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Walden University
2017

Abstract

How Women Experience and Respond to Singlism: Stereotyping and Discrimination of

Singles

by

Lisa L. Hancock

MBA, Gannon University, 1997

BS, University of Delaware, 1992

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

August 2017

Abstract

Society views and treats women who are single differently than women who are not single. This practice of stereotyping and discrimination towards singles is called *singlism*. The purpose of this qualitative study was to use grounded theory methodology to explore and explain how women experience singlism and what explains how women experience singlism. Social constructionism, cognitive dissonance theory, and social identity theory were used as conceptual foundations in explaining how society constructs the status of single women, how single women are viewed and treated, and how single women manage their single social identity. The participants of the study included women over the age of 18 who self-identified as single and as having experienced singlism. Semistructured interviews, memoing, and member checking were used to collect data. Initial, focused, and theoretical coding procedures were used to manage the data, and a content analysis of the textual data was performed. Findings from the data suggest women respond to singlism by experiencing feelings, adopting beliefs, and participating in behaviors. A woman's experience of negative or angry feelings, adopting beliefs supporting or opposing to singlism, and participating in behaviors to support or oppose singlism is explained by her internalization of singlism, and of the ideology of family and marriage. Social action is needed to counteract singlism. This necessitates an identity shift to reframe single as a positive social identity which begins by raising awareness about singlism. The findings of this study may promote positive social change by raising awareness about singlism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Singlism has been defined as stereotyping and discrimination toward single adults (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Singles are stereotyped as having similar characteristics and behaviors that are predominantly negative, are independent of actual personality differences, and represent a deficit identity, in addition to being denied advantages and benefits that are available only to individuals who are not single based solely on their nonsingle (relationship) status (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; DePaulo & Morris, 2005, 2006; Greitmeyer, 2009; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Lahad, 2012; Lahad, 2013; Moore & Radtke, 2015; Pignotti & Abell, 2009; Reynolds & Taylor, 2004; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Despite singles being denied advantages and benefits due to discrimination based on single status, as well as experiencing health problems, reduced social status, and reduced life satisfaction resulting from stereotyping and discrimination toward singles, individuals frequently do not regard these behaviors as discriminatory and wrong (Abrams, 2012; Barak, 2014; Benson, 2013; Bruckmuller, 2013; DePaulo & Morris, 2006; DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2013; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Lee & Turney, 2012; Piatkowski, 2012; Shachar, Leshem, Nasim, Rosenberg, & Schmuely, 2013; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Smith, Willmott, Trowse, & White, 2013; Spielmann et al., 2013). Recent studies have indicated a need for research relevant to the internalization of stereotypes and the effects of stereotypes on outcomes (Bennett & Gaines, 2010; Burkley & Blanton, 2009; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Laurin, Kille, & Eibach, 2013; Mulawka, 2013); exploration of the concept of single as both a lifestyle and an identity (Eck, 2013; Lahad, 2012; 2014); and the recognition and

acceptance of different lifestyles and diverse family structures (Band-Winterstein &

Manchik-Rimon, 2014; Buddeberg, 2011). Potential contributions of this study include

raising awareness of being single as a legitimate lifestyle; learning how single women

experience stereotyping and discrimination related to being single; and supporting the

recognition of nontraditional family forms. In order to promote positive social changes

related to stereotyping and discrimination affecting singles, one must first learn how

individuals have experienced and responded to singlism. I explored how women

experience singlism and what explains how women experience singlism. Women are very

concerned about how other people view them and thus internalize negative stereotypes

about singles and may feel pressured to change their single status in response

(Blakemore, Lawton, & Vartanian, 2005; Buddeberg, 2011; Shachar et al., 2013).

Negative stereotypes about singles predominantly focus on women (Barack, 2014;

Bolick, 2011; Genz, 2010; Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Lai, Lim, & Higgins, 2015). In a study

of negative stereotypes related to different parent types, single women were ranked at the

very bottom, below single men (Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette, & Gosselin, 2016).

This chapter begins by summarizing research related to stereotyping of and

discrimination against singles, describing the relevance and significance of singlism as a

problem, providing the purpose and framework of this study as it relates to addressing a

gap in the literature about singlism, and stating the research questions for this grounded

theory study. The nature of the study is then presented, including the choice and

description of the grounded theory methodology, definitions and key concepts, and

identification of professional literature supporting the definition of singlism. The chapter

concludes with a description of critical and necessary assumptions of the study, scope and boundaries, and limitations.

Background

Beliefs about relationship status serve to support Western social hierarchies (Day, Kay, Holmes, & Napier, 2011). Each society expects its members to adhere to particular social norms derived from modal behaviors and labels as deviant those who fail or refuse to conform (Jacobsen & Van Der Voordt, 1980; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). For example, historically, Western society expected individuals to form intimate relationships with people of the opposite gender and to formalize and legalize those relationships via unions called *marriage*. In 2015, same-sex marriage became legal in all 50 states. The significance of marriage has evolved from a modal behavior into a status symbol of lifetime achievement, the virtual capstone of adulthood (Cherlin, 2004), with singles even being labelled as emerging adults (Jamison & Proulx, 2013; Reifman, Arnett & Colwell, 2016). Western social hierarchies have highest regard for those who have chosen to marry and are still married, followed by those who were formerly married, and finally by those who never married. Negative stereotypes, independent of any actual personality differences, are applied to single individuals, with singles stereotyped as inferior to partnered adults (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Greitmeyer, 2009; Morris, Sinclair, & DePaulo, 2007; Pignotti & Abell, 2009) and treated differently. Treating some people differently than others is discrimination. Hellman (2008) labeled discrimination wrong when the practice demeans someone or places someone at a disadvantage. Women can be particularly affected, as single women experience a deficit social identity that increases as

they age during their 20s and 30s (Sharp & Ganong, 2011), and gender stereotypes have

been shown to be stronger for women (Lai et al., 2015).

In a society that idealizes marriage, women who are not married are called *single*,

which is a deficit term because it means "not married." The word *single* has become

synonymous with the absence of marriage, and singlehood is considered a temporary

phase of life during which an individual is waiting to get married (Barr, 2015; Eck, 2013;

Lahad, 2012; 2016). Though singlehood is often posited as a choice for women today,

that choice is often viewed as unhealthy, and single women are negatively framed as

failures of womanhood (Barak, 2014; Lahad, 2013; Lahad, 2014). Even when singlehood

is discussed as being viable for women, it is often described as an alternative to

coupledom, as opposed to just one of many lifestyles (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013), which

conveys the message that it is not the normal way of doing things. Many women believe

that other people expect them to marry, that something is wrong with them if they remain

single, and that there is pressure from family, friends, and the media to marry

(Piatkowski, 2012). Therapists have reported that distress related to being single is a

common problem of female clients aged 30-45 (Schachar et al., 2013).

Internalized stereotypes are experienced as shame and can affect an individual's

behavior, and responses to stereotype threat may involve cognitive dissonance or systems

justification (Buddeberg, 2011). Women must actively work to accept an identity of

single while living in a society that devalues the single lifestyle as a choice and labels it

instead as a deficit lifestyle (Eck, 2013). Individuals who have experienced stereotyping

and discrimination may experience discrimination stress symptoms that negatively affect

quality of life and social interaction; stress responses that negatively affect self-esteem and health; and stress, psychological distress, and depression, which can negatively affect both mental and physical health (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Thompson, Noel, & Campbell, 2004).

It is first necessary to examine how women experience singlism and what explains how women experience singlism in order to best determine how to promote a positive single identity. Through this study, I attempted to target a gap that exists in the body of research surrounding singlism between the establishment of the existence of singlism and the effects of singlism on women, and to explore ways to foster and support the concept of single as a positive social identity for women. In between these two goals, very little research exists detailing how women experience and respond to singlism, and what explains how they experience and respond to singlism. Few researchers have focused on areas such as single women's narrative experiences of being single, perceived pressure to conform to traditional social norms, pressure to marry, internalized stereotypes, reduction in behaviors in response to stereotypes, behavioral responses to discrimination, correlation between women's self-concept and satisfaction with singlehood, and behaviors to either reduce association with the single group or to exit the single group by lowering partner criteria (Bennett & Gaines, 2010; Benson, 2013; Buddeberg, 2011; Burkley & Blanton, 2009; Claypool, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013; Larson, 2014; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Piatkowski, 2012; Reynolds & Taylor, 2004; Richman & Leary, 2009; Shachar et al., 2013; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Simpson, 2016; Spielmann et al., 2013).

Recognition of singlism as a social problem that is detrimental to women requires research to understand women's behavioral responses to experiencing singlism. Awareness of singlism as an unhealthy and problematic form of stereotyping and discrimination is also a necessary precursor to recognition of a single lifestyle as an alternative to a married lifestyle, rather than simply a deficit lifestyle and deficit social identity. Research is needed to explore in depth how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, and what explains how women experience singlism. Such a research approach would provide information that is meaningful to the experiences of women who are currently single, who were single in the past, or who become single, as well as about the single social identity of women.

Problem Statement

Researchers have identified a type of discrimination that often goes unrecognized as such by victims, perpetrators, and bystanders (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Pignotti & Abell, 2009). Although racial and gender discrimination still occur, once blatantly discriminatory societal norms such as separate drinking fountains no longer exist. However, many people do not consider it wrong to view and treat single individuals differently than partnered individuals (Morris et al., 2007). Individuals who are not part of a couple experience negative stereotypes and discrimination associated with their single status (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Jordan & Zitek, 2012). For example, both single and partnered individuals view single individuals more negatively than they view partnered individuals, despite any evidence of actual personality differences,

indicating that perceived differences between singles and partnered individuals are merely stereotypes (Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981; Greitemeyer, 2009).

Society particularly views and treats women who are single differently and more negatively than women who are in couple relationships (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981). Single women are often the objects of stereotyping and discrimination, yet they rarely recognize and label the experiences as such (DePaulo, 2011; DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Morris et al., 2007; Pignotti & Abell, 2009). DePaulo and Morris (2005) defined the practices of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against single adults as singlism.

Discrimination occurs when distinctions are made among people based on a particular trait, such as whether an individual is single, and that practice demeans or disadvantages someone (Hellman, 2008). Singles are demeaned when their family practices and other friendships are devalued (Severinson, 2010). Intimate partner relationships, especially heterosexual marriages, are generally awarded higher status than other types of relationships such as friendships (Severinson, 2010), despite research that has demonstrated the benefits adults experience from nonintimate relationships (Gillespie, Lever, Frederick & Royce, 2015). The conferral of special status on intimate partner relationships and marriage may arise from the social construction of marriage as an institution to which an individual either conforms or is viewed as deviant; from the belief that marriage is associated with achieving full adulthood (Jamison & Proulx, 2013); or from the view or belief of coupledom as ideal (Barr, 2015; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Cherlin, 2004; Day et al., 2011; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Homans,

1958; Jacobsen & Van Der Voordt, 1980; Piatkowski, 2012; Pignotti & Abell, 2009; Severinson, 2010).

Single adults are discriminated against when advantages and benefits are awarded to individuals who are not single based solely on their nonsingle (relationship) status. Singlism is stereotyping and discrimination toward single adults. Stereotyping involves the unjustified belief that all single people have similar characteristics and behaviors. Discrimination entails treating singles differently than nonsingles, which is wrong when it results in an individual or group being treated as less worthy (Hellman, 2008). Despite increasing numbers of singles, singlehood continues to be viewed as a deficit identity, particularly for single women (Moore & Radtke, 2015; Simpson, 2016). Singlehood is viewed as a temporary and transitory phase of life that individuals experience while waiting for marriage, and it is associated with the attribution of negative traits such as passivity, laziness, unproductivity, and selectiveness, which are applied predominantly to women (Barr, 2015; Lahad, 2012; 2013; 2016). Discrimination against singles has been demonstrated to manifest as inequities in pay, housing rights in the military, promotions at work, subsidized employee benefits, Social Security benefits, estate taxes, capital gains taxes, insurance, housing, in vitro fertilization, adoption, family care leave, travel packages and experiences, club memberships, and even expectations for longer work hours (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; 2006; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Pignotti & Abell, 2009).

Perhaps more so than men, women are concerned about how other people view them and so may experience reduced quality of life and decreased social interaction in

response to believing that others view them negatively (Blakemore et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 2004). It is discrepant that women are concerned how others view them, may experience negative consequences in response to how others view them, yet often fail to label this experience as discrimination. Sharp and Ganong (2011) identified single women as susceptible to a deficit social identity. Stereotypes against singles may be internalized by single women as shame, and they may respond with behaviors that are intended to reduce cognitive dissonance via either avoidance or attraction (Buddeberg, 2011). A single person with a behavioral motivation for avoidance will try to avoid being single, and a single person with a behavioral motivation for attraction will try to become coupled (Buddeberg, 2011). Piatkowski (2012) stated that single women express feeling pressure from others to marry. Single women who experience stereotyping and discrimination for being single may engage in particular behaviors in response, and women who were formerly single may have engaged in particular behaviors in response.

Exploration of how women experience singlism and what explains how they experience singlism is necessary in order to determine how to help single women stop internalizing negative stereotypes about singles, replace a deficit social identity with a positive social identity, and acknowledge that stereotyping of and discrimination against singles is harmful and wrong. Stereotyping and discrimination have both been demonstrated to have negative effects on the individuals who are the targets of these practices in terms of mental health, physical health, performance, social interaction, and behavior (Bennett & Gaines, 2010; Buddeberg, 2011; Burkley & Blanton, 2009; Cox, Abramson, & Devine, 2012; Hatzenbuehler, Phelan & Link, 2013; Inzlicht & Kang,

2010; Krieger, 2014; Lee & Turney, 2012; Link & Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Mellor, Merino, Saiz, & Quilaqueo, 2009; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Richman & Leary, 2009; Sawyer, Major, Casad, Townsend, & Mendes, 2012; Shachar et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2004).

Recent research findings that documented the consequences of singlism on behavior have focused on the effects of stereotypes on behavior without awareness, supporting singlism as legitimate as a means of justifying the status quo, actions to leave the stigmatized (single) group, identity exit, redefining single as a positive identity, poor decision making in response to social identity threat, and single men redefining single identity as positive (Benson, 2013; Buddeberg, 2011; Craig & Richeson, 2016; Cronin, 2010; Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Eck, 2013; Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; McKeown, 2015; Jetten, Schmitt, & Branscombe, 2013/2012; Laurin et al., 2013; Petriglieri, 2011; Spielmann et al., 2013). Of these studies, only Spielmann et al. (2013) used qualitative methodology to collect narratives from women and men in order to learn about their fear response to being single, and McKeown (2015) employed the collection of narrative data from single women to learn about their marginalized experiences as singles.

In this study, I used a grounded theory approach in an attempt to fill a gap in the current literature regarding how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, and what explains how they experience singlism. I targeted a gap that exists in the body of research surrounding singlism between establishment of singlism as a social problem and efforts to recreate being single as a positive social identity for women. In this research

study, I asked how women experience singlism and what explains how women experience singlism. The experiences of women currently as well as formerly single were of interest.

Purpose of the Study

The practice of stereotyping and discrimination of single people has been defined by DePaulo and Morris (2005) as singlism. Exploration of how women experience singlism and what explains how they experience singlism is necessary in order to determine how to help single women stop internalizing negative stereotypes about singles, replace a deficit social identity with a positive social identity, and acknowledge that stereotyping of and discrimination against singles are harmful and wrong. The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a theory to explain how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, and what explains how women experience singlism. I used open-ended questions to elicit women's responses in their own words about how they had behaved in response to experiencing stereotyping and discrimination due to being single, in order to develop a theory grounded in the participants' own words to explain how women behave in response to singlism as well as what explains how women experience singlism.

Research Questions

The primary research question was the following: How do women experience singlism? The secondary research question was as follows: What explains how women experience singlism?

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

The practice of stereotyping and discrimination toward single people was first labeled singlism by DePaulo and Morris (2005). Researchers have generated theoretical models to understand the causes of stereotyping of and discrimination against singles, the relationship between stereotyping of and discrimination against singles, and the effects of stereotyping of and discrimination against singles on singles. However, no theoretical model exists to explain how women experience stereotyping and discrimination for being single, or what explains how women experience stereotyping and discrimination for being single. Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that allows for an explanatory theory for a phenomenon to arise from the data of participants as told in their own voices (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013a, 2013b; Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015; Glaser, 2016a; 2016b; Kolb, 2012; Patton, 2014). I used the constructivist approach to grounded theory research as described by Charmaz (2006).

Recent researchers have focused on the experience of older single adults, strategies to counter negative stereotypes of single women, social identity threat associated with being single, bias against single people, portrayals of single women, perceptions and life satisfaction of single women, singlehood as a lifestyle choice, and fear of being single (Band-Winterstein, 2014; Barak, 2014; Benson, 2013; Bourassa, Sbarra & Whisman, 2015; Buddeberg, 2011; Cronin, 2010; Lahad, 2012; 2014; Lahad & Hazan, 2014; McErlean, 2014; Piatkowski, 2012; Severinson, 2010; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Simpson, 2016; Spielmann et al., 2013). A multiple framework was used to show the role that social constructionism, cognitive dissonance theory, and social identity

theory play in stereotyping of and discrimination against single women. Social

constructionism has been used to explain how stereotypes about singles are created and

propagated, as well as the purposes and effects of discrimination against singles. Social

constructionism purports that reality is socially constructed by the actions of people in

society, that knowledge is constructed and understood based on these actions, and that

social institutions are responsible for creating stereotypes and discrimination, which

continue to exist because of them (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Diaz-

Leon, 2015; Gergen, 1985).

Cognitive dissonance theory has been used to explain single women's responses

to stereotyping of singles. According to cognitive dissonance theory, an individual will

experience discomfort when conflict exists between beliefs and/or behaviors, and will try

to reduce or eliminate the discomfort by trying to change something to achieve

consistency (Festinger, 1957). Social identity theory has been used to explain

stereotyping of singles by singles and non-singles, and why both groups may fail to

recognize discrimination based on marital status as wrongful discrimination. Social

identity theory states that an individual's social identity is based on comparisons between

the ingroup and the outgroup, with the individual seeking to distance him- or herself from

the outgroup in order to achieve self-esteem (Craig & Richeson, 2016; Tajfel & Turner,

1979). A more detailed explanation of these theories is provided in Chapter 2.

I used Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory approach, which is rooted

in social constructionism, to explore how women experience singlism, and what explains

how they experience singlism. This approach allowed themes to emerge from the

participants' voices gathered in narrative data. Women's behavioral responses to singlism may reflect attempts to reduce cognitive dissonance between stereotypes and women's beliefs and behaviors. These behaviors may involve participant efforts to reduce social identity threat (Holmes et al., 2016). Just as the practice of stereotyping of and discrimination against single women (singlism) is socially constructed, women create/construct their own meanings of singlism based on their experiences and interpretations. I explored the meanings constructed by single women that are responsible for women behaving as they do in response to singlism. Data were gathered by semistructured interviews in order to collect participants' experiences with singlism as told in their own voices. Data analysis revealed themes, indicated the need for additional data, and supported the emergence of an explanatory theory for how women experience singlism, and what explains how women experience singlism.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative grounded theory methodology to explore how women experience singlism and what explains how they experience singlism. Singlism is stereotyping of and discrimination against single people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Qualitative methods were appropriate in exploratory research where I sought both to understand and explain a facet of human behavior and have been demonstrated to be applicable and effective in the areas of sociology, psychology, and social science (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Gergen et al., 2015; Moustakas, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In the absence of a theory that could be quantitatively tested for its ability to explain how women experience singlism and what explains how they experience singlism, a

qualitative approach allowed an explanatory theory to emerge from the participant data, generating understanding through the participants' sharing of their experiences (Gergen, 2009). This collaborative effort between science and society is considered to be particular to qualitative research (Gergen et al., 2015).

This exploratory research was designed to both understand and explain a facet of human behavior reflected a social constructionist world view (Gergen et al., 2015) because a theory to explain behavior was allowed to emerge from the participants as told in their own voices through the dynamic process of data collection, constant comparison, and data analysis (Kolb, 2012). The constructivist grounded theory process of cocreating data and analysis with participants evolved from original work by Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Recognition of the ability to obtain data in the knowledge discoverable in participants' self-told experiences renders the social constructionist world view compatible with grounded theory methodology (Andrews, 2012). Grounded theory was an appropriate research method to explore how women socially construct their reality and beliefs, and how these constructed beliefs then affect their behaviors.

