

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF BEING SINGLE

Women's experience of being single

by
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Women's experience of being single has generally been neglected by psychological research and literature. However, the study of singlehood could provide valuable information about interpersonal relationships and the personal realm. Forming a romantic relationship is deemed an important developmental and social task within Western society which holds that all human beings have an inherent need for intimacy and belonging. The lack of such a relationship often leads to social stigmatization and marginalization. Whilst various studies of romantic relationships have been conducted, very few studies have focussed on singlehood. The few studies on singlehood often pose methodological problems. Situated in a feminist informed phenomenological framework; this study investigated women's experience of being single. Seven tertiary-educated, single women between the ages of 30 and 40 years were interviewed individually regarding their experience of being single. The interviews were then analysed by means of Giorgi's descriptive pre-transcendental phenomenological method. The participants' rich and nuanced descriptions of how they experienced being single were grouped into eight units of significance: being single means not being in a relationship; holding on to the "you can" freedom; a partner implies obliged companionship and support; (un)wanted attention from the right man; we are educated and independent women!; (not) wanting children, either way, time's running out; missing out on sex; and reasons for being single. The results highlighted the hegemony of romantic relationships, the prevalence of a dominant gender discourse, and also the tension between freedom and connectedness which women often experience. Lastly, the limitations and future recommendations of the study are presented.

Keywords: Single women, tertiary education, phenomenology, feminism

OPSOMMING

Vroue se ervaring van enkellopendheid word meestal in sielkundige navorsing en -literatuur verwaarloos. Tog kan die bestudering van enkellopendheid waardevolle inligting ten opsigte van interpersoonlike verhoudinge en die verstaan van die persoon-sfeer bied. In 'n Westerse konteks word die aangaan van romantiese verhoudings as 'n belangrike ontwikkelings- en sosiale taak beskou. Dit impliseer dat alle mense 'n inherente behoefte aan romantiese intimiteit en verbondenheid het. Die gebrek aan sodanige verhoudinge lei dikwels tot sosiale stigmatisasie en marginalisering. In teenstelling met studies oor romantiese verhoudinge, het weinig op enkellopendheid gefokus. Die enkele studies wat wel oor enkellopendheid onderneem is, word dikwels deur metodologiese probleme gekenmerk. Gesitueer in 'n feministies-fenomenologiese perspektief, ondersoek hierdie studie vroue se belewing van enkellopendheid en het ten doel om die metodologiese problematiek wat vorige studies ondervind het, aan te spreek. Daar is met sewe 30 tot 40 jarige enkellopend vroue, met tersiêre opleiding, individuele onderhoude oor hulle belewing van enkellopendheid gevoer. Die onderhoude is deur middel van Giorgi se beskrywende pre-transendentale fenomenologiese metode geanaliseer. Die deelnemers se ryke en genuanseerde beskrywings van hulle belewing van enkellopendheid is saam groepeer in agt betekenis-eenhede: enkellopendheid beteken om nie in 'n verhouding te wees nie; 'n vashou aan die "jy kan" vryheid; 'n lewensmaat beteken verpligte saamwees en ondersteuning, (on)gewenste belangstelling van die regte man; ons is opgevoede en onafhanklike vroue!; (nie) behoefte aan kinders (nie), wat ook al, die tyd loop uit; ontbering van seks; en redes vir enkellopendheid. Hierdie bevindinge is vanuit 'n feministiese, fenomenologiese perspektief geïnterpreteer wat die volgende uitgelig het: die hegenomie van romantiese verhoudings in die hierargie van verhoudings, die voorkoms van 'n dominante geslag diskoers, asook die spanning tussen vryheid en verbondenheid wat vrouens dikwels ervaar. Ten slotte word die beperkinge van hierdie studie, maar ook aanbevelings vir toekomstige studies, bespreek.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF BEING SINGLE

Sleutelwoorde: enkelopende vroue, tersiêre opleiding, fenomenologie, feminisme.

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Phenomenology begins in silence. Only he who has experienced genuine perplexity and frustration in the face of the phenomena when trying to find the proper description for them knows what phenomenological seeing really means. – Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 693

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction, Motivation, and Research Rationale

By and large the experience of being single has mostly been excluded from psychological research and literature (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Yet the study of singlehood could provide valid information regarding interpersonal relationships (Kaiser & Kashy, 2005) and the personal realm (Budgeon, 2008). The formation of a long-term partnership (Erikson, 1986; Gebhardt, van der Doef, Massey, Berhoeven, & Verkuil, 2010) or romantic relationship during emerging adulthood (Brown, 1999) was long deemed an important developmental task (Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009) especially in Western societies. It is still a commonly held belief that falling in love allows us to surmount a dull, solitary existence (Fraser, 2003), and that entering into a romantic relationship allows us to become self-actualized (Kile, 1992). This view has remained prominent within Western society, which encourages romantic love (Medora, Larson, Hortaçsu, & Dave, 2002) and the formation of heterosexual relationships especially (Budgeon, 2008; Korobov & Thorne, 2009). Additionally, in contemporary South Africa, the nuclear family is considered a social ideal and the symbol of social and economic success (Frahm-Arp, 2012).

The importance of forming a romantic relationship is also heightened by hegemonic gendered perceptions that women should be in a relationship with a man and have a family in order to be seen as successfully feminine (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Additionally, women are pressured to achieve the *goal* of marriage and having children within a certain timeframe with the threat of perpetual singlehood if the goals are not reached in time (Negra, 2009). In accordance with this emphasis on being in a romantic relationship, 'being single' has often results in single people's marginalization (Budgeon, 2008), and stigmatization (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) whilst heterosexual couples enjoy a privileged position. This is especially true for single women who, according to hegemonic femininity, fail to fulfil the most important requirement of femininity (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Single people – frequently referred to as 'singles' – are presumed to lead sadder lives since they lack the transcendent experience of

a romantic relationship. Furthermore, lay people often assume that single people have more problems with their mental and physical health (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Consequently single people are often the victims of interpersonal discrimination and rejection (Greitemeyer, 2009).

Previous research into romantic intimacy tended to highlight the positive association between romantic intimacy and general well-being (Johnson, Kent & Yale, 2012), the negative effects of loneliness in general (Bernardon, Babb, Hakom-Larson, & Gragg, 2011), and stereotyping of single people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Studies that consider single people as an important group that is worth investigating are, however, few and far between.

The few studies that included single people tend to be problematic in the following ways:

- (i) The definition of who counts as 'single' poses a problem within research (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Studies often include unmarried participants as single people – and yet unmarried people might well be in an intimate relationship (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010).
- (ii) Single people are often included in a study to serve as a comparative measure to determine whether married or unmarried people are happier. This implies an uncontested assumption that the comparison between married and single people is important and meaningful (Byrne & Carr, 2005).
- (iii) Moreover, research on single people rarely attempts to determine the accuracy of the aforementioned stereotyping (Greitemeyer, 2009) – two exceptions are the study by Greitemeyer in 2009, and a relatively older study by Heyn (1997). It is thus often assumed that single people are lonelier, sadder, and have less desirable characteristics, without any attempt

to provide empirical proof of this assumption. This negative view holds true for single women especially who are often seen as dysfunctional (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) and 'not right' (Pillay, 2012).

- (iv) Lastly, single people are hardly ever asked to qualitatively relay their own experiences of being single (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

Clark and Graham (2005) hypothesize that research on singlehood may help us to understand different aspects of relationships and relationship processes better (for example, how the exclusive and voluntary nature of relationships influence people's reactions to alternatives, and how other forms of close relationships help to fill our need for belonging and intimacy). It may also assist in understanding interpersonal cognitions in both close relationships and stereotyping behaviour (Conley & Collins, 2002). Furthermore, it may contribute to mitigating the current stigma of being single (Byrne & Carr, 2005). The latter authors argue that, through qualitative exploration of the experience of being single we can gain knowledge of not only the negative aspects of being single, but also the benefits of being single. We may start to scrutinize and challenge the 'ideology of marriage and family' and accept singlehood as an equally desirable and beneficial status – consequently challenging the notion that a romantic relationship should be at the top of the relationship hierarchy. Scholars may also look beyond the dichotomous divide between the married and single status groups and start to focus on the groups' similarities, as opposed to their differences, and the within group differences of a heterogeneous single group (Byrne & Carr, 2005).

Given the lack of studies on single people as an important group in itself, and the stereotyping of especially single women, I used a phenomenological method to explore a specific group of tertiary-educated women's experiences of being single with the view to challenging prevailing preconceptions of single womanhood, and highlighting both the negative and positive experiences of single womanhood.

CHAPTER 2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as a sort of lens through which a phenomenon is viewed (Terre Blanch & Durrheim, 1999). In this investigation, the experience of being single is under scrutiny. The study is situated within a feminist phenomenological perspective. In this chapter, I will present selected approaches of the feminist movement, a feminist critique of two prominent theories that are often used in the area of romantic relationships, and lastly, the feminist phenomenological approach.

2.1. The Feminist Framework

The feminist framework have frequently been used to approach studies of romantic relationships (Burns, 2000), and within this framework, the experiences of women are often used to produce new knowledge (Issaka-Toure, 2013; Kehily, 2012; Sangster, 2011). However, the feminist framework, or *feminism*, is difficult to define and entails a variety of divergent approaches (Beasley, 1999) that have been labelled or grouped in various ways including (but not limited to) liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminist theory (see Chinn & Wheeler, 1985; and Kralik & van Loon, 2007). To this may be added first-wave feminism, second-wave feminism (see Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001; and Steenkamp, 2005) and third wave feminism (see Snyder, 2008); to name but a few. More recently, feminist theory has become far more sophisticated in an attempt to incorporate intersectionalities of women's identities of class, gender, race and disability (Gouws, 2010). Indeed, contemporary feminist research is highly preoccupied with dismantling social categories and challenging binaries which have long underpinned social thinking (Lahad & Hazan, 2014). However, Sandra Harding's (1987) initial organisation of the various streams of feminist thought into three main approaches (feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemologies, and postmodern epistemologies) is what first marked feminist epistemologies as unique (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006).

A thorough explanation and description of each of these approaches are beyond the scope of the current study; however, a short description of the three *main* feminist approaches and some more recent developments, are prudent to the understanding of the framework in general:

- (i) Feminist empiricists initiated studies in order to amend the androcentric bias in research by including women in research samples and asking new questions (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This has given women a voice and enabled them to share their experiences and perceptions. According to Doucet and Mauthner (2006), there are three key elements to feminist empiricists: all facts, findings and observations are nuanced in terms of their value; empiricism is a theory of evidence and all evidence is sensory; and lastly, communities and societies acquire and possess knowledge (Longine, 1990).
- (ii) Feminist standpoint epistemology advocates the idea that daily activities and lived experiences structure our understandings of the social world (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Furthermore, they argue that, because of their oppressed location within society, women and marginalized groups hold a particular claim to knowledge (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). This location also provides them with a better and more nuanced understanding of social reality (Hesse-Biber, 2012). According to standpoint feminists, it is important to start the process of attaining knowledge by looking at the everyday lives and experiences of women and marginalized groups, analysing these experiences within the broader relations, ruling or social structures (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Smith, 1999).
- (iii) 'Postmodernist feminism' is a term that can be used to describe various feminist approaches, from critical theory, to post-structural theory. Postmodernist feminism highlights the importance of including the *other* in

research (Hesse-Biber, 2012) and is critical of the concept of women as a unified object and subject of knowing (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Lugones & Spelman, 1983). Furthermore, they emphasize a greater attention to reflexivity and the role of the researcher in the research process. Lastly, postmodernist feminism articulates the plurality of perspectives of which none can claim complete objectivity (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). In light of this, Shefer (2010), a feminist social constructionist, claims that it is pertinent for South African feminists to contest the hegemony of western feminism and its initial ideas of a unitary womanhood. In addition, she claims that it is important for them to highlight the intricate entanglement of gender with social identities and power within post-colonial contexts.

As can be seen, there is no single framework or *way of knowing* which can be described as feminist and there is a vast array of methods for understanding women's experiences, all of which can legitimately claim to have used the feminist epistemology (Kralik & van Loon, 2007). However, there are some principles which inform most feminist theories (Kralik & van Loon, 2007) and feminist research (Speedy, 1991):

- (i) Feminists conceived the concept that gender is socially constructed and separate from sex¹; in other words, masculinity and femininity are not only related to physical biology or nature. Instead, gender refers to the socially constructed notions of attributes and behaviours which count as feminine and masculine.² Being male or female is a product of society (Milestone & Meyer, 2012); we *become* men and women through our actions as shaped by society.

¹ Sex refers to the biological bodily differences between men and women and is seen as 'natural' (Milestone & Meyer, 2012).

² This is in contrast to the essentialist understanding of gender, according to which men and women are seen as being inherently different from each other and belong to separate categories. Members of each category will have the same characteristics across different societies and cultures (Milestone & Meyer, 2012).

According to Judith Butler (1990), gender is a performative construct consisting of a sequence of practices and characteristics which over time were labelled as masculine or feminine. Gender is thus not fixed nor inherent and changes as the performance, and the requirements of society, changes. More recently, drawing on post-modern and post-structural theory, feminist theorising has destabilised the *category of women* as a category of analysis, which left feminist scholars with an ongoing debate on how to theorise feminist issues without a stable analytical category (Gouws, 2010).

- (ii) Feminists acknowledge that women face oppression and exploitation. This oppression and exploitations is also evident in the androcentric bias present in research. As such, the feminist framework holds that women should be included in knowledge making (Shaikh, 2007), especially the knowledge of their own experiences. This is also true because gender affects our understanding of people's daily lives and influences social and political roles of research subjects (Kralik & van Loon, 2007). This means that it cannot be assumed that the experiences of women and men are the same. In turn this implies that the findings of research done purely on male participants are not necessarily applicable to women. In a similar way it can be argued that single women, as a social and marginalized group, have also been *ignored* in research; yet including them in research is important to gather information regarding relationship processes. In South Africa specifically, feminist scholars have shifted their focus to an *African Feminism* in which there is a greater emphasis on motherhood, sexuality, the body and the influence of customs and culture on women's own experiences (Gouws, 2010).
- (iii) Women are not a homogenous group and as such they experience their oppression, discrimination and struggles in diverse ways. The experiences of

women are not necessarily homogenous (Kralik & van Loon, 2007). Thus, from a feminist perspective, it could be argued that single women experience and perceive their daily lives differently from women who are in a relationship. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all single women have the same experiences since each woman's experience is influenced by her context and background of past experiences.

- (iv) Feminists have a commitment to reveal the forces that cause and sustain the oppression of women and/or the discrimination against women. Radical feminists, for example, identified women's autonomy, the body, and the private sphere as the main locations of oppression (Gouws, 2010). By revealing these oppressive forces, feminist researchers challenge power constructions to reshape understandings and ways of knowing in order to improve the situation of oppressed groups (Kralik & van Loon, 2007). One of these forces can be identified as the patriarchal context in which women have become accustomed to negotiate their romantic relationships. Consequently, the feminist framework is critical of this context. For example, kaNdlondlo (2011) argues that heterosexual marriage forms a key weapon for patriarchy which ensures that women remain subordinated and accept their place in society. Patriarchal culture is deeply rooted in communities in South Africa of all classes and races (Shefer & Foster, 2011). It was only after the 1994 elections that the fight against gender inequality became wide-spread and legitimated. Although women played an active role in the Apartheid struggle and there was some degree of organization surrounding gender matters, feminist discourses were and probably still are marginal particularly given the historical offensive associations with the movement of feminism as white, westernized and foreign (Shefer & Foster, 2011). This patriarchal culture

which is still deeply rooted in South African communities includes *compulsory heterosexuality* where not only heterosexuality, but also long-term relationships with men (often within the context of marriage) are constructed to be a societal norm (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). This means that women's experiences are often influenced by the regulations of heterosexuality. By acknowledging the influence of the patriarchal context in which women have to negotiate their experience of singlehood, the feminist perspective refrains from perpetuating the idea that women – especially single women – are *victims* of their circumstances (Kralik & van Loon, 2007). For example, the feminist perspective refrains from assuming that a woman is single due to some *deficiency*, but acknowledges the fact that she may be single by choice. The feminist perspective also refrains from assuming that single women necessarily dislike being single or have a negative experience of being single and holds that it cannot be assumed that she is a victim. Furthermore, the feminist framework criticizes the concept of romantic love, which is described as obscuring gender inequality and the oppression of women within intimate heterosexual relationships (Schäfer, 2008).

- (v) Feminists raise consciousness which results in alternative views and perspectives which are based on the perceptions and experiences of women. Consciousness-raising includes the acknowledgment of personal, political, social and economic constraints on women's freedom. The editors of the feminism and psychology journal: Macleod, Marecek & Capdevila, (2014) claim that even though Apartheid was replaced by a democratic system, and therefore indicate progressive changes in South Africa, we must remain cognizant of novel oppressive practices that have appeared and old ones that have taken novel forms. This is evident in the significantly high levels of

gender based violence and oppression of sexual minorities which continue in spite of the anti-sexual discrimination nature of the South African constitution. Through consciousness-raising of such remaining political constraints on women, women become aware of the sharedness of their experiences, struggles, and problems – they realize that their problems are not their own individual problems, but that they share them as a group (Henderson, 1995). In a similar fashion, single people come to realize that single people are also discriminated against as a *group* or *social category* in general, and not simply as individuals.

- (vi) Because feminist researchers work *with* women and not simply *on* women in order to challenge and change the oppressive structures (see also Fonow & Cook, 2005; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002), feminist research is concerned with matters of broader social change and justice (Fonow & Cook, 2005). This may include, for example, the attempt to change the assumption that singlehood is necessarily a negative experience. Whilst incomplete, this change has become visible: since the establishment of the feminist movement, more women have strived for an equal partnership with men both in the workplace and in romantic relationships (Schwartz, 1994). They endeavour to move away from cultural stereotypes to become more autonomous and self-confident (Aronson & Buchholz, 2001). Women no longer automatically accept a subordinate role to men (Schwartz, 1994). However, whilst women have made important progress in claiming their autonomy since the onset of the feminist movement, they still frequently feel that they do not share an equal partnership with men (Aronson & Buchholtz, 2001). kaNdlondlo (2010) argues that equality is especially evasive within the institute of marriage where the root of patriarchy still remains largely unchallenged. Thus, whilst the feminist

movement has resulted in more equality in theory, women do not necessarily experience this equality.

Feminism and psychology has been extensively debated and reflected upon by feminist scholars such as de la Rey (1997), and Potgieter and de la Rey (1997). However, despite their engagement with the notion, feminism seems to have made minimal progress in 20th century South African psychology (Segalo & Kiguwa, 2015). Segalo & Kiguwa (2015) claim that "... while the space has been less than inviting, voices from the margins have continued to echo and call for spaces for those who were previously silenced..." (p.78). The authors further assert that the nature of the academic sphere as ever-isolated casts marginalized voices as illegitimate. Segalo and Kiguwa (2015) state that refusing to take note of multiple means of knowing is a *violent* action against those individuals whose knowledge is made insignificant or irrelevant. There is a significant amount of academic work which looks at the continuous reproduction of white male privilege as well as discourses that are both racialized and gendered, in creating identities within post-Apartheid South Africa (Shefer, 2010). Yet, although feminist studies have somewhat neglected single women in particular (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) – until recently – feminists have been critical of the categorization of singleness. They hold that singlehood is often constructed as an identity that has a sense of otherness (Hester & Eglin, 1997) and can be defined as a social category (Edwards, 1997). In other words, the current categorization of singlehood places single people in a different social category altogether than non-single people. Feminists also argue that the supposed dysfunction and categorization of single women should not be the focus of research, but rather the spotlight should fall on the experiences of single women in order to recognize the dilemmas of self-representation that women have to deal with (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003).

Feminist theories, including radical feminism and post-structural feminism (Gouws, 2010), also offer a critical lens through which one may view the existing *grand* psychological and scientific theories of development and interpersonal relationships that have often been used in the study of adult development and relationships. They can also be identified as forces which serve to perpetuate the oppression of women (Kralik & van Loon, 2007). Two such theories are Bowlby's attachment theory and developmental theories.

2.1.1. Attachment theory.

Adult attachment theory is used to explain the motivation for adult relationships and their processes. Most studies of adult attachment theory have been conducted on adults who are involved in intimate romantic relationships. According to adult attachment theory, certain attachment styles can be used to predict the number of serious, intimate relationships (Bookwala, 2003), including romantic relationships, that a person will form. A person's attachment style can thus predict who is more likely to be single and unattached. More specifically, the characteristic distrust of others by people with a fearful attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) might lead to the avoidance of romantic relationships due to the anticipated rejection, whilst more securely attached individuals are more likely to form romantic relationships. Furthermore, someone's particular attachment style can also influence his or her style of loving and his or her belief in the possibility of romantic love. People with a secure attachment tend to believe more strongly in the possibility of finding romantic love when compared to those who have insecure attachment styles. Avoidant individuals specifically do not tend to believe that romantic love could last forever (Bookwala, 2003) and dismiss the value of a close romantic relationship (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1997). It is thus possible that single people with insecure attachment styles, especially those with an avoidant or fearful attachment style, might experience their situation as helpless and believe that they will not find romantic love. However, it is also possible that they do not believe that a romantic relationship could add any value to their lives and so they purposively remain single.

From a feminist perspective, attachment theory has two strengths: it is systemic (Minuchin, 2002) in the sense that it understands a person's well-being in terms of his or her relationship processes, including intimacy (Knudson-Martin, 2012). Secondly, feminists also agree with attachment theories' view that seeking and maintaining emotional intimacy with significant others is a part of healthy development (Johnson, 2009). However, feminists are also critical of the value of the attachment theory (Knudson-Martin, 2012). Since feminists contend that interpersonal, historical, and cultural factors influence life outcomes (Birns, 1999), they regard the context in which a theory was developed as an important component to the applicability of the theory (Knudson-Martin, 2012). Attachment theory was developed during a patriarchal era in which motherhood was glorified (Franzblau, 1999), and any other interests that women might have had were placed in opposition to their maternal obligations. Thus, in essence, attachment theory may over-emphasize the role of women as mothers and mollify other factors which may also play an influential role in women's life experiences. Furthermore, feminist researchers are also concerned with the lack of attention paid to gender-specific influences in attachment relationships (Knudson-Martin, 2012). They contend that gender plays a significant role in how relationship skills and expectations are shaped, and also how people respond to such skills and expectations (Knudson-Martin & Hunergardt, 2010; Tuttle, Kudson-Martin, & Kim, 2012). As such, attachment theory may be too sympathetic towards the heterosexual norm and the ideology of family and marriage. This heterosexual norm and ideology of family and marriage indirectly underline the stigmatization and marginalization of single people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

2.1.2. Developmental theory, goal attainment, and the life course perspective.

The second theory often used to approach studies of romantic relationships is developmental theory, most prominently the theory of development as proposed by Erikson (1986). According to Erikson (1986), the formation of a romantic relationship or a long-term partnership is an important developmental task of emerging adults. Marriage, which is often

seen as the ultimate romantic relationship (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), is also an important goal for most young women (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001) since it is closely linked to women's identities (Sharp & Ganong, 2007). Forming such a romantic relationship or getting married is thus similar to a goal that must be obtained. According to the goal-attainment theory, progress towards goal attainment is habitually and constantly evaluated (Carver & Scheier, 1990). When the goal is not obtained, continued commitment to achieving the goal could be injurious to well-being (Magee, MacLeod, Tata & Regan, 2003). Single people may thus experience feelings of failure at their inability to succeed in an important developmental task and goal. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, their continued commitment to finding a lifelong partner and constant rumination about being single (Gebhardt et al., 2010) can be detrimental to their well-being.

As a developmental goal, the formation of a romantic relationship, and especially marriage and motherhood for women (Lahad, 2013) can be closely linked to the life course perspective (Sharp & Ganong, 2007) which focusses on the development of transitions and pathways as differentiated by age and social and family roles (Elder, 1998). For women, the development of a dating romantic relationship into marriage is a significant age-graded transition; especially because their child-bearing years are limited (Barber & Allen, 1992). This is better known as the *ticking of the biological clock* for women aged 30 to 40 years (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Fleeson, 2001). It is thus possible that single women who are between 30 and 40 years old and who have no immediate prospects of marriage may feel they have failed to reach an important developmental goal. Such a feeling of failure to reach an important developmental goal may be heightened by the importance of marriage for the identities of women (Barber & Allen, 1992).

Whilst feminists support the usefulness of Erikson's theory in terms of the continuing quest to understand human lives and identity development (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001),

they are also critical of its usefulness. To be sure, feminist postmodernists have accused Erikson's theory – amongst various other *grand psychology theories* – of “...ethnocentrically assumed foundationalism, naive realism, presumed universalism, and rampant individualism” (Martin & Sugarman, 2000, p. 398). According to feminists, grand theories such as Erikson's developmental theory only reflect the experiences and perspectives of the men who held the intellectual power when the theories were developed (Miller & Scholnick, 2000) and, as such, functions to uphold and preserve the values of powerful social groups at the expense of those who are not part of the elite. This suggests that Erikson's developmental theory mostly excludes the perspective and experiences of women and other marginalized groups (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001).

2.1.3. Feminism and phenomenology.

Like the developmental theory and attachment theory described above, another *male-created* school of thought is phenomenology, which is often assumed to be incompatible with feminism exactly because it was mostly developed by men (Fisher & Embree, 2000). However, whilst these two theories do oppose each other in certain ways, they also complement and enrich each other. Some authors hold that there is indeed tremendous scope for the two theories to be used in combination as feminist phenomenology (Dukas, 2014; Fisher & Embree, 2000; Langellier, 1994). For example, feminist studies no longer view gender as the only dimension shaping and dominating women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1995; Heimtun, 2012); instead difference *within* women as shaped by context, culture, language, and power differentials is also deemed important (Gouws, 2010; Heimtun, 2012; Reid, 1993). Phenomenologists, on the other hand, place more emphasis on each individual's unique experiences, as opposed to the context of the individual. Thus, phenomenologists caution feminists not to impose their own feminist ideas on the experiences of women (Langellier, 1994). Within the present study, the utilisation of both perspectives allowed me to explore how each participant uniquely experienced being single, whilst also gaining greater

understanding of their experiences by considering the context within which they experienced being single.

Furthermore, feminism and phenomenology are compatible in that they both regard as valuable the understanding of a person's lived experience from the perspective of the particular person involved (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Gergen, 2008; Stoppard, 2000). The feminist perspective holds that marginalized groups (for example single women) have a unique and specific understanding of their social context and the way in which their experience of their daily lives is influenced by their marginalization (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist researchers thus also recognize that there are a number of uniquely female issues (Baumbusch, 2008) which can be associated with singlehood. Additionally, feminists' emphasis on obtaining and interpreting descriptions of different people's lived experience in the first person (Kralik & van Loon, 2007) is similar to the importance that phenomenology places on first-person accounts of someone's experiences and perspectives. As such, by involving the women who experience singlehood in the knowledgemaking process, their experiences are validated and valued (Baumbusch, 2008). In combination then, the two frameworks offer a lens through which to explore and understand the lived experiences of single women whilst remaining contextually sensitive to the unique experience of being single in South Africa.

2.2. Current Theoretical Framework: A Feminist-Influenced Phenomenological Framework

The phenomenological framework was used in previous studies of singlehood (for example, see Lewis & Moon, 1997; Sharp & Ganong, 2011), as has the feminist framework (for example, see Baumbusch, 2008; Heimtun, 2012; Lahad, 2013). It is considered useful when the phenomenon of interest was poorly defined in past research (Walker, 2007), as is the case of defining who is single.

The phenomenological approach and its methods emphasise the understanding of "... unique individuals and their meanings and interactions with others and the environment" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 726). Such an understanding is acquired by adopting the phenomenological approach which is a radical and meticulous way of observing with inquisitive eyes (Finlay, 2013). However, the phenomenological framework includes many different approaches (Lopez & Willis, 2004). For the current study, the specific descriptive pre-transcendental Husserlian phenomenological approach, as developed by Giorgi, was followed. Below, I describe the Husserlian phenomenological approach. Giorgi's specific method will be presented in Chapter 4. Giorgi's phenomenological research has its roots in the philosophical phenomenological theory of Husserl (Groenewald, 2004). According to Husserl, experiences that are perceived by human consciousness should be scientifically studied in order to understand human motivation (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Thus, the aim of phenomenological research is to return to "... the things themselves" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26) which includes the lived experience of phenomena and what a specific group of people perceive to be real. This is similar to the feminist notion of McCall (2005) that "... subject positions should be investigated as lived experiences" (Heimtun, 2012, p. 86). Because people in general do not critically reflect on their experiences daily, Husserl believes a scientific approach is needed to identify the core components of the lived experience of a specific group of people (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In other words, phenomenological research aims to describe a phenomenon without any pre-conceived ideas or prejudice whilst still remaining true to the described experience (Groenewald, 2004). From a Husserlian framework, this involves reaching transcendental subjectivity (Lopez & Willis, 2004), which implies neutrality, by blocking the researcher's consciousness of prior knowledge and experience (Natanson, 1973). One manner in which to obtain such transcendental subjectivity that is often advocated by phenomenological researchers is to refrain from doing a detailed literature review prior to conducting the study (Streurbert & Carpenter, 1999). However, for practical

reasons this was not possible in my case because a preliminary literature review was needed for academic and ethical clearance to conduct the current study. Therefore, besides my own personal experiences and preconceptions, I brought prior academic knowledge and conjectures to this study. In this regard, my approach to the current research study was more in accordance with a hermeneutic phenomenological framework that argues that it is not possible for the researcher to approach a phenomenon from a neutral position and that he or she should not pretend to do so (Hammersley, 2000). I therefore acknowledged my own perceptions and lived experience of being single, but attempted to refrain from making presuppositions regarding the lived experiences of the participants. Consequently, I aimed to investigate and describe the lived experience of being single, with at least some knowledge of the current literature and trying to stay aware of any preconceived ideas of why the participants are single or how they experience being single.

