships with men; and "Haves and Have Nots," which underscores the pervasive struggle with body image that women face and confront in their romantic associations with men.

Heartbreak

Heartbreak is very devastating.

The dimension of "Heartbreak" speaks to the emotional heartache that can follow the loss of what was once a promising, meaningful and loving romantic love affair. The fact that these particular relationships offered so much intimate connection and potential for the future often makes the disappointment over their demise even more emotionally painful and longer lasting for many women. "That's why it hurt so much, because I really did think that this was open ended

and that this could actually be something." "The reason I had such a tough time is because I truly loved him. There was something on a deep level where he touched me and I touched him."

The reasons that lead to break-ups of this sort are various. The issues of "bad timing" and "religious differences" were two explanations reiterated. "He broke that off for what he says were reasons of religion." "I am deeply in love with him and could have committed to him. We dated for two years. I was crazy about him. But, he's seven years younger than me and we're just at different places."

The ending of such a close relationship is often followed with some form of "post break up blues." "I was so depressed." "After we broke up, I felt lonely." I was just so sad. I just didn't have quite the spark that I would normally have." These feelings are often expressed through behaviors which differ from the norm. "I would cry every morning, and cry myself to sleep." "I felt bad about myself, because I wasn't taking care of myself. I wasn't dressing nice, gained weight, none of my clothes fit. I just didn't care. I didn't have the energy to go work out. I didn't want to talk to anyone. I just wanted to be by myself. I was so hurt and so sad, that I just wanted to stay inside and sit on the couch and eat pizza."

Bouts with regressive self-doubt can also accompany this period of mourning. The "loss of the dream" can sometimes make some women question their judgment. "I broke it off but it was so painful. I felt like, 'OK, I'm not happy all the time, but when I'm happy it's good. So maybe I should try sticking with it. I don't want to fail in relationships.'" "I would think about him and wonder, 'Why can't it work? I want this to go on. Maybe I can change him.'" "I thought that he felt the same way, so, how did I misread this? What happened here?"

Coming out of the acute pain takes time, which ultimately proves to be a reliable healer. "When I look at how I was last year, there's no comparison. But, I'm still working through getting out of that sadness and getting my attitude back to where it was before I met him." "He initiated the breakup of the engagement. It did take a long time to heal from that, two to three

years." Taking a hiatus from dating is often a part of the healing process for many who have experienced "heartbreak." "We dated for six years and broke up two years ago. I can't believe I'm tearing up; it took me a long time to get to the point where I could date." "When you've been heartbroken over someone, it takes a little while to even have the desire to date someone. Number one, I wasn't done liking him. Number two, I was incredibly hurt and confused by what took place." "It's like the five stages of denial, anger, etc., you must go through; it takes time before you feel like you can get out there and risk getting hurt again."

The Confidence Shakers

> If you have a number of these disappointments happen, it does shake your confidence, and you just have to wonder what's going on here. Is it me? Is it them? Is it a combination?

The "Confidence Shaker" dimension occurs when there is a particularly powerful, or a series of emotionally jolting experiences with relationships with men. The intensity of disappointment is reported by many women to have the residual effect of shaking their confidence level in themselves and in the possibility of finding a trustworthy loving relationship. The intensity of the projected hopes onto the relationship and the reaction to its loss often plays more of the influencing factor than does the actual life span of the relationship. It can begin with an infatuated, passionate beginning, when the idealized "perfect guy" comes along; only to fall from grace quickly, leaving some women bewildered, suffering a sudden and painful loss of what they hoped would be. "It was a relationship with a nightmare guy for three months when I was 31; the worst man that I have ever interacted with in terms of what it did to my psyche. It's the only time in my life that I have ever completely lost my perspective about a man."

> It was the first time I met someone who seemed to embody all of the things I fantasized about the perfect man. I thought my dreams had been answered. I imposed every good thing that I wanted him to be onto him and fell madly in love with him, not stopping to think about the fact that he didn't possess any of those qualities. Ultimately, when he let me down, of course it completely blindsided me. I was devastated, and wiped out.

When a breakup has to do with another woman entering the picture, it can wreak havoc with a woman's self confidence and be quite emotionally wounding. "When someone is fooling around on you, you feel abandoned and rejected." "I dated him for a year, and then he moved out of state. I was crazy about him, but I totally convinced myself it wasn't me, just bad timing, he's just non-committal. When he got engaged, I'm like, 'It was me,' and felt devastated. I found out he postponed the engagement, and felt vindicated."

Mixed messages and abrupt endings were commonly identified as "confidence breakers." "I use the example of the guy who would drive three hours to have dinner with me and flew me down to meet his parents and then disappeared. That really shook my confidence." "On the day moving trucks were supposed to arrive at my place with his stuff, he never showed up, and "I've not heard from him since."

Some women report depressive reactions and self-berating practices following a traumatic break up. "I resorted to that victim thing, which I hated and was so uncomfortable for me. I beat myself up over it, with, 'I shouldn't have done this, and maybe I came on too strong.'" "Wasn't I enough for him that he had to go to all these women?" "He initiated the breakup and I was freaking out. I heard my evil twin speaking, and pleading with him. It was so unlike me that it was scary. I lost 15 pounds, and it's the only time that I've ever been in a severe depression."

The cumulative effect of these wounding experiences can temporarily or permanently shake one's confidence and faith in the possibility for healthier relationships in the future. "I never had the confidence-shakers when I was younger. When I got older and out into the real, live dating world of later on, I was meeting many more men who were strange, and I definitely got dumped on my ass a few times. It actually was so shocking to me that that could happen, and it was very humbling for me to not be the be-all and end-all for somebody." Eventually, many women tend to become more isolated and guarded about pursuing other "love" interests. "I was celibate for like four years. I just kind of withdrew." "Once I did start opening myself up and get

involved in relationships, only to then get hurt or disappointed a number of times, a natural

sort of reluctance to get involved again just followed."

The Haves and The Have Nots

> There's pressure now to look younger, and to be thin and to be beautiful all the time.
> That's had a tremendous impact on women. That's where I am not optimistic, because of
> me being a tall person and not being thin.

This dimension refers to the power that body image has for so many women today. It is a

psychic burden and predominant struggle that is often carried into women's dating experiences.

"Body image issue, it's clearly a prevalent issue." "This is absolutely huge, because it has

everything to do with one's self-experience as your body ages. And when you're single, that's

the first meeting. . .what you look like." Even women who consider themselves "the haves" as

far as feeling attractive, validate the importance of this as they count their blessings for having

their physical attributes. "My experience, actually, to come to a different country is that I am

lucky that I am white and I have blue eyes and that I'm not overweight." "I don't think it's

affected my self-esteem, because I am lucky the way I look. Even sometimes I don't feel that I

am beautiful, but I know if I dress up and I go out, I will get asked out."

The frustration about rigid and critical social messages and expectations of what "beauty"

constitutes was a shared complaint from those who participated in this study. "Women value

what we look like, and there is a tremendous misunderstanding of what we're supposed to look

like, because we're allowing other people to determine what human beings should look like." "I

haven't seen much change in my weight, which is disappointing, and I'm obsessed with that. I

shouldn't care so much about looking better in clothes to be more attractive. I should care that

I'm stronger and healthier. That should be the number one priority, but I look at the magazines!"

This pressure to be physically "good enough" weighs heavily emotionally for women who

expressed feeling depressed and very angry about the struggle to "measure up." "Sometimes I get

more depressed over being overweight, with a big butt and big hips, than I do over not having

a man in my life!"

> How do you combat it? It is so pervasive. I have gotten really bitter and cynical about the whole thing, to where I make these disparaging comments about other women who can wear Victoria Secret bikinis. It's like, 'You're no better than I am. If I can run a marathon and I want to try being married and have kids, I shouldn't be less entitled to it than you just because you're scrawny.' But that's not the way it works.

When women reach their thirties, the aging process sets in more noticeably. Some

women resent what they perceive to be gender inequality, as it relates to physical appearance and

aging. "I'm panicking because my hair is starting to get gray. I'm getting wrinkles, my skin

quality is not as good, and it's harder to maintain my weight." "It's easy to get resentful about

the way society is. I have male friends my age and they're totally desirable. That's the way it is,

but it's not fair!"

Being overly conscious about weight issues is said to play itself out on the dating field.

Many women have developed the belief that men are only attracted to the prototypical petite

female. "Part of finding somebody or dating is related to weight issues; I think men prefer

women that are within normal weight ranges." "I'm constantly thinking, he wouldn't be

interested in me because I'm not attractive enough. I'm not anorexic and this is what men want."

Hurtful experiences with men can exacerbate internalized disparaging body image issues. "I've

had experiences in dating that have really reinforced that, and they are huge demons. This

married guy's psycho wife called me at home, saying, 'He said that you were attractive, but that

you had heavy thighs.'" "I felt invisible for a long time. Once I lost the weight, men looked at me

when I walked down the street." "I said, 'Just tell me, what do you want?' His answer actually

was, 'Well I'd really like it if you could lose some weight. That probably is really shallow, but

you know, I'm a guy.'" "I felt like Gulliver in the land of the Lilliputians. I'm 5'81/2" and the

short men aren't necessarily interested in talking to me, because they already feel insecure about

their height. With me towering, they could barely look me in the eye."

CHAPTER VIII

"HOW DOES IT FEEL?"

> I think there are very specific problems and emotional situations that happen to those of us who are single in our thirties.

The central finding of this research endeavor was the emergence of three distinct groups which represented the multi-faceted range of affective reactions to the single state. These groups are not absolute or always mutually exclusive. The differentiation amongst them, as expressed by the quotes in this chapter, serve to better conceptualize the widely variant degree of psychic discomfort that this phenomena triggers for women. The participants explored the question of, "How Does It Feel" to be thirty-something and single? The three properties describe the distinctions amongst the three groups. "The Sinkhole" depicts the experience of women who suffer acute and chronic psychological distress over their single status. "The Sine Wave" describes the most common middle range of the affective experience, characterized by a volatile cycle of " ups and downs." Finally, the "Free To Be Me" property illuminates the experience for a smaller group of women who feel their single status has little or no impact on their positive self image and rich quality of life.

By the time women reach their thirties, they have been single for quite a few years. "I've worked on dealing with this issue of being single for a long time." The data gathered indicated that the experience of being single carries potential to shift and transform itself as time passes. As the "Wake Up Call" property in Chapter V conveyed, some women's distress about their

single status increases as they feel it to be more burdensome and anxiety-provoking in their

thirties. For others, the thirties brought more clarity about themselves and more solace about

their single status. "Being single was especially hard in my early twenties, when I was still

affected a lot by my upbringing, assuming I had to get married to be happy. The real transition

started turning thirty, where I started realizing I can be happy without even dating."

<div align="center">The Sinkhole</div>

> It's a feeling of hopelessness. The "Why am I like this, anyway? Why bother?" It's like a
> sinkhole. This is truly how I visualize this place I'm in right now because I can't claw my
> way out of it; no matter how hard I try, it just gets worse. So then you stop trying and
> you're no better off. And you're still sinking.

"The Sinkhole" property exhibits the profound psychological ramifications for women

who feel emotionally debilitated in dealing with their single status in their thirties. This group,

smaller in number than the next two, expressed a pervasive feeling of general unhappiness and

discontent with their lives. "There are reminders all the time of my unhappiness being single.

Life shouldn't be like that. There isn't the joy."

There are nine dimensions to the "Sinkhole" experience. These dimensions relay the

range of feeling states that were expressed as part of the inner turmoil that this property so

poignantly describes. "History Repeats Itself" relays feelings of discouragement; "I Feel

Gypped," introduces the feelings of deprivation; "Powerless" highlights the loss of control; "Is It

Me?" describes feelings of insecurity and self doubt; "It's All Up To Me" conveys the exhaustive

experience of single life; "I'm Afraid" stresses the increased levels of fear about remaining

single; "So Damn Depressed" relays the increased propensity for depressive symptomotology;

"Only My Pillow Knows My Troubles" elucidates the isolation many women experience; and

"Snap Out Of It" illustrates the general presence of low self-esteem.

History Repeats Itself

> I made inquiry about him, and of course found out he was engaged. I was like, 'Why bother?' I've been there, done that before, so what makes me think that tomorrow's going to be any different than yesterday?

From the repeated and cumulative disappointments mentioned in the preceding "Dating Gerbil Wheel" category, some women come to form and internalize negative and pessimistic beliefs about their single status. The propensity for many women who have suffered these various emotional upheavals is to assume and expect that "History Will Repeat Itself." The residual aftermath of feeling this level of discouragement makes it quite difficult to remain positive and optimistic. Instead, there is a significant degree of resignation and lethargy regarding the continuation of keeping an open mind to new dating experiences and taking a pro-active stance in creating them. "It's hard getting psyched up to continue to put yourself out there, because I feel like I've done that and it didn't work." "I'm just not interested in running out and meeting tons of new people when a lot of them don't work for me anyway." A foreboding sense of futility looms about the possibility of eventually finding a compatible partner. "As far as getting what I want eventually, I'm not particularly optimistic any more. I'm a little bit cynical, if anything, and have become more sarcastic." "It is ridiculously hard and unlikely to meet anyone that would be a realistic possibility for me." This futile stance is largely founded on the presumption that one's single status is a fixed and inevitable state. Past experience tends to be used as evidence of what can be predicted and used as a future indicator.

The extent to which women have faith about finding a satisfying life partner is influenced by their own past romantic relationships with men. The degree to which they have had exposure with this type of intimacy, as well as the nature of that exposure, cultivates a frame of reference, helping to form their expectations and desires for the possibility for intimate connections with men in the future. Some women in the "Sinkhole" camp report having an absence of significant

experiences with men in their past. "I fall into the 'never had a relationship' category." "I have never felt really loved and valued by any man." Other women describe the "Confidence Shaker" experiences with men, as described in chapter VII, feeling emotionally scared and wounded by these more traumatic experiences. "I was in a lot of relationships that were very degrading, unhealthy for me, and very verbally abusive." "I got involved in a relationship with somebody who I later found out was married." Most importantly, many of these women describe "losing themselves" in their former relationships with men, not having a sense of self that was intact enough to weather the disappointments without personalizing them. "I really look to the other for a sense of validation. It's much more external than internal." "I was in this relationship for quite a long time, and was very depressed over it. He wasn't supportive of me emotionally or sexually. I had gone into the relationship feeling pretty secure, and I had come out feeling very insecure, and very undesirable, because he made me feel that way."

The feelings of futility and discouragement were also linked to sub-standard single female, male, and marital role models. Most of the women conveyed the absence of knowing any older single females who are leading productive and fulfilling lives. "I can't say that I have really strong, single female role models." "I can't think of a female role model, to be quite honest with you." This deficit does not allow for the inspiring reminder that women can create their own happiness, without it being contingent on having a male partner. "The older women I know who are single, seem bitter and lonely to me--not something I particularly look forward to." "They all seem full of regret."

Many of these women who struggle acutely with their single status have not been exposed to positive marital role models, either. "I see so many relationships I wouldn't want to touch with a ten foot pole." "There are no relationships I've seen where I feel there's a real benefit. I haven't seen any close-up proof." Nearly half of the women interviewed in this study came from never-married or divorced parents. Some of these cases, coupled with those situations

in which the parents remained in a marriage of constant strife, instilled a very negative picture of what is "supposed" to be the sacred institution of marriage. "I was 22 when my parents divorced; it was sudden. I don't think they ever really got along. They were just at war with one another. So I knew there was no guarantee that I would never get divorced." "They got married very young. My dad definitely runs on the depressed side, so he hasn't been easy to live with, especially for my Mom."

Women who feel a sense of futility about finding a compatible and fulfilling relationship with a man typically did not have exposure to positive male role models, either. "I haven't had great male role models in my life." "This negative picture of men is just everywhere. I just can't escape it." The descriptions of their fathers often were laden with disappointment. "He's not warm and affectionate. He's always right; he's never wrong. I can't stand that." "My father is emotionally very detached." "My father was a total jerk. When I do make contact with him, it's like, why did I even bother?" "He's rough; all the kids at church used to be scared of him." "He's kind of a loser. He didn't pay child support for a couple of years."

Most of these accounts depicted an absent, neglectful father figure, by whom these women felt very abandoned. "My Father has not been involved in my life. I met him briefly when I was 16, and the last time I saw him was in 1988." "He was very strict, and all I knew when I graduated high school is that I had to get away, because he did not support my independence." "After my parents divorced, my father checked out emotionally, and started to manipulate me with money. He was very negligent and became extremely selfish." Some women shared that this initial neglect from their father affected their faith in themselves and in an "other." "The absence of my father has had a tremendous impact. If he were around when I was 13 to say, 'You're beautiful. Don't let any men take advantage of you. You're worth more than that,' maybe I would have learned love from a man, and I wouldn't have had to go out and seek that."

As a result of these experiences, many of these women have come to form negative impressions and stereotypes of men in general. "Men don't care and if they have you around, they'll just treat you like crap and use you." "The fact that I haven't met an emotionally available man reinforces my view of men in general: that they just aren't very affectionate, warm, or considerate of others. I find the male population generally pretty stingy, and not real focused on relationships." I've gotten to a point, because of the situations that I've had, where I'm much more suspicious of men who have never been married by the time they're in their late thirties. I wonder whether they're gay underneath it all, or are they so emotionally stunted that they can't engage in a certain way?" "I see men wanting to just screw everybody. It made me angry, realizing, 'I don't want this. For what?' I would just relive my mother's life. Never."

The cumulative impact of the aforementioned influences is twofold. Because of the severe deprivation, some women in the "Sinkhole" feel profound desperation to find a partner, as they are still dependent on this to "make me happy." "I tend to hold on for dear life sometimes!" "I need to find this someday to finally feel complete." Others are more reluctant to get involved again. Spending years in the dating arena to no avail, or with painful memories to recall, has deteriorated the motivation and optimism about finding a life partner, leaving many of these women feeling more fearful, skeptical, and guarded than ever before. "I'm afraid of getting close because of this fear of loss, fear of getting hurt, and fear of losing myself." They may disavow the desire to marry, in order to defend against expected future disappointment. "I'm not dating anybody, nor will I be. That's pretty much guaranteed. Even if I were, I wouldn't want to squander my fortieth birthday on somebody that I would meet between now and then." "I am just so soured on the whole thing."

"I Feel Gypped"

I don't have that luxury of having somebody else to pick up the slack if I get sick, or if I freak out and have to stop working for a while, or if I should get pregnant or something. I don't have anybody else's inheritance or earning power to be there for me.

Women in the "Sinkhole" equate their unhappiness with the profound disappointment over the expectations and dreams of marriage and children not having come into fruition. "It all goes back to an original expectation, that I would be married with kids, by 32 years old." "I can't let go of the fact that life hasn't turned out the way that I wanted it to be." What often accompanies this level of disappointment is a mourning of what isn't and what may never be. "I don't think I'll ever see a forty-fifth wedding anniversary. If I do have kids, I can't help but start to do the math now: How old will I be when they're this age? When Mom was making Halloween costumes for me, my arthritis will be kicking in."

This long-standing sense of deprivation is personalized to the extent that there is an experience of an involuntary forfeiture of that which one feels entitled to. Without receiving what they feel is due, there is acute despair over what they perceive to be as a series of injustices. "I spent all my life trying to be a really good person, trying to treat other people the way I wanted to be treated. I've been accommodating and pleasing, being attuned to everybody. I've been a good kid. So, when's it my turn?" Feeling deprived of the desired life partner is held responsible for the unhappiness inherent in the "Sinkhole" experience. "I am so fortunate. So, why aren't I happy? The easy answer would be because I feel incomplete. I really want a soulmate." "How can I truly find happiness without someone to share it with?"

A feeling of deprivation, regarding the lack of having the same comforts and rights that coupled people have, operates as well. "I can actually picture the apartment that I was supposed to have, once I was living with someone, which really pisses me off, because that's something that I haven't been able to overcome." "Vacationing is a real pain in the neck. I resent the whole single supplement thing. If you go on vacation by yourself, you pay extra. I would love to have someone to travel with, ideally with somebody I'm in a romantic relationship with."

A powerful feeling of deprivation is also associated to the loss of former dreams about experiencing celebratory marital rituals. The wish to have and hold these documented moments is somehow attached to the wish to preserve a sense of youth and purpose in one's life. "I don't want a ring, I'm not going to change my name, but I've always wanted and dreamed of a honeymoon. And, I resent the fact that I'm not going to even get that!"

> Here's the day in my life that I would have looked the most beautiful, with the nails done, the facial and hair thing, and the makeover, the cool dress and the whole deal. I'm never going to have those cool glamour photos like my mom has. Of course, I won't have kids, so they won't be looking at them anyway, but even my nephew and nieces could have looked and said, 'You were beautiful! You were glowing! You were this, you were that!'

This pervasive sense of deprivation makes it difficult for one to be grateful for what is abundant in their lives. The degree to which these women struggle with feelings of deprivation is related to their embittered point of view, which often fuels a vacant and disconnected "spiritual" experience with themselves and with a "higher power." "I stopped thinking about God, because a part of me has just felt abandoned." "How can I be spiritual? I should be thankful for the many things I do have, but I've lost that entirely. It's really hard to be so grateful, when I'm so unhappy."

Powerlessness

I really want something and just feel powerless to get it.

Those women who expressed this overriding sense of deprivation also feel "powerless" to effect the degree to which they find joy and solace in their lives. There is a sense of powerlessness as some women fall victim to what they experience, or perceive to be, external expectations to marry. "I feel the external pressure every day, and hear it all the time, in one way or another. It's the very thing that you can't really do anything about." Women who follow societal norms regarding gender roles by taking a passive stance in the pursuit of a partner can feel powerless in the dating arena, as well. "I want to be in control, and I can't control the

situation. I can't control who's going to come up to me and talk, what they're going to say, what they're going to be like, or if they're going to call."

The most intense expression of this sense of powerlessness centers around the discrepancy between the desire and readiness for marriage and family, and the inability to control all factors and "make it happen." While many of these women have accessed their personal power in creating career success, they feel helpless and hopeless about the recognition that the same rules do not apply in love and marriage. "I've got my professional life all in order. Why can't I get my social life in order? I'm a believer that if I want something, I can make it happen, but this is something I can't make happen. It's incredibly frustrating." "I am ambitious and I know what I want and I do what it takes. I've found that if I work hard enough, I'll probably get what I want. It's easier for me to get my professional life on track than my personal life, because I have a hard time to figure out men in any country."

To a large extent, these women have lost faith in themselves, regarding their sense of agency to affect their lives. "I don't have enough faith in myself to be OK and make the changes I want to make." Faith in the possibility of finding a life partner some day, and faith in themselves to be all right, regardless of martial status, is dismissed as a mere "fantasy" or a futile wish. It remains difficult for these women in the "Sinkhole" to utilize their own power to create the inner happiness they seek, and to "let go" of what is out of their control.

In the "Sinkhole" power is externalized, and self-esteem is largely dependent on the presence and approval of an "other." "There was always somebody I wanted and I always felt like if I didn't have that, I wasn't OK. I've spent most of my life battling not feeling OK without this other half." "In my experience, women want to conform. Not having a man in their life in their thirties is more about them not fitting in." Rather than a partner enhancing meaning in their lives, having a partner becomes the definer of meaning. "I feel like having a partner will make life more meaningful. Unless you really have someone that's constantly in your life, sharing

things with, memories fade away and aren't kept alive by anything." "I'm finally asking myself why I want to get married and have children. A lot of it is to bring meaning to your life." The inevitable consequence, as stated before, is that their unhappiness is largely attributed to being single. "That's the easiest thing to point to and say, 'If I get this, it's going to fix everything.'" "Turning 35 does not feel good, because I would have liked to have been in a relationship by now with that person I would eventually marry."

"Is It Me?"

I do wonder sometimes, "Is it me or is it them?"

Women who feel such anguish about their single status are more susceptible to feelings of "insecurity." They are more susceptible to the self-inquisition stemming, in part, from former relationship trauma, described in the "Confidence Shakers" dimension in Chapter VII. They search for who and what to blame, plagued with the wonderment over whether they are responsible for their unwanted single status. "If I say it's not in my control, maybe that's just taking the easy way out, a cop-out. So then, I come back to blaming myself." "If all these other women can get married, why can't I?" Much of this proclivity toward self-blame is traced back to their sense of "abnormality," as their single status separates them from the mainstream societal "norm." "It seems to me that it's normal that people get married in their twenties and early thirties. To be in the mid-thirties, not be married, and not have a prospect on the horizon right now--it just seems like, 'What's wrong with me? What socially can't I do? Why haven't I connected?' I can't help but wonder about all that stuff." At times, their self-blame serves the function of retaining some semblance of control over and hope about the situation. "There's a part of me that would like it to be my problem. I don't want it to be a huge social thing, that there are just no enlightened, emotionally available men out there. That, I can't make it past. It would be worse, because if society has turned out all of these uncaring men, there's no end to that."

Some women question their judgment and expectations, even when they have been in the position of turning down the relationship. "Sometimes I wonder if I'm too judgmental and not accepting enough; there's this concept of nobody's perfect, so where do you draw the line between what you're willing to accept and not accept. Am I being too picky?" "Either you feel attracted to someone, or you don't. But with some guys, I wonder why can't I just do that. 'What's wrong with me? Why do I put such importance on this? Why do I have more requirements than I did when I was young?'"

Pondering over what is in their control and whether they could do something differently sometimes heightens insight about themselves, acknowledging aspects within them that may have undermined their success at cultivating a connection with a life partner thus far. During this reflective process, some get in touch with the behaviors that have displayed a resistance to intimacy. Many come to realize that their resistance is based on a wish to protect themselves from what they feared could be emotionally frightening or hurtful. "Am I sabotaging myself? I can't help but second guess myself. There's this stuff playing in my subconscious, that's keeping me from getting intimate with people." "I thought I was getting stronger, but I was also getting meaner, from how other people perceived me. It was a defense mechanism against getting hurt. Ripping peoples' head off kind of made me feel better; it's how I felt protected and safe."

"It's All Up To Me"

> I'm just sick of it. It's much harder for single people. Married people, people in relationships, they don't realize how easy they have it.

The "Keepers and Tweeners" property in chapter VII conveyed the functions that women seek in their desired partnership with a man. They included "helping" with daily tasks, financial assistance, and offering supportive nurturing. Many of the women who have remained single into their thirties experience "exhaustion" from the multitude of daily caretaking responsibilities. "I am so used to relying on myself for everything that it's really tiring. There is no one to offload

any responsibility to. I have to be extremely responsible about everything that I do in my life." "If I hurt myself or if I'm sick, I have to take care of that myself. Anything that I need to have done, I need to do it myself." Consequently, many are simply tired of living a single lifestyle. "I've done the single professional thing, and feel very stuck in this phase." "I've proven to everybody that I can be independent. I'm just really tired of that, because I've been there, done that."

Many women spoke of the psychological and physiological toll of living on a single income. "It is harder to make a living as a single person." "Economically, it would be easier to have somebody else to share my burden. It's tight financially. God forbid anything happens, you can rely on somebody else." Maintaining sole responsibility for managing social engagements and making important life decisions, such as investments, can feel burdensome, as well. "The thought of having to go out and find even more new friends, that's exhausting." "I bought a place, and that was huge. It carried a lot of tension, since it was an initial reminder of not living the traditional life I thought I was going to lead. I called my parents, screaming, 'You don't know how hard it is to make a decision about this yourself.'"

The panic embedded in the "It's All Up To Me" experience gets exacerbated when issues of safety and wellbeing are at stake. When women's needs and vulnerabilities are heightened, many assume a loving companion would cushion the discomfort and provide care-taking support. "I got hit by a van and broke my ankle. My best friend came and took care of me. My family is involved in their own lives, and we don't have much in common. It would have been nice to have a husband to come pick me up from the hospital, help me around the house and with work, or just for sympathy." "My father had this panic attack that I have since passed on to my single girlfriends, that we don't have good long term disability coverage. There was a woman in a car accident at the Vineyard who suffered severe head injuries. This poor woman is not married, no boyfriend. It's a scary thing, because she can lose everything."

<u>"I'm Afraid"</u>

> The fact that I don't have somebody in my life right this minute, I can deal with. It's more sort of that gnawing feeling of, "What if this is it?"

This next dimension encompasses some of the major fears plaguing women who are embedded in the "Sinkhole" experience. Based on their proclivity to believe that "History Repeats Itself," many women in the "Sinkhole" are fearful that the vacancy and disappointments of former relationships will be ". . . all I have to look forward to?" "Based on past experience, many women also come to doubt their own judgment and ability to choose appropriate partners. "There's this sense like I don't want to make a mistake, again, and choose the wrong person." "The burden of this fear of making a mistake looms, because if I made a mistake before, I'm afraid I could again."