Grounded theory differs from other qualitative research approaches because a general theory to explain a particular process or action is constructed from concepts discovered during the process of continuous data collection and analysis as theory is allowed to inductively emerge from the data as an explanation for a particular phenomenon drawn from the experiences of the participants told in their own voices (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 2016a; 2016b; Nastasi & Schensul,

2005). The outcome of this grounded theory research design is a theoretical explanation for the participants' experiences and responses to experiencing stereotyping and discrimination due to being single. This was achieved through in-depth, semistructured interviews.

The participants were women 18 years or older who self-identified as having experienced stereotyping and discrimination for being single. The participants were asked to consent to a semistructured audio-recorded interview, and their responses were coded using HyperRESEARCH, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Themes emerged during the dynamic data analysis process, and some clarifying questions from participants were necessary. Patterns revealed themes, which led to generation of an explanatory theory to explain how women experience singlism, as well as what explains how they experience singlism. Through the dynamic qualitative process of data collection and analysis, participants' semistructured interviews revealed patterns or themes across women's behaviors that led to a theory to explain how women experience singlism.

Definitions

Constructivist approach: An interpretive tradition in which the dynamic process of data collection and analysis enables the meanings that participants ascribe to their experience of a particular phenomenon to be shared and explored (Charmaz, 2006).

Deficit identity: Occurs when an individual is identified as not having a particular trait or belonging to a particular category. In this study, single is a deficit identity because it is defined as not married or not coupled (Reynolds & Taylor, 2004).

Discrimination: For the purposes of this study, *discrimination* refers to treating the members of one group as less worthy than the members of another group (Hellman, 2008).

Grounded theory: A qualitative research methodology that allows for an explanatory theory to be constructed, grounded in participants' data as told in their own voices (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss 2015; Glaser, 2016a; Glaser, 2016b).

Single: For the purposes of this study, some participants defined *single* as not in a couple relationship (Sassler & Miller, 2011); and some participants defined *single* as not married.

Singlism: Stereotyping of and discrimination against single adults (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

Social identity: A person's sense of who he or she is based on membership in a group or groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity threat: Occurs when an individual experiences environmental cues indicating vulnerability to devaluation due to social identity (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010).

Stereotyping: Involves the belief that all members of a particular group have similar characteristics and behaviors. In stereotyping, differences between two groups are emphasized and variations within individual groups are minimized (Beeghly, 2015; Bordalo, Gennaioli, & Shleifer, 2014).

Assumptions

Assumptions of grounded theory research that were relevant to this study were that the data collected would enable me to learn about the study participants' responses to

singlism as viewed by the participants, that the data collected would allow a general theory to arise to explain women's responses to singlism (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and that the participants would provide useful accounts of their experience with singlism. These assumptions were necessary as inherent to grounded theory methodology.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this research study was on adult women's experiences with singlism. The population of interest included all adults aged 18 or older who self-identified as women and had experienced stereotyping and discrimination due to being single. This specific focus was chosen in order to attempt to control for gender socialization effects because stronger gender stereotypes have been identified for women (Lai et al., 2015), and to narrow the range of the study by age. Sexual orientation was not limited in this study because the issue of concern was whether or not a woman was part of a couple irrespective of sexual orientation. Theories related to the study of singlism that were not investigated included queer theory (Zerjav, 2012), feminist theory (Buddeberg, 2011; Zerjav, 2012), and age theory (Lahad & Hazan, 2014). Potential transferability includes how women under age 18 experience singlism, how males experience singlism, and stereotyping and discrimination toward women without children, with information learned in this study having possible applications (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to future studies with those populations.

Limitations

Possible limitations of this study included participants failing to reveal information, participants providing falsified information, grounded theory not being the

most appropriate method to address the research questions, researcher bias in the comparative data collection and analysis process influencing study outcomes, and a purposive, theoretical sampling strategy containing inherent bias (Kolb, 2012). Participants may have failed to reveal relevant behavioral information due to lack of awareness because stereotypes can influence behavior without awareness (Bennett & Gaines, 2010). Limitations and potential biases were addressed as follows. Theoretical saturation allowed for data collection to continue as opposed to a limited sample size depending on data gathered from too few participants. Considerable research was conducted to evaluate and compare the applicability of various qualitative research methods to the study of how women experience singlism. Particular attention was given to the applicability of phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) versus grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 2016a; 2016b), as well as to the fit between the chosen methodology and theoretical foundation (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985; 2009; Kolb, 2012; Weinberg, 2014). Researcher bias was also addressed by reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006), member checking (Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2013ba; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), memoing (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013bb), and the use of a systematic coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Significance

Singlism is a social problem because it demeans and disadvantages single people (Hellman, 2008). Individuals who experience stereotyping and discrimination experience stress responses that reduce self-esteem and negatively impact health (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Discrimination has also been associated with stress, psychological distress, and

depression (Pascoe & Richman, 2009). Discrimination negatively affects both physical

and mental health (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Pascoe & Richman, 2009). Past researchers

have focused on single women's views of economic, safety, and social repercussions of

being single (Chasteen, 1994); but, current research is beginning to examine stereotypes

about singles, the self-concept of single women, singles' relationships, and singles as

healthy individuals (Buddeberg, 2011; Piatkowski, 2012; Severinson, 2010; Shortell,

2008). Although a path can be drawn from the establishment of the existence of

stereotyping and discrimination against singles to studies documenting the effects of

stereotyping and discrimination on individuals and concluding that singlism must cause

similar effects, there is scant research that directly documents how single women

experience and respond to stereotyping and discrimination due to being single,

particularly specific behavioral responses to either avoid being single or to attempt to

become coupled.

Further research into singlism is needed to discern behavioral responses to

stereotyping and discrimination against singles. Acknowledgment and validation of the

practice and experience of singlism are prerequisite to identification of singlism as a

social problem. Potential social change benefits include alteration in societal values that

currently exclude recognition of other non-partnered relationships as beneficial; alteration

in societal norms that indicate that nonpartnered individuals are deviant or not as good as

partnered individuals; and reduction or elimination of single women's behavioral

responses to singlism that have potential negative repercussions for individuals and

society. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to discover and understand how

single women experience stereotypes and discrimination due to being single, and what explains how they experience singlism.

Summary

Women experience stereotyping and discrimination due to being single, which is defined as singlism, via single being viewed as a deficit identity. Single women are denied benefits and advantages that are afforded to coupled women based solely on their intimate relationship status. Although there has been recent focus on promoting singlehood as a positive social identity, a lifestyle choice, and an alternative family structure, there has been minimal research exploring how women experience singlism, and what explains how they experience singlism. This chapter has summarized the research literature related to singlism, provided a rationale for conducting this study and for the use of a grounded theory research tradition, and presented the significance and potential social implications of this study. The problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions were discussed. Key definitions, assumptions, scope and boundaries, and limitations of the study were also presented. In Chapter 2, I review the literature search strategy and results, as well as present the multiple framework approach used in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Single adults are discriminated against when advantages and benefits are awarded to individuals who are not single based solely on their non-single (relationship) status. Singlism is stereotyping of and discrimination against single adults (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Stereotyping involves the unjustified belief that all single people have similar characteristics and behaviors. Discrimination is treating singles differently than nonsingles, which is wrong when the practice involves treating a person or group of people as less worthy (Hellman, 2008). Despite increasing numbers of singles, singlehood continues to be viewed as a deficit identity, particularly for single women (Moore & Radtke, 2015; Simpson, 2016). Singlehood is viewed as a temporary and transitory phase of life that individuals experience while waiting for marriage; this view often ascribes negative traits such as passivity, laziness, unproductivity, and selectiveness to singles, especially women (Lahad, 2012; 2013). Discrimination against singles has been demonstrated in inequities in pay, housing rights in the military (Pignotti & Abell, 2009), promotions at work, subsidized employee benefits, Social Security benefits, estate taxes, capital gains taxes, insurance, housing, in vitro fertilization, adoption (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), family care leave, travel packages and experiences, club memberships (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014), and even expectations for longer work hours (Jordan & Zitek, 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore how women experience singlism and what explains how women experience singlism.

Relevance of Singlism as a Social Problem

Singlism involves stereotyping of and discrimination against single individuals (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Single is viewed as a deficit identity because the only qualification is that an individual is not married/coupled (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Reynolds & Taylor, 2004). Singles are denied advantages and benefits that are offered to married/coupled people based solely on relationship status (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; 2006; Pignotti & Abell, 2009; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014). Individuals, including single women, frequently do not consider discrimination against single people as wrong (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). Singlism is a social problem that is relevant and important to the well-being of single people in terms of physical and mental health (Barak, 2014; Bruckmuller, 2013; Hatzenbuehler, Phelan & Link, 2013; Lee & Turney, 2012; Link & Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013); access to resources, services, and benefits (Abrams, 2012; Fisher, 2013; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Shachar et al., 2013; Smith, Willmott, Trowse, & White, 2013); social status (Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Benson, 2013); recognition of singlehood as a lifestyle (Band-Winterstein & Manchik-Rimon, 2014; Buddeberg, 2011; Lahad, 2012; 2013; 2014; Larson, 2014; McErlean, 2012); and life satisfaction (Piatkowski, 2012; Spielmann et al., 2013). Singlism identifies the monogamous adult intimate relationship as the only relationship important to adults (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) and promotes the ideal that coupledom, particularly marriage, is good for everyone (Mulawka, 2013). Positive social change requires that other family forms be recognized as families (Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015; Mulawka, 2013).

Chapter Preview

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the literature surrounding the phenomenon of singlism, including strengths and weaknesses of prior research and methodologies, and the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework supporting the current research study. Theories used in the study of singlism in prior research as well as theories presumed to have practical application to the current study's research questions are described. The conceptual framework includes a description of seminal research on singlism, key statements and definitions, prior articulations and applications of singlism in previous research, and explanation of how the framework supports the current research study. The literature review includes scholarly research on singlism and related constructs from the fields of psychology, sociology, health care, government, and law. The review of the literature includes an examination of methodology and methods consistent with the current study; strengths and weaknesses of prior approaches to studying singlism; justification for the current study; a synthesis of what is known about singlism, controversies in the research, and the need for future study; and a review of prior studies related to the current study's research questions as well as supportive of the approach selected.

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Literature Search Strategy

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The literature search was conducted using the Google Scholar search engine as well as the Walden Library research databases. Multidisciplinary databases searched included Academic Search Complete and ProQuest Central. Specialized databases were

also searched. PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and SAGE Premier psychological databases were searched, as was the SocINDEX sociology research database.

Key Search Terms

Search terms and combinations of search terms that yielded literature relevant to the current study included *singlism*, *stereotypes* and *not married*, *stereotypes* and *single*, *bias* and *marriage*, *discrimination* and *singles*, *status quo* and *marriage*, *system justification* and *marriage*, *marriage ideology*, *institution of marriage*, *benefits of marriage*, *marital discrimination and health*, *reaction to stereotypes*, *response to discrimination*, *response to stereotyping*, *reaction to discrimination*, *single versus married*, *never married women*, *marital choice*, *theory behind choice to marry*, *stereotype single girl*, *treatment married different than single*, *women* and *marriage*, *social constructionism* and *marriage*, *social constructionist theory*, and *grounded theory research*.

Search terms and combinations that did not yield additional relevant results included *bias* and *single*, *bias* and *married*, *drive to marry*, *effects of social discrimination*, *stigma* and *single*, *effects of stigma*, *effects of stereotypes on behavior*, *reaction to discrimination*, *single lifestyle*, *lifestyle of single people*, *old maid*, *single women*, *self-concept formation* and *women*, *life satisfaction* and *single women*, *life satisfaction* and *marital status*, *identity* and *marital status*, *gender identity*, *female self-identity* and *marriage*, *social psychology* and *marital stereotypes*, *social identity threat* and *women*, *discrimination unmarried women*, *discrimination against single women*,

marriage as social institution, *social constructionism and institutions*, *social construction of marriage*, and *female singlehood*.

Iterative Search Process

The iterative search process involved the necessity of researching related general concepts due to the paucity of research on singlism. The process was initiated by searching on *singlism* and then *stereotyping* and *discrimination*, which are components of singlism. The search was expanded to *not married* and descriptors of single people in media. Search terms were run with and without limiting to female gender. The same terms were entered again with combinations of *effects of*, *reaction to*, and *response to*. Searches were done on benefits of marriage, benefits of being single, various terms involving social identity and marital status, and combinations of key words and theories.

Current Research

My initial search on the term *singlism* yielded limited results. No explicit scholarly research on singlism was located in major journals related to psychology or sociology before 2005. Seminal research from 2005 through 2008 was identified, followed by limited references until a resurgence of interest from 2011 through the present, including several dissertations. Recent research into singlism has advanced and continues with research into the social identity of singles; understanding and overcoming both internal and external aspects of singlism, reactions to singlism, acceptance of singlehood as a lifestyle, and identification of singlism as a social problem.

Theoretical Foundation

In the current study, I sought to explore how single women experience the stereotyping of and discrimination against single people that occur as a result of the social construction of marriage/coupledom as the only social norm for adults. Single women may have behavioral responses to singlism as a means of either adhering to or rejecting social norms and values, or as a means of trying to obtain benefits. Conversely, single women may have behavioral responses that are either consciously or subconsciously intended to reduce the discomfort they experience or could experience by failing to adhere to social norms. The research paradigm began with the research-supported premise that stereotyping of and discrimination against singles exists; I sought to discover how women behave as a result of experiencing stereotyping and discrimination (singlism), as well as what explains how women experience singlism.

Through the dynamic qualitative process of data collection and analysis, participants' semistructured interviews revealed patterns or categories across women's behaviors that led to a theory to better explain how women experience singlism and their behavioral responses. Social constructionism provided a rationale for why stereotyping of and discrimination against singles occur, and for how marriage achieves and maintains status as a social norm. This grounded theory approach is compatible with social constructionist underpinnings because a theory to explain behavior was allowed to emerge through data collection and analysis (Kolb, 2012). Exploring women's responses to singlism, as well as what explains their responses to singlism, also involved tenets of cognitive dissonance theory and/or social identity theory.

Social Constructionism

Singlism can be viewed through the theoretical lens of social constructionism. Social constructionism purports that all reality is socially constructed. Social constructionism focuses on the actions of people in society as they construct their reality. Knowledge is constructed and understood based on these interactions, and social institutions such as marriage both sustain and are sustained by social interactions (Andrews, 2012; Diaz-Leon, 2015; Gergen, 1985). The socially conferred institutional status of marriage encourages individual adherence to marriage as a societal norm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Individuals who remain single are viewed as social deviants and are subject to negative stereotypes and discrimination based on their non-partnered status (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Jacobsen & Van Der Voordt, 1980; Piatkowski, 2012; Pignotti & Abell, 2009). Individuals who remain single are denied social approval and benefits given only to partnered individuals (Blakemore et al., 2005; Cherlin, 2004; Day et al., 2011; Jacobsen & Van Der Voordt, 1980; Piatkowski, 2012; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Postmodern interpretations of social constructionism propose that institutions impose criteria irrespective of any demonstrated credibility, based solely on their ability to achieve organizational objectives; and these institutions then provide security and predictability (Weinberg, 2014).

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

When an individual experiences a situation in which there is conflict between beliefs and/or behaviors, it will likely result in attempts to reduce the uncomfortable feeling by changing something to make beliefs and/or behaviors consistent (Festinger,

1957). A person who is single resolves the dissonance between this state and the widely held belief that everyone gets married by either getting married or adopting the belief that something is wrong with people who do not get married (Buddeberg, 2011). In this study, I sought to explore women's responses to singlism, as well as the explanation(s) for these responses. Some women's behavioral responses to singlism can be explained by attempts to reduce cognitive dissonance experienced as a result of being single in a society that idealizes marriage/coupledom.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory postulates that members of the in-group will discriminate against members of the out-group as a way to maintain positive social identity; from this perspective, stereotyping is basically how people quickly sort individuals into the in-group or out-group (Craig & Richeson, 2016; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory may lend some explanation as to why both singles and nonsingles stereotype single people and fail to recognize that providing benefits based solely on relationship status is wrongful discrimination. Singlism involves stereotyping nonmarrieds into the out-group in an attempt to maintain the higher status of the in-group members. Young single adults felt more positively toward married people than toward other single people because they believed that mobility from the single group (out-group) to the married group (in-group) was possible and probable (Benson, 2013). In the current study, I sought to explore women's' responses to singlism, as well as the explanation(s) for these responses. It is possible that women's behavioral responses to singlism are explained by recent research that has identified responses to social identity threat

categorized as taking action, ignoring the threat, or seeking some type of assistance (Holmes et al., 2016).

<div align="center">**Seminal Research**</div>

The phenomenon of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination affecting single adults was first labeled singlism in 2005 by DePaulo and Morris. After it was established that stereotypes about singles exist and that stereotypes about singles lead to discrimination against singles (DePaulo & Morris, 2006), it was found that most people are unaware that singles are stigmatized and even consider discrimination against singles to be legitimate (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Morris et al., 2007). The Negative Stereotyping of Single Persons Scale was developed by Pignotti and Abell in 2009 in order to further investigate singlism. It was intended to measure stereotyping of single people by asking participants to scale rate items related to proposed superiority of marriage over singlehood, perceived consequences of being single, and perceived causes of being single (Pignotti & Abell, 2009). Singlism initiates a process whereby negative stereotypes about singles are internalized by singles as shame (Buddeberg, 2011), discrimination against singles based on these stereotypes is unrecognized (DePaulo & Morris, 2006) or recognized as legitimate (Morris et al., 2007), both singles and partnered individuals maintain the status quo of singlism in order to maintain a belief that the social structure they live under is fair (Benson, 2013), and singlism exists as a twofold social problem that jeopardizes the wellbeing of singles as well as unjustly provides benefits to married and coupled individuals. Concepts related to singlism include stereotypes, stigma, prejudice, discrimination, social norms, preferential treatment for married

individuals, single identity, and single lifestyle. Initial stereotype research focused on comparisons of single people with married people; this research has developed to include delineation of singles into the categories of never married and divorced, as well as growth of the married category into coupledom as opposed to only legally married, as it has been argued that there exists little difference between married couples and cohabitating couples (Trost, 2010).

Although studies investigating stereotypes about married versus not-married people began decades earlier, singlism was not applied to the practice of stereotyping of and discrimination against single adults until DePaulo and Morris's seminal article in 2005. DePaulo and Morris proposed the ideology of marriage and family as the root cause of stereotyping of and discrimination against singles, identified singles as a stigmatized group, and introduced singlism as a social problem. A main premise of the Ideology of Marriage and Family that appears to underlie singlism is that the sexual partnership is the only relationship important to adults, given that the only qualification for being single is lack of such a partner (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Singles' acceptance of stereotyping of and discrimination against singles can also be viewed as acceptance of this ideology (Morris et al., 2007). DePaulo and Morris's work acted as a stimulus for continuing as well as contemporary research into issues including the preponderance of negative stereotypes about single people, differences between married and single people, marital status bias, lack of acknowledgement of stereotyping of and discrimination against singles, stigma surrounding singlehood, psychometric measurement of negative

stereotypes about singles, and the perceived legitimacy of discrimination based solely on marital status.

Prior Applications and Benefits to Current Research

Singlism has been applied in prior research to demonstrate how negative stereotypes (about singles) are internalized by women (Buddeberg, 2011); how individuals support singlism as legitimate in order to maintain the social status quo (Benson, 2013); that singlism is relevant to the wellbeing of singles (Abrams, 2012; Barak, 2014; Benson, 2013; Bruckmuller, 2013; Fisher, 2013; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Lee & Turney, 2012; Piatkowski, 2012; Shachar et al., 2013; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Smith, Willmott, Trowse, & White, 2013; Spielmann et al., 2013); and that singlehood is a recognized lifestyle (Band-Winterstein & Manchik-Rimon, 2014; Buddeberg, 2011; Lahad, 2012; 2013; 2014; Larson, 2014; McErlean, 2012). Prior findings support the premise that single women are adversely affected by the practice of singlism and demonstrate that being single can be associated with positive life satisfaction if social and personal barriers are identified and eliminated. In the current study, I sought to build on prior research into singlism, to discover particular behaviors that women may engage in as a result of experiencing singlism, and to learn what explains how women experience singlism.