Phenomenological theory holds that lived experiences are both socially shared and experienced uniquely by each individual (Wertz, 2005). Within the Husserlian approach to research, this entails the assumption that certain features of a phenomenon which can be discerned by the thorough study of individual experiences (Finlay, 2014) are shared by all people who experience it (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In accordance, singlehood is not only experienced within different identities (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) but also as a group designated by society (Kaiser & Kashy, 2005). This is similar to the notion of consciousness-raising from a feminist perspective in which women become aware of their shared experience as an oppressed group (Kralik & van Loon, 2007) even though differences may exist within the oppressed group (Heimtun, 2012). For the study and description of the lived experience of being single to be deemed scientific, the commonalities between the experiences of the participants should be identified – the core of which will reflect the authentic nature of the experience of being single (Lopez & Willis, 2004). According to Husserl, the commonalities of the lived experience of a phenomenon is reality and is unaffected by context and history

(Lopez & Willis, 2004). This is closely linked to Husserl's ideal of a rigorous scientific approach to the research of experiences and implies that the essence of a phenomenon should be extracted without taking the context into consideration (LeVasseur, 2003). In this case, the context includes the influence of history, society and culture on the individual's freedom of choice (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The feminist viewpoint, however, emphasises the importance of context. Within feminist research it is necessary to investigate the spatial contexts which affect a person's experience, in particular also how spatial power relations influence the exclusion or inclusion of certain social identities (Heimtun, 2012), for example how marital status influences a women's inclusion within a certain social category. As such, in this feminist-informed descriptive phenomenological study, the social context of the participants was acknowledged and incorporated into the research. In brief, a feminist-informed descriptive phenomenological framework allowed for a nuanced understanding of the experience of being single (Sharp & Ganong, 2007).

CHAPTER 3 Literature Review

In this chapter I review the literature on singlehood which I gathered prior to collecting and analysing the data. This was done in order to justify and contextualize my study to obtain academic and ethical clearance of my research proposal. As such, the literature review is mostly void of the recent influx of literature on single women which have mostly been published after the initial literature search was done. The literature I consulted after the completion of my data analysis is presented in Chapter 5. This was in line with the phenomenological orientation which advises the researcher to limit preconceived notions of the phenomenon to be studied (Giorgi, 1994). The preliminary search for literature yielded the following main topics, which will be discussed in this chapter:

- (i) problematic terminology and definitions of singlehood;
- (ii) ideology of heterosexual couple hood, marriage and family;
- (iii) sexuality and romantic relationships; and
- (iv) the stigmatization and marginalization of single people.

3.1. Problematic Terminology and Definitions of Singlehood

Studying the experience of being single can provide valid information regarding the personal realm (Budgeon, 2008) and interpersonal relationships (Kaiser & Kashy, 2005). However, psychological research and literature largely exclude the experience of being single (DePaulo & Morris, 2005)³ and refrain from asking the question of what it means *not* to be part of a couple (Budgeon, 2008). The latter conceptualisation of single as the opposite of being in a relationship is problematic in itself: as a result of this attitude, single people do not receive the attention due to them as members of a group in its own right. This issue was brought home to me when I read a study by Sharp and Ganong (2007) that closely resembled

³ However, a search of literature after the completion of this study indicated a recent increase in studies focusing on single women, especially women who are older than 30 years.

my own study in terms of the research question, the theoretical framework, and the method. However, I found the study only when I had already started writing up the results of my own study. It would have been very useful to me if I had known of this particular study while I was formulating my own proposal. This paper, however, was indexed under the key word 'never-married' – a term that I did not use in my original literature search. Similarly, other articles on single people were indexed under the keywords 'not married' or 'non-married'. Using search engines such as EBSCO host, Academic Search premier and Google Scholar yielded little literature on the experience of being single. When using keywords such as *being single*, *singlehood*, and *singleness*, the results were minimal.

The problematic definition of singlehood was mentioned by DePaulo and Morris (2005) as one of the main limitations of the current studies on singlehood. Studies often differ in terms of their definitions of singlehood, whilst most scholarly works assume that the single group is monolithic (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Some studies merely state that their sample included single people (see, for example, Bernardon et al., 2011) without any further explanation of how they defined single. Alternatively, other studies use the legal definition of single and include the non-married in the single population (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). This is problematic since 'non-married' does not necessarily imply the complete absence of a romantic relationship. The non-married population also includes people who are dating, engaged, cohabiting, and so forth (Koropecj-Cox, 2005). However, it appears that the legal definition of single is not the preferred definition used by both younger and older individuals (Conely & Collins, 2002). What does matter is whether or not someone is socially perceived as being in a relationship or not. The social definition of who can be defined as single differs according to each society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). For example, within the global and electronic sphere, you are presumed to be single until you are 'Facebook official', that is, until you change your Facebook status to 'in a relationship'. Within other societies, however, you will only be labelled as single if you do not have a sexual partner (Clark & Graham, 2005), or

if the sexual partnership is not viewed as serious (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Each *type* of single subgroup will also experience singlehood differently (Clark & Graham, 2005). The single population is thus not a homogeneous group, but a heterogeneous population with various subgroups which should be studied as such. Regardless of the definition of being single, the research on the topic is minimal in comparison to research focusing on people in romantic relationships. Contrastingly, a great number of researchers studied romantic relationships (Arnett, 2004; Meier et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2012) and the quest for a long term partner (Erikson, 1968; Gebhardt et al., 2010) especially within Western society. This is particularly evident with the overwhelming amount of literature which can be found when using keywords such as *romantic relationship*, *relationships*, *marriage*, and the likes in search engines such as EBSCO host.

3.1.1. Single people as comparison group

As implied by the literature above, the importance of a romantic relationship and its benefits have often been emphasised at the expense of single people. In other words, it would appear that single people have often been used as a comparison group in order to demonstrate the advantages of being in a romantic relationship. For example, the study by Braithwaite, Delevi, and Fincham (2010) indicates that students in a relationship have better physical and mental health when *compared* to single students. Thus, social scientists often assume that such a comparison provides a meaningful and important distinction (Byrne & Carr, 2005) in which value is normally assigned to being in a relationship at the expense of being single (Budgeon, 2008). This may have contributed to the undesirability of a single status, and the reinforcement of romantic heterosexual relationships at the top hierarchical position. According to Byrne and Carr (2005), similarities between the two groups tend to be ignored, especially similarities where single people are just as happy as those who are married. In contrast, when single people fare worse than people who are in a romantic relationship it is blatantly blamed on the dysfunction of those who are single.

However, similar to the problematic definitions of the single population, defining the group to which they are mostly compared (that is, the non-single group) also poses a challenge. Terms such as 'intimate relationship', 'close relationships', and 'romantic relationships', are often used interchangeably. This is problematic because, while related, these terms describe different types of relationships (Reis & Rusbult, 2004; Vanlear, Koerner, & Allen, 2006).

3.2. Ideology of Heterosexual Couple hood, Marriage and Family

This disproportionate focus of research on dating couples and/or married people implies the importance that relationship researchers place on such relationships, and how significant they believe them to be for people in general (Clark & Graham, 2005). In contrast, the lack of studies which focus specifically on single people as a designated group further reinforces the hierarchical importance of heterosexual, romantic relationships (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). The significance of romantic relationships is specifically emphasised in terms of their role in human development, life satisfaction, and general well-being.

Romantic relationships are often placed at the top of the relationship hierarchy (Reis et al., 2004) and young adults seek them "... with the ultimate goal of finding a long-term mate" (Simon & Barrett, 2010, p. 170). According to Furman and Winkles (2012), the formation of such a romantic relationship involves the development of affiliation, sexuality, attachment and caregiving systems. This takes place in four developmental stages:

Initially, their [a couple's] interactions could be characterized as *simple interchanges* as they develop a sense of comfort interacting with potential sexual or romantic partners. As they become comfortable, they may move to *casual dating* in which affiliative behaviour and sexual experimentation occur in a number of short-term relationships. Romantic partners are not expected to emerge as attachment figures or recipients of caretaking until they begin to develop *stable*

relationships – exclusive, longer-term relationships. In fact, these systems may not fully emerge in romantic relationships until the appearance of *committed relationships* – that is, relationships that may become a marriage or lifetime partnership; such relationships typically do not appear until early adulthood or later (p. 194).

The above quotation regarding the developmental stages of a romantic relationship implies a hierarchy of romantic relationships, with a committed relationship being at the top of the developmental hierarchy. It is thus clear that the establishment of a romantic relationship is still seen as an important developmental feature today (Deniz, Hamarta, & Ari, 2005). This is also clear in the different behaviours of each developmental system as set out above by Furman and Winkles (2012). These notions are also in accordance with Erikson's well-established theory, which maintains that finding a lifelong romantic partner is an important developmental task of emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968). The formation of a romantic relationship is seen as important to adults of all ages (Fingerman & Hay, 2002). One important aspect of development which is influenced by the formation of a romantic relationship is the development of one's identity. For example, being in a romantic relationship was found to have positive effects, such as an improved identity formation (Johnson et al., 2012).

Heterosexual couples enjoy a privileged position in society. Society provides heterosexual couples with various social, economic, and symbolic rewards (Budgeon, 2008), simply because they are in a heterosexual romantic relationship. One such an advantage which have often been mentioned by economists includes the division of labour, for example in maintaining a household, and specialization between married people. Marriage also provides basic insurance against adverse life events. Within a long-term, committed

relationship, couples expect support, expressed love and a mutually rewarding exchange of material rewards from each other (Stutzer & Frey, 2004).

The honoured position of heterosexual couples is reinforced by the 'ideology of marriage and family' (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). This ideology is based on three assumptions:

- (i) The ideology of marriage and family holds that the formation of a heterosexual and long term partnership, that is, getting married, is of the utmost importance (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). In fact, marriage is often equated with well-being (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) and is portrayed as a more desirable status than singlehood in popular media (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The use of such popular media as the most likely source of information is especially true for young adults who tend to embrace the societal models of romance and sexuality portrayed by popular media. Increased popular media consumption was also linked to greater levels of idealised standards of romantic relationships (Holmes & Johnson, 2009). Similar to the heterosexual norm (Korobov & Thorne, 2009), the ideology of the couple culture is mostly unrecognized and unquestioned (Byrne, 2003; Zajicek & Koski, 2003). The heterosexual norm also places a romantic, heterosexual relationship at the top of the relationship hierarchy (Clark & Graham, 2005; Korobov & Thorne, 2009).
- (ii) Secondly, the ideology of marriage and family assumes that all human beings long to be in a heterosexual, romantic relationship and desire a sexual partner (Budgeon, 2008). According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), single people, like most people, feel a need to belong. This is also implied by various developmental theories, such as Erikson's (1986) theory, which regards the formation of a romantic relationship as part of a person's basic development.

This means, by implication that all humans *will* go through, or *must* go through, this stage of development.

- (iii) Lastly, the ideology of marriage and family also assumes that those who are in a romantic relationship are inherently and significantly happier and more fulfilled than those who are single (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Furthermore, it would appear as if the status of marriage in particular plays an important role since couples tend to show an increase in general satisfaction as the year of marriage approaches (Stutzer & Frey, 2004). Additionally, Stutzer and Frey (2004) have found that people tend to get married with the expectation of a rewarding relationship. Hence, they might experience an increased sense of satisfaction and improved well-being because of the expectation of a rewarding relationship. This is in accordance with the literature which indicates that being in a romantic relationship increases life and status satisfaction, and has a positive influence on general well-being; as mentioned above.

However, the accuracy of this ideology of marriage and family is questionable on at least three levels. Firstly, as far as sexual happiness is concerned, the reality is somewhat in contrast to popular media's portrayal of marriage. Popular media often portrays marriage as killing spontaneous and spectacular sex (Armstrong, 2006), resulting in the decrease of the alluring value of marriage.

Secondly, whilst the preconceived idea is that couples are happier and live in marital bliss (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), this is often not the case and some marriages are indeed less than happy. On average, relationship satisfaction tends to decrease abruptly during the first few years of marriage (Murray, Griffin, Derrick, Harris, Aloni, & Leder, 2011), and around half of first marriages end in divorce (Cherlin, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2012). In contrast to an increased level of satisfaction as marriage approaches, Stutzer and Frey (2004)

also found that general life satisfaction decreases after marriage. One explanation for this decrease is that the transition to marriage can be linked to short-term changes in subjective well-being (Johnson & Wu, 2002). Another explanation is that individuals adapt to the extra pleasures of marriage, and in fact become used to them and so, after marriage, their baseline level of subjective well-being also adapts (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003). Whether adaptation has taken place or not, low quality marriages that do not end in divorce, but which persist for a long time, also have a significantly negative effect on well-being (Hawkins & Booth, 2005). According to the study by Hawkins and Booth (2008), enduring in an unhappy marriage could result in less overall happiness, self-esteem, health, and life satisfaction, which have incidentally been mentioned as some of the advantages to being in a relationship. Furthermore, due to the often unrealistic and exaggerated nature of media's portrayal of the perfect marriage (Johnson & Holmes, 2009) – which couples often use as an evaluative tool for their own relationships – an individual is often disillusioned and dissatisfied with his or her own marriage when compared to how he or she expected it to be (Holmes & Johnson, 2009). As such, dissolving an unhappy marriage puts the unhappy individual at a greater advantage of improving his or her well-being; ergo, unmarried divorcees are happier than people who stay in an unhappy marriage (Hawkins & Booth, 2005). This is contradicted by Bierman, Fazio, and Milkie (2006) who found that divorcees had poorer mental health than the consistently married when controlling for background characteristics. Yet, the study does not mention whether quality of marriage was controlled for during the analysis.

Thirdly, marriage is no longer the almost universal setting or prerequisite for child-bearing, and cohabitation has become an accepted alternative to marriage. Admittedly, marriage has become less mandatory and the social rules regarding marriage have changed (Cherlin, 2004), whilst at the same time some social aspects continue to reinforce the importance of marriage (Koropecvj-Cox, 2005). Although the institutional value of marriage

might no longer be a marker of conformity, it now serves as a marker of prestige (Cherlin, 2004) and many remain attached to the idea of romantic love even in the face of high divorce rates (Swidler, 2001). Resistance to social norms are always shaky at best (Walkerdine, 1990) and studies indicate that marriage is still valued more highly than being single (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). In line with this, the legalization of same sex marriage in South Africa (Judge, Manion, & De Waal, 2008) and the increased movement to legalize same sex marriage in other countries (Meier et al., 2009) also illustrate the enduring importance and value placed on marriage (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). In accordance with the hegemonic gender norms, young women in particular, still place great importance on marriage, family life, and the expectation of a lifelong marriage (Meier et al., 2009). Accordingly, if they are not allowed to wed legally, female same-sex partners, more often than male same-sex partners, take part in wedding-like public commitment rituals (Hull, 2006). It would thus appear as if the ideology of marriage and family persists. Conforming to this heterosexual norm and the ideology of marriage and family also provides women with status and popularity within a like-minded society (Korobov & Thorne, 2009). This could further explain the endurance of the ideology.

Being in a romantic relationship has also been deemed central to one's overall life satisfaction (Domingue & Mollen, 2009), and those within a romantic relationship show greater satisfaction with their current relationship status (Greitemeyer, 2009). Social status includes belonging to a group and social validation and it is also identified as a theoretical dating goal. It is hypothesized that some people may start or continue a relationship simply for the status it provides them in society (Kelly, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Boislart-P, 2012), such as impressing others outside of the relationship (Clark, Shaber, & Abrahams, 1999).

Being in a romantic relationship could also contribute to the general well-being (Demir, 2008; Johnson et al., 2012) of emerging adults. Research suggests that young women specifically benefit more from romantic intimacy than young men (Simon & Barret, 2010).

However, the contribution to general well-being is strongly moderated by the quality of a relationship, and this includes factors such as companionship, help, intimacy, reliable alliance, self-validation and emotional security (Demir, 2008).

3.2.1. Women, relationships, and popular media.

The importance of romantic relationships in women's lives can be linked to the hegemonic gendered perceptions of femininity often portrayed and highlighted by popular media. Gender can be conceptualized as a socially constructed sequence of practices, behaviours and characteristics (Butler, 1990; Milestone & Meyer, 2012). This implies that masculinity and femininity are intricately and persistently connected to popular media. Gender is also produced, represented and consumed in popular culture⁴. Conceptualizing popular culture as a site of political contestation (see for example Hall, 1982) allows us to consider how dominant gender norms and ideologies are challenged, adapted and reproduced (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Even though there are multiple gender ideologies, the traditional, hegemonic, Westernized idea of gender is the one most reinforced by society and popular media (Milestone & Meyer, 2012).

Hegemonic masculinity and femininity – more specifically termed *emphasized femininity* – have often been portrayed in a juxtaposition which is not value-neutral but which implies a hierarchy (Hall, 1997) in which femininity is subordinate to masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity portrays men as rational, intelligent and efficient. Men are linked to ambition, strength, power, seeking success, having naturally strong sex drives which need constant satisfaction, enjoying excess (Milestone & Meyer, 2012) and so forth. Emphasized femininity presents women as naturally kind, caring, and inclined to looking after men and children. This implies that being in a relationship with a man and starting a family are prerequisites for

⁴ Media, especially popular media, forms a great part of popular culture which can be defined in two ways: "... the cultural practices or lived culture that people engage in ... [or the] cultural texts which are symbolic and whose main function is the production of meaning..." (Milestone & Meyer, 2012, p. 3).

women to be seen as feminine. Feminine sexuality is associated with emotions, love, relationships and commitment, in contrast to men who pursue sexual gratification without the need for a committed relationship (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Thus, emphasized femininity once again portrays women who need a relationship with a man in order to express their sexuality. Popular culture, especially women's magazines, emphasizes the importance of relationships, marriage and commitment as the key sources of happiness and goals for women (Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, & Hebron 1991; Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Similarly, television series (for example *Sex and the City*) and movies (for example *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *The Wedding Planner*, and *The Proposal*) often portray women searching for and achieving the ultimate goals of finding a romantic partner and settling into a committed relationship (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Furthermore, women are pressured to achieve these goals within a certain time frame (Negra, 2009) with the threat of perpetual singlehood if the goals are not reached in time – and thus a failure to fulfil the most important requirement of femininity. It follows then that women may experience being single differently from how men perceive it due to the demands of complying with the notions of emphasized femininity.

3.3. Sexuality and Romantic Relationships

According to various researchers, it is important to incorporate sexuality and sexual motives into research on romantic relationships (Furnam, 2002; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Zimmer-Gembeck, Ducat, & Boislard-Ppin, 2011) because sex forms an important part of romantic relationships, especially initially (Furman & Wikels, 2012). Sexual expression is also seen as part of a normal and healthy life (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2006).

Going on dates or actively pursuing dating may serve various functions or may be pursued in order to attain various goals (Kelly et al., 2012). Traditionally such goals would include experimenting with sex and pleasure, improving one's social status, gaining access to more resources which would result in the reduction of uncertainty, impressing others, and so

forth (Clark et al., 1999; McCabe, 1984; Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004; Ott, Millstein, & Halpern-Felsher, 2006; Sanderson & Cantor, 1995). Sex as a dating goal involves satisfying biological urges (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999), and participating in gratifying and fun activities (McCabe, 1984; Mongeau et al., 2004). According to Kelly et al. (2012), such sexual motivations and intentions are now part of the reason why some women go on dates or actively seek a date. In other words, women actively seek dates in order to have sex. However, the women in Kelly et al.'s (2012) study reported more intimacy behaviours, goals, and motivations rather than sexual motivations and intentions. This then supports the hegemonic view that women place more importance on intimacy (Rose & Rudolph, 2006), and are thus more motivated by intimacy than by physical sexual pleasure (Kelly et al., 2012).

Sexual intimacy, which is assumed to accompany a romantic relationship, is believed to provide an individual with better self-knowledge and self-validation as a human being (Armstrong, 2006). This is especially true for women, who, more so than men, are purported to measure their self-worth through the success or failure of their relationships (Aronson & Buchholz, 2001). However, in an era of mass production and impersonal communities and businesses, people in Western societies tend to be lonely and increasingly isolated. In this context, it is argued that people will seek intimacy at any cost and will often engage in sex with very little feeling for each other in order to find such intimacy. Thus, whilst sex plays an important part in a romantic relationship, it does not always constitute intimacy (Armstrong, 2006). Furthermore, in order for sexual intimacy to be present, vulnerability in the non-sexual spheres of the relationship, as well as the sexual spheres, is important (Berecz, 2002). Additionally, sexual desire is assisted by an interactive relationship (McCarthy, 2003) and may wane when affectional intimacies or an intimate relationship is not maintained (Glass, 2004).

3.3.1. Society and the regulation of sexuality.

Throughout history, sex and sexual behaviour have been regulated by religion (Regnerus, 2007), as an organized belief system. Most religions, regardless of origin, have relatively clear guidelines as to what constitutes virtuous and morally acceptable sexual behaviour. Sexual attitudes tend to be more conservative amongst members of religious groups, than among members of non-religious groups (Ahrold, Farmer, Trapnell, & Meston, 2011). Increased religiosity – religiosity is defined by Cowden and Bradshaw (2007) as the role and importance of religion in one's life – has therefore been linked to higher levels of sexual guilt (Woo, Morshedian, Brotto, & Gorzalka, 2012), greater sexual abstinence, less sexual activity, fewer sexual partners during the person's lifetime, and having first intercourse later in life (Barkan, 2006). Individuals with high levels of religiosity often cite love as a prerequisite for sexual intercourse, and the wish to marry someone who has not previously had sex (Davidson, Moore, & Ullstrup, 2004), as well as the condemnation of premarital and extramarital sex (Miracle, Miracle, & Baumeister, 2003).

The decreasing influence of religion on sexual attitudes, however, does not seem to hold true for sexual fantasies. In a study by Ahrold et al. (2011), non-religious women still reported significantly more sexual fantasies than religious women. Thus, it would seem as if religious women are still reluctant to report their sexual fantasies and are unwilling to admit whether they have them or not. A possible explanation for this is that religions, and especially Christianity, maintain that thought and action are intertwined and cannot be fully separated from each other. This implies that thoughts should also be restricted and guided by religion (Gil, 1990). This attitude towards sexual fantasy, however, does not hold true for men, with a much smaller difference between religious and non-religious men who self-report sexual fantasies. Religiosity also seemed to have less of an influence on the sexual attitudes of men than it does on women (Ahrold et al., 2011).

As seen above, women are more influenced than men by religious beliefs and doctrines regarding sexual attitudes, behaviours and fantasies. This holds true especially for Christian women who are expected to act as the educators and caretakers of religious practices (Ahrold et al., 2011). Sexual restrictions are part of the Christian doctrine and it is often seen as women's responsibility to uphold them. As an example there is the conservative attitude of maintaining virginity until marriage (Jones, Darrock, & Singh, 2005). Maintaining this forms part of women's religious duties (Brasher, 1998). Yet again, however, a gender bias can be detected in that men's premarital sexual activity is far less controlled and treated with a more lenient and liberal attitude than that of women (Strasser, 2003).

It follows then, that single women with high religiosity, or those with a Christian background, may be less likely to engage in pre-marital sex, sexual fantasies, and have more conservative attitudes towards sex. Thus, they are less likely to acquire the sexual experience of a heterosexual relationship which is so highly regarded by Western society. They will also not benefit from the greater sense of well-being which correlates with more frequent sexual behaviour (Kelly et al., 2012; Langstrom & Hanson, 2006). However, it should be noted that all religious groups are not the same, and that even within one religion such as Christianity there is great diversity (Ahrold et al., 2011). Consequently, the influence of religion on the expression of sexual desire and behaviour will differ according to each religion and each individual.

3.3.1.1. The double standard.

Whilst women's motivation to find a partner might be the desire for sexual pleasure, as mentioned earlier, they are also more severely punished or judged as a result of religious prejudice for engaging in pre-marital sex specifically. This double standard – consisting of different rules and standards of what is seen as acceptable sexual practice for men and women (Bordini & Sperb, 2012a) – is not only applied by religious societies, but also by non-

religious societies. Reiss initiated the study of this double standard in 1956 and found that premarital sex was seen as wrong for women but allowed for men. However, in 1967, Reiss suggested that this double standard was declining and a more egalitarian attitude was being adopted, especially when premarital sex took place within an affectionate relationship. In 2003, Crawford and Popp concluded that the double standard could hardly be detected anymore. However, on closer inspection, the reported reduction in the double standard is questionable. Even though pre-marital sex or sexual intercourse outside a committed relationship is more readily accepted in today's society, the double standard can still be identified (Bordini & Sperb, 2012a). This persistent double standard is especially evident in South Africa where heteronormative values are still reinforced and reconstructed through a variety of media discourses and the State. Research indicates that there is a lack of tolerance especially towards black women in townships who do not conform to particular and limiting hegemonic ideas about gender and sexuality which constitutes acceptable femininities (Sanger, 2010).

Due to the increased gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual movements, it is also hypothesized that women's sexual norms and traditions have changed. Women now have more freedom to explore non-traditional sexual roles and sexuality⁵ including casual sex, recreational sex, and self-pleasuring (Levant et al., 2012). This is especially true for more educated women who appear to engage in casual sex more frequently (Gaughan, 2002). Nonetheless, educated single women still report having great difficulty in finding a suitable partner (Levant et al., 2012). The greater sexual freedom is also expressed more by single women who are more likely to engage in casual sex and masturbation. However, they also report greater dissatisfaction with their sex lives when compared to women in relationships

⁵ Traditional sexuality can be defined as sexual behaviour strictly within a long-term, monogamous, heterosexual relationship. Furthermore, the purpose of sex is limited to procreation, and promoting intimacy and the relational bond of the couple (Levant, Richmond, Cook, House, & Aupont, 2007).

(Schachner, Shaver, & Gillath, 2008). Additionally, not all single women have greater sexual freedom, especially not if their sexuality is non-normative. Non-conforming black lesbian women in South African townships are particularly harshly prosecuted for not complying to hegemonic norms and expressing their sexuality. Even though the South African Constitution purports to protect a person's sexuality and expression thereof, the continued torture, rape, and murder of black lesbians in South Africa indicates a lack of tolerance, especially towards women who express their non-hegemonic sexuality (Sanger 2010).

Contextual factors (such as the above mentioned religion, level of education, and sexual orientation) influence people's views of what is acceptable sexual behaviour for men and women (Crawford & Popp, 2003). For example, parents and peers tend to condemn adolescent men who do not actively express their sexuality; whilst adolescent women are condemned for doing just that (Bordini & Sperb, 2012b). Furthermore, promiscuity has been found to still be stigmatized in women (Milnes, 2010). Women are expected not to react to sexual advances, whilst men are expected to be sexually aggressive and to make sexual advances (Devries & Free, 2010). This double standard is especially portrayed in sex-education films where the sexuality of men and women are portrayed in different ways. For example, women's sexual activity is portrayed as dangerous and not readily accepted. In contrast, the sexual activity of men is depicted as normal, and men are expected to make sexual propositions, thus legitimizing men's sexual and erotic desires whilst negating women's (Hartley & Drew, 2002).

Thus, regardless of the advances in women's sexual liberation, a double standard persists. Certain sexual behaviours are still condemned in women, but not in men. Such activities include actively expressing their sexuality and having numerous sexual partners (Bordini & Sperb, 2012a).

3.3.1.2. Contradicting messages.

Given the tension between the persistent double standard and calls for women's sexual liberation, women receive conflicting messages regarding appropriate sexual behaviour. These conflicting messages may result in confusion, embarrassment, and a decrease in healthy sexual behaviour of women (Levant, Ranklin, Hall, Smalley, & Williams, 2012). The contradicting messages are referred to as the 'Madonna-whore split' by Tolman (2002).

The whore.

On the one hand, there has been a rise in the so called 'raunch culture' in which women are portrayed as secularised sex objects (Levy, 2005), there for the pleasure of men. For example, in a survey by Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008), up to 50% of women portrayed in advertisements in a variety of magazine categories were portrayed as sex objects. Furthermore, they found that in 75% of advertisements featuring women in men's magazines, the women were depicted as sex objects. Popular media – including magazines, films, and television – also encourage women to objectify themselves (Ward, 2002) as the sexual servants of men (Brooks, 2001). However, this depiction of women as sex objects often carries the message that women should be submissive (which is depicted as a desirable trait) and as the victims of violence (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). Such imagery of women reinstils the power inequality (in which men are dominant and women are submissive) which was brought into question by social changes (Wolf, 1991). It also implies that women's bodies are the property of men which can be scrutinized, assessed, and touched whenever men please (Killbourne, 1999).

Although advertisements in popular media also reflect women's increased freedom, especially in the professional and business world, such portrayals still tend to exhibit women as sexual objects of men's desires, and sexually less powerful than men. Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008) hypothesize that the increased freedom and advancement of women, especially

in careers, have contributed to the demands of women to become "... servants to popular images of beauty and sexuality" (p. 587).

The Madonna.

Even though women are often portrayed as sex objects who have recently gained the freedom to explore non-traditional sexuality, acting upon this and taking control of their own sexuality is still questioned. Women who seek ownership of their desire and sexual agency – processes usually reserved for men – are often viewed with suspicion (Diamond, 2011). As such women have to hide their sexual activity or risk being ostracized by society (Carpenter, 1998; Diamond, 2011). This reluctance to accept female independence regarding their own sexuality and sexual behaviour is related to the 'Madonna' or the virginal portrayal of women.

In contrast to the rising raunch culture, female sexuality, and especially adolescent sexuality, have often been portrayed as the passive, asexual 'good girl' (Levy, 2005) who does not act upon their own sexual drives and needs. Women are only *allowed* to have sex within long-term monogamous heterosexual relationships; and only for two purposes: procreation, and to promote intimacy and the relational bond of the couple (Levant, Richmond, Cook, House, & Aupont, 2007). This is also in accordance with hegemonic femininity in which feminine sexuality is associated with emotions, love, relationships and commitment (Milesotne & Meyer, 2012). The so called 'Madonna-whore split' is thus still quite prevalent in society's mind and women's lives (Tolman, 2002).

3.4. The Stigmatization and Marginalization of Single People

Single people are often described as lonelier, less attractive, less satisfied with their lives, more neurotic, less warm and caring, and having a lower self-esteem than non-single people. This description of single people is mostly measured through self-report questionnaires. Some comparative studies indeed indicated that single people are less satisfied with the status of their relationships (Greytemeyer, 2009), and are significantly romantically

lonelier when compared to those in a committed relationship (Bernardon et al., 2011; Van der Watt, 2012). It is also habitually assumed that single people have been deprived of the transcendent experience of a romantic relationship (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). This negative attitude towards single people often leads to the stigmatization and discrimination of single people, including their marginalization (Budgeon, 2008; DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Such discrimination includes, for example, a lower pay grade for some single people, and a landlord's preference for married tenants. Proof of the persistence of such stigmatization (also termed singlism) is found in studies which document the negative attitude towards single people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). According to Byrne and Carr (2005), single people are presumed to be single due to a characteristic flaw, or a *blemish* such as immaturity, a lack of personal discipline, or promiscuity. They are thus responsible for their undesirable status, and it is also implied that you cannot be single by choice. Hence, single people are often victims of interpersonal rejection and discrimination (Greitemeyer, 2009). It is therefore clear that a person's relationship status can influence how he or she is perceived by others (Conley & Collins, 2002). However, it cannot be presumed that all single people are single by default as a result of some dysfunction. This negative attitude towards single people is generally unquestioned by Western society and social scientists (Koropecykj-Cox, 2005), much like the unquestioned heterosexual norm and the ideology of marriage and family. Furthermore, when confronted with the existence of singlism, it is often perceived as acceptable and legal (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), even by most single people who do not seem to contest the stigmatization and discrimination against them (Greitemeyer, 2009).

