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**THE MEANING OF "BEING SINGLE" FOR MORMON  
COLLEGE-AGE SINGLE ADULTS**

by

**Jana Darrington**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

in

**Family and Human Development**

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## ABSTRACT

The Meaning of "Being Single" for Mormon College-Age Single Adults

by

Jana Darrington, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2003

Major Professors: Dr. Kathleen W. Piercy and Dr. Sylvia Niehuis  
Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

This study researched the meaning of being single among 24 college-age adults of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (i.e., Mormons). It examined influences on the construction of meanings of singlehood, gender patterns regarding the meaning of singlehood, and pressures on L.D.S. singles to date and marry.

The most important finding was that positive attitudes toward singlehood are more prevalent than negative or ambivalent attitudes. Families, as gate-keepers and transmitters of cultural information about singlehood and marriage, and the L.D.S. religion were the strongest influences on the development of meanings of singlehood. Families and religion mutually influence one another and meanings of singlehood, and supportive friends helped singles feel that they are not alone. Although there was more variation within than between gender accounts of singlehood, important patterns in construction of attitudes were also discovered. Participants felt both external and internal pressures to date and marry.

(136 pages)

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Jana Darrington

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

The word *single* has many meanings. One definition refers to a status: being unmarried or spouseless. However, it can also mean being alone or solitary, thus implying an emotional experience. The term single is a vague phrase broadly used to describe men and women of different ages and relational experiences with specific feelings about being single based on their own life experiences. It does not, however, adequately describe the actual experience of being unmarried or alone. The meaning of *being single* for any one person is shaped by a unique combination of cultural, familial, and personal experiences. However, decades of cultural norms and expectations for a successful life cycle have influenced and been influenced by the historical importance placed on the marriage ritual in the United States (Austrom & Hanel, 1985; Schwartzberg, Berliner, & Jacob, 1995). In addition, family and peer pressure to marry, and emphasis on marriage in educational, social, and religious settings contribute to the way unmarried adults view their single status (Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Stein, 1975). Understanding how young adults create meanings of being single is essential to helping them be successful members of society without feeling that they are less important than their married counterparts. This is especially true for young adults who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (L.D.S. or Mormon), a religion that places a high priority on marriage for its members. In order to understand what being

single means to these unmarried, college-age individuals, it is important to briefly describe the social contexts or cultures that may influence this meaning.

### Social Contexts

#### *Culture in the United States*

There are somewhat conflicting messages about marriage and being single in the United States today. Traditionally, marriage has been an important part of our society and was regarded as “inevitable, a natural part of the progression through life” (Austrom & Hanel, 1985, p. 15); however, the prevalence of single individuals today highlights an inconsistency in the way marriage and singlehood are now presented. According to Schwartzberg and her associates (1995):

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

In other words, marriage has been an important step on the way to adulthood, and individuals who have not yet satisfied cultural expectations in this regard may not feel that they have a valid place within their family, community, or society.

Statistical data of the United States are a representation of American culture. Regarding marriage, statistics show that being single in the United States today is more common than in the past. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s March 2000 report of *America’s Families and Living Arrangements* (2001), most men and women today marry at an older age. The median age at first marriage has risen from 23 years for men and 21

years for women in 1970, to ages 27 and 25 for men and women, respectively, in 2000. In addition, the total number of individuals who have never married has continued to increase. From 1970 to 2000, an additional 3% of both men and women ages 15 and older had never married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The group of never-married men and women ages 20 to 29 experienced a significant increase during these three decades. In 1970, an average of 31% of men and women between the ages of 20 and 29 had never married. By the year 2000, this number had doubled, showing that nearly two-thirds of men and women ages 20 to 29 had never married (U.S. Census Bureau). Today, men and women living alone comprise 26% of total households, an increase from 17% in 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau). Although this figure may also include older individuals who have been separated, divorced, or widowed, young adults between the ages of 18 and 34, many of whom have never married, comprise a third of single-person households (U.S. Census Bureau).

### *Mormon Culture in Utah*

Utah has a unique culture that can influence unmarried individuals who attend college in the state. While nearly 70% of the total population in Utah belongs to the L.D.S. or Mormon Church (Young, 1996), this percentage can be higher in some communities. Leininger (1988) defined culture as “learned, shared, and transmitted values, beliefs, norms, and lifeways of a group which are generally transmitted intergenerationally and influence one’s thinking and action modes” (p. 9). Culture is also multi-leveled. Not only are Mormon single adults in Utah influenced by the mainstream culture of the United States, but they also are influenced by their religious culture, or in

other words, ideas that members of the L.D.S. religion share, and their religious subculture, which includes ideas that L.D.S. members in Utah share. For members of the L.D.S. religion, culture refers to beliefs regarding other people, the earth, and the heavens; ways of doing things and transmitting beliefs and practices to others; and artifacts, which in the L.D.S. culture include Mormon temples, visitors centers, meetinghouses, and locations mentioned in books of scripture and church history (Bahr & Forste, 1998). Doctrine given by church authorities, such as the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, is considered sacred, contemporary scripture, and is often studied in conjunction with other scriptural texts. Members of the church often respect their church leaders, both local and otherwise, and the counsel and advice they give. However, it is important to understand that while the underlying doctrine and teachings of the L.D.S. church have remained and continue to remain constant, interpretation of the doctrine by individual members can vary. For example, the amount of focus on the doctrine of marriage by local leaders of L.D.S. single adult congregations may vary from congregation to congregation, creating differential pressure on single adults to marry. This micro level of culture, referring to an individual's assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations, also can impact the attitudes and beliefs about being single that are espoused by single adults in Utah.

In the L.D.S. religion, every worthy male is encouraged to serve a full-time proselyting mission between the ages of 19 and 21. Although the religion has no specific doctrine that says a young man should marry within a specific amount of time after returning from his mission, the L.D.S. culture in Utah expects these young men to quickly prepare for marriage, and dictates that failure to marry within a year or two

signifies personal fault. Therefore, counsel provided to individual young men by local church leaders encouraging the practice of marrying soon after the completion of a mission is based both on the doctrine of the importance of marriage and on the individual's interpretation of the doctrine that marriage should be achieved quickly.

According to Smith and Shipman (1996), "Utah is often viewed as a state whose residents emphasize traditional 'family' values... [which] encourage marriage followed by childbearing, while discouraging divorce and bearing children out-of-wedlock" (p. 91). In 1990, 90% of individuals in Utah with formal church membership belonged to the L.D.S. Church (Young, 1996), and statistical data for Utah reflect the importance placed by the L.D.S. church on marriage. For example, although the rate of marriage in both the United States and Utah declined between 1970 and 1998, the nation's decline was nearly 8 times more than Utah's decline (Utah Vital Statistics, 1998). Additionally, while the age of first marriage for both men and women in the United States continued to increase by an average of 1.7 years per decade, it remained almost constant in Utah, increasing by only 1 year over a 38 year period (Utah Vital Statistics). Compared to the median age at first marriage for the United States population in 1998 (24 years for women; 26 years for men), the median age at first marriage in Utah (21 years for women; 23 years for men) is considerably lower. Furthermore, 64% of total marriages in Utah were to women who were between the ages of 20 and 22, and 68% of total marriages were to men between the ages of 21 and 24 (Utah Vital Statistics). The trend of younger ages at first marriage in Utah, which may be a reflection of the L.D.S. Church's influence, could shape how men and women experience their single life. In other words, Utah single adults who are younger than the median age at first marriage most likely

enjoy their single status but expect to be married in the near future. On the other hand, those who remain single beyond the traditional Utah marriage age most likely have seen a majority of their friends and acquaintances marry; this could affect the meaning of being single for these individuals.

The L.D.S. religion places a high priority on family, because it is considered a central part of the doctrine of human salvation (Heaton, Goodman, & Holman, 1994). For individuals who grow up in the L.D.S. faith, cultural representations of marriage and family are present from birth. Children are taught the importance of marriage and family through songs, activities, and lessons presented in church on Sundays and in the home during the week. Active L.D.S. parents encourage their children to marry, as long as it is in the right place (i.e., an L.D.S. temple, where couples are married for time and eternity), to the right person, and at the right time. Although individual interpretations of the L.D.S. doctrine may be slightly different, young single adults in Utah are likely to feel the influence of the L.D.S. Church as it concerns marriage, regardless of their personal views.

Heaton and his colleagues (1994) identified four main differences between Mormon and non-Mormon families relating to the issue of marriage. First, Mormons have an extremely conservative position regarding pre-marital sexual behavior. Second, Mormons are pro-marriage, and are more likely to marry and less likely to divorce than the average American. Third, Mormon families are usually larger than the national average. Fourth, parents are more likely to have a traditional division of labor between husbands and wives. These trends are consistent with religious beliefs and practices

within the L.D.S. faith. A more detailed explanation of the Mormon culture will be provided in the next chapter.

#### Statement of the Problem

The script for *How to do Life as an American Adult* has long been established. The majority of men and women expect to get married at some time in their lives, and 74% of them are in fact married by their 35th birthday (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Although census data for the United States have substantiated the fact that single individuals are more common today, many L.D.S. single individuals still may wonder what it means to be single and what their role is in society. This confusion is a byproduct of the previous negative stereotypes for single individuals that still exist in society today (Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Shostak, 1987), the emphasis on marriage as an indicator of maturity, and a lack of a common script for *How to do Life as an LDS Single Adult*.

Singleness for some individuals carries with it a sense of ambiguity about his or her place in society (Caplan, 1985; Lewis & Moon, 1997; Schwartzberg et al., 1995). Historical cultural norms and the often implicit expectations of family and friends deem it requisite to attain the marriage milestone (Austrom & Hanel, 1985; Caplan, 1987; Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Stein, 1975). Individuals who remain single may often feel uncomfortable and unsure of themselves in a marriage-oriented culture.

For single adults who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the pressures to marry and struggles of singlehood seem especially potent. A majority of Church leaders, past and present, have indicated that marriage is an important goal, one that single adults should strive to achieve (Benson, 1988a, 1988b; Eyring, 1998;



Hinckley, 1997; Kimball, 1975, 1977; Lee, 2000; Smith, 1998; Young, 1997). Because of this emphasis, many L.D.S. single adults may feel increased confusion about what it means to be single. On the one hand, they see their non-L.D.S. counterparts waiting longer to get married, and/or cohabiting for a time before marrying (a practice which is forbidden for faithful members of the L.D.S. Church). On the other hand, they see, hear, and feel a frequent emphasis on the importance of marriage. With these conflicting viewpoints and the influences of family and various circles of friends, are L.D.S. singles struggling to understand what it means to be single in a predominantly marriage-oriented culture? Do they feel positively, negatively, or ambivalent about being unmarried? What influence do family, friends, and religion have on the meanings of being single? Do men and women understand their single status differently? What kinds of pressures, if any, do L.D.S. singles feel regarding their marital status?

#### Purpose of the Study

This study primarily is concerned with the way unmarried L.D.S. young adults, ages 20 to 29, perceive themselves as single people. Because of the emphasis on marriage and family within the L.D.S. culture and the early age of marriage for young adults in Utah, being single can be an interesting time for many of these men and women. Based on personal experiences with dating, perceived social support from family and friends, and the influence of religious beliefs and practices, L.D.S. singles may construct positive, negative, or ambivalent views of their single status. It is important to note, however, that the meanings of being single may differ somewhat, depending on whether individuals are single and not dating and unattached, or single and dating at various

stages of involvement (e.g., dating casually, dating exclusively, or engaged). This research attempts to establish a foundation of what being single means for these young adults, and the processes they go through to form these meanings.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Overview

This chapter begins by outlining social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, two theoretical frameworks that will guide the interpretation of findings for this study. Important issues within the literature on singlehood, as well as literature on religious socialization within the specific cultural contexts of the L.D.S. faith will then be reviewed. At the end of the chapter, the research questions for this study are presented.

#### Theoretical Frameworks

##### *Social Constructionism*

Social constructionism bases the sociology of knowledge on the analysis of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Those who support this theory believe that reality and knowledge are related to specific social contexts. What constitutes reality and knowledge for an unmarried individual in the United States, for example, may not represent the same reality and knowledge for unmarried people in China (Berger & Luckman). Specific social contexts for each individual have similarities derived from a shared, common culture, but are each uniquely different because of other spheres of influence such as family, ethnicity, race, and social class. For single adults, the family system, one of the primary socializing agents, becomes a filter through which

wider cultural messages about marriage, family, and singleness are understood (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). In addition, knowledge is “developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations” (Berger & Luckman, p. 3); thus, it becomes necessary to understand the processes through which this knowledge becomes reality for any given man or woman. The meanings of single life may become reality through early childhood socialization within the family, through practice of religious beliefs, and in response to peer influences. Through these processes, the knowledge gained about marriage, family, and being single are internalized. Although the reality of everyday life typically is organized around a “here and now” framework, it is also constructed by phenomena that are not present here and now (Berger & Luckman). In other words, reality is defined not only by the context of today but also by the context of every yesterday. Not only are current cultural representations of marriage and singlehood important, but the historical importance of marriage as a cultural preference or norm in the United States (Austrom & Hanel, 1985) influences the way singles define their reality (Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Stein, 1975).

Botella (n.d.) indicates that the construction of meaning centers on social processes that do not emphasize the sole responsibility of either the individual mind or external reality. Social constructionism focuses on groups of individuals who are “interacting and collectively negotiating a set of shared meanings” (Constructivist Metatheory section, ¶12), which then become knowledge. Social constructionism is therefore concerned with two key interrelated concepts: objective and subjective realities.

Social constructionists reject the traditional objectivist view, which considers knowledge as a reflection of a reality separate and independent of the individual, and

instead focus on the link between objective and subjective realities (Murphy, 1997). As Schwartzberg et al. (1995) here explained, family and culture “form a reciprocal system, where culture shapes family and then family experience shapes the fit with culture” (p. 31). The objective reality, or cultural norm, is based on a common consensus of data or information, which then becomes institutionalized and sedimented before becoming a part of the role identity for individuals. In other words, habits lead to traditions and the typifying of performances within roles as it is understood by a larger group (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

In the United States, marriage has long been an institution of importance, which has shaped and defined role identity for many generations of men and women. This objective reality of the importance of marriage can lead to frustration for single adults when the presence or absence of marriage is thought of as an indication of successful progression (Caplan, 1985; Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Stein, 1975). However, social constructionists question how society can free itself from personal biases, because all knowledge has been, to some extent, shaped by an individual or a group of individuals.

Subjective reality is defined by an individual’s personal experience and is generally considered to be biased, personal, and egocentric. However, it is based on an objective reality, which is then filtered by the individual in terms of gender, race or ethnicity, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics. In other words, although individuals experience life according to their perspective and reality, life is also shaped by an intersubjective world, which is maintained through interaction with others who also experience the same reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966). For unmarried young adults, their reality is continually shaped and reshaped by others with whom they

associate. Friend and peer relationships can be powerful influences on what it means to be single. In addition, families can be influential in shaping knowledge about the importance of marriage and what it means to be single. Religion, for members of the L.D.S. faith, also plays an important part in shaping reality. Faithful members of the L.D.S. church not only believe the doctrines they are taught, they also live them and “do not separate [their] daily mundane tasks and interests from the meaning and substance of religion” (Brown, 1964, p. 81). In this way, the L.D.S. religion shapes the subjective interpretation of life for many of its members. Although the society as a whole shares portions of this reality (objective reality), interpretation is unique to an individual because of his or her primary socialization, personal characteristics, private beliefs, and unique life experiences. In light of this, it is important to understand that objective and subjective realities are not dichotomous, but intertwined, one depending upon the other for its base of “knowledge” and “reality.”

### *Symbolic Interactionism*

According to LaRossa and Reitzes (1993), symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework that attempts to understand how human interaction creates symbolic worlds that, in turn, shape subsequent human behavior. In this way, symbolic interactionism helps to explain social phenomena through the shared meanings within society (LaRossa & Reitzes). The meanings that an individual attaches to his or her single state in society today can be better understood through an analysis of four basic assumptions of symbolic interactionism.

First, human beings act according to the meanings created for them in their lives (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). For single adults, the meaning and connotation of being single that is created by the individual, as influenced by society, family, and peers, will shape their experiences and interactions with others. Based on the objective knowledge of the culture(s) to which a person belongs and individual subjective reality, meanings of being single are internalized and then acted upon. If young adults have internalized a positive meaning of being single, they are more likely to act in positive ways toward other individuals. The opposite is also true. For example, an unmarried adult who is confident of his or her role, and sees singlehood as a positive prospect, will more likely communicate optimistically about being single with others. Individuals who are ambivalent or unhappy about being single may focus more on negative aspects of their single life when interacting with or speaking about it to others.

A second assumption of symbolic interactionism is that knowledge and reality are shaped by the social systems to which an individual belongs. LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) indicated that "meanings arise through interaction with other people" (p. 143). This means that interaction with others, including family and peers, help individuals to create a personal meaning of being single. Individuals who come from the same culture, such as those who share the Mormon faith, will inevitably share some of the same meanings for specific phenomena like marriage and being single. However, these meanings will also be highly subjective, based on personal experiences and interpretations within the individual's family and with peers.

A third assumption of symbolic interactionism is that individuals use an interpretive process to initially deal with and then later modify meanings (LaRossa &

Reitzes, 1993). Based on personal experience and changing social/cultural circles, the meanings of being single can be under constant revision. A young adult, for example, may have internalized a positive meaning of being single initially. However, this view may change if he or she continues to remain single while many friends happily marry. For another unmarried young adult, having a negative dating experience or seeing family and friends with unhappy marriages can prompt him or her to feel more positive about being single.