Stereotypes and Stigma

Singles are assumed to have similar traits and behaviors which exist heterogeneously and are viewed negatively, with these negative attributes causing singles to be discounted or viewed as "tainted" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Stereotypes of singles

result in the group being stigmatized. Singles may internalize these beliefs which results

in shame (Goffman, 1963). Stereotypes emphasize differences between groups and

minimize variations within an individual group (Beeghly, 2015; Bordalo et al., 2014).

This can be partly attributed to confirmation bias whereby individuals will react more to

information that appears to support a stereotype and less to information that appears

discrepant (Beeghly, 2015; Bordalo et al., 2014). Stereotypes are activated and lead to

prejudice at the societal level, interpersonal level (between two people), and intrapersonal

level (self-prejudice) which all can result in depression in the target of the prejudice (Cox

et al., 2012). Singles are discriminated against based on being perceived as inferior which

is based on a socially constructed ideology to explain their inferiority (Goffman, 1963;

Woerner, 2017).

Early research into stereotypes about people based solely on marital status found

that married people were perceived more favorably, more secure, happier, and more

reliable than never-married people (Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981). Fourteen years later,

researchers were still finding participants more likely to describe singles as lonely, shy,

unhappy, insecure, and inflexible (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Narrative research revealed

that single women were generally perceived as less happy, having fewer social skills,

being less successful, being flawed, and having less life satisfaction than married women;

that singlehood was not regarded as a lifestyle choice; and that most single women had

internalized the negative stereotypes about single women and had perhaps felt pressured

to marry (Shachar et al., 2013). In comparisons of married people with individuals in

nonmonogamous relationships, study participants attributed monogamously coupled

individuals with being happier, more sexually satisfied, and even better citizens – a phenomenon called the halo effect (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013; Day, 2013).

Today, people continue to stereotype singles as immature, insecure, self-centered, unhappy, lonely, and ugly as compared to married people (Larson, 2014). Even young, single people have been shown to feel more positively towards married people than towards other singles (Benson, 2013; Larson, 2014). Zhang (2015) found that singles were judged as less moral than marrieds. Endorsement of stereotyping of singles by singles as well as by partnered individuals demonstrated two important premises of self-stereotype impact: self-relevant stereotypes can be very powerful, and they can influence individual behavior without awareness (Bennett & Gaines, 2010). Acceptance of a negative stereotype via self-stereotyping can result in reduction of behaviors that are in opposition to the goals that are stereotypical of the stigmatized group (Burkley & Blanton, 2009), including action responses by the self-stereotyped person. Self-stereotype is correlated with lower group identification with the stigmatized group and thus negative attitudes toward stigmatized group members who speak out against the discrimination (Kaiser, Hagiwara, Malahy, & Wilkins, 2009). The Stereotype Content Model proposes that societal structure (e.g., social norms, status quo, institutions, etc.) causes stereotypes, stereotypes cause prejudice, and prejudice results in discrimination (Caprariello, Cuddy, & Fiske, 2009).

Perspective taking has been shown to reduce the use of stereotyping in judging others (Ku, Wang, & Galinsky, 2010), whereas the process of singles internalizing

negative stereotypes (self-stereotyping) as shame must be countered by positive cultural

messages about being single (Buddeberg, 2011; Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015). Cultural

messages must eliminate the stigma surrounding individuals who are not married or in

coupled relationships, as well as stop promoting the perception of individual, family, and

societal benefits only to people who are in coupled/marital relationships (Conley et al.,

2013).

 Stigma is a negative condition that is considered to be socially unacceptable.

Stigma can refer to a particular trait or attribute whose existence causes an individual to

be discounted or discredited, or to the social process that enables a particular condition to

acquire a stigmatized meaning (Bos, Pryor, Reeder, & Stutterheim, 2013; Goffman,

1963). Individuals who experience stigma have been shown to experience negative

biopsychosocial consequences including stress responses such as hypertension, heart

disease, and stroke (Major & O'Brien, 2005); depression (Cox et al., 2012); shame

(Buddeberg, 2011); low self-esteem (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Richman & Leary, 2009);

negative emotions (Richman & Leary, 2009); increased pressure to marry (Shachar et al.,

2013); and even depressed academic achievement (Major & O'Brien, 2005). How an

individual perceives stigma depends on several variables including: stigma

consciousness, perceived legitimacy, and group identification (Pinel & Bosson, 2013).

Individuals who have experienced stigma are more susceptible to subsequent perception

of stigma (Major & O'Brien, 2005), and may undertake behaviors to reduce cognitive

dissonance (Richman & Leary, 2009). A stigmatized individual may respond to

experiencing stigma by either attempting to "correct" his or her failing, or by adopting an

"unconventional interpretation" of his or her single social identity (Goffman, 1963, p. 10).

Single status is often viewed as a stigma, and stigma has been shown to negatively affect both physical and mental health due to unhealthy sustained levels of biological responses to perceived threats (Hafford-Letchfield, Lambert, Long, & Brady, 2016; Link & Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Different categories of singles, such as never-married versus divorced, have been shown to experience different levels of stigma (Slonim, Gur-yaish, & Katz, 2015); with divorced singles perceived more positively than never-married singles (Byrne & Carr, 2005). Individuals who are very conscious of stigma perceive more discrimination than those who have low stigma consciousness (Pinel & Bosson, 2013).

Subsequent researchers examined whether perceived differences between singles and married individuals were quantifiable. Research into two prominent stereotypes about singles' loneliness and higher number of sexual partners as compared to married people concluded that although loneliness and increased sexual partners were both more prevalent among singles than married people, the stereotypes did not apply to the majority of the single population (Cargan, 1986). There are clear differences in perceptions of personality characteristics of single versus partnered individuals, with singles viewed more negatively than partnered individuals; and that these perceived differences do not reflect actual differences (Greitmeyer, 2009). It appears that the stereotyping of singles differs from stereotypes that are established by observations of the group of interest, which have been found to be accurate (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Establishment of a discrepancy between perceived differences and actual differences gives further credibility to the existence of stereotypes against singles.

Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when a distinction is made between two individuals or groups and they are then treated differently based on that categorization. Discrimination can occur at the individual level or institutionally at the population level (Krieger, 2014). Discrimination is wrong when it treats the members of one group as less worthy (Hellman, 2008), such as treating married people as better than singles. In these situations, discrimination is often called prejudice. The severity of different (or exclusionary) treatment increases the likelihood of it being considered group-based as opposed to individual, with group-based exclusionary treatment more likely to be viewed as discrimination (Jetten, Iyer, Branscombe, & Zhang, 2013). However, whether or not exclusionary treatment that is considered group-based is also considered to be discrimination may also depend on several variables (pervasiveness, ability to move into another group, and perceived alternatives to status quo) that cause the discrimination to be perceived as legitimate as opposed to illegitimate (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Jetten et al., 2013; 2013/2012), with exclusionary behavior that is perceived as legitimate not being labelled as discrimination. In terms of singlism, between-group mobility and status quo are particularly relevant in relation to considering differential treatment as discrimination since the ability to move from the single to married group is considered likely for most people, and marriage/coupledom is the status quo. These two factors

contribute to singlism being considered legitimate differential (exclusionary) treatment, which is usually not labelled discrimination.

Discrimination against singles has been demonstrated in the areas of lower pay, unequal housing rights in the military (Pignotti & Abell, 2009), promotions at work, subsidized employee benefits, social security benefits, estate taxes, capital gains taxes, insurance, housing, in vitro fertilization, adoption (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), family care leave, travel packages and experiences, club memberships (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014), and even expectations for longer work hours due to perceived less responsibility outside of work (Jordan & Zitek, 2012).

Direct experiences of discrimination have been linked to quality of life variables, social interaction indicators (Thompson et al., 2004), and poorer mental health, particularly depression or psychological distress (Krieger, 2014). Perceived discrimination has also been linked with individuals' participating more in unhealthy behaviors and less in healthy behaviors (Pascoe & Richman, 2009). Emotional responses to discrimination include psychologically wounded (belittles, humiliated, degraded, hurt, bitter, or traumatized), anger (annoyance, irritation, indignation, or anger), bad feelings, shame, powerlessness, fear, sadness, feeling uncomfortable, and feeling worn out (Mellor et al., 2009). Even anticipating prejudice (discrimination) can result in psychological and cardiovascular stress responses (Sawyer et al., 2012). Emotion regulation strategies may be an important link between discrimination and mental health problems considering that increased rumination predicted increased psychological distress; suppression predicted increased distress response to stigma related stressors (Hatzenbuehler, Nolen-Hoeksema,

& Dovidio, 2009); and anger was correlated with feeling less shame (Matheson and Anisman, 2009). Responses to discrimination also appear to be moderated by both the perceived legitimacy of the discrimination as well as by pervasiveness (Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, Garza, & Mewse, 2011). Pervasive discrimination has been linked to poor mental health indicators in depressive symptoms, loneliness, and hostility (Lee & Turney, 2012). Individuals who perceive discrimination as legitimate are more likely to conform (Jetten et al., 2013/2012) and thus leave their stigmatized group in situations where social mobility is possible (Cronin, 2010).

Social Identity and Single Lifestyle

Singles have historically been and continue to be regarded as abnormal, deviant, or in a transitional phase before becoming coupled (Jamison & Proulx, 2013). There is little claim in the literature of being single as healthy or having psychological or emotional benefits other than opportunities for autonomy, independence, creativity, and self-development and realization (Laurin et al., 2013; Shortell, 2008), attributing a negative social identity to single people. Singlehood is associated with loneliness that increases with age. Single women have been more stigmatized than single men, and christened with derogatory terms such as cat lady, spinster, and old maid. However, research surrounding being single continues and has progressed from gendered narrative experiences of being a single woman in a world that assumes women are part of a heterosexual couple, to focusing on the social identity of singles and examining singlehood as a life choice that includes positive self-concept and life satisfaction.

Social Identity

Social identity is that part of an individual's self-concept (how the individual thinks about self) that is derived from membership in a group or multiple groups. A person's self-concept is based on membership in a group or groups, with social identity based on comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroup (Craig & Richeson, 2016; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals seek to distance themselves from the outgroup in order to achieve self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination towards the individual and one or more of the groups can result in the individual experiencing social identity threat. Social identity threat occurs when an individual experiences environmental cues indicating vulnerability to devaluation due to social identity (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). Health consequences of social identity (social status) threat may include psychological as well as physiological responses such as disease (Kemeny, 2009). Research found social identity threat affecting an individual's self-control and thus stimulating aggression, negative eating behaviors, poor decision making, and reduced attention (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). The effect of using a deficit model to label people according to whether they are married or not (single) deems the married group as normative and the single group as nonnormative which has implications on social identity.

In studies where singles were asked questions about how singles differed from married people, the married group was inferred to be the normative group and singles reported feeling worse about being single than when they were asked questions about how married people differed from single people (Bruckmuller, 2013). This effect has also

been proposed as a possible explanation for why stigmatized groups may not question the privileges afforded to members of the higher status group (status quo) (Bruckmuller, 2013). In addition to negative consequences, social identity threat can motivate an individual to take action to reduce the discomfort experienced due to conflict between their social status (social identity) and the status quo. An identity-restructuring response to social identity threat can involve abandoning the single identity, called identity exit, thus eliminating the threat (Petriglieri, 2011). Another identity-restructuring response to social identity threat entails changing the meanings associated with being single (Petriglieri, 2011), such as redefining being single as either temporary or a desired state (Barr, 2015; Eck, 2013). Accordingly, adopting the belief that a particular relationship status, such as a singlehood, is normal can resolve cognitive dissonance and identity threat by rationalizing the status as just another normal choice (Laurin et al., 2013).

Singleness/Singlehood

Singlehood is increasing as a lifestyle in the United States. There has been a steady decline and delay in marriage, with age at first marriage rising (Pew Research Center 2011). The rate of people remarrying has also sharply declined (Brown & Lin, 2013), which may reflect increasing occurrence of cohabitation (Isen & Stevenson, 2010). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2011 there were 102 million unmarried people ages 18 and older living in America, representing 44.1% of all U.S. residents 18 and older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Fifty-three percent (54+ million) of these were women. Unmarried individuals consist of never-married (62%), divorced (24%), and widowed adults (14%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The increase in singlehood is

correlated with sociodemographic variables including gender, age, educational level, and income (Petrowski, Schurig, Schmutzer, Brahler & Stobel-Richter, 2015).

Young singles today are more positive about singlehood in general, yet the majority do not desire to be single themselves (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). As opposed to expressing a preference for marriage, research found that young singles who expressed a preference for coupledom over singlehood actually preferred cohabitation over marriage (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). This could partially explain research indicating that singlehood may be more attractive to individuals who are more liberal-minded (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). Attitudes towards singlehood also appear to fluctuate with age, yet interviews with adults over age 65 revealed that the fluctuations may be related to social context as opposed to lifespan stage (McErlean, 2010).

Irrespective of whether or not they expressed a desire for a future relationship, singles were involved in relationships with family and friends, at work, and within the community, often to a greater degree than possible if part of a couple (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016; Severinson, 2010); yet these relationships are not afforded the same importance as romantic couple relationships. Although cohabitation is becoming increasingly recognized as a lifestyle separate from marriage, it still consists of a couple. Women appeared to struggle with describing why they were single due to polarized concepts associated with singleness, faced with attributing their singleness to either outside factors or their own personal choice (Reynolds, Wetherell, & Taylor, 2007).

The Social Environment of Single Women

Social environment consists of a woman's family, neighborhood, work team, community, and other social groups that she belongs to and that impact her sense of social identity (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). Twenty years ago, narrative research into the social environments of single women revealed challenges with limited financial resources, safe and affordable housing, transportation, and finding leisure activities not limited to couples (Chasteen, 1994). Their descriptions of living single in a couple culture included the difficulty of trying to access social networks when social activities appeared geared towards couples, being regarded as social deviants and abnormal, and being constantly fearful of being verbally or physically accosted by men (Chasteen, 1994). Single women today report many of the same concerns. Difficulties with singlehood are reported to include holidays, pressure from family and friends to be partnered, ambiguous loss, fear of being alone, complaints about married couples, and biological effects of aging (Blakemore et al., 2005; Koeing, Zimmerman, Haddock, & Banning, 2010).

Media glamorize young, single women as enjoying independence while concurrently yearning to meet a man and settle down (Genz, 2010). Popular television shows such as Bachelorette have been shown to promote the social norms that are associated with stereotyping and discrimination towards singles, and result in stigmatization of those who violate those norms (Keener & Massey, 2015). Research has documented the power of the media in shaping attitudes towards social groups, as well as in maintaining any inequalities (Schmader, Block, & Lickel, 2015). Even articles

disguised as proponents of women's choice contain derogatory messages explaining that single is a good choice now because the only guys left to marry are all losers (Bolick, 2011). Despite the modern espoused focus on singlehood as a choice, older single women formerly categorized as old maids and spinsters are now satirized by the media as crazy cat ladies while simultaneously being discriminated against based on gender, age, and marital status (Lahad & Hazan, 2014).

Independent older single women are maligned as unnatural and incompetent (Chang, 2015; Barak, 2014). As women aged they reported being acutely aware of the relationship between their increasing age and their social environment in terms of fewer men still eligible for marriage, watching other people get married, increasing concerns over the viability of becoming pregnant later in life, increased attention paid to their single status, and feeling displaced in their birth families when a younger sibling married and had children before them (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

Social Norms

A norm is a standard of behavior that is considered proper or acceptable. The greater the proportion of people who participate in the behavior, the more likely it is to represent a norm (Jacobsen & Van Der Voordt, 1980; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). An individual who does not conform to social norms is considered to be deviant, and particularly a social deviant if he or she touts refusal to accept social norms (Goffman, 1963). Marriage continues to be considered natural, a normative role for adults, and a social norm that confers deviant status on individuals with different lifestyles (Blakemore et al., 2005; Cargan, 1986). Narrative research with single women found that watching

others marry increased their experienced pressure to marry which indicates that the

marriage norm may have an informational influence since it appears to exert a stronger

impact the more others observe people doing it (Krupka & Weber, 2009). Feminist

critique purports that marriage confers a bourgeois (middle class) respectability on those

who choose marriage, which then cannot help but deem other lifestyle options as less

respectable (Marso, 2010). Despite the increase in alternative lifestyles such as

cohabitation, research indicates that women still view marriage as a natural and popular

stepping stone of adulthood (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016; Carter, 2010). In addition to

practical reasons to marry including security, stability, sexuality, pregnancy and children,

women also state that remaining single is socially unacceptable (Carter, 2010). In terms

of singlism, the difference between married and single has known grown into the

difference between coupled and single, as more individuals spend time cohabitating

which closely resembles marriage (Sassler & Miller, 2011), but without all of the state

conferred benefits.

Marriage as an Institution

Marriage is an institution because it consists of rules and assumptions that attempt

to control and govern social behaviors (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). It creates rights and

privileges, as well as expectations and responsibilities that are supposedly endorsed

(Karasu, 2007) by society as a whole. The legal system relies on the privileged status of

marriage as a means to determine eligibility for public benefits (Abrams, 2012). Support

for marriage is support for the status quo (Essig & Owens, 2009). The institutional status

of marriage imbues it with arbitrary power to confer benefits and advantages on people

based solely on sexual and intimate choices, granting legitimacy to only certain forms of intimate relationships (Marso, 2010). Those who propose that marriage is a civil right, are merely supporting that some people deserve the rights and protections of the state because of their intimate relationship choices, whereas others do not deserve them (Marso, 2010). Flanders (1996) stated that marriage benefits society and the state by preventing immoral and criminal behavior; that it is difficult and thus participants deserves rewards; and that benefits must be denied to those who refuse marriage. This perspective of marriage as an institutional enforcer of criminal law has footholds in antiquated applications whereby single men who sexually compromised single women were legally forced to marry them; as well as applicability in the current debate over same-sex marriage where supporters have argued that allowing same-sex partners to marry ensures their adherence to conservative norms (Murray, 2012).

Over 10 years ago, it was proposed that traditional marriage was becoming deinstitutionalized because of the increase in cohabitation and the movement to legalize same-sex marriage (Cherlin, 2004); yet, opponents countered that the laws, social norms, and formal and informal rules of what to do when married still existed, and that behaviors associated with marriage remained rigid (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). Recent researchers found support for the deinstitutionalization theory in that disapproval for alternatives declined (Treas, Lui, & Gubernskaya, 2014); yet, this study examined relationship alternatives as opposed to remaining single. Despite some changed assumptions about marriage, it is still regarded as the socially correct version of coupledom and family (Marzullo, 2011); with same-sex couples seeking the legitimating power of legal

marriage (Ocobock, 2013), since singles are viewed as having lower status than marrieds (Woerner, 2017).

Just as research demonstrated that both coupled people and singles accepted and espoused negative stereotypes about single people, both coupled people and singles both expressed more bias against singles when they believed that the institution of marriage was threatened, as well as when the institution of marriage was affirmed (Cronin, 2010; Day, 2013). A view espoused from some conservative religions states that singlehood is a problem that has resulted from feminism and the anti-marriage movement, and validates compassion for those who struggle to marry (Woerner, 2017). Those are also those who propose that marriage remains as a social institution but is joined by two upstarts – cohabitating and living apart together (LAT; Trost, 2010), which supports the existence of the ideology of coupledom/committed relationship ideology (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016; Day et al., 2011; Day, 2013; 2016).