As a result of doubting their own judgment and the intention of "most men," many of these women find themselves debilitated by the "fear of getting hurt" again. Negative experiences of the past with significant persons have fostered a basic lack of trust in an "other," as well as a wariness about the level of safety within any intimate relationship. "My mom was mean and that made me fearful to really get close to anybody, because I felt that they might mentally abuse me like she did." "I am very fearful about letting myself really get involved with somebody. I won't put myself out there to be brutalized."

For many of these women, having children is their life purpose, leaving them fearful and at the mercy over whether it happens for them or not. "I have a purpose in my life to create a family. What else would give a reason to my life?"

> It's that meaning thing again, in terms of legacy. When you die, you want to be remembered, and I think that's an issue that a lot of people don't really realize is in the play. Because otherwise, you're gone. What do you have in terms of a marker? With a child, you have this person who you've cared for and who loves you very much. You know you'll live on in a way and that our crazy family genes will be passed on.

As the "Wake Up Call" property in chapter V pointed out, judgment about one's age, and growing fear regarding the implications for the "dwindling" possibilities for child bearing emerge. "Even if I do meet someone, can I have a child, or am I going to be ancient as this child's growing up?" The women in the "Sinkhole" experience take this aging process especially hard, believing that their age inevitably makes them less desirable to men. "The 39 thing is an issue, because most men, if they're interested in a family, are not interested in someone who's 39." "Turning 40 does have a big connotation because, 'Who's going to want somebody who's 40?'"

The culmination of unresolved negative feelings about one's single status, coupled with being on the precipice of entering a new decade, can stir and intensify angry affect. The fear over thinking that one has reached a "point of no return," regarding the possibility for marriage and children, can make it difficult to empathize with the plights of others who are perceived as more fortunate. "I heard the news that a friend I had a falling out with miscarried. That's a horrible thing, but my gut is saying, 'Oh, big, fucking deal. You finally got your husband, your house, all this stuff that you really wanted, and I'm going to cry because you don't have a baby? How about me? I'm never even going to even know what it's like to get pregnant in the first place.'"

"So Damn Depressed"

All of these thoughts and these things that are going on in my mind have led to depression, and that can't help but affect everything else.

Due to the potent affective states described thus far in this "Sinkhole" category, it's no wonder that some women suffer more acute depressive episodes. "I hit the bottom last year. I was sinking lower and lower." "For this "glass-half-full" person, the glass is never full now, and I can't turn it around." For single women in their thirties suffering from depression, every emotion can seem inflated and overwhelming. "I think that depression magnifies your insecurities, to the point where they overpower other emotions." "Depression sort of exacerbates

the demons that we all have inside of us; insecurities, self-consciousness, all that stuff."
Sometimes it was reported to play itself out through physical ailments and somatic complaints. "I hurt my foot two years ago, I'm having surgery on fibroid tumors coming up, and I've suffered from migraine headaches. It's one thing after another, and there must be something unhealthy in my subconscious that's manifesting itself physically."

A profound sense of loneliness permeates these women who are depressed. "I have a girlfriend who is so totally lonely. She invited six people to a party, and only I showed up. That's miserable." Most of the women who were suffering more acutely with the loneliness related it to the absence of having a loving and reliable support network available to them. Those who have little or no family interaction report feeling a tremendous void, which can make the single lifestyle feel even more isolating. "Every year I have this expectation that I'm even going to get a thoughtful present from someone, and every year I get disappointed. It's a lonely feeling, that even during this season of giving and sharing, they can't be there." "I don't have that special person, and I also don't have Mom and Dad and a home to go back to that I can feel connected to, and that can be challenging." When attempts are made at connecting, to no avail, it can be quite devastating, particularly for many women living singly. "I've been really trying to make connections with family. Over Thanksgiving, I went to visit my uncle, and didn't feel anything for him. It was like 'Geez, there's another lost connection. Is there ever going to be one person in this whole family that I can have a strong connection with?'"

Many women feeling lonely also report a lack of quantity and quality of supportive friendships. "If I connected with more people, being single wouldn't be so hard." "My friendships are not where I want them to be." In addition, these women do not have a network of single friends available. "My support network of single people is really dwindling; and I really feel it." "When you don't have single girlfriends and you have to deal with all of this stuff on your own, it puts you even further apart from where everybody is."

The nature of friendships is also an important facet. Rather than feeling the comfort and joy from the friendships they do have with single women, many other of the women depressed in the "Sinkhole," described their association as more of a painful reminder of the dark side of their mutually undesirable single state. "I got really frustrated with some of my friends, because I felt that they were just being desperate. I was like, 'Grow a backbone. Have some self respect. Don't be spending your life chasing after guys like this.' Although, of course, I've done that myself." "I've got single friends that are extremely depressed, crying on my shoulder, 'Oh my god. I'm never going to meet him and all I want to do is be married.' When these friends are constantly saying this, you start thinking, too, 'What's wrong with me?'" "Driving home, she said, 'I find these nights so depressing, because we all want to be married, but none of us are, and that's so depressing.' So, I said to her, 'But isn't it comforting and reassuring to know that there are people in the exact same boat as you, and that you're not the last one on earth to be in this situation?' I say that, but I don't really buy into it any more."

Accompanying this loneliness is an increased fear of continuing to lead a single lifestyle in the future. "It's hard to talk about it, because I have a lot of angst about dating and potentially being alone. "The pressure I've felt to marry has not been social pressure, as much as just the pressure of life, just not wanting to be alone." Through this depressive lens, the prospect of their single status changing, or of reaching more emotionally stable ground, with or without a partner, feels daunting and doubtful. "Will I ever really feel comfortable saying, 'I'm really at peace with myself. Life is good!' That's hard to imagine right now." "There's the feeling of hopelessness; that, 'It didn't work then so it's not going to work now.'"

The cumulative effort and disappointments over the "long haul" have generated increased apathy and isolation as well. "I just don't want to do this single stuff anymore. It's so hard to get psyched up." "It's a deep hole, which permeates my entire outlook. And there's this lack of energy, where I don't feel like doing anything. I still struggle with just getting up in the

morning." Some women who are suffering to this degree seek psychological treatment, sometimes combining psychotherapy with medication management. "It got in the way of my life to the point where we had to do something, because I really wasn't functioning. We've been dealing with that pharmaceutically for about a year now, and the trial and error of it all is also frustrating." "I'm experimenting, under a doctor's care, with different kinds of antidepressants. It's reassuring to know that maybe it's not just me, that there is a logical chemical explanation."

It is important to note that many of these women report a history with experiencing other bouts of depression, implying that their single status is not the only precipitant cause. "There probably were episodes younger, maybe college age, or high school." "I probably tended towards depression, although nobody knew it, for a lot of my life." Unresolved family of origin issues was discussed as one of the variables, affecting their tendency toward a depressive position. The important correlation will be discussed in the next two dimensions.

<u>"Only The Pillow Knows My Troubles"</u>

> My grandmother didn't have a real easy life, but she was always this wonderful person and she used to say, 'Only my pillow knows my troubles.'

The emotional pain that many of these women expressed is suppressed and withheld, leaving them very much alone with their despair. "The public face of me does not acknowledge the depressing side of this." "I feel like hiding a lot of my negative feelings about being single from others." They attribute this inclination to a few factors; one being the negative judgment they have about their feelings, and the consequential fear that others will judge them, as well. "I hate being one of those people who dwells on this. So, I don't talk about, except with you and with my therapist." "I never wanted to be one of those negative people. And I didn't want to be obsessed with, 'I've got to get married.' It's important to me to be well liked. Right now I don't even want to be with me, so how can other people want to, unless I put on the face. That makes me a little more engaging, and outgoing."

Some of the women connected their withholding of their emotional suffering to their effort to spare loved ones any pain, or to the assumption that generational differences would prevent parental figures from understanding. "I didn't want to burden my parents, because it made them sad to hear me sad. So, I would just stop talking to them as much about the trials and tribulations of singlehood." "I didn't need my mom or my dad to be listening to these kinds of problems, because it's uncharted territory for them to know somebody in their thirties who's struggling with being single."

Women struggling with their single status are often bereft of having had unconditional familial support. Most of the women in the "Sinkhole" reported either not receiving much nurturing from family at all, or felt it to be minimal, inconsistent, or conditional. Significant evidence tied this emotional withholding to the fact that many of the women did not have parental caretakers who actively engaged them to speak freely of their feelings. "My mom wasn't physical, and we never spoke of feelings." "In my family context, you don't complain, you're not a burden to your children, and you're not whining." Growing up in these homes in which self expression was not encouraged or tolerated made some women feel ashamed of their authentic feelings; thereby defensively choosing to suppress them. "They don't know much of what I'm going through now, because they would be dismissive. My mother would try to identify by saying, "I've got problems like that, too." My dad would say, "You think you're upset. Well, they've really got it bad."

More dramatic deterrents to self expression were reported as stemming from overt and critical parental judgment of one's single status. "I can't talk with my mom about this. If anything, she's so freaked out about it that it makes me feel worse."

> The last time I talked to my dad, I was 24. I was trying to get in touch with him, because I wanted to get to know him. He was totally perplexed to why I'm not married. He proceeds to ask me if I was gay, or am I fat. He's like, "I can't imagine why you're not married." I'm like, "Maybe I don't want to be married right now, or maybe I haven't come

across the person that I feel like I can spend the rest of my life with." Why does there have to be some deformity to explain it, rather than respect for it as a decision?

"Snap Out Of It!"

Sometimes when one is down, it's a little hard to kind of just snap out of it.

The women in the "Sinkhole" struggle a great deal with their sense of self-worth. Much of the unhappiness lies within, with a dominant sense of self that is derogatory in nature, and punitive in stance. "I've been hearing that I'm very critical of myself from my therapist. It still hasn't penetrated enough for me to be able to recognize it or effect change." "There are a lot of things about me that I don't like." They express dismay over being single, and carry the additional burden of berating themselves for their negative feelings and emotional listlessness. "I tend to be hard on myself, mad at why I'm kvetching and down." "I so never wanted to be the person who always lamented that I'm not married." "Feeling all of this sarcasm, cynicism, resentment, and anger is self-protective, but it gives me an edge that I don't really like."

As noted in the previous dimensions within the "Sinkhole" property, this troubled self experience is in part related to unresolved familial and childhood issues. Many of these women described how their dysfunctional relationships with parental figures have impacted how they feel about themselves and their lives. Most who expressed more of a generalized self-loathing suffered an emotionally deprived childhood, feeling either abused, neglected, or engulfed by parental figures. "Feeling 'not enough,' probably comes from my parents." "I spent many years afraid of my mother, seeking her approval. She wasn't very encouraging, saying things like, 'You're not going to turn out to be anything.'" "Whenever she would get mad or we'd have problems, she would threaten to send me to live with my father. The message was that if you don't shape up, I'm not going to love you any more."

This negative relationship with oneself naturally engenders difficulty in the dating arena with men. "I kept sinking and felt so negative, thinking that I've got nothing to offer. I couldn't even date because there's nothing going on in my life remotely interesting." "I've always got nervous about and had a fear of dating. 'Is he going to like me? I'm not worthy. Am I not good enough, or cute enough?'" "Self-esteem, for me, is always a struggle, in every aspect: in the people that I choose to date, and me putting up with more than I should. It's a struggle to fight for what I want, and for what I deserve." "I have an underlying need to please. It's part of that codependency, with wanting the attention and wanting to be wanted, that I give up who I am and what I'm after. Somehow I become too needy, and scare him away."

Many of these women speculate a correlation between their prior emotional deprivation and the degree to which they have felt willing and able to be in a healthy and satisfying relationship with a man. "I have girlfriends who have great dads. They put up with less from the men in their lives than I do. It's because they feel more self-worth." "I keep choosing inappropriate men. I think it's because I'm trying to find the father figure I never had."

The Sine Wave

Sometimes being single really sucks, sometimes it's OK, and sometimes it's really great.

I have a good life, which is very fulfilling. I have a lot of friends, and I meet men. I can enjoy it, but it's like a sine wave, with its ups and downs.

This property highlights the experience for women who fall into the second group, regarding the continuum of affective responses about this phenomenon of singlehood in the thirties. Most of the women who participated in this study actually fell into this camp, conveying a range of feelings about their single status. They report periodic and episodic bouts of emotional highs and lows that characterizes their experience. "I have both parts. I spend my time going back and forth." "It's just sort of a roller coaster." "It's all a big cycle. It is ebb and flow, which depends on the week."

The level of desire for a relationship is one area that is reported to fluctuate. "You go through phases where you want to find somebody more than other times." "There's times when I'm very lonely and would give anything to have a date, but I'm in a strange phase right now where I can't wait to go home and rent a movie and curl up in sweats and read a book after working so hard all day. But maybe this will get old, and then I'll feel lonely again. You go through phases." One's perception about how they view their single status can be volatile, as well. "It's like putting on different pairs of glasses. With one pair, everything just looks beautiful and open, inviting and full of possibilities. With the other pair, things look like a dead end." "It's a mindset. And if you asked me tomorrow, I'd probably give you a different answer."

The duality of this experience is also rooted in one's attitude. "From day to day, there are different ways that you feel about it; your attitude can be positive and then negative." "One of the things that happens to me, and probably most people in their thirties and single, is that there are periods of time when you feel really fine about things and have a great sense of humor about stuff, and then there are times when it is just horrible and depressing and it's really hard to find the lightness and the humor." Some of these women perceive this "emotional roller coaster" to be an intrinsic and inevitable part of the "Sine Wave" experience. "Right now, things are fine for the most part, but I feel like it's only a matter of time before they kind of turn around again, and it becomes a little bit darker." "I'm hesitant to define it because it can go away at any minute."

Having consistent faith in the possibility that love, marriage, and children can enter one's life is something the women in this group reported as difficult to maintain. "There are times when you feel disappointed and fearful, and then there are times when you say you remind yourself of the abundance in your life, and the faith that it will happen. "I struggle with that tension between the part of me that hopes and believes in the intrinsic human spirit and in love between two people, and the other part of me that hasn't seen it yet, and wonders if it exists." Consequently, the degree of emotive expression of sadness vacillates, as well. "This morning I

wrote in my journal, and I was sad. I thought, 'Why am I sad?' It's because I don't have anyone. My first goal would be to be in a relationship, with a family. But, in my other goals, I'm as happy as I can be. You have ups and downs, and today, I was sad."

The dimensions of "The Sine Wave" are: "The Pros," stating the perceived advantages of being single; "The Cons," stating perceived disadvantages of being single; "The Ups," describing how it feels during the positive stages of their experience; "The Downs" depicting the more emotionally challenging times; and the "To Be or Not To Be Married with Children," expression of ambivalence about the future possibility of getting married and becoming a mother.

The Pros

There are a lot of good things and benefits about being single

The dimension of "The Pros" generates the many advantages that women attribute to leading a single lifestyle. The opportunity for solitude while living singly breeds comfort for many women. "I do like going home, not having to deal with anybody when I don't want to." "I love to be alone. I love going home and not having to answer the telephone, and being able to sit there and listen to music and read a book or watch television or get on the phone and talk with somebody without having somebody pulling at my time." These years of living life as a single person can also provide opportunity for personal reflection, launching many women on a path of self knowledge. "One of the things about not jumping into marriage early is that it makes you question why you want to get married, and helps you find your own answers." "One good thing about being single is I've spent a lot of time on myself. I know who I am. I know what makes me happy. I know when I'm uncomfortable, and what to do about it. It's been wonderful in the sense that it's a great time to learn a lot of lessons, and get self knowledge."

Taking the time for self-reflection and self-knowledge enhances the quality of self-esteem for many women. "I think you need to learn self-love being single. I don't think you

learn self-love when you're in a relationship. Even if they say you're so wonderful, you need to feel it in here first." As a result of this personal growth work, some women find that there is a benefit to gaining understanding about previously unresolved issues in their lives before their involvement in a serious and committed relationship. "I see a benefit in being single right now as I work through some personal issues. Had I gotten married earlier, I know I would be unhappy."

The appreciation for the sense of freedom singlehood affords was frequently echoed by the participants. "The advantages are the incredible freedom of literally being able to pick up and do whatever I want to do, when I want to do it, how I want to do it." "I love the complete and utter freedom. You always get to be who you want to be." They all spoke of enjoying the independence that freedom brings. " I don't have to be accountable to anyone. I can go where I want to go on vacation. I don't have to pick up somebody else's dirty clothes around the house or cook for them, so that's an advantage." "I've gotten a new job, getting a new apartment, have new responsibilities, so it's been really nice to be able to focus on all of that." There is a sense of relief of not having to consult with, or accommodate an "other," about any facet of their lives. "The advantages of being single, that I enjoy, is not having anyone to report to." "I can do what I want, and I don't have to go to a movie just to pacify my partner, which is a nice feeling."

Another fringe benefit in leading a single lifestyle is the available discretionary time to cultivate and nourish significant relationships with family and friends. "When I do have time, I want to spend it with my friends and my family. If I were involved with a relationship, I would be pulled in another direction." "It's almost easier when I'm single, because I'm more mobile in being able to go see friends and family--a lot easier to do than to take a boyfriend."

This freedom also affords the time to interact with the children of family and friends and develop significant connections with them. This is an important vicarious thrill for many single women without children of their own. "Being single, I'm very lucky to have some close friends who share their children with me. I'm really lucky to have that." "I spent six weeks at my

sister's house every single day, to help with her new baby. My nephew thinks that I'm part of the furniture. There are those things that I don't know that I would trade in. I could not have done it if I had kids and a husband." This has afforded those women who have cultivated these close bonds with children a special and unique place in their lives. "I made her a halo and cut out wings. We decorated them with glitter glue and jewels. I took her to go see Santa, walking through Nordstrom's dressed like an angel. Her mom wouldn't have time to do things like that."

> One thing that I've tried to tell myself through this whole baby issue came from Marian Williamson, when someone asked her, "I'm 39, I'm single, I'm going to relatives' houses and everybody has kids but me. How am I going to cope with it?" She responded, "You are in the most wonderful position in the world, because you get to be the fun, wild, crazy aunt, able to do all the things with the kids that the parents won't ever do."

Some women also mentioned appreciation for the financial freedom that singlehood affords. "I enjoy that I can say, 'With my income tax return next year, I will travel.' I know that I couldn't if I had a family." "I can pretty much buy the things I want." Singlehood also gives others the opportunity for being able to focus on academic and career advancement without as many distractions. "Being single, I could pursue those professional and academic goals and dreams." "The other advantage of it is that career-wise, nothing's holding me back. I can go wherever, I can work long hours, and I'm not hurting or taking time away from somebody."

The other "Pro" to being single for many women is the absence of what they deem to be disadvantages of being married with a family. The viability and advantages to singlehood become reinforced when it is in comparison with a married person's reality that appears less fortunate. "Seeing couples fighting makes me feel I've made a good decision, like, 'OK, you're alone, but you have not settled, and you have not sold yourself short.'" "I don't have to go through battles some couples go through for things that I take for granted."

As a result of all the aforementioned advantages of single life, a number of women can appreciate their years lived as a single person. A look into the future breeds optimism that if and

when they are married someday, these single years will serve to increase their gratitude for what they have found. "I've always had these two-year periods between boyfriends. Within those years, I've traveled, my career has taken off, and I've met incredible people who have become dear friends. So life has actually been nice during those periods." "I think after us having gone through all of this, we will be unbelievably appreciative of what we have."

The Cons

Still being single is the one area in my life that is weak right now.

"The Cons" dimension lists the ways in which singlehood has been perceived as a disadvantage. "The challenge is everything from the financial end of it to the emotional end of it, because I don't think anybody wants to spend their lives alone." The primary hardship expressed is in living without the presence of a partner, who can offer emotional and sexual intimate companionship. "You want somebody to go home and make love to, who can share in your jokes and who you can have conversations with." "The worst of it is thinking to yourself that no one loves you at certain times." Missing the sharing of life experiences with a life partner is another a theme that frequently arose. "I want to just share everything with someone." "There's always this one little thing that's really been eating at me, which is that I'm not sharing life with the love of my life." The drawback of not having a partner seems to be embellished during social and holiday occasions. "It really sucks around holidays or events where it would be nice to have a significant other." "The sentiment in holidays or weddings is when I really miss not having someone to love."

Some women feel that prolonged singlehood has created a level of rigidity in the way they live their lives. "I've gotten so set in my ways that I don't think it's a great thing." "It's really hard to break your own patterns, especially if you've been by yourself a lot." Another one of the "cons" mentioned was the anticipatory fear and worry about a more challenging struggle

ahead for them, as they approach 40. "I think, once I hit 40, the biological clock will impact me a lot more." "I guess when I turn 40 I'll start worrying." "I have wondered how I'm going to feel when I'm reaching 38 and 39. That's when I really think I'll start to worry."

As referenced in the "On A Different Page" property in chapter VI, the increased probability of drifting from many married friends, due to lack of commonality and available time, was a common complaint amongst these women. "The down side is that it's not easy to blend in with married friends because there's nothing in common." "When I want to go and do things, my married friends are too busy."

The "What's To Be Expected" property in chapter V, and the "Keepers and Tweeners" property in chapter VII, made reference to the various expectations and desires that many single women in their thirties have come to define for themselves. They are living in an age when there are so many more personal and professional options and opportunities available to women. Dealing with the absence of some of the very things they have come to know they want so desperately can be frustrating. "We're the generation of entitled women, to a large degree. We're entitled to be happy, we're entitled to be sexually aggressive; to tell and show men how to have orgasms. We're career-wise, power-wise, we want it all and we're struggling with it all."

The Ups

I'd say the perfectly fine phase is the absence of a dark phase.

This dimension of "The Ups" explores the nature of the good feelings associated with single life, and what circumstances elicit those feelings. During the "up" times, women are feeling good about themselves and enjoying their life as a single person. "When I'm in that up phase, I just feel connected. My body, my brain is going, I'm creative and feel sexy and smart and I just feel like I can do anything. And it's funny, because when I am in that up phase, lots of people call me." "My ups feel like I'm independent, doing what I want." They are not as

weighed down emotionally by worry or fear based concerns. "When I'm feeling good, I'm

not that I won't find that person, someone to marry." "It feels so fabulous not having that level of

discomfort and intensity." There is more of a degree of optimism and gratitude regarding the

infinite possibilities available. "It can be just lovely. It's like, 'Wow'! There's so much potential

here for joy and meeting wonderful people, and it just seems so open." "On the up times, I look

at everything through rose colored glasses. Everything is wonderful!" When women are feeling

themselves in this general state of wellbeing, faith in future opportunities for love and marriage

are in full bloom. "There's times where I'm feeling so hopeful and full of faith that it is going to

happen." "There's just a lot of confidence that I'm feeling that I'm where I need to be, and when

the time is right I'll meet somebody and it will be right."

During "The Up" stage, most of the participants reported being engaged in many interests

and activities. At these times, there is more of a tendency to diversify their attention and energy,

versus focusing primarily on issues of dating and singlehood. "When it gets more into a positive

area, I focus much more so on other things that are going on in my life." "It's when you're

focusing on other creative and fulfilling things in life."

The data revealed precipitating factors, which evoke these positive feelings. The

resurgence of hope about the potential for romantic involvement was the most common factor

said to promote this "up" phase. "I feel better when I'm going through steadier periods of dating

and meeting new people." "Right now I happen to be in a perfectly fine phase, because I've had

a number of positive dating experiences; it's just what makes the difference." "When I meet an

attractive man, I just envision the possibilities. When that hope is rekindled is when I feel good."

Enjoying one's personal support network and having a secure and fulfilling work

environment are also a state of affairs that make a difference in the quality of life for these

women. Connections with friendship networks which remain intact and maintained, is often in

sync with a positive and productive period. "When I'm doing well, I'm keeping better in touch

with all my friends and doing more things with them." "When I'm in the OK phase, then I'm active and hanging out with my friends, whether they're married or single." Feeling financially secure and on a satisfying career track is a meaningful influence as well. "I just see how much I'm growing and how I'm heading more career-wise to where I want to be." "I look at my little chunk of savings that's just growing. It feels great!" "Things begin to move in the right direction when I'm doing my art and I'm printing a photograph that's really great, or I have a show. That's when I start really feeling there's just endless possibilities for me."

The Downs

> When you're down, you're not yourself. You feel unfulfilled and discouraged. There's that fear and panic of, "Oh my god, have I totally missed the boat?"

The dimension of "The Downs" uncovers the darker side of the affective experience for women who fall into this middle group, characterized by the fluctuations of "highs and lows." Despite the fact that their "downs" are not as emotionally debilitating as in the "Sinkhole" experience, it does exist and present a psychic challenge to this group of women. "Believe me, there have been some pretty big downs." "Right now, I'm at the bottom. I do have to say it's rather unpleasant."

The most pervasive feeling that was reported to be representative of a "down period" was the resurgence of periodic bouts of loneliness. "When I'm down, I feel more lonely than anything else." "I feel lonely. Not alone, but just lonely. And sometimes I'll get bored hanging out with the girlfriends." The idea of "being alone" generates anxiety for some. "Sometimes I'm really wanting and missing that wish for being a couple." "There's lots of times I don't feel OK about being alone."

As previously mentioned in the "Been There, Done That," dimension in chapter VII, impatience and apathy with single life is also felt during the challenging times for these women. "What's tiring about it? Same old stuff I've been dealing with for 20 years. I'm sick and tired of

being the single girl." "It's like the scene in *When Harry Met Sally*. When they get the Christmas tree together it's fun and easy. After they break up, she tries to do it on her own and it's just more of an effort and more difficult!" "When I feel burnt out from doing everything, it knocks a lot of things out of whack for me."

During these periods, feelings of doubt and hopelessness surface and intensify. "The downs are more of the helplessness and the hopelessness of, 'This is just never going to happen.'" "There's a sense of desperation and pessimism." "Feeling victimized or getting down on yourself is not the most productive way of dealing with it, but sometimes being single is just a drag. It's like, 'God, how did I end up like this? Am I ever going to meet anybody? If I'm not, what's my life going to be?'" Anxieties about the unpredictability of the future also accompany this experience. "It's such a huge unknown; and sometimes that gets really scary." "The unknown is always anxiety-provoking for me."

Women who experience these "highs and lows" can feel depressed as well, though their depressive periods are not as acute or long lasting as in the "Sinkhole" experience. "There are times when I've found myself fallen into a real depression." "A really dark phase is feeling just really low energy, dark, and blue and maybe crying, or just feeling sorry for myself, and feeling like 'I can't stand this.'" Feelings of sadness and resentment come up, in response to their unwanted single status. "When I get really bummed out, I get resentful. I see these incredibly plain people that are out there in couples and wonder, 'What is the deal?'" "It's those times, feeling depressed, when I feel so sad about still being alone."

When feeling depressed, these women report having a higher proclivity toward negativity and a general dissatisfaction with their present state of affairs. "It will set me back and I'll think, 'I can't believe that I have to do this dating thing. This is such a drain on my psyche.'" "If you're in a really down period, it's obviously really hard to be positive, because things feel black or white." An increased level of vulnerability to disappointments and a tendency to approach life

"too seriously" is part of this depressive position as well. "There have been times that I don't have the resilience to just feel really good about stuff." "When I lose my humor about the dating game, that's when I know I need to step back and kind of recharge my batteries." Some women recognize the self perpetuating and potentially self-defeating consequences that the depressive state can create. "It's a vicious cycle. You get more depressed, so you don't feel like doing anything. Then you feel like, 'What's the point? I'm not going to meet anyone.' And while you're in that state of mind, you probably won't."

The precipitant influences said to be responsible for triggering the "downs" were numerous. "I'll feel really good about things; then an incident will happen or a turn of events will occur which doesn't feel so good, and I'll get really bummed out about what's going on in the dating world." The quality of self-esteem described by most of the women in the "Sine Wave" group wavers and is sometimes as fluctuating as their experience with their single status. As a result, they are susceptible to the "down" periods, particularly if they are not feeling good about themselves. "I'm very gray. I can often be very tough on myself, but I'm trying to get better." "My self-esteem is mixed. I can look objectively and recognize my good qualities. Then, there is the other part that can be hyper aware of all the magnified flaws."

The relationship front is, again, where a great deal of power lies, swaying these women from one side of the continuum of the experience to the other. Disappointing interactions with men had a potent impact in being able to bring them down. Most of the women in "The Sinkhole" had either a lack of or negative experiences with former relationships with men. The women in the "Sine Wave" group were more likely to have had more varied experiences with men, both positive and negative. Long hauls of being single, without any prospects on the horizon, can take its toll and eventually chip away at a sense of optimism about the future. "When a year passes without dating anyone significant, my hope begins to waver." "Life gets empty, boring, and meaningless, especially when you don't bond with someone closely for a long

time." Often, the loneliness originates from feeling the void of an intimate emotional connection that friendship cannot replace or fill. "There's nothing like sharing that with someone special." "I want to share experiences with someone in an intimate way, and sometimes feel lonely without it." Missing the comfort and joy of physical touch and sexual intimacy was also mentioned. "It's been a long time since I've had a very physical, nurturing boyfriend. I miss that tremendously." "I miss having sex. It would be nice to share it with someone that I feel really good about."