This discrimination and stigmatization may indeed contribute even more to the negative *consequences* of being single, than the mere fact that they are single (Simon, 2002). Single people might perceive the negative attitudes towards them and incorporate these into their own self-evaluations (Byrne & Carr, 2005). The goal-attainment theory provides another explanation for the decreased health and life satisfaction of single people. According to this

theory, we continually and often automatically evaluate our progress towards goal attainment (Carver & Scheier, 1990), which, in this case, is finding a romantic partner. Failure to attain this goal may lead to constant rumination (Gebhardt et al., 2010) which was also proven to be detrimental to psychological well-being (Watkins, 2004) and general life satisfaction. Thus, it is not necessarily *being single* that leads to decreased well-being and life satisfaction, but it may also be the constant rumination about a specific goal that needs to be attained.

Furthermore, the assumed negative consequences of being single were contradicted by some studies which indicated the positive effect of being single. Budgeon (2008) finds that it is still possible for single people to form a positive identity, despite the knowledge that they are part of a marginalized group. Well-being amongst single people was also related to having better employment, education, and having children (Bierman et al., 2006), and single people are seen as more independent, career oriented (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), and open to new experiences. Additionally, one empirical study finds no significant difference between the self-ratings of personality characteristics of single people and people who are in a romantic relationship (Greitemeyer, 2009). Another study indicates that not only are married women the most depressed segment of the population – and far from happy with their heterosexual relationships (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993) – they also have higher rates of depression than single men, single women, and married men (Heyn, 1997). A possible explanation for the high rates of depression amongst married women, are the gender norms that require women to subsume their personal needs to the wishes of their husbands (McGrath, 1992). These findings are, however, dated and as such must be understood within the social and historical context of when they were performed.

Yet, even with evidence to the contrary, however minimal it might be, the stigmatization and marginalization of single people prevails (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). There appears to be a lag in acknowledging that single people are not necessarily unhappy, immature, or to *blame* for their single status. According to Byrne and Carr (2005), there is a

gap between the macro-social changes – such as the increasing single population (Statistics South Africa, 2012) – and the gradual blurring of gender-typed roles that allow women to become economically independent from men (Carr, 2002). This would encourage and sustain singlehood, and the slow-to-change cultural ideals in which marriage is the ultimate goal and ideal status. A possible explanation for this is the fact that it might be easier to ignore the stereotyping of a group of which the members are seemingly voluntary, a group which *can be left* at any given time (Clark & Graham, 2005). Another possible explanation for the cultural lag is that singlism serves to maintain the societal belief in marriage by disparaging those whose lives challenge the belief (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Stigmatization and marginalization thus serve to mitigate the *threat* to the societal norm.

3.4.1. The gender bias of stigmatization.

The stigmatization of single people often carries a gender bias (Bell & Yans, 2008). Single women are frequently presumed to be neurotic, promiscuous and dangerous, and are seen as ‘old maids’ (Koropecj-Cox, 2005). Another term used to describe single women – especially of a more advanced age – is ‘spinster’ (Gordon, 2003). On the other hand, single men are often referred to as the ‘eligible bachelors’ (Baumbusch, 2004). Yet, colloquially, these terms have vastly different connotations. The *old maid*, for example, can be colloquially defined as:

A woman who has passed the age at which women typically marry ...derogatory term; ‘maid’ is short for ‘maiden’ meaning ‘virgin’, and stems from the former presumption that a woman who had neither married nor had children was a virgin (Contrarian, 2010).

Another colloquial definition of an old maid includes four attributes: the assumption that the person is a virgin or sexually fastidious; that she is sexually aloof and shows little to no interest in men; and that she is over particular, pernickety and shallow. Lastly, this

definition also comes with the prediction that she will die a virgin, without having been in a long-term relationship, and alone (Madaoxsama, 2009). On the other hand, some colloquial definitions for a bachelor includes that he is "... someone who understand the TRUE definition of MARRIAGE (Marriage is the #1 cause of divorce)" (Comanche, 2009). Another definition holds that a bachelor is an unmarried man and a "woman's dream man", who flirts at almost any occasion (Bootywarrior, 2013). Whilst these definitions are not academic, they do provide valuable insight into the way lay people use terms such as 'old maid' and 'bachelor'. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that the general terms used to refer to single people – including terms such as 'unmarried' or 'never married' – also increase the stigma of single people since the term in itself implies a state of lacking something (Lewis, 1994). Besides from the gender bias implied by the terms used to describe single women, women are also looked at more negatively when they delay marriage in comparison to men who delay getting married (Krueger, Heckhausen, & Hundertmark, 1995).

Education also plays a role in the stigmatization of women. For example, it is believed that middle-class women are more likely to marry than poor women (Haskins & Shawhill, 2007); however, educated women are more likely to postpone marriage (Situmorang, 2007; Thornton, Axinn, & Teachman, 1995). Being highly educated has also been argued to be the reason for the increase in the never-married population of some Asian countries. This is because of the increased autonomy and options educated women have (Jones, 2004). Indeed, in Indonesia, for example, educated single women are called *city singles* and it is assumed that they are single because they are "... highly educated, ambitious, single minded, determined, active and a career person" (Situmorang, 2007, p. 288). Research has also indicated that single women who achieve success in their careers are perceived as more hostile and less likeable. This means that some women hide their occupational success in order to avoid negative evaluation (Greitemeyer, 2007). Furthermore, education is also expected to play a role in the lives of single women since programmes in popular media (for

example, shows such as *Sex in the City*, and *Bridget Jones' Diary*) target white, middle-class, educated women (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

The stigma surrounding single women in South Africa, and the sexual objectification of women in general, were placed in the spotlight when President Jacob Zuma commented that it is "... not right..." for women to be single. He further commented that it is a "... problem in society and a distortion..." to remain single, and having children is "... extra training..." for women (Pilay, 2012). It is prudent to note, however, that President Zuma's comments should be read within the context of a particular manifestation of traditional Zulu culture with which Zuma self-identifies. In the Zulu culture women are *brought in to do the job* of continuing the man's lineage. Furthermore, *isithembu* – or polygamy – allows a Zulu man to have as many wives as he can afford, or buy⁶ (Zondi, 2007). Notwithstanding, this appears to stand in contrast to President Zuma's declared dedication to the empowerment of women in a modern and progressive democratic country of which he is the leader (Pilay, 2012). Yet, similar to the statements made by President Jacob Zuma, academic research often assumes that single women are shaped differently due to some personal dysfunction (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Furthermore, more so than men, women measure their self-worth through the success or failure of being in a romantic relationship (Aronson & Buchholz, 2001). Thus, women who are in unhappy romantic relationships may feel pressured to mitigate their negative situations since success in a romantic relationship is also seen as a measure of social worth (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Hence, they would rather be in an unhappy relationship than lose their social worth because of a failed relationship. However, more research is needed to understand the gendered concept and experience of being single (Koropecyj-Cox, 2005).

⁶ Within the Zulu culture, the man has to 'buy the service' of the woman who has to continue his lineage. He does this by paying 'ilobolo' (the dowry or bride price) to the 'lending family', that is, to the family of the bride (Zondi, 2007).

3.5. In Conclusion

Research regarding the experience of being single is meagre whilst research on romantic relationships is extensive and plentiful.⁷ This indicates the importance placed on being in a romantic relationship. This significance is generally expressed in terms of human development, life satisfaction, and general well-being, especially in comparison to single people. Furthermore, literature also focusses on the importance of sex and sexual intimacy which is assumed to be part of a romantic relationship. However, the literature on sex is still beleaguered by a sexual double standard in which women are expected to negotiate the strenuous and contrasting roles of the whore or the Madonna. Religion also plays an important role in the attitudes towards sex and the sexual behaviours of women, especially when they are single. It is often assumed that single people are worse off since they do not experience all the benefits of being in a romantic relationship, including the sexual benefits. This means that they are often marginalized and discriminated against. Once again, women bear the brunt of these socially exclusionary mechanisms: They are more readily *blamed* for being single and more pressure is placed on them to marry. In addition, single women are generally viewed as more dysfunctional than single men.

Even though research has indicated certain benefits to being single, it tends to have certain limitations. Some of these limitations have been highlighted in some of the earliest studies in which researchers advise ways to improve the literature on singlehood, yet the advice generally seems to have been ignored. It is clear that four limitations are mentioned repeatedly: firstly, who counts as part of the single population? As mentioned earlier, the classification of who counts as *single* is often poor or not even mentioned at all. Consequently, it is difficult to compare or find literature on the subject of singlehood. Secondly, single people are often just used as a comparative group to determine whether

⁷ As at the time of commencement of this research.

single or married people are better off. However, the benefits of being single are then often ignored whilst the negative aspects of being single are highlighted. If single people are only studied in comparison to non-single people, it also implies that they are only worthy as research subjects in order to *prove* that coupledness is better than singlehood. Thirdly, research has not often attempted to determine whether the negative stigma and assumptions regarding single people, are true – with the exception of a few studies. A final difficulty with the current research on single people is that they have largely been excluded as active participants in the studies (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Research rarely attempts to confirm whether single people do in actual fact have less desirable personality characteristics (Greitemeyer, 2009). Furthermore, there are hardly any qualitative studies in which single people are asked about their experience of being single. I thus aimed to address these limitations in existing research in my study by recruiting a specific group of single women after the boundaries of being *single* had been clearly set – and by qualitatively exploring their experiences of being single as they live and perceive it, without comparing them to women who have a partner.

CHAPTER 4 Research Method

In the following chapter, the research methodology is presented. It includes the research aim, the research design and method, and the reflection and bracketing.

4.1. Research Aim

The study aimed to explore and describe a group of tertiary-educated women's experience of being single.

4.2. Research Design and Method

Informed by the theoretical frameworks presented earlier in this thesis, a qualitative and phenomenological research design was followed. Phenomenological research is not concerned with a quantitative amount of a particular phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009), but rather the qualitative experience of the phenomenon of interest. Phenomenology develops a deeper understanding of subjective human experiences (Rose, 1990) and aims to describe "... what one perceives, senses and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (Kockelmans, 1967, p. 24). Phenomenological research therefore asks the question 'What is it like?' (Giorgi, 2009); thus, in this study: 'What is it like to be single?' This is in contrast to the more quantitative questions (Englander, 2012) of 'Are you single?' or 'How often have you been single?' The aim of the study was also not to generalize but to focus on the perspective of women with reference to their daily experiences of being single.

More specifically, I used the descriptive pre-transcendental Husserlian phenomenological method as proposed by Giorgi. As implied by the name, Giorgi's theory is influenced by Husserl's goal of the scientific study of the consciousness (Finlay, 2014). Accordingly, Giorgi holds that psychological realities can only be understood through rigorous procedures that are rooted in phenomenological philosophy (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Such rigorous procedures involve a fixed and established step-by-step process which

results in findings which can be replicated (Finlay, 2014). This is in contrast to the hermeneutically orientated, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), as proposed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), which is a more fluid and multidirectional approach to research (Finlay, 2014). As a novice qualitative researcher who has been educated within a positivist and quantitative research orientation, I was provided with clearer guidelines by Giorgi's step-by-step research than those provided by IPA.

Giorgi's descriptive pre-transcendental Husserlian phenomenology also emphasises the processing and analysis of individual experiences with the end goal of distilling a psychological experience that is common to all of the participants (Finlay, 2014). For that reason, each participant's lived experience of being single was obtained individually, but the general or collective experience of the phenomenon – and not a mere description of the experience of each individual (Giorgi, 2009) – is explicated in the final synopsis of the findings. This integrated whole can also be supplemented by elaborating on the variations of the experience of being single, where necessary (Finlay, 2014).

As a novice qualitative researcher and second-language writer, I was drawn to the simple style of writing utilized by descriptive pre-transcendental Husserlian phenomenological research reports. In fact, authors such as Appelbaum (2012), Finlay (2014) and Halling (2002) encourage researchers to present findings simply. Researchers are also advised to use participants' words frequently in order to retain transparency (Halling, 2002) and to provide evidence of any claims made (Finlay, 2014). Giorgi regarded subjectivity as having particular importance when gaining knowledge regarding humans. According to Giorgi (2004), subjectivity refers to our source of life and awareness and is at the centre of all human sciences. Past research, especially within the natural sciences, focused on subjectivism as a pejorative concept.

According to Sinha (1969), there are two key aspects to subjectivism:

... [firstly] truth is merely personal ... [and] can vary from person to person and from instance to instance. ... [secondly] an egocentric viewpoint but without taking the uniquely personal aspects of the ego into account. ... it takes a subject to experience any object but it is an abstract subject rather than a concrete, living person (Giorgi, 2004, p. 4).

However, Giorgi (2004) does not fully agree with this take on subjectivism, claiming that it leads to negative relativism. Instead, Giorgi is more in favour of Mohanty's (2000) view on *subject* and subjectivism. According to Monhanty (2000), subjectivity includes an interior mental life which is a continuous stream of experiences taking place in lived time, and not in objective time. By absorbing these experiences within a social milieu, the subject becomes individualized and unique by the particular contents of an experiential stream (Mensch, 1997). Understanding and utilizing subjectivity within knowledge-gaining thus requires psychological phenomenological reduction. This involves focussing on what is being presented to and how it presents itself to the researcher. Yet, the researcher cannot claim that the presentation actually exists in the way that it is presented or experienced by the researcher. Giorgi (2004, p. 20) explains as follows: "... the objects of our experience become phenomena. We only claim that we experience it that way and we refrain from judging it to *be* as we experienced it."

As such, objectivity is not possible since it is constituted by a subject. Giorgi advises the researcher to utilize *purpose-guided* or *role-guided* subjectivity which means that the researcher should put aside her/his own intrinsic interests to allow for the interests of the participant, or the characteristics of the object, to come to the fore (Giorgi, 2004). The hold of self-interest can be broken in order to let the experience of others, as they really are, into the experiential field.

According to Giorgi (2004) subjectivity can:

... even place itself in the perspective of the other; that it can bracket its own past experiences in order to approach new experiences of the same type freshly; that it can perform the psychological reduction, which means a backing away from the spontaneous movement toward an object in order to focus on its phenomenal presence ... (p. 22).

In accordance with this idea, I strove to become aware of and bracket my own subjective experiences of singleness and interest in it in order to get a sense of the experiences of the participants. Thus, my aim was not objectivity, but rather honesty regarding my own preconceptions and experiences and foregrounding the experiences of the participants in this study.

Lastly, it should be noted that there is not one single, correct way to do phenomenological research. It is a relatively flexible research methodology (Finlay, 2014) which allowed me to utilize the influence of a feminist approach for my research – for example I also took the context and background of the participants' experiences into account when analysing the data.

4.2.1. Participants.

The exact number of participants to be recruited is not stipulated within the guidelines of Giorgi's theory (Englander, 2012) who cautions that "... research based upon depth strategies should not be confused with research based upon sampling strategies" (Giorgi, 2009; pp. 198-199). Yet, he does advise the use of at least three participants. Seven women who were single at the time participated in this study. Due to possible variations in each participant's relationship history, status and experience of singlehood, I elected to explore the experiences of a very specific and relatively homogenous group of single women: self-identified heterosexual women between the ages of 30 and 40 with at least a tertiary

qualification, had a Christian background, who had not been involved in a close romantic relationship or a serious dating relationship over the past two years, who had never been married, nor who had any children.

This specific age group was selected due to the considerable pressure on women between the ages of 30 and 40 to be in a romantic relationship (Gebhardt et al., 2010). This is especially true because of the ticking of the proverbial biological clock (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Fleeson, 2001) and because marriage is considered a significant age-graded life transition (Sharp & Ganong, 2007). According to Lahad and Hazan (2014) being single and over 30 marks a transgression of age-appropriate behaviours and expectations. Single women are classified and stratified by age rank which places both the twenty-something single woman and the thirty-plus married women above the thirty-something single woman. I also selected women with the same level of education because research has indicated that women's levels of education influence their experience of singlehood (Cwikel, Gramotney, & Lee, 2006; Lewis & Moon, 1997; Wolf, Laditka, & Laditka, 2002). I elected to focus on women with a tertiary qualification as I would find it easier to access and interview this group of women.

Furthermore, due to the strong influence of religion on people's behaviours (Perrone, Webb, Wright, Jackson, & Ksiazak, 2006), and views on relationships (Jaffe, 2011); participants from a broadly similar religious background were selected. I elected to recruit participants from the same religious background as my own because I identify myself as Christian and have some understanding of this background. I therefore recruited Afrikaans and English-speaking participants who grew up in Christian homes and who still identified with those values. Also, I only included women who identified themselves as heterosexual because it could be argued that, given the stigma and discrimination often experienced by lesbian, bi-sexual, gay and transsexual people in South Africa (Lane, Mogale, Struthers,

McIntyre, & Kegeles, 2008), their experiences would likely differ from those of heterosexual people.

Snowballing techniques were used to recruit participants. First, I constructed a Facebook page in which I provided details of the current study and the need for research participants. The page contained contact details where people who were interested in participating or who had further questions regarding the research process could contact me on a secure e-mail account or telephone number. Thus, participants were not asked to provide any personal details, nor did they have to indicate their interest in participation on the Facebook page. However, the use of Facebook as a recruitment mechanism did not yield any of the current participants. All of the participants were recruited through my personal network which consisted of my supervisor, my friends, and family. I asked my friends and family to approach possible participants in their own social networks. I then contacted potential participants who consented to their contact details' being passed on to me. If they met the inclusion criteria set out above, I arranged a time and place to meet and conduct the interview.

Each participant was interviewed twice. Second interviews were used to address gaps in the first interviews or to obtain further information. Even though it was not the intention, all of the participants are white. This is most likely due to my predominantly white circle of family, friends, and church members and because I study at a university with a predominantly white student population. Table 1 indicates the basic demographic description of the participants.

Table 1:
Basic demographic information

Name	Age	Single for:	Highest Degree	Religious Upbringing	Current Religion	Preferred interview language
Anja	35	12 years	PhD	Catholic	“Bad” Catholic	Afrikaans
Bella	38	6½ years	BA Hon	Dutch Reformed	Quaker	Afrikaans
Danny	30	2 years	PhD	Methodist	Methodist	English
Ella	31	Whole life	MA	Dutch Reformed	“Liberated”	Afrikaans
Gretal	31	4 years	MA	Dutch Reformed	Dutch Reformed	Afrikaans
Haley	36	Whole life	MSc	Dutch Reformed	Agnostic/Atheist	Afrikaans
Jane	35	Whole life	BPhil	Dutch Reformed	“Spiritual”	Afrikaans

4.2.2. Data Collection.

The interview is the preferred data collection method used by phenomenological researchers (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This is due to interest in the participants' lived experience of a certain phenomenon (Englander, 2012) and because it is rooted in the wish to understand a person's lived experience and how he or she makes sense of a specific phenomenon (Seidman, 1998). Whilst face-to-face interviews are more time consuming, they allow for richer, more nuanced, and in-depth data collection (Englander, 2012). Hence, I collected data by conducting two semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 4 for interview schedule) with each participant; consequently a total of 14 interviews were conducted. The aim of the phenomenological interview is to gather the richest and most descriptive data regarding the phenomenon, as is reasonably possible. Thus the participants were asked to describe their lived experiences of being single in as much detail as possible. In accordance with the phenomenological framework, the interview questions were directed at the experience of each participant (Giorgi, 2009) by asking open-ended questions, whilst refraining from asking leading questions, and avoiding any unnecessary interruption (Seidmand, 1998). To avoid asking leading questions and any bias, I needed to arrive at the interviews with an "... [o]penness to whatever meanings should emerge..." (Hycner, 1985, p.280). This was mainly done by bracketing which involves bringing into awareness all pre-

existing understandings, biases, assumptions, and presuppositions (Smyth, 2004) of the experience of being single. This enabled me to be aware of any preconceived ideas, including my own experience of being single, which in turn assisted me to distinguish between such ideas and experiences, and the experiences of the participants. I also intended the interview to be a dialogue between me and the research participants (Groenewald, 2004); yet the dialogue was led by the interviewee (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This meant that, as the researcher, I had to be tolerant of silences and follow up on hunches and non-verbal cues. Following the guidelines above allowed me, as the researcher, to be cognisant of what the participants were saying, what they were trying to say, and also what they were trying to say through non-verbal cues such as sighs and laughter (Seidemand, 1998).

Each interview took place at a venue of the participant's choice with only two conditions: it should be quiet enough in order to be able to record the interview; and private enough to avoid any unnecessary interruptions. Consequently, the interviews were mainly held in the participants' offices, homes, my own residence, and one follow-up interview took place via Skype. Afterwards the interviews were transcribed with meticulous accuracy (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008) either by me, or a trustworthy scribe. Once the transcriptions had been done, I listened to the interviews again to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions and also to identify aspects of the interviews which needed clarification and further investigation. Such areas were marked and follow-up interviews were organized with each participant. After the follow-up interviews had been meticulously transcribed, the transcriptions were rechecked for accuracy. Thereafter, each participant's two transcribed interviews were combined into one comprehensive document which, with the audio recordings, was to be used for data analysis.

4.2.3. Data Analysis.

The transcribed data were analysed using the guidelines provided by Giorgi's descriptive pre-transcendental Husserlian phenomenological psychological method. Whilst phenomenological researchers caution that the quality of data may decline when analysis becomes too focussed on certain steps and rules (Smyth, 2004), Giorgi (1975) finds it necessary to provide guidelines to inexperienced researchers (such as I) who do not have a strong philosophical background. The guidelines set out by Giorgi (1975) and later used by various other researchers, can be grouped into six steps.

4.2.3.1. Grasping a sense of the whole and the context of each interview.

Firstly, the transcriptions were read in their entirety in order to grasp a sense of the whole (Wertz, 2005) of the phenomenon. The audio recordings were also listened to as a comprehensive whole. Grasping a sense of the whole of the interviews provided a better understanding of the context of each interview. In this way the units of meaning could be delineated (Smyth, 2004). While reading the text I attempted to refrain from any preconceived ideas and judgements. In order to facilitate bracketing, I made footnotes at relevant sections of the interviews where I expressed my own thoughts and feelings on the matter. This helped me to remain cognisant of what my own thoughts were and to refrain from imposing them on the data and the experience of the participant. It was impossible for me as researcher to remain completely neutral, since much of what the participants said resonated with my own personal experience of being single. Hence, I also met my supervisor to talk about any issues arising in order for my personal thoughts and experiences to remain checked. This was necessary in order to focus on what was in fact being presented in the transcribed data (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008), and was followed throughout the data analysis process. In order to facilitate easier communication and sharing of information between my supervisor and me, the following steps were done electronically utilizing functions of MS Word.

4.2.3.2. Extracting units of meaning.

The second step involved rereading the transcriptions whilst attempting to delineate possible units of meaning (Groenewald, 2004) by highlighting "... those words, phrases, non-verbal or para-linguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows" (Hycner, 1985, p.282) in yellow. These units did not always specifically hold meaning regarding the experience of being single; however they did contribute by providing context and a better understanding of the participants as individuals. The highlighted pieces were then reread and units of meaning which could be linked to the experience of being single were re-highlighted in blue and copied to a separate document in the form of bullet points. The bullet points allowed for easier identification of a specific unit of meaning. The units of meaning extracted were statements which illuminated the experience of being single (Hycner, 1999). Those units which were not extracted were kept in yellow and were, at a later stage, checked again to make sure they were not left out unnecessarily. After the units of meaning had been delineated, I reflected upon each unit of meaning. This reflection was done in order to distinguish what each unit of meaning revealed about the experience of being single (Wertz, 2005), and whether there was a hierarchical relationship (Biggerstaff & Thompton, 2008) between the units of meaning. This also helped to determine any psychological insight in each unit. The possible meaning of each unit was then added to the relevant unit in the form of a second level bullet point, and also italicized in order to avoid confusion. Furthermore, any thoughts of possible interpretations were added in square brackets. This served two purposes: to ensure accuracy of memory, since many of the thoughts were also linked to non-verbal cues which were not always apparent in transcriptions; and secondly to, again, avoid confusion with original data and analysed data.

4.2.3.3. Clustering of units of meaning to form units of significance.

The units of meaning of each participant were then clustered into themes within the holistic aspect of the interview (Groenewald, 2004). This was done in a number of steps: firstly, a separate document was created in tabular form. I then read through each separate unit of meaning. This could be easily identified because bullet points were used. As I read through each unit, I reflected upon its possible meaning, highlighted it purple (this was done in order to keep track of which units had been reflected upon and used) and then copied it to a row in the table. The row was then allocated a single phrase which depicted the meaning derived from the unit. If the next unit did not fit the phrase given to the row, it was copied to a new row and given a different phrase, and so forth. In this manner, all units were sorted into different rows forming units of significance. I then went back to the original transcription to check whether any of the units of meaning had been left out in the first place (they were still highlighted in yellow) would not perhaps fit into some of these clusters. If they did, they were added to the rows of units of significance. The hierarchy of the units of meaning were again reflected upon in terms of the units of significance. Where needed, the hierarchy was adjusted, based on the quantity of units within the cluster and also according to emotional and non-verbal cues which I could remember from the interviews.

4.2.3.4. Summarizing each interview.

The fourth step consisted of synthesizing which involved expressing and combining the reflections and insights into a consistent statement (Wertz, 2005). This was done separately for each unit of significance and for each participant. I first read through all the units of significance clustered together in a row in the table. I also consulted the notes I had made for each unit of meaning. Thereafter I summarized them into as concise yet comprehensive and illustrative paragraph as possible. This paragraph, or statement, expressed the psychological structure (Eatough & Smith, 2008) of the experience of being single. It

should be noted that, up until this point, all participants' data had been analysed independently. It was only in the following steps that the experiences of the participants were combined to form a comprehensive whole.

4.2.3.5. Combining of all the interviews into a coherent whole.

The units of significance of all the participants, in combination with the summaries added to each row, were then combined into a new comprehensive table. Each unit of significance made up one row. However, what each participant had said was still clearly marked. I then read through each unit of significance, or row, in its entirety in order to make a summary of each unit of significance as a whole. The summary of each unit of significance, which now reflected the lived experience of all the participants with reference to a specific aspect, was typed on a separate page. These two documents – the full comprehensive table, and the summary of each unit of significance – were then sent to my supervisor in order to be checked for validity and accuracy. After some time we then met and discussed my findings. With her advice and guidance in mind, I then proceeded to the final step of data analysis, which is a synopsis of research findings. It should be noted that from this point onwards, much of the analysis was not done electronically but manually – which will be made clear to fulfil requirements of research transparency – for practical purposes.

4.2.3.6. Synopsis of research findings.

As was noted above, a research synopsis was the last step in the data analysis process. This involved what is generally called the *writing up* of the results into a coherent whole. The two documents were given to my supervisor and were both printed and bound separately. I then commenced with writing up my results through a systematic approach.

Firstly, I read through the summary of each unit of significance and manually highlighted any subthemes which were discernible in different colours. For example, within the unit of significance of *We are educated and independent women!* the subtheme of *I can*

only date certain men arose. Thereafter, with the documents next to each other, I read through each participant's units of significance and highlighted the subthemes accordingly. I then continued by making a short diagram which indicated a possible flow of subthemes and which participants contributed to each.

The second step involved typing headings for each subtheme within a draft of the final document and adding the units of significance (from this point onwards referred to as "quotes" or "quotations") below the relevant headings, to form a coherent and logically flowing presentation of the experience of being single as described by the participants. As each quotation was added, three things took place: firstly, it was crossed out in both the diagram in the notebook, and also in the printed table. This was done in order to avoid duplication of data and also to ensure that all relevant data had been included. Secondly, the quotation was attentively read through and any points which warranted further discussion were electronically highlighted in red. Lastly, translations were added at the end of each quotation. These translations were not professionally done. However, since I am proficient in both Afrikaans (my home language) and English (my academic language), it was deemed unnecessary to get a professional translator. Yet, it should be kept in mind that the translations have only been loosely done. The original Afrikaans quotations were then electronically highlighted in black – in order to be easily identifiable, and deleted just before the thesis was finalized. The Afrikaans quotations were deleted due to the word limit for the thesis.

Thirdly, each subtheme was then read through and the parts which had been highlighted red in step two were discussed and elaborated upon, after which the highlighting was removed to indicate that it had been discussed. I also returned to the original transcriptions of each interview to check whether any of the units of meaning which had not originally been included in the units of significance table might be relevant to any of the subthemes being discussed. If any were found, they were added to the presentation of the

results. Consulting the original transcriptions of the interviews also allowed me to remain cognisant of the context of the units of significance, and also of the phenomenon as a whole and general experience as advocated by the feminist approach and Giorgi respectively. Furthermore, the notes on my thoughts and interpretations of the original units of meaning were also consulted in order to present the data as accurately as possible.

Lastly, as this process unfolded and evolved, some units of significance were merged with others in order to avoid any repetition and duplication of results. The units of significance were also shuffled around to adjust the hierarchy accordingly and also to enhance the coherent flow of the results. Additionally, I indicated important points by electronically highlighting the relevant points which needed further discussion in yellow. This was only possible after additional literature research. Finally, I read through the comprehensive table in order to identify all quotations which had not been added to the results. If, on reconsideration, they did fit in to some of the subthemes, they were added accordingly. If, however, I still deemed them irrelevant to the subthemes or units of significance, they were copied into a separate document. This was then sent, with the complete results section, to my supervisor to check for accuracy and validity of findings.

This document, however, far exceeded the word limit allowed for the current thesis. Hence, after consulting my supervisor, some of the more prominent experiences of being single, which represented the experience of all of the participants, were chosen to be discussed in detail. This is also in accordance with Giorgi's descriptive pre-transcendental Husserlian phenomenology in which individual experiences are analysed in detail; yet the experience of the phenomenon as a whole and how it pertains to all of the participants is included (Finlay, 2014). The remainder of the units of significance were removed from the main body of the thesis and placed as Appendix 7. Thereafter, and following further research into the existing literature, all important points that had been highlighted in yellow were

discussed and the highlighting removed. However, it should be noted that, because further research into existing literature stressed certain aspects of the current participants' experiences of being single (which were then only presented in Appendix 7), they were moved back to the main body of the thesis. Similarly, some quotations which were relevant to the units of significance, but which were now deemed superfluous, were moved to Appendix 6. Each time this occurred, a footnote was added in order to direct the reader to the relevant part for a more contextual understanding of the specific experience to be grasped.