Research into trends in attitudes towards marriage in the United States indicate that women who are single, better educated, employed, and relatively nonreligious have less traditional views about marriage; with public opinion overall indicating a shift away from traditional marriage norms; which is an indication that recent government programs to support and promote marriage have not been successful (Gubernskaya, 2010). Supporters of the institution of marriage claim that it provides benefits to society as a whole (Karasu, 2007); yet, specialized government programs are just an example of the many benefits and advantages aimed at only married individuals that clearly do not benefit singles in society. Promoting the belief that marriage is for everyone, the ideology

of marriage and family essentially transforms marriage into a universal that is supposed to be good for everyone (Mulawka, 2013) and thus creates singlism.

Benefits of Marriage

People perceive marriage to have individual, familial, and societal level benefits (Conley et al., 2013). As perceived benefits of marriage decrease, the age at first marriage increases (Rotz, 2011). Literature, research, and popular media all stated that benefits of marriage include better mental health (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Lodge & Umberson, 2014; Waite & Lehrer, 2003); physical health, happiness, economic security, having children (Waite & Lehrer, 2003); lower blood pressure, lower stress, less depression, and higher life satisfaction (Holt-Lunstad, Birmingham, & Jones, 2008); increased quality of life as an older adult as compared to singles (Han, Park, Kim, Kim,, & Park, 2014); living longer (Rendall, Weden, Favreault, & Waldron, 2011; Waite & Lehrer, 2003); more promotions at work, subsidized employee benefits for spouses, social security benefits for spouses, special estate tax laws, reduced capital gains taxes, lower insurance rates, better access to housing, support for in vitro fertilization, increased desirability in adoptions (DePaulo & Morris, 2005); surrogacy (Smith et al., 2013); family care leave, travel packages and experiences geared towards couples and families, reduced club memberships (DePaulo, 2013; DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014); higher pay, better access to military housing (Pignotti & Abell, 2009); reduced expectations for working overtime due to assumed family responsibility outside of work (Jordan & Zitek, 2012); and even serves as a protective factor against poor health outcomes (Carr & Springer, 2010) including suicide (Corcoran & Nagar, 2010). Self-

report measures have confirmed that married people report better self-rated health than single and divorced people (Lindstrom, 2009). Research into the long-term consequences of relationship formation found that although the subjective well-being of young adults decreased after they entered a married or cohabitating relationship, that they were still happier than those who were single (Soons, Liefbroer, & Kalmijn, 2009). However, some recent research has disputed these claims. A recently created and validated a measure of relationship satisfaction that enables comparison between partnered and singles purports that evidence supporting a positive direct correlation between marital status and life satisfaction is faulty (Lehmann et al., 2015). In a similar vein, it has been proposed that singles and married are found to be dissimilar in terms of mental health outcomes because of the inclusion of divorced and widowed individuals with never married individuals (Matheson, McQuaid & Anisman, 2016). Research by Timonen and Doyle (2014) found that the relationship between marital status and life satisfaction is mediated by whether or not the person chose to be single.

Over 1,000 federal laws afford special privileges and benefits only to married people (DePaulo, 2014). Even the U.S. joint income tax filing causes singles to be penalized at tax time as compared to married people (Kahng, 2010). Financial incentives to marry result in more people entering marriage, but those who study marriage question whether unions based on financial incentives achieve anything besides the tax benefit (Fisher, 2013). Beginning in 2006, the U.S. government began spending approximately $100 million dollars each year to promote marriage (e.g., BSF, building strong families; MRE, marriage and relationship education; SHM, supporting healthy marriages), and

these funds were taken out of federal welfare funds (Johnson, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2013); suggesting that only married low income people deserved government benefits.

Yet research is not conclusive as to the realization of all of these supposed benefits, and research results sometimes conflict. Loughran and Zissimopoulos (2009) found that wages of both women and men actually decreased after marriage. Research comparing the wellbeing of married individuals with those who were cohabitating found that they both resulted in increased psychological wellbeing and decreased contact with family and friends as compared to singles, but that cohabitating people were actually happier and had higher self-esteem than married people (Gillespie, Lever, Frederick, & Royce, 2015; Musick & Bumpass, 2012). In instances where very slight differences were found, marriage was not always the winner. Research investigating the supposed relationship between marriage and health found that being currently married was associated with more health benefits than being in a marriage that was disrupted by divorce or death; and that causation is not always one-directional, with poor health leading to unhappy marriage and divorce (Hughes & Waite, 2009).

It is important to note that research comparing married with single individuals should be differentiated from research comparing married with non-married adults who are in an intimate relationship (Schneider, Rapp, Klein, & Eckhard, 2014). Benefits formerly attributed to marriage, such as well-being, are also found in other close relationships such as cohabitating (Simon & Barrett, 2010), committed romantic relationships (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010), and friendships (Gillespie et al., 2015). No significant differences in life satisfaction were found between married people

and those living as married (Bailey & Snyder, 2010). Greater happiness, less depression, and protective factors against anxiety and depression have been found to be benefits of both marriage and cohabitation (Horn, Xu, Beam, Turkheimer, & Emery, 2013). Vanassche, Swicegood, and Matthijs (2013) found that married people were happier than cohabitating people, but then explained that this difference is much smaller in countries where alternate family types such as cohabitating are more accepted. Researchers also caution that studies linking health with relational status are often generalized as opposed to individualized according to various categories such as racial groups (Koball, Moiduddin, Henderson, Goesling, & Besculides, 2010). Some singles refuse to describe themselves as single, choosing instead the labels of divorced or widowed which have higher social status than single (Severinson, 2010).

Methodology and Methods Consistent With Scope of Current Research

I used a constructionist theoretical lens which is typically associated with a qualitative research approach (Cresswell, 2009) to focus on the single phenomenon of singlism. The inquiry strategy of grounded theory was chosen since it has been demonstrated to be an effective method of qualitative research in the fields of sociology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), psychology (Moustakas, 1994), and social sciences in general (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; as cited in Creswell, 2013bb); and it allowed for an explanatory theory to be developed from the data collection and analysis process. The data collection method was semistructured interviews with open-ended questions that enabled me to collect participant meanings about their experiences of singlism, make interpretations about the data collaboratively with the participants, and

advocate for positive social change by contributing to the body of research about singlism as an identified social problem that adversely affects single people (Creswell, 2013ba). This has been described as a collaborative effort between science and society that is particular to qualitative research (Gergen et al., 2015). The importance of a narrative approach has been demonstrated when studying a marginalized group or experience (Mckeown, 2015).

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Controversy in Prior Research

Prior researchers approached the study of singlism to establish its existence as a social problem that involved stereotyping and discrimination towards singles that was unrecognized as such by the majority of people. Recent research has expanded to examine the social identity of singles, understanding and overcoming both internal and external aspects of singlism, reactions to singlism, and acceptance of singlehood as a lifestyle. Weaknesses in previous research approaches included: asking how people view singles as opposed to asking how singles feel, and focusing on only the negative aspect of being single as opposed to the positives. Strengths of previous research approaches included: evaluation of perspective taking to reduce stereotyping, establishment that differences between singles and married individuals were perceptions only, what legitimizes discrimination, the inclusion of couples with married people when comparing them to single people, and research establishing that women have particular feelings in response to messages of singlism expressed by family members and society. Two particular research issues related to singlism with controversial results involve the relationship between female education and resources, and support for the social norm of

marriage; and that marriage provides benefits to all people over all other types of relationships.

Indication for Current Research

Individuals who are single have historically been labelled using a deficit model – not married. Literature and the media proclaim that married individuals are happier as well as physically, mentally, and emotionally healthier. Marriage is considered an important developmental milestone signaling full adulthood. Singles are viewed as existing in a transitional stage where they are just waiting for marriage (Lahad, 2016), with little recognition or acceptance of singlehood as a chosen or accepted lifestyle. Married individuals, and increasingly coupled individuals, are considered to be the social norm; and elevated status, advantages and benefits are awarded to individuals who are not single based solely on their non-single status. Marital status permeates all aspects of society with official forms requesting marital status, calculation of taxes due based on marital status, insurance rates based on marital status, and even gym memberships providing cost savings to married people. Narrative research with single women revealed that their experiences of being single were both positive and negative; and that they attempted to reframe their singleness as a time for personal self-improvement, yet still progressive towards future better relationships (Reynolds & Taylor, 2004). Women reported receiving various messages from family, friends, and society that they perceived as pressure to conform to traditional social norms in terms of lifestyle (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Some women reported feeling more internal pressure to marry in order to be happy (internalized stereotypes) than from family, friends, and media, yet this appears to

be more related to having children as opposed to having a romantic relationship (Piatkowski, 2012).

Highly educated women and high-resource women are more likely to remain single (Dykstra & Poortman, 2010); and that women with higher self-concept (how they feel about themselves) are more satisfied with singlehood (Piatkowski, 2012). Singlehood among older women is also increasingly being delineated into single by choice, and by default - single by chance (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013; Lahad, 2014; Morris & Osburn, 2016; Slonim, Gur-yaish & Katz, 2015; Timonen & Doyle, 2014). Recent research with young, single women found that they espouse their freedom to choose while simultaneously supporting and accepting traditional female roles, stating that the traditional roles are good as long as a woman chooses it. The effect of this rhetoric is that it removes the need to create alternative roles for women and thus the possibility of positive social change (Jacques & Radtke, 2012). Single women now face being categorized into these two hierarchical levels with choosing singlehood obviously trumping being single because of an inability to become coupled (Lahad, 2014). This indicates the need for research to explore in depth the experience of being a single woman, the benefits of being a single woman, the idea of single as a social identity that is not a deficit identity, how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, and what explains how women experience singlism. The current research approach provides information that is meaningful to the experiences of women who are single, who have been single, and who could become single, as well as about single social identity.

I used a grounded theory approach to attempt to fill a gap in the current literature regarding how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, and what explains how they experience singlism. Single women who experience stereotyping and discrimination for being single may engage in particular behaviors in response to experiencing stereotyping, demeaning discriminatory practices, and/or disadvantageous discriminatory practices. Immediate reactions to stigmatization and discrimination related to social acceptance include negative affect, and lowered self-esteem; followed by behavioral responses that are prosocial, withdrawn/avoidant, or antisocial depending on the individual's perception, comprehension, and interpretation of the experience (Bos, Pryor, Reeder, & Stutterheim, 2013; Hafford-Letchfield, Lambert, Long, & Brady, 2016; Richman & Leary, 2009).

Singles who focus on these negative aspects of being single may attempt to distance themselves from the group by disparaging singles (Benson, 2013). The social mobility potential will cause them to identify less with singles and strive to enter the married group since married status is more socially valued (Benson, 2013). Behaviors to avoid single status may include remaining in an unsatisfactory relationship, and even being less discriminating in mate selection (Larson, 2014). Research using the Fear of Being Single Scale indicated that individuals were willing to settle for less than desired in romantic relationships in order to avoid remaining single (Spielmann et al., 2013). Ffear of being single predicted willingness to settle for less responsive and less attractive dating partners (Spielmann et al., 2013), thus increasing the chances of entering the married group sooner.

Social Change

This research will further the goal of positive social change by raising awareness about how women experience singlism. Social action to counteract singlism and potentially self-harmful responsive behaviors includes fostering positive social identity and raising social awareness about life experiences of single people (Bryne & Carr, 2005; Cargan, 1986). In order for stereotyping and discrimination towards single women to change, women must be able to regard singlehood as a positive identity as opposed to a deficit identity (Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Moore & Radtke, 2015). Constructing a new identity for single women will require social change to support the identity turn of transitioning from understanding these women as not married to understanding them as individuals (Budgeon; 2016; Eck, 2013). This process will require shifting social identity for women towards a multi-faceted and holistic model including content and meaning derived from their many successes as opposed to solely marriage and motherhood (Band-Winterstein & Manchik-Rimon, 2014).

Summary and Conclusions

Major themes found in the literature surrounding singlism involve stereotypes of singles, the stigma of being single, discrimination towards singles, single as a deficit social identity, singlehood as a lifestyle, the social environment of singles, social norms, and the benefits of marriage/coupledom. This chapter was a review of literature relevant to the phenomenon of singlism. It began with examining the components of singlism–stereotyping and discrimination towards single adults – including outcomes for both single as well as married people in terms of social status, social identity, benefits and

advantages. A paucity of newer research seeks to explore the concept of single as a positive social identity for women, including ways to support and foster that identity. I attempted to target a gap that exists in the body of research surrounding singlism in between establishment of singlism as a social problem, and efforts to recreate being single as a positive social identity for women. I asked how women experience singlism, and what explains how women experience singlism.

The next chapter defines the research questions, and provides a rationale for the chosen research methodology. The role of the researcher will be defined and explained, including any potential conflicts of interest, bias, or ethical concerns. Participant selection, data collection, and the data analysis plan are identified.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a theory to explain how women experience singlism and what explains how women experience singlism. Research has established that society views and treats women who are single differently than women who are not single (DePaulo, 2011; DePaulo & Morris, 2005, 2006; Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981). This practice of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination has been defined by DePaulo and Morris (2005) as singlism. Women are concerned about how they are viewed by other people (Blakemore et al., 2005) and so may experience and respond to singlism in a manner that has clinical implications for mental health. In this study, I used a grounded theory approach to explore the experiences and behavioral responses of individual women in order to formulate an explanatory theory. The experiences of both currently and formerly single women were elicited.

This chapter begins with identification and justification of the research tradition. The role of the researcher is then defined and explained, including any potential biases or conflicts of interest. An in-depth review of the chosen methodology includes the participant selection logic, researcher-developed instrumentation, procedures for the pilot study used to evaluate the interview protocol, procedures for data collection for both the pilot study and the main study, and the plan for data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical procedures related to the study.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study, I sought to explore how single women experience stereotyping of and discrimination against single women (DePaulo, 2011; DePaulo & Morris, 2005, 2006; Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981) as a result of the social construction of marriage/coupledom as the only social norm for adults (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Cargan, 1986; Carter, 2010; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Lauer & Yodanis, 2010; Marso, 2010; Marzullo, 2011; Mulawka, 2013). Single women may have behavioral responses to singlism as a means of either adhering to or rejecting social norms and values (Bennett & Gaines, 2010; Benson, 2013; Burkley & Blanton, 2009; Eck, 2013; Jetten et al., 2013/2012; Petriglieri, 2011). Conversely, single women may also have behavioral responses that are either consciously or subconsciously intended to reduce the discomfort they experience or could experience by failing to adhere to social norms (Buddeberg, 2011; Festinger, 1957; Laurin et al., 2013; Richman & Leery, 2009). The research paradigm began with the research-supported premise that stereotyping of and discrimination against singles exist, and I sought to discover how women behave as a result of experiencing such stereotyping and discrimination (singlism), as well as what explains how women experience singlism.

Research Questions

The primary research question was the following: How do women experience singlism? The secondary research question was as follows: What explains how women experience singlism?

Qualitative Research Design

I used a qualitative research methodology to explore and understand the meanings that women ascribe to the social problem of singlism. The exploratory nature of the topic indicates the appropriateness of a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is a good fit when a problem or issue needs to be explored and a very complex understanding of that problem or issue is sought (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Common characteristics of qualitative research approaches that are applicable to this study include the researcher as the key instrument for data collection (Hatch, 2002); inductive as well as deductive reasoning (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2016); learning the meanings that study participants ascribe to the phenomenon being studied (Hatch 2002); a changing research design (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2016); the inclusion of the researcher's experience in the interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016); and holistic presentation (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative research practices were used, including positioning the researcher within the study as the interviewer, including the researcher's personal values in the study, collecting participant meanings, focusing on the single concept of singlism, interpreting the data, collaborating with participants, and raising awareness about singlism as a social problem (Cresswell, 2013; Carlson, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Open-ended questions were used to elicit individual meanings. This inductive form of inquiry supports the researcher interpreting individual meanings in a search for general themes (Creswell, 2013ba) or explanatory theory. In qualitative research, theory can both guide the process and provide a lens through which to view and interpret the data. Theory can be used in qualitative research as a way to provide a

theoretical orientation for the study or even as an inductive outcome of the study (Punch, 2011).

Constructivist qualitative approaches are rooted in Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social constructionism, whereby participants develop subjective meanings for their own experiences. Discrimination against people who are not in couple relationships may arise from the social construction of marriage as an institution to which an individual conforms to obtain social approval (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Homans, 1958). Collecting participants' subjective meanings about their experiences with singlism in order to allow a theory to explain their behavior to emerge through qualitative analysis was consistent with social constructionism (Kolb, 2012). Social constructionism involves research to understand and explain human behavior (Diaz-Leon, 2015; Gergen et al., 2015) and is compatible with a grounded theory approach (Andrews, 2012).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory differs significantly from other qualitative research approaches for two main reasons: The theory is constructed from concepts discovered during the process of data collection, and the research process involves a continuous cycle of data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A general explanation or theory is generated to explain a particular process or action, as opposed to describing a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 2016a; 2016b). Description simply tells about a particular phenomenon, whereas theory offers a possible explanation for why the phenomenon occurred (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 2016a; 2016b). The purpose of grounded theory research is to inductively discover an explanation for a phenomenon in

the data of study participants (Patton, 2014). Grounded theory has evolved from original

work by Glaser and Strauss (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to be either more constructivist

(data and analysis are cocreated with participants) or objectivist (data as real without

attention to process of production) in nature (Charmaz, 2006). Theory is allowed to

inductively emerge from the data as an explanation for a particular phenomenon as drawn

from the experiences of the participants told in their own voices (Nastasi & Schensul,

2005). The outcome of this grounded theory research design was a theoretical

explanation for the participants' experiences and responses to experiencing stereotyping

and discrimination for being single.

Theory guided the choice of research approach and was also the outcome of this

study. This research focused on processes surrounding a woman's experience with

singlism, the goal of theory development, and dynamic data collection and analysis

processes involving the emerging theory and participant collaboration indicating the

applicability and appropriateness of a grounded theory approach. I followed a systematic

procedure, as modeled by Strauss and Corbin (2015), in an attempt to generate a theory to

explain the particular processes or actions related to singlism. Through the dynamic

qualitative process of data collection and analysis, participants' semistructured interviews

revealed patterns or themes across women's behaviors that led to a theory to explain how

women experience singlism. This process reflected grounded theory's social

constructivist methods because the theory was constructed inductively from the

participant data (Charmaz, 2006). With a constructivist grounded theory approach, I

sought to explore how these women constructed their reality and beliefs, and how these constructed beliefs then affected their behaviors.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). My role as the researcher in this study was to conduct the semistructured interviews with study participants and to use applicable tools to interpret the data. A benefit of acting as both researcher and interviewer was the opportunity and ability to immediately respond to any participant data that indicated the potential benefit of additional questions, expansions, or clarifications in order to better understand the participant's experience of singlism. Another benefit was the ability to directly observe the study participants while they were engaged in the interview process.

It was possible that the recruitment process, particularly the use of the Walden University Participant Pool to obtain study participants, could result in study participants being known to the researcher. According to the IRB, this is not problematic unless there is an unequal power relationship between the student researcher and the student study participant. Unequal power relationships may also arise due to interactions between the interviewer and the participant due to demographic or socioeconomic variables (Roller, 2014). Reflectively recording the details of the perceived interaction between the researcher and each study participant after each interview can help address issues of interviewer/researcher bias, including concerns about subsequent objective interpretation (Roller, 2014). Member checking enabled study participants to view preliminary findings and comment on them—a practice that contributed to the accuracy of qualitative findings

(Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2013ba; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A quality interview is dependent upon the researcher's ability to remain objective as well as sensitive in order to stimulate creativity (Patton, 2014). Any questions from the researcher or study participants about possible inappropriate participant relationships would have been directed to the IRB for review. There were no questions or issues related to possible inappropriate participant relationships.

The potential for bias may also have existed due to the researcher's personal experience with singlism, as well as observed and communicated experiences of singlism of family members, friends, and acquaintances. Bias could have affected the study, particularly during the data collection and interpretation processes. A pilot study of qualified professionals was conducted to help eliminate potential bias (Chenail, 2011) by asking a group of faculty to evaluate the interview question for bias.

Methodology

The population of interest in this study consisted of single women who had experienced singlism as well as coupled or formerly coupled women who had experienced singlism. Both men and women are targets of singlism; however, messages encouraging young people to exit the single state as part of the entrance to adulthood, as well as the categorization, stigmatization, and malignment of older never-married adults, focus more on women (Barak, 2014; Chang, 2015; Lahad & Hazan, 2014). The primary criteria for study participant selection were that participants should be women ages 18 and older. Secondary criteria were determined by the women's self-identification as having experienced singlism. The sampling strategy and sample size were dictated by the

specific type of qualitative research method chosen, grounded theory, because the specific type of qualitative method influenced both the sampling strategy and the sample size.