When an opportunity presents itself with a wonderful man whom a woman does not feel attracted to, she can sometimes question her judgment, instincts, and natural inclinations. "There have been a number of situations where there's just like the greatest guy in the world and I feel zero attraction for him. I struggle with that, which can really get me down sometimes too." When faced with a date gone sour, some women experience "the downs" once more. "In the aftermath of a bad blind date, you can get yourself into a real funk."

Just as regenerated hopefulness in finding someone was reported to precipitate the "up" cycles, a fall from grace from that platform of hope can precipitate the "downs" as well. "The very clear precipitant for this down day was over this totally great guy. If I were to envision somebody who I could really see ending up with, it could be him. The bottom line is he hasn't called, so it's a little burst of that fantasy bubble."

When relationships that do get off the ground become unsteady, it can also plague women with doubt and the fear of the unknown. "Because of this whole mind set of looking for a mate, I get crazy obsessing over whether he is going to be it or not." "I'm in limbo, wanting to break up with him weekly, and it's very unsettling." As the "Heartbreak" dimension in Chapter VII revealed, when break-ups of meaning do occur, it can be very emotionally stirring, regardless of who initiates this decision. "I definitely got down and depressed last year, when we broke up." "After I ended it, I was a mess. I missed him terribly for a long time and was in agony over

whether I did the right thing." Challenging feelings can also resurface when one comes in contact with a former boyfriend. " A friend insisted on inviting my ex-boyfriend to her wedding. It was awful because it was just being hammered on me." "Every time I run into him I get this awful pit in my stomach, which stays with me for days sometimes."

As the "Wake Up Call" property in Chapter V relayed, heightened anxiety about being single often follows a surge of external judgment or concern, from others. "When people say, 'You'd better start having kids now,' it does bother me. I have these little panic attacks, but then they go away." "In my thirties, all of a sudden, it's like, 'This isn't quite as easy.' The pressure to marry wasn't what I felt inside. It was the expectations from everybody else, saying "Oh, past 30 and not married." If there were no external pressures to settle down and have children, I probably wouldn't want to get married until I was about 40."

Women who have a strong and assertive demeanor, backed by beauty, career success, and intelligence, relayed feeling frustrated, disillusioned, and misunderstood when their positive traits are deemed intimidating to men.

> I take it as criticism when I am told that I am intimidating as a woman, because I am very smart and I am very tall. "You're just an imposing figure. It's going to take quite some guy to handle you." I'm not somebody who is made of armor. I'm somebody who has all of the same insecurities that any human being has. I, too, wonder "Do I look nice?" or "I hope this person likes me because I want to be liked and eventually loved."

Outside of the relationship field, there exist other circumstances and occasions, which are said to trigger an emotional struggle for women in the "Sine Wave." Feeling isolated, from a lack of auxiliary support, is one example. "I feel lonely on weekends, when I am not waking up to a job and not seeing people." "I have moments when I call my single friends and they're all busy going out with their boyfriends, and here I am alone." "I feel bad when I go home and there's no message on my answering machine from anyone. It's like, 'Where are my friends?' When these relationships are not where I want them to be, it's kind of hurtful."

Hormonal changes were also identified as a trigger for mood swings. "When I have P.M.S., all of a sudden, I feel like I'm all alone." "You think, 'Am I unlovable?' And that's usually the P.M.S time." "It does happen around P.M.S.-ing, because I feel unattractive, and I'm thinking, 'Who's going to love me while I look this awful?'"

The "Status and Stigma" category of chapter IX will address how feeling "down" is sometimes generated during occasions that stir up unmet longings for a partner. "During the holidays, I yearn more to have family, to have my kids opening gifts; it's a harder time." "An event like going to a wedding alone can be extremely depressing. It's something that puts a single woman into just a horrible downward spiral." As previously mentioned in the "Wake Up Call," property in chapter V, birthdays are benchmarks that can also be painful reminders of their unmet desires for marriage and children. "My thirty-fifth birthday was a real head trip for me. It was this reminder of this big, fat thing in my face of what I wasn't." "My thirty-fifth birthday was just really overwhelming to me. I thought, 'This is really not in keeping with what I thought I would be doing.'"

To Be Or Not To Be. . . Married and a Mom

Even though I want to find someone, there are times when I just don't.

This dimension of "The Sine Wave" calls forth the ambivalence that the majority of the women in this study expressed about getting married and having children. Their desire for and certainty about married life is another area in flux. Many women who represented the "Sine Wave" experience of singlehood, described vacillating between their desperate longings for a loving and intimate partnership, and the resistance against acquiring this "dream." This ambivalence was reported to be fueled by their fear of the undesirable compromises that may accompany that circumstance.

Many of the women began talking about this duality by describing the tension between the hope and the jaded skepticism about finding and having a life long relationship with a man. "The whole idea of having kids and being married I do want, but I just don't know if it's now." "It's like I want to be far away, but I want to be close." Discussion about their resistance usually followed, as they expressed what they believed or feared they would have to give up, in the name of having a committed partnership. In their assumption that they must relinquish so much of what they associated to be the advantages ("The Pros") of singlehood, there lies a fear of losing themselves. They expressed disenchantment about compromising any degree of freedom, independence, and control, which they have come to value and cherish. "I really don't like that feeling of losing control." "The ambivalence is that I would be giving up a certain amount of freedom that I have enjoyed. Having someone around me constantly scares the hell out of me, because I enjoy my privacy and my down time."

Some of the study's participants were wary of giving the time and emotional energy that a relationship may warrant. "It's hard to make room for that relationship." "It just takes a lot out of you. I just don't know that it's worth the effort any more." Giving up the freedom to explore and discover new relationships was also a point of contention. "My ambivalence is giving up the opportunity that I'm going to be traveling and have an incredible affair. It's that, 'Harold Robins, live on the edge' fantasy." "There's something appealing about that experience, when you're five feet off the ground, and have the initial high; the adrenaline, endorphin high of romance is really fun. That would be hard to say good-bye to forever."

The ambivalence about marriage and children is also expressed within the context of the reluctance to change or compromise. Some women feel less flexible, with strong opposition to modifying their desires, needs, and practices. "Wanting to be in a relationship is hard because of that whole compromising thing. It's something I haven't done and don't plan on doing. There's that fear in giving too much, because it could take away from a part of me. I haven't quite gotten

over that yet." "I'm not as willing, any more, to open myself up and have someone grow and change with me. I'm very settled in my life, and used to functioning independently."

Many women also conveyed the fear of "getting hurt," if they were to become emotionally attached again. "I'm sure part of my ambivalence is just to protect myself from getting hurt." "My twenties and early thirties were the times in my life when I felt kind of wilder. A lot of that was centered around my relationships with men; there was an excitement associated with it, but there was also a down side, which was getting hurt and being disappointed." As a result, marriage remains a tentative wish for some of these women, particularly when the desire for or reality of having children is less of a factor. "I thought it much more important to have kids than to get married. With that probably being ruled out of the picture, I don't know that I would really see the point in getting married?"

However, the idea of having children someday also brought up mixed feelings. "I have ambivalent feelings on kids." "I've grappled with the idea of having the kids for a long time." For some, the ambivalence is rooted in being distracted by the goal of finding a satisfying relationship first. "If I met someone and fell in love and wanted to build a life together, then I would probably be able to see having kids. But for now, I can't even imagine." "I'm more committed to having the right partnership than getting married before my opportunity to reproduce ends."

Here again, the fear over the loss of self arises, as many women speculate how much of themselves they would have to modify for the sake of their child. "It really has to compromise one's time. You can't be half into your mothering, or half into a marriage. You have to give it all up." "I've been able to experience a lot more on my own, as opposed to having babies and then restricted of going out or doing things." Anticipatory fears of being overwhelmed by having the responsibility for the welfare of children was emphasized, as well. "I just think raising kids is such a huge responsibility, and I'm just not sure how willing I am to take that on." "I couldn't be

an at-home mom; there has to be more than that." There is also a tie to the concept of a woman's identity being altered, when and if they marry and become a mother. "It still hasn't struck me that my best friend is a mom. And I don't see myself as a mom yet, either." "I looked at her and she just looked like a mom to me. It was just different. She carried her body in a certain way, her temperament is a little different with the kid. Your whole world has become this concern with the kid. It really could be all consuming." The foreboding fear of the challenges of child rearing looms, as well. "You see a mother with kids on the street, and the kids are acting up, and I'm thinking, 'Maybe I don't know if I want this.' On the other hand, when I see a child, I'm just like, 'Oh my god, they're so cute and so adorable.'"

The data revealed precipitating factors which influenced the "Ups" and the "Downs" experience. The same holds true for these fluctuating and ambivalent feelings regarding the desire for marriage and children. The fear over loss of self and hesitation to get involved again was attributed to the "History Repeats Itself" inclination, discussed early in this chapter. Women in the "Sine Wave" experience did not report the extreme void or dysfunction in former relationships with men as the women described in the "Sinkhole." Nevertheless, their positive and negative experiences continue to foster ambivalence, as they can also perceive former disappointments with men as an indicator for the future. For those who suffered with the "Ouch That Hurts" property described in chapter VII, the desire to get involved again in another intimate relationship can become tempered. Deprivation of positive dating experiences with men can negatively affect one's level of faith in its possibility in the future. "I don't know how much of it was a natural reluctance in my personality, or fear of making myself vulnerable, or fear of making this commitment, and how much of it was gained as a result of having had experiences which certainly didn't convince me that I wasn't going to get hurt." "When you go through too many frogs in a row, you just think, 'Oh my god. Is this all that is out there?'"

These women's perceptions, for example, were affected by negative associations with compromising too much of themselves in their past relationships with men. "I've felt like I've compensated myself more than I would have liked to." "I certainly saw a lot of movies I didn't want to when I was with my last boyfriend. He was somebody who made me do things that I really didn't want to do." The cumulative disappointments of the past have, in many cases, created a guarded suspicion and lack of trust in men. "I have a trust issue with men that has built up." "The impact of that is that you become very leery."

Many associated this fear of engulfment to family of origin dynamics. Some participants conveyed not being given the freedom to be separate from significant others, especially their mothers. "We're a very close family, really too close for comfort." "My mother was an extremely domineering woman, who ran my life completely and who gave me no freedom at all to be myself." "My first therapy, at age 29, addressed a lot of guilt and anger associated with my feelings that my mom always expected me to take care of her emotionally, and I didn't want to." This theme of needing to sacrifice part of one's own authenticity, for the sake of keeping a relationship intact, was also modeled by some of these women's parents. "I also think you have to sacrifice or compromise money. That comes from watching my mother hide it and being controlled by her husband."

As dubious marital role models influenced the chronic discouragement of the "Sinkhole" experience, it breeds ambivalence for many in the "Sine Wave," as well, as they garner doubt over whether there are necessarily "greener pastures" if married, with children. One example is the fear regarding gender roles, that many of life's responsibilities would still rest on their shoulders. "As far as the modern woman's situation, there's still a certain amount of sexism involved. All my female friends who have husbands or significant others do a lot more of the housework and caring for the relationship. They go on vacations that he wants to go on, rather than ones that they want to go on, etc."

Some of the exposure to child rearing does not make it look as appealing, but rather chaotic and challenging. "So much of the experience that I see with my friends and their kids is not really that positive: screaming kids and running around and things breaking. I don't know if I really want kids, because I can't stand that." "Since my sister had her child, and since my mom had my little sister, I've realized that parenting is very challenging, all consuming, tiring, and demanding." Consequently, many of these women fear losing their freedom for the sake of the family. "Watching a lot of friends and my sister, so much of their lives are completely dedicated to these kids. They're tired of watching children's shows, they couldn't leave the house a lot of times. They wish they could sleep late. They are just very limited because of the kids." "My married friends have no freedom, because they're tied to their families. Most of them are bitching about it because they miss the days when they could just go out to a movie or go out to dinner, and now they're home with two screaming kids, and they want to pull their hair out."

Watching some women struggle through a divorce and becoming a single parent also reminds some women of the risks involved with a commitment to marriage. "She's a single, professional mom. She does the nanny thing and that's fine. But I need someone here that would have equal responsibilities. There is just no way I could do it alone." "My younger sister is divorced and a single mom of two girls, which I've learned, from her, is a big challenge." It is common for these women who struggle with this ambivalence to count their blessings when they compare their current reality with the previously mentioned undesirable trade-offs. "I don't know that I would trade in the things that I've gotten out of not having that. I've been able to travel a lot, which my sister hasn't." "When I look at them, a part of me is glad that's not me, and I'm fortunate for the time that I have to experience things on my own."

Some women have pondered whether their ambivalence has unconsciously or consciously negatively affected their capacity to have formed lasting relationships. Many recalled patterns of clinging too tight or running away. "I wonder if I've sabotaged myself and

gotten in my own way; how many times was that relationship within grasp that I didn't recognize?" "When I really like someone I was always afraid of getting hurt. So perhaps it led to too much dependency in the relationship." "I don't like being in a position where I'm vulnerable at all."

> There was fear associated with letting go; being in a relationship and feeling like I can't set a boundary or I can't keep a part of myself. That's probably why I didn't have a lot of long-term relationships. I was always in relationships with people that I shouldn't have been, that were emotionally unavailable. Now I'm starting to realize that I was unavailable, too! So then, you just attract certain people.

Free To Be Me

> My friends say, "I just don't know how you bounce back after dating someone." "I don't know how you can be alone for so long." "How do you not have a boyfriend?" The point is, I'm OK with me and they weren't the right person for me, so why should I mourn someone that wasn't right for me?

This property, within the "How Do I Feel?" category, describes the group of participants in the study who represented the most consistently positive side of the spectrum, as far as their experience being thirty-something and single. The general profile of this experience is that there is a dominant state of well being. This state is characterized by high self-esteem, a productive and fulfilling quality of life, adaptive and effective coping strategies to manage life's challenges, and an almost unwavering trust and faith in themselves and in the "universe" to continue to provide the happiness and security they seek--be it with or without marriage and children.

The dimensions embedded in this property are: "Connected And Separate," which conveys the ability for self-love and connection with others; "Anticipation is Keepin' Me Waiting," points out the optimism about finding and experiencing romantic love; "Life Is A Box Of Chocolates" highlights a quality of life which is full and satisfying; and "Resiliency and Resolution," relays the methods employed to cope with life's challenges, particularly as it relates to being single.

Connected and Separate

> I don't believe the "Together, We Are One" motto. I can't wait to be two wholes coming together in an awesome way.

This dimension illuminates how the highly functioning and satisfied women in the "Free To Be Me" group carry the capacity to be both "connected" to an "other," while preserving and navigating their lives from the perspective of a "separate" enough self. Their self-esteem, for instance, is not dependent on the connection with, or the approval from an "other." They do not evaluate themselves on the basis of having a partner, nor do they judge their intrinsic worth and value to be reliant on having a man in their life. The ways in which they spoke of this concept usually began with an emphasis on how good they felt about themselves. In contrast to the low self-esteem that the women in the "Sinkhole" conveyed, and the volatile self experience for the women in the "Sine Wave," those in the "Free To Be Me" group conveyed high levels of esteem, consisting of a steady view of self that is very positive. "I love myself and have grown to be very comfortable and proud of who I am." "I honor and respect myself."

Rather than feeling "powerless" to effect one's happiness, as with the "Sinkhole," these women have come to know and value themselves in such a way which supports their sturdy emotional foundation, regardless of external and environmental circumstances. "What I bring to everything is who I am, nothing to do with whether I'm married or not." The concept of self-responsibility is not something they are "exhausted" by or "resentful" of, as in the "Sinkhole." Rather, they embrace it and the empowerment it has brought to their lives. "I'm completely responsible for my happiness. If I'm down, it's something I need to figure out. I can't blame it on anyone else." "I'm not living for the future anymore, waiting for a husband who will take care of all this someday. There is no one else to take care of this but me. This makes me feel so much happier and in control of my life!"

Working from the vantage point of finding happiness within is the way in which these women navigate their lives. For some, this has been their natural inclination, while others have gained this wisdom and ability along the way. "I knew inside that there were a lot of insecurities that showed up in my relationships with my boyfriends. It was time for me to find that happiness inside--that a man wasn't going to do it. I had to reach that point in my life where I was strong, because part of creating a good relationship is being happy and content with yourself."

Many of the women experiencing more trauma over their single status view this predicament as a deficit. Conversely, these women, who are enjoying greater life satisfaction, perceive it much more as a choice which they have had some control over. This empowers them, as opposed to feeling solely at the mercy of outside forces. "I remind myself that I could have been married, if I wanted to be married. If that's all I was looking for, that could have happened, and it still could." "I have made choices along the way that also put me in this position, and rightly so!" From this self-accepting point of departure, their single status is validated versus pathologized. Being single is not experienced as a reflection of a deficit in the self. "I've accepted the fact that my life is not traditional." "I am single, which is not any better or worse than being married." "Having found myself alone at 30, but happy and content with my situation at school and the job, I said, 'It's OK! I can be single.'"

For the women gaining a lot of pleasure in their lives, even temporary disappointment or longing for a life partner does not affect their sturdy sense of self, or the rich quality of their life. "Some people think that if they're not with someone, they don't value themselves. Some girlfriends of mine don't feel like someone without the other half. I don't feel that way. I like myself, so it's not as if I want to have a partner to be a better person." "Some of my girlfriends aren't as happy. They're looking for a man to make them happy or to make them whole, to complete or rescue them; they haven't spent the time to do it themselves." These women believe that total reliance on a man for inner peace and tranquility simply "does not work." "If you are

someone who's not already happy with your life, and with the way that you've turned out as a human being, you're going to be miserable anyway." "Until you've found your own value, and sense of strength, spirit, and happiness, and until you enjoy your own company, it's going to be very difficult to find somebody else who wants to spend time with you."

Rather than feel the "Sinkhole" depression over disappointments in the dating field, many of these women believe in their power to choose how they will respond to any life event. "My belief that I will be OK, regardless, really comes from finding myself, from working on myself, knowing that only I can make me OK. Someone could walk away from me tomorrow, no matter who it is, and I'm still standing here, I'm still breathing, I'm still walking, and only I have the power to let them devastate me in any way, shape or form."

These women who are thriving, have the resilience with which to author their own reality and beliefs, warding off external judgments which they deem irrelevant and destructive. "I think societal stigmas are out there, in terms of being single, but I keep it out there. I don't want to think about that, because I don't think that's true." "I know what those cultural attitudes and beliefs are, but I didn't buy into them."

While these women are able to look forward to a future partnership with an open heart, they have a separate enough sense of self to continue to take good care of themselves as they live a single lifestyle. They trust in their capacity to be OK with or without a partner. "I'm finding that life will still be great if I don't get married and have children, because I'm in charge." "It's very liberating to know that I can lead a happy life without being absolutely attached and dependent on having a man and children in my life."

One of the factors that is key to the psychological stability and positive mental health of these women is their capacity to genuinely believe in and be committed to creating and enjoying the multitude of ways in which their life has meaning. In this way, they disassociate their sense of well being from the outcome of whether they are to have the family they have always wanted.

This, in turn, liberates them from feeling at the mercy of this occurrence, and leaves them feeling "free to be me," no matter what. "At 30, I don't feel a time clock. If I weren't to find a husband, or weren't to have children, it would be OK with me." "I want kids, but if I didn't have them, it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. I think that you can go on to have a happy life if you don't have children."

Part of this approach also involved the ability to distinguish and relinquish that which is not under one's control, surrendering to a trust in fate and destiny to some degree. "If I'm single into my forties, and I end up not having children, and I don't meet someone till I'm 50, but have 30 years with a loving, wonderful relationship, I'll feel damn lucky." "I hope to have my own children. I have come to the belief that if I'm meant to, I will. That's an area that I truly feel I have got absolutely no control over. I have no control if I'm going to meet this special person prior to my childbearing years. I also have no control, if I try to have kids, that I can have them."

From this "connected but separate" position, women are more able to advocate for what they seek from someone they love, while letting them go if need be.

> I got strong enough to tell him, "I know what I want out of a relationship. I'm coming to the realization that it's not going to be with you. As much as I love you, I love myself more, and you're not giving me what I need. I want a commitment, and to move forward. If you can't do it, you've got to let me know." He came back and said he was in love with me, but he can't commit to that right now. So I said, "You do your thing. I need to do mine."

Anticipation Is Keepin' Me Waitin'

I want to be pregnant. I want the swollen ankles, I want the everything!

The anticipation of someday finding a partner was met with some fear, as described in the "Sinkhole" property, and some ambivalence, as described in the "Sine Wave" property. Those women attributed their hesitation to the fear of losing themselves in relationships. In contrast, because of the aforementioned ability to be "Connected And Separate," the women who relate to

the "Free to be Me" experience of singlehood eagerly anticipate the potential for this with certainty and utter excitement. "When you're single, I love the anticipation that I'm going to meet somebody. It's like a smorgasbord; it's the excitement of the possibilities." "I want to have a big family. I want the screaming and the yelling, the running in and out. I want my home to be a hearth, a very inviting place where you have to kick people out because it's so comfortable."

Even though these women carry the faith that, in the event they do not marry, they will still lead happy and productive lives, many of them hold to a sturdy belief in its inevitability. "There isn't an ounce in me that doesn't believe that it is possible!" "It's not 'if' I meet someone, it's 'when' I do." These women also have faith that they will have children, as well. "I know that I will get so much joy knowing that something is growing inside of me. I cannot wait." "Because I want children and believe that I'm meant to have them in my life, I will."

Some of these women also attribute this perspective to an underlying positive posture, from which one views herself and her life. "I'm horribly optimistic. Happily, wonderfully, hopelessly, hopefully, I am. That's the answer to your question why I think that I'm going to be married. The core of my being is being an optimist." "My optimism comes from within, and from the way that I see the world." These women are not as laden with the fear-based worries expressed by the other two groups. From this optimistic departure, many believe in the infinite possibilities that lie ahead. "They're making so many advances in medicine that I can have my baby at 40." "I'm hearing more and more women having babies at older ages, so that's not as big of a concern."

Because of the ability to be "Connected And Separate," a healthy self image leads to feeling worthy of a wonderful relationship with a man. "I'm a gift here, just as I am." "My belief in finding the right partner comes from within, in terms of how I feel about myself. I have a tremendous sense of confidence in myself, in terms of what I can offer a partner." "It's that fundamental level of security, of never questioning my ability to be loved."

As opposed to the feared "loss of self," instigating much of the ambivalence relayed in the "Sine Wave" perspective, this group of women do not believe they have to involuntarily give up any part of themselves, for the sake of preserving an intimate and committed life long relationship with a partner. "I don't think I have to give up anything to be with someone. I think I can only gain, because if I have to give up something, it's not voluntary. If you do something because you want to do it, you do it; then, you're not losing anything and you're not giving up anything." "Your partner shouldn't stop you from doing things that you enjoy doing. It should just add things that you enjoy doing with that partner." Rather than the needs of a family burdening and holding one back, as expressed as part of the ambivalence inherent in the "Sine Wave" experience, through this lens, it is viewed as an extension of one's love that comes naturally and effortlessly. "You want to worry about someone. It's just part of caring about somebody; and it's a part I look forward to."

Besides the presence of high self-esteem, other factors which influence the degree of anticipatory faith in having a family some day relate to past experience in former relationships, role modeling, and beliefs of a spiritual nature. Most of the women who relate to the "Free To Be Me" experience have learned to anticipate and have faith in the potential of what lies ahead, based on their positive frame of reference. Many have benefited from having former rewarding intimate experiences with men. "I've been so fortunate to have a number of very positive experiences, where the men that I've been involved with have been very good to me." Their social life has been fluid, with easy access to meeting men in the dating arena. "I've never had a problem meeting or dating men." Every time I go out, some guy will invariably come up and talk to me." These interactions have usually been complimentary in nature. "I've had wonderful relationships." "Overall, my relationships have been pretty healthy."

Rather than incurring the "wounds" from unhealthy relationships, as described in the "Confidence Shakers" dimension in Chapter VII, these women report past relationships that

invoke wonderful and cherished memories. Former boyfriends were remembered with fond sentiment, based on the admirable qualities they possessed, which were valued by these women. "He was very in touch with the emotional side of people, very humane, had tremendous insight, and fairly self-expressed." "We had that humor going. That was a blast. It was what I call my whirlwind romance." "We had a really healthy relationship, where I was able to communicate what I needed."

Many of these women who wonder "when," not "if," they will fall in love again, reported having had opportunities in their past when they could have married. "I was asked three times and I said no." "I've been asked, but I didn't want to." Others carry the knowledge that it has been their choice not to marry, rather than out of a sense of deficit or default. "There's guys who have crushes on me, and I probably could have married them if I wanted to." "If I wanted to just be married, I could have just gotten married."

Positive experiences with these former significant relationships became the fertile ground for these women to know what it is to love and be loved by an "other." "I've had two really significant men come to mind, in terms of just being in love and being loved. I will always have that." They know what it feels like to love. "There's no question that I really loved him." "I loved being in love." Moreover, they have received love as well. "He was able to communicate how he really felt about me in a way that was so real. So, I found a genuine caring for me." "I felt protected and really warm and loved and cared for." "He's still madly in love with me, he just can't commit." These former relationships, held in such high regard, often set the stage for hopes and expectations for the future. "My first boyfriend, right out of the box, could not have been any more loving and supportive. He saw me as the earth, moon and stars. That really set the tone for what I thought relationships would end up being." "It makes me know that I can have that, also, because I still feel that they were both really special guys."

Most of the women interviewed who have faith in the existence of healthy relationships, have been largely influenced by positive marital role models, as well. Many of them spoke of the faith derived from watching their parent's marriage thrive, grow, and last. "I've never been aware of any time in particular where I sensed a weak time in their marriage." "It's a very strong role model for me, because it's one of few marriages that I've seen that has really worked, for over 40 years." The reliability and longevity that characterize many of these positive marital role models offers inspiration and hope that such a compatible and committed relationship between two people can and does exist. "To have parents to have achieved 45 years of marriage makes me proud." "As they've gotten older, their marriage has gotten even stronger." "Nobody in my family gets divorced. So, it isn't in my experience."

Some of the women whose parents are still married witnessed their successful efforts to overcome periodic bouts of marital hardship. This created a faith in the capacity to find a relationship which is strong and resilient enough to manage any difficulties along the way. This exposure created the knowing that it is possible for couples to learn effective techniques toward conflict resolution, without damaging or deteriorating the fiber of the relationship. "I use my parents as a role model because I think that they've been able to combine the areas that are so critical for me; they can get through the really tough times and still have fun with each other." "My parents have struggled and evolved into keeping their marriage together. They're closer than ever now. There's an absolute peace. I feel very lucky that I lived there to watch all of it. My goal to being married and having children is to have that kind of a marriage, where you are 100% committed to each other." Some women, whose parents divorced, reported the significance of witnessing their parents recover emotionally and find happiness with another person. "I think it was important for my father to have a support person, and my mom wasn't that for him. His new wife is." "I realized that not all people are meant to be together, but that doesn't mean you can't find true and lasting love with another someday."

For those women in particular, who did not grow up watching happily married parents, the exposure to other positive role models helps to create their anticipation of what is possible. "Talking to friends whose parents have good marriages helped me to know that something else is possible. What I've seen other people with is what I would strive for." Having friends who have found happiness with their partner is of definite reinforcement to the faith these women carry. "I have role models in my generation of friends who are married, whose relationships I would love to have: warm, loving, caring, concerned, funny, everything that you would possibly want." "I love being able to be around them, because it just lets me know that it is something possible, that you can have. I'm not nuts for being optimistic."

Positive marital role models also contributed to the faith in being able to find some of the valued characteristics in a relationship, as discussed in the "Keepers and Tweeners" property, in Chapter VII. Of special appeal to these women is the idea of having a relationship with "equality" and "mutuality," as evidenced by these couples, that you can be "connected and separate," as discussed earlier in this chapter. "I remain committed to just being myself. I realize there are people who are very self-expressed in themselves, who are married, and who have what they want in life. I know I can do the same." "I see marriages that are a real team effort. Both people still have their freedom, doing their own thing, but they also work together and think the other is wonderful. That's what I want and would love to have." "They have the kind of marriage that I dream about: really just a best friend, where you just love to be together, but you're totally willing to let the other one do what their strengths are, and you come together beautifully."