The idea that culture and societal processes influence individuals and small groups is a fourth assumption of symbolic interactionism (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The increase of single adults in the United States, and the fact that it is more acceptable to be single in today's society, inevitably influence unmarried individuals' view of themselves. In fact, some characteristics of singlehood, such as freedom and independence, are celebrated in the United States and viewed positively by many. On the other hand, religious practices, such as those within the L.D.S. Church that define marriage as important, also influence how unmarried L.D.S. individuals view their single state. This combination of cultural and societal processes can provide single adults with certainty or ambiguity concerning their single state, depending on the interaction between them.

Knowing one's roles within society is an important concept of symbolic interactionism. According to Gergen (1999), "social life is played out in the roles we acquire, invent, or are forced into. In this sense, if you look ahead in life, you can see stretched out before you a [series of] structure[d]... roles" (p. 124) such as child, parent, teacher, or manager. Most roles within society come with a script or a way of knowing



what to do and how to act in specific situations. Because marriage has been an important part of the culture in the United States, the script for being single is still being revised by today's young adults. How does this script read currently? For those who were socialized in a gender-specific marital environment, the construction of this revised script ought to be especially interesting.

### Analysis of Literature

#### *Single Adults*

Literature surrounding singles and their life concerns is more plentiful than in previous years, but is still minimal in comparison to the abundance of literature on marriage-related issues (Austrom & Hanel, 1985). In addition, the majority of literature on singles focuses on individuals over the age of 30, with the largest portion of research focused on women only (e.g., Austrom & Hanel; Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Losoff, & Maurer, 1996; Lewis & Moon, 1997; Sheehan, 1989). This review will focus on five main topics found consistently within the empirical literature: (a) types of singles; (b) reasons for being single and attitudes toward marriage; (c) satisfaction with single life; (d) perceived social support for single adults; and (e) gender differences among single adults.

*Types of singles.* Some research on single adults has divided them into distinct categories. For example, Castellanos (1993), in her qualitative research study of professional, single women between the ages of 33 and 48, labeled her group of single women as *seekers* and *non-seekers* of marriage. She defined seekers as women actively pursuing an intimate relationship, while the non-seekers were not looking for a

relationship. Women in both categories were successful, intelligent, independent women who pursued a wide variety of careers; however, seekers were more likely to be unsatisfied with their careers and see their professional competence as intimidation for potential partners. Conversely, non-seekers indicated they were autonomous and self-confident and reported high job satisfaction. Both groups indicated marriage would be desirable. However, seekers were more inclined to express traditional roles and standards of femininity and hoped this would lead to marriage, while non-seekers believed that active pursuit of marriage would contradict the image of the independent, competent, satisfied woman they had created. In addition, non-seekers had given up traditional ideas of roles and femininity when their ideals did not correspond with lived experiences and were more accepting of a wider range of lifestyles. Non-seekers also did not equate marriage to happiness (Castellanos).

Another qualitative study conducted by Lewis and Moon (1997) used nine focus-groups of *always single* and *single again* women to investigate perceptions of being single. One hundred and six women participated in this two-phase study. The primary theme that emerged from this study was that single women have unacknowledged or unanswered fears about being single. This was supported by three sub-themes that included (a) the recognition of both advantages and drawbacks to being single, (b) ambivalence about why they were single, and (c) feelings of loss or grief, while expressing content with single life overall. These women saw freedom and independence as the two main advantages of single life. In contrast, drawbacks that were mentioned included not feeling special to a man, the absence of touch, not having children, the lack of continual companionship, and growing old alone. The authors noted that the desire for

freedom and independence somewhat conflicts with the desire for perpetual companionship, adding to the feeling of uncertainty about being single for these women.

In Arthur Shostak's (1987) review of singlehood, never-married singles are divided into four separate categories based on two characteristics: whether their single state is involuntary or not, and whether it is permanent or temporary. He notes that *ambivalent* singles (i.e., voluntary and temporary) are generally younger men and women who postpone marriage in pursuit of education or career goals. They are not intentionally seeking a partner, but are open to the idea of marriage. In contrast, *wishful* singles are those who are involuntarily and temporarily single, and are unsuccessfully active in seeking partners. They hope for marriage in the near future. *Resolved* singles, whose single status is voluntary and permanent, are those who have chosen the single lifestyle over marriage and do not intend to marry in the future. *Regretful* singles (i.e., involuntary and permanent) desire marriage, but "[feel] compelled... to regard singlehood as a 'life sentence'" (p. 57) because they are unsuccessful at finding a partner. This last group of singles quite generally includes older single women and perhaps some older single men, who are faced with the realization that 94% of the population (except themselves and those who are resolved singles) will marry at some point (Shostak). In addition, Shostak indicates that once in their 30s, happiness with single life for never-married women decreases, because men of the same age generally marry or start dating younger women. This may lead to self-degrading thoughts concerning sex appeal and personal worth for these single women who compare their "grim spinsterhood" to the "media image of the married woman: happy, sexy, and desirable" (Shostak, p. 358). In

contrast, society seems to be more accepting of older, single males who often glorify the advantages of single life, leading them to forget the drawbacks.

Respondents to surveys in Shostak's (1987) study identified several "coping mechanisms" to deal with their single life. These include permissive social attitudes, secure same-sex friendships, marriage-deriding attitudes, assertive social attitudes, dating aids, such as internet dating, bars and clubs, etc., and pro-singlehood options (e.g., co-ed dorms, single's educational, and counseling services).

*Reasons for being single and attitudes toward marriage.* In 1985, Austrom and Hanel extended the work on singles in an extensive survey study of 482 men and women (average age 34 years) about their reasons and motivations for being single, their satisfaction with single life, and their social support systems. Because marriage is still regarded as a natural part of the life cycle, the authors felt it was necessary to examine why individuals felt they were still single. They found that the largest percent of respondents (43%) reported they were single by deliberate choice and had associated positive reasons with their choice to remain single (such as "too many interesting people to choose from," "present lifestyle could not be improved by marriage," and "does not want marriage lifestyle"). However, 23% indicated they were single because of themselves or circumstances beyond their control. These respondents mentioned that they had not yet met the right person, that previous relationships had not worked out, that they were shy, or that they did not feel attractive to the opposite sex. A majority of respondents also believed that they were unmarried because their expectations for a spouse were high. When asked about satisfaction with single life, the authors found that the largest percent of individuals (47%) were unsatisfied with their single state, while

only 25% were satisfied with being single (28% said they were neutral). The authors found that individuals who had made a conscious choice to remain single were more satisfied with their free time and their friendships than those who were involuntarily single. However, there was no difference between the voluntary or involuntary single groups on their relationship satisfaction with family or potential partners (Austrom & Hanel, 1985). According to the authors, there tended to be two kinds of single people: those who embraced the single lifestyle and enjoyed it thoroughly, and those who were unsatisfied with single life and blamed their unmarried state on personal or situational inadequacies.

In a qualitative study of single men and women who had chosen not to marry or remarry, Stein (1975) explored the more positive meanings of being single that individuals create. Using a sample of twenty participants, he found that the majority of individuals cited freedom, enjoyment, opportunities to meet people and develop friendships, economic independence, sexual freedom, and personal development as some of the *pulls* toward being and/or remaining single. It is important to note, however, that 18 of the 20 participants wanted to be single because of their negative experiences within marriage or cohabiting relationships. These individuals did not feel that the traditional nuclear family could satisfy the demands of self-development, and they did not want to feel dependent upon one person to feel fulfilled. In addition, they had experienced a sense of loneliness or isolation within their close relationships because they did not feel that they could communicate with their spouse or partner about meaningful life experiences. Many respondents indicated that marriage was an entrapment that restricted opportunities and repressed independence, experimentation, and learning (Stein). In

addition to the liberal sexual climate of the 1970s, during which this study was conducted, it makes sense that those who have had negative marital relationships in the past would find more enjoyment and satisfaction with a single life.

Many women in the study by Lewis and Moon (1997) mentioned personal events that made their lives meaningful, but the always single women had more difficulties expressing what had made their lives meaningful. Single again women said they felt envied by their peers, while the always single women indicated they (1) felt pitied; (2) felt blamed for their singleness; or (3) were considered failures. According to the authors, the women tended to unconsciously switch back and forth between internal (i.e., self-blame) and external (i.e., circumstantial) reasoning to explain why they were unmarried. When asked if they were single by choice and why, the responses tended to be "Yes, because I haven't met the right person" and "No, because I haven't met the right person," indicating a general confusion regarding reasons for being single.

Frazier et al. (1996) conducted a study on the desire for marriage and life satisfaction among unmarried adults who were over the age of 30 years. In response to an open-ended question about why they were single, the authors found that responses fell into three categories: barriers, personal choice, and interpersonal deficits. The most common responses dealt with barriers (e.g., "I haven't met someone I like at the same time as s/he likes me"), followed by personal choice (e.g., "Marriage is an out-dated, archaic tradition rooted in male dominance..."), and then personal deficits (e.g., "difficulty in maintaining long-term relationship"). Although respondents indicated barriers over personal choice, they also preferred to indicate that they chose to be single over naming specific interpersonal deficits that might explain why they were still single.

The authors found no differences by gender. In addition, they found that compared to previously married individuals, never-married individuals were more likely to desire marriage. The authors indicated that this finding was related to lower levels of self-esteem in their sample of never-married individuals than previously married individuals.

Long (1983) noted in her study of 214 unmarried college-age females (mean age 19 years) that attitudes toward marriage may have changed because of the different ideas of gender-roles which had begun to surface at that time. However, she found that general attitudes toward marriage were still favorable and that 89% of the respondents said they expected to marry, but not for several years. She also made comparisons between attitudes toward marriage and the effects of parents' marriages on their daughters. She found that participants whose parents were "unhappy" in marriage had less favorable attitudes and lower expectations for marriage than those whose parents were "happy" in marriage or those who came from "broken" homes.

In a study of unmarried single adult men and women over the age of 30, Kaslow (1992) attempted to understand current attitudes and feelings about singleness as well as attitudes towards marrying in the future. Questionnaires were mailed to 53 men and women and were received from 15 women and 6 men. She stated that because of the small number of respondents, results were tentative. Participants noted in an open-ended question that they liked their freedom but also felt isolated and lonely as singles. Three men and twelve women were generally content with their single status, and all participants but one expressed a hope to marry someday. Kaslow indicated that although participants are aware of the benefits of being single, they felt some ambivalence because they did not have "a partner with whom to share intimate feelings and thoughts in a

committed, durable relationship" (p. 92). She stated that being single does not necessarily mean that one is dysfunctional or unhappy; many of the participants found satisfaction and meaning within their busy and productive lives.

*Satisfaction with single life.* Life satisfaction can be defined as the positive assessment of actual achievements in comparison to goals and aspirations; it is the assessment of progression toward desired goals (Lewis & Borders, 1995). In a 1995 study about life satisfaction among 152 divorced and never-married women, Lewis and Borders identified five main predictors of life satisfaction. They included job satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, regrets regarding life circumstances, internal locus of control, and leisure time activities. Of particular interest to the current research are the regrets reported by these single women. The authors noted that if the degree of life regrets was low, life satisfaction was subsequently higher. For this particular sample, only three never-married women experienced a high degree of regret, while the majority of respondents indicated a moderate to low level of regret. As a whole, this group of women overall did not exemplify the popular myth that single women continually focus on what could have been (Lewis & Borders). It seemed that the majority of these 30 and 40-year-old women (78%) accepted their single state and ceased to focus on the "what ifs" of the past. In general, they made the best of their circumstances and were enjoying life as much as they could. Individuals who have not yet reached this state of peace about their singleness, such as those in the 20 to 29 year-old range, may continue to focus on the lack of marriage in their lives and find more cause for regret concerning single lives.

Cockrum and White (1985) studied 60 never-married single adult men and women between the ages of 27 and 46 concerning influences on their life satisfaction.



They indicated that in previous research, never-married singles were not differentiated from other single groups, but were combined with divorced or widowed single adults. The authors suggested that life satisfaction for never-married single adults would have somewhat different influences than for those who had been married previously. They found that the main predictors of life satisfaction for these single adults were related to the quality and quantity of human relations (e.g., social integration, loneliness, and attachment). The authors noted a gender difference, however, and indicated that life satisfaction for men in this sample was most dependent on self-esteem and the availability of social integration (the "perception of how available and accessible a network of persons are with whom interests and values are shared," p. 553). For women, however, emotional loneliness (a "sense of loss and longing for a close attachment relationship," p. 552) and the availability of attachment (the "perception of the availability and accessibility of secure peace-giving relationships," p. 553) were the strongest predictors of life satisfaction (Cockrum & White).

*Perceived social support.* Past research on social networks is extensive and helpful in establishing that social networks of family and friends are important to every individual. Much of this research, however, focuses on the influence of social networks in the development, maintenance, and dissolution of romantic relationships (e.g., Driscoll, Davis, & Lipetz, 1972; Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Johnson & Milardo, 1984; Leslie, Huston, & Johnson, 1986; Lewis, 1973; Parks, Stan, & Eggert, 1983; Ridley & Avery, 1979; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992). While this may have an impact on why some individuals marry or remain single, this past research does not focus on the perceived social support that social networks give unmarried young adults with their

single life, or how this support affects the development of attitudes toward being single. However, past research does indicate that supportive family and friends are necessary for individuals in various life-stages throughout the life cycle.

According to Procidano and Heller (1983), perceived social support denotes the impact social networks have on an individual. "If networks provide support, information, and feedback... then perceived social support (PSS) can be defined as the extent to which an individual believes that his/her needs for support, information and feedback are fulfilled" (Procidano & Heller, p. 2). Krause and Markides (1990) further indicated that social support is a multidimensional construct that consists of different types of support, including emotional support, integration, tangible help, and information support. The proposed research will focus primarily on the amount of perceived emotional support relating to being single, and integration, which is the "embeddedness of an individual in a reciprocal network of shared obligation [which] imparts a sense of belonging" (Krause & Markides, p. 38). Does perceived social support affect individuals who are single? In what ways does it promote a positive development of being single? Past research (e.g., Driscoll, et al., 1972; Felmlee, et al., 1990; Johnson & Milardo, 1984; Leslie, et al., 1986; Lewis, 1973; Parks, et al., 1983; Ridley & Avery, 1979; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992) suggests that social support does indeed provide affirmation for single adults.

In a quantitative study of 517 single and 521 married individuals, Austrom (1982) attempted to recreate outdated findings on whether individuals with spouses had better physical and emotional health than singles, as has been suggested in previous research. In his study, the married respondents did not report better physical health than single persons. However, they did report more happiness and life satisfaction. Analyses

showed that this finding was more related to having a good social support system than to actual marital status. In other words, any individual with a consistent, strong support group would be satisfied with life. The study notes, however, that being married often provides the necessary "expressive and instrumental" social support that individuals need, especially for men. The expressive system provides the individual with affection, intimacy, and a sense of community, whereas the instrumental system helps in the fulfillment of tasks (Austrom & Hanel, 1985). Austrom (1982) also noted that while some single individuals seemed to have had success in creating strong social support systems, they were, in general, more likely than the married respondents to suffer from the lack of social support. In later research, Austrom and Hanel noted that "the correlations between satisfaction with single life and various aspects of social support systems suggest that the satisfied single respondents have developed more effective supportive networks" (p. 22).

In their study of never-married men and women, Cockrum and White (1985) noted that supportive friendships were a vital source of validating singlehood as an acceptable way of life. Self-worth can be validated by interacting with others who have similar life circumstances, and can be a significant source of support and reinforcement to being single in a marriage-based society (Cockrum & White). This study supported previous research that suggests that supportive family, friends, co-workers, and others play an important part in the life and happiness of single adults. The authors reported that positive social support from these various sources served to validate singlehood as an acceptable adult status, and to reaffirm never-married individuals that they are not deviant (Cockrum & White).

In her study of loneliness among older un-partnered men and women, Dykstra (1995) contended that friendships can, in some cases, provide support similar to that found in marriage or cohabiting relationships. In addition, she suggests that friendships, in which individuals share similar interests and values, can be helpful during specific life stages, such as being single in a predominantly marriage culture. Obviously, friendships cannot provide certain characteristics that are generally supplied by marriage, such as sexual needs and the daily presence and availability of a spouse or partner (Dykstra). However, friends can provide emotional support, love, understanding, respect, trust, as well as validation of beliefs, judgments, and behaviors (Dykstra). For individuals who are single, this support can be vital to the development of a healthy and positive attitude toward being single.

Likewise, Shostak (1987) indicated that a supportive group of friends is necessary to deal with issues of loneliness that often pursue single adults. He noted that socialization with other single adults plays a critical role in the development of a happy single experience because it allows single adults to share dating experiences; offer emotional support; provide a listening ear for single life discouragements and delights; and share common perceptions of life, love, and being single (Shostak).

In her dissertation research of 89 single women between the ages of 27 and 47, Sheehan (1989) examined loneliness as it related to childhood and current relationships. The author used Bowlby's attachment theory to propose that loneliness is the result of a lack of secure relationships. She indicated that a feeling of security for these women was affected by the levels of trust, love, and happiness in both parent-child attachments and current, attachment-providing relationships. The author did not find that her sample was

any different in this respect from the normative, mostly married population with respect to loneliness. In other words, for the women in her sample, loneliness was not related to being single, but rather to a lack of security in personal relationships with friends, spouse/partner, and family (Sheehan).

While it is apparent that social support is important to a single individual's way of life, it is not completely clear how support groups help the single individual to create a positive construction of being single. Research has suggested that association with other singles can validate the single way of life (Cockrum & White, 1985; Dykstra, 1995; Shostak, 1987), and the current research study proposes to deepen the understanding of this influence within the realm of the L.D.S. religious culture.