Walden University IRB approval was obtained before obtaining participants and collecting data. An advertisement to recruit study participants was submitted to the Walden University Participant Pool and placed on four private social media groups on Facebook (Appendix A). Permission was required to advertise on one of the social media groups and was obtained from the group administrator. The groups were selected because they contained women over the age of 18 who might have experienced singlism. Participants self-identified as women aged 18 and older who had experienced singlism. The Walden University Participant Pool, a subset of the student population of Walden University, is diverse in demographics excluding educational level, given that all participants have attended college. The four private social media groups selected on Facebook were Community of Single People, Gamma Theta Gamma of Alpha Chi Omega, Lana and Nina's Referral Network, and PG Retreat Private. Community of Single People consists of women and men who support being single as a lifestyle, whether or not they are single. Gamma Theta Gamma of Alpha Chi Omega consists of women who are alumnae members of a national women's sorority. This is a diverse group of women excluding educational level, in that all but alumnae initiate members must have attended college. Lana and Nina's Referral Network consists of professional women working in careers in the greater Los Angeles area. Given the educational requirements typically associated with most professional careers, it is likely that this

group is not diverse in terms of educational level and that the majority have attended college. PG Retreat Private consists primarily of parents of gifted children and professionals who provide services to gifted children and families. This group is diverse in all respects, excluding the fact that all members either are gifted, have a gifted child, or work with gifted individuals. If initial recruitment results had yielded too few study participants, the advertisement to recruit study participants would have been placed on the three social media group sites for a second time. The study remained active on the Walden Participant Pool website until enough participants were obtained. The scope of participation and a description of the study were provided to potential participants in writing prior to obtaining their consent (Appendix A). Signed consent forms were obtained from participants prior to their participation in the data collection phase (Appendix B).

Study participants participated in a 1-hour interview that was audio recorded, and they were advised that they might be contacted during the analysis stage of the study in order to clarify their responses or to gain additional information. Once the analysis process was completed, including follow-up data collection from participants, participants were offered an opportunity to ask questions, to view preliminary study findings, and to comment on those findings, after which they exited the study. At the completion of the study, anyone who indicated an interest in receiving study findings, including study participants, will receive them via email (Appendix C).

Sampling Strategy

Backman (1999) stated that grounded theory sampling often progresses from more general sampling strategies to more selective sampling strategies as the researcher learns what type of participants are most helpful in contributing data for the theory. A purposeful sampling strategy was used in order to locate study participants who could contribute to building the theory to explain how and why women experience singlism, with a concurrent secondary snowball strategy used to find more women who contributed relevant and useful information about the experience of singlism. A purposeful sampling strategy was employed in order to seek to identify participants who would contribute rich information (insights) central to the phenomenon being explored (Smith et al., 2009). Backman cautions student researchers not to sacrifice effectiveness of the sampling strategy in response to the time limitations inherent in doctoral programs. This issue was addressed by targeting advertisements to recruit study participants who would be diverse in terms of geographical location, educational level, income level, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational and career paths. Diversity was sought by advertising on selected social media groups and via the Walden University Participant Pool. This concern was also addressed by incorporating a secondary snowball strategy whereby study participants were asked to suggest additional women who might contribute rich information to the study.

This secondary strategy consisted of asking each study participant to suggest other women who might participate and contribute relevant data (Creswell, 2013b, p. 158). This was accomplished through the final interview protocol question, in which I

asked each study participant who else I should speak with to learn more about the experience of singlism. This selection of individuals who contributed to the codes that formed the theory is also referred to as theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Sample Size

Sample size refers to the number of analysis units in a study. Qualitative studies usually involve fewer participants than quantitative research studies, but grounded theory research may require a much higher number due to the process of developing an explanatory theory from participant data (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013b; Patton, 2014). Despite ample commentary regarding sample size by multiple experts familiar with grounded theory research, no definite number or formula has been proposed to determine the optimal sample size for a grounded theory research study. Twelve interviews generally contribute enough data for saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) when the saturation point is specified as occurring when additional participants do not contribute any new data to categories. However, the cyclical processes of data collection and analysis that in part define grounded theory as an approach complicate the concept of data saturation as viewed from the perspective of finite predetermined categories (Charmaz, 2006). Rather, theoretical saturation should be sought whereby data are collected and analyzed until categories are saturated and no new categories are discovered (Charmaz, 2006).

Guest et al. (2006) found that on average 80 codes were obtained from the first six interviews, 20 codes were obtained from the next six interviews, and an additional 5 codes were contributed by the third set of six interviews. They concluded that 94% of

high-frequency codes were present in the first six interviews, with 97% of high-frequency

codes present in the first twelve interviews (Guest et al., 2006). These figures apply to

qualitative studies in general and have not been generalized to grounded theory, yet the

procedure can be used to determine an initial sample size. It is advisable to specify a data

saturation point before beginning the data collection phase (Francis et al., 2010).

Specifying a data saturation point involves selecting an initial analysis sample size of x

and then stating that after a certain number of interviews past the initial x interviews with

no new code contribution (and in this grounded theory study, no new category creation),

one has reached the saturation point for the data collection for the study (Francis et al.,

2009, p. 1234).

Using the approach suggested by Guest et al. (2006), I found that new codes were

generated in the first 18 interviews. This finding, combined with the suggestion of

Francis et al. (2009) to specify how many noncode contributing interviews will trigger

the completion of the data collection phase, suggested an initial sample size of $n = 18$ and

an established saturation point of an additional 6 interviews that did not contribute new

codes, for a sample size of $n \geq 24$. However, two applicable observations further

informed this decision: Most grounded theory samples fall between 20 and 60 interviews

(Creswell, 2013b, p. 89), and it is necessary to provide institutional review board (IRB)

committees with a participant number that is equal to or larger than the actual sample size

to avoid the necessity of requesting permission for additional participants (Corbin &

Strauss, 2015, p. 135). In consideration of these observations, sample size was specified

as $n \geq 24$ and $n \leq 60$.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was a researcher produced semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol contained open-ended questions that were intended to elicit data that was rich, substantial, and relevant to singlism (Charmaz, 2006). Sufficiency was established by a pilot study, which will be discussed in the next section, as well as by the iterative collection and analysis processes of grounded theory. This included the ability of the researcher as interviewer to ask immediate and subsequent follow-up questions. Questioning data sufficiency required evaluating the following: collection of background data, detailed descriptions of a range of participants' experiences and responses, data underlying the surface issue, possible changes over time, ability to use data to develop analytic categories, and the ability to make comparisons between data that can help generate and inform the researcher's ideas (Charmaz, 2006).

The interview protocol was developed by me to ask specific open-ended questions intended to elicit participants' experiences and responses related to singlism. Consistent with socially constructed meanings, content validity in this research study was evaluated by how accurately the data elicited by the interview protocol and collected by the researcher represented the study participants' experiences with singlism (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in order to test the sufficiency of the data collection instrument, the interview protocol, as well as to contribute to internal validity. The pilot study was used to ensure that respondents would understand the terminology used in the

interview protocol, to determine if the wording of any questions elicited strong emotions that could cause a participant to become defensive, to ensure that no leading questions were used, and to make sure that the interview could be completed within a reasonable time frame. The internal validity of the interview protocol was improved by asking the pilot study participants for feedback about the above issues, as well as assessing whether the questions provide sufficient data to answer the research questions and are interpretable (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Six Walden University faculty members were recruited via e-mail to evaluate the interview protocol. Faculty were offered the option of providing written feedback to me via e-mail, or verbal feedback via telephone; and all feedback would be summarized in writing to be used to revise the interview protocol. The revised interview protocol was then to be utilized in the main research study.

Main Study Participation and Data Collection

Data were collected consisting of individual women's experiences with discrimination against single people, both how they experience the discrimination and how they respond to the discrimination. Open-ended interview questions were used in order to enable women to actively participate in the research by responding to questions as well as suggesting new questions. Semistructured interviews were the primary method for collecting data from participants, which is consistent with an exploratory study utilizing a grounded theory approach. Open-ended interview was the best data collection method for learning about individual women's experiences with singlism. It enabled women to actively participate in the research by responding to open-ended questions,

suggesting new questions, and becoming involved in the question-response-question

cycle. Semistructured interviews consisted of an interview protocol of open-ended

questions that sought to elicit the participant's experience related to a particular

phenomenon, such as singlism. Grounded theory involves a dynamic, iterative process in

which the researcher and the participant work together to clarify questions, actively and

continuously considering possible explanations for the behaviors being studied. All

interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis using computer assisted

qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). An interview protocol was used to conduct

the interview. The protocol contained an introduction to the study, followed by the

interview questions. The introduction contained an overview of the study, consent,

confidentiality, and withdrawal procedure. The interview questions included the

following (Appendix D):

1. Tell me about being single.

2. How do you view other women who are single?

3. What is your reaction to how the media portrays single women?

4. Tell me about a time that you believed that someone viewed you in a certain way due to being single; and how did that make you feel?

5. Tell me about a time that you believed that you were treated differently due to being single; and how did that make you feel?

6. Tell me about any stereotypes you have heard about single women.

7. Please share with me the contact information of any other women I may contact who you think might contribute to this research study.

Following the interview questions, and in accordance with the grounded theory research methodology, the interviewer determined and asked appropriate follow-up questions of participants.

Data were collected from study participants during one-hour semi-structured interviews that were conducted privately via telephone or Skype in my private office and audio recorded. The researcher collected the data as the interviewer. The frequency and duration of data collection were daily and ongoing until the data saturation point was reached. Notes were taken during the interview to aid with the researcher's interpretation, and formulation of follow-up questions. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in order to capture more and better data which was then available for coding and themes. I will keep the original audio files and also backed up the files to another device. The transcriptions were stored on my laptop and backed up to a secure offsite backup location. HyperRESEARCH was used to assist with storing and coding data. These data files were also backed up and stored in a remote location. Audio recorded data will be destroyed at the completion of the research study. Transcribed data will be destroyed in 5 years (Sieber, 2013).

Data Analysis Plan

I examined how women experience and respond to discrimination against singles. The unit of analysis was the individual. Data were collected that is representative of the range of feelings and sensations that women experience in response to singlism, as well as data representing the various behavioral responses that women exhibit in response to singlism. This process required discriminating between which feelings and behaviors are

significantly different and which can be categorically combined. It also required

analyzing deeper feelings possibly underlying a surface expression.

Coding

Participant data were analyzed and coded to discover the core phenomenon,

causal factors, and actions taken in response to the core phenomenon, influencing factors,

and consequences (Creswell, 2013b). Since grounded theory results in development of a

theory to explain a phenomenon, at the end of the process these concepts were illustrated

in a visual model that depicts the relationships between and among them. Data analysis

techniques appropriate to this qualitative research plan for a grounded theory study

included taking notes, identifying codes, reducing codes to themes, counting the

frequency of codes, relating categories, and displaying the findings (Madison, 2011;

Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Additional techniques specific to grounded theory

research included category saturation whereby data were collected until additional

iterations contributed no new data/categories. The process of coding in grounded theory

progresses from initial coding in which the researcher tries to identify actions/concepts,

to focused coding which attempts to synthesize and explain larger chunks of data, and

finally to axial coding which begins to analytically unify the identified concepts and ideas

(Charmaz, 2006). The strategy during the initial or open coding phase was to construct

codes that were short, simple, and precise and qualitatively identified actions or concepts

(Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser,2016c). I used line-by-line coding in

order to view the data critically and objectively, outside of the interview as a whole

(Charmaz, 2006). Codes were constructed as I actively defined/named actions and events,

with my point of view subjectively determining the significance (Charmaz, 2006) and reflecting the presence of the researcher within the study. Focused coding become more selective and conceptual, and I went back through the data with the codes obtained in the initial phase, and synthesized larger blocks of data using the most significant codes (Charmaz, 2006). The coding strategy progressed from concept identification to concept development, and added to the properties and dimensions of the prior identified codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

A constant comparative method was utilized at each level of analysis, such as comparing data within interviews, and then between interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Each data set was compared with prior data sets to determine if new data changed old categories, required new categories, or fit into existing categories; helping to maintain objectivity (Patton, 2014). Axial coding then established linking relationships between conceptually based categories (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout the entire coding process, Corbin and Strauss (2015) stressed the importance of memoing to aide in reflection and to contribute to synthesis and analysis. The inclusion of member checking in which study participants were provided with preliminary findings in the form of themes or patterns that have arisen from the data provided an opportunity to evaluate if the researcher correctly interpreted the participants' experiences (Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2013ba; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Software

HyperRESEARCH is computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). It has been used successfully in the social sciences field since 1991, and is

capable of coding and storing data, analyzing data, and assisting with theory building. I will maintain control of the original audio files, and also backed up the files to another device. The transcriptions are stored on a laptop and backed up to a secure offsite backup location. HyperRESEARCH helped identify main themes as well as axial themes much more efficiently than simply reading all the transcriptions repeatedly and searching for similar themes and patterns. There were no discrepant cases as no individuals responded to the recruitment advertisement with statements indicating their disbelief or lack of experience with singlism.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness applies to the researcher, to the data sources, and to the selected methods of collection and analysis. Trustworthiness in this grounded theory research study entailed efforts to address the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The use of a reviewer can contribute to a research plan's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this research plan, the work will be reviewed by the dissertation committee and the internal review board (IRB). Explaining my own experience with singlism, as well as asking study participants to review the study results and interpretations, contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013b). Credibility, or internal validity, involves the quality of a study. Appropriate strategies that were used to establish credibility included prolonged contact with research participants; reaching data/category saturation point; and being aware of the researcher's influence on the processes of conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation (known as reflexivity). Research quality was also

demonstrated by the concepts and processes meeting standard grounded theory criteria. This research study met criteria for a grounded theory study by examining a process as the key element in the theory; utilizing a coding process to move from data to theory; presenting the theory as an illustrative model; using memoing during the data collection and analysis processes; and by being aware of my influence on the processes (Creswell, 2013b).

Quality was also established, maintained, and increased through the use of rigorous standards of data collection (Tracy, 2010). Multiple methods of data analysis with HyperRESEARCH were utilized. This was a method of triangulation which is an important technique to help establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple perspectives would have been included to increase credibility by including discrepant information from individuals who do not experience/observe/believe that singlism occurs, but no discrepant data was collected. Patton (2002) also espouses that the researcher's belief in the value of qualitative research is crucial to credibility. Additionally, techniques such as explicitly discussing experiences, biases, and theoretical orientation helped to establish researcher credibility (Patton, 2014). Returning to the study participants to ask whether researcher interpretations were accurate representations of the participants' meanings (member checking) established the credibility of both me as well as the project (Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2013ba; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability, or external validity, is the degree to which the study results can be generalized to other people or situations. A systematic approach to data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling strategy, rich descriptions from study participants, and variations in participant selection

strengthened external validity (Charmaz, 2006). Dependability is the stability or consistency of the inquiry process. Dependability was increased by utilizing a systemic approach to data collection, interpretation, and reporting findings; as well as by having another person review the researcher's field notes. Confirmability is the degree to which outcomes can be confirmed or collaborated by others. Systematic approach, memoing, field notes, and inclusion of discrepant data contributed to objectivity.

Ethical Procedures

Written approval was obtained from the IRB before recruiting study participants and collecting data. All study participants were provided with the purpose of the study, the researcher's role, and expectations for study participants. Expectations included participation in a 1-hour audio recorded interview responding to questions about their experiences with stereotyping and discrimination towards singles; and possible follow-up contact to clarify responses or to collect additional relevant data. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions, that they could reschedule their interview if needed, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, including their previously given responses.

Study participants were informed of any possible benefits or risks of participation. Potential benefits included the ability to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding a form of stereotyping and discrimination that affects many people. Potential risks included the possibility of feeling strong emotions during or following the interview process. All participants were informed that their information, including the consent form and interview data, will be kept confidential. This was listed on the consent form

provided to participants. The consent form also contained contact information for the researcher. Confidentiality was maintained by conducting interviews in private. The consent forms, audio recordings, transcribed data, memos, and field notes are kept in the researcher's locked office. The audio recordings do not contain any last names so protect the participant's identity from the transcriber. The transcriber completed a confidentiality agreement to protect the identity of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews (Appendix E). Participant names or identifying information were not used in transcripts. Audio recordings will be destroyed after completion of the research study, and transcripts will be destroyed after 5 years.

One area of this research that could have posed ethical concerns is that women were interviewed about a topic that could have caused them to reveal aspects of intimate relationships. I needed to guard against asking any questions that were not beneficial to the research study, avoided any questions that could have been considered arising merely from personal interests of the researcher. Another important legal and ethical consideration when conducting open-ended interviews about relationships with women is the potential to reveal violence or abuse. If a study participant had revealed current abuse, the interviewer might have experienced a strong urge to want to help her; but could not confuse the roles of researcher and therapist/counselor. A desire to provide help could have conflicted with the completion of this study which will contribute to positive social change by raising awareness about singlism. It was important to ensure that open-ended interviews did not turn into counseling sessions.

Another area of concern was that a woman's current intimate partner might not have wanted her to participate in this study and this could have caused conflict between the woman and her partner. This potential risk of study participants experiencing discomfort or conflict as a result of their participation in this study was addressed by providing participants with a list of resources they could use to locate counselors in their local area (Appendix F). Due to population identification and sampling strategy methods, potential study participants were from different states so resources were national.

Summary

This chapter justified the selection of a grounded theory research design, discussed the role of the researcher, and described how any issues of bias or conflict were handled. The presentation of research study methodology included issues related to participant selection, research design, and data collection and analysis. The chapter concluded with an in-depth discussion of issues of trustworthiness and ethics. The next chapter will present the results and impact of the pilot study, describe the data collection and analysis phases of the main study, and summarize the answers to the research questions obtained by the main study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a theory to explain how women experienced singlism and what explains how women experienced singlism. In this grounded theory study, 18 women who self-identified as single provided responses to interview questions. Two women provided subsequent thoughts about singlism via emails to the researcher during the week following their interviews; one woman sent a link to an article related to singlism, and eight women participated in member checking by reviewing their coded transcripts and requesting changes, providing clarification, expanding responses, and answering additional questions via email.

This chapter begins with a description of the impact of the pilot study, factors that may have influenced the interpretation of study results, and relevant participant demographics. It then details how the data were generated, recorded, coded and securely stored, including consideration and treatment of any unusual circumstances or discrepant cases. The implementation of methods that were used to verify trustworthiness is described. The data collection procedures adhered to the ethical and confidential measures outlined in Chapter 3. The chapter concludes with presentation and illustration of study results and a summary of the findings in response to the research questions.

Research Questions

The primary research question was the following: How do women experience singlism? The secondary research question was as follows: What explains how women experience singlism?

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in order to test the sufficiency of the data collection instrument, the interview protocol, as well as to contribute to internal validity. Six Walden University faculty members were recruited via e-mail to evaluate the interview protocol. The results of the pilot study did not indicate any problematic issues with the interview protocol, and the original interview protocol was then used in the main research study. The pilot study did not result in any changes in instrumentation or data analysis strategies.

Setting

The setting describes the environment of the study, including any conditions that may have influenced the study participants or their experiences. The experiences of seven study participants may have been influenced by recent personal conditions in existence at the time their interview data was collected. Participant 2 was in the process of a foreign relocation for work. Participant 7 was experiencing grief due to a recent divorce. Participant 11 was completing her doctoral dissertation. Participant 14 was experiencing grief, anxiety, and depression due to an ongoing divorce. Participant 15 had just completed the emotional sale of her house following a divorce, leaving a supportive neighborhood community. Participant 16 had recently left an intimate relationship, moving out on her own. Participant 17 had recently purchased her first home. These experiences are included in the participants' experiences of singlism and so are not considered to negatively affect the interpretation of study results, as the study included women's experiences of singlism, whether past, present, or both.