4.2.4. Trustworthiness.

Phenomenological research aims to describe the lived experience of a specific phenomenon as accurately as possible from the perspective of the person living/experiencing it. In order to achieve this, the researcher must be as neutral as possible, and assume the phenomenological attitude (Giorgi, 2009). According to Giorgi's theory (1994), this involves setting aside previous knowledge, assumptions, and understandings of the phenomenon. Giorgi (1994) believes that such an approach, in combination with taking rigorous steps to analyse the data, will result in a trustworthy and accurate representation of the lived experience of a specific phenomenon by a specific individual. However, self-reflection is also a very important step within phenomenological investigation (Finlay, 2009) and especially feminist research (Nencel, 2014). Furthermore, as the researcher, I have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Hence I examined my own perceptions of being single so that I could distinguish which perceptions were mine (as the researcher) and which originated from participants in the research (Finlay, 2008). Through self-reflection I became aware of my own preconceived biases, experiences, and understanding of being single in order to separate them from the descriptions that were provided by the participants (Finlay, 2009). This was done by keeping personal thoughts, feelings, and possible interpretations distinguishably separate from the original data. This dichotomy is mentioned throughout the thesis in various parts of the data analysis process.

Lastly, the trustworthiness of the data was enhanced by discussing any emerging themes with my supervisor, an experienced qualitative researcher who is familiar with the proposed study. This helped me to bracket my own pre-conceived notions and to keep as close as possible to the participants' own accounts of their experiences.

4.2.5. Reflection and bracketing.

In this section I position myself as the researcher within the context of the phenomenological and feminist perspectives, as well as in the research process.

4.2.5.1. Phenomenology and reflexivity.

Within phenomenological research, the experiences of the participants are studied from their own perspectives and the viewpoints taken are their own. In other words, they are not removed from their lives nor are they studied artificially. Yet the phenomenological researcher cannot give a pure and unbiased *insider's perspective* since it is impossible for the researcher to enter the mind of the participant. Consequently, as the researcher, I was always *removed* from the participants' perspectives whilst attempting to capture their perspectives through constant, continuous and critical questioning (Clancy, 2013). Furthermore, phenomenology recognizes that complete objectivity is not possible (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn et al., 1999) and that a degree of subjectivity is inevitable (Giorgi, 2004). Since my own personal perceptions and experiences would inevitably influence my interpretations and evaluations of the participants experiences (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), reflexivity was needed in order to avoid prejudice, bias, and the domination of my own personal ideas (Finlay, 2003). In part, this was done through bracketing. By bringing to the foreground my own preconceived ideas, perceptions and experiences of being single, I attempted to distinguish them from those of my participants (Giorgi, 2009; Smyth 2004).

4.2.5.2. Feminist reflexivity.

I did not originally, or in truth even consciously, use a feminist approach for this study. It was only after I had read the first draft of the results section in its entirety that my intuitive feminist approach became evident after which I had to familiarise myself with this framework.

Within the feminist perspective there are generally two currents of reflexive writing: reflexivity as a corrective measure, and post-foundational post-modern reflexivity. Corrective reflexivity is used as a measure to ensure a more egalitarian and non-authoritative relationship between the researcher and his/her participants. By employing self-reflexivity, the researcher enables a relationship in which differences are acknowledged and the researcher's positionality is placed in the foreground (Nencel, 2014). This positionality involves "... the need to reflect upon and write about how their situatedness or their terministic screens ... influence an understanding of their data" (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 117). This stance therefore required me to reveal my assumptions, histories, social situation and identity; including how this may have influenced the research process and findings (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

However, proponents of the post-foundational post-modern approach to reflexivity are critical of using reflexivity as a corrective measure (Nencel, 2014). Since it is only the researcher who employs reflexivity and who goes through the process of reflexivity (Lather, 2001), they argue that it perpetuates colonial relationships by attempting to mask the power the researcher has over the subject (Pillow, 2003).

4.2.5.3. My own background.

I was raised by parents who are feminist in many ways and they encouraged me to be an independent, critical thinker. Parallel to these ideas, however, more traditional gender notions were sustained. For example, they had specific ideas about appropriate behaviour for women and the value of gentlemanly behaviour from men. Unsurprisingly, because I was

raised in a feminist home and environment, albeit in a traditionally romantic one, my innate *romantic feminism* unwittingly served as an undertone and base for this research. It must be noted that my background also closely resembles the demographics of the current cohort of participants. I use the term *romantic* loosely since whilst I would describe myself as a feminist, I am also rather romantic in disposition – for example I desire a committed romantic relationship for myself, I value traditional chivalry and courteousness such as a man opening the car door for a woman or helping her carry her luggage, and so forth.

4.2.5.4. The research process.

There are various ways in which my background and personal experiences may have influenced the current research study, yet it was impossible to recognize and discuss them all. However, there are two specific aspects which are of particular importance: identifying with the participants and the imbalance of power.

(Not) Identifying with the participants.

My own cultural and educational background is very similar to those of the participants: I am also a tertiary-educated, white, heterosexual woman, who was raised as a Christian, and who has been single for more than two years. Therefore much of what the participants said resonated with me. For example, I could empathize with the *irritation* at some of the lingering patriarchal views regarding single women. Yet, this resonance also meant that I sometimes assumed an implied or inherent meaning in some of the participants' descriptions. For example, when discussing the constant questions asked by others regarding their single status, I assumed an understanding of the irritation this causes – sometimes without clarifying how they experienced and perceived these questions.

The bio-demographic similarity between my participants and me also meant that I sometimes expected the participants' experiences to be similar to my own. For example, I have not chosen to be single for most of my adult life and I do not enjoy singlehood. It is thus

possible that I may have been predisposed to focus more on the negative than the positive experiences of my participants. Unsurprisingly, many of the negative experiences that the participants described seemed all too familiar to me: loneliness, the difficulty to find dates for weddings and events, having to do things alone, being bombarded with questions about why I am still single, doubting myself, and so forth. However, I could not ignore the positive experiences which my participants described, and, with the help of my supervisor and the rigorous steps provided by Giorgi, the positive experiences of being single were also highlighted in the research findings.

Another important affiliation I shared with my participants was religion, which plays an important role in my life. As a minister's daughter, I was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church, but not in the strictest sense. My parents always encouraged my sister and me to be open-minded about other religions, including the different Christian doctrines. Furthermore, sex was never a taboo topic in our home and was not made out to be wrong or filthy as some of the participants described. However, even though I do not mind talking about sex in general, I believe that sexual intercourse belongs within a serious committed and long-term relationship. Furthermore, I respect that each person's sexual behaviours and encounters are private, and that some are not comfortable in sharing their experiences. I was therefore careful in asking about this aspect of their lives. It is also possible that the participants were aware of my cautiousness and that this inhibited them from talking freely about their sexual behaviours and thoughts.

I would classify myself as a devout traditional Christian, yet open-minded and not fundamentalist. This is in contrast with most of my participants who were either not religious anymore, or not devout. Indeed, one participant was particularly aggressively against Christianity and especially the narrow-mindedness and judgemental tendencies of the Dutch Reformed Church. I could feel in the interview that I reacted to this and wanted to defend my

religion and my father's occupation. Furthermore, my Christian beliefs are usually a solace when it comes to the negative experiences of being single. This is in contrast to the participants who, with the exception of Greta, did not particularly mention personal religion as featuring in their experiences of or coping with singlehood. I felt sorry for my participants who did not have the solace which religion provides me.

Power imbalance.

As mentioned above, reflection is often used as a corrective measure. In line with this, I acknowledge the position of power of the researcher over the participants. In certain aspects I did have more power: I decided on the research topic, which questions to ask and what descriptions to follow up on; I interpreted the data; and I decided which results to present and how. With the help of my supervisor, and by employing reflection, bracketing, and Giorgi's methodology; I tried to ensure the validity of the results and to mitigate the power imbalance.

However, I also believe that to a certain degree the participants had the upper hand. As an inexperienced researcher, I sometimes felt intimidated by my participants' age and life experience as working women. Furthermore, I could not offer any real monetary reward to the participants all of whom had a substantial income. This meant that I sometimes felt guilty about taking up their time and asking them very difficult, and sometimes uncomfortable questions, without what I perceived as a palpable reward. As a result, in the first interview I was unable to always probe the participants' responses as well as I could have. Under my supervisor's guidance, I tried to address this limitation by identifying the gaps in the first interviews and following them up in the subsequent interviews.

Taking the above into account, it is undeniable that my own personal perceptions and experiences influenced all aspects of the research process. Furthermore, it is also probable that there are other influencing factors which I have not discussed or am even unaware of. Yet, I

do believe that the results presented in the following section present my best attempt at foregrounding my participants' experiences of being single.

4.2.6. Ethical Considerations

I obtained ethical clearance from the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (HUMANIORA) (see Appendix 1 and 2) before I embarked on this study. Participants were fully informed about the study and they provided informed consent (see Appendix 3) before participating in the interview process. Before each interview the participants were again informed about all relevant research aspects. Furthermore, they were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study if/when they wanted to (see Appendix 4) with no negative consequences. Each participant was asked whether she would be more comfortable being interviewed in Afrikaans or English. With the exception of Danny, all the participants chose Afrikaans. Regardless of the precautions taken, it remained uncertain what the personal interviews might uncover (Smith, 1992). For this reason 'consensual decision making' or 'process informed consent' was applied (Walker, 2007). Furthermore, I was aware of the fact that the privacy of the participants was at risk and that it was my responsibility to protect their individual privacy to the best of my ability. The use of a Facebook page as a recruitment mechanism placed the confidentiality of the participants at risk. However, participants were not asked to convey any personal information or their interest in participating in the research, on the Facebook page. A secure e-mail address and telephone number where the participants could contact me were provided. Furthermore, I protected the individual privacy of the participants by safe-guarding all research information. Additionally, no identifiable information was made public or shared with anyone outside the research team, nor is it reported in my research findings. Participants were informed that a pseudonym would be assigned to each of them in order to protect their identities. The true identity of each participant (referred to by her pseudonym in this thesis) is known only to the researcher.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic it was possible that participants might feel a certain amount of discomfort during the interviewing process. It was also possible that some psychological issues might be uncovered. In the event of serious discomfort or the uncovering of psychological issues, the participant would have been referred to a professional practising psychologist. I also would have reported any such incidences to my supervisor. However, no such measures were needed during this study.

CHAPTER 5 Results and Discussion

The chapter begins with a more detailed description of each participant's profile in order to provide a better understanding of the context of each one's lived experience.

Thereafter, the units of significance which best describe the participants' lived experiences of being single are presented: firstly, in table format with a short description of each, and then in more detail.

In order to keep a sense of personal identity and human experience, participants are referred to by their pseudonyms, rather than, for example, 'participant 1' or 'participant 2'. Pseudonyms are provided and used for some of the significant people the participants referred to. Excerpts from the Afrikaans-speaking participants' interview material are presented in English. Three spaced ellipsis points (...) are used within sentences to indicate when words have been omitted from the participant's speech. Four spaced ellipsis points (. . . .) are used when material was omitted from either the beginning or the end of a sentence. Additionally, square brackets are used to point out inserted material such as additional explanations or behavioural cues. Lastly, to indicate specific emphasis placed on words by the participants, the phrases, words, or part of the words, are italicized and followed by the words 'emphasis added' in square brackets.

5.1. Profile of the Participants

In the following section a detailed description of each participant is given in such a way as not to reveal information that would compromise the participants' identities. The descriptions – which are based on the participants' lives at the time of the interviews – include

their age; current work; families of origin; most recent relationship,⁸ as well as a short statement on how they described themselves.

5.1.1. Anja.

Anja is a 35-year-old female who works and lectures in a male-dominated occupation. She grew up in what she called a “liberal” family with an older sister and a younger brother. Anja defines her family as liberal due to their having gay friends, different cultural backgrounds, being open to inter-racial relationships, and not having any objections to living together without being married.

Anja's mother, who was like a friend to her; recently passed away from a terminal illness. The death of her mother, whilst very hard on Anja, resulted in her becoming a little closer to her father whom she did not see much of as a child and to whom she had not been close to previously. She currently feels closest to her sister who lives abroad and they make an effort to have regular contact. Whilst Anja still sees herself as a Roman Catholic, she calls herself a “bad Catholic” because she does not agree with all the rules and tenets of the church. Anja's most recent relationship was 12 years ago and lasted for a few weeks. The man ended the relationship without providing any reason or explanation. She believes, however, that his father's disapproval of the relationship may have had something to do with it. Anja describes herself as “a nerdy type of girl” who knows what she wants in life and what she wants from her career.

5.1.2. Bella.

At 38 years of age, Bella was the oldest participant. She currently works as a journalist. Whilst she likes her job, especially its fast pace, she would rather do charity work

⁸ Please refer to Appendix 5 – A Short Description of Each Participant's Dating History, for more detail on other relationships.

and not be dependent on her occupation for a livelihood. Bella was raised as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church; however, she converted to Quakerism when she started studying at university. She also said she had been effectively raised by a cousin because her father had to look after her sister and mother; the latter, she believes, suffered from a psychological disorder. Bella seems to have distanced herself from her family after going to university.

According to Bella she now has a purely financial relationship with her mother, and wants nothing to do with her sister; Bella says that she is creating her own family as she goes along. Her last relationship was six and a half years ago. She and her partner were in a relationship that lasted for about seven years with a one-year break somewhere in the middle. According to Bella, her ex-boyfriend wanted her to mother him. He became involved with drug dealers and Bella ended the relationship. Bella describes herself as self-sufficient and an “info junky”, which suits her job quite well. She appears to be satisfied with her life thus far. She says that, although she does not seem conventionally successful, she feels that she has lived and she treasures her memories of interesting life experiences.

5.1.3. Danny.

At 30 years old, Danny is the youngest participant. Relatively recently she moved to another province where she works as a researcher and lecturer. Danny says that she does not have a “good” relationship with her mother, but had a “very good” relationship with her father, who died four years ago. Danny says she still finds it difficult to come to terms with her father's death. Whilst Danny's religion (she is a Christian and a member of the Methodist Church) provides her with a moral base, she does not like prescriptive religions. She has been single for two years. Her last relationship was with a long-time friend. After he moved overseas, he proposed to her via an e-mail. A few months before the wedding, Danny went to visit him. A few days after she arrived, he broke off the engagement. Danny describes herself as an introvert, a very private person, and quite ambitious, especially in her career as an

academic. Although Danny is a private person who found sections of the interviews uncomfortable, she had a positive experience of the interviews. According to her, the interviews made her think about her life and she has become more open to relationships.

5.1.4. Ella.

Similar to Danny, Ella (31 years old) has recently moved from one province to another and works as a lecturer. She is very focused on her career and believes that her singlehood enables her to do so. Ella grew up in a family of five with two sisters, one older, and one younger. She described her family as rather traditional and having conservative values.

Ella grew up as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, but she does not like the way in which the church has created a hierarchy of sins in which some sins are seen as worse than others. She has travelled a lot, and has not lived in one place for long. Her most recent relationship, which lasted for about seven months, took place eight years ago. Her last boyfriend, Ed, was a black person and, since neither of their families would have approved of the relationship, not many people knew they were dating. In the end, when things did not work out, they did not think it would be worth the effort to tell their families. She loves politics and reading; and describes herself as a “closet romantic”; however, she says she does not have a sentimental vocabulary and does not like talking about her own emotions. She is a pragmatic and rational person. Ella also experienced the interviews positive and interesting; making her think about things she does not usually allow herself to think about – such as why she is single.

5.1.5. Gretal.

Gretal is 31 years old and works in the field of health sciences. According to Gretal, she had a happy childhood and a “good” relationship with both her parents and her siblings. Even though Gretal grew up in a family that attended the Dutch Reformed Church, she did engage in “church hopping” before she settled down in the Dutch Reformed Church again.

Her last relationship was four years ago. According to Gretal this boyfriend was a “charismaniac” who ended the relationship because he believed that God did not want them to have a relationship. Gretal describes herself as a person who tends to overinvest in things, including in relationships, after which she is disappointed when she does not get as much back. Furthermore, she describes herself as an extrovert, albeit a serious one, and as an emotional person. She experienced the interview process as “good” and says she feels that it reassured her that her experience of being single was not quite as negative as that of some of her friends. She mentioned, for example, that she is not as “bitter” as some of her single friends are.

5.1.6. Haley.

Haley is a 36-year-old female working as a scientific researcher within the wine industry. Although she grew up in a small town as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, she is no longer a Christian and describes herself as “half-agnostic, half-atheist”. According to Haley she did not have a happy childhood. She experienced her father as a very aggressive man. He provided for her material needs, but was emotionally distant. Haley’s mother suffered from various mental health problems and died a few years ago.

Haley has been single her whole life, and has only one experience of “connecting” with someone on a different level. She believes that the part of her which would have wanted a relationship has never developed. Lastly, Haley describes herself as “a very difficult person” who always expects the worst of others; she is an introvert but would prefer to be an extrovert. She experienced the interviews as positive and is pleased that someone is trying to understand the experience of being single. She also hopes it will help to correct society’s misconceptions of single people.

5.1.7. Jane.

Jane is 35 years old and has recently started studying in the field of humanities while she works as a manager in the hospitality industry. Jane's mother died eight years ago. Despite the fact that Jane believes her parents loved each other, she did not like the way her father treated her mother. Jane is not close to either of her siblings. Jane is no longer religious, even though she was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church as a Christian. She prefers to be called spiritual. She describes herself as having been single her whole life – although she has dated quite a few men. In these dating relationships, however, she often found herself in the position of the “other woman or mistress”.

Jane describes herself as a “homebody” who used to be very shy, but is now more confident. She says she tends to be “cynical, stubborn”, and does not like any form of confrontation. She experienced the interview interesting but is concerned she may be perceived in a negative light; for example that she may be judged for having had a number of sexual partners.

5.2. Units of Significance

In Table 2, a summary of the Units of Significance gathered from the data is presented with a short description of each. However, due to the stipulated word limitation for a master's thesis in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Stellenbosch University, not all of the Units of Significance could be presented or discussed in detail in this section (for a more thorough presentation of the Units of Significance not presented in this section, please see Appendix 7 – Units of Significance Not Added to Results Section). A short description of these is presented in Table 3. I presented and discussed only eight of the Units of Significance:

- (i) being single means not being in a relationship;
- (ii) holding on to the “you can” freedom;
- (iii) a partner means obliged companionship and support;

- (iv) (un)wanted attention from the right man;
- (v) we are educated and independent women!;
- (vi) (not) wanting children, either way, time's running out;
- (vii) missing out on sex; and
- (viii) reasons for being single.

The selection of these eight Units was based on hierarchical importance, and also because they present the participants' shared experience of being single. Please note that there are numerous ways in which the data could have been interpreted to form different Units of Significance. The Units presented here are thus but one way in which the experience of being single can be described.

Table 2:

Table summary and short descriptions of Units of Significance added to main Results and Discussion

	Unit of Significance	Short Descriptions
1	Being single means not being in a relationship	“Because I’m not in a relationship” which includes commitment, being able to expect things from a person, sharing physical space and contact, making a choice to be in a relationship and to work on it, and knowing it will not fix everything. We also think single men have it easier than single women.
2	Holding on to the “you can” freedom	“You can do whatever you want” and this freedom can be taken away by a partner. However, this freedom has a negative flipside which includes having to do things on our own, and being lonely.
3	A partner means obliged companionship and shared activities	Aside from being a threat to our freedom, there are some good aspects to having a partner, such as being able to expect support from him, his presence, and his help without even having to ask for it. This is also different from the support we can expect from friends and family.
4	(Un)wanted attention from the right men	We like it when men make an effort and pay attention to us; they must also invest as much in the relationship as we do. However, this must be on <i>our</i> terms, and we don’t like them to disrespect us.
5	We are educated and independent women!	Being educated is a way of defining ourselves. It also means that we can only date certain men who are also educated, or at least ambitious. Lastly, having a job helps with being single, mostly because we are too busy to think about being single.
6	(Not) wanting children; either way, time is running out	Want them, don’t want them, either way, time is running out and age is catching up with us. There are alternatives though, such as adopting or dating men with children. But we neither want to be single mothers, nor stepmothers.
7	Missing out on sex	We don’t have a problem with pre-marital sex, but “there is a right way of doing it” and we are not loose, nor are we prudish! We do miss out on sex though, and we’re still uncomfortable talking about it.
8	Reasons for being single	We have standards, and the pool of possible partners is small. We’re also not really trying because we like being in our comfort zones with all our freedom. We also simply don’t know why we are single, so it must be our fault.

Table 3:

Table summary and short descriptions of Units of Significance only added in Appendix 7.

	Unit of Significance	Short Descriptions
9	My family and being single	They're either okay with my being single, or they are not okay.
10	Age and finding a partner	The older we get, the less likely we are to find partners. Or at least we'll have to adjust the type of partner we want. But age can also be good and liberating.
11	Settling	We refuse to settle, and only people who are not happy with themselves settle. They are also the ones who do not understand us, and criticise us!
12	Friends	We have good and close friends, especially our single friends; but we have to make the effort and it's simply not the same. Some of our friends are like family though.
13	Physical appearance	"It doesn't matter, but it does", and we feel more attractive when we're in a relationship. It is also probably a reason why we are single.
14	How we are seen by others because of being single	Others feel sorry for us, they keep asking questions, and they keep blaming us. But this is simply the way society is set up, and actually they are just jealous of our freedom.
15	Being Christian	It does have some an influence still; for example, who we date, and whether we have hope of finding a partner or not. But it doesn't really have an influence anymore, because some of us don't really believe anymore.

5.2.1. Being single means not being in a relationship.

The general definition of single provided by the participants was: "... I am not in a relationship" (Anja). Similarly, Danny said she saw herself as single "... because I'm not in a relationship, I'm not even dating anyone at the moment..." In the same way, Haley said she was single "...because I've never been in a relationship". Bella said you are single because "...you are no-one's number one person". However, Gretal and Jane added some details to the description of being single. Gretal saw herself as single because "... I am not in a relationship with a man, not at all." Jane said: "There is nothing in my life at this stage which can contradict it. ... because I have not gone out with someone formally. As in, no one has ever asked me: 'Will you go out with me?'"

Being single is thus basically defined as the complete absence of a romantic relationship with a man or simply the opposite of being in a relationship. It is thus pertinent to understand what it means to them not to be single, in other words, what qualifies as *being in a relationship*.

5.2.1.1. Being in a relationship.⁹

The participants provided far more elaborate detail on the definition of being in a relationship – and also what they perceived an intimate relationship should be like – than on being single.

There's a form of commitment.

Firstly, three participants mentioned that a certain degree of commitment has to be present. If a male partner is committed to you, you can expect certain things from him – such as spending time and doing things together – often without asking. Gretal explained that a relationship is a “committed friendship where it [pause] yes with the expectation of marriage”. Danny elaborated on the description of a relationship:

... in a relationship I think there is a certain degree of loyalty, um, there's a certain degree of commitment. ... It's a commitment, it's um, a decision. For me it's a decision that you decided you wanna work on this, you wanna be committed to this relationship, yes.

To Bella, being able to commit to someone and stay with that person is something to strive for:

... but just the idea that you really [pause] can commit to someone ... It is really amazing if you can meet someone that you feel: “I want to spend the rest of my

⁹ Please refer to Appendix 6 for extra information on the evolution of a relationship from *dating*.

life with you” ... It is something to strive for. And, and I realize it takes a hell of a lot of work and everything, it's really [pause] enviable and also praiseworthy if you can manage that.

Expectation, companionship, and physical closeness.

Five participants also mentioned that a relationship involves expectations, especially that of companionship and sharing physical space and intimacies with a partner. Ella said that being in a relationship means: “There's an expectation ... for me to be in a relationship is, it is about companionship ... to have a companion, who [pause] does things with you ... and almost, is obliged to be on your side.” Haley also mentioned that a relationship involves doing things together:

I see a relationship as, um, two people who do things together. As in, I'm not talking about working together, I'm talking about people who live together, have children together, go to the movies together, eat together, that I see as a relationship.

Danny mentioned: “Developing a certain type of intimacy. And I don't mean physical intimacy, but being able to ... share things. Um, and having *really* [emphasis] got to know each other. You know, um, your personalities, and your behaviours et cetera.” Lastly, Jane mentioned that being in a relationship involves “...spend[ing] a lot of time together...Because for me if you spend time together, you sleep together, you go to things together, it starts to change into a relationship...”

Gretal described the physical contact associated with being in a relationship as: “[It could] range from anything; from just a hug, someone who scratches your back, someone who touches you, and up till kissing and everything that follows on that.” It is this “doing things together” and being able to expect things from your partner that Haley saw as desirable and an

advantage of couple hood. She said that she felt bitter when she saw couples having these advantages that she also longs for:

I am often bitter when I see them [laughs slightly]. ... it sometimes looks easier ... It will be easier ... Like to, to send my husband with my car because um, because some people still has the perception of: "Women are stupid when it comes to such things" ... Or, it's, let's say I come home and I must work, but I should also cook, [laughs] then I can work while someone makes the food ... I sometimes wonder how it could be. And then I think it would be rather nice to live in a big house with a big garden, and a dog playing in the garden, and the husband and wife who arrive at home together, and takes the child out of the car, out of the station wagon ... then I'll think how nice it would actually be if *two* [emphasis] people went on holiday together, *two* [emphasis] people who visit my father ... that I will have someone at home who can do things for me. And that, it's not like I'm selfish, I will for, I will do things for someone else as well.

Taking the above into account, being single thus means to *not be* in a relationship. In turn, not being in a relationship means:

- (i) *not having* someone who is committed to you, whom you can expect things from and do things with;
- (ii) *not having* a taken-for-granted companion; and
- (iii) *not sharing* a physical space and physical contact.

It is then this *not having* which influences their daily lives, how they experience things, and also how they perceive the treatment of others. The participants' definition and description of being single in terms of the absence of a romantic relationship points towards the dominance of an *in*-relationship status and the lack of singlehood as an equal status.

Problematic labels that have often been attached to single women in previous research – and

also in general by society – include *old maids*, *spinsters*, (Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Situmorang, 2007), *Christmas cakes*¹⁰, *parasite singles* (Dales, 2014) and the more recently added *never-married*, *unmarried*, and *unattached* (Baumbusch, 2004; Lahad, 2013). Furthermore, the term *spinster* has specifically been linked to refer to an overly “... fussy, prissy, demeanour” (Amyes-Hanselm, 1997, p. 544). In turn, “fussy” is seen as a characteristic responsible for being single (Byrne, 2008). Hence, calling a woman a *spinster* implies prejudice as to why the person is single. To be sure, a recent study of single Nigerian women indicated that single women (beyond the age considered conventional for marriage) are often blamed for their single status and it is assumed they are single because of personal character defects (Ntoimo & Isiugo_Abanihe, 2014). According to a recent study of internet blogs by Lahad and Hazan (2014) the prevalence of the well-worn trope of the pejorative old maid term remains evident in blogs such as the one by Gal (2007):

From a certain stage, every single woman will be tagged as a shrivelled old lady. She will be pitted ... for being an old hag. She will pass her nights by watching television, eat without control and share her bed with cats as no normal men would want to touch her (see Lahad & Hazan, 2014, p. 130).

The above quotation clearly indicates the negative and stigmatized connotation of terms such as *old maid* used to describe older single women. More positive terms, such as *ever single* or *lifelong single*, are rarely used (Baumbusch, 2004). According to Furgeson (2000), the term *never-married* is used by family and demographic researchers to differentiate it from three other marital states: divorced; separated; or widowed. However, Furgeson seemingly ignores the fact that the term *never-married* can also be divided into various other relationship groups such as single, cohabiting, engaged, and so forth (DePaulo & Morris,

¹⁰ This is in special reference to women who remain unmarried beyond 25 years of age, that is, of “...less value after the 25th...” (Dales, 2014, p. 227).

2005). Another less pejorative term used to define single women is that of *ohitorisama*¹¹ (as coined by Iwashita Kumiko) which is used specifically in Japan to refer to a woman, independent of age or marital status who values and practices individuality and self-expression.

Yet, similar to other more positive terms, *ohitorisama* does not make a distinction between the different types of single women – indeed; implicitly the definition includes married women. Additionally, it is not an identity taken up by all women within its margins and is used less *by* single women, and more *about* them. However, as other terms used to denote single women, it exists as a category with particular social meanings. It marks the boundaries of a particular social category and serves as a discursive marker of one version of singlehood – suggesting possibilities for agency by performing everyday tasks conducted at the margins of feminine ideals (Dales, 2014). However, whether using pejorative terms or not, continuing to define women in terms of their lack of a partner could possibly be influenced by the fact that studies of single women are mostly focussed on comparing them to married women (Newtson & Keith, 1997). This further entrenches the idea that single women's experiences, and even how they define themselves, are only valuable when they can be compared to married or *attached* women. Furthermore, the persistence of dividing individuals into groups that are based on gender and marital status may be specifically disadvantageous for single women due to the negative connotations to words such as *spinster* and *old maid*, whereas there is no comparable term for single men. In contrast, terms such as *bachelor* have a relatively positive connotation (Baumbusch, 2004).

¹¹ The term *ohitorisama* can be loosely translated to mean 'singleton', 'single woman', or 'individual'. However, the term carries deeper meaning as can be seen in Iwashita's original definition: "... an adult woman who is an established individual; the particular sense needed to allow coexistence with others; and a life philosophy one should use for succeeding in work and love... [excluding] ideologically single, advocates against marriage, separatists and egotists ..." (see Dales, 2014, p. 226).

Baumbusch (2004) maintains that the focus of her study on the experience of single women,¹² referring to them as *ever single* and not merely comparing them to married women could help to validate the status of single women and even help to mitigate the stigma attached to single women. In the same way, I attempted to refrain from imposing my own ideas and definition, and those of the current literature, on the participants. Instead I searched for their definition and description of *being single*. However, as can be seen above, the participants seemed to lack a validating *singlehood discourse* and defined and described being single in terms of the lack of a relationship.

It is not a fairy tale and will not fix everything.

All of the participants, however, mentioned that the fairy tale idea that a relationship will fix everything, is always perfect and that one will live happily ever after (Jackson, 2001) was not accurate. Danny specifically questioned the fairy-tale idea and the idealistic picture portrayed by the media. She said:

I think there's this fairy-tale idea that if you get married and you have the white wedding, you're happy. ... I think about it more deeply, you know. ... There's no way you can live with someone and never have conflict. So, I think, um, it's not as simple, as idealistic, as what is projected in the media.