In addition, a large portion of the literature on singles and their needs for social support focuses on stable friendships only. As previous research on social network influence within romantic relationships has indicated, family support is also a powerful tool for creating meanings and positive images of life. For single adults who are members of the L.D.S. Church, parental involvement can be especially influential, considering the emphasis the religion places on families. In addition, participants of the current study may live in close proximity to their families and have regular contact with them. In light of this, it is important not only to understand how friendships with other singles can influence the meanings attached to being single, but it is also important to acknowledge and examine the impact that families have on this construction.

*Gender differences.* One area in which families might have an influence is that of gender-specific qualities and characteristics through primary socialization of male and female children. Social encounters, such as dating, are often scripted in gender-specific

ways; these scripts, then, "serve as a blueprint for both choosing a course of action and evaluating behaviors already performed" (Rose & Frieze, 1989, p. 258). Historically in America, there have been different expectations for men and women with respect to marriage and being single. For example, it has typically been the role of the man to ask the woman for a first date, plan it, and provide the transportation and entertainment (Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). In most aspects, men have been "in charge" of dating while women play a more passive role in the event (Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). Rose and Frieze (1989) stated that "cultural norms for the first date are explicit, formal, and have changed little over the past 30 years" (p. 259). Although there have been some changes in the last few years (e.g., it has become socially acceptable for females to ask males on dates), gender role expectations are still prominent for many L.D.S. single adults.

Caplan (1985) indicated that what is important to a man may not be important to a woman in relationships and marriage. She suggested that there are some aspects of relationships that matter more to women and are remembered with greater care. This is not necessarily the same for men. Unmarried L.D.S. women looking for marriage partners may look for different qualities and characteristics in future spouses than do men; perhaps women, in general, have more and/or higher expectations for marriage than men. Caplan also indicated that men's sense of worth has traditionally come from sources outside the home, such as work and participation in sports. For women, self-worth is based more on relationships. She noted that "if you are a wife or mother, whatever else you do, you will still feel like a failure if you are not a superb wife and mother. This is not the same experience husbands and fathers have" (p. 7). In general, unmarried women today tend to regard marriage as a source of emotional and legal

security, whereas men regard it as a source of companionship, mutual help, and sharing (Caplan). She also indicated that men and women are generally socialized differently as children, which can have a great effect on the successful fulfillment of future roles in adulthood.

In other articles, gender differences were most often seen in relation to social support systems (Austrom & Hanel, 1985; Cockrum & White, 1985). Austrom and Hanel found that their female participants were significantly more satisfied with their friendships in general and with the types of people they had as friends. As Cockrum and White suggested, this could be a result of female sex-role socialization in which expressiveness and sharing are encouraged. They found that "women are therefore more likely to have support systems and to utilize their family network as means to combat the distress and depression that loneliness can precipitate" (Cockrum & White, p. 552). In general, women tend to be more capable of establishing and maintaining supportive relationships with others (Austrom & Hanel).

Although Frazier and his colleagues (1996) also found gender differences in their sample of never-married men and women, they indicated that, overall, men and women were more similar than different in the reasons why they were single. They also found that within their sample, men generally had more desire for marriage than women. In subsequent analyses, they reported that this finding could be attributed to two possible reasons. First, although more women today are working outside the home, they are still primarily responsible for the care within the home. Due to the strain of multiple-roles, and less of a need to rely on a man for economic security, marriage may be less desirable for women. Second, men tend to have less social support than women and may desire

marriage more than women because it provides the kind of emotional support men need.

In this study, women's loneliness did not depend on whether they were involved in a relationship, because they found intimacy and support from their friends (Frazier et al.).

For the unmarried L.D.S. adult, gender-role socialization toward marriage is prominent in religious teachings and everyday life. In 1995, L.D.S. church leaders stated:

Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.... By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed (The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [hereafter The First Presidency], 1995, p. 102).

Other church leaders also have emphasized this point. Elder Dallin H. Oaks (1995) indicated that "God created us 'male and female' (D&C 20:18 [modern-day scripture]; Moses 2:27; Gen. 1:27). What we call gender was an essential characteristic of our existence prior to our birth" (p. 7). He also refers to other statements on the same topic made by church leaders in 1912 and 1922. In addition, Elder Richard G. Scott (1996) stated:

Our Heavenly Father endowed His sons and daughters with unique traits especially fitted for their individual responsibilities as they fulfill His plan. To follow His plan requires that you do those things He expects of you as a son or daughter, husband or wife. Those roles are different but entirely compatible. In the Lord's plan, it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole. Indeed, a husband and wife are not two identical halves, but a wondrous, divinely determined combination of complementary capacities and characteristics.

Marriage allows these different characteristics to come together in oneness—in unity—to bless a husband and wife, their children and grandchildren. For the greatest happiness and productivity in life, both husband and wife are needed. Their efforts interlock and are complementary. Each has individual traits that best fit the role the Lord has defined for happiness as a man or woman. When



used as the Lord intends, those capacities allow a married couple to think, act, and rejoice as one—to face challenges together and overcome them as one, to grow in love and understanding, and through temple ordinances to be bound together as one whole, eternally. That is the plan. (pp. 73-74)

How does this gender-role socialization from L.D.S. church leaders affect how single L.D.S. men and women think about being single? Do men and women construct different meanings of being single based on their religious beliefs, their family background, and their experiences with friends, roommates, and peers? This research attempted to identify if this was the case and to examine specific points on which men and women may differ.

#### *Religious Socialization Within the L.D.S. Context*

Religion can play an important role in the life of many individuals. For those individuals who use their faith and religion as a referent, the position of that religion regarding issues of marriage and being single will have a significant impact on the formation of attitudes and beliefs (Rutledge, 1993). Krause (2001) has reasoned that “people who are members of formal religious organizations receive a good deal of emotional... and tangible assistance... from their fellow parishioners” (p. 281). Religion, then, can have a significant influence on attitudes and beliefs of adult members. Socialization for members of the L.D.S. Church on issues of marriage and singlehood can begin in early childhood and continue through young adulthood. Those who identify strongly with their religion are likely to feel the influence of the L.D.S. Church’s position on marriage and being single on the development of their own attitudes and beliefs.

In an article regarding the distinctive nature of Mormon families, Heaton (1988) discusses four unique characteristics that are integrated into the family system, which

“will continue to influence [the] individual[s] and organizational behavior of Mormonism” (p. 107). Two of these, which shed light on this discussion, are chastity and conjugality. Chastity refers to the conservative view of L.D.S. adolescents and young adults toward premarital sexual behavior. Of course, not all Mormons conform to the strict moral code, but Heaton noted that there has been consistent confirmation that premarital chastity is more common among Mormons than members of other religious groups. The author also defined conjugality as the L.D.S. tendency to marry. With respect to conjugality, in a comparison study of Mormons, Catholics, Protestants, and those with no religion, Mormons had a higher percentage of individuals over the age of 30 who had ever married. Heaton (1988) also noted that there is not an overabundance of single people in the L.D.S. faith, but explains that the strong emphasis on marriage may draw attention to those who are single within the Church. Perhaps this also plays a part in emphasizing their unmarried state and influences how they construct the meaning of being single.

*The L.D.S. perspective on the importance of families and marriage.* For individuals who have grown up as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, informal religious socialization that focuses on family and the importance of marriage begins in early childhood. Parents are instructed by church leaders that they “have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live” (The First Presidency, 1995, p. 102). Between the ages of three and twelve, children attend Primary on Sundays where they learn about the importance of families in lessons and songs, such

as "Families can be together forever," (Corporation of the President, 1989), which teaches children that through preparation and living God's commandments, we can be together with our families forever; "Love is spoken here," which speaks of both a mother's and father's roles in "leading the way" and teaching children to "trust and obey" (Corporation of the President, p. 191); "A Happy Family," a simple song that cheerfully proclaims "I love mother; she loves me. We love daddy, yes sreee; He loves us, and so you see, we are a happy family" (Corporation of the President, p. 198).

When the age of twelve is reached, boys and girls graduate from primary and begin to attend Young Men and Young Women on Sundays and once during the week. Each individual receives a *For the Strength of Youth: Fulfilling our duty to God* (Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2001) pamphlet that includes instructions and information on what is expected of the youth of the Church. It is to be used as a guide for living a righteous and morally clean life. In this pamphlet, the youth of the Church are instructed:

[Do not date] until you are at least 16 years old. Dating before then can lead to immorality, limit the number of other young people you meet, and deprive you of experiences that will help you choose an eternal partner.... When you begin dating, go in groups or on double dates. Avoid going on frequent dates with the same person.... Do things that will help you and your companions maintain your self-respect and remain close to the Spirit of the Lord. (pp. 24-25)

For this reason, education received in the 14 and 15 year-old class groups for both genders focuses on dating as well as other gospel principles. Young men and women look forward to the time when they can date. As the youth begin to date, lessons on dating individuals with good qualities and characteristics is stressed. A popular adage "You marry who you date" warns teens to avoid dating individuals they do not think they could ever marry.

Formal religious education outside of church and home begins during the high school years as teens attend religious seminary classes either before or during school (early-morning or released-time seminary) or on their own in a home-study program. The type of seminary class depends on the number of L.D.S. youth in the area. In college, formal religious education continues with the Institute of Religion program, available at nearly every college or university worldwide. Although principles of the gospel are the focus of many of these classes, Preparation for Marriage classes are also very popular with young adults, regardless of actual dating status. In other words, although the class is geared toward dating or engaged couples, other single individuals often take the class with the intent to learn skills and knowledge for future relationships and marriage.

When young men and women graduate from high school, they are invited to attend the adult Sunday classes which include Priesthood for men and Relief Society for women. Both organizations are instructed separately using the same manual. For young adults who attend a singles ward (i.e., a group of single adults between the ages of 18 and 29 who live within the same geographic boundary), the emphasis on marriage and family is enormous, because lessons and activities often focus on the importance of marriage and dating. Also, questions from and conversations with local church leaders often show concern for the unmarried young men and women of the church. In college-centered areas, such as the location of the proposed study, young adults often live near other young adults who see who they are dating, if they are dating, and what they do on dates.

In 1995, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the L.D.S. Church issued what is known as "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." In this

document, they state, "We... solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children" (p. 102). They further indicate, "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan" (p. 102). Current Church leaders have continued to emphasize the importance of marriage and family. In 1998, President James E. Faust, the second counselor in the First Presidency of the Church declared that "many covenants are indispensable to happiness here and hereafter. Among the most important are the marriage covenants made between husband and wife. From these covenants flow the greatest joys in life" (Faust, 1998, p. 17). Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, "The sweet companionship of eternal marriage is one of the greatest blessings God has granted to His children.... From the beginning of time, marital companionship of husband and wife has been fundamental to our Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness" (Wirthlin, 1997, p. 32).

For members of the L.D.S. Church, then, religious socialization is a key part of the growing and learning process. Family and religion are often so interconnected that it is difficult to separate family socialization from religious socialization. For young single adults who have grown up as members of the L.D.S. religion, family and religious teachings are intermingled, and it would be inappropriate to study one without the other.

*Religion as a socializing agent.* Albrecht (1998) explained that religious socialization "involves the transfer of religious attitudes and behavior patterns from one generation to the next" (p. 278). He notes the importance of the family, especially the parental religious attendance and in-home religious observance, on the development of

religious attitudes, values, and behaviors in adulthood. He states that personal religious behavior patterns are most often developed from the experiences individuals have in their homes.

According to Cornwall (1988) much of the past research on religious socialization has used adolescent respondents (see Aacock & Bengston, 1978; Albrecht, Chadwick, & Alcorn, 1977; Hoge & Petrillo, 1978; Johnson, 1973; Thomas, Gecas, Weigert, & Rooney, 1974). She also noted that other studies focusing on adult populations (see Greeley, McCready, & McCourt, 1976; Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Himmelfarb, 1977, 1979) indicate three important aspects of religious socialization. They include parental religiosity and family religious observances, peer/spouse religiosity, and church socialization (including religious education). Because of the emphasis on families in the L.D.S. Church, parents and siblings play an important role in socializing children through to adulthood regarding issues of religiosity. Therefore, discussions on the religiosity of L.D.S. young adults will, of necessity, include discussions of the impact of parents and family.

In a study of religious socialization among L.D.S. adults, Marie Cornwall (1988) examined the interrelatedness of family, church, and peer influence on religious socialization. She noted that past research focused entirely on family, church, or peers as a sole influence in the socialization process without acknowledging their interrelatedness. Consequently, her research includes all three potential sources of religious socialization. In addition, she sought to understand the role of the family in providing a religious worldview and modeling religious behaviors. She concluded that the religious socialization within the family had a significant influence on all other variables affecting

adult religiosity, including the influence of peer groups and church socialization. She found that family religious socialization has an effect on adult religiosity because it interacts with other variables, such as church attendance and integration into an L.D.S. peer network. Cornwall also indicated that church socialization and peers also have a significant impact on adult religiosity to the extent that parents are responsible for initially "channeling" their children into church activities and social networks that reinforce the religious beliefs and encourage continued participation (Cornwall).

As children grow to young adulthood, encouragement and channeling from parents can remain a factor related to adult religiosity. For college-students who are members of the L.D.S. Church, even if they are away from home, there is an immediate network of individuals within their singles wards. With the high concentration of Mormons in Logan, Utah, where this research took place, a ward generally consists of several apartments within one complex or several apartment complexes within the same geographic area. Thus, these L.D.S. college-age students are generally surrounded by peers who help to sustain religious beliefs and commitments (Cornwall, 1988).

In another study on family influence and religious involvement, Stott (1988) indicated that children are socialized, or indoctrinated, through religious beliefs and practices of parents. Consistent with Cornwall's (1988) findings, Stott found that family and peers influence the individual's religiosity. He noted a high correlation between church attendance of the father and mother and the child's church attendance. In addition, he indicated a high correlation between the child's church attendance and the child's religiosity, which in turn was related to adult church attendance and religiosity. He found, however, that the influence of the family on adult religiosity wanes, and the

influence of other primary socialization groups, such as friends and spouse, increase and show a stronger correlation to the religiosity of the adult children.

#### Rationale for Study

Past research on singles has focused primarily on individuals over the age of 30. However, many of the same issues are relevant for unmarried adults in their 20s. Unmarried young adult individuals (between ages 18 and 30) are often thought of as "just not married yet," implying that marriage is a future expectation and goal for the majority of these individuals (Long, 1983). In addition, as a majority of marriages in the United States occur between the ages of 20 and 29, young adults in this age group are surrounded by a "veritable avalanche of people marrying around them" (Schwartzberg et al., 1995, p. 58). According to Schwartzberg and her colleagues, there is tremendous uncertainty about life during this time. Not only are young adults attempting to establish identities separate from family and high school friends, but many important life decisions are made during this time, including pursuit of education, choice of career, choice of marriage and potential partner (Schwartzberg et al.).

Marriage in the United States has long been considered an entrance into the adult world (Austrom & Hanel, 1985), and many middle-class families consider marriage as the "conclusion to the launching period" (Schwartzberg et al., 1995, p. 59). Although this is changing some today, young adults in this age group still experience an intense pressure to marry, and they generally put more focus and energy into meeting and finding potential partners than at any other time in their life (Schwartzberg et al.). This is particularly the case for young men and women in Utah who, on average, marry three



years earlier than the average American (Utah Vital Statistics, 1998). Some young adults who experience this intense pressure may make finding a partner their primary goal, and many other difficulties are seen as relating to their "I'm *still* single" status.

Few studies of single adults have included individuals in their 20s; it is therefore important to understand the pressures to marry on this group of single adults. In light of the information provided by Schwartzberg et al., it would seem important to investigate how the pressures felt to get married by individuals in this age group affect their definitions of and satisfaction with being single.

Many L.D.S. single adults in their 20s experience both internal and external pressures to date and marry. For example, an individual may personally desire marriage and put pressure on himself or herself to find that one special person before it is "too late." This could be termed *internal pressure*. In addition, friends and family members who want to see the individual happily married may add *external pressure* by asking questions such as "Why aren't you dating anyone?", "Why aren't you married yet? You're so cute!", and "What is wrong with these boys/girls?" These types of questions and other similar comments may cause the unmarried individual to ponder more deeply why he/she is not married and to intensify the search for a partner in order to satisfy his/her own desires and those of others. Over time the external pressures seem to diminish somewhat. Although the person may still desire marriage and place more intense internal pressure on himself or herself to find a marriage partner, the amount of comments and questions from family and friends relating to the topic lessen as they come to accept that person's single status. Perhaps as family and friends begin to accept the

individual's single status and support him or her in that decision, the individual will also come to accept that status and the internal pressure will also diminish.

Most research does not address the pressures to date and marry. In addition, the majority of research on single individuals does not include individuals between the ages of 20 and 29. In light of this, it is important to understand how individuals who are in their 20s construct the meaning of being single. Do they consider being single a positive way of life with which they are happy? Are they actively seeking to change their single state as soon as possible? Or do they feel that being single is both positive and negative, creating an uncertainty about single life?

This research will seek to understand the construction of the meaning of being single for today's college-age young adults by examining the effect of different contexts on that meaning. Not only do personal experiences with dating have an impact, but also family and friends, who create supportive social systems, can strongly influence the meaning of being single. In addition, a strong emphasis on marriage by one's religion such as in the L.D.S. religion can influence the meanings of being single.

#### Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of how unmarried L.D.S. adults view themselves as single people as a result of their cultural and family background and peer relationships. The questions guiding this research are:

1. How do L.D.S. college-age singles construct the meaning of being single? Are meanings generally positive, negative, or are singles ambivalent about what it means to be single?