Demographics

Demographics describe the characteristics of the study participants. Study participants were obtained via advertisements placed on four private social media group pages, through the use of the Walden University participant pool, as well as by study participant referrals as part of a secondary snowball sampling method. The number of study participants obtained from each source was as follows:

- Community of Single People—8

- Lana and Nina's Referral Network—3

- Gamma Theta Gamma of Alpha Chi Omega—1

- PG Retreat Private—0

- Walden University Participant Pool—1

- Study participant referrals/snowball sampling method—5

Predetermined collection of demographic information was not completed due to the grounded theory nature of the study, with the goal of allowing the relevance of participant demographics and characteristics to be established via participants' voluntary disclosure during the interview process. Information related to the following demographics and characteristics was contributed by participants during the interview process: age, education level, marital status, occupation, religiosity, geographic location, and whether or not the women had children.

Age

One participant disclosed that she was in her 20s. Six participants disclosed being in their 30s. Three participants were in their 40s. One participant was in her 50s. Three

participants were in their 60s. Four participants did not disclose any information about their age.

Education Level

As disclosed in Chapter 3, three of the advertisement locations were groups containing women with higher education levels: Lana and Nina's Referral Network, Gamma Theta Gamma of Alpha Chi Omega, and the Walden University Participant Pool. The remaining two groups contained women with various levels of education: Community of Single People and PG Retreat Private. There were no participants from the PG Retreat Private group. Eight participants were from the Community of Single People group. Of the eight participants from the Community of Single People group, three indicated that they had a college degree, and five did not indicate their level of education.

Marital Status

Nine study participants indicated that they had never been married. Seven study participants were divorced. One study participant reported that she had been engaged to be married for 6 years. One study participant was legally separated and in the process of becoming divorced.

Occupation

Study participants revealed the following occupations: musician, aerospace engineer, business professional (3), school staff, consulting firm, engineer, former teacher (2), management consultant, doctoral candidate/psychological assistant, graduate student, non-profit owner, fundraiser, and first responder. Two study participants did not disclose any information about their occupation.

Religiosity

Two of the 18 study participants revealed that religion was an important factor in their lives. The remaining 16 participants did not mention religion.

Geographic Location

Many study participants reported having lived in multiple different countries as well as multiple different states during different periods of time. Their geographic location is reported here as their location of residence and work during the time immediately preceding and including their interview. Geographic locations were reported as follows: California—7, Canada—3, Washington—3, Florida—1, New York—1, London—1, Massachusetts—1, and Colorado—1.

Children

Thirteen study participants disclosed that they did not have children. Four study participants indicated that they had children. One study participant did not indicate whether or not she had children.

<center>**Data Collection**</center>

Data collection is the process of gathering information that enables a researcher to answer research questions. The semistructured interview protocol was administered to 18 women over the age of 18 who self-identified as having experienced the phenomenon of singlism. Three study participants e-mailed additional thoughts or comments to me during the week following their individual interviews. The opportunity for member checking was provided to all 18 study participants by emailing each participant a copy of her interview transcription with the researcher's codes and comments. Eight study

participants provided feedback on the coded transcripts. Feedback included requesting a change, providing additional clarification or expanding on a comment, asking a question, thanking the researcher for the opportunity to participate, expressing a desire to see the final results, and promising to reply at a later date.

Participants were initially offered the choice of participating in the interview via Skype or telephone. Participant 1 chose to participate via Skype. The Skype connection was poor, and subsequent transcription was noted as very difficult by the transcriber. Subsequent participants were advised of difficulties with the Skype connection and agreed to participate via telephone. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' earliest convenience and with consideration of the researcher's work schedule, time zone differences, and time needed for the transcriber to finish transcribing the prior interview in order to facilitate the comparative analysis process according to grounded theory methodology. Several individuals who indicated interest in participation did not participate, yet the associated scheduling process still occupied a significant amount of time. Individuals cancelled scheduled interviews, did not show up for scheduled interviews, or failed to schedule interviews after several weeks to months of communications with the researcher. The duration of the interviews varied by participant; durations are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Duration of Study Participant Interviews

Study participants	Length of interview (minutes)
Participant 1	75
Participant 2	45
Participant 3	30
Participant 4	60
Participant 5	30
Participant 6	60
Participant 7	45
Participant 8	45
Participant 9	60
Participant 10	55
Participant 11	50
Participant 12	55
Participant 13	30
Participant 14	80
Participant 15	75
Participant 16	65
Participant 17	55
Participant 18	70

Participants' interview data were audio recorded using a Dictopro Digital Voice Recorder. The audio file was then transferred and stored on the researcher's hard drive on a password-protected computer. The audio file was identified by a three-digit numerical code and transmitted to the transcriber via e-mail attachment. The original audio file and the returned transcribed file were stored on my password-protected computer. Field notes were taken during the interview. Audio files and transcriptions were backed up and stored in a secure remote location using Carbonite.

Variations in planned data collection procedures involved the necessity of using the researcher's field notes in the comparative data collection and analysis process to facilitate data collection while waiting for audio files to be transcribed, in addition to eliminating the Skype option due to poor picture and sound quality. Additionally, I originally anticipated needing to interview 24 study participants in order to reach categorical saturation, yet no significantly different experience was reported after the first 11 interviews. The decision was made not to pursue six additional interviews in order to obtain significantly more similar data.

Unusual circumstances encountered during data collection included poor picture and sound quality during the Skype interview with Participant 1; dropped calls resulting in interruptions during interviews with Participants 1, 4, and 11; noise from construction occurring next door to Participant 14; a barking dog outside the window of Participant 14; and brief, intermittent disruptions in call connection with Participant 17.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in qualitative research involves trying to discover and understand the phenomenon or process being studied by using the data gathered to describe the phenomenon or process. Inductive reasoning was employed in this research study and involved examining individual components of participant experiences of singlism and searching for patterns and themes related to participant experiences in order to formulate a theory to explain how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, as well as what explains how women experience singlism. An iterative coding and analysis process was used to move from coding individual words and phrases from individual participant interview transcriptions to larger representations including categories and themes. Initial coding involved importing each participant interview transcription into the HyperRESEARCH assisted qualitative data analysis software program and performing line-by-line coding to identify patterns both within an individual's interview and between and among participants' interviews.

The subsequent focused coding process involved rereading and comparing coded data both within each interview, between interviews, and among all interviews. HyperRESEARCH tools including frequency report, word counter, and the code book were consulted to assist in recoding data, combining categories, deleting irrelevant categories, and grouping categories, resulting in an anticipated and appropriate reduction in codes. Subsequent focused coding removed duplicate or similar categories, combined similar items, classified feelings and behaviors into comprehensive categories, kept

demographics as separate categories, and removed items that appeared random and irrelevant to the study.

Initial codes that were frequently and easily identified were related to study participants' voiced experiences with specific examples and instances of stereotyping of and discrimination against single women, as well as demographic information. Coded demographic information included age, education, geographic location, occupation, relationship status, religiosity, and whether the participant indicated that she had children or not. Participants easily provided multiple examples of stereotyping of single women that were predominantly negative, as well as examples of discrimination against single women occurring at work, during travel, and even in recreational capacities. Codes representing specific instances of negative stereotyping and discrimination were then combined into two general categories (Table 2), as the purpose of the coding was to explore how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, not to collect examples of singlism. However, eliciting specific examples was necessary in order to learn how study participants responded.

Table 2

Type of Participant Examples of Singlism

Participant	Negative stereotype	Positive stereotype	Discrimination
1	18	0	2
2	4	0	8
3	1	0	2
4	2	2	2
5	0	0	1
6	1	0	4
7	9	0	0
8	8	0	7
9	12	0	6
10	10	0	2
11	16	2	5
12	1	0	0
13	4	0	0
14	5	0	2
15	2	0	2
16	12	0	1
17	6	0	2
18	3	1	7

Participants' responses to experiencing singlism were grouped into three main categories of adopted beliefs, behavioral responses, and feelings in response to singlism (Table 3). Seventeen of the 18 study participants had a similar pattern of internalizing singlism. These items were coded as something wrong, reflecting the wording frequently used by study participants (Table 4). Internalizing singlism contributes to the explanation of how women experience singlism, as well as motivates participant responses to singlism. Although feelings are a response to singlism, they were grouped separately from more action or task oriented behaviors. Adopted beliefs could be either supporting or rejecting in nature, but were deemed as being in response to having experienced singlism.

Table 3

Type of Participant Responses to Singlism

Participant	Adopted belief	Behavioral response	Feelings
1	5	17	19
2	2	4	21
3	2	1	4
4	9	17	9
5	1	5	3
6	0	9	18
7	2	3	9
8	3	5	1
9	4	3	18
10	3	4	4
11	11	6	6
12	3	4	2
13	1	9	4
14	11	12	2
15	13	10	8
16	7	4	3
17	3	3	7
18	5	4	1

Table 4

Frequency of Response Indicating "Something Wrong"

Participant	Something wrong
1	2
2	4
3	0
4	2
5	0
6	1
7	14
8	4
9	2
10	4
11	7
12	3
13	1
14	0
15	1
16	4
17	3
18	0

Information that was deemed relevant to understanding what explains how women experience singlism was less straightforward and needed to be inferred from participants' overall comments about their lived experiences. These items were captured into the categories of environmental factors, family of origin, ideology of marriage and family, media, occupation, and education. The categories of occupation and education were also viewed as demographics. Participants generally did not repeatedly refer to their occupation or education level once it was revealed, whereas multiple statements per interview were coded as environmental factors, family of origin, ideology of marriage and family, and media. (Figure 1.)

![Pie chart with segments: 43% Ideology of Marriage and Family, 31% Environmental Factors, 15% Family of Origin, 11% Media]
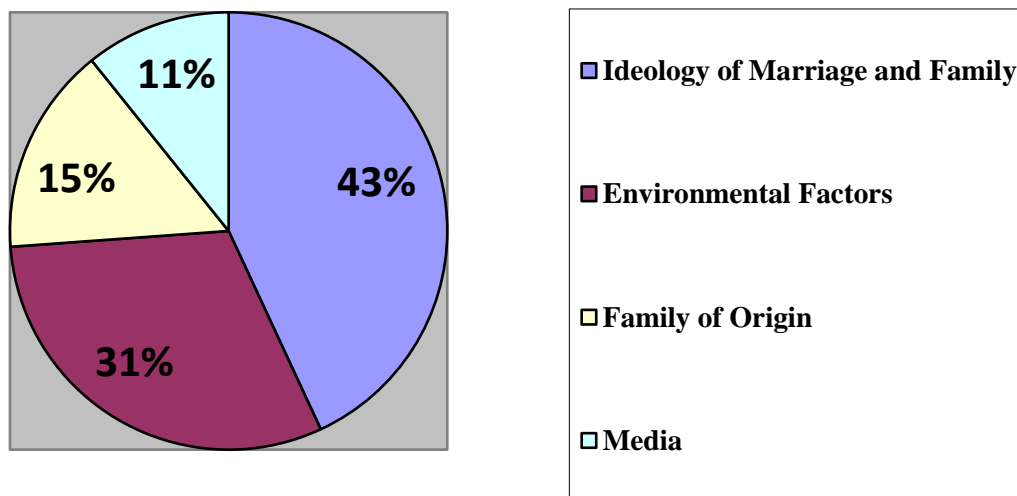
Figure 1. Pie chart showing nondemographic categories relevant to study participants' experiences of singlism.

The overall pattern that emerged from the data was that single as well as formerly coupled women appear to internalize singlism, and the underlying Ideology of Marriage and Family (Table 5). Sixteen of the 18 study participants were found to have internalized singlism either consciously or unconsciously. Participant 3 appeared very aware of singlism, actively sought out supportive environments without singlism, works to raise awareness about singlism by conducting research, and described herself as an "activist." The experiences of Participant 11 gave no indication that she had internalized any part of singlism; but, she disclosed that she believed she had perhaps internalized some part of it at one time. Of the 16 participants whose told experiences indicated that they had internalized singlism at some point in their life, some openly acknowledged it at times. For example:

- Participant 4: "I've certainly thought something might be wrong with me."

- Participant 14: "I think I fell into that personally."

Some participants revealed their internalization unintentionally by making comments that clearly indicated that they had adopted beliefs and/or behaviors supportive of singlism. For example:

- Participant 2: "A really odd thing to be 30 and single."

- Participant 7: "I'd say that most of the world is pretty much in agreement that's an unappealing outcome."

- Participant 10: "I would consider single by choice folks who were also like, yea, I'd be happy to be in a relationship but I'm just not right now."

- Participant 14: "Getting married is probably the one normal thing I did I think."

Table 5

Indicators of Internalization of Singlism

Participant	Marital status	"Something wrong"	Ideology of marriage & family
1	Never married	√	
2	Never married	√	
3	Divorced		√
4	Never married	√	
5	Engaged		
6	Never married	√	
7	Divorced	√	√
8	Never married	√	√
9	Divorced	√	
10	Never married	√	√
11	Never married	√	√
12	Never married	√	√
13	Divorced	√	
14	Divorced		√
15	Divorced	√	√
16	Divorced	√	√
17	Never married	√	√
18	Divorced		√

Participant responses to singlism included adopted beliefs, behavioral responses, and feelings. Negative feelings about self function as supporting singlism. Feelings of anger or unfairness about singlism indicate opposition to singlism. For example:

Negative feelings about self (supports singlism)

- Participant 2: "Right now, single just feels very lonely and a little bit out of the loop for me."

Feelings of anger or unfairness (opposed to singlism)

- Participant 6: "I feel like 50 percent of Americans are married—at any one time you've left out half of the population."

Participant beliefs formed four categories of beliefs supporting singlism, beliefs opposed to singlism, beliefs disparaging marriage, and beliefs disparaging coupling/relationships. For example:

Adopting beliefs supporting singlism

- Participant 10: "Sometimes, when I meet somebody and I'm like they're super unpleasant but they're in a relationship I'm like how is that person in a relationship when I'm not in one."

Adopting beliefs opposed to singlism

- Participant 1: "All the other groups are out looking for a guy. I don't need one! I'm me!"

Adopting beliefs disparaging marriage

- Participant 11: "For reasons of not settling down and sacrificing the things that I wanted. I chose to remain single."

Adopting beliefs disparaging coupling/relationships

- Participant 8: "Doing our own thing … instead of coupling your identity with another person."

Participant adopted beliefs resulted in active or passive behaviors. Active behaviors involved actions to comply with singlism, avoid singlism, seek out support as a single, and to raise awareness about singlism. Passive behaviors involved ignoring or accepting singlism, or refusing to comply with singlism. For example:

Active behaviors to comply with expectation/assumptions of singlism

- Participant 4: "I got involved with a man and I was just absolutely blown away by the approval I got, which was the main reason I was in the relationship."

Active behaviors to avoid situations/instances of singlism

- Participant 10: "And then I left. I mean I could only stay at the reception for like 20 minutes and had to go."

Active behaviors to seek supportive community for singles

- Participant 3: "I hang out more in environments that are very supportive of single women."

Active behaviors to raise awareness about singlism

- Participant 15: "So I do find myself often in the position here of having to teach them how to, you know, treat single people."

Passive behavior to ignore/accept singlism

- Participant 9: "There's nothing you can do to change these things because they've been this way for so long."

Passive behavior to refuse to comply with singlism

- Participant 14: "I don't want that life."

Study participants often indicated having multiple different responses to singlism. Some responses appeared discordant. For example,

- Participant 5 expressed feelings of anger in response to expectations of marriage yet is engaged to be married.

- Participant 6 expressed feelings of unfairness about discrimination due to marital status yet expressed these views as "complaining."

- Participant 8: "I get worked up and kind of angry" about singlism and then I "ignore it."

- Participant 12: "Some people are [single because they are] not as wanted"; "I know that's not the case with me."

The study participant's chosen response(s) appeared to be related to different individual factors as revealed by their narratives. Factors that appeared relevant to at least one study participant's response pattern included: presence and degree of internalization of singlism/ideology of marriage and family, age, education/occupation, marital status, religion, presence of supportive community/single friends, work environment, parental attitude (Table 6). Participants whose responses indicated higher degrees of internalization of singlism/ideology of marriage and family reported more feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that support singlism. The presence of supportive community/single friends appeared to be more consistently reported by study participants who also exhibited response patterns consisting of feelings, beliefs, and behaviors opposed to singlism. Participants whose narratives revealed high levels of inequality in the workplace exhibited more feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that supported singlism. Participants who indicated that their parents were supportive, and did not pressure them to marry, exhibited response patterns consisting of feelings, beliefs, and behaviors opposed to singlism.

Table 6

Relevance of Individual Factors to Participant Response Patterns

Factor	Responses supporting singlism	Responses opposed to singlism
Internalization	Higher	Lower
Age	-	-
Education/occupation	-	-
Marital status	-	-
Religion	-	-
Support/friends	Lower	Higher
Work environment	Inequality	Equality
Parents	-	Supportive

Qualification criteria for study participation included acknowledgment of experiencing singlism. It was possible that individuals could respond to the recruitment advertisement for this research study with statements indicating their disbelief or lack of experience with singlism. The inclusion of discrepant information from individuals who did not experience/observe/believe that singlism occurs would increase credibility by including multiple perspectives. No individuals responded to the study advertisement purporting a lack of belief or experience with singlism. However, whereas all study participants were able to easily and readily describe stereotyping of single women, participants described a range of experience with discrimination for being single. Since singlism involves both stereotyping and discrimination towards singles, women's experiences with either stereotyping or discrimination are relevant and included in the analysis.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness applies to the researcher, to the data sources, and to the selected methods of collection and analysis; and entails efforts to address the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This research plan was reviewed by the dissertation committee and the IRB to contribute to the research plan's trustworthiness. This research study met criteria of a grounded theory study by examining a process as the key element in the theory, utilizing a coding process to move from data to theory, presenting the theory as an illustrative model, using memoing during the data collection and analysis processes, and by being aware of the researcher's influence on the processes. Multiple tools for data analysis with HyperRESEARCH were utilized including frequency report, code book, and word counter.

Credibility

I discussed my own experiences with singlism with study participants prior to and during participant interviews, and study participants were asked to review the study results and researcher interpretations to contribute to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Additional strategies that were used to improve the quality of the study include prolonged contact with research participants; reaching data/category saturation point; and being aware of my influence on the processes of conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation.

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity, is the degree to which the study results can be generalized to other people or situations. I used a systematic approach to data collection

and analysis to contribute to external validity. Rich descriptions were collected from study participants, and a theoretical sampling strategy was utilized. Interview data were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded multiple times in consideration of comparisons within each interview and between interviews. Study participants were involved in the process via member checking.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability or consistency of the inquiry process. Dependability was increased by utilizing a systematic approach to data collection, interpretation, and reporting of findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which outcomes can be confirmed or collaborated by others. Systematic approach, memoing, field notes, and inclusion of discrepant data contributed to objectivity.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

The primary research question was: How do women experience singlism? Experiencing singlism means that a study participant reported experiencing stereotyping and/or discrimination for being single. As a result of that experience, the woman either experienced negative feelings about self and/or other single women, or experienced feelings of anger and unfairness. In many cases, a woman experienced both negative feelings and angry feelings. Negative feelings included: despair, judged, hurt, left out, uncomfortable, invisible, odd, excluded, don't belong, awkward, guilty, terrible person, lazy, disappointment, sad, inferior, anxious, worried, disapproval, tragic, despairing,

disconcerting, screwed up, disrupted, vulnerable, selfish, third wheel, and helpless. Angry feelings included: cross, fed up, angry, annoyed, surprised, horrified, frustrated, and appalled.

Adoption of beliefs included: adopting beliefs in support of singlism, adopting beliefs opposed to singlism, adopting beliefs to disparage marriage and/or coupling relationships. Examples of each of the three types follow:

- Participant 9 adopted a supporting belief: "There's nothing you can do to change these things because they've been this way for so long."

- Participant 11 adopted a belief that is opposed to singlism: "We can be single and happy. You can be coupled and you could be happy. There's no wrong way to be happy. It's not just only being married. Or being partnered. This is also a viable option. And it's a satisfying one."