Similarly, the other participants also indicated that they did not believe that a romantic relationship was a cure for loneliness or unhappiness. Ella said that being in a relationship involved "... choos[ing] to love and then you have to love your choice", something which takes a lot of work and getting to know the person you are in a relationship with:

¹² Please take note that this study focused on the experience of single Canadian women aged 65 to 79 and can thus not be used as a direct comparison to the current group of participants.

Love isn't the feeling, it's devotion, not emotion, type of [pause] you know it, it takes a lot of work. ... and then you decide, then you make the decision to go on a journey with the person, you know. ... they *work* [emphasis] on their relationship. ... People meet someone and they think: "He's the one", and then they think because he's *the one* [emphasis], it will just be moonlight and roses, and when it is *not* [emphasis] they are disappointed ... You know, it is not *always* [emphasis] moonlight and roses, I don't think that exists. You must be willing to put in the effort. That's why so many younger people's relationships don't work. I don't think they're willing to put in the, the effort and the time into it... so for me it would be a lot of work, to get to know the other person on that level ... To understand their hope, their hopes and dreams, in life; to understand what makes them happy; to, to notice when they are sad; to, be there for them, to support them ... [sighs]. Yes, go through all those stages with them, and in, and really to take the time to get to know the other person, and not to try and change [him] ... I think if I have to be in a relationship now, it would be a helluva adjustment for me, simply because I've n-, not, I'm not used to taking someone else into consideration with my daily goings on ... but I think the practical will be a *bigger* [emphasis] adjustment ... The practical will be a *very* [emphasis] big adjustment for me, the rest, the rest probably also, but I think the practical will be the biggest adjustment. ... And also because I'm not in a relationship, because in a relationship a person has to, it is, may be, it would be a big challenge for me, because in a relationship you must open up a bit, emotionally.

Likewise Anja said:

I don't think it [relationships] makes you [pause] happy, it is for the happier, but won't make you [pause] happy, you must first be happy with yourself. ... I don't

want to say you make, make, *peace* is maybe a too strong word for it, but [pause] it is how it is at this stage, and I wouldn't be happy, I, if I'm unhappy now, I wouldn't be happy by finding someone.

Similarly, Jane said:

You must first get to know yourself very well, you must first be able to be on your own before you can be with someone else. ... Yes [pause] and you must know who you are and what you want.

Whilst Bella said:

I don't think it makes you whole, and all that stuff about you become one and you lose your identity, and everything in the [pause and demonstrates with hands] that thing that the ministers reads [laughs]. But um [pause], it's nice to have somebody. There's no denying that, it is.

Gretal also seemed to be aware that all her problems would not simply vanish if she was in a relationship:

I think I often feel lonely, but I feel, I suspect it is also a loneliness that, that I can also experience in a relationship also. ... I think I realize that, um [pause] whether you are married, or engaged, or in a relationship, you always [pause] have troubles or difficult things to work through.

The perception that a partnered relationship is not synonymous with being happy was also mentioned by Addie and Brownlow's (2014) participants who said that they would not seek marriage simply to create meaning and fulfilment in their lives. Lastly, Haley also did not believe that marriage was perfect:

...people decide they don't want to be married anymore, then they just leave. So it's not, it's also not a guaranteed thing. So, the fact that it is not a guarantee makes me think then: "But oh, why must you bother in any case and go through all that effort to get married, and then it is also so expensive to get married?" ... according to me, there're actually so many marriages where there're something wrong. ... well, people get around. And people do just what they want, but because they have a piece of paper, it doesn't matter what they do wrong.

Yet, when asked whether she would want to marry one day, Haley answered: "Yes, I, yes I, I, it is, um, just because it looks nice, the wedding part, and then the part of being married too, to um, I think a person can feel safer in such a setup, yes."

As mentioned by Danny, the positives of marriage and romantic relationships tend to be emphasized by the popular media. Indeed, according to the literature, being in a romantic relationship, or being married, has long been associated with better global life satisfaction (Reis & Gable, 2003), especially in comparison to never having been married, being separated, divorced or widowed (Stanley, Ragan, Rhoades, & Markman, 2012). However, we should caution against the "... pervasiveness of the assumption among well-being investigators that successful outcomes foster happiness" (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005, p. 803). Contributing to the argument, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) argue that global life satisfaction may indeed be the cause of happiness in other domains, including in relationships. Since life satisfaction tends to remain fairly stable over life course (Lucas & Clark, 2006), it is probable that individuals who are satisfied with life before marriage will remain satisfied after marriage (Stanley et al., 2012). Furthermore, Stutzer and Frey (2006) also find that those who are more satisfied with their own lives were more likely to marry ultimately. Indeed, being generally satisfied with life before entering into a relationship may be predictive of better adjustment to the relationship and satisfaction with the relationship. Furthermore, the

participants' opinion that relationships and marriage require hard work has also been linked to satisfaction with a relationship and general satisfaction with life. Research indicates that people who work to improve their relationships can also increase relationship satisfaction (Stanley et al., 2012) in much the same way as marital interventions increase individual well-being (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, & Stickle, 1998).

It's easier for men.

Four participants maintained that men experience being single differently from women, mostly because of societal norms. Jane said:

The thing of an old maid, but a ba-, a bachelor, it's like completely different stereotypes. ... bachelor is cool, from my perspective, many people, but old maid is not. ... Bachelors are cool; they are, like, like, people think of bachelors as: "It is the guy who can get a bunch of chicks, *do* [emphasis] what he wants, and he has this cool place where he lives". And, they don't see it as a negative thing at all if he is not married, they'll rather say: "Oh, but you were smart". ... Old maid almost has this pathetic meaning to it, although I do think that's busy changing.

Along the same lines, Danny believed that the idea of an old maid was "... so clichéd and so old fashioned. ... society recognizes that women have a certain period that they can realistically have children, naturally. Um, and that puts more pressure on women I think to be in a relationship." As such, according to Danny, men are less pressured to be in relationships because they do not have the responsibility of bearing children. Likewise, Haley explained:

I don't think they experience it the same, completely. [sighs and pauses] Um, I think, it think for men it's sometimes more acceptable to be single than for women ... so yes, the man is the breadwinner, so he earns the most money. So, he must look after the woman, so a woman must have a man. So that's why it is, um, except that it now, yes except that they experience it as more advantageous for a

woman to be in a relationship. Meanwhile for many, for a man it doesn't matter in that way... I think maybe because [pause] because they are seen as, uh, because men are seen that they [pause] are stronger people, that they don't need to get attention.

Similarly, Ella mentioned the double standard between single men and women in society:

I think there, there, the-, are *such* [drawn out] double standards for men and women, it's unbelievable. If a man is still single at 35, it is okay, he's playing the field, he pays attention to his career but it is okay. If a woman is alone at 35, she's over the hill, she can't find someone, she must take what she can get, people wonder all sorts of things about her, what is wrong with her, et cetera, et cetera. And it's difficult. And I think with women in general *crave* [emphasis] more companionship than men.

From the above, it appears as if the participants perceive men's experience of being single to be easier because there is less pressure on them to be in relationships, whether for biological reasons or not, they are not negatively stigmatized for being single, they are the "cool" bachelors; and they are more able to choose to be single than women are. As mentioned earlier, the stigmatization of single people does in fact have a gender bias (Bell & Yans, 2008), with women being stigmatized more than men – especially as far as colloquial terms and women's ability to have children, are concerned. Furthermore, there may also be truth in Gretal's perception that men can choose more freely to be single. Since men are still mostly the initiators of dating contact (England & Thomas, 2007; Sassler & Miller, 2011) – especially on the Internet which has become the main source of finding a romantic partner (Kreager et al., 2014; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012) – men may indeed be more likely to *choose* to be single.

Research, however, indicates that men specifically benefit more from marriage than women do (Monin & Clark, 2011). Reasons provided for this include: the greater social support that wives give to their husbands; women's greater insistence on healthy and preventative behaviours; and the reduced inconvenience of daily activities for men since women tend to perform such tasks of household maintenance. However, these benefits listed by Wanic & Kulik (2011) are all rather *practical* and are not indicative of the benefits of a non-marital or non-cohabiting romantic relationship. Men can thus also benefit from being in a romantic relationship, especially from being married. It is therefore likely that they are aware of these benefits and that they also experience negative feelings when they do not have these benefits. Furthermore, (and this observation applies to the current participants too) never married men in their thirties also start to question why they are single and whether they would be happier in a relationship (Klinenberg, 2012). Men must also accept their identity of being *ever single* and form a new understanding of who they are as single people, especially if they intended to marry at some point in time (Eck, 2013). Men attempt to accept their single situation by focussing on the positives of being single (Sharp & Ganong, 2007) and past negative experiences to substantiate why it is better not to be in a relationship (Davies, 2003). As mentioned previously, like the participants in this study, men also emphasise choice and independence to make sense of their singlehood (Eck, 2013).

I still hope, but I don't.

Some of the participants still hoped to be in a relationship, whilst others have simply lost hope or gave contradictory messages about their hope of finding a partner. Anja was the first to imply that: "... everybody wants someone, where they can just vent, or with whom they can ... just to share with someone". Bella described this as everybody's "... default setting..." and a "... natural process..." She said:

... maybe it's just a person's default setting to be, to, to want to be in a relationship. ... But it's almost like a natural process to pair off ... It, it [giving up hope] will not be very nice, but I don't know when you give up? Do you give up when you die? Do you give up when you're 90? ... at this stage I must unfortunately say almost hopeless And hopeless, I don't know, I hope I never lose hope. But sometimes you go through stage where you think: "Ah, I'm going to die alone, it's terrible".

Similarly, Ella gave contradictory messages:

For a long time I thought: "Oh, I don't even hope anymore, I don't think it exists for me". ... but, I think hope remains... it's, is almost, a bit of a contradiction to what I said earlier, about the hope, the closet romantic that still hopes a bit. But I feel like [sighs], as time goes by I lose hope, and I [have] almost made peace with it. And, um, so I think, at this stage I am resigned, I almost feel, if it happens, fantastic, but I'm not counting on it ... if you take away *expectation* [emphasis] then you give yourself the opportunity to be surprised again. In a way, I am not cynical about love in general; I'm just cynical about love for *myself* [emphasis at start of word].

Similarly, Gretal mentioned:

...I must probably want it before I will get it, right? ... we can fight against it, but in a way we all still wait for our knight in shining armour ... I believe I will get him while I live. ... when I look at it as: "It is my right" – then I become unhappy. Yes, so I try to really see it as a bonus, and not as a right or a necessity in life, because then I become very unhappy. ... And I think that's why I say that marriage is a privilege and not a right. Because the moment that I start to think of it as my right, the world owes it to me, then I become bitter. But to realize that it

is a privilege which I just haven't experienced yet [pause], then at the most I will get sad, but being sad is fine, being bitter is not fine for me.

Differing from the other participants, Haley and Jane seemed to have stopped trying, and have given up hope in finding a partner, respectively. Haley said:

It is also not my goal in life to get someone. I think for a lot of people it is the ultimate goal because this idea has been maintained or presented to you as a child. ... what you could possibly see is that I [have] challenged this idea, I know I don't have to do what the idea tells me to.

Similarly, when I asked Jane whether she thought she would find a partner one day, she replied: "I doubt it. ... Because, like I say, if it still hasn't happened, why [starts laughing] would it happen in the *next* [emphasis] 35 years?" Other studies also find that single women continue to have some hope of finding a partner (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Lewis & Moon, 1997; Situmorang, 2007) since they reserve a space for a father figure for their children, or hold out for a partner before they have children out of wedlock (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). The uncertainty of whether they would still find and marry a partner or not, can, according to Lewis and Moon (1997), be problematic since they cannot achieve closure regarding this issue. They are therefore not able to recognize, resolve, and come to terms with their identity as single women. This argument may, however, be outdated in the current world climate that increasingly acknowledges and values fluidity and uncertainty. It can therefore not be assumed that uncertainty about one's relationship status has a negative influence on women.

5.2.2. Holding on to the "you can" freedom.

When asked how they experienced being single, all of the participants almost immediately replied that it was "*lekker*" [wonderful] because of the freedom they had. However, on closer analysis, it is clear that there is a flipside to this freedom.

5.2.2.1. You can do whatever you want.¹³

When asked about their experience of being single, all seven participants repeatedly – with the exception of Jane who only mentioned it once – mentioned the freedom they had.

Anja described her experience of being single as:

... it is nice because you, you're free, you can do what you want, you don't have someone whom you must report to ... I can do what I want, basically. I can be at work, and I can decide I want to gym, I can go away with friends for a weekend, um, I can get up in the morning and decide what I want to do. I can leave my house dirty if I want to ...

Bella mentioned the freedom:

...but it's nice not to have to tell someone what I'm doing, where I'm going, when I'm going to be back, no one.... Sometimes the, the freedom of being single is more important than anything else...

Danny also expressed enjoying the freedom of being single:

I like the freedom, um that I have to, you know, do what I like. When I get home in the evenings, I can watch whatever I want, I can eat whatever I want. If I want to do work, I have the freedom to do that ... I can make whatever I like, I can watch whatever I want to on TV, it's, ja, you don't.... So I like, I like the freedom that I have now ... um, the liberating part is I have the freedom to do whatever I want, to be quite honest [chuckles]. ... I don't have to worry about anyone, you know, I, I can do as I please and if I get a job overseas tomorrow I can take it.

¹³ Please refer to Appendix 6 for extra information on how Bella and Greta linked freedom to what is expected of them in terms of what they have to do for others.

Similarly, Ella said:

Liberating. ... [sighs] it's nice. You can do what you want, when you want, with whom you want. You don't have to, um, justify yourself to anybody. ... I went overseas a couple of times, and if you are alone it is easy, because you can do just what suits you ... I can really do just what I want ... You can really do just what you want. ... Um, independent, you can come and go like you want, you can do with your finances what you want, you can choose your own friends, and again you don't have to justify it to someone else. Um [pause], you have freedom of movement, and, and freedom of thought and you don't have to feel as if you are offending someone by thinking differently or doing differently...

Gretal also mentioned her freedom:

... there're a lot of nice things about it, I have a lot of freedom... freedom in terms of time, and money, and choices, I can do what I want, when I want, like I want, with whom I want. ...um, yes I think that's the big freedom, yes. I like freedom, to be able to do what I want, when I want.

By the same token, Haley described her experience of being single as:

And because I can do just what I want. I like that. I don't have to [takes deep breath] ask someone, anyone's permission before I do something. ... I can just do what I want ... [very long pause] Okay, I feel free, like because I can do what I want.

Lastly, Jane said: "I can do what I want, I am very ... I don't like it to be told what to do; and ... I can come and go as I want." Thus, in general, all seven participants mentioned that they liked being single because it was "lekker" [wonderful] to have freedom.

This freedom that the participants reported to enjoy can be linked to the main benefit of being single mentioned in the literature: Single women in other studies also indicate that they appreciate the independence they experience in various aspects of their lives (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Baumbusch, 2004; Lewis & Moon, 1997), and the autonomy to live their lives the way they pleased (Dales, 2014; Wang & Abbott, 2013). Similar to the participants in the current study, the women in other studies enjoy the freedom of not having to consider another person, being able to choose their own social activities, and controlling their own finances (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Baumbusch, 2004; Dales, 2014; Lewis & Moon, 1997; Wang & Abbott, 2013). In addition, the older women become, the more they perceive that marriage would be at the cost of their freedom (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Ferguson, 2000). Other researchers also find that the women in their study did not want to give up their freedom by entering into a relationship, because that would imply losing competent parts of themselves (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). Similarly, Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) also found that loss of autonomy – especially in a patriarchal country such as Nigeria where a wife is seen as the property of her husband – is one particular hurdle single women perceive the need to overcome. However, it should be noted that for the participants in the current study, the freedom that they cherished seemed to be mostly theoretical in the sense that they spoke about what they *could* do, and not what they actually *did* do with the freedom that comes with singlehood. Additionally, the participants mostly described their freedom by speaking in the second or third person which made them appear rather removed from the freedom they stated that they valued. Hence, it remains unclear whether they practically utilize and live their freedom, and whether it is a positive and mostly intellectual frame to make their singlehood more palatable.

Maybe I've spoken too harshly; maybe I wouldn't lose my freedom¹⁴.

When the participants spoke about their ideas of being in a committed relationship, they had some strong opinions about the restrictions related to a committed relationship. For example, Anja described a partner as someone whom you had to “report to”. Likewise, Bella said a partner is someone “... [I] have to tell what I'm doing where I'm going when I'm going to be back, that type of thing. ... someone you have to take into account”. Similarly, Ella said: “You must take the other person into account. You know, if you want to go out then you must at least send an SMS and say, ‘I'm coming home later tonight.’” Jane also had concerns that a partner would tell her what she could or could not do. She stated that “... usually then they [a partner] is like: ‘You may not see these people, or you may not go there, or you may not do this.’” By the same token, Haley said that a partner is “... someone [whose] permission [I] have to ask before I do something ... before I bring something home, before I take out a DVD ‘do you want to watch this?’ or so ...”

However, when I questioned and probed these ideas, they reconsidered their words and softened their formulations. In reconsidering their words, they chose to rather refer to not having to take someone into account. Bella said: “So, not to have to [pause] take someone into account can be advantageous.” In the same way, Danny said: “So there's no pressure you know to, um, take someone else into consideration.” Likewise, Ella said: “You don't have to take other people into account.” Lastly, Haley also said: “No. I don't necessarily have to ask someone's permission, like it sounds very much almost patriarchal. ... I should have said to, um, take someone into account ... like I must almost, um, compromise somewhere”

¹⁴ Please refer to Appendix 6 for more detail regarding the participants' perception of a partner as a threat to their freedom.

In her second interview, Danny also said that since the first interview she had reviewed her notion about one's freedom being restricted in a relationship:

... it's something that I've thought about [pause] after we did our last interview ... to what extreme do you lose freedom when you're in a relationship ... I've really thought about this ... am I being a little bit too extreme thinking that just because you're in a relationship you, you lose all your freedom? Yeah [pause] and I realize that, you know, you have a say in this, it's not like you're taken prisoner when you enter into a relationship...

One possible explanation for their emphasis on the loss of freedom that comes with a relationship is that it showed their singlehood in a more positive light. It also allows a redefinition of themselves as strong and independent women who refuse to be *told* what to do by men, similar to the women in previous research (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). This is comparable to what Eck finds in his (or her) study of single men, that the men relied on the "...repertoires of choice, independence, and self-development as a way of making meaning of the unanticipated state" (Eck, 2013, p. 58). The current participants' descriptions of their experience of being single as *it's okay*, *it's our choice*, and *we are free*, may therefore indicate that they use the same cognitive strategy to make sense of, and accept, their current situation. However, this possible rationalisation seems to be tenuous because it did not hold up under scrutiny by the participants themselves.

5.2.2.2. "... the aloneness brings the freedom, and the freedom the loneliness"

Even though the participants seemed to value and enjoy their freedom, four participants acknowledged that there was a downside to it; or they contradicted one of the advantages of the freedom they mentioned. Anja, for example, stated as part of her freedom that she "... can go away for a weekend". However, later in the interview she said something rather different: "... couples sometimes go away on weekends, um, it's difficult to go away on

your own.” In the same way Bella – who often enjoys not having to accommodate someone after a long day of work – later in the interview pointed out that coming home alone after work was not always ideal:

And tomorrow I come back from work, tired, and then I think: “Gee, it would be nice if there was someone who could make me some tea” ... and sometimes it is [pause]: “Ah hell, here I’m going home, alone again”.

Ella, whose friends would often say: “Gosh but it’s nice, you can do all of these things”, described her reaction to this sometimes as: “Yes, you say that it is nice now, but you are not necessarily completely aware of the flipside.” When asked to describe the “flipside”, Ella replied:

Ah, just that you are sometimes simply alone. I don’t necessarily say *lonely*, *lonely* [drawn out emphasis] ... sometimes you just feel: “Ah, it would be nice to have someone to share this with”. ... a lot of the things I do, you do on your own. So, it is just part of the drawbacks.

Gretal made a direct connection between her freedom and experiencing loneliness:

... it is precisely the aloneness which brings the freedom, but sometimes it is the freedom that also brings the loneliness ... and the picture which I’m getting now is almost this, this freedom where there, but there is no structure, no plan to it ... I miss that more and more, to have someone, to not have that freedom, almost not to know what to do with your time, your money, your caring.

Previous research indicates that loneliness is the primary disadvantage of being single (Lewis & Moon, 1997; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014; Wang & Abbott, 2013).

Additionally, Lahad and Hazan (2014) found that single women do not resist the cultural scripts which portray long-term singlehood as empty, lonely, and a loss. This formulation of

singlehood does indeed portray a horrendous future of living a "... lonely, mentally unstable and socially marginal life..." (p. 130) if they do not find partners (Lahad & Hazan, 2014). Whilst not explicitly mentioned as the main disadvantage of being single, the current participants clearly stated that it was indeed a major drawback of singlehood. The participants also seemed to link this negative experience to the freedom they had. Essentially, the current participants' linking of loneliness and freedom seemed to be related to their experience of having no significant other who cared about what they did, when, where, or how. As such, no special person attached meaning to their lives, making it more difficult for them to attach meaning to their own lives (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2008). Secondly, as was mentioned by Gretal, it was possible to feel overwhelmed at times, by the options offered by their freedom and they seemed to long for the automatic structure and togetherness that couple hood tends to bring.

In conclusion, whilst the participants said they enjoyed being single because of the freedom they had, it was an ambiguous and complex "can" freedom which often seemed unutilized. The participants also seemed ambivalent about whether they would lose this freedom when they entered into a relationship or not. Lastly, Anja, Bella, Ella, and Gretal also made reference – sometimes indirectly – to the drawbacks they experienced as a consequence of their freedom.

5.2.3. A partner means obliged companionship and shared activities.

All the participants had quite a lot to say about their perceptions and opinions of what they expected from a partner. The foundation of these opinions was based on what the participants observed, and for some, what they experienced in past relationships.

5.2.3.1. A form of obliged support and someone who is simply there.

Aside from the participants' apparent concerns about the possible threat a partner posed to their individual freedom, they had a fairly positive view of a partner. Six participants

mentioned some level of support that came with the mere presence of a partner. Anja mentioned:

And if you had a bad day, there's someone with whom you can share [that]... but you also want to [pause] know he's on his way home ... they [couples] at least have someone at home at night. Whereas I go *to* [drawn out] a cold, empty flat at home at night.

Similarly, Bella said:

It is someone whom you can call when things go badly, but also someone who is happy with you [pause] but it just feels like almost, if there is someone who shares that joy with you, then, it makes it so much sweeter. Um, so it's not just someone who's there for you in the bad times, but it's also someone who is truly happy for you [pause] and that is again that "you're my number one" thing. ... but most of the times I come home and think: "Gee, it would have been nice now [pause] to talk to someone a bit." [Pause] Um, so, [pause] I miss that companionship a lot.

In a comparable way Jane explained:

I would like to have someone else whom you could phone, yes. ... it's just someone with whom you can share everything, tell everything; who, you know, will be there; I [stutters] I would like to have that, long term.

Ella described her perception of a partner as: "...that person [who] um, must go with you to whatever event, you know that companionship, it is important to me." Similarly, Gretal mentioned:

Like, it's a bit selfish, maybe someone who will just focus on me [laughs] yes. ... And yes, a sounding board, someone who can almost tell me: "But listen, just yesterday you said you're looking forward to this, what's going on with you

today?” Or whatever. Yes, just a sounding board. ... Ugh, it is stuff such as struggling with, um, practical stuff for example, an old example is to struggle with a car [laughs] or... Oh, practical stuff such as going to a wedding, you're invited with a date. That's difficult for me. So, I think it would be nice to ... have that partner, someone with whom, who goes through the motions with you. Yes, I sometimes really feel as if *no one* [emphasis] knows about my doings. ... I really want, I think, someone to share my life with. ... I think I really just want someone to live with. ... Yes, just that someone who knows about me. ... I almost want to say someone who lives with me every day...

In the same way Haley described how it would be if she had a partner. She said:

As in, if a person has a lot of things that you must do, then if you are in a relationship you can share the tasks: This one does this, and that one does that. But, if you are just on your own, then it feels to me like I'm struggling with that. ... I am going home tonight [and then I] can't tell anyone what happened today and how I feel about it. ... If I think about it “Ugh, I have no one, I have a lot of things to do, and I wish I could just give someone something [to do], then it is really something which makes be very sad.

*Thus, I won't have to do things alone.*¹⁵

The *lack* of the constant presence and support of a partner also implied that often the participants had to do things *alone*.

¹⁵ Please refer to Appendix 6 for extra information provided by Haley and Ella for why they do not like going to events with couples or why they would rather share certain activities; respectively.

Danny, for example, spoke about going to coffee shops alone:

Um, I used to do it quite often, but now it's tapered off a bit. ... And often you would see people alone there and you'd think: "Ah, it would be so nice, you know, to um, to maybe just have coffee with this person", but you're just too shy, and you, you don't know how they're going to react.

Similarly, Ella said:

... a lot of the things that I do, a person does on one's own. So that is now part of the drawbacks ... a lot of the times I travel on my own. And it is nice, but it also has a bit of its, its, its drawbacks. ... there are other things which you *don't* [emphasis] necessarily, you want to share it with someone ... a person cannot, for example, go alone and eat at a nice restaurant ... Especially not in South Africa, because people will look very weirdly at you. ... I, would *rather* [emphasis] do things alone than not do them at all ... And there are things in my life, which, I then don't, out, out miss out on. So then I shall do things alone, but people will in the first instance, would *rather* [emphasis] do it with *someone* [emphasis]. ... It *rather takes* [emphasis] sometimes, it depends on what you do, but sometimes it takes guts to do something on your own.

By the same token, Haley mentioned:

[Sighs quite heavily] The worst thing for me is if I really want someone to go and do something with, there is no one ... Um, yet I sometimes feel alone ... if one wants to do something with someone, then, then there is no one to do it with.

Lastly, Jane also referred to the fact that she generally goes to functions alone. She said: "You're alone, you don't have someone to sha-, to share things with, you must go to functions alone."

Aside from generally doing things alone, as can be seen above, five participants mentioned going away for weekends alone, or doing things with couples alone which they find specifically difficult because they do not have a partner. Anja said: "If a person thinks about couples going away for weekends, um, it's difficult to go away on your own." Bella started to avoid this: "So, I get tired of going out with couples. And, um, especially going away for a weekend with couples. I try to actually, without [pause] without insulting someone, I try to avoid it." Ella also mentioned her dislike of going away for weekends alone: "... if you [sighs and pauses] want to drive out to Namaqualand for a weekend to go and look at the flowers, there isn't necessarily someone to do that with, not everything is nice to do alone."

Differing slightly from the three examples above, Jane did not mention going away for a weekend, but simply mentioned going to dinner parties with friends who are in relationships:

Disadvantages [of being single]: To go to dinner parties alone, that sucks! ... Because everyone are couples, and then you feel like out if you are single ... or any social event where it is couples, couples ... then you are like [funny voice]: "Okay [said drawn out], awesome, I'm sitting at the head of the table and everyone are [sic] couple, couple, couple". And you feel like an idiot.

Similarly, Haley said:

... couples, they sit together and eat, and then they go and dance together, or they go and stand outside and they drink a little something. It is like that if you are with someone, you who are alone, then go and talk to someone; then you are like the fifth wheel and I don't like being that. ... [Takes deep breath] I have gone out with some of my colleagues, like with the one colleague and her husband ... they speak about little things with each other; and then I am there, and then [pause] I

wonder if I can say something about it. Because it is not necessarily, the stuff they talk about is not necessarily the type of thing which I can say s-, they are not generally things like [sighs] the weather [laughs] about which anyone is welcome to give their input. It is usually something which involves them.

Weddings¹⁶ were mentioned by four of the participants as events where the lack of a partner was particularly difficult to navigate. Ella said:

... like I say, to actually go to events and weddings and so on. I'm at the point now where I just tell people: "I'm coming on my own", because I've had very bad experiences due to inviting people along and then it really doesn't work out. ... you have an acquaintance or a friend of a friend who says: "Ah, you know, invite him along, because he's nice", and then it is a disaster ... if a person gets invited to weddings and that type of thing, then it is always an issue for me to find someone to take along with me, because almost all my male friends are married ... So it, it, it is rather an issue.

Similarly, Gretal said:

... like to go to weddings, you're invited with a date. I find it difficult ... Once or twice I did go alone and it was a very big mistake, I really felt terrible when I went alone, then rather a blind date or a strange guy, but not alone again ... one still sticks out like a sore thumb [laughs] who, um, is there alone, and all those couples.

¹⁶ Please refer to Appendix 6 for explanations provided by Gretal and Haley for why they experience weddings as particularly difficult to attend without a partner. Anja, Ella, Gretal and Haley also mention how this has changed.

When asked about going to weddings alone, Jane simply replied:

On my own? No, I would rather not go than go to a wedding on my own. ... Now because it sucks, it is like everyone is a couple, everyone dances, there is two, two, two at a table. Nah ah!

Along the same lines Haley described how she would rather make up an excuse than go to the wedding of a close friend:

But I'm procrastinating, because, um, actually I really want to go, but it is [sighs], it will be difficult for me to get someone. ... I will [pause and sighs] it will definitely be uncomfortable, it's going to be awkward. ... But there's just certain things which I find difficult, like if I go to a wedding now, then I will have to find someone to go with. That is what makes it more difficult. [I will phone my friend and say:] "Listen here, I won't make it now...." which is stupid, but, but that's just to avoid ...

The lack of companionship as a drawback of being single was found in previous studies (see Baumbusch, 2004; Dales, 2014; Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Lewis & Moon, 1997). For example, Lewis and Moon (1997) also find that women missed a companion and someone to share their interests with. In a more recent study, Baumbusch (2004) finds loneliness to be the main drawback mentioned by her participants who have been single their whole lives. However, the participants of Baumbusch's study belonged to a different age group (65 to 79 years old); hence, they also mentioned missing the companionship of grandchildren particularly. However, a recent study by Dales (2014) – with a more comparable age group of 30 to 49 years – indicated that doing things alone is indeed of great importance to single women in order to gain agency. To be sure a website by Iwashita

Kumiko¹⁷ specifically targeted women who want to eat out or travel alone, providing *ohitorisama* with guidelines to doing things alone. Dales (2014) argues that the *ohitorisama* model is a means of overcoming the stigma and discomfort accompanying solo activities of single women. Yet, her participants, similar to mine, still experienced the psychological barriers to being a visibly single social presence, noting the exclusion from social spaces. Whilst eating out, going to coffee shops, and going on holiday alone are everyday acts which do not impede married people from participation, they exemplify the kind of unconventional behaviour for single women who requires explanation, justification, and advocacy (Dales, 2014). Additionally, the loneliness and solitary life of single women can also be detected in the discourse used to describe them, specifically the connection to the term of being the *crazy cat lady* as can be seen in the following blog by Banosh (2011):

... the cruel destiny which awaits a woman who remains single. She might be cast as the “crazy cat lady”; this aging, solitary, poor woman who hangs around the neighbourhood with her night gown on and feeds all the neighbourhood cats (see Lahad & Hazan, 2014, p. 130).