- a. What influence does family background/relationships have on the meaning of being single?
  - b. In what ways does the L.D.S. religion influence this meaning?
  - c. What influences do other individuals, such as peers, friends, and roommates have on the development of this meaning?
2. In what ways do men and women differ in their construction of meanings of being single?
  3. Do L.D.S. single adults experience pressure to date and marry? If so, what pressures do they experience?

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

The prevalence of singles in the United States today has prompted researchers to examine the experiences of single individuals and how they are different from their married counterparts. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to study single and married individuals, and the experiences of different types of singles. Despite the growing interest in researching single individuals, little research has been carried out on the growing number of singles who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The current study was conducted to fill this gap in the literature. A qualitative method, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of the experiences of these particular individuals, was used to examine never-married L.D.S. singles between the ages of 20 and 29, when marriage is most likely to occur in this population. A survey that combined both demographic and open-ended questions was developed, focusing on feelings about being single during this life-stage, and the major factors assumed to be influencing the development of these feelings.

#### Sample

A total of 24 individuals (10 male, 14 female) participated in this study. All participants were living in or around Logan, Utah, at the time of the study, were students at Utah State University, and had never been married. Although this study included men and women between the ages of 20 and 29, the majority of participants (87%) were between the ages of 21 and 25, and the mean age for the sample was 23.2 years ( $SD =$

2.86). Women averaged 21.9 years ( $SD = 1.16$ ), while men averaged 25 years ( $SD = 2.86$ ). This difference in age is likely due to the fact that most male participants serve missions for the L.D.S. church between the ages of 19 and 21. With the exception of one male participant who had left the religion for a while and was re-baptized at age 21, all participants were currently active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and indicated they had grown up in the L.D.S. Church.

Of the 24 participants, 14 individuals identified themselves as being unattached, meaning they were not dating anyone; five individuals reported they were dating casually, or in other words, they were dating, but had not made a commitment to date any one person; two individuals were dating exclusively and had made a commitment to date only one person; and three individuals were engaged, that is, they had made a commitment to marry one person.

Most of the participants ( $n = 18$ ) were in their junior or senior year of college and came from a variety of majors that included family and human development, business, mechanical engineering, math/physics, exercise science, and geography. As expected, the majority of participants ( $n = 19$ ) considered Utah or Idaho their home; four participants came from other states, and one participant had grown up mostly in Mexico. Eighteen individuals came from a two-parent biological family, five individuals came from a mother-stepfather family, and one individual came from a single-parent family.

#### Procedures

To recruit participants, the researcher announced the study and invited participation in a Logan L.D.S. student singles ward, after obtaining permission from

Church authorities. She also visited several University undergraduate and graduate classes. In these announcements, students were told the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation, and the basic procedures. In the L.D.S. student ward, a sign-up sheet for participation, and the basic procedures. In the L.D.S. student ward, a sign-up sheet was passed around, and interested individuals provided the researcher with their name, phone number, and email address. In University classes, the researcher provided an email address and asked individuals to contact her. Forty-one packets were distributed, and 24 were returned, for a return response rate of 58.5%. Thirteen individuals from the L.D.S. singles ward participated, and eleven participants were recruited through University class announcements.

A qualitative approach was used to gather data, requiring participants to fill out a questionnaire containing demographic and open-ended questions relating to being single. No identifying information was requested on the questionnaire, allowing participants to maintain anonymity and to answer questions freely. The researcher allowed members of the L.D.S. singles ward to read and sign the informed consent document (see Appendix A) and to obtain a packet following their church meetings, to enable individuals to more easily participate in the research. Others from the L.D.S. student ward, and participants recruited through the University, met with the researcher on campus during the week. This initial meeting, in which participants had an opportunity to ask questions regarding the study before signing the consent form, usually lasted less than ten minutes. Each participant was given the questionnaire on paper (see Appendix B) and on floppy disk and was instructed to complete it in either Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect, and to save their responses to the accompanying disk; this procedure saved time and reduced errors that typically occur in the transcription process. Participants were instructed to

complete the paper-copy of the survey in the event of any difficulties with the computer procedures. Three participants completed a paper version of the survey. These surveys were typed by the researcher and saved to a disk. In addition, participants were told that they could complete the entire questionnaire in one sitting or at their convenience during the week. Participants were asked to return the paper-copy of the research packet to the researcher's office within one week.

Several days following the initial meeting, the researcher contacted participants (via phone or email) to remind them of the study and to request the return of completed materials as soon as possible. When materials were returned to the researcher, information on the floppy disks was transferred to a private computer that contained QSR NUD\*IST (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1995), the qualitative computer program used for data analysis.

### Measures

Participants were asked to complete a combined in-depth demographic and open-ended questionnaire assessing their dating experiences, personal beliefs, family background, religious practices and beliefs, and peer influences. The demographic questions provided the researcher with information about the individuals' family background, current dating status, family of origin, peer relationships, and religious background. The open-ended questions inquired about individuals' perceptions of marriage and what it means to be single; feelings regarding their single status; the perceived pressures to date and get married; and the influence of family, friends, and religious beliefs on participants' attitudes toward being single.

Closed and open-ended questions were inter-mixed because some open-ended questions were better asked immediately prior to or after a closed-ended question. For example, the open-ended question "how do you define the words 'date' and 'dating'?" was asked prior to participants' indications of how often per month they go on a date on a scale of zero to "more than 10." This allowed respondents to answer all questions on the same basic topics at the same time, rather than going from topic to topic as would be the case if the questionnaire had asked all closed-ended questions before the open-ended questions. Inter-mixing the closed-ended questions with open-ended questions also allowed participants a rest from answering the more in-depth and introspective open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions allowed for a variety of answers with regard to both content and length, and included items such as, "How would you explain 'being single' to someone else?", "How satisfied are you with your current single status? Please explain.", "Do you feel pressure from your [family, religion, friends/roommates] to get married? Please explain.", and "In what ways have your [parents/siblings, religion, friends/roommates] influenced the way you feel about being single?" Other questions asked participants to describe their perceptions of what they expected marriage to be like, and what they felt the major differences were between being single and married. Questions initially were developed based on previous research, the researcher's personal experiences with being a single member of the culture under observation, and casual conversations with other L.D.S. singles.

A pilot test of the initial measure was conducted during August 2002. Eight men and women between the ages of 21 and 26 participated. Most participants completed the



measure in one hour. Results revealed that some questions were redundant and these were subsequently combined. Participants also commented on confusing wording or phrasing within specific questions; these were clarified. Additional questions were developed based on the pilot test results (e.g., what is the difference between being single and being married; why is getting married important; and what do you expect marriage to be like) to draw more responses to specific issues.

The final measure consisted of 68 questions and took participants an average of two hours to complete. The majority ( $n = 16$ ) of participants finished the questionnaire in one sitting. Several participants completed the survey in less than one hour, but there were others who took three or four hours to complete the survey.

#### *Role of the Researcher*

Because of the qualitative nature of this research, it is necessary to understand the role the researcher played in the study design and completion. Much of the initial focus and scope of the study came from the researcher's personal experiences, and therefore had a bearing on what was considered important in the data and in the process of interpretation of the data.

In addition to being a life-long member of the L.D.S. church, I am a never-married female in my mid-twenties. I have had several years of personal experience within the L.D.S. culture as a single individual. I also have had time and opportunity to establish a knowledge base of the specific language used within the L.D.S. single culture, the subtle pressures of being single, and the tensions and ambiguities associated with this life stage in the L.D.S. culture. I have had an intimate access to other singles who have

also constructed meanings of being single. This background allows me, as a researcher, to have a unique understanding of how it feels to be an unmarried adult in the Mormon culture. Because I am in the same life-stage as many who participated in the study, I am better able to understand the Mormon experience of being single than individuals who are not of the faith, or individuals who are married. Also, many of the participants may see me as a peer, someone who understands what they are going through, and they may have more candidly shared their experiences about being single.

As a researcher, however, I am aware that my personal experiences are unique to me and that others have different opinions of, experiences with, and meanings of their single lives. Each individual understands the meaning of being single somewhat differently, depending on his or her family background and personal lived experiences with the religion, family, friends, and roommates. Realizing this, I attempted to let the research tell these participants' stories of singlehood, rather than relying upon past research to decipher individual experiences. After I understood the diversity of meanings within individual questionnaires, I compared and contrasted it with previous research on singlehood. In this way, I did my best to set aside what I already knew about the phenomenon of singlehood and let the individuals tell their stories.

#### Data Analysis

Participants' answers were analyzed using a modified grounded theory method based on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998). This process allowed the researcher to explain the single life phenomenon based on the participants' responses (Creswell, 1998), but was not used to actually create a specific theory about the phenomenon.

The initial step in this process was open coding, which was used to identify broad concepts and define them in terms of their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To begin the process, answers to the questionnaire were read and re-read for an overall feel of the general concepts, ideas, and impressions found consistently within the data regarding singlehood and marriage. For example, during this stage, participants' references to marriage were marked for future reference, and then sorted by different dimensions. These general concepts of marriage were very broad and encompassed many potential sub-themes. This process was continued until a saturation of themes was reached, or in other words, codes occurred repeatedly. Next, the data underwent axial coding, whereby the researcher identified categories and subcategories related to the general concept or themes found in the open-coding previously (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the example above, sub-categories under the concept of marriage were developed, such as "marriage equals progression" and "marriage brings companionship." These sub-categories gave more breadth to the more general idea of marriage and allowed for a deeper understanding of marriage. Through this process, the researcher began to answer the research questions concerning the individuals' feelings about being single and the major factors influencing those feelings.

As the qualitative data were coded and analyzed, the computer software program QSR NUD\*IST (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1995) enabled the researcher to store data, organize files, and continue to identify major themes using the grounded theory approach. Once this process was complete, the stage was set for further analysis to answer the remaining research questions concerning gender differences and the pressures felt by these individuals to date and marry. The second research question on

gender differences was answered by dividing the participants by gender and analyzing concepts according to gender using the same process outlined previously. Utilizing QSR NUD\*IST made this process easier.

Issues of validity are always a concern for qualitative researchers. Validity is defined as "the degree to which [findings are] interpreted in the correct way" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 20). In this research study, validity was addressed by having a committee member read a portion of the data and independently code it for general concepts and themes. Coders then met to discuss coding schemes and resolve any discrepancies before merging coding schemes for the project. In this manner, the researcher worked to ensure that interpretations were not biased by the researchers' personal views and belief systems. In addition, Kirk and Miller (1986) also indicated that validity can be assured by the questions put to participants by the researcher. The questionnaire for this study was developed based on a careful consideration of issues within the current literature on singles, and with a complete and comprehensive knowledge of the L.D.S. culture.

Reliability is also a concern for qualitative researchers. Kirk and Miller (1986) defined reliability as "the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research" (p. 20) and suggest a careful documentation of all decisions surrounding the research process. In this study, the researcher documented the development of interpretations as the research progressed. This was accomplished by recording general impressions of surveys in a memo field within the QSR NUD\*IST program. In addition, interpretations and impressions of participants' experiences were compared side-by-side in several different formats. As this was done, a general story-line

of singlehood began to emerge from the data, despite the uniqueness of individual responses.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Overview

The purpose of this research was to answer the broader question of how L.D.S. young single adults construct the meaning of being single. Research questions focused on the feelings L.D.S. single adults have about being single, factors influencing these feelings, gender differences in the construction of being single, and pressures L.D.S. single adults feel to date and marry. Each participant has a story to tell, and in qualitative research, it is the researcher's responsibility to understand and attempt to give voice to these stories. Although each individual had different experiences that shaped the meaning of being single, a general story-line emerged during the course of this project. For these individuals, a simple definition did not always describe the emotional experience of being single. Also, the meaning of being single was strongly influenced by family-of-origin and reinforced by religious beliefs. Because family is such an important part of the L.D.S. religion, families and the L.D.S. Church teachings tended to mutually influence the meaning of being single for these young adults. In addition to family and church, supportive friends also were important as singles developed these meanings. These factors will be discussed in more detail later in the results section.

Findings are presented as they relate to the research questions. First, definitions of being single and concepts related to marriage are explained. Within participant responses, positive, negative, or ambivalent feelings about being single were evident. These will be presented, followed by a discussion of the main factors that influenced the

construction and meaning of being single. Additionally, men and women are compared in their construction of being single, and finally, the pressures to date and marry felt by these L.D.S. single adults are discussed. Participants are identified by gender and age.

#### Research Question One: The Construction of Being Single

The first research question addressed how L.D.S. single adults construct the meaning of being single, the attitudes they have toward being single, and the different factors that influence this construction. Therefore, participants' definitions of being single and their beliefs about marriage were examined first. Next, positive, negative, and ambivalent attitudes toward being single are presented, followed by a discussion of the factors that influenced the construction of the meaning of being single.

##### *The Definition of Being Single*

Participants were asked to answer the question, "How would you explain being single to someone else," and they responded in several ways. Eight participants described being single simply as "not being married." Of these, three females also included engaged in their definition (i.e., "not engaged or married"). Participants ( $n = 6$ ) also said that being single meant they did not have a significant other. This concept is distinctly different from not being married and was well expressed by one female, age 20, when she said that "being single... means that you are not exclusively seeing anyone; ...when you start dating only one person, you are no longer single." Five participants defined singlehood as having freedom. One 23-year-old male best expressed what others

felt when he said, "being single is an opportunity to really get to know yourself, be adventurous, [and] do things on your own, unrestricted." Two of these participants (both males) defined singlehood simultaneously as not having someone and as having freedom. For a few participants ( $n = 3$ ), being single meant that one was "not married," "not engaged," and "not dating someone." This was characterized by one 23-year-old female as being "the lone ranger." Two other participants defined singlehood differently. Unlike the others, one 24-year-old male defined being single as a state of limbo, somewhere between youth and adulthood. Another unique response came from a 25-year-old female, who said that being single is "a time in one's life (the only time in eternity) when one is able to act singly with God as the major source of comfort and advice." She noted that during childhood or when married, the relationship with God includes at least one other individual, but that being single is the only time when an individual's relationship with the Lord is singular. She said, "Reliance on the Lord for major decisions [during this time] is most imperative." Overall, the majority of these participants agreed that singlehood meant they were lacking a partner, although the type of partner they needed to become "not single" (e.g., spouse, fiancé, boyfriend/girlfriend) differed among them.

### *Ways of Describing Marriage*

In addition to defining singlehood, participants frequently described marriage in terms of what they expected and how they perceived it would be. Understanding how these individuals described marriage is important to understanding their feelings about



being single and the factors that influenced those feelings. For these participants, several main themes related to marriage emerged from the data.

*Marriage brings companionship.* Participants looked at marriage as a source of companionship. Twenty-one separate statements by both males and females indicated that they wanted and expected companionship to be a part of their marriages. They wanted someone to love and to love them; they wanted someone who could be supportive and who would help with challenges they expected in marriage. One 20-year-old female said:

[Marriage brings] a powerful sense of loyalty and responsibility and 'attached-ness'.... [It provides] a connection... that can't be made with other people you're not married to. [It will be] the ultimate connection with someone. I hear it's hard sometimes, but that the value of having that connection makes getting through the hard times possible.... I dream about marrying someone who is my best friend and someone I wouldn't worry about being afraid to be all of myself when I'm around him.

Males and females talked about their dreams of having steady companionship, someone who could be relied upon during times of trouble, and someone who could provide support. Six other female participants referred to the expectation that their spouse would be their best friend, and one male, age 24, said that being single was lacking a best friend. Additionally, participants mentioned working together and compromising in order to achieve goals within marriage. One 29-year-old male said, "Both have to make the decisions and set the goals for your family. [You] work together and support each other to build your home." A female, age 23, also said "When you're married, you must work as a team; singles don't experience that sort of teamwork." The idea of having someone to work with on potential challenges arising in marriage gave comfort to many of these singles.

*Marriage will not be easy, but it will be worth it.* Directly related to having companionship, both male and female participants expressed their idea of marriage as something that would be difficult, but wonderful. One male, age 29, said, "I know there are hard hard times [and] trials, but after the bitterness, you find peace and happiness when you [as] a couple have had [to] overcome the trials." A 22-year-old female expressed a similar idea by saying,

I expect [marriage] to be happy, but I also expect that since neither one of us are perfect that the marriage road will be a bit rough at times. I hope that we will be able to accomplish what we both desire as a couple and as individuals working together.

Most of these single adults acknowledged that marriage would not always be easy, and that there would be ups and downs. However, they had positive expectations for marriage; despite the trials, they expected love, excitement, and joy in their relationships. For these single adults, then, marriage provides not only companionship, but also companionship that will help resolve at least some of the challenges they expect to find in their marriages, making life easier to bear.

*Marriage is a way of progressing though life.* Another way these single adults depicted marriage was as a way of progressing. They often indicated that by marrying they would move on to the "next level in life" (female, age 22) or that they would have "completed one more step" (female, age 20). The concept that "marriage is more the doorway into complete adulthood" (female, age 23) is consistent with both Austrom and Hanel's (1985) and Schwartzberg and colleagues' (1995) arguments that children truly become adults only after they have married. A 25-year-old female responded:

When one marries, it seems they enter into a different status and rank in life; to a single person that status is illusive, unknown and very enticing. It seems that life doesn't really begin until one marries and starts a family.

One 20-year-old female talked about the idea of progression as becoming an adult by marrying and leaving her familial home.