- Participant 7 adopted a belief disparaging marriage: "I'm sure there's a whole bunch of gnarly underneath those marriages. There's probably a bunch of crap going on like there always is."

Subsequent behaviors can then be classified as either active or passive. Active behaviors included: complying with the expectations/assumptions of singlism, avoiding situations involving possible singlism, seeking support as a single person, and raising awareness about singlism. Examples include the following:

- Participant 17 stated that she likes being single, hates dating, yet is unhappily dating because she wants to be coupled like her friends.

- Participants 1, 4, 10, and 12 avoided social situations and activities, left events and activities, and changed jobs in order to avoid singlism.

- Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 14, 16, and 18 sought out support for singles. Participant 14 describes finding a supportive community: "I was so, so happy when I, like, I found a group."

- Participant 3 identifies as an activist and raised awareness about singlism by completing graduate research about singlism.

Passive behaviors included: ignoring/accepting singlism or refusing to comply with singlism's expectations. Examples include the following:

- Participant 6: "I don't know, I feel like instead of complaining I should do something about it. I don't always know what to do."

- Participant 9: "I mean we're accepting of it, it's just the way it is."

- Participant 11: "I'm not going with the flow. And I also have the nerve to be happy about it and that makes people uncomfortable because how can I possibly be happy dong something that culture has told us we shouldn't be happy about."

The secondary research question was: What explains how women experience singlism? Although the narratives told by the study participants revealed multiple explanations for how a woman experiences singlism, the underlying explanation appears to involve whether or not she has internalized the related ideology of marriage and family, and to what degree she has internalized it. The predominant indicator was use of

the phrase "something wrong" and similarly worded phrases expressing the same idea. Some examples follow:

- Participant 2: "If you're not married or in some type of long-term relationship that there's something wrong with you."

- Participant 3:

  Yea, yea and that is, you know, kind of like, almost like the assumption that nobody could possibly see being single as a totally valid life choice. You know it is something that is OK maybe temporarily but certainly not long term and if you're going to be there long term (inaudible) it is because you have some sort of pathology or something wrong.

- Participant 7:

  It's like that is so reinforcing the general sentiment which is there's something wrong with you if you're just searching for love all the time and you keep stepping in the wrong relationships and everything melts down and you can't be paired up. It's like the classic tragedy.

- Participant 9: "If you've got divorced you've done something wrong. There's no way to be a winner."

- Participant 10: "Oh. I think it's, it's that there's something wrong with them, you know? Like, you know, you're a cat lady, right? Or you've got some weird quirk."

- Participant 11: "Because I start to think maybe there is something wrong with me."

- Participant 16: "There must be something wrong with her."

- Participant 17: "It's that she's not dateable or she's not marriage material and that there's something wrong with her mentally and that's why she can't find a man."