Lahad and Hazan (2014) hold that the companionship of cats have specifically come to symbolize the lack of men in single women's lives, with cats presumably becoming the only companions of single women. As a matter of interest, Lahad and Hazan (2014) offers the fact that cats are seen as independent and far less sociable than dogs to be the reason as to why cats are chosen to present single women¹⁸.

Furthermore, research indicates that, similar to the current findings, there are specific activities which *trigger* the discomfort of the participants (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Sharp &

¹⁷ The website, named the Association for the Promotion of the Single, was started in 1999 and later published as the book *Ohitorisama* (Dales, 2014).

¹⁸ Whereas dogs are chosen to represent the more sociable nature of single men (Rogers, 2001).

Ganong, 2011). Much like the current findings, Sharp and Ganong (2011) find that weddings are particularly uncomfortable events for single women to attend. Participants experience feelings of exposure, heightened visibility, and vulnerability at weddings which is also clearly evident in the quotations above. Aside from the fact that the participants feel that they were different from all the other couples, and hence more visible to others and having an increasing sense of marginalization; other reasons why weddings in particular act as triggers can be guessed at. It is possible that weddings remind the participants of what they *want* – for most at least – and what they *do not* have. This then triggers thoughts of doubt as to why they are single and what is wrong with them (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

5.2.3.2. Why specifically a partner?

Three participants mentioned that friends and family did not provide the same kind of effortless and obligatory companionship that they associated with a partner. This was evident when Bella said:

... you become a burden to your friends if you [pause] where from a, from a partner kind of expect. *It's* [drawn out] kind of his [pause and laughs] in his job description. ... And also, if you have a partner, then the person is in any case mostly physically there, so you don't have to go and search for the support. ... If you are my partner then [pause] I have that [pause] automatic expectation ... you don't have to say anything, and its fine. Where if it is a friend, then I sort of *must* [emphasis] go and tell it to you. ... and I think this is the biggest thing a person misses out on when you are single is, is [pause] you will in any case make me feel better whether I say something or not...

This was mirrored by Ella:

...if you are in a relationship, the other person is sort of obliged to share it with you; [laughs] which makes it easier maybe... that that person, if they are officially

your *kys* [steady date], is officially your boyfriend, is obliged to be on your side.

Um, even more so than your family. ... So your boyfriend or girlfriend is the person who must be on your side, it is *your* [emphasis] person, it's, it's the person who is always there for *you* [emphasis].

Similarly, Greta expressed:

I think to have a partner, or to have a husband, would almost be like, um, almost a designated supporter [laughs]; someone who um, who's supposed to be, to know what I'm going through, because now I sift the whole time. [Pause] ... to me it feels like so much effort to keep the friends who are interested up to date. Um [pause], while I think, if [I] had someone with me, it would almost have been spontaneous.

It is evident that the participants perceived a partner to provide more readily available companionship and support than their friends and family. Laubach (2013) proposes that people's perception that a partner's support is more valuable than other people's support may be due to society's unbalanced emphasis on the importance of a romantic relationship.

5.2.4. (Un)wanted attention from the right man.

The participants' varied experiences and perceptions of men were influenced by their previous romantic relationships, dating, and general interactions with men. The experiences and perceptions were so varied that, in a manner of speaking, the only similarity was the dissimilarity of the descriptions. However, some common experiences¹⁹ were discernible: the effect of a man's attention on women's perceptions of themselves; predatory men; and the perception that being single is easier for men.

¹⁹ Please refer to Appendix 6 for other experiences described by the participants. These include: Why a relationship started; The end of a relationship; Break-up and new perspectives; Other negative experiences of men; The Internet experience; Men and my education; and Enlightened or old-school men.

5.2.4.1. A man's attention.

The participants generally referred to the validating effect of men's attention. For example, Danny described that Dirk's attention affirmed her:

... but I think it was just um, fun ... just to have that interaction and that attention, and the attraction ... it was really exciting. I, I was actually quite happy, and what's interesting is that I was very confident during that time. ... well it's physical attention, touching, um, taking me out ... um, phoning me, emailing me, um, so just that contact

Haley described that she felt nurtured by the attention she received from a man who took her out:

It was really enjoyable ... I know he made it all about me. ... he really wanted me to be comfortable: "What do you want to eat, what do you want to drink?" and he *paid*²⁰ [emphasis] and dropped me off at home. ... I think deep inside me I actually wish to be nurtured like that. I think that's where it comes from. ... I once experienced it, with someone, to connect with someone. And we didn't, we didn't touch each other. ... it was just the fact that someone tried to understand me.

Similar to Danny's reaction, Jane's experience was that Jeff improved her self-confidence:

And I'm actually more confident in myself, so if someone doesn't like me, go away. ... But I think it has also something to do with a man [laughs] that I started seeing then ... He helped me a lot with self-confidence.

Conversely, the break-up of a relationship with a man led to Gretal doubt herself:

²⁰ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Danny and Haley's explanation of why they appreciate men's paying the bill for them.

I asked myself a lot of questions: "...am I not nice enough ... capable enough in a relationship?"... That was the broken part, the very, very sore part ... I really wondered why *I* [emphasis] cannot be in a relationship? What is it that causes my inability to be in one ... I always look for the fault within myself, what did I do wrong, what didn't I do enough of, or did too much of? ... both times I went through it rather *deeply* [emphasis] ... I always look for the issue with myself.

Similarly, Jane blamed herself when her relationship ended: "And immediately I thought: 'There's something wrong with me, isn't there?' Then I said: 'Well, why not, are you embarrassed about me?'"

Thus, the participants indicated that they felt affirmed and validated by the romantic attention of a man, and tended to doubt and/or blame themselves after the ending of a relationship. They did not seem to consider the possibility that the men who ended the relationships might be at fault. This suggests that they may have internalized the patriarchal views that women's value is measured by the opinions of men and the value men place on them. These patriarchal views are often portrayed in the gendered representations of popular media, which in turn are strongly influenced by society and culture (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Popular media endorse and emphasize a femininity that revolves around the importance of attracting male attention in order to feel like a successful, feminine woman. Thus, when not attracting 'enough' attention from men, women are perceived as being in danger of not fulfilling their life's goal of marriage and a family – and, in turn, failing at being feminine women. Especially in popular media, women are then encouraged to make an effort at improving their chances to get a man, for example by beautifying themselves (Milestone & Meyer, 2012).

The body and physical attraction.

In line with the aforementioned, the participants referred to their own physical appeal when they talked about their relationships with men. Danny, for example, explained how Dirk made her feel:

I felt good about myself, I felt attractive ... I think more confident in my appearance, and my attractiveness ... telling me that he's attracted to me ... and just you know his body language around me was very, you know, I could tell that he was attracted to me and that he enjoyed my company

This was in contrast to her description of her relationship with Dan, especially when they broke up:

... I think that [the body language] made me feel very bad about myself, like I was an unattractive person. ... it was just terrible. ... he also said he realizes he's not attracted to me, and ... he actually said that he's repulsed by me ... he used those exact words, that he wasn't attracted to me, that was one of the reasons why he broke up, why he ended the engagement. ... I don't, I'm not attractive ... I don't look a certain way.

Similarly, Greta also started to doubt her appearance after the attention of men had been withdrawn: "I asked myself a lot of questions: 'Am I not pretty enough, am I not nice enough ... capable enough in a relationship?'" She also continued to explain how her relationship status influenced her body image:

I have just realised in myself that the times that I feel at ease with being single, are the times that I find it easier to make an effort with myself. It's actually weird how it works the wrong way round. And the time that I feel lonely, and down with being single, those are the times that I almost have trouble with myself to make

sure that I make an effort with my appearance; so it works a bit inversely, hey? It, um, I want to believe that I actually have enough self-respect to make myself neat and beautiful even if I don't have someone ... But on the other hand I also realise that the times when I was in a relationship, it was almost more enjoyable to take care of myself for someone ...

In a similar vein, Haley perceived physical appearance to be related to her relationship status – especially why she was single:

... they [men] want people who look like models. ... I have always believed there is something physically wrong with me, like how I look ... because, firstly: I am bigger than the average woman ... men don't like to choose a woman who, in the first place, is bigger than them.

The participants thus perceived a woman's physical appearance to be of great importance to men. Furthermore, they suggested that their own body image is strongly influenced by male attention, or the approval of men. Many feminists have highlighted the manner in which femininity is achieved through physical compliance with conventional beauty ideals (for example, see Bartky, 1990). However, the same does not hold true for men who are not subjected to constant and rigorous disciplinary strategies to uphold physical appeal as women are (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Women are thus defined and valued in terms of their physical appearance (which in turn is closely linked to age and the ability to bear children (Lahad & Hazan, 2014)); anything else, such as a career and education, are seen as secondary. This is especially true for the women depicted in popular women's magazines in which a key theme is how women can look good in order to attract the attention of men (Ballaster et al., 1991; McRobbie, 2000; Tincknell, Chambers, Van Loon, & Hudson, 2003). As mentioned by Haley, what counts as acceptable physical appeal (or the ideal beauty) is very narrowly defined as small, thin, with silky hair (Milestone & Meyer, 2012) and,

paradoxically, 'natural' beauty is seen as what men want most (McRobbie, 2000). Women, who do not possess this 'natural beauty' which men want, are encouraged to improve their physical appeal cosmetically in order to achieve the ideal beauty. This undermines any messages by feminists in which femininity can also be marked by confidence and independence (Tincknell et al., 2003). Thus, even though a woman (or in this case the participants) may have a successful career, confidence and independence, her feminine identity is still constructed by her physical appearance and appeal to men (Kilbourne, 2003). Similarly, although the current participants also seemed to define themselves in terms of their education, this identification did not seem to hold up as far as men were concerned, in which instance physical appeal seemed to be of the greatest importance.

5.2.4.2. Unwanted men's attention.

Three participants also spoke about their perceptions of unwanted sexual advances from men. Jane, for example, described how she experienced the sexual overtures of older married men from her home town; men she used to look up to as a child:

... the big problem, something which really shocked me, all of a sudden they [men] proposition themselves to me and then I think like "Holy crap" ... and then the men sleep around, and they try to pick me up. Then I'm like: "What about your wife?" [And they'll say:] "Oh, don't think about it like that". ... It's actually gross. They become all touchy and [pause] "Come here with me." Or, I want to now, they try to, like, press up against you; then you're just like: "I don't think so".

Similarly, Danny explained her disapproval of the sexual advances of the men she met online:

Well, I had [sighs] really strange men contacting me. And from the outset, you know, making sexual advances. Sending pictures, wanting me to send pictures,

nude pictures; and I just didn't feel comfortable... I didn't feel comfortable then I knew: "This isn't for me. This isn't gonna work for me." So I took down my profile.

Whilst Danny experienced men's sexual advances as uncomfortable, Gretal described feeling bad and coming to the realization that: "... the type of man I want is scarce". She continued to describe her experience as:

... online dating, gee, it's a jungle out there [both laugh]. ... from guys who want someone for a threesome for their marriage... Um, it was just bad for me... he [sighs] sent me a rather vulgar video ... it was really just bad for me ... it was just rather [pause] it was a bit insulting to me that he sent me this joke about underwear and erections... I was sort of disillusioned; we do things differently [from men].

In accordance to the descriptions provided by the participants, hegemonic masculinity is portrayed by a strong and natural sex drive; men seek constant sexual gratification, irrespective of commitment and emotions which are linked to femininity. Gender norms thus allow for certain characteristics and practices (such as a heightened sex drive) to be seen as typical and appropriate for men. However, the current participants described a dislike and discomfort with the overt nature of some men's sexual approaches. This is in accordance with feminine gender norms in which women are required to be sexually reticent and to fend off men's sexual advances (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Furthermore, this is also reminiscent of Christianity's requirement that women should act as the educators and caretakers of religious practices (Ahrold et al., 2011), including the responsibility of maintaining virginity and virtuous sexual conduct (Jones et al., 2005).

5.2.5. We are educated and independent women!

As mentioned earlier, previous research indicates that education influences the stigmatization of single women, especially with regard to who is likely to be single and why. However, to my knowledge (and at the time of the initial research process), research has failed to provide a qualitative description of the influence of education on the lived experience of single women. Thus it can be said that the current study addresses this gap in the literature because it describes the influence of education and socio-economic status on the lived experience of single women, in terms of how they describe themselves; how these factors influence the type of man they were willing to go out with; and how their education helped them to cope with being single, either directly or indirectly.

5.2.5.1. It is part of who I am.

In describing themselves, three participants made specific mention of their education and/or careers. Bella for example, said:

... I made a shift when I was 32, I moved to [a different type of work]. And uh, after a while I realized: "It's a good thing that I made this move [pause], now I'll check it out a bit, but this is not me" ... I must work at [where she works now]. ... It's a big relief to realize: "Actually it fits what you [pause] do, or will be doing again soon, it fits." And then it is, it's not an acceptance of bad; it's an acceptance of something positive. And that makes everything easier.

Differing slightly from Bella, Anja explained her description on an Internet dating site:

... I am, well, I am the person who I am in terms of, I am a bit of a nerdy type of girl ... it wasn't indicated there that I work but there was indi-, well ... But um, I did write that [long pause] I am a smart person, I have a good job ... I work very

hard, and that is just part of it, and I like what I do. ... Um, I have the career that I want to have. ... Yes, in terms of my career I know where I'm going. And [pause] I am happy where I am at the moment [pause] but within the next few years I shall be a professor, yes.

Similarly, Danny mentioned:

Um, the type of work I do, because I'm working in academics, I bring work home a lot. Um, marking and research, and it takes [sic] up a lot of my spare time. And I think people that don't work in academics don't always get that, you know. That you not, you don't have so much free time, I think I'm quite ambitious, and I want to use as much of my free time as possible to do research and to move forward with my career. And, I think if I was [sic] in a relationship, it would be more tricky to do that, because I would *have* [emphasis] to spend time with that person ... So, at the moment I've got absolute freedom with regards to that. I don't have to worry, you know: "Am I spending enough time with my partner?"

From the last quotation it would seem as if Danny suggested a trade-off between spending time with a partner, and spending time on furthering her career. This is similar to the earlier research findings of a qualitative study by O'Brein (1991) where the single women also felt they had to choose between a career and having a spouse. Similarly, in a more recent study, Baumbusch (2004) finds that some of the participants described how they had chosen to be single in order to focus on their professional careers.²¹ Additionally, previous research found their participants to also perceive women's domestic duties to hinder achievement of personal goals such as furthering their education (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Ntoimo &

²¹ Please note that the aforementioned studies mentioned as comparable examples focussed on different age groups: O'Brein interviewed women aged 80 and above, whilst Baumbusch focussed on women between the ages of 65 and 79 years. These women are likely to have experienced different social settings in their earlier years regarding the compatibility of career success and marriage.

Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). The findings of Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) specifically highlight the constraints which household production imposes on women in more patriarchal societies such as Nigeria – and seemingly also South Africa. This is similar to findings by Dales (2014). Her participants also mentioned their education and careers to be important to them, and the perception that domestic duties will impede on their studies. Lastly, O'Brien (1991) also finds that single women considered their careers as a major source of self-identity, similar to the current participants who seem to define themselves through their education.

5.2.5.2. I can only date certain men.

In the last quotation from Danny, she hinted at the importance her education and/or career had in terms of her relationship with a partner – and this was mentioned by five participants. In general, the influence of their education and/or their careers can be divided into two sections: 'thus they must be educated or at least ambitious,' and 'a woman's education and income as a perceived threat to men.'

Thus they must be educated or at least ambitious.

Danny described her preference for educated men:

... I've always been attracted to men who are eq-, who are well educated. ... I, I've never dated or been interested in someone who, you know, doesn't have a job, or has at least done some tertiary type of education. I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing, if I'm being judgemental, if I'm setting my standard too high.

Anja explained why she wanted an educated man:

I like, or I can't see myself with someone who isn't, he doesn't necessarily have to be highly educated ... I can't see myself in a relationship with someone who is, for example, a bank cashier. I want an equal, yes. ... It is more difficult, because there are fewer people who come into consideration. ... it will be

someone who, for example, is also in the academics, or someone who just has a professional job, um, maybe a lawyer, maybe a CA, maybe um, someone who is just a doctor or, you know a me-, someone who also just understands that I have my own career. And [who] also [pause] understands the process you went through, you have that education. ... but someone who can also just understand that my work is rather important to me and if I have to work late one day, then I work late.

Bella also mentioned not being able to date an uneducated man:

... it is difficult to date someone who is not completely as smart as you are.²² It makes a difference. It sounds very snobbish, but [pause] but if you are smart then you must kind of hold back. And uh, [pause] I don't play dumb well [pause and laughs]. It doesn't work. I'm not going to pretend as if I don't know something, because it will make you feel better. ... If you don't ge-, uh, maybe even more important than that is, is drive and ambition. Because [sighs], yes. It is immensely frustrating if, if someone is also happy with the fact that they know nothing and aren't going anywhere and they do nothing about it.

Likewise, Greta mentioned:

It does, it plays a role. It does. ... it is almost an automatic reaction if someone has spelling errors in his, in his [internet] profile, then I'm immediately put off So, okay, I could also spell after matric, but I just think now that I'm so much further, I'm just so much more irritated actually with [laughs] with stuff like that. ... I don't necessarily want to marry an academic ... anyone who has a passion for his work and who tries to do his work as good as I do mine. ... it is important to me.

²² Please refer to Appendix 6 for a description of what happened when Bella was asked on a date by someone she did not see as compatible.

Because I think if a person has studied further, it does say something about drive and ambition ... even if he hasn't studied further, but just to have a lot of drive and ambition is his work is important to me.

*A woman's education and income as a perceived threat to men.*²³

Aside from wanting men to understand that their work was time consuming, important to them, and to understand the process of attaining a degree; five participants mentioned that their education level might be intimidating to men. Anja said:

... for a woman who is highly educated, you need someone who is not... a guy who is not threatened by your education. Because there are people who think: "Listen here, I don't want anything to do with that, um, a man must look after a lady", because it is, we still have a rather traditional society in many of those ways.

Similarly, Bella mentioned:²⁴

I think one [referring to an educated woman] intimidates people a bit, without meaning to. ... It plays a very big role. Um, for me it would be ideal to have someone who had more money than me. ... a financial, at least equal relationship is non-negotiable. I don't think I can date someone who earns R10 000 per month. It's just not going to work. ... Most men, whatever they say, still believe in any case that the man is supposed to make the money. So, it is intimidating, I suspect ... obviously my contribution [pause] in the amount of work input and output, I don't really want it to be much bigger than yours, because it's going to

²³ Please refer to Appendix 6 for the participants' perception on Elightened versus Old School men.

²⁴ Please refer to Appendix 6 for a short description of why Bella would ideally not work at all.

become an issue [pause] okay, we can talk about it, but I can almost tell you it will not work.

Gretal described being “too much”:²⁵

I've always thought I um, I'm not enough, but then one day I realized that's actually not what's going on. In fact I sometimes feel too much. ... Too much in terms of, I am relatively sorted out, I can look after myself, I can do most things for myself, I have a very full life without, without a man, and um, and I studied further, and I have strong opinion, and I like things. I really try now, with sport also, to keep myself healthy and busy, so I've heard that it threatens people, that it threatens men. Yes, so the too much is now more than the not enough. ... I think then it's again that thing of too much, I feel too much, too sorted out, too settled, too self-assured whatever [sighs].

Accordingly, Haley believed she challenged men:

But, what I've thought about, um [long pause], it's actually why I'm more sure there is nothing wrong with me, it's because [pause] because about the standards that I have about certain things. Like, there are some thing about which I, I can't accept second best [pause] yes, I can't [slight laugh] a-, or if someone says something and I know it is not my standpoint, then I can't just keep quiet. And I think maybe some men don't like it when they're challenged.

However, this was contradictory to what Haley had said earlier:

I do rather think it could intimidate people ... Um, but still if I take into account the environment in which I am, like in this town, everyone has at least a master's

²⁵ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Gretal's description of her reaction to being too much.

degree or honours degree. It's, it's not magnificent, so it can't really intimidate people here. Um, so yes, I think it can play a role; but not, I don't think it plays a role here.

In a different way, Jane also affirmed the belief that men were intimidated by a woman's education level:

... men in general think I'm a dumb blonde. ... But I [stutters] give that impression a lot. ... oh, laugh at their silly jokes, pretend that you don't understand. ... And it's easier that way. ... Because otherwise they always start, especially when I say ... I'm in the [social sciences] business then they start all these [pause] irritating remarks and [pause] I don't like that. And it is easier to pretend you are dumb, than to constantly try and argue with them about something.

The notion of seeking an educated partner is not unique to the current study. Previous research indicates that educated women seek egalitarian marriages (Rhoads, 2012; Wang & Abbot, 2013) and would rather wait for a husband who meets most of their ideal qualities (Wang & Abbott, 2013) than to marry one who does not. One such a sought after quality is egalitarianism in the domestic sphere, as was found in a study of contemporary never-married women in Nigeria (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Another such an ideal quality appeared to be a man's social and economic status (SES). Extensive literature indicates that women have a greater esteem for a potential partner's SES than men do; whereas men value a possible partner's physical attractiveness more (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993; Regan, 1998; Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994). This seemed to be the case especially when a long-term relationship with the person was considered (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Whilst these findings may have been influenced by dominant gender roles in the 1990s (when most of the cited research was conducted), more recent research indicates much the same: women value a potential partner with a higher SES

more than a partner with a lower SES, whilst men place more value on physical attractiveness. Furthermore, SES also appears to play a role in the mate selection of men: men prefer women with a lower SES (Greitemeyer, 2007); especially in more patriarchal societies women with high-wage paid work are seen as unmarriageable, arrogant and too independent (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014).. Among the three possible explanations is the fact that the more critical perspective of educated women (Heilman, Wallen, Guchs, & Tamkins, 2004) entails that men are more critical of educated women and generally regard them as less likeable. Men possibly assume that more educated women will be less interested in having children, will be harder to control, will not be interested in keeping house, and be more interested in pursuing their own careers (Greitemeyer, 2007). Indeed, the findings by Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) indicated that women who move away from the private patriarchal household by seeking paid employment are seen as unfeminine resulting in the involuntary singlehood of many. Secondly, a more critical perspective of educated women may involve the idea that men perceive women with a higher SES as less faithful (Brown & Lewis, 2004; Greitemeyer, 2007). And lastly, men who have more traditional beliefs and expectations concerning gender roles (Ambwani & Strauss, 2007; Twenge, 1997) tend to reject women who violate these roles (Fiske, 1998; Franke, 1997; Greitemeyer, 2007) – women with a stable livelihood are often seen as too financially independent to make a “... submissive and good wife ...” (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014, p.1996). The more traditional gender role beliefs and expectations refer to the traditional expectations of men as providers (Ambwani & Strauss, 2007) – implying a bigger income and better SES than the female – and women as objects of beauty. However, Greitemeyer (2007) finds that the high levels of education, rather than women's incomes, are the aspects that men perceive negatively. This being so, it is also possible that the participants reacted more positively to men with a higher SES than themselves since the participants – whether consciously or not – expected a more positive attitude towards them from such men. This possibility was also hypothesized by Greitemeyer

(2007), though it has not yet been substantiated by research. However, it should be noted that in some instances the possession of economic resources can be seen as an advantage by some men. For example, besides from findings reinforcing patriarchal gender norms, Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) did also find that certain men are attracted to women who can contribute to a family's economic well-being. Yet, in most cases, it is not expected for women to have a higher income than men.

Whilst the participants in the current study seemingly placed the pressure of finding an *equal* partner on themselves alone, previous research indicates that highly educated single women also experienced external pressure to find an equal partner. Ferguson (2000), for example, also finds that women experience pressure from their families to find a partner who has an education and a prospective career. Furthermore, some Asian societies prescribe that well-educated women find a husband with an equal qualification (Malhotra, 1997). Similarly, traditional mate-selection notions in Chinese societies dictate that women should marry a man with a higher socio-economic status – and this limits the pool of possible partners available to women who have a high SES (Cui, 2011 in Wang & Abbott, 2013). However, both these studies (Ferguson and Cui) were done in different social contexts which limit the comparability of the studies. Further research is thus needed in order to further investigate the pressures society and family place on women to marry an equal partner in social contexts similar to the current study.

5.2.5.3. It helps me cope with being single.

Having a career also seemed to help some of the participants cope with being single by keeping them busy, by helping them rebuild their lives after a break up; or lastly, by giving them hope.

*I keep busy.*²⁶

Anja hinted at the fact that her job keeps her so busy that she is fine with being single: "...in the day when you are at work, it is sometimes, it is usually fine, because you're so busy in any case." Similarly Jane said: "Most of the time, if you keep busy, then you keep your attention away from it." Along the same lines, Bella mentioned that she used her job as an escape and outlet:

... so I work more and more ... Yes, no, I definitely noticed, yes. Like this story which I'm going to do now, it's not, it doesn't fall within my work hours. It makes me happy, and it obviously makes the work happy because they don't have to pay for it ... Yes, it is an escape and an outlet...

Danny mentioned:

So I think that does play a role, it definitely does. ... if I didn't have this job, which is very demanding, which demands a lot of my time If I didn't have that, maybe I would be more upset at being single. I think I would be more aware of it.... It would be a bigger issue in my life. But, because I'm busy and I have something to aspire to I'm, I'm okay with it. ... when we have a long holiday; I get very, very down, I'm very depressed. And I think that's because then I realize how isolated I actually am. ... being at work is very good for my mood. ... it just keeps me going. I don't have time to think about, you know, what's missing in my life. When I'm at work, I just carry on, you know, so. That's important f-, it influences [my] mood, you know. If I'm busy or not [slight laugh] influences my mood.

²⁶ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Anja and Bella's accounts of how keeping busy may also contribute to why they are single.

Differing slightly from the four participants above, Ella did not mention her work, or even her advanced education; she simply said: "... I always feel that someone who reads can never be lonely." By saying this, Ella suggested that she could never be lonely since she could read and also liked to read.

Other good things.

Their careers and education also provided them with more indirect ways of coping with being single. Danny²⁷ described her job as something to come back to after her relationship with Dan had ended:

So I had a job to come back to. ... I think I was really lucky that I had that, I think if, if I had quit my job, I would have been in a very, very difficult situation. So I think having a job to come back to, that, that was a big help.

Ella described her career as a source of protection²⁸ and justification:

But I think [pause] because I [pause] have a good job and a good education, um, it [discrimination] is not necessarily aimed at me. But there definitely is discrimination in society against single women, but I think again like I said more in the worker class. Because there're just fewer things with which you can justify it [being single]. I can almost kind of justify it with my career, um, but if you do not necessarily have a good career, or career opportunities or prospects, then, then I think now but, but it [getting married and having children] is what you must do, you know.

²⁷ Please also refer to Appendix 6 for Danny's description how her work serves as a source of support.

²⁸ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Ella's explanation regarding equality in the workplace.

In contrast, Bella described:

... everyone whom I talk to in the same situation says the same thing. If you don't have children, or a family, then it is expected that you shall work in December. ... in fact, at [company] in Johannesburg, it was said that: "People with families get preference for December holidays." ... [I] then start to feel resentful, towards other people. ... There's the exp-, expectation from both sides that you will be there, because you in any case don't have anyone at home. ... there's not [pause] feeling of but you're discriminating against me because I'm single [pause] that idea does not exist for people.

When asked how this made her feel, Bella replied: "[sighs] Uh, abused [laughs]."

Similarly, Haley described:

And then I express my frustration... then people will make comments, like: "You don't get some",²⁹ or um, "Yes, you don't have a husband, that's why you are so difficult". So yes, that is, that are all the things which makes me then [breaths in deeply] feel there's something wrong with me.

However, Haley also described how her job served as a source of hope:

... I experience, I don't have a feeling of hopelessness. It is as if I, I know I can look after myself. ... but I'm not a hopeless person ... I am, I'm not hopeless or helpless. I can look after myself ... I have examples of single people who are very successful in life, yes, my frame of reference is my work now. Like there are very successful women there who are not married, like their work basically, yes they probably put the energy they would have put in a relationship into their work. ... So to me it is like: "You are not *completely* [emphasis] um, hopeless or helpless if

²⁹ There is a strong possibility that this is in reference to sex

you don't have a man." ... for me it is a comfort to see, like: "You, you are not doomed to die". ... If you are not with someone, it doesn't mean that you can't be successful in your work ... It is not a hopeless situation.

Using a career as a coping mechanism for being single has been reported in previous research (Dales, 2014; Lewis & Moon, 1997). Indeed, the majority of Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe's (2014) participants stated that they would not consider entering into marriage without an independent income as a manner of keeping control over their own lives and to protect against the financial deprivation suffered by financially dependent women. Furthermore, research also indicates that educated single women tend to be better off than less-educated or uneducated women (Cwikel et al., 2006; Wolf et al., 2002).³⁰ However, to my knowledge, these studies mostly define *better off* as healthier, longer living or economically more stable. Furthermore, the influence of education on the general well-being of single women was mostly identified as an extra piece of information when comparing married and unmarried women.³¹ This is with the exception of a very recent study by Dales (2014) which was only published after the initial analysis of my findings. In her research focussing on the *ohitorisama* concept (including a book which offers chapters on financial planning for single women) and agency in Japan, she found that education did indeed play an important role in the experience of single women. In particular, the presumed increased financial income which an education provided, allowed single women in Japan to improve their lives and independence through increased consumption and a lifestyle advocating expensive hobbies. As such, the *ohitorisama* model suggests a level of consumer power beyond the scope of most women (Ortner, 2001) excluding financially dependent women. In

³⁰ Please note that these studies focussed on an older cohort of women, aged 70 and above; which limits the comparability to the present study.

³¹ In fact, Waldron, Hughes, and Brooks (1996) base their research on a study that compared married and unmarried women and they hypothesize that paid work may provide the same benefits and thus be a substitute for marriage. This hypothesis is problematic since the participants were not asked about their own experiences or perceptions of their education, and also because – as mentioned previously – 'unmarried' does not equate the absence of a romantic partner or relationship.

essence then, the popularised *ohitorisama* lifestyle "... is fixed on particular assumptions of women's socioeconomic capacities that limit its inclusivity, and in this sense it is as prescriptive as the full-time housewife ideal..." (Dales, 2014, p. 234).