These positive marital role models were reported to inspire faith and heighten anticipation for what may lie ahead. "The marriages of friends in their mid-thirties seem to be happier than some of our other friends who got married when they were younger. So that gives

me faith that I can benefit, perhaps, from waiting." "When I see happy couples, I often smile with eager anticipation for when I meet the one that's meant for me someday."

The "Free To Be Me" women who did not have positive upbringings are determined to break former, "destructive" familial patterns, and not to heed what they consider to be "counter-productive" advice from parental figures, as referenced in the "Potent Messages" section in chapter V. They refuse to agree with or succumb to the directive to marry, "just to marry." "My mother was like, 'Get married.' I'm really glad I didn't, because I would have been stuck in a marriage that absolutely drove me crazy. I just don't want a divorce, or to rush life, because then. . . it's over!" Other women, who were told or shown by their mothers not to trust men and to remain completely independent, have challenged this position as well. Some of them have chosen and created a different belief system, founded on the possibility of being one's own person, while able to enjoy a committed and intimate relationship with a man. With the development of these new and differing assumptions, these women have chosen not to assume that they must inherit their mothers' fate when it comes to love and marriage. "The idea for me is that marriage is for keeps. I don't want to go through a divorce like my parents did when I was very young." "Unlike my mom and a lot of the other women that I grew up with, I don't want this totally separate thing. I don't dislike or distrust men like they do. I want to be independent and still be in a relationship. I think that it's possible to have a good, working relationship with your spouse."

Just as marital role models affected so many of these women's level of faith in and anticipation of marriage, so have their male role models impacted this perspective. The influence of the maternal role model in these women's lives was covered in the "Strong Woman Number" property in Chapter V. Following suit, most of the women in the study had much to say about their experiences with their fathers. Most of the women doing well had positive experiences with father figures. They described fathers who displayed characteristics worthy of their admiration

and esteem. "My dad is exceptional. He's the person with the highest integrity that I know." "I respect my father. He makes mistakes and admits them." "He's very honest and self confident. He knows who he is and doesn't try to be somebody else." "My dad is an affectionate person both emotionally and physically." In the same vein, these women spoke of the close connection they felt with their fathers, which they value so deeply. "I can talk very openly with my father." "He was a wonderful hands-on father." "I don't remember a time of not having my dad around." Though some women did not have their biological father available to them emotionally, surrogate father figures played an important role in providing this important connection. "My stepfather made me feel very loved; as a child, he was everything to me—the same with my older brothers."

Many associated positive experiences with their fathers with their expectations of the qualities they would like to find in a partner. "If you would ask me, would I like to go out with someone with his qualities, yeah I would." "I would not mind marrying somebody who's like my dad." This paternal role modeling was credited, by many women, to have instilled a sense of faith that there are wonderful men out there, and to have had a positive effect on their associations with many men thus far. "I usually have nice relationships with men. I guess because I had a nice relationship with my father." "The reason that I have not lost faith in mankind is because of my father. I see a guy who is worth the trust." "That's probably where the optimism comes into play, because my father is not the only man out there who's the way that he is."

Some of the women referred to positive relationships with brothers and male friends as confirming their faith in finding a man of desire. "My brother and I were very close. So, I find it a lot easier to be with men." "My brother is my best friend." "I think a belief in being able to have a great relationship with a guy developed towards the latter part of my college years, when I lived in a co-op with men. It just was this possibility that this can be a friendship that turns into something more, and this I what I can have in a marriage."

As referenced in the "Doing My Strong Woman Number" in Chapter V, positive female role models also influence the degree to which single women have faith in being able to find happiness, with or without a life partner. Most of the women doing well have been inspired by female role models who exhibit a strong sense of self, whether they are married or not. Observing these female role models who lead productive and happy lives adds vigor to their sense of faith. "My mom hasn't lost herself in this relationship. She's always expanding herself." "I love to see women who are happy doing their thing and hopelessly in love with their husbands. Maybe it's not too crazy to think you can have it all, after all." Women who happily married later in life serve as role models, as well. "My dad's new wife married him for the first time when she was 52. She's somebody who lived her own life, and decided to wait until the right man came along. She's more of a role model that I've recognized." "I'm glad to see women who find the right man eventually. It makes me optimistic that it's never too late."

Having positive single female role models helps to preserve the faith that life can be worth living without the presence of a life partner—that a sense of self does not have to be diminished by being single. Witnessing previously married women who now lead fulfilling single lives, is also of significant influence. "There have been a lot of women in my family that are single and independent. They feel more empowered and more self expressed about who they are." "My mom's sister and my mom are both very strong minded, and doing their own thing." Interestingly enough, however, most of the women in the study did not have older, never-married, female role models. The ones mentioned by this group of women were their contemporaries. "My friend, who's going to be turning 42, has never been married, and has a very positive outlook, believing things always work out for the best." "My role models are my friends. They're in their late thirties, doing great professionally. They're interesting women who just go out and attack the world, fully taking advantage of all there is to offer. They are exactly where I'm at. . . wanting to meet someone, and not feeling incomplete because they haven't yet."

Life Is A Box Of Chocolates

> I play my instrument, and I do my art. I just have a lot of things going on and a lot of friends. Life is pretty darn good.

This dimension of the "Free To Be Me" experience calls attention to how the quality of life of single women affects their sense of general well being and life satisfaction. Being single does not present an emotional challenge in this "Free To Be Me" experience, because these women are finding joy and contentment in their life as it is. The cage isn't rattled by the unmet desire for marriage and children, as it is in "The Sinkhole" and "The Sine Wave" experience. "Being single doesn't bother me in the least, because I'm happier than I've ever been in my life." "Sure, I would love to fall in love and have children, and look forward to the day it happens, but until then, I'm still me and life is still wonderful."

While the generally unhappy women, as discussed in the previous chapters, feel the psychic burden of regretting past "mistakes" or worrying about the future of being "alone," these women, leading productive and fulfilling lives, do so with the intentionality of living in the present. It takes, for some women, the growth and wisdom that comes from time and experience, to have consciously chosen this path. "I wasted a ton of time in my life worrying and feeling badly about not having those things that I thought would make me feel OK, or that I thought would make me feel whole—not anymore." "I'm not working so hard at trying to find someone to be with. It's not my primary focus and not defining my behavior any more. Instead, my focus is being present and living a fulfilled life. That means feeling OK about not being with anybody, and not spending all of my time and energy talking about being disappointed because the guy that I like doesn't want to be with me."

Letting go of the former blueprints of what was supposed to be, and refocusing attention on constructive and meaningful wishes and goals for themselves, is a part of the process of "staying present." "I told myself that the focus now would be on my career and providing lots of nice

things for myself." "I just went into, like, pure nesting mode, and I set up a house that is me, not worried about a guy not liking pink! It's me in all of my glory, with all the stuff in it that I'm comfortable with. Now, I love where I live." Those leading a lifestyle of satisfaction are active. "I spent two months overseas, and two weeks in California doing the AIDS ride. It was great." The data indicated that activities of a philanthropic nature, where one can contribute their time and energy, are very rewarding for many single women. "I believe in the Jewish concept of 'tikunalam:' the fixing of the world by helping people to help themselves."

Having goals and a vision for the infinite possibilities that lie ahead also plays a role in one's quality of life. Women who participated in this study who were striving and thriving in life with a great deal of joy, shared many of their aspirations, which are bringing significant optimism and meaning into their lives. "I find, and I've seen it, that the people who are following their dreams are the people who are happiest. That's what I'm following, because you don't get anything out of life by not taking risks."

The data indicates a significant correlation between the level of satisfaction at work and overall quality of life. The women in this "Free To Be Me" group reported feeling invested and excited about their professional lives, which are rich, and full of potential for future growth. "I have chosen a profession that matches who I am. You can make a living out of it, get paid for it very nicely, and have a great time doing it!" "I have the enthusiasm that still makes me bubble. I wake up in the morning excited to go to work."

Many single women in their thirties have been in the work force for many years, and take pride in the fruits of their labor. Their level of confidence has flourished through professional achievement and recognition. Many voiced the significant impact of feeling accomplished and valued in their work setting. "I've been working eleven years in my career and I'm doing very well. I'm respected and they come to me, and I'm considered in upper management. It just feels good and fun to have your opinion count. Not that I don't like money,

but it's more the recognition that I get that I enjoy." "I worked so hard in building this résumé, and finally reaching a place in my career where it's what I love, it's not new, and I could get a job anywhere now, feels great. I constantly get people trying to steal me away. So having that security is better than any other kind of security."

Having financial security is another common factor that improves the quality of life for many single women. "I make great money. I can buy what I want, when I want." "I feel very secure financially with myself. I've taken care of my retirement if I should need it. That's a nice feeling." Some women linked feeling more settled professionally to feeling more prepared for involvement in and commitment to an intimate relationship. "Until you're settled, I don't think you can focus on a relationship. I feel ready because I'm more settled in myself and with work." Maybe this is what I needed to do, before I got into a serious relationship."

The presence of a support network of family and friends is crucial in the maintenance of a quality lifestyle. This subject evoked tearful affective responses for many, as they were moved by the abundance of love they have been privileged to receive. "I do not, at any point, feel alone in this world. I rarely sit home not having someone to go to the movies with because there isn't anybody who I wouldn't hesitate to call to say, 'I really need some support right now.' If I'm feeling that way, I can get that." Many of the women who reported feeling gratified with their lives, described a home life growing up which provided a sufficient degree of love, support, and nurturing. Numerous rewards come from being blessed with this unconditional love from family. For one, these women all know they are loved, which has a direct correlation with them feeling loveable as well. "I felt extremely valued and loved, and grew up with an affectionate family. That's why I think I've come to love myself." Loving overtures, conveying positive regard and reinforcement, were remembered as crucial in helping build a strong sense of self. "I was always beautiful and smart. Everything I did was wonderful, and I always felt like they were proud of me. That contributed a lot to my sense of self." "My family thinks that I'm pretty fabulous, and

a really neat person. They like to be with me a lot. I get a lot of positives from them."

Words of encouragement were also noted as significant by these women. "I have very wonderful parents, who instilled, 'Go for it. Whatever it is.'" "The positive core within me, I believe, ultimately comes from my parents, because they always encouraged me."

The degree to which women are subjected to negative external judgments about themselves and their single status was said to be of significant impact. It was associated with the "Wake Up Call" panic in Chapter V, the "Only The Pillow Knows My Troubles" tendency of the "Sinkhole," and the "Downs" of the "Sine Wave" experience. Most of the women in the "Free To Be Me" group described familial support and acceptance about their single status. The non-judgmental posture about their single status was reported to have eased the single pathway for many women. "My parents have never pressured me about getting married. They've understood that life is different now than it was for them, and that we all have to find our own road. They've always just been proud of whatever we do." "They gave me the message that it doesn't matter what society says--just follow my heart."

Those single women whose parents can and have offered auxiliary support, feel that it has been very helpful in their ability to manage a single lifestyle. "My parents have always let us know, if we really needed something, they were going to be there. This reassurance brought a sense of security that was so critical for me."

Not only has this unconditional love from family helped to create the positive self-esteem influential in the "Connected And Separate" property, but it has also become the frame of reference for many women who believe in and are looking forward to finding a loving partner. "I have a very high self-esteem, which I think that my family initially instilled that." "Both of my parents together are a womb to me. If I can find both of them in one person, that's what I'm looking for."

For the highly satisfied women in the study, spending quality time with friends increased their sense of connectedness, and enriched their lives. "Having friends is critical. I can count on them to make life fulfilling and meaningful." "I'm blessed with a lot of good friends, people who reaffirm a lot of wonderful things about life." The quality of the friendships is so intimate and strong that it transcends and is unrelated to marital status. "My three best girlfriends are all wildly amazing women who have never been uncomfortable with, or not been able to relate to my being single, nor have I ever been uncomfortable with their being married. I like all of their spouses and know all of their children. I have women friends who really value and honor women's relationships, whether they're married or not."

The women who are "Free To Be" also reported having more single girlfriends available, versus the lack of such conveyed by some of the women in the "Sinkhole" and "Sine Wave." "The idea of being a single woman in my thirties right now hasn't struck me as an anomaly because out of my core group of friends, only one is married with a child."

Resiliency and Resolution

> "If I won't find the man of my choice to partner with, then I'm just going to have a kid on my own, but that's going to be my decision, too."

While the "Free To Be Me" experience bears less emotional challenge than for the women in the formerly described groups, it is not void of any of life's tasks and hurdles to face and overcome. The dimension of "Resiliency and Resolution" exemplifies some of the ways in which women in this cluster emotionally deal with not having cultivated the family they so desire.

One concept that the "Connected And Separate" property began this chapter with is the importance of having a sturdy sense of self with which to navigate through life's vicissitudes. Part of gaining a sense of self comes from acquired self knowledge, which in turn leads to greater empowerment. "I'm very quick to take care of myself and to know what I need to do. I don't

think my girlfriend, who is struggling, can do that." "I'm really lucky in that I have a really good sense of self, which helps me get through this and really anything."

Data revealed the power of perception and attitude in dictating how one views and experiences single status in the thirties. The single women who are leading productive and fulfilling lives are all authors of their own beliefs and reality. "The ingredients to my happiness now is about finding out who you are, knowing who you are, trusting yourself, being comfortable with the choices and decisions that you make, and learning from experiences." They have come to identify and evaluate the external expectations and judgments that they wish to adopt or discard. "This absolute expectation toward marriage for normality and happiness is something that society has put in my head. And now I'm getting rid of it!" "Who's clock are you dealing with? The only person that you have to be responsible for now is yourself. There's no other expectations, guidelines, shoulds or should nots, at this point." Rather than internalize and follow societal, cultural, or familial standards of what one should be, have, or do, these women act from a self-directed point of departure. They embrace the idea of one's limitless control over perceptions and actions, when dealing with any life event. "You've got to put everything into perspective. I plan on being here for a very long period of time, and I am damned if I'm going to have a miserable life doing it."

> You can be a victim as long as you can't move. If you sit still and let the world impact you, and don't take the world by its balls, it's very easy to start feeling very depressed, question the lifestyle you're choosing, or the lifestyle that has chosen you. Then, you can feel like, "I'm nothing because I don't have a man in my life." If you're willing to shake it up a little bit, you can see a whole different world that's so wildly interesting that you would experience it one way by being a single person, and another way by being a couple.

Rather than the "Sinkhole" feeling of being "gypped" by the expectation for marriage and children not having come to fruition, the "Free To Be Me" women recognize the "silver lining" in how their lives have unfolded. They have come to acknowledge and appreciate the multitude of life lessons and blessings that have made sense and use of their single status. While the

advantages of the freedoms afforded by single life were mentioned in the "Ups" of the "The Sine Wave" experience, this group focuses on it more extensively and embraces it more fully. They express excitement about "doin' my own thing," and are thriving with self confidence in the ability to take care of themselves in a genuinely fulfilling way. Freedoms, mentioned previously, and deemed significant for this group as well, included the "opportunity to travel or make geographical moves," "have casual romances," and "pursue academic and career goals." "It's very liberating for me. I have a lot of ideas about what I'd like to do."

As opposed to perceiving the absence of the financial support of an "other" as a detriment, these women view the necessity to be financially and emotionally self-sufficient, navigating a career path for themselves totally independently, as a positive. "I just quit my job of eight years. Here, I am able to set up my own hours, do projects the way I want to do them, do an array of different kind of work, and because I'm single, I can kind of risk this."

When most of these women reflected about their past relationships with the men in their lives, they were certain that they would not have been appropriate choices for a lifetime partnership. "Being single doesn't bother me, because none of this other wonderful stuff would have happened had that blueprint taken place. I dare say I might even be divorced by now, because the men that I was dating then wouldn't have been enough." "The day that I turned 30, my boyfriend of a year broke up with me on my birthday. Now I know it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me." They attribute part of this awareness to their own individual growth and development. "I changed a lot in the past ten years. I would have definitely married someone very different then, than I'd be attracted to now." "I'm not the same person I was six, seven years ago." Some of them look back, with the wisdom of today, and realize that they were not ready to marry during years past. "There is no way on God's green earth that I was prepared to get married at 26 years old. It didn't feel right. I felt like I was a kid."

From the years of relationship experiences with men, and the solitude that single life affords, many women have come to know themselves more fully. "We tried to hang on and it just wasn't there. That is the time when I started writing, and spending time getting to know myself, spending time figuring out what I really wanted." "In hindsight, I'm glad I didn't get married yet, and had that time for myself." Because of the time available to get to know themselves better, there is a widely held assumption operating that they will make better choices as a result of their life experience thus far. "Being single at 30 is more exciting than ever, because whoever I meet now will be ten times better for me than who I would have met at 19. Who I meet now is who I choose to be with, not who I need to be with, or who I need to take care of me." "I think that the older I get being single, the healthier I will be when I find the right relationships."

The idea that the years of single life will also serve them well in the parental arena was of noteworthy mention. "I know I wouldn't have been as good a mother as I can be now when I was younger. I'm older, wiser and more prepared now." "Having kids has been a minor thing for me until recently, when I've been thinking about it more. I think it's because I could be a good mom and I have a lot of love to give. And I think I'm finally mature and secure enough to where I can put my own needs behind theirs, whereas when I was younger, I don't think I could have."

As opposed to the "Sinkhole" feelings of deprivation, recognition of the silver lining allows the women who are "Free To Be" to embrace a sense of gratitude for what is abundant in their lives. "I look around and I see people who have less than I do. So why would I say that I'm unfortunate, when I am not?" "Buddhism seems to fit with me the most, about just being happy

and I'll just cry about something or I get really sad. Once I allow myself to feel that, my

natural reaction is, 'OK, what do I need to do to get myself back in a place of feeling good?'" "I

can eventually get rid of the sadness. I'm usually good with working on myself." Many of those

who are accepting of themselves and their single status described a process by which they

successfully are able to work through psychological challenges, as it pertains to their single state.

> Making sure I have the type of life that I'm capable of having is really spending time with
> getting to know myself, and admitting my faults, admitting my strengths, listening to my
> fears. If I'm conscious enough to hear them, I can embrace them and let them out. I don't
> think many people spend time truly getting to know themselves. A lot of people are afraid
> of letting their fears out, afraid of becoming vulnerable or weak.

The emotion is acknowledged, honored, embraced, felt, expressed, and worked through, versus

being processed and interpreted in a berating and self-depreciating manner, as referenced in the

"Snap Out Of It" dimension of the Sine Wave. "It's OK to be single and feel this way. You have

your ups and downs." "I allow myself to sort of be depressed. I'm very mindful of what's

getting me down. Rather than trying to deny it, I wallow in a way where I hibernate." Many of

these women believe that what separates them from their girlfriends in distress is their capacity to

have the psychological tools to be able to work through their feelings and quickly recover their

sense of stability and well being. "I work through uncomfortable feelings through journaling. I

allow whatever is inside to come out; sometimes I cry and I deal with it. If I keep going, often

times I'll get answers, directions, things I need to focus on."

> Somebody that doesn't have that mechanism of self care, falls into deep depressions,
> because she doesn't have the resilience and the tools to be able to block out dating
> problems, and be able to get up and move on and find something else that makes her feel
> good. That sets her back for weeks and makes her pull the covers up over her head. I
> might have one day I feel like doing that, but I will fight emotionally to mentally to get
> back to that place of being positive about it.

Many of these women also derived a faith in their ability and resilience to work through

obstacles by facing former challenges and overcoming adversity. They come to integrate and

appreciate these life struggles as having a significant impact in helping shape the fabric of their

lives, and in functioning as part of the building blocks of their learning and growth. "My optimism comes from coming here with nothing. I was capable to do something on my own, so why would I be incapable to have a relationship?" "I never thought a time would be possible when I could look in the mirror and feel good. I know, now, that no matter what is left to come, I'll be able to make it through." "I have been through a lot of stuff, and I came through it OK. I'm not hurt or bitter, but feel blessed. I have faith that I have the capacity to deal with it, or with almost anything."

There are a variety of resolutions, specifically about the issue of marriage and children, that these women implement into their perspective, helping to foster greater peace of mind. As mentioned in the previous dimension, some women's unwavering faith in finding a partner is of comfort. There are some women for whom the fears about the urgency to bear children due to biological clock issues are simply not operating. "The whole biological clock issue does not affect me as much as most women know." "It never really burns within me. I don't see little kids on the street and fall apart, as some of my friends do. They feel it acutely. I don't." Most of these women are trying to come to terms with their wish for children and its unknown fate. "It's become. . . 'OK, what if you don't find someone? You need to learn to be comfortable with it."

The idea that parenting does not have to be given up because of the absence of a spouse motivates many other women to give thought to other options available. Single parenting, though not optimal, is becoming a viable option for some women who want children. Laying secure financial groundwork is part of the process of the mental and practical preparations needed for dealing with this alternative. "I've actually considered the possibility, in the future, if I'm financially well off enough, to have a child without a husband." "I've got to make as much money as possible so that I can do it on my own." Single parent adoption is also a consideration for many, as well. "I can't see myself not having kids. I would not have a child, but I could see adopting a child."

Resigning oneself to the possibility of never having children is another avenue through which healthy resolution is gained. Working diligently through this process, many women come to accept this reality, continuing to create meaning in their lives in a multitude of ways. "Now that I'm 38, I really don't think I'm going to have kids. Now, it's much more about making my plans on my own, taking care of myself the way I need to, appreciating the fact that I have other options." "When you get to be 38, It becomes a more viable possibility to think about being with somebody and not having a family."

CHAPTER IX

STATUS OR STIGMA

> I feel like saying to the world, "Don't dismiss
> us, just because we don't fit the cultural
> stereotype, just because we've never registered
> for gifts or invited you to our wedding, or
> procreated. It doesn't mean that we don't matter
> and that we haven't contributed.

Being single in the thirties can be experienced by women as a term that merely describes their marital status, or a term that connotes an attached stigma. This category elucidates the circumstances under which many of these women feel stigmatized by their single status. Data analysis of this issue was collected from the statements from all three groups, described in the previous "How Does It Feel" category. For the purposes of this particular study, the word "stigma" refers to any experiences whereby one's single status was felt to be judged, criticized, or met with skepticism and concern. Sometimes, this experience can be driven by external feedback, and other times it can be an internal reflection of how one may feel about being single in various circumstances.

Due to influx and prevalence of modern day opportunities for women, a small number of the participants in this study did not report that their single status felt like a stigma. "I think this is really the first decade when it's not a stigma. That's a really modern, new thing." "The 'old maid' thing is a thing of the past, especially since I think I heard the median age now is 27, to get married. I don't think you have to be 'Mrs. Somebody' any more. I don't feel that kind of

pressure." For most of the participants, however, being single did conjure up several ways and situations under which women do feel stigmatized by this. "We're still in the minority and we still all bitch and moan about that to each other." "It's flipped, in my thirties. I'm more comfortable with myself, but uncomfortable with the stigma of being single."

Several dimensions to this property describe the various circumstances under which many women feel stigmatized by their single status. The dimensions are: "The American Dream," illustrating how women feel stigmatized in the society in which we live; "The Cultural Catch," discussing ethnic influences that further stigmatize singlehood; "Home For The Holidays" conveys the struggle with familial judgment and concern about one's single status; "Mutant Messages" conveys the internal struggle with feeling different than from the majority, and from one's peer group; "The Questions Quandary" exemplifies the questions asked of women that imply a stigma attached to being single; "Over The Hill," speaks of the stigmata of aging; "Here Comes The Bride," relays how uncomfortable single women in their thirties feel when they attend a wedding alone; and "Going Solo" relates the stigmata for many women who attend various social events alone.

The American Dream

> I think society goes through revelations. There was free expression in the sixties and seventies. Now, the pendulum is back and we're back in the fifties, imposing the expectation of "traditional" family values.

Living in American society today, many women in their thirties feel their single status to be judged and questioned as something inherently different from the mainstream norm. Societal expectations to marry by a certain age exacerbate the discomfort for many. "Society in general says people grow up and get married. I'm not partnered, so there's just that overwhelming feeling that somehow I don't quite fit in." "Even in our day, when things have changed and marriage has been delayed and we have a lot more opportunities for women, you still feel this

pervasive stigma that is all out there once you pass a certain age and are still single. Society is still structured for couples, especially as you get older."

Many of these women's statements revealed their perception that American society still views singlehood, especially for women who reach their thirties, as a pathological state. "A lot of people make connotations, that because she never got married, she must be a lesbian. There's this underlying need to be partnered and intimate with someone. And if it's not a man, it must be a woman." "Society assumes that if you're 35 and haven't been married by now, you probably never will be, because there must be something wrong with you." I even hear women say it about men: 'If he's 35, there must be a reason that he hasn't been married by now.'"

The world of print and visual media serve as both a reflection of societal trends, and a powerful influence in creating them. Many women feel that the media has played a role in depicting singlehood as both daunting and in need of attention and correction. "Books like, The Rules, is a representation of the pendulum swinging back to the conservativism of the fifties, programming women to be a certain way, valuing marriage above self expression." "We all are reminded how difficult it is to marry someone in your late thirties. It also came from that horrible statistic about having a better chance of being in a high-jacking than getting married past 40. That was probably an urban myth, but it was all over the media, and very scary."

The data indicated, however, that the degree to which women feel their single status to be stigmatized in the larger culture depends, in part, on the particular geographical location in which they reside. "I was in a city which is very provincial. It just seemed like every person I met was married." Some women who live in urban, metropolitan large cities, feel stigmatized to a lesser degree, due to greater communal acceptance of diversity. "There isn't that kind of stigma here, because you have every ethnicity and religious background represented, every permutation of humanity that you can find."

When I travel outside of New York I feel that stigma. While in the Midwest, the questions came, "Are you married? Do you have kids?" When I said, "No," I cannot tell you how many people said, "I'm so sorry." They gave me their condolences. "How are you handling that? Aren't you scared?" They were so serious about it, and here I am looking at them with all of these children they can barely support. They saw no value in me as a career woman. They only saw me as a barren woman, who had no choice but to earn money for herself. It almost felt like it was medieval.

Two sub-cultures within American society are the work place and religious institutions. Some women feel their single status to be stigmatized in the work force, as well. "One of my colleagues was talking about another woman, like me: 37 years old, single, attractive. He said, 'What's wrong with her, that she's not married?' I absolutely flipped out about that comment. It wasn't about me, but it was totally about me. It was one of the motivating factors for moving on." "There's this one guy at work, in his sixties. He's an unconstructed male, who will scream, "I don't get it. What's wrong with you? Why don't you have a man?" I'll laugh it off, but it does bother me because you can be a female President of the United States, and if you're not married, there's still something wrong with you." The challenge increases for some single women in the workplace who find themselves in the minority in this environment. They are held to higher standard in terms of what is expected of them, because of the assumption that they have more available and discretionary time to devote to work. "The majority of women that go into medicine are married by the time they're 30. My resident friends, just about all are married, so sometimes I feel a little bit left out." There's a prevalent expectation in my office that if you're single, without a family, you can stay and work a little harder. That's been hard to deal with, because dating takes more time than family!"

Within the sphere of religion, marriage is often recognized as a rite of passage. Most of the significant religious rituals are centered around getting married and having children. Consequently, once past a certain "acceptable" age, religious institutions were mentioned as another place where some women feel uncomfortable as a single person. "I think that religious

institutions get their strength from continued growth of family, because if we want to

perpetuate our race, we need to have children." "I was working in Jewish communal work, that

promotes family, as it should. People set me up here and there, and here I am, wondering how

many people think there's something wrong with me at this point."

As a result, many single women in their thirties feel as though they are an invisible and

forgotten group in American society today. "As single women in our thirties – even with more

recent shows like "Ally McBeal" and "Sex in the City" with more emphasis on it, it still feels like

we're a forgotten group." Many of them wish for more societal awareness about the unique

challenges they face, and for their single status to gain increased recognition as a viable option.

"To my knowledge, no one that I know of has ever done a study like this. I love the fact that

someone is finally giving voice to this situation, and dilemma, occurring in our society." "I just

wish there was more emphasis on the possibilities of not being married, that we weren't so

brainwashed. Because I think that I would have gotten happier earlier, if there wasn't such a

push."

The Cultural Catch

It's a stigma only when I'm in Jamaica. Back in my mother's day, they developed this
saying there that if a woman is "old," in her thirties without a kid, they would call her a
mule, because mules can't reproduce.

As the "Potent Messages" in Chapter V related, one's ethnic culture also gives messages

about marriage and single life that can stigmatize or normalize women who are single in their

thirties. "It is more acceptable in the African-American community for black women to be single

and have children, because there's always been a legacy of black women raising children on their

own, and black men not committing to relationships." "Every white woman grows up and thinks,

'At 26 I'm going to find a husband.' There are more white families than there are black families.

White men are more comfortable with the idea of being in the family situation because more of them came from families that stayed together." "Few Latinos I know are still single at 31."