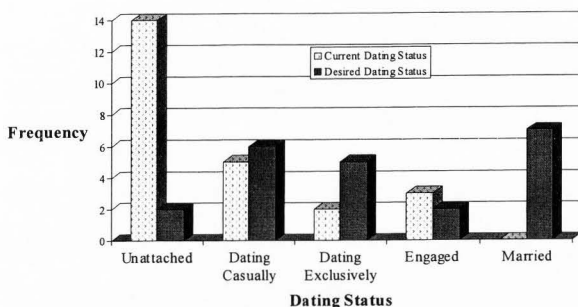
Other participants also depicted marriage as a growth opportunity and something that brings a sense of completeness. Consistent with feelings expressed by one mid-30-year-old female participant in a study by Lewis and Moon (1997), a 24-year-old male said, "[Marriage] also allows growth that can never come to those who remain single." A female, age 20, expressed the feeling that, if married, "the leaders in the church would view [her] as more complete, further on the track of progression than [she is] now. Not totally complete, but closer than [she] was as a single person." For these singles, then, marriage is viewed as an opportunity to develop, to grow, and to become better individuals.

Both male and female respondents tied the concept of progression to their religious beliefs. Members of the L.D.S. religion believe that marriage is necessary for religious reasons, and as one female, age 23, said, "getting married is among the very most important things that we need to do in this life. It is vital toward our eternal salvation, [and] we cannot be fully exalted without it." All of the respondents stated that marriage was important for religious reasons.

### *Satisfaction with Being Single*

There is often an emotion tied to being single, and this was evident in each of the surveys. Participants initially were asked to identify their single status based on four

categories created by the researcher (i.e., unattached, dating casually, dating exclusively, and engaged). Next, participants were requested to indicate their desired dating status according to the previously listed categories. To these were added two additional categories: married and "I am satisfied with my current status." The results showed that many participants desired either to be in a different stage of singlehood or to be married; only five of the 24 participants said they were satisfied with their current status. The findings for their responses are presented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Participants' current relationship status and their desired relationship status.

*Note.* Desired dating status for participants who indicated they were satisfied with their current status ( $n = 5$ ) were counted as having the same category they had listed as their current dating status. Two participants gave multiple responses to their desired dating status. Since their desired dating status could not accurately be determined, their responses were not included in these results.

Participants also were asked, "How satisfied are you with your current single status?" Of the 24 participants, 10 indicated they were satisfied, seven said they were unsatisfied and seven stated that they were both satisfied and unsatisfied at the same time indicating a mixed feeling. Because this question referred to participants' current status,

the findings were initially analyzed by single status. Of the 14 individuals who identified themselves as unattached, four indicated that they were simultaneously satisfied and unsatisfied with being single. One 22-year-old female who said, "Right now I would like to date more, but it is okay that I am not. I guess that I am content, but not content" captured the ambivalence that these persons felt toward being single. Four other unattached singles said they were satisfied with their current dating status, while six unattached singles said they were unsatisfied with being single. These unsatisfied-unattached singles sometimes gave specific reasons for being unhappy, such as a recent breakup with a steady dating partner. Of the five individuals who identified themselves as casually dating, two had mixed feelings regarding being single, two were satisfied, and one was unsatisfied. One male and one female were dating exclusively, and both gave somewhat mixed responses to the question. They were satisfied, but not completely. All three of the engaged participants indicated they were satisfied with their current single status. This comes as no surprise because they have a steady dating partner and are progressing toward marriage and what most people in the sample considered to be "happiness." Although participants may have expressed satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or a mixture of the two regarding their current single status, this did not directly translate into positive, negative, or ambivalent attitudes about being single. These attitudes, which were influenced by satisfaction, were also greatly influenced by factors such as personal, family, and religious beliefs, and interactions with family, friends, and peers.

*Attitudes Toward Being Single*

Three attitudes toward being single emerged from the data. These were labeled as positive ( $n = 12$ ), negative ( $n = 3$ ), and ambivalent ( $n = 9$ ), which contained both positive and negative expressions of being single.

*Positive.* There were 12 participants who expressed positive attitudes about being single. Only two participants had nothing negative to say about being single; for these participants, every response indicated a positive outlook on their single life. Ten other participants expressed some slight negativity, but their overall perceptions of singlehood were positive. Positive attitudes toward being single were identified by the researcher from overall impressions of participants' language of singlehood and marriage. These attitudes were described in a variety of ways that included an excitement for life, a love for learning and personal development, and a feeling of not being ready for marriage. One female, age 21, expressed her excitement for being single by saying, "It's way fun! It's freedom and fancy. I have a lot more time on my hands. I have a lot more friends. I can do a lot more things." Several participants, including both males and females, commented that they were glad they had time to learn and grow while single. One male, age 24, said, "I'm still in shape at age 24, which is more than I can say for my married friends who are my age." A 20-year-old female responded:

Someone who doesn't have a goal to work toward and just sits around waiting for something to happen might feel abandoned or without hope of being married. With the knowledge that I have, I know that things will work out in time and that I should be working on myself.

Several of the younger participants, mostly females, age 20 or 21, commented that they felt too young to marry. One said, "I want to date to have fun right now. I do not

feel ready for marriage. Plus, I am only 20-years-old. I want to see the world before I am tied down." This idea of marriage as restrictive was expressed by a few men and women, and suggested a more positive current outlook on singlehood.

*Negative.* A few participants had a difficult time seeing anything good about being single. A majority of their comments about singlehood reflected a negative attitude, a desire to be married, and unhappiness with life in general. One female, age 22, explained:

I am okay with being single, but I would enjoy going on more dates. It seems like I go through spurts. Sometimes I go on more dates... sometimes I am in a famine. When it rains it pours. Right now I am in the drought. I would like to change that but I don't really know how I would do that. It is really hard to be some places where everyone has someone to be with. I feel like such an outcast. I don't like that feeling.

These three participants generally found singlehood to be a lonely place and espoused an "anyplace-but-there" attitude regarding their single status. One 22-year-old male, said, "being single sucks." He explained, "If you are a male and have returned from a mission and aren't married you are almost worthless." This young man also said that he felt he was seen by his family and religion as unsuccessful or incomplete because he was not married. A 24-year-old female also said, "It's hard to be single at age 24 because everyone wants you to be or get married." For these single adults, singlehood was not the most pleasant experience. Although they tried to see the positive side of singlehood, they had difficulty expressing it.

*Ambivalent.* Nine participants expressed both positive and negative comments about being single. Their overall surveys were a mixture of both positive and negative

comments; with neither attitude more prevalent than the other. One female, age 23,

spoke of experiences with her family:

My family is constantly making jokes about me being single – all of the returned sister missionary jokes that laugh at the stereotype of sister RM's not getting married until they are 30+ years old. I don't think it makes me feel like I need to get married to please them, or... makes me emotional that I'm not married. I take it all in good humor... Last Christmas I asked my dad what he wanted for Christmas and his only response was a son-in-law. I laughed; it was funny!

This female was able to take a potentially negative situation and make it positive. Later in her survey, she commented on the influence her older brother had on her desire to get married. She said:

I can tell that some of his attitudes about getting older and needing to get married have rubbed off on me. I guess I don't want to find myself in his shoes – 25 years old, single, and watching as your options are all getting married off right before your eyes.

Other participants exhibiting an ambivalent attitude toward being single seemed to desire marriage, while accepting and enjoying their single status. Their comments seemed to be more matter-of-fact, without strong positive or negative emotions. One 24-year-old male participant said that he thinks others view him as “a little bit worldly and trendy” and “needing to get serious and settle down.” However, he did not let other's opinions affect his enjoyment of being single. Like others, he was not in any particular hurry to get married, though it would be desirable if it happened. A 23-year-old female put it this way: “I don't want to look desperate and it will happen when it's supposed to. I am not in a hurry to regret getting married too young.” These participants frequently expressed a desire to get married as well as a positive attitude toward being single. They looked forward to ending their state of “limbo” and being part of the married population, but emphasized that they were not obsessed or desperate about their single situation.



*Factors Influencing Attitudes*

Participants were unique in the way they had developed their positive, negative, or ambivalent views of singlehood due to their personal life experiences. However, two key factors, family and religion, were most influential in aiding singles the development of attitudes toward being single. A secondary influence included the support or non-support of friends.

*Family.* The family, as the primary socializing agent for children, had a great impact on the views of marriage and singlehood for these college-age singles. If families expressed positive views about being single, then these single adults tended to be more positive about their single status as well. One 20-year-old female indicated she had a “non-traditional upbringing... where [her]... dad was the one who was home.” Of her family, she said:

They like me being single right now, and even if I were a lot older and not married, they'd be fine with that (I think). We have extended family who never got married or who [are] being single again after divorce, so it's not like my parents or sister don't know of people who are happily single. And as far as eternal progression, they know that some people don't get married here on this earth. Whenever my parents talk about the family that I'll have someday, they still sound as if it's a far away time – so it's expected, but not pressured.

One 23-year-old male, when asked which family member had been most influential concerning marriage and singlehood, talked about his siblings: an unmarried, oldest brother who has had lots of girlfriends, and an unmarried sister who has “been with the same wonderful man for 13 years.” He also said that he doesn't feel pressure to get married because a “brother who has been married for 10 years says, ‘don't ever get married.’” For him, his family and a determination to “enjoy the present situation and the benefits it has to offer” help him to see singlehood as a positive experience.

One male respondent said that his family believed that "marriage is one of the greatest things you can ever do, [but to] stay single until you find the right one, and only do it once." He later indicated that his parents were the most influential in his life concerning marriage and being single, and that his mom had told him not to get married before he graduated from college. Even though he expressed a strong desire to get married, the support he felt from his family network as a single adult enabled him to feel a release from the potential distress of single life.

A 22-year-old female with a negative attitude toward singlehood said, "I feel like I need/want to be married before [my younger sister] is. [She] is 5 years younger than me and I don't want to be an old maid." She also said of her brothers, "sometimes they will make comments after I have done something saying, 'No wonder you can't get any guys.' Those kinds of things make me feel like I am worthless." Although she said she felt some support from her parents, she also expressed that being single could be "stressful" because of her family's expectations.

Participants who were ambivalent toward being single sometimes felt simultaneous pressure and support from family members. One male, age 29, expressed this feeling that many of the ambivalent singles felt about being single when he said, "My sisters... say... come on it's your turn, it is time now, every one of your cousins of your age are married but you. They also give me advice and support." Other participants also talked about the influence of their family; however, their responses were generally coupled with their religious beliefs.

*Church.* As taught in 1995 by the leaders of the L.D.S. Church, the family is ordained of God and is central to God's plan of happiness for all of His children (The

First Presidency, 1995, p. 102). For the single adults who grew up in active L.D.S. homes, the family and the L.D.S. religious beliefs were mutually influential in developing attitudes toward marriage and being single. One 25-year-old female expressed this idea when she said:

My mom always expresses great faith that the Lord has a plan for me and my responsibility is to be happy with my situation. I know that my parents pray for me to have the capacity to choose wisely and to use discernment. Knowing their support, love, and faith affects my perception of who and what I am.

The support this young woman felt from her family, and the idea that God would guide her, shaped her more positive view of being single. A 24-year-old male showed the influence of both family and church when he explained, “[My family believes that] marriage is good when it is time.... [The L.D.S. religion teaches that] marriage is good at the right time and [to] the right person after prayers and answers have been offered and received.” His responses show the close relationship between teachings in the L.D.S. church and family precepts. In many cases, family values and church principles become personal precepts for these single individuals to live by. One 21-year-old female participant illustrated this notion when she said after one response, “This isn’t just repeating what I have heard in church. This is what I personally believe.”

The idea of having faith in God and marrying the right person, at the right time, in the right place appeared several times in many of the surveys, regardless of whether individuals felt positively or negatively about being single. It seemed to be something that kept participants from “feeling like [they were] stranded here, being single” (female, age 20). Even while experiencing some pressure to get married, many of the participants spoke of trusting in God’s plan for them as a way to alleviate the pressures they felt about

remaining single. Highlighting this, one 29-year-old male said, "I believe that singlehood in the church is being accepted more and more. I think that the prominence of Sheri Dew [a previous leader in the church's international women's organization] has helped Latter-day Saints be more sensitive of those who are single."

Many participants also saw a separation between the Church itself (i.e., the religious teachings) and the Mormon culture (i.e., the influence of the people). One 22-year-old female said:

The L.D.S. religion has validated my feelings that everything will be alright. I know that I am an okay person even if I am not married.... The LDS culture (or people) has made me feel like I am worthless because I am not married. I have not fulfilled the next calling in my life. It is a very stressful time.

Not all of the participants expressed a distinction between church and culture; however, those who did pointed to the more negative influence of church members and the overall positive influence of the religious teachings.

One 29-year-old male explained that both of his parents had each married several times during the course of his life, and that the impact of their behavior had given him a more negative attitude toward marriage. Of his parents he said, "Their opinion of what I should do does not hold any water." He indicated, however, that he possessed a strong relationship with God, which had helped him to develop a strong positive view of being single. He said:

The L.D.S. faith has no doctrine that says that one must be married at a certain age. There is no mold for the perfect time to marry. In the LDS faith, personal revelation is encouraged. I know better than anyone when I am ready to take on the incredible responsibility of marriage.... I believe that Heavenly Father expects us to marry when the time is right.... I trust my relationship with God is secure enough that he will let me know when and who I should marry.

For this young man, as well as others in the sample, religious beliefs had a strong impact on the view of single life.

*Friends.* Although social network size was not measured, participants said that their friends, by and large, were supportive of their single status. As one 20-year-old female expressed, "Why would another single person pressure me? Only married people do that." Consistent with the findings of Cockrum and White (1985), single adults in this sample found that single friends normalized their single experience. Because of their friends, these single adults felt validated in feeling lonely at times, or feeling like it was difficult to find a marriage partner. Dykstra (1995) also indicated that friends provide emotional support, understanding, trust, and respect. One 29-year-old male said that his brother "as [his] best friend [was] someone [he could] trust and discuss things with." Other participants named family members, roommates, or close friends as people they trusted to provide support. For a few participants, however, there were friends who were not totally supportive of being single. One female, age 21, said:

Friends always ask me why I am not married – like its bad or something—and a lot tell me that its my own fault I'm not married because plenty of guys are interested, and I just don't give them the time of day.

In some cases, participants reported that they felt supported by their single friends and pressured to marry by their married friends. In other cases, participants said that although they had some friends who were not supportive of their single status, they did not let it bother them.

In summary, participants had constructed meanings concerning being single in positive, negative, and mixed ways. Family and religious beliefs primarily influenced these meanings in such a way that if the family was positive about participants' single

status, then the participants themselves were also positive about being single. Similarly, the teachings of the L.D.S. religion and a faith that God had a plan for them sustained the majority of these single adults in the midst of singlehood. Friends, generally, were supportive and helped participants feel that it was okay to be single.

#### Research Question Two: Gender Differences in the Construction of Being Single

The second research question asked if men and women constructed being single differently. This question will be answered by (a) examining the definition of singlehood and marriage according to gender, (b) exploring the patterns of different attitudes men and women may have toward being single, and (c) identifying differences in factors that influenced participants' attitudes according to their gender.

##### *Definitions of Singlehood and Marriage*

Males and females in this sample tended to give the same definitions of being single. Two important differences did occur, however. Women were more likely to define being single as being completely alone, meaning they were not married, not engaged, and did not have a significant other. Men, on the other hand, more often defined being single as having freedom. There were no other apparent differences in the way males and females defined being single.

When speaking of marriage, only females tended to express the notion of marriage as a way to progress in terms of achieving a state of adulthood. However, males who indicated the need to marry in order to progress often mentioned it in conjunction

with their religious beliefs. One participant related a comment from his parents who said, "You need to get married to move into the next stage of spiritual progression" (male, age 24). Another male, also age 24, said "marriage is the next step to eternal progression." For the men in this sample, who on average were older than the females, marriage was not necessarily the doorway into adulthood. Depending on their life experiences and relationship with their families, females tended to believe that they were seen as more of a child and less of an adult because they were not married. However, males in this sample felt that, for them, marriage would be the doorway into "eternal progression."

#### *Satisfaction with Singlehood*

Males ( $n = 10$ ) and females ( $n = 14$ ) both expressed varying degrees of satisfaction with singlehood. In response to the question, "How satisfied are you with your current single status? Please explain," participants gave a variety of answers. Although both males and females reported satisfaction with being single, females more often than males expressed satisfaction with singlehood. A 20-year-old female said, "I'm actually pretty satisfied with being unattached" and a 24-year-old male reported, "I'm satisfied because I have had opportunities for relationships that I've learned from. I don't want to rush into marriage, and I know that the Lord will give me the opportunity when He sees fit." An almost equal number of males ( $n = 3$ ) and females ( $n = 4$ ) commented that they were dissatisfied with their single status. As one male, age 22, said, "[I am] unsatisfied – it gets lonely once in a while." There was also little difference in the numbers of males and females who expressed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction at the same time, although a slightly greater number of males ( $n = 4$ ; females,  $n = 3$ ) expressed

mixed feelings about singlehood. As one 29-year-old male participant said, "I am satisfied to the extent that I haven't met the right person.... I am dissatisfied because I deeply yearn for the intimacy, love, sharing, and trust that can come from a healthy marriage." Results for satisfaction with being single are presented by gender in Figure 2.

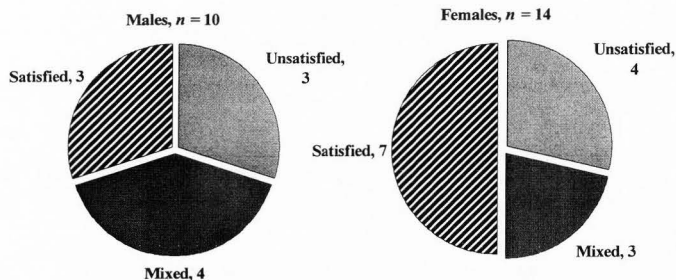


Figure 2. Satisfaction with being single for males and females.