Nonetheless, given the relative lack of qualitative research into the influence of single women's education, the current study provides information on single women's own ideas and experiences of the role of education and career in their lives.

5.2.6. (Not) Wanting children; either way, time's running out.

Having children was not the top priority of any of the participants. However, the four participants who did want children seemed aware of *time running out*. Thus, they were beginning to consider alternatives such as investing in the children of friends, adoption, and artificial insemination. However, for various reasons, they did not want to be single mothers. The possibility of becoming stepmothers was also discussed; yet only Bella seemed to be open to the idea. Three participants mentioned that they did not really want children, especially not their own. Jane said: "I don't really want children". Ella gave a more elaborate explanation:

... I've never wanted children. Even when I was, like, a teenager, it was never part of my dreams for myself. I just feel like that motherly instinct to pop out a mini-me, I feel [pauses and laughs] it probably sounds terrible, hey? ... So yes, if I wanted my own children, then I would have had to start thinking about: "Okay, how will I do that?" ... So if I wanted children then I probably would have thought differently about things. My, planned my life differently, but I don't want children, so now I focus more on my career...

Bella said:

Um, I think a person can also rather have fun. And oh, it, children are sweet and nice, and they give hugs and slobbery kisses, and so, and it is very sweet [laughs] and nice. ... Yes. I think a person misses out on such small things, but the bigger picture I just think: "That, that's just not me".

Anja gave the impression that she had changed her mind about wanting children: "... but by some way or the other, I was never broody, and all my friends started to become broody and all of a sudden [pause], something started to bug me a bit." Similarly, Haley seemed to change her mind from time to time:

[Sighs and pauses] um [long pause] Yes, I think so [pause] um, I think so because [pauses, sighs and pauses again] um, [nervous chuckle]. It is difficult, sometimes I want them; sometimes I don't want them ... Um, I, I do actually think I have something to give to children. Personally I think I'm very good with children. ... And then I think [pause] um, it's a feeling of; I think if a person has a child, it is like something which is your own. Something which comes from you and it is yours. But I shall never have that, that which I can say: "This is mine".

Danny described having children as being part of a family and leaving a legacy behind:

... I think there is a part of a woman that instinctively wants to mother. ... I love children, and people have told me that I'm very good with children ... that's one aspect of being single that is starting to bother me a bit. The fact that I don't have children and that I don't know, you know, what the prospects are. ... it's the need to feel like you're part of the family, like you're leaving a legacy behind. ... I

enjoy children's company. I enjoy their innocence, and their, their fun and their laughter.

Similarly Greta said:

... it is something which I miss a lot. The fact that I'm single also means that I can't have children. ... The other day I realized how little physical contact I have right. I don't really even get hugs ... people don't touch each other anymore. Yes, and I think, gee, this can sound very sick, but you must hear me correctly now, that is what children also give one. Children who will just climb on top of me, and play with my hair, and give hugs ... And I think that's where the old spinster idea comes into play, people become so in your personal space, so set neh, that no one ever breaks into your space. Then in that way children are good for me.

The link between whether you want children or not and being single was especially evident in Ella's comments and Greta's words: both equated marriage with the ability to have children. Ella believed she might have been more motivated to find a husband if she had wanted children. This is similar to previous research which indicates that children are the expected outcome of marriage (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Dales, 2014) – which also marks the "...passage into responsible adulthood..." (Maree, 2004, p. 541). Additionally, the dissatisfaction of being single is made worse by the "... painful thought of remaining single and childless for the rest of life and visions of loneliness in old age" (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014, p. 2003). In addition, Ferguson (2000) finds that women who did not particularly wish to have children were more likely to avoid marriage altogether, much the same as in the case of Ella. On the other hand, Ferguson (2000) also finds that never-married women who regretted not having been married expressed greater regret at not being able to have children because they were not married, than at not being married per se. This is similar

to findings of Lewis and Moon (1997; 2007) whose participants also mentioned feeling loss and grief about not having children.

5.2.6.1. Age and my time frame.

Whether or not they wanted children, five participants linked their ability to have children to their age or a time frame. Anja explained:

And if you actually think at 35 there isn't [pause] ... you must still meet someone, then you must get to the point where you [pause] are sure in the relationship, then you must get married, or that's how I would do it, I would marry and then [pause] have children ... It will not happen in a very short time period, so [pauses and sighs] and if you still want children, a person shouldn't actually wait too long for it.

Similarly, Jane described:

... I used to always have this time frame for myself. I believe you must first date for three years before you marry ... like definitely be together for three years. Then you must first be married for three years, for the three-year itch, before you have children. And if you just look at time, I am 35, in six years' time I will be 41. That's too old. ... Biologically, and obviously, it's... you're 60 when that child is 20, and ... It becomes more difficult, the older you are. I am used to children, so it, I know [pause] how difficult it can be.

Even though Ella did not want her own children, she noticed other people starting to worry about her age and her ability to have children:

... and yes, at 31, you are you know, a person wants [pause] society tells you that you must be married, and start thinking about children... maybe if I wanted children, it would have been different because then there is a biological [long

pause] clock [laughs] obviously, not so? But I don't plan to have children at all. Even if I entered into a relationship later, children would not be a part of it. So I'm not bothered by it as much, and I feel like I can kind of focus on my career and so forth.

Danny mentioned that she was currently in her "decade" to have children:

... the one thing that I am aware of is the fact that if I wanna have children, this is the decade that [laughs] that I have to do that. So, um, I think, if I were to meet someone, I'd be very open about that from the start and say: "Ja, I want to have a family, if this is not something that you want [slight laugh] this isn't gonna work". So, yes, I do think age plays a role.

In much the same way, Haley said:

[Takes deep breath and sighs]. I think it [age] could start to have an influence now, yes, because it is another thing which becomes *wrong* [emphasis] with a person. If you are over a certain age ... if you are younger than 35, then you can maybe be caught up; because someone sees you: "Oh, you can at least still have children." ... And then they hear 36 and then they think: "Oh, no but she won't be able to give me anything." So yes, I think that it could, could be an influence.

Haley's link between age, fertility, and marriageability was likewise reported in previous research in which participants felt pressured to marry while they were still in the fertile age group (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Wang & Abbott, 2013). Lahad and Hazan (2014) theorize that through the adoption of the "... panoptical male connoisseur..." (p.131) the loss of youth and reproductive power renders older single women as social rejects and outside the norm (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). As such, older single women are expected to experience persistent anxieties and cannot possibly compete with

younger women who can still produce children – as is also clear by Haley's perception of her own marriageability. Evolutionary theorists may argue that this perceived pressure is not too far from the truth, since men's adaptive problem – which they have to overcome in order to survive – is to identify women with high reproductive potential (Greitemeyer, 2007). On the other hand, feminists might argue that such findings are reminiscent of ageist and patriarchal scripts in which younger women have the advantage of beauty and fertility (Lahad, 2013). This was also implied by best-selling author, Gottlieb (2008), in her best-selling book "Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr Good Enough" in which she advises women to hasten and marry whilst they still have the assets of youth, beauty and fertility lest they remain alone. More recently, Addie and Brownlow's (2014) participants also mentioned being advised on finding suitable partners and extending their fertility. This ageist and patriarchal sort of advice seem to influence an already younger group of single women and are exemplified in a relatively recent online blog of Hashachar (2011):

You are already twenty three years old, you better not rest on your laurels – beauty does not last. You should begin to compromise ... you will realize that you have turned into an old and ugly maid and feel remorse about all the ugly ducks that you have rejected in the past whom by now have turned into swans without you (see Lahad & Hazan, 2014, p. 131).

Such advice and reasoning are problematic since they suggest that a woman's value lies in their youth and fertility – two qualities that are time bound and which older single women are on the verge of losing (Lahad & Hazan, 2014). It also objectifies women as only having *physical* worth to men, which will inevitably decline, and that this worth is only valuable as perceived by *men*. In contrast, at closer inspection of the blog post by Hashachar (2011), men's ageing is not linked to the same lack of physical attractiveness, rather they turn into "swans" and seem to become more agreeable with age (Lahad & Hazan, 2014). It is

women then who have to compromise their standards, lest they become old, infertile and unattractive. Nonetheless, the link between women's age and their ability to have children is a long-standing one.

Whether or not a woman wants children, there has always been a *right age* at which it is expected of them to have children (Baumbusch, 2004; Dales, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Gee, 1990). It implies that it is more acceptable to be single at a younger age (Sharp & Ganong, 2011) because a woman still has the ability and option to conceive and bear children at a later stage. Single women who are 30 years and older – which is generally seen as the right age for marriage and who will soon be past the 'right age' to bear children (DePaulo, 2007) – are perceived to have over-extended their option to be selective about who they are willing to date (Lahad, 2013) and as such they must compromise on their standards (Lahad & Hazan, 2014). If indeed they then remain unmarried, they are presumed to be overly picky, prissy, and fussy (Byrne, 2008); all terms which generally have a negative connotation (Lahad, 2013).

Aside from the societal pressure to have children at the right age, women are also pressured to become mothers, since it is seen as the norm and desirable that women should become mothers (Cwikel et al., 2006; Hays, 2004). Women are thus confronted with the notion that motherhood brings unique and ultimate fulfilment and meaning. This likely influences their experience of being single (Alexander, Rubinstein, Goodman, & Luborsky, 1992; Baumbusch, 2004). The regret at not having children could also be linked to the lack of informal care when older (Baumbusch, 2004). The assumed lack of informal care for older, single and childless women leads to another form of stigmatization and discrimination since policy makers often presuppose that such women will place strain on formal health and welfare services (Connidis, 1994; Cwikel et al., 2006).

5.2.6.2. *There are alternatives.*

The participants mentioned alternative ways to have children, varying from investing in the children of friends, adopting, or artificial insemination.

My friends have children, I can adopt, or what about artificial insemination?

Gretal said investing in the lives of her friends' children was important to her, especially if she never finds a partner.

Interviewer: ... say you don't get a partner one day, you know, what then, how do you feel what will you do then? How do you feel about the idea that it is possible that you are single forever?

Gretal: ... I think the only thing which will make it possible for me to do that, um, is children in my life. I, I already have a lot of children in my life [laughs], friends' children ... [whom I] love dearly. So I believe I will increasingly invest in them, yes. And then I shall also hope that my brother and sister also have children [laughs]. Yes, so I that's still my only back-up plan, yes [laughs].

This is similar to the findings of Situmorang (2007) that single women preferred to remain close to the children of siblings in order to avoid loneliness. Adoption was another alternative mentioned. When asked if she will ever consider adopting a child, Bella responded:

... hopefully I will never reach that point, like I see other people reaching when you suddenly think: "Oh hell, I'm going to be alone for the rest of my life, I am going to adopt a child now, and then the child will replace that relationship." ... Shoot me before I do that ... you cannot [pause] bring someone in who must replace a man. ... people do that with children... you adopt that child because you don't want to grow old alone. So, then you immediately place that burden on the

child: "You will now, will now have to look after me, that's why I adopted you".
.... If I can adopt a child because it is either that or the child will grow up really badly; yes, by all means. I'll do that, I will adopt 20. But, a child does not replace the relationship you have, an equal relationship which you have with a partner...

Danny mentioned more alternatives of having children:

Um, ja, and I, I have thought about: "Do I want to adopt?" Or you know, "Would I consider artificial insemination?" or one of those options ... That's something that, it's in the back of my mind at the moment... Um, it's something that I have considered, but I think it's a very difficult decision to make, because the implication, that's a, it's a very big decision, you know. Not only financially, and emotionally and physically, but just: "What impact is that gonna have on the child?" You know? Not having a dad. Ja, so I think I must not be selfish and just think about your own needs, you know. I've got to think about this person that I'm bringing into the world. What type of impact would that have on the child? In the long term.

But I don't want to be a single mother, for good reasons!

In the previous quotation, Danny touched on a very important point which four other participants also mentioned: Being a single mother. Danny seemed to be the only participant who even considered being a single mother. Anja said: "I won't [have] children, well, I won't plan to have children without being married." Ella said: "... I think it is better to raise a child with two parents, anyway. It's the ideal, it does remain the ideal." Greta appeared to agree:

I always joked and said I would adopt, or go as far as having my own child one way or the other, but I think a child should grow up with a father. I don't want to be a single parent. ... No, no, I think besides from the fact that it is tough on the parent, I think it is also tough on the child.

Haley described why she did not want to become a single mother:

[Laughs] A single parent? [Laughs, pauses, and sighs] I have wondered about it, and I have, I have decided: "No, not a single parent"... Because I know I will not be able to do so financially. And, um [pause] and I think a child needs both parents, a mother and a father. So, then I shall rather, for the sake of the child, not have a child. ... for me it is about absolutely giving the utmost, utmost, utmost, utmost best for your child. ... you must know you will have enough money one day. And you must, for him, um; people must give things to children [sighs]. ... because I suffered in my life without certain resources, I really don't want, at all that say a child of mine must also suffer. So in that sense I will not, I will not be able to provide for someone. ... I know I won't, I won't be able to look after a child.

Lastly, Jane also mentioned:

No [pause], I shall not have children if I'm not married, not neces-, not necessarily because of religion, but I think it's right for socialization, there must be a father and a mother figure, it is easier and I think especially still in the society where I live, a si-, a single mother [pause] is still looked down upon. ... Like in my family it [having a child out of wedlock] shall be a *huge* [emphasis] issue. ... they will first make a helluva noise. ... and throw around recriminations ...

The participants' responses to becoming single mothers may be influenced by the nuclear family ideology. According to this ideology the biological family, which includes both biological parents, still remains the ideal family type (Coontz, 1992; Planitz & Feeney,

2009).³² Indeed, Hertog (2009) argues that marriage is "... the necessary condition to ensure a suitable environment for children..." (p. 154). This then implies that being single means forgoing childbearing. Previous research also indicates that single women are reluctant to have children outside of marriage (Dales, 2014), and that age plays a major role when women decide to have children (Bock, 2000; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). White, tertiary-educated, never-married women were more likely to wait until their mid-thirties to have children outside of marriage (Bock, 2000). However, this was not the case for the current study because none of the four participants that were 35 years and older were considering becoming single parents. One possible explanation is that the social contexts in which the two studies were performed were rather different than the context of the current participants. Bock (2000) conducted her study as a participant observer of a Single Mothers by Choice support group in the United States of America – an affluent country that provided more security than South Africa. It is thus possible that the women in Bock's study experienced more support for the idea of becoming single mothers and may have been more confident in their financial and economic ability to take care of a child on their own. This was indeed mentioned by Haley who did not want to have children because she perceived herself as financially unable to provide for a child. This is similar to findings by Sharp and Ganong (2011) where participants wanted to wait to have children outside of marriage until they were financially secure enough.

Another reason for the reluctance to become single mothers that were indirectly hinted at by some of the participants was waiting (or hoping) for future unknown husbands to appear. This is similar to previous research where women hinted at holding a space for possible future husbands and fathers (Bock, 2000; Nelson, 2006; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). In some instances, however, women do not merely *hint* at holding a space for a possible future

³² However, research also indicates that family types have small effects on the development of children, and that there is substantial overlap in the functioning of different family types (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Planitz, Feeney, & Peterson, 2009).

father to their children. Indeed, the *possible future father* and threat of single motherhood seems to be used by some as a way to persuade some women to compromise and hasten to find a partner as can be seen in the following blog post by Giga (2007):

And to the women who have not experienced the dubious pleasure of being single above the age of thirty-five: continue nagging me with fertility tests and stories of single motherhood, menopause, and the state of my ovaries. This will definitely help me find a groom tomorrow (see Lahad & Hazan, 2014, p. 131).

The annoyance of Giga is quite apparent, and whilst my participants made no reference to such threats of single motherhood made by others, it does indeed appear as if my participants would rather hold out for husbands than to have children on their own. One possible reason is that they perceived they would be seen as less attractive to men who did not necessarily want to become stepfathers, much like they themselves did not want to become stepmothers. Lastly, another reason why the participants did not want to become single mothers was due to the conventional assumption that two parents are better than one. However, research has indicated that this need not be the case. Indeed, children raised by single parents are better adjusted than children raised by two parents who are in an unhappy marriage (Louw & Louw, 2007).

A stepmother then?

Lastly, four participants mentioned the possibility of becoming stepmothers. However, only Bella did not seem to have a problem with becoming a stepmother:

... where before, [I would] not even [have] considered someone who has children; now it's almost like [pause] added value. ... Because then I don't have to do all the work ... I don't know if I should have my own children, because I, I don't know, then I shall have to change my lifestyle so much that I might become resentful towards the child ... Yes, I would be a kick-ass type of stepmother

person ... children are busy. And [pause] they demand your attention, and there's no time to do anything else. .. it is mostly about time. It is also about planning things, and you can't just pack up and go somewhere. It's always one or another mission. And [pause] it looks like too much for me ... I, sometimes then, then it looks very nice to me, but I do think my first instinct is right that is, is very nice if I can send them home by the end of the day.

Unlike Bella, Gretal, Haley, and Jane did not want to become stepmothers. Whilst Gretal did not mention the term *stepmother* specifically, she said: "... I really want my own children." Haley spoke in clearer terms:

... I also don't think stepmother; because, um, I am very [long pause] yes, I, I, I have this idea about the stepmother in the Snow White book ... [pause] yes, it is either the stepmother rejects the children, or the children reject the stepmother. And it's that idea of rejection which now makes me the stepmother thing, so I'll also not become a stepmother.

Lastly, Jane did not completely reject the idea: "It depends how old the children are. ... Rather very small than older. ... But then you are in their lives for so long, you are not necessarily [pause] the [pause] person who comes in and changes everything."

Haley and Jane provided reasons for why they would not like to become stepmothers. Their reasons can basically be reduced to the stigma of the evil stepmother. The story of the evil stepmother can be traced back to the ninth century (Ceglian & Gardner, 2000) and still carries with it a pervasive negative stereotype. In contrast, scholars argue that stepfathers are more easily accepted and do not face the same stigmatization as stepmothers.³³ From a very

³³ Levin (1997) argues that women face contradicting roles because, as women, they are expected to be caring and close, but as stepmothers they are expected to remain distant. This then results in internal conflict as to which role they should fulfil. On the other hand, stepfathers do not experience these contradicting roles

young age children are taught to dislike stepmothers in fairy tales such as *Snow White* (mentioned by Haley), *Cinderella*, and *Hansel and Gretel* (Christian, 2005). Popular news media also serve to perpetuate the stigma of the evil stepmother by using titles such as *Wicked stepmother in regime of neglect* (Europe Intelligence Wire, 2002), and *Slaying the wicked stepmother of baseball* (Moore, 2003). It is no wonder then that the continuous portrayal of stepmothers as wicked, greedy, selfish and evil have negative consequences for stepmothers' self-esteem and family relationships (Christian, 2005; Jones, 2004). This then contributes to feelings of insecurity, separation or loneliness, and the constraints on the role of stepmothers (Jones, 2004).

Yet, based on current research findings, this stigmatization also seems to influence single women who are currently not stepmothers. More specifically, the reluctance of the current participants to become stepmothers may influence their dating behaviour since they may avoid going on dates with men who already have children. This then contributes to the minimization of the pool of possible partners (See section 5.2.8.1.). Furthermore, Jane seemed reluctant to become a stepmother because of the possible disruption she may experience as a result thereof. Indeed, stepfamilies usually do form after the disruption of the biological parents' marriage. This can result in complex structures and functioning (Planitz & Feeney, 2009) and leads to a unique set of pressures and strains for family members – as was expected by Jane – and could indeed contribute to the negative stigma of stepfamilies in general (Planitz & Feeney, 2009). On the other hand, Bella seemed to have no belief in the evil stepmother idea, nor did she seem to consider the possible disruption and changes to the family structure. Bella made the assumption that the biological mother would still be present in the children's lives, and that being a stepmother is almost void of any responsibilities.

because as men they are *not* expected to be close and caring, and, as stepfathers, they are expected to be distant. Hence, for stepfathers, the two role expectations correlate with each other (Levin, 1997). However, both stepmothers and stepfathers are perceived to be less caring than biological parents (Planitz & Feeney, 2009).

5.2.7. Missing out on sex.

At the time of the interviews only Bella and Jane were sexually active (and Jane was only sexually active at the time of the first interview). Danny, Gretal and Haley have not ever had sex with a man. I perceived the participants to be generally reluctant to talk about their own sexual activities and I was consequently hesitant to probe this apparently sensitive topic.

5.2.7.1. *On pre-marital sex.*

With the exception of Gretal, none of the participants had any qualms about pre-marital sex. However, three of the participants did mention *conditions* for having sex.

I'm waiting.

Recent research has indicated that single women – especially those who identify with being Christian – still believed in not having pre-marital sex (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). This is similar to Gretal who explained why she did not want to have pre-marital sex:

For me it remains something which still belongs within marriage, within the safety of marriage. ... for me to, to have sex is more or less to marry, like it was in the times of the Bible. And I also realize it's, uh, an *old fashioned* [emphasis] way of thinking, but up until now it has protected me, it has also deprived me of things, probably, I'm curious, but it has protected me³⁴.

³⁴ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Gretal's explanation of what the safety of marriage means and what waiting to have sex has protected her from.

There's a right time and way.

Three participants described what can be termed a *right* way to have sex. Firstly, Anja described:

... I am, well I am a Christian, but I will [pause] yes [long pause] sleep with someone before [leaves sentence hanging] ... I will not sleep with someone and in, take that step if I, he must be committed to me, but, and committed to try it, the relationship. ... He must make the commitment, I'm not just one of a string of people ... Um, in the end [pauses and sighs] my feelings about that are [pause] it's about [sighs] I'm not going to jump from the one person to the next [pause] so, yes, it, yes, it is more about how it, yes. ... For me there's, there's a way to do it, and it's not, there's a difference between [pause] sex within someone in a relationship and being loose. ... I think, you g-, and don't go, okay, for me being loose is, you go out [pause] and you [sighs] you go and jump in bed with just almost anybody. Where, I will not do it, unless I actually think that I, or feel for such a type of person.

When asked her opinion on pre-marital sex, Danny said: "I don't have a problem with it, as long as you are ready,³⁵ and you're comfortable, um, then I don't have a problem with it." Similarly Jane explained:

I'm not religious at all, for me it's more about, I'm not really someone who sleeps around, so I have, I must first have a connection with someone before I would do something like that, in general. And, yes, but it has nothing to do with religion, it has more to do with safety and being comfortable, than anything else. ... And the safety and comfort thing of sex goes, it is someone with whom you share

³⁵ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Danny's explanation on what "being ready" entails.

something ... um, safety and comfort, it makes you feel better, it almost feels like there is someone who cares. Even though it's not, I *know* [emphasis] logically, it is not necessarily so, but yes.

Oh well, why not?

Differing from the participants above, Bella, Haley and Ella made no reference of a right way of having sex, nor did they regard their religion to be of any consequence as far as their sexual activities were concerned. Bella, for example, said:

No. Not at all. It is [pause]... I think a person can selectively switch things off. But in any case it, yes [pause], maybe if I were still in the Dutch Reformed church, it probably would have bothered me [pause] I don't know also, no, it wouldn't have. No.

Similarly Haley said:

But I definitely think differently about it and I don't think that it is wrong.³⁶ ... [laughs nervously] No, it's not, I, I will definitely not say it's a *sin* [emphasis] to, to sleep with someone before you are married, I wouldn't say that.

Ella also did not believe there was anything wrong with having pre-marital sex:³⁷

.... I decided it is part of life and I want to experience all aspects of life. So I can't hold to that and say: "Oh, I will not have sex before marriage", and if I don't plan on getting married, because then it means I become a nun; and that is not what I wanted for myself. So I've let that go. I decided, it is not the most important thing

³⁶ Please refer to Appendix 6 for a detailed explanation given by Haley as to why she does not think pre-marital sex is wrong.

³⁷ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Ella's explanation of how age played a role in her decision to have sex.

to me; and if people are not satisfied with that or if people are not happy about that, then it is their business.

Another study by Ntoimo and Isugo-Abanihe (2014) also sheds light on single women's experience of sex and sexuality before marriage. For the women in Ntoimo and Isugo-Abanihe (2014) their sexuality was controlled by men:

Women who refuse sexual intimacy are “dumped” for other girls, whereas those who engage in sexual intimacy are labelled promiscuous and untrustworthy. ...

Women are seen as sex objects and any resistance to that identity attracts disadvantages, such as no marriage in some cases, and “over indulgence” in sexual activity makes her a slag (p. 1998).

In contrast, patriarchal heterosexual standards condone sexual permissiveness for single and married men. This is evident of the sexual double standard and also of the contradicting messages single women have to navigate through. The Madonna-whore split seems thus to be as prevalent as always.

5.2.7.2. We still miss out.

Whether sexually active or not, however, at least six participants stated that they did sometimes feel that they missed having sex, with Ella being the only person who did not say so specifically. When asked if she felt like she was missing out on sex, Anja simply replied: “Sometimes yes ... Well, yes [laughs] it's been a long time [laughs].” Bella said: “Yes [said drawn out] yes indeed. Yes, ah, there's no denying that. ... It is very relaxing and makes one feel safe and wanted.” In line with this, Jane said:

... sex on demand would always have been a good thing. ... I miss the actual sex a lot but I think I miss the stroking, kissing and cuddling more. ... I do not have

enough physical intimacy at the moment ... I am used to having sex on a regular basis now and I struggle at the moment.

Differing slightly, Greta explained:

I think I miss out on that person who lives with you and on um, obviously on the physical contact also. Yes, I think I definitely miss out on that also. gee, gee, I think gosh it could range from anything; from just a hug, someone who scratches your back, someone who touches you, and to kissing and everything that follows on that.

Danny described missing out: "... there will be the occasional time that I will wonder: 'Ah, it would be nice to have someone to cuddle with or to be intimate with.' ... sometimes it bothers me and I long for it." Lastly, Haley said: "Yes [emphasis], but I, I don't think I miss just that physical touching, physical deed, I miss more [sighs] um, intimacy, to connect with someone." It is important to notice that it is not merely the physical act of having sex that the participants said they missed out on; they mention the simple presence of someone, connecting with someone, or simply a scratch of the back. This is similar to findings by Lewis and Moon (1997) where participants reported missing the touch of a special man. They also hypothesized that the depression some of their participants experienced may be due to touch deprivation.

What we do about it.

Four participants mentioned various ways of how they deal with missing out on sex or physical intimacy. Haley, for example, said:

Masturbate ... Channel the need through exercise... or by eating or reading ... or to think ... or watch TV ... or play Sudoku, or I will *kuier* [interact socially] on social media or say something, or by going out to a concert or the theatre.

Danny appeared rather uncomfortable when she replied:

Um [sighs uncomfortably and pauses] I fantasize, can I be honest [laughing] and say that? Ja, so, um, ja, I fantasize and I think about it, but I think that it's so private; it's such a private thing to talk about. And, um, ja, I do have desires [slight laugh] I'm not gonna lie, but it's not something that happens on a regular basis.

Jane and Bella had slightly different ways of dealing with it. Jane seemed more comfortable than Danny when she explained:

If I do have the urge, I masturbate ... Sometimes I do stupid things, and go and pick someone up. ... So I go to a bar and pick, you know, you know that guy will not be good for you; and then you spend more and more time with the person, and then [sighs] you fall in love, or whatever. Not necessarily because you would have chosen him, but because you are alone and needed the company and sex, then you do things like that.

Bella explained: "I have someone³⁸ who is around every now and then and we have a good understanding about this."

This, however, seemed insufficient for the participants who also mentioned that there was a difference between simply having sex and making love, or having sex with someone you care about. Haley said that masturbation was not enough because "... an emotional connection is lacking". Danny commented on the sufficiency of fantasizing: "Most of the time

³⁸ This is in reference to her relationship with Bertus.

it is, but I sometimes wonder what 'the real thing' is like and long for it." Similarly, when asked if having sex with Bertus³⁹ was enough Bella answered:

No, more and more often is needed ... There is definitely a difference between sex with someone which is just for fun and games, and someone whom you really care for. So [sighs and pauses], people can switch that part off, but at a stage then you also realize: "Yes well, this is just shagging." [Pause] So, you get the physical pleasure out of it ...

Jane also experienced that it was not enough and believed there was a difference:

No, I do not feel this is enough to just pick up men for sex as the next day you just feel worse about yourself. ... Yes. One is sex and one is making love. It sounds so tacky but yes there is a difference. ... Sex is just, fun, it is [pause] who people who have sex, there, there can maybe be a bit of emotions, but it is just a physical thing. Making love is, for me, a more emotionally intimate [pause] situation. ... Well, for me like I just said, for me, there is definitely a divide between sex and making love, with making love, you sleep over⁴⁰.

Lastly, Ella (who said she did not miss out on having sex) still thought there may be a difference:

Interviewer: ... do you think there is a difference between sex with a man and sex with a boyfriend or a guy or whatever? Um, and do you think you miss out, or not?

³⁹ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Bella's comparison of having sex with Bertus and having sex with Ben.

⁴⁰ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Jane's explanation of how sleeping over and the morning after has particular meaning for her.

Ella: Gosh, I don't know. Um [long pause and laughs] I don't know, I don't think so, I don't know; because you're asking me now to compare something with something which I don't know at all, you know like I, I don't know. Um [clears throat], maybe that a person knows each other well and trust each other, I don't know, then things maybe become different in the bed, in, in the room, I don't know. Like I say I can't actually compare it, because I don't know how it will be um, really.

Interviewer: At this moment you don't feel you miss out on anything?

Ella: No.

Although casual sex can provide a positive experience for some women in the short term (Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2011), even the most permissive women tend to gravitate towards sex within a committed and romantic relationship in the long-term (Townsend & Wasserman, 2011). Despite the movement for female sexual liberation and many women wanting to enjoy sexual freedom before entering into marriage (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014), casual sex is still "... not a good fit for women's nature" (Rhoads, 2012, p. 515). Women tend to react negatively to sexual hook-ups, especially penetrative hook-ups (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Grello, Welsch & Haprer, 2006), whilst men tend to react positively to these (Townsend & Wasserman, 2011). Women, for example, report feelings of guilt and anger at themselves for not really knowing their sexual partner, and due to the lack of further contact (Paul & Hayes, 2002). According to Owen et al. (2011), the main contributor to whether women reacted negatively to casual sex was the perceived investment of the partner. This is also true for more permissive women who report rejecting casual sex due to the insufficient interest and investment shown by partners (Glenn & Marquard, 2001; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Townsend & Wasserman, 2011). Thus, if a woman feels the partner is equally invested in the relationship, she will experience fewer feelings of guilt, vulnerability, and exploitation (Owen

et al., 2011). Furthermore, even though women indicated that they did not want any emotional involvement with their sexual partners, they still reported more feelings of worry-vulnerability than men (Townsend & Wasserman, 2011). Research also indicates that women expect more emotional investment from their sexual partners than their sexual partners tend to give (Rhoads, 2012). Women's sexual scripts also tend to include emotional intimacy and commitment, whereas men's social scripts are more prone to include aspects of casual sex (Markle, 2008).