The culture's impact on single women is also related to how acculturated into the larger American society they are. "The Latino culture is very patriarchal and expects that women will marry and bear children. But I didn't grow up with Latino women. I've been Americanized and grew up in a predominantly Caucasian community." Particularly present for ethnic minority groups is the feeling of being perceived as "different," by both the culture with which one identifies, based on the color of her skin, and the larger mainstream culture into which she has assimilated. Women who relayed this experience shared their difficult time "knowing where you fit in on a cultural level." "Something that I'm still kind of wrestling with is that there is this sisterhood kind of thing that goes on with a lot of African-American women, that I don't fit in there." "I lived with a black boyfriend and wound up losing friends. It could be that it was too different, or that it was going to take me away from them. Boyfriends had been white in the past, because I had been rejected by the black community growing up, saying, 'You're an oreo. You sound white and you act white.'"

Home For The Holidays

It is hitting the holidays, so I'm still feeling a little bit of a pang.

The holiday season is a time of joy for some single women, and a struggle for others. It is a time of many social gatherings, where one can feel awkward, lonely, and out of step with the "rest of the married world." "The strongest pressure comes this time of year, because there are Christmas parties that I never have a date for. That feels really odd." "It's about spirituality, and connecting with someone. It's lonely, because you miss out on that sharing. There are all these expectations that you try to ignore, but they do have an affect on you."

Holiday "celebration" with family is a particular time when many women more acutely feel the impact of their single status, as it sets them apart from familial and sibling marital patterns. Their role within the family is partly defined as the "single person." The status of being single remains a foreign concept to many of the generations before them. This difference can present a psychological challenge for many who find themselves in this position. "The hard part is that my grandparents got married at 18, and my parents and oldest sister at age 20. I think about when my mom was 34. She had all of her kids already! And so did my oldest sister."

> There's this weird tiptoeing in my family, about if and when I'll ever get married. My only living grandparent now talks about my 18-year-old niece getting married, and it's like, "Well, what about me?" In his day, people got married so young, that maybe to him I'm old, and that my opportunity has passed in his eyes. Obviously this is hard, because I'm crying. It's that invisible thing. I'm 34, so the focus is shifting to my 18-year-old niece.

Interpersonal dynamics amongst siblings are also affected by marital status, often evoking a range of emotions and reactions. Feelings of envy can spring to the surface, as they see their sisters, for example, having found what they wish for and don't yet possess. "One sister is married and other divorced. Being the one not married, without kids, brings a freedom with it, which I enjoy immensely. On another hand, there are things that I wish I could try out." When single women experience their envy unacknowledged by an "insensitive" married sibling, it can exacerbate the feelings of internal deprivation and conflict between them. "I have a single friend who has a younger sister on her third child. She has been hounding her to help think of baby names. Finally, my friend just blew up and said, 'Do you realize that I'm 37 years old and I may never have children?' It didn't occur to her sister that that's a concern." More often, this experience of "envy" is mutual, between themselves and their married sisters. "There's this doubt that maybe they've made the wrong decisions, just as I kind of look at them and go, 'I wonder what it's like to have kids.'" "Sometimes my sister says, 'I wish that we could trade

shoes a lot, because you are so free. You're so lucky, to have so much time for yourself.'

And I'm thinking, 'You're so lucky to have a family.'"

Being single in a family comprised of marital dyads leaves some women feeling so "different" from everyone, that it affects their desire to partake in family gatherings. "Being there for five days, with nothing but relatives that are moms, kids, and husbands--then there's me, the odd one out. You just stick out like a sore thumb." "It's very easy to feel invisible in those types of holiday get-togethers, when everyone has their babies and everyone's ooh-ing and ah-ing, and my niece and nephew saying, 'When are you getting married?' It's really not that much fun." "The holidays thing are a really hard time for me, because it just feels magnified. The thought of one more holiday going as the only single one-- I'm so tired of all of that."

Some women eventually decide to break the mold and risk disappointing their families, for the sake of spending the holidays in a manner in which they feel more comfortable.

> It's expected, for the Jewish holiday, that I'll go home to my parents', out of state. Instead, I spent the weekend with a very good friend. My dad gave me the cold shoulder. Probably from all my therapy, for the first time, I actually told my mom, "Dad doesn't have a clue what it's like for me, and how difficult this is to grapple with. The holidays to me are just an in-your-face reminder that I don't have the kind of family that I would want to have. To go home to and see all the kids I grew up with, with kids, while here I am with Mom and Dad, that's definitely not where I want to be. He's just got to understand that."

Mutant Messages

> If somebody had been watching the TV screen of my life, they might just say, "Hey, she is way off track here."

> It becomes embarrassing not to be married at this age, in a lot of situations, when everybody else is.

This dimension reflects how it feels for many women to suddenly be a member of a minority culture, consisting of single women in their thirties. This experience is not limited to the larger society and family context, but in their friendship and peer network, as well. The "On A Different Page" property," in Chapter VI, reported how many single women suddenly find

themselves out of step with their peers who are married. Many women voiced the feelings of stigma that are associated with this experience. "It's not a big deal for me, being single, when I'm with my single friends. But if I'm with all my married friends, I feel this sense of longing and need. I feel as though I'm a little behind. They met and fell in love, late twenties, and I wonder, 'Why haven't I met that person yet?'" "Most of my friends are married with kids, and it forces me to look at my life and at where I am. I just feel displaced, like I can't relate."

As the "Wake Up Call" property in Chapter V noted, sometimes this experience intensifies as women move further into their thirties. "Very few of my friends got married in their twenties. So there was this huge group of people in their early thirties who were bright, interesting, fun and single. There was no stigma attached to it. Being in that environment, it was the norm, whereas now, all of a sudden most everybody is now married." "As a 36-year-old, I look at where everyone else is in their life and most people are married with two kids right now, and I'm still dealing with blind dates, which can be very depressing."

Feelings of shame can accompany this "out of sync" position many women find themselves in. "I find it difficult if we've been single together for a while, it's like they've moved on and I haven't; feeling like I'm still doing the same thing. It's embarrassing for me. I don't want to still be talking about my blind dates while they've kind of leapt ahead." "There's pressure, and you start to feel a little bit like a loser, wondering, 'If they have this great life, with a family, how come I don't have that?'"

As the "Is It Me" property of the "Sinkhole" articulates, self doubt and blame can sometimes accompany this experience as well. "It almost feels not normal; the biggest challenge I face right now, is just dealing with that." "There's been lots of times where it's felt like, "Shit, is something drastically wrong with me?" "All of the people I know have boyfriends, husbands or families now. I even have friends who have gotten divorced who already have boyfriends, and I'm still sitting here. That's been very painful." Feeling "displaced" and "lost" was a

common affective description, as well. "It's the feeling of being left out. It was just really clear to me that I was involved in a whole different ball game, and in a really different league." "A married friend invited me to his barbecue. I was one of the three who were single. I had this identity crisis, because I couldn't find my place, and didn't feel comfortable with anyone. I was so self-conscious about the fact that I was alone."

The Question Quandary

> I think there's a big stigma in still being single at my age. These people all wonder how come I've never been married.

This next dimension relays the flurry of questions single women hear about their single status that make them feel it is a stigma that should be remedied. Questions from family members can sometimes feel "like an inquisition." "There is a pressure from the family of, 'When are you going to get married? When are you going to have children?'" "Sometimes my mother puts pressure on me, asking, 'Haven't you found someone?' 'You need stability in your life.' That's when I feel it." Other questions make some women feel as if they are being perceived as the "powerless, pathetic victim." "'What's a nice girl like you doing single?' I've definitely heard that. And I'd like to punch those people in the face." "I hear people say, "I'm surprised some man hasn't swept you up." I look at it more as I haven't found anyone I want. The way I hear them saying it is that the opposite sex is in the control, that I'm unlucky because no one has come by and decided they wanted to marry me." "If one more person says, 'I just can't understand what a pretty, intelligent, funny, effusive person is doing single. . .' I understand where the compliment is, but it only makes me wonder about that just as much."

Other questions imply that their single status indicates a pathology that must lie within them. "This older woman said to me, 'Do you have a boyfriend?' I said, 'No,' and she said, 'Well, what's wrong with you?' And I was like, 'OK, so you're getting out here.'" "When people say, 'Why isn't somebody like you married?' they're trying to give you a compliment, but

in fact it's really not, and I face that all the time, like there's something wrong me. There is this stigma or embarrassment, because it's the only thing in my life that I can't really answer."

Due to this barrage of questions, many single women come to feel that their single status bears justification and explanation. Often, they hear others trying to "fish around for answers" that would satisfy their curiosity or concern. "Two women going away? In their late thirties, relatively attractive. People just automatically think that you must be lesbians. That's an external pressure which I can't stand." "People are wondering, 'Hmm, is she gay? This doesn't make sense.' They feel that there should be an easy answer as to why someone like me is not married." Questions of this nature come from men in the dating field as well. "One of the first questions he ever asked me was, 'Are you able to have children?' I hope that I'm with somebody that that's not the only reason they want to marry me." "If one more guy asks me, 'How come you've never been married?' That's part of the stigma to being single at 37. Like, is something wrong with me?"

Over The Hill

Now I'm ready for marriage--and I think I wasn't before--and I feel a little bit that my timing is just off for my chronological age in our society.

As I approach 40, I'm working harder than I ever have in my life but still losing ground on a lot of levels.

The "Time Warp" category in Chapter V highlighted the experiences of time passing, leaving many women suddenly panicked about their single status. This dimension relays how some single women feel that, once they reach thirty-something years old, their age becomes another factor in which there is a stigma attached. Many stated their assumption, based on experience, that age was a detriment to them, regarding eligibility in the dating arena. "At this point, the biggest negative is my age; this is truly a biologic fact. I think guys, in general, like to

go out with younger women. And frankly, I don't feel like dating somebody who's 50, either." "When they find out you're 39, you get this sense from them that that's too old."

Many women report feeling "old" when it comes to love and marriage, while they are still reaching their stride professionally. "The role models in my career show me that there's more to come and only better things ahead. But, the role models in marriage say, 'You're 35, and behind the times here." "I feel old in that I'm 35 and I'm still not married. But, when I think in terms of my career, I see women out there doing lots of things way beyond 35 that I hope to eventually achieve, as well."

Some women made references to the societal messages which they believe reinforce the aging process as an unappealing and stigma related event. "The media is on board now with the aging baby boomers. Women are just hitting their stride at 40. But aging is still a stigma." "It's a whole syndrome. In the movie industry, they're casting older guys, who should be cast with women who are over 40, with the 20-year-olds." This perceived gender inequality and double standard about the aging process only serves to exacerbate this experience for many women. "It's a hard position to be single and 39 and in this society. If you were a man, the older you get, the more valuable a commodity you become, whereas with a woman, it's the inverse."

Here Comes The Bride

I was one of the very few people that wasn't with someone. All of a sudden, every single person got up to dance except for me.

The "On A Different Page" property in Chapter V, and the "Mutant Messages" dimension in this chapter, brought attention to how single women feel as their single network of friends diminish. Going to weddings can be emotionally challenging. Being the only single woman attending, or a member of a small minority of single persons in attendance, often highlight the sense of isolation and marginalization. "I've never been self-conscious about that stuff. But now you go, and everyone is with someone. And, I'm like, 'Oh God. . . I'm alone.'"

"I used to love going to weddings, and now I dread them because I hate going alone. It's, once again, the stigma of everyone's married or engaged, and here I am alone, single, again. I'm one of maybe a handful of people versus 20." Various traditions common in wedding celebrations can also make some single women feel that they either "stand out" or are "left out." "At a wedding, it's, 'When is it your turn?' Trying to throw the bouquet directly at me, I felt like I was on display; 'Look how miserable she is.' It sent me into a depression for weeks." "At my cousin's wedding, the rabbi asked, because the bride and groom were soulmates and had found each other in this world, 'I want all of the other married couples to stand and hold hands, and be grateful you have found each other.' I felt so isolated. I just looked around and there were just a few people who are not standing. I thought it was awful and rude. It really bothered me."

For single women, finding a date for a wedding can be an emotionally provocative experience. "I have a wedding coming up and I'm already stressing out about it, because I have to find a date! It would be more fun if I went with someone, so I could dance and have a good time." "It's the stigma from not having that guaranteed date." Not having the option of bringing a date to a wedding evokes anger and resentment for many single women. "Whether you're invited with someone or not is a very big issue for women." "I have friends who will no longer go to weddings by themselves." My girlfriend's getting married and, like a lot of Jewish people, they'll have this huge wedding, but they won't invite you with a date unless you're standing up, or you're living with someone or engaged. I was one of two people that wasn't invited with a date. I'm like, 'For the two people, you couldn't have sucked it up?'"

<div align="center">Going Solo</div>

At my niece's Bat Mitzvah, I felt invisible. I felt like, "She's the single 32-year-old sister," somehow less interesting, because I was alone. I wasn't married, I didn't have kids, so I didn't count.

The dimension of "Going Solo" emphasizes how uncomfortable it feels, for many single women, to attend social engagements as a "solo" guest. When friends who are coupled plan social engagements with one another, some single women express distress at not being included, while others are "uncomfortable" at the thought of being included and feeling like "the lone rider." "There's a stigma when all your married friends are going out for dinner in a big group. Their message to me is, because I'm not dating anyone, I'm not invited, because it's all couples." "I feel uncomfortable when it's a very 'couply' environment; it's hard. It's natural that when people become couples, they tend to socialize more with couples. So, there are certainly times when I feel like being in a relationship with someone would make me fit in better." The preference to attend social events with an intimate partner is largely based on the desire for a comforting and supportive presence. "I loathe going to formal business parties by myself and I can't express to you how much that annoys the shit out of me. I want to have somebody who's with me, supporting me, because I'm shy and nervous enough."

Social gatherings in the singles circuit are designed for the purpose of bringing the singles community together, and introducing individuals to one another. These constructive, yet contrived, events can feel intimidating and humiliating for some who have not had positive experiences at them in the past. "What's terrifying is how you make a connection with someone, how to talk to someone. Do you initiate or do they initiate? It's feeling like you're on display; and whatever decision is going to be made, is going to be made within five minutes. It's how you looked, did you say the right thing." "Going to singles events alone makes me feel like an adolescent again, with all of the insecurities resurfacing. I wonder, 'Why am I putting myself in this situation that makes me feel totally alienated, inadequate, not interesting and not attractive?'"

CHAPTER X

"YOU GO GIRL"

> I spend a lot of time trying to know what I need
> to do to make myself feel OK about where I am.
>
> I've gone through phases where I get pretty low,
> and then I can pick myself up and take myself
> out of them, and thank God for that.

This document, thus far, has conveyed many of the various psychological challenges

facing many single women in their thirties. This category highlights some of the employed

strategies that are used to effectively cope with these challenges. Many strategies utilized have

already been pointed out in the document. In Chapter VII, the "Methods To Meet The Man"

dimension listed several pro-active strategies that many women employ to initiate and participate

in ways to meet men. This often leaves them more open and available to the opportunities that

could help manifest their desire to meet a potential life partner. "The Pros" and "The Ups"

dimensions, of the "The Sine Wave" experience stressed the effectiveness of acknowledging,

appreciating, and using the many advantages and freedoms that singlehood has to offer. The

"Connected And Separate" dimension of the "Free To Be Me" property emphasized the

importance of not giving others the responsibility and power for one's happiness, and being able

to "let go" of what is not in one's control. The "Resiliency and Resolution" dimension of the

"Free To Be Me" experience stressed the powerful impact of recognizing the "silver lining" in all

of life's experiences, and having gratitude for what is abundant. This dimension also

discussed the important capacity to identify and work through feelings directly, rather than dismiss them or judge them negatively. Finally, that dimension also gave life to the concept of "changing the blueprint" to explore options other than just the traditional marriage and children expectation.

With all of these mentioned, additional coping methods were reported or elaborated on, allowing for a more comprehensive inventory of the strategies that are important to convey. The dimensions in this property are: "Nurture, Pamper, And Treat Yourself," pointing out the various means by which women feel nurtured; "Don't Worry Be Happy" refers to some attitudinal and cognitive strategies found useful; "The Power Of Unconditional Love" focuses on the helpfulness of reaching out to supportive significant others; "The Tools That Teach" property delineates how solitude, psychotherapy, and self help tools are helpful strategies used by many women; and the "God and Me Are Partners" shares the impact that having "faith" has for many of these women.

"Nurture, Pamper and Treat Yourself"

> Since I don't have a family, I don't have a child, and I worked in the last ten years, I am entitled to whatever I have. This is what helps me pamper myself a little more. I don't have to feel guilty about it.

This dimension focuses on the actions that many women take which bring them comfort and joy. Learning to take care of themselves often begins with their basic needs. Maintaining a healthy exercise and diet regime is reported as an effective strategy to self care. "I like the endorphin high I get from working out; I read that people who eat healthier, feel better. Right now it's all about me and self-care." "Exercise is very important. It calms me down. I burn up that negative energy. I'm more able to see what really is happening." "I've started to feel better physically and emotionally because I'm not as burnt out as I was from work. I've been doing things like taking herbs, to make me feel more alert and have more energy."

Creative outlets are other means by which many women gain comfort. "My art is my life story. When I can't sleep because I'm feeling very blue, I can do a piece and sleep like a baby. It's a way to release and express, because I'm not good at verbalizing all the time. It's been such a healing force, that's helped me survive a lot of broken heart stories." "Because of my search for meaning, I've thrown myself more into my creative outlets, because it's always immediately gratifying. My art has always benefited me. I've always gotten positive responses."

Many women who are coming off of a difficult time period, as described in the "Ouch, That Hurts" property in Chapter VII, spoke of the need for taking "time off" to recover and heal. "It's called hibernation, and that's when I come home and I treat myself to things. I turn the phone off. I rent romantic movies that are uplifting, make myself nice dinners, and allow myself whatever feeling I'm having." "Sometimes I just need to lay off of the dating for a little while, and avoid things like going to weddings or being around my friends who are married with children--certain things that I know that I need to do as self preservation techniques, until I can be positive and strong again." "I didn't know what I wanted to do with work, or with men for that matter. I clearly needed a real big break from this life. I need to start seeing the big picture. And so I took myself to Asia."

Some women spoke of the effort to find their "center" as a way back to feeling balanced and in control of their lives. "I needed to regroup, and figure out what I was about again, because so much of me was caught up with him." Women utilized many different strategies to achieve this. A couple of examples were spending time reflecting in "a safe haven," or participating in a comforting daily practice. "I go to the beach, because that's my church. The beach straightens me out, and centers me." "I go on long walks."

"Staying busy" is one method of healing that some women report to be helpful, particularly during emotional times when they feel more "fragile." "I generate stuff to do for myself, whether it's fixing up my house, or shopping, I always feel better when I'm busy." "It

helps in that you can actually enjoy things, even without somebody else. It's also a distraction from sitting and getting depressed." Refocusing attention on other meaningful activities can also bring new life into one's present reality. "I'm going to force myself to become comfortable just doing things I want to do, by myself. I'm going to the Chicago Symphony Center alone, and I just became a member of the Art Institute." "I try and fill my life with other things, so that my love life (or lack thereof) is not my sole focus. With fun trips and activities to look forward to, it makes it easier to feel neutral or good about what's going on." The "feeling of contributing and making a difference" through philanthropic participation is something many women spoke of as healing and generative. "I did the AIDS ride, which was with a ton of people, which was also real important to me. I love to support the gay community, and feel real good about that." "I joined a not-for-profit agency and volunteer tutoring kids. It mean a lot to me, and to them."

Developing relationships in which maternal or mentoring skills can be vicariously shared is reported as quite rewarding and meaningful. "My career is a big part of my identity. It's feeling like I'm competent and successful at something. I like the teaching and mentoring aspect of it a lot, which I'm sure, psychologically, has something to do with not having kids." "I've had a lot of that maternal stuff fulfilled by all the youth work I've done."

<div align="center">"Don't Worry, Be Happy"</div>

> I took a very hard look at what I did have going on in my life, and that's what I focused on this past 36th birthday, by getting my friends together and making it about celebration, instead of about where I wasn't: the count your blessings type of thing.

This property unleashes some cognitive shifts and attitudinal strategies that are reported to significantly improve the quality of these women's lives. As mentioned in the "Free To Be Me" category, there are noticeable benefits in choosing to "be present," versus belaboring the past or worrying about the future. "Leaving my past behind was major, because it was consuming me

and not helping me with my present at all." "I'm working on being always very present. This allows me to be more self-expressed and aware of what may be coming up inside of me." "Using resources like inspirational books gives me a sense of peace, by reminding me to be where I am and to try and enjoy where I am. Although I do want to be married some day, I can still just enjoy being here."

The strategy of focusing attention on the present, for single women who desire marriage, takes the focus off of finding the relationship as the dictate and predictor for happiness. "After getting in touch with what I want, and putting it out there, I really believe that I need to take care of myself and feel the best that I can about myself. Waiting for a man to enter my life is not an area I want to spend too much time dwelling on." "It's a bad way to go through life, feeling like, 'Oh my god, when am I going to meet somebody?' That's not productive on any level. A healthier way of dealing with it is saying, 'I cannot redo the past ten years; rather than lament that, this is where I'm at now.' I do have control over the next ten. So, what do I want, and what are some positive things I can do?"

Some women find it helpful to apply this "being present" mentality when they attend single events. By diverging from their former outcome-focused approach, they report enjoying themselves a lot more. "About this goal orientation of going to certain events, I thought about it, and then went to an event and changed my goal scenario and I wound up having a good time and I didn't walk away disappointed." "I realized that the purpose there wasn't to meet a man. My purpose was to go and just meet as many people as possible and have fun." Ironically, taking the focus off of the sole intention to find a life partner is how some women expect that they will find their appropriate mate. "I'm just starting to focus on being happy, whether I have this relationship or not. I think through that is how I will meet someone." "Once I become immersed in just living my life and being happy with it, then I think that will come if it's meant to happen."

Living in the present and taking advantage of the benefits of single life is primary to this way of thinking. "There clearly are advantages to being single. It doesn't mean I wouldn't rather be with somebody, but as long as I'm in this position, I try to take advantage of the things that I can do." "I tell myself to take advantage of being single and enjoy that now, because it's not going to be there later on."

The power of positive thinking is another attitudinal strategy that proves effective for many women. "It's just the way that I want to be in the world. I want to be a positive person and I want that kind of energy." This applies, as well, to how they choose to perceive their aging process and their single status predicament. "Age 40 sounds cooler than 39; being 40 sounds like you're starting over. I'm in a new age category for when I'm in these running races, instead of the upper end." "What comes to the rescue is the positive way of dealing with it. Blaming and being self-critical and self-castigating is not going to help anything. It's more productive to focus my energies in a positive way." A positive attitude was also related to using "fantasy" to conjure up the possibilities that lie ahead. "When I start to feel down about it, I start this process of feeling better about myself and what I have to offer, and just get back into having faith that if that's what I want, it will happen; it just hasn't happened yet." Sometimes I daydream, fantasizing about the man that I would like to be with. That seems to calm it, because it's like eating. I satiate it. It's almost as if it's happened, and then I move on." Some use the "it could be worse" philosophy to turn their former "misfortune" into a benefit. "My mom said it's better to be not married than married to the wrong guy. I've got a positive attitude from that." "Unlike some of my friends, I'm happy that I have developed my own life first. I've accomplished now what I've wanted to."

Finding the humor in one's life circumstances is a coping strategy that many women stressed was crucial is sustaining a feeling of well being. "There's safety in humor about blind

date stories. If it was the worst thing in the world, by the end of the conversation, it's funny

and we're laughing about it."

> One essential element is that part of the coping mechanism that allows there to be a
> lightness and a sense of hope and faith, is humor. It's provided a way that I could get
> through the guy who disappears, or the guy that's gay, or the guy that goes out on a 17-
> hour date with me and then tells me he doesn't want to get involved. I need to be able to
> let those roll off my shoulders and not be devastated by each one of them. I need to look at
> the absurdity, and as long as I can find something funny about it, then it's OK. It makes
> me able to go on to the next dating experience, without carrying this baggage or bitterness
> along. That is my mechanism that allows me to continue on the dating gerbil wheel.

Power Of "Unconditional" Love

> I don't know what life would be like without my friends and family. Their unconditional
> support has been invaluable. They are always there for me.

The "Life Is A Box Of Chocolates" dimension of the "Free To Be Me" category

illustrated how the support network of those women who are successfully navigating their way

through life is of profound importance. Allowing oneself to receive and be nurtured by others is

also a strategy of self care that has crucial significance to the well being of most women. With

the absence of a life partner, the parental unit can sometimes function as the primary nurturing

and support network. "I just feel like my parents are sort of my stabilization, my base, in a way."

"We should be with people who, when we're with them, we feel good about ourselves. My

parents and family tend to be one of the places where I get that."

Acceptance and reassurance from family members about their single status helps to

maintain a healthy perspective. "There's never been any pressure in my family that there's

something wrong with me." "My mom influences me to not worry." "My mom hopes that I find

a wonderful husband, but 80% of my family is happy over the fact that I haven't settled." "I draw

on everything that my parents have instilled in me. They instilled the notion that everything's

going to be OK, because I have the power to make it OK. Nothing can take that away from me.

It's not as if I'm living by the vicissitudes of all sorts of strange little things that are out there. I can make myself better, happier, and more secure."

Feeling this unconditional familial support through times of conflict reminds many women about the possibility for a loving connection with an "other" that can transcend differences and temporary difficulties. "Throughout my whole family, there's an unconditional love there. We use that word because to say that it's unconditional means that you can forgive when something goes wrong. 'I love you unconditionally no matter what you do and no matter what you say to me; it doesn't mean that I'm going to walk away.'"

Many of the women reported the significance of having in their lives non-family members from whom they receive much love and support. For some, this support has reinforced what they have already receiving at home. For the less fortunate, these "unsung heroes" provided an opportunity for essential connections that have helped these women develop a greater sense of self-worth. "Although we were brought up in the projects, there were some great people. Most of all, teachers have always encouraged me to go on and do better." "I really connected with, admired, and got very close to my friends' mothers. They brought out the best in me, and treated me with respect."

> The minister and his wife helped me a lot in high school, when I lived with them. I had stopped believing in God. I never forgot when the minister said to me, "You might feel that God isn't helping you at the moment, but he is, because he's put me here to help you." I thought, "Why can't I choose my own parents?" And he's like, "Well, you can't, but we still love you." They made me feel loved, and calmer.

Enjoying and relying on a friendship network has also been an invaluable coping strategy for single women in their thirties, providing gratifying support for so many. For those who lead satisfying lives, the availability of friends is an extension of the support they've enjoyed at home. It has also offered an alternative support network for those not able to rely on family. "I share more intimacies with my friends than with my family." "I'm single, and I use some of my friends

as a kind of family." "I know that I have made it to where I am right now with the help of my friends." Many women spoke of the importance of choosing their friends carefully and wisely. "I choose a like-minded people, who are not going to look at me and say, 'You need to get married.'" "The key is to surround myself with the people who are really positive for me."

The strategy of cultivating, maintaining, and utilizing the connection with friends serves a number of helpful functions. Having a network of single girlfriends to share activities with brings joy and comfort to many women. "I'm going on a kayaking trip in Fiji in with four girls, to Australia for New Year's Eve, and then to a spa, with six girls, in February." "I don't sit around waiting for a date, because I go out with my friends, and we have a great time."

Being in the "same boat," with other single women in their thirties helps to normalize versus pathologize their single status. It also helps to lower their sense of isolation in the experience. "It does normalize my life, because I'm not the only person that's doing it. We're still in the minority, but we have each other for support. We're all dealing with the same situation, and just dealing with it together, which makes it easier." "I have other girlfriends that are my age that are single, which is nice, because in numbers there is strength. So I'm not a loser, and there are a lot of people who are single and 31, too!"

Securing an outlet to discuss the experiences of being single is an important function that these relationships provide. "My friends and I will sit around and bullshit until the cows come home, philosophizing on why it is that we're single. We support and commiserate together." "I'm so conscious of what I talk about with other single women. We usually talk about wanting the partner, our frustrations and disappointments, the hope and the helplessness; we discuss some apprehension in terms of what lies in our future." The mutual emotional support that single women can offer each other as they navigate through a "married world," proves invaluable for many. "I get a lot of support from my single friends. We tell each other, "Don't forget, you're

the gift. We remind each other of that all the time." "We all root for each other, and uplift one another."

> When one of us is going out on a date we'll call and leave a message with a hilarious poem that we make up. We make each other laugh about it, and then after the date, we have to report in. It's like a game, because you can immediately offload any bad feelings that you have, or you can share the fun if it's good. It makes us feel a little bit less alone. It adds an element of lightness to it that is critical in being able to get through this.