Note. Satisfaction was determined from responses to the question "How satisfied are you with your current single status?" Participants who said they were both satisfied and dissatisfied were placed in a *Mixed* category.

#### *Attitudes Toward Being Single*

*Positive.* Nearly two thirds of the participating females viewed singlehood as an overall positive experience. While many of these women also expressed an understanding of the disadvantages related to being single, their overall attitude toward being single was positive. However, only one third of the participating men also expressed a positive view of being single. Despite this difference, both men and women expressed similar ideas suggesting that happiness is a state of mind not related to dating



status. Both men and women also said they enjoyed having time for themselves, and to spend with family and friends. Expressions of faith in God, that marriage would occur in the "Lord's time" were also mentioned by both men and women. Other comments, such as "to be single is better than to be unhappily married" were mentioned only by men. Women talked more about feeling support from the L.D.S. church (e.g., "The church takes great care to watch over their single people!" female, age 23), and not feeling ready to get married.

*Negative.* Although only a few (one male and two females) expressed an overall negative attitude toward being single, many men and women mentioned negative aspects of being single. There was little difference in the content of men's negative comments and women's negative comments. Men and women referred to feeling like they were in a state of limbo, where they felt out of place and sometimes like an outcast. Both men and women said singlehood was a lonely place, and both spoke of feeling incomplete, worthless, and like a failure. Men more often specifically mentioned their desire to have a family, while women said that they were not progressing in life because they were single. This idea, however, also implies the lack of a spouse and family, since many participants defined marriage as the way to progress through life.

*Ambivalent.* Singles whose experiences had been both good and bad expressed neither strong positive nor strong negative feelings toward being single. Although most of the men ( $n = 6$ ) and a few of the women ( $n = 3$ ) were ambivalent about being single, there was no specific difference between men and women in the way they expressed their ambivalence. Responses were generally a study in contrasts; the most common word in participant statements was "but." The most common idea expressed by these ambivalent

singles was that being single was okay, but they desired to date more or to get married.

Graphic representations of attitudes toward being single are presented by gender in

Figure 3.

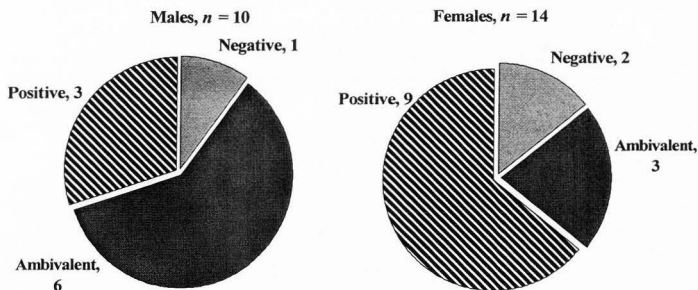


Figure 3. Attitudes toward being single for males and females.

*Note.* Attitudes were determined based on the researchers' interpretations of the emotions expressed in individual surveys. Individuals who expressed both positive and negative feelings regarding singlehood in their survey were placed in an *Ambivalent* category.

#### *Factors Influencing Attitudes*

There were no major differences between men and women in this sample in the way that family, church, or friends influenced the development of the meaning of being single. Cockrum and White (1985) indicated that women generally have more social support and tend to "utilize their family network as means to combat the distress and depression that loneliness can precipitate" (p. 552). This finding did not hold true in this study; for the single adults in this sample, regardless of gender, family had an influence, and was important to both single men and single women. In most cases, when their

families had a positive view of being single, the participants also had a positive attitude toward being single. They mostly felt encouragement from their families, and often said they did not feel different than their married siblings (when they had any). Their families encouraged them to find happiness regardless of their dating status, and expressed love and support for their decisions.

There also were men and women ( $n = 7$ ) who experienced simultaneous support and pressure from their families regarding their single status. Many expressed an ambivalent attitude toward being single. Some of these men and women remarked that they felt they were not worth as much as their married siblings, or they were expected to be the trend-setter in their family. For some of these individuals, some of the negativity they felt from their family was reduced or mitigated by their personal religious beliefs. Having faith in God and feeling that God has a plan for them helped them to look more positively at being single.

In addition to the older average age of male participants in this sample, ambivalence for many of the men was most likely influenced by expectations for men of the L.D.S. faith. The L.D.S. culture often puts pressure on male missionaries to marry shortly after they return home, and this idea is understood by both men and women in the church. This idea was explained by one 21-year-old female who said, "Once a mission is completed, a boy's first responsibility is to prepare himself for marriage." Many of the men who expressed ambivalence toward being single felt this type of pressure. One male, age 24, expressed this when he said, "[I sometimes feel like I am] not as important or righteous because I haven't gotten married, but there are so many good things about being single too." His comment illustrates his ambivalent feelings toward being single,

as he acknowledges this underlying current of pressure for him to marry and concurrently recognizes the benefits of singlehood. It was interesting to note that only one male who felt such pressure expressed only negative feelings about being single. It was also interesting to find that several returned missionary females commented on feeling pressure to marry because they had been home for some time already. However, the overall view of being single for these female returned missionaries was not any more negative than other females or any of the males; this was, in part, because they felt supported by their parents as single adults. Men also commented on the idea that "married people are much more accepted and they are given callings" (female, age 22). One male, age 24, said:

Being single, I can't become a bishop or high priest or anything like that. They also look at you differently in calling you to assignments. For example, if a married young man, that's active and is a returned missionary has just moved into the ward, he is considered a great asset and is immediately put [into] a calling in the young men's [organization]. However, a young single, returned missionary moves in, [and] it almost seems like [they're] not sure what to do with him, like he's just a piece of dead weight to the ward.

Men, who on average were older than the women in this sample, expressed these feelings, which seemed to increase the ambivalence they felt about being single.

A few men and women ( $n = 3$ ) did not feel that they were supported in being single. They felt pressure from both parents and siblings, and tended to express more negative feelings about themselves. For some of these persons, religious beliefs helped to alleviate the pressures felt from the family. However, those that perceived simultaneous pressure both from family and the L.D.S. religion and/or culture tended to have a more negative outlook on being single. In all cases, friends were supportive and helped to balance the pressures and attitudes toward being single.

In summary, there was not much difference between men and women in terms of their definitions of singlehood, or the factors that influenced those attitudes. However, interesting trends in the attitudes toward being single emerged according to gender. In this study, more men than women were ambivalent about being single. Even though they had some different life experiences, there was not much difference between the expressions of those life experiences for men and women. It was difficult to contrast the genders because there was often a greater variety of opinions and experiences within one gender than there were between genders. In concurrence with the findings of Frazier et al. (1996), the men and women in this sample were more similar than different.

#### Research Question Three: Perceived Pressures

##### to Date and Marry

When asked if they felt pressure to marry from family, friends, or their religion, one-fourth of the participants indicated that they felt no pressure. One said that no one has the "power to pressure me on this issue" (male, age 29). In addition, respondents said that parents and friends expressed encouragement and support, trusting the single individual's judgment to make the right decision regarding their marital status. Several participants also expressed the idea that "when it happens, it happens" (male, age 24). One female, age 24, said of her family, "they tell me not to worry about marriage because it will come when it is time." These individuals did not perceive pressure to date or marry.

In contrast, just over one-third of the participants said that they felt some pressure, but that it was minimal. One 23-year-old female noted that she felt "not so much

pressure that it bothers me, but there is an element of pressure. Well, maybe pressure is the wrong word – expectation would fit better.” This idea of expectation for marriage was strongly felt among these participants. However, they also indicated that they did not feel pressure to date or marry just because other people expected them to do so.

Other participants ( $n = 9$ ) said that yes, they did feel pressure to date and/or marry. Pressure often came from various sources, including family members, church members or leaders, and friends, but rarely came from all sources simultaneously. A few of these participants noted that they felt pressure from their parents to marry, but that their siblings supported them as single adults. Four of these individuals also pointed to church members as a source of pressure. One female, age 24 said, “I don’t feel pressure from the Church. I feel more pressure from the people in the church. In Utah, it’s normal to be married young.” Others indicated that while their single friends supported them as single individuals, their married friends sometimes applied pressure. When asked if he felt pressure from his friends, one 24-year-old male simply said, “[It] depends on their marital status.”

For those participants who felt even minimal amounts of pressure, they often felt support from another source. Sometimes, they expressed that they felt pressure in specific circumstances, as was the case for one 23-year-old female who said, “I do feel pressure from my parents when they set me up [on a date] or suggest I move to BYU in order to find a suitable husband.” Individuals who felt pressure from the L.D.S. church tended to temper the pressure they felt by saying things like, “That’s part of God’s plan” (male, age 24), and “I do feel some pressure, but it’s a good kind of pressure. Without feeling pressured to do important things in life, you might not see the importance of the

step" (female, age 23). Others who felt pressure from the L.D.S. church distinguished between the religious teachings and the church members. One 22-year-old female said, "I do not feel pressure from the L.D.S. religion, but I do feel pressure from the L.D.S. culture. I feel like everywhere I go there are people who wonder if I am dating anyone and if not, why? It is ridiculous and very frustrating at times." A male, age 24 commented on this when he said, "The L.D.S. religion encourages marriage because it's a necessary ordinance, [but] it's our choice. The religion itself has nothing to do with the pressure; however, its members sometimes do." For these individuals, the ability to separate religious teachings from the behavior of church members was important. Although they felt pressure from the people in the church, they did not feel pressure from the actual doctrine of the church, making their single experience less negative.

Participants ( $n = 18$ ) also experienced pressure from themselves to date or marry. This internal pressure often was triggered by friend's positive dating or marriage experiences. One 22-year-old female said, "When people around you are getting married, and have someone with them, it causes me to want that in my life." A 22-year-old male also said, "My best friend is dating and I see the happiness that it brings to him and I want that happiness." Some participants felt more pressure as they aged. One male, age 24 said, "I feel... like I shouldn't waste the time just having fun but deciding if this is the right girl." A 22-year-old female also expressed this idea when she said, "It is because I am at the age in Utah when you start to be referred to sometimes as old." Other participants feeling internal pressure said they felt so "because it is something that I want so badly for myself" (female, age 23). Desires to marry, feelings that time is wasting the older they get, or knowledge of friends with positive dating experiences seemed to create

a substantial internal pressure to date and marry for some of these young adults. This pressure also was alleviated for some by the support they felt as singles from family and other friends.

In summary, some participants who felt no pressure to date or marry felt that family and friends trusted their judgment to know when the time was right for them. Other participants who felt minimal pressure saw it as more an expectation than pressure to marry. Participants tended to perceive both internal and external pressure to marry. External sources of pressure came from both family, the L.D.S. culture, and sometimes married friends. Internal pressure to marry came from a desire to marry, the feeling that time may be running out, or awareness of a friend's happiness in dating or marriage.

#### Summary of Findings

This research produced many interesting findings that included participants' feelings about being single, factors influencing those feelings, and perceived pressures to date and marry. In response to forced choice questions, many participants indicated that they desired to date casually, date exclusively, or be married instead of their current dating status. For a majority of participants ( $n = 14$ ), their current dating status was unattached. However, open-ended responses gave participants an opportunity to explain their satisfaction with single life; analysis of these responses showed that ten individuals were, in fact, satisfied with being single in general, while seven participants said they were unsatisfied and seven reported both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with being single.



In addition, more men were ambivalent about being single, while more women were positive about their single experience. Although many participants articulated slight negativity toward their single status, half of them expressed overall positive feelings toward being single. For these individuals, family support, religious teachings, and personal beliefs, especially faith in God, were the main factors influencing the development of these positive feelings. For participants who were ambivalent or negative about singlehood, pressure to marry from family and church members played a greater role in the development of these feelings. Interpretations of church teachings about singlehood by these individuals were often more negative, also contributing to the ambivalence of negativity toward being single expressed by these individuals. All participants commented that friends were often supportive and enabled participants to normalize their single situation.

Participants who felt ambivalent about being single expressed both positive and negative feelings regarding their single status. Because they desired marriage and believed it was an important step as far as their religious beliefs were concerned, they sometimes felt as if they were not living up to expectations. However, many of these singles also enjoyed their single lives with the added freedom they had to do what they wanted, when they wanted, and did not regret their life experiences to that point. Family and teachings from the L.D.S. religion often had both negative and positive influences on these singles' attitudes toward their single lives. Friends were often supportive and gave these single adults reasons to enjoy their single lives.

Only a few participants expressed negative attitudes toward being single. They expressed a strong desire to get married in response to survey questions, and feelings of

inadequacy or worthlessness as single individuals. These participants expressed that they often felt pressure to marry from family and religious leaders, and comments from family members made these participants feel like they were failures because they hadn't married. In one case, religious teachings and personal beliefs, such as faith in God, allowed a small measure of hope and a feeling that life could be alright. However, overall, these participants did not often seem to be able to see joy in their single situation. Friends did seem to help somewhat, but their support alone was not enough to help them feel positive as single individuals.

Many individuals experienced some sort of pressure, either from themselves, their family, their religion, their friends, or a combination of these factors. In most cases both external and internal pressures to marry were balanced by support from other sources.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Overview

This study was conducted to gain an understanding of how L.D.S. college-age single adults construct the meaning of being single. Because marriage and family are high priorities within the LDS faith, this research attempted to understand if meanings of being single were affected by specific factors such as participants' family and family life, religious beliefs, and peer relationships. One of the strengths of this research is that it used participants' own definitions and descriptions of singlehood and marriage within specific contexts to gain an understanding of L.D.S. single life. Participants were very helpful in sharing their own experiences, and they provided insight on what it means to be a young single adult in the L.D.S. church today. This chapter begins with a discussion of the key findings and is followed by a discussion of the theoretical frameworks as they were applied by the researcher to the findings. Limitations of this study are presented, and suggestions for future research are provided.

#### Important Findings

Several important findings emerged from the data. The most important one is that positive, negative, and ambivalent meanings of being single are influenced primarily by families, by religious beliefs, and by the unique interdependent relationship of these factors. Meanings of being single are also somewhat influenced by individuals' peer relationships. Additionally, different patterns or trends in the development of singlehood

attitudes between men and women are highlighted. Finally, external and internal pressures, which add another dimension to the meaning of singlehood, are discussed.

#### *Attitudes Toward and Satisfaction with Being Single*

Each participant had developed specific meanings of being single that were positive, negative, or ambivalent, depending on respondents' personal life experiences. Participants also expressed various levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with being single. In response to forced-choice questions about their current and desired relationship status, many participants indicated that they did not want to be in their current stage of singlehood; only five of the 24 participants said they preferred their current single status, while many others desired to be dating casually, dating exclusively, or married. However, participants were later given the opportunity to clarify their satisfaction with singlehood in answer to an open-ended question. Participants recognized the importance of marriage in their lives, and they explained its value as they talked about their personal, family, and religious beliefs. Many desired to marry and were actively working toward this goal. Their responses to the forced-choice question indicated that this is the case. However, this did not mean that they generally were dissatisfied with being single. This finding is consistent with Kaslow's (1992) preliminary research on unmarried men and women in their thirties who expressed both a hope that they would marry in the future and current contentment with being single.

In their study of single men and women who averaged 34 years, Austrom and Hanel (1985) found that the largest percentage of single participants were unsatisfied with being single. This was not found with the current sample; the largest number ( $n =$

10) said they were satisfied with being single. Seven participants also expressed dissatisfaction with being single, and an equal number of participants ( $n = 7$ ) said they were simultaneously satisfied and dissatisfied. The average age of the participants in the current sample was 23 years, eleven years younger than participants in the Austrom and Hanel (1985) sample. For the participants in the current study, marriage was believed to be likely in the near future. Many expressed the expectation that they will, in fact, marry within the next few years. There was some evidence in the current sample, however, that participants were less and less satisfied with being single as they aged. This supports the research by Austrom and Hanel (1985) that indicates that satisfaction with being single may be somewhat age related.

Overall, these L.D.S. singles were more positive than negative about being single, but this finding was not necessarily tied to their level of satisfaction with single life. Lewis and Borders (1995) explained that satisfaction was the positive assessment of progression toward desired goals. These L.D.S. single persons wanted to be married and had identified it as a goal. For example, in a forced-choice question, many participants indicated they desired a serious dating relationship or a married relationship status over their current single status. Because many of them could not say they had progressed toward this goal in a desirable manner (i.e., they were unattached and not dating anyone), many of them expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with being single. However, because of the influence of their families, their religious teachings and beliefs, and their friends, participants articulated more positive than negative feelings about being single throughout the questionnaire. In other words, these single adults experienced some dissatisfaction with being single, yet still felt positively about their single status. One of

the strengths of collecting data using qualitative methods is that participants have the opportunity to explain or clarify forced choice answers. In this research, responses to open-ended questions allowed participants more freedom and individuality in expressing their feelings about being single, which provided more in-depth, personalized data on the topic.

As with Austrom and Hanel's (1985) study, the current research contained both individuals who embraced single life, developing positive meanings, and those who blamed themselves or others for their dissatisfaction with being single, and developed negative meanings. In addition, there were those who simultaneously embraced single life and expressed reasons for being unsatisfied (i.e., developed ambivalence). In comparison to the older participants in Austrom and Hanel's (1985) study, these participants were more positive about and satisfied with their single lives, and expressed more hope for marriage in their futures. With their faith in a higher Power who guides and directs their path, these young L.D.S. single adults felt that singlehood could be a positive experience.

#### *Primary Influences: Family and Church*

For the single individuals in this study, family and church were the primary influences on the development of meanings of being single. Because of the importance placed on marriage and families within the L.D.S. religion, these two factors were intertwined and constantly influencing each other. In her study of influences on religious socialization and religiosity, Marie Cornwall (1988) explained that the family was the key influential factor. She indicated that "family religious socialization affects adult

religiosity to the extent that it influences intervening variables: church and seminary attendance, and integration into a network of L.D.S. peers" (p. 226). In the current study, a similar finding occurred; families, as the interpreters of religious teachings, were key in the development of meanings of singlehood for these individuals.