Study participants who did not internalize the ideology of marriage and family did not internalize singlism as a societal or cultural norm, and did not experience negative feelings about self or other single women when exposed to singlism. Frequent exposure to singlism appeared to increase internalization of singlism. Sources of frequent exposure included family, parents, religion, media, and traditional work culture. Protective factors often involved supportive parents, single friends, financial stability, supportive community, female mentor, and educational pursuits. Figure 2 represents the process to formulate the model of this theory from the coding categories.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  something wrong    │
                    └─────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ negative stereotypes about single women│  │ discrimination against singles│
└──────────────────────────────────────┘   └──────────────────────────────┘
            ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
            │ feeling as response to singlism   │
            └──────────────────────────────────┘
                   ┌────────────────────┐
                   │  adopted beliefs   │
                   └────────────────────┘
                 ┌────────────────────────┐
                 │  behavioral response   │
                 └────────────────────────┘
```
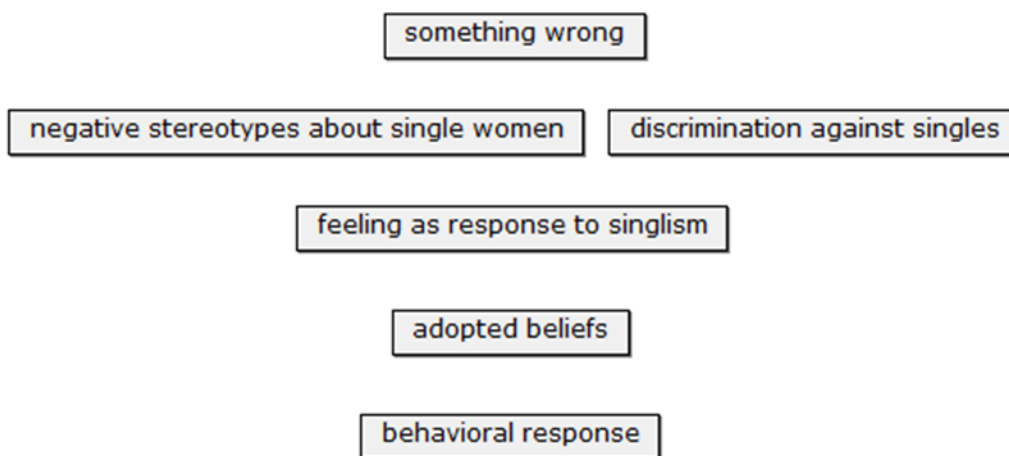
Figure 2. Response to singlism process.

Summary

As a result of experiencing singlism, a woman first experiences feelings in response. These feelings can generally be categorized as negative feelings about self or about other single women, or angry feelings. She then adopts beliefs in support of singlism, opposed to singlism, or disparaging of marriage and/or coupling relationships. Subsequent behaviors either actively comply with the expectations/assumptions of singlism, actively avoid situations involving possible singlism, actively seek support as a single person, actively raise awareness about singlism, passively ignore/accept singlism, or passively refuse to comply with singlism's expectations. Although multiple individual factors can influence how a woman experiences singlism, the underlying explanation appears to involve whether or not she has internalized the related ideology of marriage and family, and to what degree she has internalized it. The predominant indicator was use of the phrase "something wrong" and similarly worded phrases expressing the same idea.

Study participants who did not internalize the ideology of marriage and family did not internalize singlism as a societal or cultural norm, and did not experience negative feelings about self or other single women when exposed to singlism. Frequent exposure to singlism appeared to increase internalization of singlism. Sources of frequent exposure included family, parents, religion, media, and traditional work culture. Protective factors often involved supportive parents, single friends, financial stability, supportive community, female mentor, and educational pursuits.

This chapter described the data collection and analysis processes, including relevant participant demographics and characteristics, as well as individual situations and

circumstances that may have influenced the study participants at the time of their

individual interviews. Issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability were reviewed. The answers to the research questions were summarized

with data to support the findings. Chapter 5 is the interpretation and analysis of the study

findings, social change impact, and directions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Single women report experiencing stereotyping and discrimination for being single. As a result of these experiences, they internalize negative stereotypes about singles, develop a deficit social identity, and even fail to recognize that stereotyping of and discrimination against singles are harmful and wrong (Buddeberg, 2011; De Paulo & Morris, 2006; Morris et al., 2007; Piatkowski, 2012; Shachar et al., 2013; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a theory to explain how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, and what explains how women experience singlism. I used open-ended questions to elicit women's responses in their own words about how they had behaved in response to experiencing stereotyping and discrimination for being single. Themes emerged during the data analysis process, and participants provided clarifications as well as elaborations. Patterns revealed themes that led to the generation of a theory to explain how women experience singlism, as well as what explains how they experience singlism.

Key Findings

As a result of experiencing singlism, women either experienced negative feelings about themselves and/or other single women, or experienced feelings of anger and unfairness. Sixteen participants reported negative feelings, twelve participants reported feelings of anger or unfairness, and ten participants reported experiencing negative and angry feelings concurrently (Table 7). The code words generated by the initial analysis are provided in Tables 8 and 9. These initial code words were then subsequently grouped

according to whether they represented negative feelings about self or other single women, or feelings of anger or unfairness about singlism.

Table 7

Type of Participant Feelings in Response to Singlism

Participant	Negative feelings about self/others	Feelings of anger/unfairness
1	15	4
2	20	1
3	3	1
4	5	4
5	2	1
6	17	1
7	9	0
8	0	1
9	16	2
10	3	1
11	5	1
12	2	0
13	4	0
14	0	2
15	7	1
16	3	0
17	7	0
18	1	0

Table 8

List of Initial Code Words Subsequently Grouped as Negative Feelings

Obliged	Upset	Despair	Uneasy
Excluded	Missed out	Left out	Pressured
Uncomfortable	Hurt	Surprised	On display
Punished	Horrible	Different	Odd
Lonely	Out of loop	Stigmatized	Disconnected
Awkward	3rd wheel	5th wheel	Expendable
Guilty	Self-conscious	Taken aback	Blown away
Misunderstood	Terrible person	Cringe	Nervous
Horrified	Too old	Sad	Condescended to
Less than	Worried	Helpless	Anxious
Driven away	Not normal	Disapproved	Depressed
Disconcerting	Panic	Invisible	Tortured
Sad	Inferior	Too independent	Missing something
Struggling	Misfit	Outsider	Not accepted
Punished	Unwanted	Don't have a life	Disheartening
Don't belong	Void	Undesirable	Unlovable
Aberration	Incomplete	Spinster	Socially maladjusted
nth wheel	Weird	Additional wheel	Very strange
Judged			

Table 9

List of Initial Code Words Subsequently Grouped as Feelings of Anger/Unfairness

Cross	Fed up	Unfair	Want same rights
I lost it!	Annoyed	Bothered	Bugs me
I don't understand	Frustrated	Appalled	Angry
Impatient	Really?	What the f***!	Pissed off

Women then adopted beliefs categorized as either supportive of singlism or opposed to singlism. Some women who adopted beliefs opposed to singlism also adopted beliefs to disparage marriage and/or coupled relationships. Women who adopted beliefs supporting singlism then exhibited active behaviors to either comply with the expectations/assumptions of singlism or to avoid situations involving possible singlism,

as well as passive behaviors to ignore/accept singlism. Women who adopted beliefs
opposed to singlism exhibited active behaviors to avoid situations involving possible
singlism, seek support as a single person, and/or raise awareness about singlism, as well
as passive behaviors to refuse to comply with expectations linked with singlism (Table
10).

Table 10

Behaviors Associated With Belief Categories

Type	Supportive of singlism	Opposed to singlism
Active	Comply with expectations/assumptions of singlism	Avoid situations involving possible singlism
	Avoid situations involving possible singlism	Seek support as a single person
		Raise awareness about singlism
Passive	Ignore/accept singlism	Refuse to comply with singlism

How a woman experiences singlism appears to involve whether or not she has
internalized the related ideology of marriage and family. Women who did not internalize
the ideology of marriage and family did not internalize singlism as a societal or cultural
norm and did not experience negative feelings about self or other single women when
exposed to singlism. Exposure to singlism from family, parents, religion, media, and
traditional work culture appeared to support internalization of singlism. Supportive

parents, single friends, financial stability, supportive community, a female mentor, and educational pursuits appeared to function as protective factors.

Interpretations of the Findings

Literature involving stereotypes, stigma, discrimination, social identity, single lifestyle, singleness/singlehood, social environment, social norms, institutional status of marriage, and benefits of marriage was reviewed in Chapter 2. Key findings of this study were compared with the peer-reviewed literature, frequently resulting in the confirmation or extension of the ideas presented in previous research. In some instances, the study findings did not support prior research. A multiple-framework approach to viewing singlism was also presented, viewing singlism alternatingly via social constructionism, cognitive dissonance theory, and social identity theory. Study findings were then analyzed and interpreted within each of these contexts as appropriate.

Study Results as Compared to Prior Research

Descriptions of singlehood often ascribe negative traits such as selectiveness to women (Lahad, 2012; 2013). Some study participants reported that other people attributed their singleness to being picky or overly selective. Some study participants agreed and viewed the attribute as negative, whereas others agreed and viewed the attribute as positive. Participants who agreed and viewed it as a negative self-descriptor internalized negative stereotypes about single women, adopted beliefs supporting singlism, and responded with behaviors supporting singlism. Some examples follow:

- Participant 9: The perception is that women who are still single are very picky and maybe that's my case (laughter). We feel we deserve to be picky at this

point because, well, we don't want to go through the pain. We don't want to have to accommodate them and we don't want to give up our independence.

- Participant 10: "And I think that's also maybe why I've always stayed single for awhile is because I just am really picky and I'm like, ah, is this person worth having to spend more time with somebody?"

- Participant 12: "Both sets assume you should be in a relationship. The people like the German traveler think you're unwanted but closer friends think you're picky."

Single women frequently do not consider discrimination against single women to be wrong (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). Study participants who adopted negative feelings about themselves then adopted beliefs to support singlism and behaved in ways to actively comply with singlism or to passively accept it. Some study participants voiced their beliefs that singlism is wrong yet still passively accepted it. Other study participants expressed feelings of anger and unfairness about singlism, adopted beliefs opposed to singlism, and behaved in ways to either actively seek support as a single, raise awareness about singlism, or passively refuse to comply with singlism. Some examples follow:

- Participant 5 actively complied with singlism by espousing that she did not want to get married in the near future yet had been engaged for over 6 years.

- Participant 9 passively accepted singlism: "I mean we're accepting of it, it's just the way it is."

- Participant 16 actively sought support as a single by finding a support group for single people: "Some of my choices have been positively influenced by reading some of the stuff in the online community of singles."

- Participant 3 considered herself an "activist" and wrote her master's thesis to raise awareness about singlism.

- Participant 11 passively refused to comply with singlism.

    Because I have had many opportunities where I perhaps could have bonded with someone who maybe wasn't the best for me but would have made me look like I was part of everyone else. And so I could have fulfilled the role of being coupled. And I chose not to.

Singles are assumed to have similar traits and behaviors that exist heterogeneously and are viewed negatively, with these negative attributes causing singles to be discounted or viewed as "tainted" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Stereotypes of singles result in the group being stigmatized. Singles may internalize these beliefs, which results in shame (Goffman, 1963). Singlism initiates a process whereby negative stereotypes about singles are internalized by singles as shame (Buddeberg, 2011). Study participants repeatedly reported being viewed by others as having something wrong. A majority of study participants internalized this view and expressed that something must be wrong either with other single women or with themselves as single women. Some study participants indicated feeling shame for being single, as evidenced by attempting to hide

the fact by pretending to have a husband, or by referring to themselves as divorced in order to be perceived more favorably. Some examples follow:

- Participant 2: "I'd say I'm probably more discriminating against myself, what's so wrong with me that I haven't found some type of partner, someone I want to spend my life with."

- Participant 17:

    I think a lot of times it's this like well there must be something wrong with them that they're not in a relationship and that they can't for some reason take care of themselves or they're these money-hungry business driven women who only care about their career and that's why they don't have time for a man.

- Participant 7 pretended to be married sometimes: "I still to this day say, you know, I'll ask my husband, or I'll have my husband read up on it."

- Participant 15 identified as divorced instead of as single: "it is better to be seen as divorced than to be seen as single and never married."

DePaulo and Morris (2005) proposed the ideology of marriage and family as the root cause of stereotyping of and discrimination against singles, identified singles as a stigmatized group, and introduced singlism as a social problem. Singles' acceptance of stereotyping of and discrimination against singles can also be viewed as acceptance of this ideology (Morris et al., 2007). Internalization of the Ideology of Marriage and Family was associated with internalization of singlism, negative feelings about self, adoption of beliefs supporting singlism, and behavioral responses such as actively complying with

singlism, actively avoiding situations, and ignoring/accepting singlism. Behaviors undertaken solely to comply with singlism or to avoid situations due to the fear of experiencing singlism constitute social problems.

Singlism is relevant to the wellbeing of singles (Abrams, 2012; Barak, 2014; Benson, 2013; Bruckmuller, 2013; Fisher, 2013; Jordan & Zitek, 2012; Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Lee & Turney, 2012; Piatkowski, 2012; Shachar et al., 2013; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Smith, Willmott, Trowse, & White, 2013; Spielmann et al., 2013). Study participants expressed negative feelings about themselves and participated in behaviors solely to comply with or to avoid situations involving singlism. Even participants who did not support singlism took steps to avoid situations in which they anticipated that singlism might occur. Adoption of a negative self-identity, behaviors performed in response to singlism that support singlism, as well as behaviors enacted purely to avoid singlism do not promote the wellbeing of single women.

Stereotypes lead to prejudice at the societal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels, which can result in depression in the target of the prejudice (Cox et al., 2012). Many study participants endorsed negative feelings about themselves, as well as beliefs that their parents or other family members were disappointed in them for being single. Even study participants who espoused awareness and condemnation of singlism still expressed curiosity as to why another woman might be single. In some instances, study participants even stated that they would be wary of entering into a relationship with a person who had always been single. Single women had internalized the negative stereotypes about single women and had perhaps felt pressured to marry (Shachar et al.,

2013). The majority of study participants had internalized the negative stereotypes about single women. Study participants repeatedly reported feeling pressure to marry from family, friends, and media.

Two important premises of self-stereotype impact are that self-relevant stereotypes can be very powerful and can influence individuals' behavior without their awareness (Bennett & Gaines, 2010). Acceptance of a negative stereotype via self-stereotyping can result in reduction of behaviors that are in opposition to the goals that are stereotypical of the stigmatized group (Burkley & Blanton, 2009). Some study participants reported engaging or remaining in relationships in order to comply with singlism, realizing afterward that they had done so. Many study participants espoused negative views of single women, including themselves, demonstrating the power of self-relevant stereotypes, as well as their role in adopting beliefs and behaviors to support singlism, whether actively or passively.

Individuals who have experienced stigma may undertake behaviors to reduce cognitive dissonance (Richman & Leary, 2009). A stigmatized individual may respond to experiencing stigma by either attempting to correct his or her failing or adopting an "unconventional interpretation" of his or her single social identity (Goffman, 1963, p. 10). Some study participants sought to become coupled and even engaged or remained in unsatisfactory relationships in order to avoid being single. Other study participants attempted to reframe being single as a more positive identity by disparaging marriage or coupling. Emotion regulation strategies may be an important link between discrimination and mental health problems, in that anger has been correlated with feeling less shame

(Matheson, McQuaid, & Anisman, 2016) related to perceived legitimacy of the discrimination as well as pervasiveness (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, & d Anisman, 2009). Study participants who expressed feelings of anger or unfairness in response to singlism then adopted beliefs opposed to singlism, and then exhibited behaviors to actively seek out support for being single, to raise awareness about singlism, or to passively refuse to comply with singlism.

Responses to discrimination also appear to be moderated by both the perceived legitimacy of the discrimination as well as by pervasiveness (DuGuid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, Garza, & Mewse, 2011). Pervasive discrimination has been linked to poor mental health indicators in depressive symptoms, loneliness, and hostility (Lee & Turney, 2012). Individuals who perceive discrimination as legitimate are more likely to conform (Jetten et al., 2013/2012) and thus leave their stigmatized group in situations where social mobility is possible (Cronin, 2010). Study participants who internalized singlism, thus legitimizing it, expressed negative feelings of self, adopted beliefs supporting singlism, and participated in behaviors supporting singlism. Study participants espousing negative feelings of self also described experiencing singlism in environmental factors (such as work), family of origin, and via media.

An identity-restructuring response to social identity threat can involve abandoning the single identity, called identity exit, thus eliminating the threat (Petriglieri, 2011). Some study participants reported entering/remaining in unsatisfactory relationships in order to avoid being single. Others reported using deception to make people think they were married/coupled. A few reported identifying as divorced as opposed to single in

order to appear in a more positive light. Another identity-restructuring response to social identity threat entails changing the meanings associated with being single (Petriglieri, 2011), such as redefining being single as either temporary or a desired state (Eck, 2013). Some study participants spoke about being single as a positive identity, yet exhibited two different approaches to women who chose not to be single. Some study participants adopted a positive single identity, while still allowing women choosing to be non-single to also have a positive identity. Other study participants espoused a positive single identity while simultaneously disparaging married or coupled women.

Single women reported feeling displaced in their birth families when a younger sibling married and had children before them (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Study participants who reported this also reported negative feelings of self, as well as adopted beliefs in support of singlism. These feelings appeared to stem from the attitudes and behaviors of participants' parents. Parents were reported to give preferential treatment and regard to a sibling who married or had children. Participants expressed particular discomfort when the sibling was younger than the participant.

Research into trends in attitudes towards marriage in the United States indicated that women who are single, better educated, employed, and relatively non-religious have less traditional views about marriage (Gubernskaya, 2010). The results of this study did not support this view. At least half of the study participants had always been single, with the majority college educated and employed in professional occupations; yet, the majority still internalized singlism. It is possible that women may purport to have less traditional

views about marriage when they in fact adhere to tenets of marriage in order to avoid disadvantages of being single.

Narrative research with single women revealed that they attempted to reframe their singleness as a time for personal self-improvement, yet still progressive towards future better relationships (Reynolds & Taylor, 2004). This was confirmed by several study participants who indicated that they embarked on self-improvement initiatives subsequent to ending a marital or couple relationship, while simultaneously indicating their interest in entering into a future marital or coupled relationship, and that their self-improvements might somehow improve their chances of a successful relationship. This is reflective of the view that there is something wrong with a woman who is not in a relationship. These participants spoke about having time to devote to themselves, yet worded responses as negative views of self such as working on myself.

Women reported receiving various messages from family, friends, and society that they perceived as pressure to conform to traditional social norms in terms of lifestyle (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Study participants confirmed experiencing a great deal of pressure from family, friends, media, and even work environment. Participants were encouraged to meet people, date, be less selective, be more feminine and submissive, be less independent, and to marry. Perceived pressure ranged in intensity from odd looks to direct advice. Immediate reactions to stigma and discrimination related to social acceptance include behavioral responses that are prosocial, withdrawn/avoidant, or antisocial depending on the individual's perception, comprehension, and interpretation of the experience (Hafford-Letchfield, Lambert, Long, & Brady,2016; Richman & Leary,

2009). Study participants exhibited behaviors to comply with singlism (prosocial); to avoid or ignore singlism (withdrawn/avoidant); or to seek out environments supportive of singles, to raise awareness about singlism, or to refuse to comply with singlism (antisocial).

Singles who focus on negative aspects of being single may attempt to distance themselves from the group by disparaging singles (Benson, 2013). Behaviors to avoid single status may include remaining in an unsatisfactory relationship, and even being less discriminating in mate selection (Larson, 2014). Research using the Fear of Being Single Scale indicated that individuals were willing to settle for less than desired in romantic relationships in order to avoid remaining single (Spielmann et al., 2013). Study participants expressed negative feelings about self and other singles, spoke about married/coupled individuals as settling, and sought to enter, entered, or remained in a relationship in order to avoid being single.

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

Existing theories provide explanations for stereotyping and discrimination towards singles, resolving conflict between beliefs and behaviors, and self-stereotyping. Although each of these theories is related to an aspect of singlism, none explains how women respond to singlism, or what explains how they respond to singlism. The reported experiences of study participants as told in their own words revealed themes and patterns that resulted in a theory to explain how women respond to singlism, and what explains how they respond to singlism. Women revealed responding to singlism with negative feelings about themselves and/or about other single women, or with feelings of anger.

Some women described experiencing both types of feelings. Women's narratives revealed that women then adopted beliefs that were either supportive or opposed to singlism, followed by behaviors that served to either support or oppose singlism. Internalization of singlism appears to explain how women experience singlism in terms of whether they experience negative or angry feelings, adopt supportive or oppositional beliefs, and participate in supportive of oppositional behaviors. Family, parents, religion, media, and traditional work culture appears to contribute to the internalization of singlism. Protective factors included supportive parents, single friends, financial stability, supportive community, female mentor, and educational pursuits. Prior research by DePaulo and Morris (2005) found that the ideology of marriage and family underlies singlism, with internalization of the ideology of marriage and family underlying internalization of singlism.

Women who reported internalization of ideology of marriage and family/singlism reported negative feelings about self and other singles, adopted beliefs supporting singlism, actively behaved in ways to comply with singlism or to avoid singlism, and passively ignored/accepted singlism. Women who reported a high level of supportive community and single friends reported feelings of anger and unfairness about singlism, adopted beliefs to oppose singlism, actively behaved in ways to seek supportive community and to raise awareness about singlism, and passively refused to comply with singlism. Women who reported a high level of inequality in the work place reported both negative feelings about self and other singles as well as feelings of anger and unfairness about singlism. They reported adopting beliefs supportive of singlism as well as

disparaging of marriage/coupling, behaved actively to comply with or avoid singlism, as well as passively to ignore/accept singlism. Women who reported having very supportive parents reported feelings of anger/unfairness about singlism, adopted beliefs opposed to singlism, actively behaved to seek supportive community and to raise awareness about singlism, as well as passively to refuse to accept or comply with singlism.

Social Constructionism

Singlism is based on the ideology of marriage and family which encourages/enforces adherence to the social norm by conferring advantages and benefits to those who marry/couple, and denying the same to those who do not comply. Individuals who remain single are viewed as deviant and subject to negatives stereotypes and discrimination (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blakemore et al., 2005; Cherlin, 2004; Day et al. 2011; Jacobsen & Van Der Voordt, 1980; Piatkowski, 2012; Pignotti & Abell, 2009; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Study participants reported being viewed as having something wrong with them for being single or for expressing that they desired to remain single. Negative stereotypes were described as negative feelings about self as well as about other single women. Some study participants adopted beliefs and behaviors supporting singlism, perpetuating the practice. A few examples follow:

- Participant 2 vocalized her respect for "interesting, smart, single women who have cool careers in their lives and I want to be like them"; and then followed with "what am I doing in my life, what's wrong with me that I'm still single?"

- Participant 7 stated that she knows people who are "single by choice", yet states that "most people find it depressing" when they "aren't in relationships and wish they were".

- Participant 10 voiced her opinion that "single by choice folks" were actually people who felt that "yea, I'd be happy to be in a relationship but I'm just not right now".

- Participant 9 likens being single to being "a second class citizen".

- Participant 14 describes being single as the most peaceful, joyful, creative, and authentic times in her life, yet states that "getting married is probably the one normal thing I did".

Cognitive Dissonancy Theory

Single women may experience uncomfortable feelings due to singlism. When a woman experiences a situation in which there is conflict between beliefs and/or behaviors, she will likely attempt to reduce the uncomfortable feeling by changing something to make beliefs and/or behaviors consistent (Festinger, 1957), such as resolving the dissonance between being single and the widely held belief that everyone gets married by either getting married or adopting the belief that something is wrong with people who do not get married (Buddeberg, 2011). Study participants who internalized singlism expressed negative feelings about self and other singles, consistent with singlism. Study participants who felt negatively about self and other single women adopted beliefs to support singlism, actively behaved to comply or avoid singlism, as well as passively ignoring/accepting singlism. Some participants adopted beliefs that

disparaged marriage/coupling as a way to justify remaining single as a preferred identity as opposed to one of several lifestyle choices. Some examples follow:

- Participant 4 entered and temporarily remained in an intimate relationship in order to gain "approval" from those around her who could not understand that she was "not interested in finding a mate".

- Participant 1 indicated that she would "go out of my way to make sure that I didn't get into a situation where I could even accidentally become coupled", and self-identifies as "anticouple".

- Participant 14 believes that when people marry they "settle" [for less]; and that "most people in relationships are not particularly happy and don't seem particularly mature."

Social Identity Theory

Stereotyping is how individuals are classified as belonging to either the in-group or the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In situations where it is possible to move from the out-group to the in-group, individuals are likely to try and distance themselves from the out-group (Benson, 2013). One way to distance oneself from the out-group is to join in stereotyping and discrimination of the out-group, despite being a member of the out-group. Study participants reported being categorized, as well as categorized themselves, as being in the out-group with the in-group consisting of people who are married/coupled. Despite being members of the out-group, they expressed negative feelings about themselves for being single, as well as about other single women. A few examples follow:

- Participant 11 stated that "I love being single" yet from time to time "I start to think maybe there *is* something wrong with me".

- Participant 12 indicated that "some people [who are single] are not as wanted and, like, I know that's not the case with me, you know?"

Limitations of the Study

Interpretations of the findings of this study are bound by limitations. The sample size was relatively small and initial data collection was limited to approximately one hour per participant. Although the sample size was only 18 participants, this was appropriate for an exploratory study. Participants were recruited via internet, e-mail, and university participant pool which necessitated access to a computer. Due to the limited time period of the study as well as the desire for an expanded geographical area, participants were not sought via other means. Limitations affecting generalizability and validity of the study included participants' self-reports of their experiences during which they may have knowingly or unknowingly censored actions, thoughts, or feelings in order to present themselves in a particular light. The majority of participants who volunteered for this study were Caucasian (77%); which means other cultural and ethnic groups were not equally represented. Although study participants who identified as Black (11%), Asian (6%), and Latina (6%) participated, they were not representative comparative to the overall population. Study participants relayed dating experiences with men, and some study participants spoke about dating experiences with both men and women. The actual sexual orientations of the study participants were not disclosed. It is not known if sexual orientation impacted the study in any way, such as in a woman volunteering to

participate. I did not target specific sample demographics, and it is not known whether

ethnic and cultural groups were not equally represented or if the advertisement appealed

more to some groups. The majority of study participants were from the US (78%), but

the midwestern and southern states were not geographically represented. The geographic

distributions of the targeted social media groups and of the university participant pool

were unknown to me. The age of study participants ranged from 20s to 60s, and so no

women were included from the age groups of 70s and 80s despite the average life

expectancy of women being 81. This is attributed to the possibility that elderly women

may be less likely to participate in social media and in the university participant pool.

The study was also bound by recruitment of participants through an initial purposive and

secondary snowball sampling strategy. The majority of participants who volunteered for

this study were college educated (at least 72%); which means all socioeconomic statuses

were not represented. The voices of uneducated women, lower income women, and

unemployed women were not represented.

I attempted to reach these women by a subsequent advertisement on my personal

social media page that has a wider range of socioeconomic status, yet no women

indicated interest in participating in the study. It is unknown whether this was due to lack

of interest in the study, or whether none of the women had experienced singlism. Finally,

study participants had self-identified as having experienced singlism, which may have

failed to attract participants who were not aware that their experiences were considered

singlism. This limits the generalizability of the study results due to the sample consisting

of participants that adhere to certain criteria, which disallows generalization of the study results to populations outside those criteria.

Recommendations

Literature and prior studies related to women's experiences with being single have indicated the need for research to explore in depth the experience of being a single woman, of the benefits of being a single woman, of single as a social identity that is not a deficit identity, and how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism, and what explains how women experience singlism. I explored themes and patterns that emerged with single women and their experiences of singlism. As this study only included 18 women who had experienced singlism, it is important for additional studies with more participants and/or quantitative studies to provide additional data regarding the theory of how women experience singlism and what explains how they experience singlism. Limitations described above related to age, culture/ethnicity, geographic location, and socioeconomic status also provide opportunities for future research with women in their 70s and 80s, culturally/ethnically diverse women, women from the midwestern and southern states in the US as well as abroad, and women from various socioeconomic levels. In addition, several ideas and themes emerged from this study that could be further examined:

- Study results found that media is a source of frequent exposure to singlism, and appears to increase internalization of singlism.
- Study results found that traditional work culture is a source of frequent exposure to singlism, and appears to increase internalization of singlism.

- Study results found that access to a supportive community may be a protective factor that reduces internalization of singlism.

- Study results found that financial planning/financial stability may be a protective factor that reduces internalization of singlism.

Implications

The practice of stereotyping and discrimination of single people, particularly women, is a social norm known as singlism. Individuals, groups, organizations, society, and related policy are influenced by social norms, as well as influence social norms. Changing how people view and treat single women may change how single women experience being single. This potential impact for social change can occur at the individual, group, organizational, and societal level which is then reflected in policies affecting single women. This social change also has implications for research as well as clinical practice.

Social Change

Research findings of this study might promote positive social change by raising awareness about how women experience singlism. Study participants reported negative feelings about self as well as about other single women, which then caused them to adopt particular beliefs in support of singlism, and to behave in ways that further perpetuate singlism. Singlism affects individual single women, as well as singles as a group. Stereotyping and discrimination also occur at the organizational as well as societal level, with policies existing that legally award benefits and advantages to nonsingle people based solely on their single status. Social action to counteract singlism and potentially

self-harmful responsive behaviors includes fostering positive social identity in addition to raising social awareness about the life experiences of single people (Bryne & Carr, 2005; Cargan, 1986; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015). In order for stereotyping and discrimination towards single women to change, singlehood must be reframed as one of many positive identities possible for a woman as opposed to a deficit identity (Budgeon, 2016; Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015; Moore & Radtke, 2015). Constructing this new identity for single women will require social change to transition from viewing these women as not married to viewing them as individuals (Eck, 2013). This process will require shifting social identity for women towards a multifaceted and holistic model including content and meaning derived from their many successes as opposed to solely marriage and motherhood (Band-Winterstein & Manchik-Rimon, 2014).

Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications

A grounded theory study to explore how women experience singlism and what explains how they experience singlism was chosen in order to allow the narratives of single women to be told in their own voices. A theoretical explanation for the phenomenon was gleaned from the themes and patterns revealed via constant comparison within each interview as well as between and among the participants. The tentative theoretical explanation for how women experience singlism and what explains how they experience singlism is based on the study participants' told experiences, as well as on the researcher's observations of each participant's interview and the emerging themes and patterns. This theory can be further explored by collecting narratives from women not represented in the sample, as well as by collecting data from a much larger sample size

via creation of a quantitative instrument to gather data related to single women's negative feelings about self and other singles, adopted beliefs, and behaviors in support of singlism.

Recommendations for Practice

The outcome of this study may help foster a better understanding of single women, which may help mental health professionals who interact with single women, as well as with women seeking relationship counseling and career counseling.

Conclusion

Single women respond to singlism by experiencing negative feelings about self and other single women and/or feelings of anger and unfairness. Negative feelings about self and other single women function to support singlism; whereas feelings of anger and unfairness are in opposition to singlism. Single women then adopt beliefs that are either supportive of singlism or opposed to singlism, and may possibly be disparaging of marriage or coupling behaviors. Women may adopt beliefs that support singlism, yet disparage marriage and coupling in order to resolve conflict caused by remaining single. Single women next exhibit behaviors that support or oppose singlism in accordance with their supportive or oppositional beliefs. Behaviors can be active or passive, or a combination of both active and passive behaviors. Active behaviors to support singlism include compliance or avoidance. Passive behavior supporting singlism is ignoring or accepting singlism. Active behaviors to oppose singlism include seeking out supportive community and raising awareness about singlism. Passive behavior opposing singlism is refusing to comply.

How single women experience singlism is expressed in their feelings, adopted beliefs, and behaviors in terms of whether they are supportive of singlism or opposed to it. How single women experience singlism is explained by internalization of singlism and the underlying ideology of marriage and family. Exposure to singlism via family, parents, religion, media, and traditional work culture appears to increase the likelihood of internalization of singlism. Individual experiences of singlism were also affected by the presence of supportive community/single friends, financial stability, female mentor, educational pursuits, and supportive parents that functioned as protective factors.

The majority of study participants exhibited a pattern of unconscious internalization of singlism revealed by their adoption of negative beliefs about self and other single women; and subsequent participation in behaviors that supported singlism. Although the women verbally professed opposition to singlism, their narratives indicated that they had internalized negative feelings; as well as provided evidence of beliefs and behaviors that functioned to support singlism. These seemingly irrational responses to singlism were largely unrecognized by the women, and are not best explained by the existing framework. It is possible to theorize, based on the themes that emerged from the data, that irrational responses to singlism and subsequent failure to recognize beliefs and behaviors as irrational may be explained by a woman's unrecognized internalization of singlism, and the underlying ideology of marriage and family. The significance of this finding is that women may need to first become aware of internalization of singlism, and the underlying ideology of marriage and family, before they can recognize that they are responding in ways that function to support singlism.

Further study is needed to continue to learn how single women experience and respond to singlism in order to effect social change that begins with raising awareness and progresses through shifting single from a deficit identity to one of many possible social identities. As single becomes one of many possible acceptable social identities instead of a deficit identity, policies that deny advantages and benefits to singles based solely on their single status will be challenged as discriminatory and wrong.

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    dissertation). Retrieved from

    http://scholarworks.uni.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1238&context=etd.

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate and Description of Study

Social media posting/Walden Participant Pool posting:

Hello, my name is Lisa Hancock, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University conducting research on singlism. My study involves exploring how women experience and respond to stereotyping and discrimination of single women.

I will collect contact information and general demographic information from potential study participants (women at least 18 years of age), and contact you to schedule a one-hour interview. All interviews will be conducted by me. I may need to contact some study participants after the interview for additional information. Interview participants will also be contacted for an opportunity to review the findings of the study and to comment on them prior to completion of the study. The interview will be audio recorded to assist with data collection, transcription, and coding. Study participants will never be identified by name.

Your participation is strictly voluntary and will be kept confidential. No other person will know your name or your information. If you decide at any time that you no longer wish to participate, you can withdraw at anytime. Please feel free to contact me at lisa.hancock@waldenu.edu, or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Jonathan Cabiria, at jonathan.cabiria@waldenu.edu at anytime for further information.

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a study of singlism. You were chosen for this study because you are a woman over the age of 18 who self-identified as having experienced stereotyping and discrimination for being single.

This study is being conducted by Lisa Hancock who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information: Singlism is stereotyping and discrimination towards single people. The purpose of this research study is to learn how women behave as a result of experiencing singlism; and what explains how women experience singlism. Through this study we hope to obtain knowledge about this form of discrimination and its effects on those who experience it.

Procedures: If you participate in this study you will be asked to:
- Participate in an hour-long audio-taped interview
- Tell me how you have experienced stereotyping and discrimination for being single
- After initial data has been collected, additional questions may be needed to further clarify the data. This may take an additional 30 minutes to complete.
- You will also be offered the opportunity to review and comment on the study findings prior to completion of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study: As a result of participating in this study, it is possible that you might experience mild discomfort related to your experience with singlism. A list of counseling services will be provided if participation in this study presents this need. This study might help others learn more about how women experience singlism, and raise awareness about this type of discrimination. The study will hopefully help us understand how women experience and respond to singlism, and why.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality of Data: All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Audio-recordings will be uploaded and stored through password protection. No one but the researcher will have access to identified data.

Confidentiality: You may ask questions you have now or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via Lisa Hancock at lisa.hancock-rehrig@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani

Endicott, Chair, Institutional Review Board. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information and I believe I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By my signature I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Written or Electronic***** Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic***** Signature

_____

*The Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA) establishes the legal equivalence of electronic signatures with manually-signed signatures.

Appendix C: Request to Receive Study Findings via E-mail

You may request to receive a summary of the findings of this study via email.

I would like to receive information about the study findings via email. (circle one)
YES   NO

Printed Name   _____
Email Address   _____

Appendix D: List of Interviewer Questions

1. Tell me about being single.

2. How do you view other women who are single?

3. How do you think the media portray women who are single?

4. Tell me about a time that you believed that someone viewed you in a certain way due to being single.

5. Tell me about a time that you thought that you were treated differently due to being single.

6. Tell me about any stereotypes you have heard about single women.

7. Please share with me the contact information of any other women I may contact who you think might contribute to this research study.

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement—Transcriber

Confidentiality Agreement - Transcriber

I, _____ , agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Lisa Hancock related to her research study on the research study titled "How Women Experience and Respond to Singlism: Stereotyping and Discrimination of Singles". Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, (name of researcher).

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to (researcher's name) in a complete and timely manner.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

_____	_____	_____
(Print Name)	(Signature)	(Date)

Researcher

Lisa L. Hancock

_____	_____	_____
(Print Name)	(Signature)	(Date)

Appendix F: List of Resources for Local Counselors/Service Providers

National Board for Certified Counselors
Find a National Certified Counselor in your area
www.nbcc.org

NetworkTherapy.com
A Mental Health Network
www.networktherapy.com

Psychology Today Therapists
Find a Therapist
https://therapists.psychologytoday.com

Therapist Locator
A public service of American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT)
www.therapistlocator.net

therapy**tribe**
A unique therapist directory
www.therapytribe.com