When the "goin' gets tough," friendships can also serve the function of "keeping one another in check." "I have a friend who is obsessed with meeting someone. It monopolizes every conversation we have. Finally, I said to her, 'You need to deal, because it's hard to be around you if this is going to be all-consuming, because there's more to life." "During times that are hard, there are friends who I've been able to say, 'What I'm going to need from you is for you to remind me of the conversation we had two days ago, when we were so excited about all these good things and possibilities; remind me of how happy I was when I wasn't attached to anybody, not depressed about something not working.'"

Having male friendships that are nurturing is also important to many women. "It's free. It's no holds barred. I don't have to think about whether I'm romantically interested. They can just be my friends." "I have a lot of guy friends; maybe in a certain respect it satisfies a little bit of that need for male companionship." Some of the women relayed the importance of the relationships they have with gay male friends. "It's the best of both worlds, they have the feminine side that can relate to you, and the masculine side that makes it feel good to have a close man around." "He's my best friend, and makes this much easier on me; because we really do have such an intimate relationship, just without the sexual stuff."

<u>Tools That Teach</u>

> I've finally come to realize that I am a gift. How I got there? Therapy, meditation; I've read the self help books about feeling good about yourself; positive thinking, everything you can imagine, I've tried.

The way in which women of their thirties come to know, love, and trust themselves is through various means of "Tools That Teach." The dimensions within this property are: "Solace In Solitude," which highlights the benefits of the years spent single that provided many women the time alone, teaching them much more about themselves; "The Therapy Connection" relays the tremendous learning and support, that many single women have derived through seeking therapeutic assistance; and "Self help Solutions" compiles many of other tools that women report using, which have been of significant help to them.

Solace in Solitude

In the confines of my own space, I came to know and understand myself.

One of the advantages mentioned in the "Pros" dimension of the "Sine Wave" was the opportunity for solitude which is inherently more available while leading a single lifestyle. This was one of the concepts that garnered credit for helping incorporate the ability to be "Connected and Separate" in the "Free To Be Me" experience. This first dimension reinforces how the opportunity for solitude can aid one's development in coming to grips with themselves. "I'm pretty in touch with myself, which definitely comes from being single for so long. I just have spent a lot of time with myself, allowing me to work through a lot." "I enjoy being myself. I enjoy my own company. I like doing things by myself, and I think those desires just kept getting stronger and stronger."

Some women recalled their conscious decision to take time off from dating in order to create time for inward reflection. "When I basically took that long hiatus of dating and seeing anyone, I had no choice but to be alone and to think." "I promised myself I would not date for one year. It was probably the most growing pains I've ever had to go through in my life. But, after that, I've never been more independent. All of a sudden, it was, 'I choose you in my life. I don't need you, I want you.'" After this voluntary or involuntary time of solitude, many women

look back with gratitude for the time to learn and enjoy being with themselves. "I'm not afraid any more to be alone because I am fine. I don't feel lonely." "Once that year was up of consciously deciding not to date, I felt an absolute freedom to be with myself. It was the most wonderful kind of feeling in the world."

The Therapy Connection

> Therapy was my school of life. I learned about looking at my past more closely, and saw how it affects the present. I challenged old beliefs that were distorted and not working. Most of all, I came to value myself, and that's amazing.

Another means through which significant numbers of women in their thirties are coming to know and value themselves is through a psychotherapeutic process. The majority of the women who participated in this study have chosen this process as a medium for learning and growth. Most of these women entered therapy as they approached thirty or after. "I started going to right before the time that I was 30." "I stepped in after 30 and was in it for six years."

Several precipitants triggered the decision to pursue this avenue of self help. Some women entered the process with an acute degree of anxiety and depressive related symptomotology. "What it boils down to is I wasn't feeling that happy or that satisfied with my life." "Everything felt bleak and I felt so awful inside. I was staying at a friend's house. I had nothing to look forward to. I had to do something, and make changes. I knew I couldn't do it myself and I knew I needed help."

Other women seek therapy because of feeling "out of touch" with themselves. Some attributed this to feeling overwhelmed and distracted by the plethora of tasks demanded of them. This often leads to feeling inundated with the frustration and anxiety implicit in the "Late Bloomer" and "Wake Up Call" properties of Chapter V. From this sense of detachment from self, therapy is one means through which they try to regain a connection to themselves. "I went into therapy because medical school completely stunted me in terms of learning about myself.

Internship was so overwhelming that I never had time to myself. Going to therapy was an opportunity to kind of sit back and learn about myself again."

Unresolved childhood and familial issues are often presenting problems that women in their thirties bring into the treatment process. "My mom just wasn't there. This is why I had years of therapy, because my objective was to go on." "I felt guilt-ridden about being sexually abused as a child, that somehow I had caused this to happen; for years, I had totally got that out of my mind. Then I started having these dreams. Therapy was a way to deal with it."

Relationship issues with men are frequently the catalyst motivating women in their thirties to seek assistance from a therapist. Sometimes the nature of their presenting difficulty is having few, if any, satisfying romantic relationship experiences. "The reason I started going to therapy was because of the fact that I hadn't had any long term relationships." When women are currently involved in a relationship that is a struggle, they often go into a treatment process to better understand their experience in the context of their relationship matrix. "He kept pressuring me to get married. I was stuck and I thought it might be worthwhile to talk to somebody." "I went to Al-anon to deal with the problems with my boyfriend of three years."

The frustration, confusion, and challenges of singlehood can also spur women to seek counsel and support. "Working toward healthy living was what made me seek therapy when I was 29. I was single then, too, but it didn't carry the same intensity or focus as it does now in therapy at age 36." "A lot of my time in therapy is spent discussing my singlehood. I spend so much time trying to keep balanced, talking through each relationship or each date; to verbally explore those things that I don't want to do with my friends; to really examine my own actions, to explore what was reality, what were the signs here that things weren't going well."

A very common precipitant motivating women to seek therapy is when a significant relationship ends. The need for support and counsel intensifies as they try to recover from this painful time. "The first time I got dumped, that is what got me into therapy. I freaked out and

just couldn't deal." After every major breakup, I would see a therapist for a couple months, because I would need to talk it through and then would feel much more better about myself." At times, women's therapeutic experience can lead them toward greater clarity about the decision to terminate a relationship, providing a transitional safe haven for them to affirm their capacity and resiliency. "My therapy gave me the strength to break up with him and to go on."

Many women use the interim between the ending of one relationship and the start of the next, to do a lot of important individual therapeutic work. The benefits of this include getting back in touch with who they are independent from a love attachment, and increasing their insight into faulty relationship patterns. "Because I said I wouldn't date, I was panicked and depressed. I stood there going, 'Now what? I don't know what I like.' All of a sudden, no one is there. I was lost." "The reason that I got into therapy is that I needed to find out why I allowed a man who was extremely ordinary to get up into my psyche like that. I just couldn't believe that that kind of thing could happen to me, that I really lost control over reality."

The women in this study who have been or who are presently involved in a therapeutic process, found it be a powerful and personally rewarding experience. "Therapy was the biggest gift in my life." "Even though I was resistant at first, I'm such a fan of it now. I think everyone should do it!" "I can't say enough of how helpful it was, and is." "I certainly understand myself better and it helped me define my view of what's important to me." The benefits they derived from therapy are numerous. From the start, the process gives way to formerly suppressed and repressed feelings. "I had these bottled up emotions that would come out in an extreme, inappropriate way. Therapy helped me locate and express my anger. Once I started getting rid of the layers, I came to know more about myself." "Sometimes therapy is just a venting mechanism where I've just had too many bad dates, and too many jolts."

From the expression and analysis of previously uncharted psychological territory, insight develops about how it came to be that one lost her voice and sense of self along the way. "As a

young kid, I was very good at following my gut. But somewhere in there, it got lost, by the external forces and environmental situations, maybe." A traumatic event in childhood, triggering a shaky ground of parental support to provide the safety and nurturing a child needs, can be the catalyst for a young girl losing her connection to herself. "My parents got divorced when I was nine; this is probably where I stopped following my gut. My whole security crumbled. Everything that I knew disappeared, including the love and attention." When there is parental intolerance and prohibition of a child's authentic thoughts and feelings, young girls can be steered away from their own instincts. "My father was raised in a very strict Catholic family where you couldn't show anger. The message was, 'I'm the father. Get over it. You speak when you're spoken to.' That's how it was." "My mother is an absolute fix-it kind of person, and very narcissistic. Every time I had an opinion, she alters it and argued with me. After all that, repeatedly, I just started backing down."

Many women who reflect on how, when, and why they became disassociated from their authentic experience, remember it to be a coping strategy to avoid anticipatory conflict and gain approval with idealized parental figures. "I didn't want to create an argument, an outburst of conflict with my dad, mostly." "You know yourself as a little child, but then you pick up on what would please your parents. I remember playing sports, not necessarily something that I would have chosen to do, but something that I watched my father smile over." Consistent lack of parental mirroring and affirmation instills, for many women, a basic disconnect and distrust from their own inclinations and judgments. "My mom would say I was being too picky, I expect someone to be perfect. So, I would doubt myself and my instincts and what I wanted, thinking maybe I was being unrealistic or idealistic. She influenced the way I was thinking and contributed to myself doubting my gut instincts."

Some women think that societal gender bias and inequality helps to create women's lack of confidence. "When girls hit the teenage years, their self-esteem plummets. It could be the way

we're treated in society. There aren't as many role models of strong, independent women. You're supposed to be married with a family, whereas the boy is given responsibility to be the one that's competitive, strong and secure." "Being a girl, when you're younger, you go into a classroom, and unless you make yourself a force, they're not going to call on you."

Therapy, for single women in their thirties, promotes greater understanding of the connections between past unresolved family of origin issues and current dissatisfaction with love interest relationships. "I think everything stems from your childhood, and all of that was brought up in therapy." Identifying, articulating, and developing insight into familial and present-day patterns is an important part of the healing process. "I'm forced to confront these issues that just don't seem to go away." "Therapy helped me see what was really going on, and what I was really feeling." Women in their thirties have often worked at this process long and hard enough to have made significant progress at more definitively understanding these patterns. "I probably latched on to any man that came along due to escaping worrying about whether my parents would make it." "I ended up understanding that I was allowing external forces to impact the way I felt, understanding more about some skewed ideas about relationships, what men should be, and about judgments I had about the world; impacting how I was relating and having difficulties with long term appropriate relationships." "Therapy helped me understand how my father not being around made me get into patterns, seeking men who were not fulfilling me emotionally, and who were absent and unavailable, the way my father always has been, understanding that my seeking love from these men had to do with the fact that I didn't have that love inside myself for me."

An important part of the treatment experience for single women in their thirties, is their growing understanding of the function of their behavior. "A lot of my life I've spent in denial. If I don't think about it, it doesn't exist. That was my way of dealing with problems, or not dealing with them." "I've always been a pleaser. I've realized in therapy that it was a defense mechanism, because of wanting to be liked and get along with everyone." Through productive

therapeutic work, women come to see and evaluate the consequences that come from their various behaviors, dispositions, and defenses. "What would ultimately happen was that I would be pleasing everyone else, but then I would be suffering."

Adaptive and healthier behavioral changes often emerge for women from the learning derived from their introspective work. Some women learn what they could have done differently in former relationships, helping to inform their choices and actions in the future. "Therapy functions with the important relationships as a way to look at what happened to be able to evaluate my actions and his actions, mostly for future reference." In becoming more individuated, through a therapeutic process, many women report growing separate enough to not personalize others' behaviors, and to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs more directly. "I learned not to analyze everything, to really take things for face value and set your boundaries and really understand that it's not about you." "If you don't tell somebody what you need, they don't know. I learned that in my therapy and that helped me be a little bit more verbal."

Single women in this age cohort who relay a positive experience in individual therapy noted the relationship with their therapist to be a crucial factor in the development of this healing and strengthening process. "She's like a sister, mother, grandmother, aunt, whatever you want, for a good seven years." "It was from her that I got the affirmation that I say, and every time I say it, it's like she's sitting on my shoulder." For many women, their therapeutic relationship offers a holding environment to safely explore conflicts and regulate affect states. "I like to go for a checkup under the hood, as I call it." "It helps to talk to someone about my need to focus more on my needs, my wants, my desires, vs. what that other person was telling me." "I look forward to going to my group therapy. It's really nice to have a group of people who sincerely care about you. It makes it a lot less lonely." Many women reported feeling mirrored, affirmed, and validated by their therapist. "I have always questioned certain things about my strength, or

my non-conformity. Sometimes those put you on the outside of the traditional world, and every now and again you need to get confirmed that it's real OK to be there." "My whole life, I thought I had to give to be loved. But my therapist is the one who got me to believe that, just being who I am, is the gift. To have her support, and knowing that no matter what I did or what happened, I could be myself, and she still loved me, no matter what, there was this unconditional love from her. To feel that is really great."

Self Help Solutions

I'm open to lots of ways to take care of myself. . . meditation, books, tapes.

In lieu of, or as an adjunct to therapy, single women in their thirties use many self help methods that foster self reflection and enlightenment. Reading is a widely used tool, from which many women gain knowledge and comfort. "I started reading certain books that really helped me get through a lot." "Self help books remind me to trust my intuition. I like to understand me, really how I feel, how I work." Books that focus on "spirituality" are particularly powerful in touching some women's lives. "Reading spiritual books helped me really put things into perspective, teaching me about relinquishing control, and of control that you do have over your life." "I like to read spiritual books. They help me believe in myself, giving me a sense of security. Through them I've gained more of an understanding and acceptance of who I am."

Self help programs and workshops can also assist women in their search of self and wish for a greater sense of empowerment. "I did every chapter every week. That helped me a lot; it takes you through childhood memories, and that's how I came to understanding my mother, and myself." "This course I took was about looking back, and asking where this came from. I got a lot out of my grief with my brother; it also gave me space to think about what my ideal relationship is and how am I going to turn that possibility into reality? It definitely made me more aware of what of my past is going into this."

Journaling is another self help method women use as they journey on the road to self-discovery. "Writing in my journal really made me work through old baggage, and come to terms with why I had certain ideas." "It's helped me get to areas and blocks that are much deeper than the surface, that you really need to spend time to get there and let them out." "Journaling definitely helps me face myself and stay grounded."

Methods such as meditative practice, affirmations, and the viewing of television shows dedicated to self awareness, growth, and healing, also prove helpful to many women in their thirties. "This book has great little meditation practices." "I have these self-esteem tapes that I listen to, when I start to feel not as good about myself, or not as self-confident." "I go on walks every day, and I say the same affirmation over and over again." "I'm a big Oprah fan."

God & Me Are Partners

Many of these women in their thirties, spoke of their exploration of matters of "spirituality," as assisting them in reflecting about themselves and their single status. Many contended that their belief and connection to some form of spirituality has created the faith that they will find a life partner, and the knowing that they can continue a productive and rewarding life in the event that they remain single.

Many of the women gave voice to the "spiritual" dimension within themselves. "Spirituality, to me, is the belief in myself. I believe that God is in everyone, that we're all connected." "I'm a very spiritual person. I believe in all that yin-yang stuff, positive thinking, that things happen for a reason, and you're where you're supposed to be." For many of the well-functioning women, a belief in some form of a "higher power" accompanied their faith in themselves. "My faith that all will be OK comes from having a close and strong personal relationship with God." "I have great faith in the universe. You can call it God. I call it the universe, and a higher power."

The process of this "partnership" entails that, first, the individual takes responsibility for identifying what is desired, doing whatever is in the individual's control to bring about its fruition. That is followed by a relinquishing of this control, "to the universe," for assistance. "I believe in the interconnection between timing and intuition--asking for what you want, and believing it will come, and being patient. I've learned this and it brings me complete comfort." "If you put an effort to do the best that you can, I believe that the universe takes care of you."

Many women in the study applied this faith of a partnership between themselves and a "higher power," to their perceptions and dealings with their single status. For starters, they expressed applying the same faith to finding their lifetime partner as they have with other life goals and desires that have come to fruition. "I want marriage to happen, and since I've always been able to get everything else in my life, why not this, some day?" "My faith in finding someone comes from the notion that if I have a goal, I've usually attained it. So, why should this be any different?" "Timing has ruled everything in my life, and that has created a natural trust that things will be OK somehow."

Some women described distinct practices aimed at and dedicated to the desire to find someone special. "Right before I go on the blind date, I just keep saying to myself, 'I am beautiful and a gift, and my soulmate recognizes it. I release it to the universe.' I'm telling you, that has been my biggest savior, this affirmation." "In terms of wanting the right man in my life, I wrote down what I wanted. There's nothing I can do now but believe he's going to come some day." "If I want that family, I've got to envision that as my next step. So I practice imagining myself with a family and a husband."

A common appendage to faith in a "higher power" is the idea of "fate" and "destiny" playing a role in effecting life events, including marital status. Part of one's capacity to accept the current state of affairs of being single is the trust in a force outside of oneself. "I think of it almost as it's a fate. It's something that's just meant to happen." "I do have a sense of faith that

everything that's meant to happen, happens for a reason, and I'm where I'm meant to be, where I am right now." There is also a relinquishing of control and a reliance on "fate," about the biological clock issue of children as well. "Kids.....I don't allow it to be a fear, because if I'm meant to have them, I will. If I'm not, I won't; there are certain things I don't have any control over." "If God means me to have kids, they will be here. Otherwise I will be adopting; or some way, they will be in my life."

These women reported reaping significant psychological rewards from their dedicated beliefs and practices of a spiritual nature. "I found that spirituality really struck a chord with me. Even if things are all over the place, just having that faith makes a huge difference. I feel safe and secure." "When my intention and spirit are at one, this creates a lot more peace and tranquility for me." "Going through my whole life process, if I didn't have faith in something, I wouldn't be alive today."

CHAPTER XI

LESSONS LEARNED

> I've learned a lot about what does and doesn't
> work in my relationships with men, and what
> helps me take care of myself along the way.

Most of the participants in this study spoke at length about the lessons that they have

learned in their lives as single women. Many of them acknowledge and appreciate the

opportunity for learning through any life predicament. "Life is a continuous learning process and

journey. I've been learning so much." "Even with this study, I think we could all learn

something."

The dimensions inherent in the "Lessons Learned" property, are: "Me, Myself, and I,"

which conveys the lessons women have learned about themselves. The primary lesson has been

to recognize their personal power and responsibility for creating and preserving their own

happiness; "Necessary Ingredients" includes the significant components that many women have

identified as necessary in creating a loving and long lasting intimate relationship.

Me, Myself, and I

> I suddenly have come to realize that I am the gift. I don't have to control it or continue to
> believe that if I give more, if I do more, maybe he'll like me. I'm the gift as I am, and
> that's the true lesson.

This dimension calls forth the learning about self that occurs for single women in their

thirties. Data analysis revealed that once single women enter their thirties, they express a quest

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for self knowledge. "I want this decade to be about really asking myself, 'Who am I?' and, 'What is it that I want to do and accomplish?'" During this journey of self-discovery, many women become more mindful of self, and of what they deem to be most authentically important to them. "I started evaluating what I wanted to do career-wise, what do I want to be when I grow up." "I'm on this quest to learn about myself." During the process of focusing on themselves, their knowledge of self, love of self, and trust of self become enhanced. They come to know themselves in a new, richer, and more expansive way. "I know myself a lot better now. . .what my buttons are, what affects different things in my decision making." "I'm much stronger than I was when I was in my twenties, emotionally and physically."

As single women in their thirties come to know themselves in a deeper and more authentic way--fostered by the aforementioned "Tools That Teach" methods-- they more easily define what it is that they want for themselves. "Being in my thirties, I know myself better and am real clear about what I want and what I need." "I feel like once we reach our thirties, there's something that we're seeking; perhaps depth, less judgment, more understanding of what occurs around us and what we want for ourselves." More than ever, women of this age begin to appreciate the importance of being and remaining true to oneself. "My intentions and what I'm committed to is to be self-expressed and to be myself." "I want to feel like I can just do what I want to do that expresses me."

As stated in the "Connected and Separate" dimension in Chapter VIII, and through the "Tools That Teach" and the "Dating Gerbil Wheel" experiences, women's most pronounced lesson seemed to be one of self-responsibility. Many come to learn this infinite piece of wisdom from their intimate relationship experiences and from their time in solitude as a single person. Many of their accounts recalled a time when they expected or hoped that the presence of a man in their life would "complete" them and would provide the main sources of happiness and well being. "Not every man you meet is going to end up being Mr. Right, that's going to take you

away from, what I called my life of drudgery." "I always looked for the guy that was going to make me feel wonderful."

Many eventually learn the lesson that the power to affect one's life does come from within. "I have to change myself. Nobody will change me." "I believe that you need to love yourself and not look for someone else to fill that in you. When you do, someone is going to love you back. That's been a big learning process for me." Many single women have learned that taking responsibility for a partner, in an effort to "change" or "fix" them, does not work, either. "I have to watch that part of my nature to take on someone's problems and try and solve them for them, because I can see very clearly now that they can solve their own problems." "I no longer think I can fix them. I've been down that road and I don't choose to go down again."

As the "Therapy Connection" demonstrated in Chapter X, identifying unhealthy dynamics in one's family of origin and how the residual emotional effects have played out in romantic relationships offer important lessons as well. Once these connections have been understood and worked through, some have learned about the benefit of letting go of the past. "If you are 30 and single, it's time to deal with the issues and then to really just let go. If you are alive and breathing and can take care of yourself, you need to let go of the pain and anxieties."

From this place of self-responsibility, women develop a stronger foundation from which to believe and care for themselves in a loving and compassionate way. "I've learned the idea of just being a little kinder to yourself, and realizing that when you look in the mirror, you don't always see the potential. You also need to believe in the people who believe in you." In addition, many single women have learned to trust their judgment in the dating arena. "I've learned to trust what your gut is telling you. When I feel that something isn't right, it isn't right. If you feel like something is a little bit strange, it is."

> Never ignore your intuitions. If every part of your intuition is telling you that this is not going to work out, if you're compromising yourself all the time, don't ignore it. If there's a pattern that you see and you're thinking to yourself, "I should leave this before I get so

miserable," then do it. Chances are you're picking up something else on a level that you're not quite ready to hear, but at the same time, it's letting you know it's there. There is doubt and there's a reason for it, and give yourself a lot of credit, because it's the cliché, "You deserve more."

"The Necessary Ingredients"

I believe that the older people are, the better they know themselves, having a better idea about what it takes to make relationships work.

The "Keepers and Tweeners" property in Chapter VII noted desirable male traits and relationship functions which many single women in their thirties find appealing. Throughout the years in the "Dating Gerbil Wheel," women also learn a great deal about what they deem to be the essential elements, which create and nurture a good relationship. Some of the participants began talking about this by expressing the important lesson of slowing down the dating process in order to get to know someone. They believe that this approach can prevent the sexual interaction from clouding or distorting the overall picture. "I'm not going to sleep with a guy on the first five dates. I would love to, but will not any more, until I feel that I'm in a relationship, and I know that all good things take time." "When it's that strong so fast, too, it burns out." "Go slowly. Don't have sex immediately, because it just panics people. If you dip your toe in the water and go slower, you'll know a little bit more about what they're made of, and won't have as much fear." Many women enforce this lesson after gaining the realization that sex isn't necessarily equated with love. "Jumping into a sexual relationship before the emotional connection is there is not advisable. It doesn't work." "I can now deal with the physical stuff waiting. I used to assume that the physical stuff was equated with being in love, and it wasn't. It may have been infatuation or lust." "Love isn't lust. Just because someone wants to go to bed with you and wants you as an object of desire, doesn't necessarily mean that they will take good care of you. I've come to learn that I should get the love first and then head into lust, looking for love and kindness rather than physical attraction."

For single women in their thirties who desire marriage and children, it is common to have learned more about what they look for in a partner. They are intentional about their choices, and are less likely to continue to date someone unless it promises some potential for a long lasting relationship. "It's a different ball game now. I won't get involved with anyone with whom I don't feel potential." "I have to feel excited and that there's potential for it to work."

Some women have learned that choosing a partner within one's culture or religious affiliation can foster greater ease and commonality. "I have to stop dating men who aren't Jewish. With the first one, it was a significant reason for the breakup, and the second one broke up with me because of it." "I started dating a number of people who were not of my faith. Now, I would not do that, because it's harder to not have that to share."

Women who participated in the study also shared their acquired knowledge about the degree of "work" and commitment it takes to make a relationship succeed. Some women have felt their expectations of the past to have been "unrealistic." "Years ago, if I didn't get what I wanted, it was like, 'See ya; out of here.' I've realized that even though you can't change someone, sometimes you can break through barriers through working on the relationship instead of automatically booking." "I don't think, any more, that it's going to be a scene from a movie where everything's out of focus and there's beautiful music playing and you're, like, tromping through the meadow. I think you'll meet somebody and there will be a lot of good things about them, but there will be issues and problems you'll need to work through."

Part of the "work" of positive relationship building that many single women have come to understand, is learning to directly and authentically communicate. This starts from the beginning stages of a relationship, in fostering the ability to get to know each other. "Any man can come up to me and boast about his accomplishments. My question is, 'Who are you?'" "I remember thinking, 'I have no idea what men think.' There are gender differences, but now I

think what's important is that fundamentally we're all the same. What they think could be just what I think, but you never know unless you discuss it."

Many women have learned from their past experience of withholding their feelings from their partner. The hesitation to self-disclose is often founded in their fear of retribution or rejection. "I found myself back in the same rut, where I wasn't really honest about my feelings or saying what I really wanted, for fear that he would walk away and reject me." "Part of the reason why I couldn't voice myself was this fear that if I did say what I thought, that he would disappear." Many women have learned that when they haven't communicated directly with their partners, their feelings would eventually be covertly expressed. "Because I didn't really know how to express myself, I would just explode in anger a lot of times."

Through this learning process, women begin to implement new ways of thinking about communicating with a future partner. Many stated their intention to more clearly and overtly communicate their thoughts, feelings, and desires. "I have to express myself and tell them how I feel, not just expect them to figure it out." "I just talked to someone with a very interesting opinion, which was to tell men straight, before anything starts, what I want in my life--that I want to have a family and I want to have children, that I am not just wanting a baby and a sperm bank. I want to have a partner."

Lessons learned regarding communication skills that foster better conflict resolution were also mentioned by some of the women interviewed. Paying attention to the framing and timing of messages were two factors cited which were thought to be "necessary ingredients" in dealing with conflict more effectively. "I learned to communicate what's really bothering you, and doing it in a positive way because he'll listen that way, as opposed to just shutting down." "We learned to work things out in a productive way. We didn't have angry discussions. I would bring it up when the time was right." The importance of deciphering what is worth negotiating was another lesson learned. "The little stuff, like picking up his clothes, is not worth fighting over. If he's

true blue, salt of the earth, then pick your battles. You must decide what's worth discussing, and when to just let it go."

Some women discussed having learned not to stereotype all men, based on their past experiences. "Until recently, I haven't made any solid friendships with men. But I've gotten to know some men at work who are really cool guys. A bell went off saying, 'Treat him like a nice person, just like you would treat anyone, and he might surprise you.' And you know, they do!"

Another lesson is watching for the tendency to become too self focused or set in their ways. "Don't get so caught up in your life and in you, that you don't realize that there's somebody else." "You have to be careful that you don't become selfish, because you're used to only taking care of yourself and not considering anyone else." Learning to listen and become more attuned to their partner's reality was of stated importance. "You have to listen to what the other person is saying and to what's bothering them, not looking to see what you get out of it."

Coming from a position of acceptance rather than unyielding judgment was believed to be another "necessary ingredient" for a healthy relationship. "You can't change anyone. You've got to accept them as they are and accept their good and bad." Former idealistic and unrealistic fantasies of finding "perfection" in a partnership, for some, have been eventually discarded. This presumes the imperfection in us all. "You've got to be mindful of the mistakes that he's going to make, and that the man in your life might be going through similar problems as you." "It's another human being and nothing and nobody is perfect." With greater acceptance can come a greater level of patience. "I've learned patience too: not to expect somebody to know or do it my way." "I'm being a much more patient person and not trying to jump all over someone."

As the "Connected and Separate" dimension illustrated in Chapter VIII, developing healthy and appropriate boundaries is deemed a crucial component to sustain a respectful and satisfying relationship. Some of this learning is rooted in past experience, when there has been a "loss" of self. "In my past experiences, the lesson I learned is that I fall into codependency. I

become very dependent, fear rejection, and want to be wanted. I often give up what I want to do. Then, I feel more disempowered from that, and I start resenting it." "I've always been so wrapped in the guy's world. Finally, I think I'm learning about boundaries that work." This lesson included the realization that one does not have power to control an "other." "Trying to impose certain feelings on a relationship just doesn't work." "Having a partnership is not controlling each other. It's live and let live, but at the same time, we can live together."