In the L.D.S. religion, families who are active in the church teach religious principles to their children from a young age so that these religious principles often become family rules and guidelines for life. Participants in the current study showed clear connections among their family beliefs about being single, the L.D.S. beliefs of singlehood, and their personal beliefs about being single. This connection was illustrated in the similar definitions of being single given by participants when referring to their own definitions, their family definition, and the definition they felt was expressed by the L.D.S. church. Family beliefs about singlehood and marriage often focused on church teachings, again showing the interrelationship between church and family in the L.D.S. culture. These family and religious precepts, which are often so similar that it is difficult to differentiate them, became personal precepts for many of these young adult individuals (Albrecht, 1998; Cornwall, 1988).

Other individuals made a distinction between family beliefs and religious beliefs. For them, both factors were important influences, but family was the stronger in developing meanings of being single. This finding supports the statement by Schwartzberg et al. (1995) that culture influences family, and the "family experience shapes the fit with culture" (p. 31). In other words, the family system interprets and expresses cultural messages about marriage and singlehood in unique ways, aiding in the development of attitudes toward and meanings about being single for family members.

In this way, the family and religious beliefs help singles create their own realities of being single.

Another important finding about the influence of the L.D.S. church was the distinction some respondents made between L.D.S. church teachings and the behavior of L.D.S. church members. For those participants who made this distinction, the influence of L.D.S. church members, such as leaders and ward members, often inclined participants to have a more negative view of being single. These single adults sometimes felt pressure not to be "single" by their church leaders, or they felt that their single status was tolerated, but not fully accepted. Despite this finding, those who distinguished between religious teachings and culture often reported that the actual teachings of the church, such as having faith in God's individual plans for them, made them feel better about being single.

#### *Other Influences: Peer Relationships*

Friends often were very supportive of the single individual. Although network size and strength was not measured, participants said that their friends helped to balance out any pressures they may have felt from family or their religion. As with studies by Cockrum and White (1985) and Shostak (1987), friends of participants in this study not only helped to normalize single life, but they also rallied around each other and created a group of individuals who could talk about common experiences and share thoughts and ideas about their single experiences. Close friends, including some siblings, were often named as the most trusted individuals and provided participants with an emotional tie. This was consistent with findings from a study by Dykstra (1995) who said that



friendships, especially with individuals who share similar interests and values, can provide similar emotional support, love, understanding, respect, and trust, as marital or cohabiting relationships. For many of these L.D.S. single individuals, feeling support and an emotional bond with their other single friends encouraged the development of more healthy and positive attitudes toward being single.

#### *Gender Patterns in the Meaning of Being Single*

Factors influencing the construction of being single, such as family, religion, and peer relationships, were similar for both genders. However, interesting gender patterns emerged during an analysis of the satisfaction with and attitudes toward being single by gender. Nearly two-thirds of the female participants in the sample were positive about being single, and only one-third of the males expressed positive attitudes toward being single. However, nearly two-thirds of the male population expressed ambivalence about being single. This difference may be explained in part because members of the L.D.S. church view marriage as a commandment from God and much of the emphasis is placed on the young men to "find a wife and marry her and make her happy" (Benson, 1988a, p. 51). Finding a spouse was considered the responsibility of the men, by both female and male participants. Because of this, men may feel that spiritual blessings they would have received if they married are in jeopardy if they do not marry. Women, on the other hand, often are told that if they are "worthy and endure faithfully, [they] can be assured of all blessings from a kind and loving Heavenly Father – and I emphasize all blessings" (Benson, 1988b, p. 53). The greater responsibility men face to find a companion and marry, as well as the danger of losing spiritual blessings if they do not, may have

prompted the men of this sample to feel a greater degree of ambivalence toward their single status. In addition, the men in this sample were, on average, three years older than the women. The difference in average age and the increased pressure to marry as they age may also partially explain why men in this sample found singlehood to be less positive than women.

Another interesting finding that appeared during the comparison of men and women was the concept of marriage as a way to progress in life. Most of the men and women felt that singlehood was a temporary stopping point along life's path, and once married, they believed they would again be progressing along the "right track." Consistent with research by Long (1983), participants in the current study desired marriage and expected to marry in the future. This finding differed from Frazier et al. (1996) who, in a quantitative study of never-married and divorced singles over the age of 30, reported that their sample did not reflect an overwhelming desire to marry. They did note, however, that never-married single adults desired marriage more than did divorced single adults (which comprised 95% of their sample population). In the current sample, women tended to believe that this temporary state of singlehood meant that they had not fully achieved adulthood. They believed that their families and others viewed them as more of a child and less of an adult if they were not married. This was not true for men. When male respondents referred to marriage as progression, they used religious terminology and never spoke of it in terms of becoming an adult. The men considered themselves as adults; however, if they never married, they expressed that they would not "move into the next stage of spiritual progression."

Cockrum and White (1985) reported in their findings that single women were more likely than single men to find comfort from the emotional strains of singlehood within their family networks. This was not found in the current sample. Both men and women talked about the importance of their families in developing positive meanings for their single lives.

#### *External and Internal Pressures to Date and Marry*

Most participants in this research experienced both external and internal pressures to date and marry. Previous studies on singlehood have not fully examined these pressures, which can play a role in the development of attitudes toward being single, and are a major part of L.D.S. culture for marriage-age young adults. For these individuals, if pressure to date and/or marry was applied by one source, participants often felt supported by another source. Many participants in this study indicated that they felt emotionally supported by family and friends, and a part of one or more supportive networks (e.g., family, close friends, roommates, L.D.S. singles wards). According to Krause and Markides (1990), emotional support and integration are two important components of social support, and feeling support from specific sources seemed to balance the pressure from other sources for these participants.

Some studies have indicated that supportive networks can validate singlehood (Cockrum & White, 1985; Dykstra, 1995; Shostak, 1987), and participants indicated that supportive friends did indeed help them normalize their single experience. However, for the majority of participants, there was no clear relationship between perceptions of pressure from various sources and the development of ambivalent or positive attitudes

toward being single. Some individuals who had developed positive attitudes about singlehood noted that they did feel pressure, but it was often minimal. Likewise, of the ambivalent singles in this study, some said they felt pressure, others said they were expected to marry (i.e., minimal pressure), and some said they felt no pressure whatsoever. Individuals who developed a negative attitude toward being single often felt pressure to date or marry from several sources, including themselves. While it is certain that participants felt these pressures to date and marry, it is not certain how these pressures are related to the formation of attitudes toward singlehood. This suggests that the relationship between perceived pressure and attitudes of being single is perhaps more complex than first expected. These findings are preliminary, and more research must be done to examine these concepts and their relationship.

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### *Social Constructionism*

One of the theories used in this research was social constructionism. One assumption of social constructionism is that meanings of phenomena like marriage and singlehood are important because those meanings shape and affect the reality of marriage and singlehood. One of the strengths of the current research was that participants were given the opportunity to define their views of marriage and singlehood. Participants were asked to record their personal thoughts and ideas and their own perceptions of marriage and singlehood. In addition, participants were requested to discuss how they derived these ideas and views from their family, religious beliefs, friends, and society, and how they shaped their perception of singlehood. This project emphasized participants' own

definitions of singlehood and attempted to gain understanding of the interaction of meanings from different sources (i.e., family, religious beliefs, friends). Meanings are derived through societal processes, and the negotiation of thoughts and ideas can become reality for groups of individuals (Botella, n.d.; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The reality of singlehood for these L.D.S. single adults was captured when participants expressed the same or similar perceptions of marriage and singlehood within several of the different areas of influence, which included personal beliefs, family interactions, religious beliefs, and peer interactions.

According to social constructionists, meanings attached to concepts such as marriage and singlehood are created by society, and as society changes, meanings change. In this way, reality and knowledge are influenced by specific social contexts that are derived, in part, from a shared, common culture (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Participants in this study shared several of the same influences, including the middle-class culture of the United States, and Mormon culture in Utah. These different influences helped shape positive, negative, and ambivalent meanings of being single. Berger and Luckman also note that reality is impacted, not only by the "here and now," but also by phenomena that are not present here and now. This means that the historical meanings of marriage and singlehood in United States history, as well as the traditional patterns of marriage found in Utah, were important influences on the development of meaning.

At the time of the study, all participants were currently living in the United States. For many single adults, the reality of singlehood in United States middle-class culture has recently been in transition. Historically, singlehood has been associated with negative

images (Schwartzberg et al., 1995; Shostak, 1987), and marriage has been emphasized as the doorway to adulthood (Austrom & Hanel, 1985; Schwartzberg et al., 1995).

Participants who referred to feeling like they were viewed as "old maids" or "incomplete" in some way illustrate that these negative stereotypes of singlehood have not yet completely disappeared. However, the increasing number of unmarried single adults in the United States today (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) has contributed to feelings among singles that they are not alone, and allowed them to adopt a more positive view of being single.

In addition, most of the participants ( $n = 19$ ) grew up in and around Utah or Idaho, in locations that had a predominant L.D.S. influence. Vital records statistics for Utah in 1998 showed that the typical age at first marriage in Utah was 23 for men and 21 for women. This is a reflection, in part, of the influence of the L.D.S. religion and the importance placed on marriage. In the current sample, men, on average, reported they expected to marry at the age of 25 years ( $SD = 2.7$ ) and women reported an average age as 23.3 years ( $SD = 2.9$ ). For this sample, the expected age of first marriage could be higher because of the influence of older ages of marriage in the United States as a whole, which have increased to 27 years for men and 25 years for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). However, this could also be a reflection of ideologies typically espoused by college-age men and women from middle and upper class families.

Berger and Luckman (1966) also noted that other spheres of influence, such as family and religion, assist in creating meanings for individuals. Meanings are unique because the shared cultural messages from the L.D.S. faith about being single and the importance of marriage were transmitted by families. In this way, families were the gate-

keepers of information about marriage and singlehood. During childhood, they influenced their children regarding the importance of marriage and the images of singlehood. Even though cultural meanings were similar, they were also unique because of the influence of family. The interrelationship between family and church was shown when participants frequently mentioned the need to marry for religious reasons, often in conjunction with their families' belief systems. In addition, the way that the family perceived singlehood impacted the way young adults viewed singlehood; when parents and siblings considered singlehood as a positive experience, then L.D.S. young adults were also more likely, overall, to experience singlehood positively. In many cases, comments from parents and siblings and actions toward their single adult specifically impacted the perception of the reality of singlehood. All were part of the larger L.D.S. culture, but because participants grew up in different homes, meanings of being single were somewhat unique to each person. Interestingly enough, the family's influence on singlehood is still quite strong for these young adults, most of whom have moved away from home and no longer interact with parents and siblings on a daily basis.

Another sphere of influence within the L.D.S. church is the more recent evidence of prominent single adults in the L.D.S. church. They have also positively impacted many of the participants' beliefs about singlehood. For example, Sheri Dew, a former counselor in the L.D.S. church's world-wide women's organization (Relief Society), has shown that great things can be accomplished as a single individual. Several participants mentioned the fact that singles are treated differently or looked upon more positively, in part, because of Sheri Dew's fame and influence.

In social constructionism, there is an interaction between what is called the objective meanings and the subjective meanings of marriage and singlehood. Objective meanings are formed by a consensus from a large group of people regarding meanings, philosophies, and ideas. In this study, meanings of being single were developed and maintained through interactions with those who both share and do not share the same reality. For this group of single adults, friends and peers, who also were single, helped to normalize the experiences these singles were having. In some cases, friends had very different ideas about marriage and singlehood than the participants. Participants in these situations generally pointed to their families as the main source of meanings in their lives, indicating that their friends had a secondary influence. However, because many had friends who also were single, participants did not feel that they were abnormal or different in any way because they were single.

### *Symbolic Interactionism*

The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism also was used for this research. One assumption of symbolic interactionism is that individuals act according to the meanings of different phenomena in their lives (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). William Isaac Thomas (1863-1947), who was influential in linking symbolic interactionism with family studies, is credited with the idea known as the Thomas theorem, which states that "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (as cited in LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 140). Participants who had internalized a positive meaning of being single talked about it often and expressed satisfaction and delight with being single. Participants with a negative internalized meaning could find nothing positive to



relate about singlehood. Other participants in this research were ambivalent and simultaneously recognized both advantages and drawbacks to being single (Lewis & Moon, 1997).

Like social constructionism, symbolic interaction also indicates that knowledge and reality are shaped, in part, by specific social systems to which individuals belong (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Despite their individuality, participants in this research often shared the same meaning for specific phenomena like marriage and being single. Knowledge of what it meant to be single as well as knowledge about what marriage was, primarily was shaped within social systems such as participants' family-of-origin, as influenced by L.D.S. church teachings. In addition, several participants specifically mentioned the impact of the L.D.S. culture, or the social system of L.D.S. church members, on their feelings towards being single. For some, the L.D.S. culture shaped a very negative reality of being single for them; for others, who said they did not feel pressure to marry from the L.D.S. culture, the social climate of singles wards was very enjoyable, enabling them to create a positive reality of being single.

Another tenet of symbolic interactionism is that individuals first interpret information, and then later modify it on the basis of their personal experiences (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). For these participants, the meaning of singlehood was continually modified through personal experiences with dating, and positive or negative examples of marriage in their families' and friends' relationships. For these participants, a desire to marry, experiences with dating, and potential opportunities for marriage continually shaped and reshaped the single experience for them. Several participants said they felt more frustration with singlehood as they aged, while others expressed this dissatisfaction

in relation to their own negative experiences with dating. Participants also related their friends' positive dating experiences as influencing their desires to marry. Other participants who expressed a positive attitude toward singlehood noted the influence of friends' negative marriage experiences, or related negative dating experiences from themselves and others. Participants who had experienced unhappy parental marriage also expressed more positive meanings of being single. In this way, participants were continually reshaping the meaning of singlehood based on their personal experiences.

Most participants were also influenced by the culture and society of which they were a part (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Shostak (1987) noted in his article on singlehood that freedom and independence were highly valued by singles. Participants in this study also expressed an appreciation for both freedom and independence as singles; however, men in this study more often defined being single in terms of freedom as compared to women. In comparison to married men, cultural images of single men have often espoused this idea of freedom from married life and responsibilities. For women in this study, the cultural images of singlehood are not yet stronger than the cultural messages of marriage that women receive from both American society and their own L.D.S. culture.

L.D.S. single adults between the ages of 20 and 29 are in a stage of life when marriage is an expectation. They desire marriage and yet, enjoy the freedoms of singlehood. The meanings they create of being single are shaped by an intricate interaction between several spheres of influence that include their family, their religious beliefs and practices, and the ideas of singlehood in the United States and the world around them. In addition, family, which is also influenced by church teachings, influences the development and maintenance of perceptions of the self and peer

relationships. As most of these participants were not living at home, the meanings they created for marriage and singlehood were less reliant on daily interactions with their families and more reliant on the cultural messages they received. In this way, the impact of the L.D.S. church, its teachings and cultural messages, were also important in developing meanings of singlehood for these single adults. There was not one particular influence that was solely responsible for the formation of meanings. Although family and religious beliefs had the strongest impact on the development of meanings, other factors, and the interconnection between factors, also affected meanings of singlehood.

#### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Because of the small, homogeneous sample and the nonrandom selection of participants, the results of this research are not generalizable to all L.D.S. single adults between the ages of 20 and 29. This study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes single adults utilize to develop meanings of being single within the L.D.S. cultural context; the sample was sufficient for the purposes of this study. Although the location in which this study was conducted is geographically isolated, it is greatly influenced by the L.D.S. religion, and using this location provided a good foundational base of what it means to be single within L.D.S. culture. However, a larger, more racially and ethnically diverse population might be of interest to future researchers. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a world-wide church, and there are more members of the church living outside of the United States than within the United States (Heaton, 1998). Because of different cultural meanings of marriage and being single, meanings of being single for Latter-day Saint young adults living outside of

the United States could be very different from those living in Utah. It would be interesting in future studies on this topic to stratify the population by location and obtain a sample of single adults within each area. This would allow the researcher to make comparisons across different cultures and locations.

There are different ideas of what it means to be single, and a small handful of individuals, such as was used in this sample, may not adequately represent all of the possibilities. This research employed a purposive sampling technique, which allowed for specific types of people to participate. In this case, a majority of the participants in the current sample were unattached, which added to the existing knowledge-base of singlehood. However, future researchers could utilize a broader spectrum of the population of single adults, which would include greater representation from persons who were dating exclusively or engaged. With this information, future researchers could compare meanings of being single across different stages of singlehood. However, this research, which focused on participants' own definitions of singlehood and marriage, allowed for an "in depth" view on the meaning of being single that would not have been possible in a standard, forced-choice questionnaire.

The questionnaire used in this study was carefully prepared to ask questions about many different facets of single life; however, the meaning of being single by its very nature is not just a definition of words. Word choice, language, tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions all add to the development of meanings. With the questionnaire, the researcher was only able to tap the word choice and language aspects of meaning. Although it was sufficient to answer the research questions, future researchers might gain further understanding into the meaning of being single by

conducting personal interviews or focus groups. With personal interviews or focus groups, the researcher could better tap into a collective set of negotiated meanings (Berger & Luckman, 1966), and could interact with participants to understand better what it means to be single; such interaction is one of the key aspects of both social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. As conducted, the researcher interacted with the data during analysis to determine a collective meaning of being single.