From these lessons, a more profound understanding of the concept of mutuality arises. "I really learned that I have no control over the relationship. I can do part of the work, but the other person has to do part of the work. I cannot force the situation to happen." "Both people are mutually responsible for the success or demise of the relationship." "Now I feel I've made more room for differences. I'm going to pursue my yoga. If the person chooses to do it, fine. If not, that's OK, too." A related ingredient, also mentioned in the "Keepers and Tweeners" property in Chapter VII, is the importance of equality within a relationship. Problem solving and the act of giving, for example, were thought to deserve equal distribution of responsibility. "At this stage in my life, I don't want to be the sole problem-solver. I need to find some level of equality." "My problem, in the past, has been that I've been the one giving. I'm learning that I don't need to be doing that, too early, too soon, too much."

What naturally develops for many women is a reluctance for settling for less than what they have come to value and desire in a committed relationship. "I'm not really willing to settle at all. If I can't find a soul mate, it's not worth it." "The biggest lesson is that I'm not going to settle. If it takes me five more years to find somebody, so be it." "I want to find someone who is well suited to me. So, I'm not going to settle for just being married."

CHAPTER XII

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The participants in this study described a rich and multi-faceted account of their experience of singlehood in their thirties. They were all forthcoming about the variations of their experience, and about the ways in which they perceive and navigate their lives as single women. The central finding in this research was the emergence of three distinct groups of women who expressed variation in the degree to which their single status causes disruption in their lives.

Most of the participants relayed their recognition of the cultural expectations for women to be married, with children, in their thirties. Many of them voiced the various circumstances in which they felt their single status to be a stigma, as a result of this societal mandate to marry. However, the degree to which external influences and their single status affected their experience of self, and the quality of their lives, was varied. While some are struggling with their single status much more acutely than they did in their twenties, others are not emotionally rattled by its presence, due to a more defined sense of self. Regardless of this variation, all of them shared their experiential lessons about themselves and about the relationship they seek. They also reported an array of strategies that help them cope more effectively with the challenges of singlehood in their thirties.

The major categories of "The Experience of Never-married Women in their Thirties" are: (1) Time Warp; (2) Interpersonal Dynamics; (3) The Dating Gerbil Wheel; (4) "How Does It Feel"; (5) Status or Stigma; (6) "You Go Girl"; (7) Lessons Learned.

"Time Warp" describes the passing of time, which motivated many women to review their past and current expectations of themselves and their lives in their thirties. Most of the participants assumed they would have been "Settled By Thirty," and all of them continued to desire this for themselves. As single women, they have also been doing their "Strong Woman Number," learning to become self-sufficient emotionally and financially. These expectations were, in part, influenced by "Potent Messages" having to do with cultural, ethnic, and familial dictates, identifications with their mothers and sisters, and parental role modeling.

Some women attribute their single status to being a "late bloomer," as far as their social and sexual development. This was reported to be influenced by constitutional tendencies, birth order and parental messages, and academic and professional demands. As a result of the expectation of marriage and children not having come to fruition, many women feel a "Wake Up Call," which increases their anxiety over not having garnered this desired goal, and creates a more pressing urgency to acquire it.

The second major category of experience, "Interpersonal Dynamics," underscores the impact that singlehood has had on many of these women's experiences, in relationship with others in their lives. In the family setting, many women implied that their single status has kept them in a childlike position, without the respect for their independence and worth as a single adult. For others, their single status has spurred the familial assumption of their increased availability, serving as one catalyst for their caretaking role within the family system. As women remain single into their thirties, many grow to feel "On A Different Page" than their friends, who have moved into a marital and family lifestyle. This often elicits "mutual envy" concerning the perceived advantages and disadvantages of singlehood and married life. With the transformation and sometimes loss of the single friendship network, many single women are faced with themselves more than ever before, having to find other internal and external supportive resources.

The third major category of experience concerns the "Dating Gerbil Wheel." This describes women's experience in the dating field. Most of the participants conveyed the challenge explicit in meeting men in one's thirties. Some of the variables reported to account for this are: the "Shrinking Talent Pool" of men available, the disinterest in many of the "awkward" and "contrived" ways of meeting men, and the cumulative weariness from continuing efforts over time. Many women are frustrated with the process they describe as a "Dating Game," in which there is a hesitation to convey authentic intentions and desires, for fear that it will "scare him off," or that it will give him the "upper hand."

From years of experience on the dating field, many women have come to identify male traits which distinguish the "Keepers" from the "Tweeners:" those who are appealing to women as long term prospective partners from those who are not. Many of the desirable traits include: physical attraction, emotional availability, consideration, intellectual stimulation, good sense of humor, and trustworthiness. The function of the relationship was also said to be important. Functions deemed meaningful to many women included companionship, household helper, financial partner or primary provider, and nurturing "lover." The behavioral traits identified as undesirable included being self-involved, uncommunicative, unreliable, critical, possessive, needy, dishonest, and non-committal.

Many of the participants also spoke a great deal about the various emotional challenges they experienced during and after some of their more significant relationships with men. Some experienced "heartbreak," over the loss of someone they cared for deeply. Others felt wounded and traumatized, when they felt rejected and abandoned. A common frustration revolved around many of the women's struggle with body image from both an internal perspective and an external one, as they experienced feeling judged and criticized in the dating arena. Many attributed this to cultural mores determining what women are supposed to look like.

The fourth category of experience explored the variation, in response to the question, "How Does It Feel?" as it applied to their single status. Three groups emerged, which represented the range of affective and perceptual experiences for single women in their singlehood in their thirties. The "Sinkhole" property described the experience of women struggling with their single status most acutely. They conveyed an overall state of despair, often flooded with feelings of discouragement, deprivation, powerlessness, self-doubt, depletion, fear, and depression. Many of these women found themselves alone and isolated in their experience, reluctant to share their distress with others, in part due to the lack of familial and peer group supports available. Furthermore, they are more likely to berate themselves for their single status, and for the feelings it evokes within them. These women do not convey a positive sense of self, and tend to attribute most of their unhappiness to their unmarried status.

The "Sine Wave" property was used to characterize the experience of most of the participants in the study, who convey the erratic "Ups" and "Downs" in dealing with their single status. The primary advantage of singlehood was identified as offering the discretionary time available for solitude, self reflection, quality time with significant others, financial freedom, etc. Each woman emphasized her appreciation for the freedom to think and do for herself. The disadvantages mentioned included: periodic bouts of loneliness, the absence of emotional and sexual intimacy, getting "set" in one's ways, fearful anticipation of approaching 40. During the "good times" of singlehood, women in the "Sine Wave" report feeling a sense of well being about themselves, enjoying their lives, and having faith in future opportunities to meet a partner some day. Successful activity in the dating arena is given much credit for eliciting this phase of the cycle. In addition, support from others and professional satisfaction also help to improve the quality of their lives. The "down" periods are characterized by increased loneliness, lethargy, anxiety about the unknown future, and bouts with depressive symptomotology. Precipitants to these "down" periods are comprised of wavering self-worth, disappointment in the dating field,

negative judgment about their single status from others, hormonal changes, and events such as weddings and birthdays, which stir up longings for a partner.

A volatile stance about the desire for marriage and children is present for these women, as well. While their happiness is also somewhat dependent on finding a partner, their ambivalence is based on their anticipatory fear about "losing" themselves to a relationship. In addition, they sometimes fear "getting hurt." The influencing factors, summoning the ambivalence, included past disappointments with men, unresolved family of origin issues, and negative marital and familial role models. As a result of the way in which the "Sine Wave" group of women experience their singlehood, they tended to report feeling overly "needy" of relationships, or overly guarded and unapproachable.

The last of these three property groups was represented by the "Free To Be Me" experience. This group of women have and maintain a steady and positive sense of self. They are in control over how they perceive and respond to their single status, choosing to view it as a choice versus a deficit. Thus, being single in their thirties does not impact their sense of self or the quality of their lives.

The capacity to be connected to others, while retaining their individuality, is present. As a result, they eagerly anticipate the joy of falling in love, while they commit themselves to living in the present and creating a full and satisfying life as a single person. These women carry an unwavering faith that they will find romantic love someday, while they also have faith that they will be OK if it never comes to pass. The factors that were given tribute for influencing these women's strong sense of self, and faith in finding a life partner, were as follows: a constitutional optimistic outlook on life, positive experiences in former love relationships, positive marital, female, and paternal role models, consistent "unconditional" love and nurturing from friends and family, the presence of some form of spirituality in their lives, and commitment to self growth

work. The quality of life for these women is rich and diverse. They tend to be satisfied with their careers, have financial security, and enjoy the supportive presence of a single network of friends.

These women shared how they remain resilient and successfully resolve life's challenges, including the current absence of their desired goal for marriage and children. Their methods for coping with this involved: the acquisition of self knowledge, the use of personal power and responsibility, the recognition of the "silver lining" concept, embracing the freedoms of singlehood, the acceptance and working through of authentic feelings, and the exploration of other options for parenting in the future.

The fifth category of experience listed the circumstances in which many of the women, in all three groups, felt stigmatized by their single status. Examples included societal and ethnic messages which hold marriage and family to be the prized norm; holiday time with family, when others are married or when there is pressure to marry; feeling like a "mutant" amongst married friends, and feeling "out of step" with their peer group; the barrage of inquiries about their single status; the difficulties dealing with the aging process; and attending weddings and other events alone.

The sixth category of experience consists of the strategies employed for coping with the challenges of singlehood in the thirties. Helpful methods for healing and self care included: maintenance of a healthy diet and exercise regime, creative outlets, solitude, staying active and involved, development of mentoring relationships, focusing on the present, positive thinking, keeping one's sense of humor, embracing the support of family and friends, and focus on a "spiritual" faith in themselves and in the loving and helpful presence of a "higher power."

Through years of solitude, psychotherapy, and self help resources, many women come to learn invaluable lessons about themselves and about their interpersonal relations with others, as well as learning about constructive and effective coping strategies that help them take care of

themselves through life's inevitable emotional challenges. Approximately 60% of the participants had been or were currently in therapy. They were quite descriptive about the meaning and importance of this process in their lives. Reasons for seeking treatment varied, including feeling "out of touch" with self, and unresolved family of origin issues. Many reported that they entered treatment after a breakup with a love interest, or because of their despair about their single status. Insight-oriented work revolved around tracing and understanding the disconnection from self, linking past unresolved family of origin dynamics with their self experience and their experience in intimate relationships with men.

The therapeutic experience provided a safe and effective forum for a large majority of the participants to face, understand, and resolve any emotional upheavals obstructing their way. For many, their journey of self discovery took them from the "Sinkhole" or "Sine Wave" experience into more of the "Free To Be Me" experience, celebrating a more separate and positive self experience, enhancing the quality of their interpersonal relationships with others, and leaving them feeling well equipped to enjoy life as a single woman, while optimistically anticipating enjoying an intimate and satisfying relationship with a man someday.

The final major category of experience highlights the "Lessons Learned," comprising much of what single women in their thirties have come to know about themselves and about what constitutes a healthy and long lasting relationship. Lessons about self included: the identification of authentic desires and goals; the importance of self-responsibility for empowerment to create the happiness sought; and the working out of "unfinished business" from the past that had intruded upon life patterns and degree of satisfaction and well being.

From years of life experience in and out of the dating field, these women have more clearly learned about the "necessary ingredients" to finding and sustaining a healthy relationship with a man. The significant factors included: slowing down the dating process, "love isn't lust," seeking similar cultural backgrounds and values, working at relationships and commitment,

practicing direct and truthful communication, exercising mutual acceptance versus judgment, as well as the ability to be "connected and separate," and to maintain mutuality and equality. As a result of more closely defining who they are and what they want for themselves, many of the participants repeated the "lesson" of "not settling" for what they felt worthy of and thought possible between two people in a loving relationship. All were proponents for being single, rather than being in a relationship that did not feel good and right to them.

CHAPTER XIII

IMPLICATIONS

On Being Single in the Thirties

This study promotes women's experience of being single in their thirties as a prevalent and relevant topic for exploration. All of the participants were forthcoming about their experience, which provides clinical evidence about the importance of this subject matter.

The theory derived from the data in this study suggests that when singlehood is prolonged into the thirties, most women experience some degree of intensified concern and psychic struggle with this predicament. Often, this enhances the inclination to reflect inward for knowing and guidance. Borysenko (1996) contends that, "We may be well into our thirties before we begin to identify subtle patterns of behavior that are compromising the quality of our relationships" (p. 124). The "Tools That Teach" category conveyed the various means through which these women come to know themselves and identify destructive patterns. The time that singlehood affords offers the opportunity for solitude, self-reflection, clarity, and resolution.

The results of this study also veered away from some of the authors' assertions. Sheehy (1995) refers to the thirties age cohort of women today as "The Me Generation," who carry high expectations and a sense of entitlement of "having it all" (p. 38). The "Keepers and Tweeners" and "Necessary Ingredients" properties highlight the desires, goals, and dreams that many women in their thirties have come to identify. However, these women's sense of entitlement was not pathological in nature, but rather a result of their coming to know and value themselves, for all that they are and all that they can be.

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Sheehy also contends that "projecting a false self" is prevalent in the thirties, while the forties and fifties bring the return to true authenticity. The data contrasted this contention, as the "Free To Be Me" property and the "You Go Girl" and "Lessons Learned" categories elucidated this intention toward authenticity to be in motion much earlier than Sheehy reported. The results from this study imply that women in their thirties are beginning to take a much closer look at their intrapsychic and interpersonal experience. Borysenko (1996) put it succinctly when she stated that, "Central to a woman's age thirty transition is the question, 'What do I really want?'" (p. 101). Anderson and Stewart (1994) applied this to single women approaching 40, when "postponing dreams no longer makes sense." Priorities change and all walks of life are evaluated. The "Free To Be Me" women exemplified the ability to be focused on what was best for themselves. Many of the "You Go Girl" strategies focused on identifying healthy means of self-care. Moreover, the "Me, Myself and I" property, in the last chapter, reinforced the lesson of self-responsibility for one's own happiness. Data analysis captured this tendency for some single women in their thirties to give less attention to finding a partner and more attention to defining what internally makes them happy.

Schwartzberg et al. (1995) acknowledged that, "Singlehood has very few signposts to mark the trail" (p. 9). "The absence of marriage leaves the adult in undefined territory, where there is no legitimate social role beyond a certain age" (p. 6). The lack of available positive single female role models for women today was expressed under the "History Repeats Itself" dimension of the "Sinkhole" property. This implies that there is a need for special recognition for the unique challenges facing single women in their thirties, who have not yet garnered the marriage and family desire, expressed in the "What's To Be Expected" property. Without the roles they thought they would play, predicated on earlier expectations, they are faced with themselves--leading them through an inward journey that is both challenging and rewarding.

The theory generated from the data in this study is most remarkably distinct from previous studies on singlehood because of its exclusive focus on the cohort of women in their thirties. Furthermore, the variation inherent in the data analysis disseminates a unitary profile of singleness, which is so very prevalent in the literature. Most of studies cited generalized their findings, which either glorified or pathologized the single state. The exception to this was Dalton's (1992) phenomenological research, which did portray the subjective world of never-married women as a "multifaceted experience" with different meanings, "depending on her perspective at any point in time" (p. 69). Dalton veered from the focus of this study, however, by the small sample of nine women, whose ages were between the ages of 32-54.

Many studies in the literature review focused on the negative aspects of single life (Doudna and McBride, 1981; Hite, 1987; Holder and Anderson, 1998; Levinson, 1978; Lieberman, 1991; Pearlin and Johnson, 1981; Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Scutt, 1994). The "Sinkhole" and the "Sine Wave" properties reiterated many of the common struggles of singlehood that these studies pointed out. Many of these examples are cited in the "Wake Up Call" and "Sinkhole" properties and the "Status or Stigma" category. These examples include: low self-esteem, depression, poor body image, helplessness, humiliation and shame, lonesomeness, envy, anxiety and uncertainty about one's future, and the biological deadline for having children.

Other research reviewed tried to debunk the "myth" of the negativity of singlehood, by concentrating only on the advantages of single life and the high functioning sense of well being of the women interviewed in those studies (Adams, 1976, 1981; Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Gigy, 1980; Gordon, 1994; O'Brien, 1993; Stein, 1976, 1981; Schwartz, 1976; Witzel, 1991). "The Pros" and "The Ups" of "The Sine Wave" experience, along with the "Free To Be Me" property, all reinforce many of the positive experiences of single women as well. The most common example of this was the joy of and appreciation for the immense freedom that singlehood

intrinsically offers. This supported Potuchek's (1996) assertion that "autonomy and independence are the most universally and highly valued features of singleness."

This research endeavor also differentiates itself from prior research by relaying a multi-dimensional account of the experiences of single women in their thirties. Variation in the data was uncovered in almost every category of experience. A review of some of the examples of this variation are as follows: The "Potent Messages" dimension in the "What's To Be Expected" category conveyed the variation in identifications which influence women's motivations and goals; "Interpersonal Dynamics" revealed the multiple ways in which interpersonal roles and experiences with friends and family are impacted by remaining single in one's thirties; "The Dating Gerbil Wheel" category recounts the various ways that women meet men and the variety of experiences that they report having in the dating arena.

The central finding in this study was the emergence of the three distinct groups in the "How Does It Feel?" category, which described the various perceptions and emotions that women in their thirties carry about their single status. Many previous studies have conveyed the experiences of women as either struggling or succeeding with their single status. In contrast, this study's results imply a much more complex, diverse, and multi-faceted experience. Data analysis revealed that some women in the "Sinkhole" do experience a painful and psychologically debilitating struggle with being single. The majority of women in the "Sine Wave," however, convey a volatile emotional experience with it. Others, in the "Free To Be Me" camp represent the capacity to accept and deal with their single status in a way which does not impact their quality of self or their quality of life.

This multi-variant account was also expressed in the "You Go Girl" category, which highlighted various self-care strategies employed by many women. Finally, the "Lessons Learned" category also relayed the diverse facets of learning derived from years of being single and in the dating arena.

A concept most pronounced in the literature reviewed had to do with the enormous cultural influence that impacts single women in their thirties. Most of the authors, previously cited, pointed out the patriarchal dominant culture's imposed expectation for women to pursue and have attained marriage and family by the time they reach their thirties. Singleness is then perceived as deviating from the norm, and often met with overt and subtle forms of skepticism and judgment (Adams, 1971; Anderson, et al. 1994; Cejka, 1993; Hite, 1987; Johnson & Staples, 1993; Potuchek, 1996; Scutt, 1995; Stein, 1991). The "What's To Be Expected" property supported the assertion that this cultural dictate to marry influences what women expect themselves and their lives to be. The "American Dream" property of the "Status or Stigma" category also reinforced the literature's contention that societal pressure to marry by or in one's thirties increases the feeling of disenfranchisement for women whose paths to not follow the expected "norm."

The literature also conveyed that one's particular ethnic and religious culture can ease or exacerbate the degree to which there is a sense of marginalization for single women in their thirties (Farber et al., 1988; Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Staples, 1981). "The Cultural Catch" property, under the "Status or Stigma" category, reviews the variation within ethnicities, which have relative influence on women's experience of singlehood in the thirties.

The research data also reiterated the tendency for negative cultural judgments to be internalized for so many women. Because single adults get so many messages that their lives are incomplete without a partner and family, many "use marital status to evaluate their lives and wonder if there is something lacking in them" (Schwartzberg et al., 1995, p. 4). The difficulty of warding off these judgments was communicated in this study, as well. The "Wake Up Call" property illuminated how many women feel panicked and lost when the expected blueprint does not come into fruition. "The Sinkhole" property captured the sense of deprivation, self-doubt, and fear that weighs heavily on those women suffering acute distress from their single status.

Lastly, the "Status or Stigma" category communicated many women's difficulty in dealing with external events and environments, whereby they feel stigmatized by their single status.

The ironic twist to the cultural mythology, which predicts marriage and children to be a predicable and inevitable event in the life cycle for women, is the impact of the breakdown of the institution of marriage. This is evidenced by the statistical high rate of divorce (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). The demographics in this study are consistent with this statistic, as nearly 50% of the participants were raised with divorced or never-married parents. This life experience correlates with the ambivalence mentioned in the "To Be Or Not To Be Married and a Mom" property of the "Sine Wave," as many women relayed that they were "Doin' Their Strong Woman Number" in an effort to not end up dependent on a man and abandoned like their mothers. This ambivalence is founded on the fear emanating, in part, from the lack of available healthy and long lasting marital role models.

The results from this study also draw implications for what accounts for women's single status in the thirties. Former studies by Dougherty (1993) and Lieberman (1991) analyzed singlehood through a more psycho-pathological lens. Their conclusions imply an inevitable correlation between parental object deficiencies and women's ability to form and maintain fulfilling heterosexual relationships. The problem is often positioned in the literature as intrapsychic, without much regard for external and circumstantial factors. Data analysis in this study does support the possibility for the connection between one's single status and unresolved intrapsychic conflict. The "Sinkhole" property most distinctly describes the internal struggle with being single for women who are suffering from deeper underlying conflict. These women do specify their chronic struggle with depression, anger, fear, deprivation, powerlessness and self-doubt.

However, this study broadens the lens with which to view the etiology of singlehood for women in their thirties. The "Late Bloomers" property conveys factors which delayed some

women's experience with dating and relationships, either by way of strict parental mandates, more demanding academic and professional pursuits, or a slower maturation toward this inclination. These are not examples of pathology, but rather circumstantial factors which influenced their present single state. The "How Do I Meet Thee," property in Chapter VII conveys the scarcity of suitable men available in "The Shrinking Talent Pool." In addition, many women pointed out that "It Ain't Easy" to find appropriate, safe and comfortable avenues in which to meet potential candidates to date.

The "Keepers and Tweeners" and the "The Necessary Ingredients" properties also supported Borysenko's (1996) assertion that, "as women mature and become more emotionally astute, inauthentic relationships become harder to abide" (p. 127). The women who have come to know and value themselves have great hopes and expectations for a healthy and fulfilling relationship with a man. Characteristics of this desired relationship include mutuality, compatibility, and emotional and physical intimacy. These women naturally, then, "don't want to settle" for a relationship to which they do not feel connected and committed. This finding poses a challenge to Potuchek's (1996) general presumption that women think that an unhappy marriage is better than the single status alternative. For those in the "Free To Be Me" group, the perception about their single status is that it has been more of a choice than a deficit or an indication of personal failure or inadequacy.

Theoretical Implications

The Constructive/Developmental theoretical model, developed by Robert Kegan (1982), did not specifically address women's development in their thirties, or the experience of singlehood for women during this time. However, this phenomenon may be viewed in light of his theory. His conceptual framework offers an appropriate fit, through which diagnostic understanding can be derived about the variation of experience described in this study, for single women in their thirties.

The central finding in this study was the emergence of three distinct groups of women, who voiced the variation in the experience of being single in their thirties. Kegan's theory offers an applicable perspective on why some women suffer with the debilitating "Sinkhole" experience, while others deal with the volatility of "The Sine Wave," while there are those who convey joy and fulfillment, derived from the enlightened "Free To Be Me" perspective. Additionally, his clinical theory contributes a therapeutic process by which clinicians can be of greater assistance to women who are facing and struggling with the relevant issues of single life.

Kegan normalizes developmental challenges and milestones, as he predicts inevitable emotional upheavals along the way. He promotes his constructive-developmental framework as "the most important psychological ally of any systematically excluded group" (p. 212). The theory's departure from a pathological orientation normalizes, predicts, and positions challenging predicaments in life as opportunities for evolutionary growth (p. 212). As addressed throughout this document, extended singlehood for women in their thirties is still viewed as a cultural stigmata, having some "palpable effects on human development" (p. 212). Particularly in the "Interpersonal Dynamics" and "Status or Stigma" categories, many women conveyed their experience of feeling like a member of this "excluded group." However, congruent with Kegan's optimism is how many of the participants have used this unexpected turn of events as a catalyst for self-understanding and growth.

To review, Kegan believes his model to offer, ". . . a corrective to all present developmental frameworks which universally define growth in terms of differentiation, separation, increasing autonomy, and lose sight of the fact that adaptation is equally about integration, attachment, and inclusion" (p. 109). His model is one which claims evolutionary movement in the lifecycle that is fueled by the creation of meaning, through ultimately finding

the evolutionary "truce," or balance, between the dual yearnings for individuation and connection.

Data analysis indicated the variation in how the participants experience their single status. In the absence of having their desired committed and intimate relationship, some women, who yearn for such, are laden with a painful sense of regret of the past, deprivation in the present, and fear over the potential for loneliness, isolation and unrecognized dreams of the future. Other women cope with this reality with greater ease, empowerment, faith, and optimism. Kegan's theoretical model of development offers one lens, from which to gain clinical insight and understanding into this variation of experience. His stage development, characterized by the various levels of subject-object relations, can be usefully compared with the diversity of experience, described in the "How Does It Feel" category of this study. The stages that apply to this population would be the movement from the interpersonal stage three to the institutional stage four, and onward to the interindividual stage five.

The Stage Three "Interpersonal Self" and the "Sinkhole" Experience

In the "interpersonal balance" of stage three, one's sense of self is merged and fused with the "other" (pp. 95-103). Because there is an inability to know themselves outside of an interpersonal context, there is a higher likelihood of exhibiting low self-esteem and assertiveness, and dependence on others for approval. This also increases the chances of feeling incomplete, wounded, and sad, in the face of rejection from or absence of an "other." The "Ouch That Hurts" property, within "The Dating Gerbil Wheel" category, relayed the emotional distress present for so many women who are disappointed with former relationships. Many of the women who have suffered these "wounds" from past dysfunctional relationships, have struggled to have their personal boundaries distinct enough from the significant or desired "other." Thus, they have not been able to effectively defend against feeling "controlled" or "devastated" by a partner, who was not appropriate for them. The "Sinkhole" property described the women who most suffer with

this predicament, as experiencing feelings of deprivation, powerlessness, self-blame, fear, depression, and isolation.

Using Kegan's stage three formula, the degree to which there is psychic discomfort can be attributed to stage three's excessive state of "embeddedness" with the "other." In this stage, echoed by each property of the "Sinkhole" experience, one is merged in the interpersonal, trying to be worthy of others' affection and approval. Her too permeable boundaries make meaning contingent on how others see her, since her definition of self is so externalized. "For a self that is derived from interpersonal relationship, it can be experienced as the threat of the loss of the self. The neediness, fears of abandonment, wish to be cared for that characterizes the depressive picture at this transition is a grasping to keep the self afloat, lest it drown in this sudden incapacity to maintain its buoyancy or balance (p. 207).

When marriage and motherhood do not happen in the societal and familial expected time period, women in Kegan's stage three and in the "Sinkhole" fear the loss of navigating anchoring supports. They question their self-worth and feel victim to an unjust reality. It is also common to feel unlovable and to blame themselves for the absence of desired partners. The "I'm Afraid" dimension revealed the fear about the potential for happiness in the present and future, without the partner who defines their sense of well being and the quality of their lives. Additionally, the women in the "Sinkhole" tend to suppress their feelings so that "Only The Pillow Knows My Troubles." They berate and disavow their distress, with a self-imposed command to "Snap Out Of It." Kegan proposes that this is part of the "evolutionary process," whereby the feelings of distress are a "potentially shameful experience," because it "involves the recognition that others have been aware of vulnerabilities in me that I am only now coming to see" (p. 216).

Through Kegan's normalizing and optimistic lens, his concept of depression, emerging from an "evolutionary upheaval" (p. 203), can be applied to the understanding of those women in the "Sinkhole," who mourn the loss of what they expected to be inevitable: marriage and

children, by age 30. "All growth is costly. It involves leaving behind an old way of being in the world" (p. 216).

The Stage Four "Institutional Self" and the "Sine Wave" Experience

In Kegan's model, the shift to stage four carries some reliance on the "other" for meaning and gratification. This was evident in the "Ouch That Hurts" property, within the "Dating Gerbil Wheel" experience, when many women shared their painful times, when they felt wounded or saddened by the ending of a relationship. The women in the "Sine Wave" also expressed still feeling at the mercy of their dating predicament; feeling the "Ups" when there is a resurgence of hope for a connection, and feeling the "Downs" when there is a lull in activity or disappointment with a man in their life.

Yet, the movement in this stage is elicited by the classic question, "Who is in charge around here, anyway?" (p. 205). The "Therapy Connection" dimension informed the reader that many women seek counsel because of turbulence within a current relationship, or after a painful or unresolved break up. Often, they enter therapy after immersing themselves in the "other," having lost the focus of "Me, Myself, and I." Some have used this medium to help them in the transition from the embeddedness of Stage 3, to beginning to focus attention on the self. Sometimes, during the early stage transition, in order to develop a self-authoring identity, it is beneficial and necessary "to avoid sexuality entirely, lest one be reabsorbed in the old embeddedness" (p. 204). As reiterated in the strategies for self-care in chapter X, some women relayed a decision to "not date" or to remain "celibate," in order to regain a sense of composure and selfhood. After being on their own for extended periods of time, many reported acknowledging their own emerging voice, more separate from and less influenced by any "other."