The questionnaire used in this study was carefully created and pilot-tested prior to the start of this research; however, a few minor limitations with the measure were discovered during the course of the study. For one, the length of the questionnaire seemed to create problems for some participants. Either they did not feel they had the time necessary to complete it, or they felt overwhelmed by the number of questions involved. A shorter survey on the same topic may have provided a greater depth of expression on specific issues. A second difficulty with the questionnaire was the possibility of an order effect. Each questionnaire had five sections that appeared in the same order. By the end of the questionnaire, answers to questions dealing with peer relationships were very short. Although all respondents indicated that friends were supportive, they did not give many details as to the ways in which their friends were supportive.

In addition, to fully understand the meaning of being single for young single adults, one must understand the complexity of the factors, such as family, religious beliefs, peer relationships, as well as others that may influence this meaning. Future research on this topic might benefit from studying specific factors (i.e., family, religious

beliefs, peer relationships) individually. Then, more research on the combined influence and interaction of the factors would have a more solid foundation.

Future research might also examine more closely different sources of pressure on L.D.S. single adults, and the extent of the pressure from each of those sources on individuals to date and marry. Comparisons between L.D.S. young adults and non-L.D.S. young adults might also highlight other areas of influence by religion and its specific culture on the development of meanings of being single.

### Conclusions

Despite the limitations of this study, the in-depth and personal experiences these single individuals shared provided a wealth of data concerning the issue of singlehood within the L.D.S. culture. Specifically, this study highlighted the processes by which single individuals develop meanings of and attitudes toward singlehood. These meanings are based on cultural information received from their families and L.D.S. church leaders, as well as personal experiences with marriage and singlehood in family and religious social settings, and in relationships with their peers. All single adults, regardless of their personal or religious beliefs, deal with similar issues of singlehood and marriage. Their attitudes toward singlehood may differ somewhat, but the processes across different cultural contexts will be similar. Whether single adults are L.D.S., Catholic, Baptist, or live in the Western, the Southern, or the Eastern United States, individuals will be similarly influenced by their personal, family, and religious beliefs and practices, as well as their interactions with other single individuals.

Despite the "social clocks" for marriage and the influence of the L.D.S. culture in Utah, this study shows that L.D.S. single adults can have positive experiences with and positive feelings toward singlehood. L.D.S. singles do not have to be negative about being single because of cultural expectations that they ought to marry; they can make a conscious choice to be positive. The first step, however, is to understand the factors that influence the development of meanings of singlehood, and the ways in which they impact single adults.

Based on the results of this study, it is evident that meanings of being single, although reliant on cultural messages, are unique to each person, based on factors such as family influence and beliefs, personal beliefs and experiences, and peer relationships. Families had the strongest impact on these single adults in developing meanings of singlehood. Although other spheres of influence may also impact the meanings of singlehood, families, as gate-keepers of information and transmitters of cultural messages on marriage and singlehood, had the most prominent influence. It is emphasized by the teachings of the L.D.S. church that family is very important and that parents have a duty to raise their children in love. Religious teachings are filtered, interpreted, and acted upon by families during childhood and youth. These teachings are often then adopted by young adults as their own principles and guidelines for life. Other sources of influence, such as participants' peer relationships, also impact the meaning of being single. Associations with friends and other single individuals reassure L.D.S. single adults that they are not alone at this time in their lives. The intricate interaction among several spheres of influence, of which the family is the most dominant, created mostly positive meanings of singlehood for these L.D.S. single adults.

With the distinctive nature of human beings to interpret life based on personal experiences, there is great potential for a variety of different stories when discussing the script of *How to do Life as an L.D.S. Single Adult*. From this research, it is clear that family and church leaders have an immense potential to influence L.D.S. single adults to develop their own story. For the majority of these participants, the script reads more positively as a result of the encouragement from family, religious teachings and leaders, and peers to view singlehood as an exciting adventure and a time for pursuing education and personal interests. For others, the script was more negative, with family and the L.D.S. culture cited as direct influences on that script. Family and church leaders should understand the important impact they can have on the single adults in their lives, and strive to help single adults write positive life stories, regardless of their stage in life.

This research was unique because it used participants' own definitions of marriage and singlehood, and their own perceptions of the reality of single life. The willingness of participants to share their stories and experiences allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be an L.D.S. single adult today. This research also showed a link between definitions of marriage and singlehood, and single adults' perceptions of family expectations regarding marriage and singlehood. While others may tell different stories, this overall positive in-depth view of L.D.S. singles is encouraging, and may offer hope to other single adults who have not found singlehood to be a wholly positive experience.



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## APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Informed Consent and IRB Approval

**INFORMED CONSENT**  
**The Meaning of "Being Single"**  
**for Mormon College-Age Single Adults**

**Introduction/Purpose**

Professor Kathleen Piercy and Professor Sylvia Niehuis in the Department of Family and Human Development at Utah State University are conducting a research study to find out more about how unmarried, college-age individuals who are members of the L.D.S. Church construct the meaning of "being single" through the influence of family, friends, religious views/practices, and personal experiences and beliefs. You have been asked to take part in this research study because you are an unmarried member of the L.D.S. Church and can provide important information regarding your experiences. There will be at least 20 individuals participating in this research study.

**Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, the following will happen:

At the start of this study, the student researcher will confirm your email address or phone number, which will enable her to contact you during the course of the study. You will then be given an envelope with an I.D. number. Inside the envelope, you will find a paper-copy of the questionnaire and a floppy disk containing the same questions in Microsoft Word and Corel WordPerfect programs. These will have the same I.D. number. You will be asked to fill out the questionnaire on a computer and save all responses to the disk. The researcher will give you a brief tutorial on how to answer questions on disk and will answer any questions regarding this procedure that you may have. If you experience any difficulties with the floppy disk or the computer procedure, you will be able to complete the paper-copy of the questionnaire. The researcher will email or call you approximately four days after the initial meeting to remind you to return the completed materials. You are asked to complete and return the envelope containing the paper-copy of the questionnaire and the floppy disk to the researcher in approximately one week.

**New Findings**

During the course of this research, you will be informed of any significant new findings (either good or bad) that are associated with this study.

<b>Benefits</b>	There may or may not be any direct benefit to you from this research. The investigators and others, however, may learn more about what being single in the L.D.S. Church means to college-age young adults. No specific benefits have been guaranteed to you in order to encourage your participation in this study. Please inform the researcher if you would be interested in receiving a summary of the results when this research is concluded.
<b>Risks</b>	There will be minimal risk associated with participating in this study. Because of the nature of the research, you will be asked questions that relate to being single that involve your personal dating habits, your family life, your church beliefs/practices, your peer relationships, and your feelings about marriage and being single. Your answers will remain confidential and you are encouraged to freely and openly share your feelings about and experiences with being single. You may choose not to answer a particular question if you are uncomfortable with it.
<b>Unforeseeable Risks</b>	This research study is not experimental. Therefore, there are minimal unforeseeable risks.
<b>Extra cost(s)</b>	You will be responsible for providing your own access to a computer with Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect. There will be no other costs involved in participating in this study.
<b>Voluntary nature of participation</b>	Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence.
<b>Explanation &amp; offer to answer questions</b>	Dr. Piercy, Dr. Niehuis, or the student assistant, Jana Darrington, has explained this study to you and answered any questions you have had. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Dr. Piercy at (435) 797-2387 or Dr. Niehuis at (435) 797-1696.

**Confidentiality**

Research records will be kept confidential consistent with federal and state regulations. Your identity will be coded using numbers and letters and your actual identity will not be associated with any of the published results. The information on floppy disks will be downloaded to the researcher's personal computer, which is password-protected and located in a locked room. An additional copy of the data will be kept on a zip disk; however, no identifying information will be associated with this data. Floppy disks will then be re-formatted and will no longer contain any personal information. Paper-copies of the questionnaire associated with this project will be kept in a locked file in a room that will be locked whenever the student researcher is not there. Data associated with this project will be kept for 3 years after the project is complete and then will be destroyed.

**IRB Approval Statement**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects at USU has reviewed and approved this research study.

**Copy of Consent**

You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and retain one copy for your files.

**Investigator Statement**

"I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered."

**Signature of PI and Student Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Kathleen W. Piercy  
Principle Investigator  
797-2386

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Sylvia Niehuis  
Principle Investigator  
797-1696

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jana Darrington  
Student Researcher

**Signature of Participant**

By signing below, I agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date


# Utah State UNIVERSITY

12/10/2002

VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH OFFICE  
1450 Old Main Hill  
Logan UT 84322-1450  
Telephone: (435) 797-1180  
FAX: (435) 797-1367  
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Web site: <http://www.usu.edu/vpr>

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Kathy Piercy  
Sylvia Niehuis, Jana Darrington

FROM: True Rubal, IRB Administrator 

SUBJECT: The Meaning of "Being Single" for Mormon College-age Single Adults in Utah

Your proposal has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board and is approved under expedite procedure #7.

- X There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.  
There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file for the period of one year. If your study extends beyond this approval period, you must contact this office to request an annual review of this research. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the Board prior to implementation. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board.

Prior to involving human subjects, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each subject or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after the project ends. Each subject must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for their personal records.

The research activities listed below are expedited from IRB review based on the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human research subjects, 45 CFR Part 46, as amended to include provisions of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, June 18, 1991.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Appendix B.

Instruments



**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**Feelings about Being Single**

**Section I:****Demographic Information:**

1. What is your gender?  
 M  
 F
  
2. What is your birth date (MM/YY)? \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_
  
3. What year in school are you in currently? (please mark one)  
 Freshman  
 Sophomore  
 Junior  
 Senior  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_

**Section II:****Personal Beliefs:**

1. How would you explain **being single** to someone else?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. For the purposes of this study, I have identified 4 specific **single** descriptors. Please mark your current single status according to the words/phrases below.  
 Unattached (you are not dating anyone)  
 Dating casually (you are dating but have made no commitment to date just one person)  
 Dating exclusively (you have made a commitment to date only one person)  
 Engaged (you have made a commitment to marry one person)
  
  
3. Would you prefer to be...  
 unattached?  
 dating casually?  
 dating exclusively?  
 engaged?  
 married?  
 I am satisfied with my current status.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE****Feelings about Being Single**

4. Are you actively seeking a marriage partner? (Please define what "actively seeking" means in your answer.)
5. Why or why not?
6. Please list three to five reasons why you might like to be married (**1 = most important, 5 = least important**). If you have no desire for marriage, please indicate why.
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.
7. Please list three to five reasons why you enjoy being single (**1 = most important, 5 = least important**).
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.
8. What is the difference between being single and being married? What are the changes that come with marriage that will make it significantly different from single life?
9. How do you define the words "date" and "dating"?
10. How often per month do you go on a date (as defined above)? (please mark **one**)  
\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_ 10 \_\_\_ More than 10
11. How often per month do you plan and carry out a date (as defined above)? (please mark **one**)  
\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_ 10 \_\_\_ More than 10

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**Feelings about Being Single**

12. What life goals have you been able to achieve because you are single?
  
13. What life goals have you **not** been able to achieve because you are single?
  
14. How satisfied are you with your current single status? Please explain.
  
15. At what age did/do you expect to get married? Why did you choose this age?
  
16. If you are past the age at which you expected to get married, does it affect your interactions with potential partners? If so, in what ways? (Please be specific and use examples if it will help illustrate the point.)
  
17. To what extent is getting married important? Please explain.
  
18. Do you feel pressure to get married in the near future? Why or why not?
  
19. What sources of pressure to be married do you see most consistently in your life?
  
20. How much control do you feel you have over your future marital status?
  
21. If you are seeking to be married in the future, do you generally weigh life decisions based on whether they might present you with more or less opportunities for marriage? Please explain.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**Feelings about Being Single**

22. If you answered positively to the previous question, what kinds of decisions have been affected by your goal to be married (e.g., choice of college, relocation for job, continued education)?
23. What do you expect marriage to be like? Please describe your perceptions, hopes, and dreams for your future marriage.

**Section III:**

**Family Background:**

1. Where does your family live? City/State: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is the area around your family home...  
 rural  
 urban
3. Is your current family a:  
 Two parent, biological family  
 Mother-stepfather family  
 Father-stepmother family  
 Single mother family  
 Single father family  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- If you marked single mother or single father, would you please indicate if parent is:  
 single, never married  
 separated  
 divorced  
 widowed
4. What does your family believe about marriage and being single?
5. Please describe your perceptions of how your parents viewed you as a single person. (Please be specific and give at least one example that helps illustrate your point.)
6. Has your birth order influenced your definition of being single? If so, in what ways?

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**Feelings about Being Single**

7. Please describe your perceptions of how your siblings view you as a single person. (Please be specific and give at least one example that helps illustrate the point).
  
8. Which family member has the most influence in your life concerning marriage and being single? Why?
  
9. Regarding the person above, please explain **how** he or she influences the way you feel about being single.
  
10. How has your family influenced the way you feel about being single? (Please be specific and give at least one example that helps illustrate the point.)
  
11. Would your parents or siblings view you differently if you were married? In what ways?
  
12. Do you feel pressure from your parents or siblings to get married? Please explain. (Please be specific and give at least one example that helps illustrate the point.)

**Section IV:**

**Religious Experiences:**

1. Did you grow up in the L.D.S. Church? If yes, where did you grow up? If no, how old were you when you joined the L.D.S. Church?  
    \_\_\_ Y – (please give city and state where you grew up) \_\_\_\_\_  
    \_\_\_ N – (please give your age when you joined the L.D.S. Church) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Please explain what the L.D.S. religion means to you and how it affects you and your life.
3. How often per month do you attend Sunday church meetings? (please mark **one**)  
    \_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE****Feelings about Being Single**

4. Do you regularly attend a weekly institute class?

\_\_\_ Y  
\_\_\_ N

5. On a scale from 1 to 5, how religious are you (1 = not at all religious; 5 = very religious)?

\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5

6. What is your father's religious affiliation?

\_\_\_ LDS \_\_\_ Protestant  
\_\_\_ Catholic \_\_\_ Jewish  
\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. How often per month does your father attend Sunday church meetings? (please mark
- one**
- )

\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4

8. What is your mother's religious affiliation?

\_\_\_ LDS \_\_\_ Protestant  
\_\_\_ Catholic \_\_\_ Jewish  
\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. How often per month does your mother attend Sunday church meetings? (please mark
- one**
- )

\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4

10. While living at home (prior to college), how often per week did you... (please mark
- one**
- for each question)

have a prayer together with your family?  
\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_ 10 \_\_\_ More than 10

have a family religious discussion?  
\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_ 10 \_\_\_ More than 10

read the scriptures together with your family?  
\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_ 10 \_\_\_ More than 10

attend religious instruction outside the home (i.e., seminary or other instructive meetings)?  
\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_ 10 \_\_\_ More than 10

11. What does the L.D.S. religion teach about marriage and being single?

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**Feelings about Being Single**

12. Please describe how you believe you are viewed by the L.D.S. religion as a single person. (Please be specific and give at least one example that helps illustrate the point.)
13. If you were married, would the L.D.S. religion view you differently? Please explain. (Please be specific and give at least one example from your life that helps illustrate the point.)
14. In what ways has the L.D.S. religion influenced the way you feel about being single?
15. Do you feel pressure from the L.D.S. religion to be married? Please explain. (Please be specific and give at least one example from your life that helps illustrate the point.)

**Section V:**

**Peer Relationships:**

1. If you live with roommate(s), do you have a close friendship with at least one of your roommates?  
\_\_\_ Y  
\_\_\_ N  
\_\_\_ I do not live with roommates.
2. If yes, does this roommate support you as a single person or pressure you to get married? Please explain and give at least one specific example to help illustrate the point. If no, please indicate.
3. Do you have a close friendship with someone besides your roommate(s)?  
\_\_\_ Y  
\_\_\_ N
4. What is the gender of your closest friend?  
\_\_\_ M  
\_\_\_ F

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**Feelings about Being Single**

5. Does this closest friend support you as a single person or pressure you to get married?  
Please explain.
6. How many of your friends (please include roommates, if any) are currently...  
unattached (he/she is not dating anyone)?  
\_\_\_ None of them  
\_\_\_ A few of them  
\_\_\_ About half of them  
\_\_\_ Most of them  
\_\_\_ All of them  
dating casually (he/she has made no commitment to any one person)?  
\_\_\_ None of them  
\_\_\_ A few of them  
\_\_\_ About half of them  
\_\_\_ Most of them  
\_\_\_ All of them  
dating exclusively (he/she has made a commitment to date only one person)?  
\_\_\_ None of them  
\_\_\_ A few of them  
\_\_\_ About half of them  
\_\_\_ Most of them  
\_\_\_ All of them  
engaged (he/she has made a commitment to marry one person)?  
\_\_\_ None of them  
\_\_\_ A few of them  
\_\_\_ About half of them  
\_\_\_ Most of them  
\_\_\_ All of them
7. How have your friends/roommates influenced your views of marriage? (Please be specific and give at least one example from your life that helps illustrate the point.)
8. In what ways have your friends/roommates influenced the way you feel about being single? (Please be specific and give at least one example from your life that helps illustrate the point.)



**DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**Feelings about Being Single**

9. Please describe how you believe your friends view you as a single person.
  
10. How do you think they would view you if you were married?
  
11. Do you feel pressure from your friends/roommates to get married? Please explain.
  
12. Does having friends/roommates that are single affect your feelings toward being single? Please explain. (Please be specific and give at least one example from your life that helps illustrate the point.)
  
13. If you have friends/roommates that are dating or engaged, does this influence your feelings toward being single? If so, in what ways?

Approximately how long did this survey take you (in hours)?

Did you complete the questionnaire in one sitting or in multiple sittings?

**\*\* THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!\*\***