Stage four's "Institutional Balance" favors differentiation over integration, promoting a sense of autonomy, agency, and self-regulation (p. 189); "the notion of independent selfhood is paramount" (p. 204). Thus, the resolution of the evolutionary tension between inclusion and

independence during this stage exalts the latter. Here, the fear is more the loss of self versus the former preoccupation over the loss of an "other." Many women in the "Sine Wave" group articulated their ambivalence in whether "To Be Or Not To Be Married and a Mom." The feared "loss of self" was reiterated numerous times by these participants. The ambivalence these women described mirrors Kegan's assertion about the dual yearnings for connection and independence. Much of the "Sine Wave" dilemma is the confusion between enmeshment with an "other," triggering the urgency to find a partner, and the fear that this "merger" will threaten their newfound sense of autonomy.

The limitation and weakness of this self-sufficiency can be a tendency to over-differentiate and become too embedded in one's autonomy. During this stage, one can be overly defended, guarding this newly found sense of individuation. There can be an unconscious or conscious tendency to become more isolated. This is based on the fear that intimate connections could impose boundary loss and threaten this posture of self control (p. 223). This "self possessiveness" is a limit "which tends to show itself more clearly in the private regions of love and closeness than in the public light of work and career" (p. 242). The women in the "Sine Wave" also reflected on experiences when they noticed themselves "sabotaging" relationships, usually by a guarded posture and reluctance to feel "too vulnerable" with a man, fueled by their fear of "getting hurt." For some, then, doing their "Strong Woman Number," has been motivated by a compensatory self reliance. They make great efforts to try to prevent being abandoned or left, without a "self" to rely on, like many of their mothers before them.

Because those in this stage have not yet reached a balance between independence and connection, there still lies a struggle with guilt from or fear about, judgment from others. Kegan describes that while she turns inward to self-advocate and navigate, she may experience anxiety ridden grieving periods, afraid of the losses she may incur with her new and unsettled self emerging. This experience is depicted in the "Cons" and the "Downs" dimensions of the "Sine

Wave" property. These women relayed the disadvantages and "down" periods of singlehood to be effected by negative judgment from others and by the "high and low" cycles within their dating experience. The degree to which they continue to struggle with cultural, familial, and environmental dictates is also depicted in the "Status or Stigma" category, in Chapter IX.

<u>The Stage Five "Interindividual Self" and the "Free To Be Me" Experience</u>

The hallmark of the rebalancing out of stage four into the "interindividualism" of stage five, is the "out-of-society" perspective (p. 195). "There is an abandoning of reliance upon the group, standard, or convention" (p. 232); "there is a sense of leaving the moral world entirely," so that "shoulds and oughts" are no longer of concern (p. 232). Here, the "instinctual" trusting of one's intuitive judgment takes precedence, repudiating the struggle with external judgments. One reaps the rewards of a self developing, separate from and not defined by its "duties, roles, or institutions" (p. 239).

This stage closely marks the experience trail of the "Free To Be Me" group of single women in their thirties. As the data relayed in Chapter VIII, rather than looking to an "other" for meaning, these women have their boundaries between "self" and "other" more appropriately intact. They are the meaning makers of their lives, acting from a place of self-responsibility and empowerment. Thus, they are not as susceptible to feeling the disappointment from the environmental "Potent Messages," dictating "What's To Be Expected." In addition, they do not allow external negative judgments about their single status to elicit the panic of the "Wake Up Call," the "Downs" and ambivalence in the "Sine Wave," or the shame from the properties in the "Status or Stigma" category.

Their ability, as indicated in the "Resiliency and Resolution" dimension, to prepare for and "change the blueprint," allows room to contemplate and pursue other avenues of meaning besides marriage and children. Some remain open minded, as well, toward options for having children without a partner. Their positive mental attitude sustains their capacity to "let go" of

what is not in their control, and to accept their single status as a viable way of life.

Consequently, being single, for those in Kegan's stage five and in the "Free To Be Me" group of

this study, does not impinge on their sense of self or negatively impact their quality of life. In

these instances, women have grown to embrace their personal power to create the happiness they

seek, independent from whether the desired male partner has appeared in their life.

The data analysis generated by this study illuminates the power that the quality of self-

esteem has on affecting how women perceive and experience their single status in their thirties.

The high functioning women have been able to detach themselves from "other" directed

expectations and judgments. Due to the positive and sturdy quality of their self-esteem, they are

not dependent on the connection with, or the approval from, an "other." As the "Connected And

Separate" dimension of their experience conveyed, these women do not evaluate themselves on

the basis of having a partner, nor do they judge their intrinsic worth and value to be reliant on

having a man in their life.

Some of the women who have evolved into the "Free To Be Me" experience, have done

so through a focused and diligent process of self reflection. Methods used frequently were

presented in the "Tools That Teach" dimension, in Chapter X. Through those strategies for

learning and healing, as well as through their life experiences, they have grown to embrace the

"Me, Myself and I" lessons of personal power. Furthermore, they have developed this quality of

self-worth by learning to "parent" themselves and become their "own pride and joy" (p. 189).

A capacity for intimacy springs from this capacity of the self "to be intimate with itself,"

and for emotional conflict to be formulated, tolerated, and used toward the advancement of self-

knowledge (p. 106). "Having a self, the hallmark of stage 5, now has a self to share" (p. 106).

Thus, these women's identities are solidified to the extent that they are not burdened with the

"Sine Wave" and "Sinkhole" fears of "getting hurt" and "losing" themselves. What naturally

follows is the re-emergence of and heightened desire for the company of others, and an increase

in one's availability to others. As the "Anticipation Is Keepin' Me Waitin'" dimension of the

"Free To Be Me" experience noted, those who have individuated to this level eagerly anticipate

this union with someone someday, while remaining confident in their capacity to preserve their

sense of self and continue to grow as an individual.

As the "Connected And Separate" dimension of the "Free To Be Me" experience

described, the capacity to lead fulfilling lives as single women in their thirties comes from having

the ability to integrate "self" with "other." Emotions and impulses can be experienced, integrated

and resolved between one self-system and another (p. 106). Here, a woman can continue to seek

and maintain her wish for partnership, without it shaping or disrupting her sense of self or

equilibrium. Transitioning from her former meaning orientation of merger and identification, she

now enjoys a "context for loving which preserves, supports, and celebrates a kind of mutual

distinctness, independence, or cooperation of separate interests" (p. 219). The theme of

reciprocity is felt and celebrated, giving birth to the capacity to "mutually preserve the other's

distinctness" while enjoying the readiness and enthusiasm to invest in an affectionate, deep and

rich bond with that "other" (p. 253). This balance guards what Kegan considers the "two greatest

yearnings in human experience. . . a precious sense of differentiation, separateness, and

autonomy, and the sense of inclusion, integration, and connection" (p. 107).

The "Culture of Embeddedness:" The Central Mechanisms for Development

The core concept of Kegan's theoretical model of development is that, throughout the

lifecycle, the individual is in constant motion of trying to strike an "evolutionary balance"

between psychological embeddedness with the environment and the maintenance of a distinct

self. According to his framework, intrapsychic growth occurs by way of the person's interactive

involvement with the environment, which he refers to as, "cultures of embeddedness." "They are

psycho-social environments which hold us (with which we are fused) and which let go of us

(from which we differentiate)" (p. 116). His examples of these "naturally therapeutic contexts,"

include: mothering, the family, institutions, school, peer groups, intimate adult "love" relationships, and the work place (p. 116).

There are three functions that these "cultures" need to provide for the individual to successfully thrive and grow. The "holding" function provides "careful attention, recognition, confirmation, and company," in the experience of the "other" (p. 126). The "letting go" function supports and encourages the individual's natural emerging steps toward independence, shifting from embeddedness to differentiation (p. 127). The third function is "remaining in place," during a time of transformation and movement from one stage to another. As the variation in the "How Does It Feel" category supported, singleness can be an "extremely positive" and "transcendent" experience for some, while for others, the "philosophical crisis" emerging from every stage shift can precipitate experiences of "boundary loss, impulse flooding, and a not knowing and sense of meaninglessness" (p. 231).

This notion of how environmental influences affect one's experience of self and of life in general is also congruent with the results of this study. Kegan predicts that this transition, from stage three's interpersonalism to stage four's institutionalism, is more difficult for women than men, due to the female orientation toward inclusion and the difficulty acknowledging their need for distinctness (p. 208). Kegan cites recurring evidence that females, more vulnerable to fusion, reach the interpersonalism stage faster than their male cohorts, but seem to stay there longer or remain there indefinitely. He traces this trend to the differing embeddedness cultures made available to men and women. ". . .the interpersonalist balance, with its orientation toward affiliation, and the organization of the self around the expectations of the other, conforms to the traditional stereotype of femininity" (p. 211).

One form of the embeddedness culture is actually the larger culture in which we live. The impact of societal mores on the concept of adulthood and marriage was evident throughout data analysis of this study. The rigid expectations for women to marry and bear children, by the

time they reach their thirties, was connected to cultural dictates in the "Potent Messages" dimension, in Chapter V. The "American Dream" and "Cultural Catch" properties in Chapter IX, signified how western culture's negative judgments on singlehood evokes a feeling of stigmata, for many of these women.

Kegan posits that "normal experiences of evolution involve recoverable loss; what we separate from we find anew" (p. 129). The exception is if the embedded culture is neglectful during this time, arresting the capacity for the planned task of detachment. This inability to "remain in place" can create an "unrecoverable loss, the very experience which separates mourning or grief from melancholia or depression (p. 130). The family provides a crucial culture of embeddedness. It is where one first comes into contact with having, or lacking, a sense of intimacy and connection with an "other." Most of the women in the study who experience more psychological distress over their single status reported insufficient nurturing from their childhood caretakers. The "So Damned Depressed" illustrated this experience, while the "Only My Pillow Knows My Troubles" uncovered the lack of supportive familial and peer group resources available to these women. The final "Snap Out Of It" dimension of the "Sinkhole" depicted the correlation between these women's low self-esteem and the unresolved dysfunctional deficits within their family of origin experience.

Related to the embeddedness culture's failure of "letting go," Kegan gave the example of the mother, who encouraged the prolonging of her child's dependency, in an effort to "ward off her own abandonment depression" (p. 28). The child then learns that being fused and embedded promises approval and gratification, while separation can elicit a fear of retribution and rejection. "She must purchase her differentiation at the price of integration. She comes to experience closeness and being taken care of highly ambivalently; they are her fondest wish and her gravest nightmare" (p. 128). This closely relates to the "Potent Messages" relayed in Chapter V, in which some women have gotten the familial or maternal directive to marry, and the message that

a woman "needs a man" to protect and complete her. Therein lies the ambivalence, so noted in the "To Be Or Not To Be Married and a Mom" dimension of the "Sine Wave" experience, fueled by the fear that a loss of self might be an inevitable compromise, if and when the desire for marriage and children comes to fruition. The "Not A Grown-up Yet" dimension in Chapter VI also depicted the failure of some parental figures to recognize and support their adult daughter's emergence into themselves as single women. Finally, the expectation, judgment and disappointment from family about one's single status was also identified as one of the variables which precipitated the "down" cycle for the women in this group.

Another forum of a culture of embeddedness lies within the context of adult love relationships. The women in the "Sinkhole" communicated significant deprivation in their various cultures of embeddedness. Many were discouraged over their belief that "History Repeats Itself," due to the lack of or wounding experiences with former romantic relationships. These women were stuck in stage three's "overincluded interpersonalism," without many affirming resources to "hold onto."

In contrast, those women who reported a strong sense of self and a fulfilling lifestyle, did credit much of their growth and life satisfaction to the positive "cultures of embeddedness" in their lives. This was elaborated on in the "Life Is A Box of Chocolates" dimension of the "Free To Be Me" property, and the "Power of Unconditional Love" property, in Chapter X. The availability and presence of family and friends was recognized to have offered unwavering support, during times of calm and "upheaval." The capacity to have and hold a strong sense of self as separate from an "other" rooted back to having appropriate boundaries within their family of origin. They report being encouraged to have their own thoughts and feelings, and to navigate from this point of departure, versus worrying about the expectations and judgments from others. Having the good fortune to bear witness to positive marital role models, and enjoy loving relationships with father figures was also given much credit for some of these women's sense of

well being and optimistic stance. Their rich quality of life was also said to have been enhanced by a stimulating and supportive work environment.

Evidence from the data supported the conclusion that women do better emotionally, being single in their thirties, when they have a network of friends. This is an important resource, helping to fulfil many important emotional needs. Many women expressed the challenges of feeling "On A Different Page" from their peer group, and like a "Mutant," as they felt different and alienated from the majority of their friends, who are now married. Those who cope well with singlehood in their thirties relayed the "unconditional" quality of their friendships. Most of them also still have a number of single girlfriends, who are "in the same boat," providing a social outlet and a means through which to share commonalties and derive support.

The participants who voiced the "Free To Be Me" experience relayed their faith and excitement in finding a loving and compatible partner someday, reflecting a healthy capacity to connect with an "other." This perspective was referenced in the "Anticipation is Keepin Me Waitin" dimension, in chapter VIII. They attributed part of their optimism to the positive and healthy romantic relationships that many of them remember fondly and use as a frame of reference to what they believe to be possible.

Clinical Implications

Kegan's constructive-developmental theory can be applied to the clinical setting as well. His theory on the etiology of various symptomotology does acknowledge "the unity and continuity" between childhood and later lived phenomena" (p. 188). However, rather than pathologize this connection, his evolutionary model observes and normalizes recurring phenomena throughout the lifespan, without regarding it as regression or recapitulation (p. 188). His framework suggests that the later stages are "better," based on the "philosophical grounds of their having a greater truth value" (p. 294). "Each new evolutionary truce further differentiates the self from its embeddedness in the world," "creating a more integrated relationship to the

world" (p. 294). The function of treatment, then, is to provide helpful assistance as one moves through these phases of development.

There is previous research, though minimal, which reports the prevalence of single women in their thirties seeking therapy (Levinson 1996; Schwartzberg 1995). Data analysis supports the claim that many women bring their experience of being single into therapy as the presenting problem (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). Sixty percent of the participants interviewed in this study have been or are presently engaged in some form of a psychotherapeutic process. "The Therapy Connection" dimension, under the "Tools That Teach" property, conveyed the usefulness of using psychotherapy to address intrapsychic and interpersonal difficulties, as they pertain to the issue of singlehood.

Former psycho-dynamic theories of development were based on the traditional "intact" family experience. Marriage and children were assumed to be an inevitable reality, once women reached their thirties. In the clinical setting, the unmarried status was frequently viewed as a deficit and abnormality, in need of healing and repair (Erickson, 1959; Freud, 1914; Havinghurst, 1953). Kegan's model does not hold a judgment that it is a necessary adult "task" to be married. Rather, he focuses on the intrapsychic experience of "self" and "other," and its impact on how the individual experiences herself and how she relates in the world. He relates to his clients as "persons evolving," rather than as patients who are definitively "sick" (p. 264).

Congruent with Kegan's philosophy, many of the participants in this study used the therapeutic forum to explore the "dual struggle" between the fear of engulfment with an "other" and the fear of being "utterly alone" (p. 107). The therapy was often described, by both Kegan and the participants, as assisting in the identification between the distinction of externalized self-definers (i.e., finding a husband, parental and societal expectations), vis-a-vis the exploration and re-evaluation of their own self-imposed judgments and expectations.

Kegan's clinical stance is optimistic, upholding the faith that one can move through painful and unsettling obstacles to a higher, sturdier, and more authentic emotional ground. Applied to this research, single women can heal and move from the debilitating "Sinkhole," through the "Sine Wave" volatility, and onto the more stable ground of the "Free To Be Me" experience. The therapeutic aim is not to cure or solve the "problem" of singlehood (p. 273), but rather to "know and hold" the person before, during, and after their transitions from one stage to another, helping them to "acknowledge and grieve the losses" and "celebrate the gains" (p. 261).

To aid them in this potential for developmental growth, Kegan's helping functions can be applied to the therapeutic setting, when working with single women in their thirties. The therapist can provide a "holding" environment, understanding and confirming how female clients may be experiencing their single status, while safely exploring conflicts and regulating affect states. The clinician "lets go" enough for the client to experience herself as separate from the therapeutic matrix, capable of self-determination. As single women struggle to disentangle themselves from external judgments and dictates, it is imperative that the therapist convey an impartial and objective stance. This neutral position reinforces the client's capacity to identify her own authentic thoughts and feelings. The next step is for the therapist to encourage these women to trust and follow their intuition and to use their own knowing and desires as their most reliable compass.

The therapist also can provide a "bridging environment," and "continuity," by "staying put" while the client struggles to reintegrate at a new level. This involves acknowledging the potential for grief, which can be experienced in letting go of the old self. Helping to affirm and celebrate the emancipating joy of discovering and creating the new emerging self is part of this therapeutic function as well. Single women often enter treatment struggling with the loss of an idealized relationship with a parent or former romantic "other." They may be pained for a time,

as they struggle to disengage from the embedded dependence. Yet, they also begin to know themselves more than ever before, feeling more "empowered" and in control of their lives.

Many women who participated in this study, conveyed their "evolutionary" process, which has lead them toward a greater sense of well being. As the "Tools That Teach" property conveyed, through diligent self-reflective work, they have come to understand, embrace, and develop a self that is independent, yet capable of connection, with an "other." Consequently they have reaped the rewards of their newfound ability to enjoy a fulfilling quality of life as a single woman, while remaining open and available for intimacy with a significant "other."

In summary, Robert Kegan's theoretical and developmental framework illuminates how the nature of one's boundaries between "self" and "other," impacts the way in which single women in their thirties experience their single status. It also provides insight into how the environment plays a role and how clinicians can be of valuable assistance to these women, during their journey through life's vicissitudes.

The researcher values and agrees with the appropriateness of Kegan's clinical model in working with single women in their thirties. However, the only departure from its exclusive use is a bias toward expanding his "client centered" approach to integrating more active interventions, as well. Many indicators in the "Free To Be Me" property and the "You Go Girl" and "Lessons Learned" categories, provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of cognitive approaches in promoting healing and growth. Through various therapeutic modalities and self help tools, many women have learned to identify distorted beliefs and perceptions about themselves and about "marriage," predicated on societal and familial norms and "Potent Messages." They then evaluated the use and the truth value of these in their own lives, discarding what they found to be skewed and counter-productive. In this way, they were able to retain and reclaim what they defined as their own set of values and goals. The researcher asserts that Kegan's therapeutic functions of "holding," "letting go," and "staying put," are of crucial importance to the

therapeutic endeavor. However, clinical initiative, which encourages single female clients to actively probe and explore the aforementioned questions, is an additional and compatible effective therapeutic intervention.

Implications for Clinical Social Work

This study addresses the reality of life today for single women in their thirties. It is a research endeavor that has not yet come to pass. This topic is intrinsically relevant to the field of social work. We live in an era when the adult single population continues to rise. Current statistics inform us that most women will be single, sometime during their adult years. Marriages have been delayed, divorces have increased, and women usually outlive their husbands.

If we consider the number of individuals never-married, separated, divorced, or widowed, there were over 23 million, or 12% of adult Americans living alone in 1994. Women accounted for the larger share, 6 of 10, living alone, increasing 94% from 1970 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). Adults are getting married less often and later in life. Census population profile (1995) reports the following relevant statistics: between 1960 and 1993, marriage rates for 15-55 year-old women dropped by 41%; the average first marriage age for women rose from 20 in 1960 to 25 in 1993, to 24.5 in 1994; the average age for first-time grooms rose from 24 in 1975 to 27 in 1992. More specifically geared to the purpose of this study, between 1970 and 1994, the proportion of never-married women 30½-34 years old tripled from 6 to 20% and from 9 to 30% for men; among persons 35-39 years old, the proportions of never-married doubled from 5 to 13% for women and tripled from 7 to 19% for men.

Pearlin and Johnson (1981) cite an accumulation of studies which insist that singles are more prone to emotional problems, while a state of overall psychological well being is more prevalent amongst those with spouses.

> Controversy remains as to whether already existing emotional deficits create the single state, or whether their disposition to emotional problems is a consequence of being objects

of contempt because of their failure to conform to prized norms; defining marriage as the most desirable and healthiest state adults can attain. (p.166)

While literary attention on the prevalence of singlehood and the important issues it evokes has increased in the last two decades, there is still a significant void in the literature which acknowledges the unique vulnerabilities and challenges single women face in the "thirty-something" cohort. This deserves our attention, as clinicians and as researchers. It is a social issue, a woman's issue, and a clinical issue.

The data conveyed in this study is evidence to the fact that women think about their single status a great deal, and have much to say about this subject. The motivations for participation expressed by many of the women concerned the wish for greater social recognition of this issue. Many voiced their interest and curiosity to compare their experiences with other women. There was the hope that this mutual exchange might lessen their sense of isolation and offer exposure to new and better ways of coping with their single status. This indicates that the modality of group therapy could prove helpful to those women who are struggling with their single status.

Over half of the women in this study have participated in some form of a therapeutic process. The theory generated from the data specifically addresses the vast and varied experiences of being single for women in their thirties. The central finding of the three distinct groups of affective experience, provides a multi-dimensional account, which contributes new theoretical understanding of women's emotional distress, as it relates to their experience of singlehood in their thirties.

The theory proposed offers effective treatment implications, by noting areas needing transformation and resolution. The data collected from those women who report a more cohesive and fulfilling life experience highlights the factors deemed healing and generative. This information helps to determine what factors contribute to successful adaptation to the single lifestyle. Many of the women reported that self-knowledge in their thirties was their greatest tool

toward developing a strong and resilient self. Clinicians can utilize this information, when working with women in their twenties as well, helping them get a head start in this important and rewarding process of self-reflection and insight. In addition, the application of Robert Kegan's theoretical and clinical framework adds greater depth and optimism with which to view and treat the variation of experience, implicit in working with single women in their thirties.

Through increased insight, understanding, empathy and helpful intervention strategies, mental health clinicians have the ability to assist those women, who have difficulty navigating their way through this unexpected and turbulent time in their lives. It remains an appropriate and rewarding therapeutic ambition to support them in their journeys of finding their way back to a sense of wholeness and greater life satisfaction.

As far as social implications, some women voiced the helpfulness of having a connection with some form of spirituality. Organized religious institutions can play an important function in facilitating the process of helping single women integrate into the community at large.

In addition, psycho-educational programs, for those who work with this population, as well as for the population itself, would be very beneficial as well. Clinicians and educators can take advantage of the opportunities to encourage families to reexamine the expectations imparted on their daughters regarding marriage. Likewise, educating young women early on is important in reassuring them that there are acceptable and satisfying roles for women besides, or in addition to, becoming a wife and mother.

<u>Implications For Further Study</u>

This study's exploratory findings call forth the potential for further study on related phenomena. The researcher believes it would be of benefit to the field of psychology and social work to conduct a longitudinal study, interviewing this same group of women ten years from now, during the next decade of their lives. Would single life become more devastating to deal with in the forties? Or would time and maturation prove a natural healer, enabling some of the
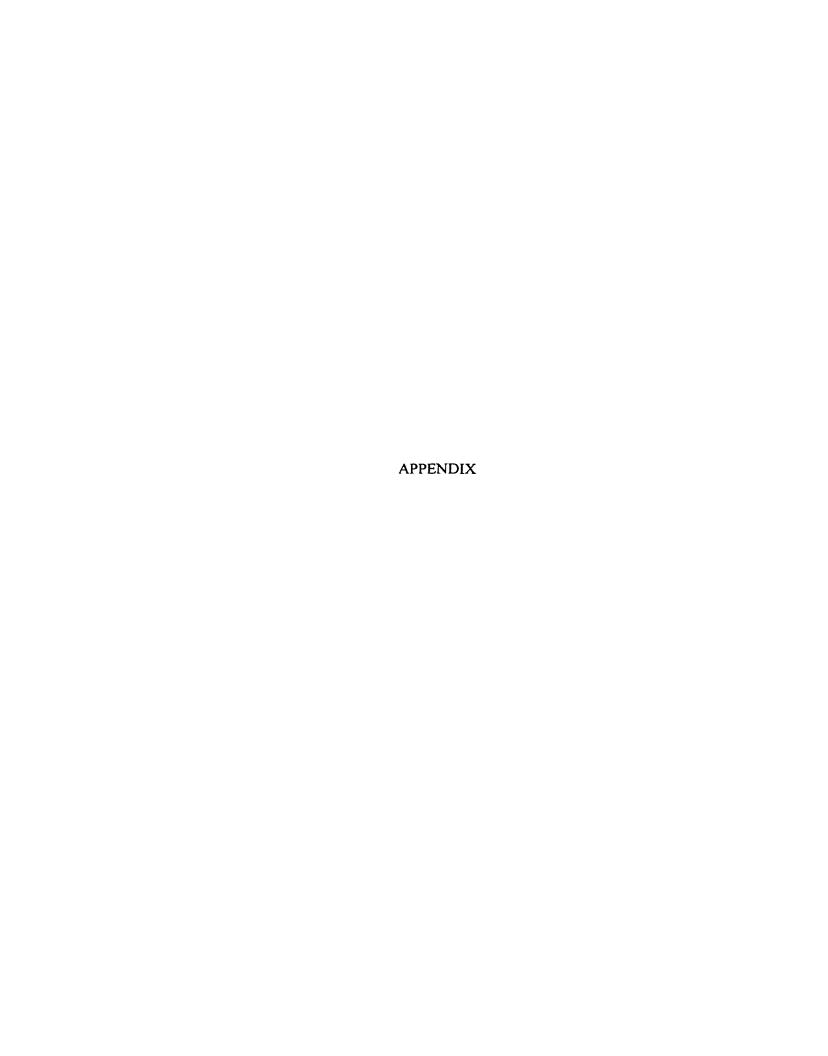
women in the "Sinkhole" and "Sine Wave" to have evolved more toward the "Free To Be Me" experience? Related to the variation in these three groups is the question about what constitutes the capacity for resiliency, when facing unexpected challenges throughout the life cycle.

The participants in this study could not possibly represent a generalized sample. For the most part, they were urban, well educated, and sufficiently financially secure. It will be of value for future research to determine if these findings hold true for groups of women from rural communities or of lower socioeconomic status. Comparing the results of this study to the experience of singlehood under different sets of circumstances could also prove to be of clinical benefit. Such instances could include comparisons of data with voluntary singleness, singleness post divorce or death of a spouse or singleness as it relates to the lesbian experience.

Another interesting research endeavor might be to interview married women in their thirties. It would be a clinically relevant topic to explore whether the developmental issues of "self" versus "other" focused struggles, for example, are apparent in the psyche and lives of married women of this age group. The results of such a study could help to determine whether this is a developmental thirty-something issue, or one that applies to the singles population in particular. Comparing the data generated in this study to the experience of single men in their thirties could also highlight relevant gender issues as well.

All of the aforementioned examples have potential to further enhance the literary knowledge about singlehood, helping clinicians be better equipped at understanding and treating those who face this phenomena of human experience.

APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT

I, --------------------------------------, agree to participate in a research project conducted by Marcy Cole, LCSW, as part of her requirements for fulfilling the Ph.D. program at The Institute for Clinical Social Work, Chicago, Illinois. I understand the purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the experience of never-married, childless single women in their thirties, who desire marriage and children.

My involvement will be to participate in two or three semi-structured interviews, for approximately one hour each. I understand that these interviews will be tape-recorded. I will be asked questions which involve my experience of being single in my thirties. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I may decline to answer any question asked or I may stop the interview at any time.

I further understand that the information I offer is confidential. My identity and the identity of any person to whom I refer during these interviews will not appear or be used in this research project. I understand that phrases and or sentences which I say may be used anonymously as data in this project; and that the tapes will be destroyed after this research project is completed. I give my consent to have this data published, or to be used for the purpose of further research and/or teaching. For participation in this research endeavor, I will receive a copy of the final transcript.

As a participant in this research, I am aware that I may be asked about sensitive issues. There are however, no known risks to the participants in this research as long as confidentiality is maintained. If at any time I have questions about the research I may call the researcher at 312/541-1450. Should I experience any undo harm or distress, I am aware of the option to meet with the researcher for debriefing, supervised by Dr. Dennis Shelby, for up to three visits. If any distress persists, I will be given a referral to the Gerald Wexler Clinic.

I understand the above statements and agree freely to participate in this research.

Signature   Date

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