Even though men's social scripts involve more casual sex, research indicates that it does not necessarily imply that they regard casual sex as satisfactory as sex within a committed relationship. In truth, Waite and Joyner (2001) state that *both* men and women tend to report higher levels of sexual satisfaction within marriage, in comparison to single or cohabiting individuals. Another aspect which appears to be positively correlated with sexual satisfaction is whether an individual is in love with his or her partner (Barrientos & Paez, 2006). Furthermore, sexually active individuals who are not attached to a particular individual report the lowest level of sexual satisfaction, regardless of frequency (Pedersen & Blekesaune, 2003). Additionally, gender also plays an important role in sexual satisfaction (Lauman et al., 2006; Waite & Joyner, 2001) with women's sexual satisfaction being greatly influenced by commitment, whether the relationship is long-term or not (Pedersen & Blekesaune, 2003) and their expectations (Lauman et al., 2006). On the other hand, men's satisfaction is more influenced by sexual frequency (Lauman et al., 2006). It should be noted, however, that the findings mentioned here have limited comparability since the demographic data and the definition of being single varies across studies. Nonetheless, taking the literature above into account, it is not surprising that Jane and Bella seemed to be dissatisfied with their casual sexual relationships. Interestingly, studies have also indicated that women who partake in casual sex and hook-ups are more inclined to desire romantic commitment and relationships, instead of wanting marriage (Garcia & Reiber, 2008; Owen & Fincham, 2011).

This was indeed the case for Bella and Jane; who seemed to have lost hope of marrying one day, but still desired romance and commitment.

What is it we do want then?

After establishing that the participants did not feel particularly satisfied with the physical contact they were having, and that they perceived a difference between sex and making love, they were asked to describe what they did want out of physical intimacy or contact with a man. Bella simply replied: "Acceptance, pleasure. Safety and acceptance and relaxation." Similarly, Haley longed for "... a feeling of acknowledgement – someone notices me and acknowledges my presence – and acceptance – how I look and am are acceptable for the other person – and it makes me feel very good about myself." Danny described the matter thus:

Physical affection makes one feel desired and validated and can be very comforting which is important to me. ... I felt desired and attractive in these instances. I felt physically excited, content and on a high, but due to the fact that these experiences were very short-lived and isolated, I was left feeling rejected, unattractive, inadequate, lonely...

Lastly, Jane said:

It gives me validation. It makes me feel that there is someone that actually wants me, that there is somebody that does find me sexy. I am a lot happier when I have someone with whom I can be intimate with. The intimacy makes me feel better about myself not only physically but also that I am worthwhile. ... I handle stress a lot better if I have sex regularly. It is a very good why for me to get rid of stress. There is nothing like an orgasm a day to keep the stress away. I am also a very sexual person and if I do not have sex I get very frustrated. ... I also get intense pleasure out of the fact that it was me that made them have an orgasm. That is just

for me. I was able to give him so much pleasure on a primal level that it makes me feel good about myself, as if at least I can get this right. Sex also makes me very happy. I always laugh and giggle during sex. It is euphoric I would say. I find it fun and relaxing and a lot of it is about control.

In short, the participants wanted to feel like they were worth the time and effort of someone showing sexual interest in them. To some degree it may even be speculated that it is a form of self-validation. Due to the highly sexualized depiction of women in popular media (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008), they may perceive their value in society to be determined by how *sexual* they are and as such only feel valued or validated when someone shows sexual interest in them. To my knowledge, there is no comparable literature which qualitatively explores what single women want from sex and physical intimacy. Indeed, literature regarding single women and sex is negligible at best. One possible reason may be the lingering of the *Madonna* side of the *Madonna-whore* split, in which women are expected to be virginal or even asexual (Tolman, 2002). As such, for fear of judgement, the discomfort of talking about their sexual activities may prevent single women from taking part in research regarding their sexual needs and/or activities.

5.2.7.3. It's still uncomfortable.

To be sure, four participants in the current study mentioned discomfort when speaking about the topic of sex or what others may think of their sexual lives; whilst one participant refused all together to speak about it. Danny said: "I think that it's so private, it's such a private thing to talk about"⁴¹ ... Um, well [slight laugh], when you spoke about the sexual things, those were quite uncomfortable." Gretal also noted that "...this points to my discomfort regarding the 'topic'". Similarly, Haley said: "It is still uncomfortable to talk

⁴¹ Please refer to Appendix 6 for Danny's explanation as to why women in particular find the topic uncomfortable; and also her perception of how others view her with reference to sex.

about it, um [nervous laugh], yes, it is, it is, but I pretend as if it doesn't exist." On a slightly different note, Jane explained her reactions after having sex:⁴²

... obviously, you obviously feel, you feel like a slut, you just picked someone up and slept with him, it's again like, it probably comes from the religion thing and how you were raised ... Yes, if I want to know it or not. ... You obviously feel guilty if you do stuff like that, then you think: "*Slut*" [said drawn out, almost teasing], but, it, it's, it probably comes from religious, and, and, values which you learned when you were young. [Pause] Um [pause], it doesn't necessarily influence my behaviour, but I do feel guilty about what I do. ... I shall always wonder ... Like what people, it bothers me, how can I say now? I feel guiltier that other people will find out what I do, than that I myself feel guilty about it.

Jane's concern of how others might perceive her due to her sexual actions may be influenced by her sister's (Jennie) reaction after finding out that Jane had a reproductive ailment:

... and she says to me: "Now what did you do to get that?" In other words she's insinuating that I slept around. Then, it's like, how she is judgemental about things like that. ... I just kept quiet, I didn't answer her. Yes [pause] Um [pause] hurt, I was like: "Okay?"

Even though research indicates that pre-marital sex has become relatively common among young people, including single women, in many societies extramarital sex is still condemned. This may present difficulties for older single women who want to have sex (Situmorang, 2007). This is particularly so since pre-marital sex is often viewed as acceptable among men, or sometimes even encouraged (Kayiar, 1995; Sakalh-Uğurlu & Glick, 2003);

⁴² Please refer to Appendix 6 for Jane's description of her behaviour after she had sex.

whilst women who engage in pre-marital sex are often stigmatized (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014; Sakalh-Uğurlu & Glick, 2003).

Glick and Fiske (2001) theorize that there are two forms of ambivalent sexism regarding the sexual activities of women – benevolent and hostile sexism. This sexism works to reinforce men's power over women. Benevolent sexism idealizes women, suggesting that they should be *purer* than men, and should be placed on a pedestal; as long as they conform to the traditional roles which men assign to them. Furthermore, they should not challenge the authority of men (Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997). Since (theoretically at least) the current group of participants do indeed challenge the traditional roles and the authority of men, they forego the right to be protected and admired by men. As a result, they can now be subjected to hostile sexism. Hostile sexism is a subjectively negative attitude towards women who are guilty of "... questioning traditional beliefs, seeking a prestigious or powerful role, or using men's sexual attraction to them to gain influence over men" (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p. 297). Simply put, benevolent sexism encourages women to conform to traditional gender roles by rewarding them with safety and protection; whilst hostile sexism encourages women to conform to traditional gender roles by punishing them with a negative attitude. It seems as if the current participants' reasons for wanting sex resonates with benevolent sexism as their accounts hinted at their being dependent on sex with men to feel "acknowledged, validated, safe" and so forth. Research does indeed indicate that women are much more accepting of benevolent sexism due to the positive tone of chivalrous protection and provision (Glick et al., 2000).

On the other hand, education and past sexual experiences seem to allow a more permissive attitude towards sexual activities (Le Gall, Mullet, & Shafiqhi, 2002). Furthermore, the greater egalitarianism of women results in a less negative attitude towards women who engage in pre-marital sex (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Yet, whilst some of the

participants stated that they had no problem with having pre-marital sex, advocating a *right way* to have sex does suggest a more conservative stance. This is likely, as mentioned by Jane, the influence of their Christian upbringing, since religion and religiosity influence sex guilt (Ahrold et al., 2011; Regnerus, 2007; Woo et al., 2012).⁴³ In general, Christian doctrines do not favour casual sex (Rhoads, 2012). It is thus possible that the participants were trying to *justify* their positive views of pre-marital sex by advocating a *right way* to have pre-marital sex. Thus, whilst they did not still follow the strict doctrines of their Christian upbringing, it may still have an influence in when, with whom, and in what context they have sex.

If one takes the above into account, it would appear as if the participants experience a myriad of conflicting messages and influences regarding their sexual activities. On the one hand they seek acknowledgement, validation, and safety which seem to support benevolent sexism. Yet, their education and previous sexual experiences allow them to have a more permissive attitude towards sexual activity. However, at the same time, their religious upbringing influences them to experience a certain amount of sex guilt which, on the face of it, influences their willingness to admit to their sexual activities. If they do admit to it, they apparently feel the need to *justify* it by reporting that there is a *right way* in which they have sex.

Such ambiguity in experiences, requirements and social norms may lead to even more obscure and uncertain sexual scripts. Sexual scripts⁴⁴ are "... the 'blueprints' for sexual conduct, detailing with whom one will have sex, what acts one will perform, when and where sex will occur, and for what reasons" (Markle, 2008, p. 46). As can be expected, such sexual scripts are culturally determined and explain how one is expected to react in certain sexual

⁴³ See also Literature Review

⁴⁴ Sexual scripts are constructed on three levels: Cultural scenarios which include the norms of sexual behaviour provided by culture; interpersonal scripts which convert cultural scenarios to be appropriate for certain situations; and intrapsychic scripts which include sexual fantasies, objects, and behaviours which result in sexual arousal. This will also connect individual desires to social meanings (Markle, 2008).

situations. For women, the predictable sexual script is one in which they wait to be chosen as a sexual partner (instead of doing the pursuing), wishing to please men, and also feeling affection and love towards their partners (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). As part of second-wave feminism, women's desire for sexual pleasure outside of the limitations of monogamous heterosexual relationships was established (Markle, 2008). Indeed, in the self-proclaimed feminist series *Sex and the City*, the four main characters are portrayed to have sexual scripts in which women have sex without any real feelings or consequences (Markle, 2008). These scripts, however, appear to differ vastly from the interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts of actual women, and they also engage in far more sex than usually reported by women (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 2000). Furthermore, the traditional romantic aspect in which all four characters seek the elusive fulfilling and enduring romantic relationship (Markle, 2008) – and incidentally at the end of the series they all find it – does nothing to support the supposed sexual script in which women are liberated from the traditional emotional and romantic sexual scripts.

Regardless of whether female sexual scripts are changing or not, Markle (2008) posits that sexual scripts should ideally allow people to govern sexual situations, obtaining sufficient pleasure with the smallest amount of anxiety and risk. However, due to the conflicting messages of how women should behave in sexual situations, their sexual scripts may cause confusion and ambiguity, or uncertainty about how to act in sexual situations.

5.2.8. Reasons for being single.

Throughout the interviews the participants either directly or indirectly mentioned various reasons for being single. The most notable indirect reason is that they have standards and requirements which, by default, mean that fewer men are deemed possible partners. Furthermore, only Greta was actively making an effort to find a partner; whilst at least five

participants were making no effort. Lastly, four participants also mentioned that the fault must be their own.

5.2.8.1. We have standards and requirements.

Throughout the interviews the participants constantly mentioned various aspects which they would find important in a partner and some attributes they were not willing to compromise on. Some of these have already been discussed in the applicable sections and will only be shortly mentioned and summarized here, whilst others are new and will be discussed in more detail. In short, the standards and requirements can be summarized in four sections, and include: education; the presence or not of children; religion and/or cultural background and race; and lastly, some unique requirements mentioned by three participants.⁴⁵

Three participants mentioned that religion played a role in whom they were willing to date. With reference to her previous relationship with Brian, Bella said:

People think fundamental differences between people are solvable; you can get over anything. You can't. Um [pauses and sighs], he's, he was, mmm, well he is probably still Muslim, and at the beginning it didn't matter, but it does become an issue. ... I don't think I shall really have a relationship with someone who, who another, belongs to any other religion. It's just difficult. Because, as I said, one thinks it doesn't matter, but it does.

Similarly, Gretal said:

I think it plays a role, um, definitely I don't want to have someone who is not also a Christian like me ... so I really want someone who knows about grace. Someone who realizes that we're all actually just broken and that we need so much grace ...

⁴⁵ Please refer to Appendix 6 for unique reasons provided by the three participants.

I really want someone who serves the Lord; I don't think I would even be able to just date someone who doesn't serve the Lord. ... No, so religion plays a role.

Danny differed slightly:

Um [sighs], I think what religion does more than anything is it gives you a certain moral base. ... your religion gives you a moral basis, and based on that you, you act in a certain way. So yes, I, I think it does. Um, I expect certain moral behaviour from a partner, you know, because of my background, because of my religious background, and the type of person that I am. So, yes, I do think it plays a role.

Furthermore, cultural and racial backgrounds also played a role. Bella mentioned:

... but the thing which I've realized which plays a bigger role is politics, good old racism ... any sign of racism means you're anyway not the person whom I will be interested in the least. So then you're off my list immediately.

This is similar to findings by Addie and Brownlow (2014) who reports that some of the participants rejected possible partners who were not of the same religion as them. Requiring a partner of similar faith to their own thus limits the options of possible partners for Bella, Gretal and Danny. Another criterion for a possibly partner appear to be race, as can be seen when Haley said: "... but I definitely do *not* [emphasis] want to date a black man, and you, you will not believe how many black men still try then." Furthermore, Anja hinted:

If you come from extremely different cultures, it makes, it very difficult, or it makes a relationship more difficult ... we do things differently just like totally different than they do it. And you're raised differently; you've got other, not necessarily values, but traditions and those types of thing.

Hence the pool is small, and the environment doesn't help.

With the requirements above taken into account, it was not surprising that Danny said:

... I would have liked that, that they have some kind of tertiary education. But on that thing [Internet dating site], I just said matric and above ... I wanted to be open [sighs], so, ja. ... I wanted to open the pool and make it a bit wider. I think if I put doctorate, if I had to put doctorate, if you had to have a doctorate as a requirement there, the pool would become very small, and even if I put masters, the pool would become very small. So I think it was there to be open-minded and to just open the pool up a bit. I work at a university so of course; the student population is, off limits for me [slight laugh] ... And then obviously colleagues, um, I don't know if that's something I need to think about, whether it's appropriate to date a colleague. Um, you know, I don't know if there are rules regarding that or how that's supposed to work. Um, then, yeah, I suppose in my neighbourhood, the shopping centres and the coffee shops, um, I often eat alone at restaurants, and then I, I might see a single guy there eating alone. I don't have the confidence to approach him, but you know that, that's the pool that's available. And then of course, Internet dating is, is the other one.

Other participants also mentioned the lack of possible suitable partners. When asked about the number of available men in her surroundings, Jane gave a simple "Few" followed by laughter. Anja gave an equally nondescript answer: "... [Sighs] I think where you are, maybe it has a bit of an influence because you also learn more, number of people, the number of people with whom you come into contact." Similarly, Ella mentioned:

And in [town where she previously lived] [long pause] friends, but they were, like me, say, or, bit older, or then rather younger, I have, a few, I don't know, maybe they are half, friends but good acquaintances, or friends of friends, you know,

who are around 25 still, and they still want to play around and so forth and there was in any way no attraction, weren't ... type of, selection for *me* [emphasis] ... no, no, at this stage really no one. ... Yes I don't think in my, specific job, field, there are necessarily many [pause] men, not one. Secondly, single men even less, so in my, in my, in my professional context I've never really met anyone in any case.

Along the same lines, Haley mentioned:

[Laughs, almost like a giggle] My work environment, yes, there're single *black* [emphasis] men. [Laughs.] But it, yes there are some, some farmers who are single. Yes, there i-, there are actually available, yes. ... No, because I, I have never ever had like a wow feeling with anyone that I've ever met. So no, no, then not one of them are. And, I have not yet analysed it to the level of, I have told you that whole feeling story,⁴⁶ right, I cannot feel; but, but like um, "whether you can mean something to me like you're good at that, and I am good at this, so maybe we can be together"; I have not ever experienced it on that level.

Gretal, on the other hand, gave a thorough description of her "sample":

Gee [said in a drawn-out manner and with a sigh]. ... so if that then is a sample [pause] of the men with whom I come in contact, then it is, two of them are single, three are single, one is my brother, one is gay, and the other one is not, for me, not attractive. ... the availability is minimal. Um [pause], and I don't understand, statistically it sometimes doesn't make sense, I know there are fewer men than women, um, I think I just live in an environment where there [pause] are fewer single men.

⁴⁶ Please refer to Being single means not being in a relationship.

According to the participants then, the pool of possible partners in their surroundings was very small. Furthermore, they did not find the few that were available attractive or, in Haley's case, a potential partner. Whilst the participants did not mention this specifically and directly as a possible reason for being single; the lack of contact and interaction with eligible partners obviously plays a role in why they are single. Not having met a suitable partner, often due to a lack of opportunity (Ferguson, 2000), was also mentioned as reasons for being single in previous research (Baumbusch, 2004; Ferguson, 2000; Lewis & Moon, 1997). Moreover, Wang and Abbott (2013) report that single, educated women were reluctant to give up some important selection criteria in order to find a partner.

Selectiveness does, however, also lead to single women experiencing discrimination, stigmatization and marginalization (Lahad, 2013). This is evident when Gretal, for example, described people's reactions to hearing that she was single: "I speak on behalf of a few friends as well, we will often hear we are picky ... Very negative, very negative, because, it um, um, it almost rings a bell of snobbishness ...". Ella provided a similar example: "... people have asked me whether I like men or you know, why, why am I single, type of what is my *problem* [emphasis], you know. What, what do I actually want now?" This is indicative of the discursive process whereby selectiveness is no longer portrayed as being confident and self-determining – as it used to in the nineteenth century New England: for example (Berend, 2000).⁴⁷ On the contrary, it now portrays "... pathology, excessiveness, and loss of self-control" (Lahad, 2013, p. 23). This has also especially been linked to women older than the *marriageable age* who are told to be sensible about what they want in a partner (Yin-Wag & Kit-Wa, 2009). Being too selective about what you want in a partner is thus seen to precede loneliness, isolation and singlehood, the ultimate social punishment; especially for women

⁴⁷ According to Berend (2000), during the nineteenth century selectiveness placed single women who rather waited for true love at the top of the moral scale. Indeed, they were perceived as being morally superior and were seen as praiseworthy figures.

above a certain age (Lahad, 2013; Negra, 2009; Taylor, 2011). Thus, it is implied that selectiveness is a privilege which expires after one's marriageable age. In addition, in her analysis of online columns, Lahad (2013) also finds that selectiveness is seen as a pathology for which there are cures and remedies. These proposed cures and remedies serve the purpose of helping the women to realize and fulfil their real potential and purpose in life, to marry and have children (Lahad, 2012; Taylor, 2011).

5.2.8.2. We're not really seeking or trying.

Another aspect which should be taken into consideration is that most of the participants – six in total – were not *actively seeking* partners, or had not been open to finding a partner until recently. For example, Anja said:

Because [sighs] a few years ago I would have, for myself, I was a lot more st-, you are a lot more strict with yourself. Now I say: "Okay fine, let's do this" and then ha-, have fun, innocent fun the evening, and then you see how it [pause] in terms of [pause] that is what you want...

In the same way, Jane explained:

But I must tell you, I have only started to go out, or started seeing people in the last two-and-a-half years. ... for a long time I didn't go out at all, didn't meet new people at all. Um, I was very shy, I'm a bit more confident now. ... Um, I think I have, a lot of it has to do with confidence, and I'm maybe more ready now than I was before ... emotionally [pause] ready to actually be, or try to be, in a long-term relationship. ... I think I'd [pause] be more compliant to compromise and [pause] I am actually prepared now to, not settle for the wrong person, but to, ah, it is not differences, settled is not the right word [pause] to compromise.

However, Jane was still not willing to be active on an Internet dating site which her friend joined on her behalf:

I am actually on an Internet dating website. ... and I've never responded to anyone. ... if I meet someone I immediately know if I'm interested or not, and the Internet thing is so impersonal. ... there are many of my friends who are actually actively doing the Internet dating thing, but I think it's more pick-ups than anything else. ... They meet and have, or have sex, and there they go again, and no. I think it's very dangerous and stupid behaviour.

Bella, Danny, and Haley were making no effort of finding a partner at the time of the interviews. By default this was also true of Ella who, on various occasions, made it perfectly clear that she was single "by choice". Bella said: "I would really want someone, but I'm not going to go out actively and go and look for someone. If it's meant to be, it's very fatalistic now, but if it's meant to be then it must just happen." Similarly, Danny said: "But I'm not desperate, you know, I'm not [sighs] purposefully seeking out someone. If it happens, it happens, if it doesn't it doesn't."

Haley, however, seemed to be rather on the fence:

... [Sighs very deeply] Um [laughs]. No, not at the rate I'm going. No, because I don't do anything, I don't do anything to find someone. ... Um [pause] yes, I think I shall [try Internet dating again], because I, I feel it is, it's kind of the only place because I'm not social, going out; for example I don't go to church, because one meets people there. ... that [internet dating site] is like in a, a good opportunity to a bunch of people, go through a bunch of people, and decide what you want. The only disadvantage of that is, a person cannot always see if someone is lying or not.

Differing from the participants above, Greta said:

I hoped to with sport, um cycling, to interact with more single men, and I have. ... Cycling, Internet dating [pause] okay and then the blind dating, I do it, um [pauses and sighs] I think, many people are trying to get me to move, and I realize that with moving there comes a whole lot of new growth, eh. Um, so if I then don't meet someone ... So it's maybe the next option, yes, but I also I won't just do it to meet someone, um, I think that will be foolish to, to just give up everything to meet someone.

Previous research also indicates that some women were simply not interested in actively seeking a partner, even though they were open to marriage (Situmorang, 2007). However, it is not always made clear why women do not actively seek partners. In the following section, the current participants shed some light on this.

We're in our comfort zones.

Whilst most participants did not give specific reasons for why they were not actively seeking partners – with the exception of Ella and Haley – some reasons can be deduced. Bella gave possible insight into why she was not actively seeking a partner when she described the following:

... I've had that one really bad relationship and after that I didn't really feel like it. ... the longer you are single, the... one becomes more set in one's ways. ... Um [pause], and then it becomes all the more difficult to think: "But [pause] eeh, do I really want you in my space? Because my space is nice and I'm used to it".

Similarly, Danny hinted:

I need to be a little bit more open about that. You know, I think I close myself off a bit and I've been a bit, maybe too introverted and too in my shell, um, and I

realize that, you know, maybe it's not as bad as I think it is, maybe I'm not going to be as, you know, uncomfortable as I thought that I originally would be.

Gretal, however, specifically mentioned:

... but I rather force myself to give something a go, because um, because I realize I'm inclined to not give something an opportunity, out of fear and out of comfort zone yes and all those things... maybe out of fear that someone will go and pray again after six weeks [laughs] I realize it is not that now. Or maybe out of fear that [pause] that I will not be enough or will be too much.

Similarly, Haley also mentioned being scared:

I think it's about fear. Like fear of all the freedom I will lose if I actually find someone. And also fear of all the things that I will find out about myself. And [pause] of [pause] um, yes, I will maybe, not maybe, certainly definitely must decide if I want to sleep with someone or not, and I can't, I can't yet, think that far yet that I will do that. Yes, so that is why I'm not actively looking for someone.

Haley elaborated on her fears:

... I am scared there is something bigger wrong with me. Like say for example [pause] I sound like a record that got stuck now, but say [nervous laugh] but I'm scared [pause] that I will really not be good with sex, or something like that. I am scared of, or that I will have one or the other obscure fantasy [long pause] like [pauses and gives nervous laugh], like to be tied to the bed or something. ... Yes. Fetish, that's the word, yes. Stuff like that, so um, yes [pause] it is mostly that which I'm scared of and that I'm scare that I [sighs and pauses] um [pause] that I'm not good in a relationship set up at all. That I, maybe that I'm someone who *must* [emphasis] be on my own. Maybe *not at all* [emphasis] maybe, say I now

think I'm a good person, maybe I'm really not a good person if I'm in a relationship.

Thus, since the participants above enjoy their current comforts or freedom, they appeared rather reluctant to allow someone such as a partner to enter their space and to possibly take away or disrupt some of their comforts. This is similar to findings by Ferguson (2000) who found that some of her single participants were comfortable with being alone and were reluctant to give up some of their freedom in order to marry. However, this was mostly reported amongst older participants – 45 years and above – who reported being past the usual age of wanting marriage and children (Ferguson, 2000). Furthermore, as stated by Gretal and Haley, there was also some fear involved; whether of getting hurt again or finding out things about oneself which one does not want to.

So it must be our fault.

Seeming at a loss as to why they were single⁴⁸ or where to find a partner; three participants seemed to then look for the fault *within* themselves. This is similar to other research findings where single women blamed themselves for being single (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Lewis & Moon, 1997). In the current study, participants, most notably blamed their physical appearance⁴⁹. Danny said:

Um, there are times when I'm vulnerable, when I wonder, you know: "What is wrong with me? Why am I not in a relationship?" ... where I feel: "Yes, maybe I'm not pretty enough."

⁴⁸ Please refer to Appendix 6 for a description of how the participants seemed to be at a loss.

⁴⁹ Please also refer to Appendix 7 – Physical appearance – for a full description regarding this unit.

Haley seemed quite adamant when she said:

Oh, it can be a, one of many things. [Clears throat.] I really investigated this thing, hear, I read books about it, I have, it's almost another subject area for me.

[Laughs, pauses and takes deep breath] And um, I think it's about like physical because I'm so big and because I'm not symmetrical. Those are the two things about which, what I think are wrong with me.

Gretal said:

So I think I'm inclined to look for the fault in myself. Yes, because analysing is one thing, but I'm analysing it up to the point where I, I almost want to say, shoot myself in the foot.

It is also possible that, in a westernized society where the physical attractiveness and fertility (Addie & Brownlow, 2014) of women is often emphasized as their most important attribute (Osmond & Thorne, 1993), the participants were indoctrinated to focus on those standards more. Similarly, the sexual objectification of women by society may lead to the internalization of such values which, in turn, condition women to focus more on their physical appearance (Ambwani & Strauss, 2007; Frederickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Rwenge, 1998) and to perceive their bodies and physical appearance as the only commodity that they have to acquire social goods such as a romantic relationship (Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002). This is in accordance with more recent literature which indicated that sexual attractiveness was a strong factor in finding a mate for single women in Nigeria. Single women perceived themselves not being sexually and physically attractive enough for men to be the reason as to why they were still single (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Indeed, one participant recounted how she changed her physical appearance and style of dress after a male acquaintance drew her attention to her poor dressing as scaring men away from her. It is little wonder then that literature has indeed indicated that women report more body image concerns

than men (Hargreaves & Tiggerman, 2004; Sondhaus, Kurtz, & Strube, 2001). This could quite possibly be the case for Danny especially who was told that she was unattractive and repulsive; or for Haley whose mother told her she would never get a husband if she were fat. According to Osmond and Thorne (1993), such objectification of women renders women's lives and experiences invisible to others. This *invicibility* can also be linked specifically to older single women whose experience of invicibility is symbolic of their social exclusion and isolation due to their advanced age (Lahad & Hazan, 2014; Woodward, 2006). Accordingly, the participants may experience feelings of not being noticed by possible partners because they feel they are not physically attractive enough according to the standards set by society.

In conclusion, the participants thus described a vast array of their differing lived experiences of being single. Their descriptions were rich and nuanced, resulting in a long, complex, and interesting synopsis of findings. In order to guide the reader through these myriad of experiences, summaries of the key points of each unit of significance, as well as concluding remarks on each, will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6 Summary, Conclusion, Reflection and Recommendations

Using a feminist influenced phenomenological framework, I aimed to gain a nuanced and rich description of seven women's experiences of being single. Given the lack of studies regarding single women, and also the limitations these studies impose, I used a qualitative method to explore women's experience of being single as expressed and described by them. In line with the feminist framework, I thus included women in the process of knowledge making, by working *with* women and not *on* them. Furthermore, I highlighted that women are not a homogenous group, but that certain groups of women (for example single women) experience oppression and exploitation differently from others (for example women in romantic relationships). I also contributed to consciousness-raising by emphasizing certain aspects which sustain the oppression of women – in particular the marginalization of single women. In addition, I challenged the common perception of single womanhood as a negative experience by not assuming it to be a predominantly negative experience. Instead, I highlighted *both* the negative *and* the positive experiences of the women who participated in my study. In this chapter I will summarise the main findings of my research. I will reflect on these findings and their implications for the development of psychological theories that accommodate and include singlehood as a way of being in its own right. Lastly I will discuss the limitations of the current study and also make recommendations for future research.

6.1. A Brief Summary of Women's Experience of Being Single

The participants experienced being single in complex ways and the description of their experience in the previous chapter is equally multifaceted and intricate. I identified fifteen different units of significance and discussed eight of them in more detail. The essence of each of the latter eight units of significance is summarised below:

- (i) The participants defined being single as not being in a relationship and did not seem to have a discourse that validated singlehood as a way of being in its own right.
- (ii) The participants emphasized the advantages of the freedom they associated with being single. However, it often seemed to be a theoretical freedom and it remained unclear whether the participants practically lived or utilized this freedom.
- (iii) A partner was perceived as someone who could provide them with obligatory companionship and support. The participants particularly emphasized that they would not have to ask for, or seek for the support of a partner.
- (iv) Men's attentions had a positive effect on their self-esteem, especially in terms of how they felt about their physical appearance. However, the attention had to come from the right man and should not be overtly sexual.
- (v) The participants often defined themselves through their education. They relied on their education for independence and also as a coping mechanism for being single.
- (vi) Whether they wanted children or not, the participants seemed fully aware of the proverbial biological clock that was running out of time. Additionally, the lingering importance of the traditional nuclear family values influenced the participants' openness to becoming single mothers.
- (vii) The participants mentioned that they did miss out on having sex, especially within a committed relationship. However, the participants were still reluctant to talk about sex due to discomfort which is most likely influenced by their Christian backgrounds and the lingering patriarchal culture.
- (viii) Various reasons why the participants were still single came to light: the small pool of possible partners, and the participants' lack of trying to find a partner

because they were in their comfort zones or simply did not know where to find a partner. They also blamed themselves for being single.

6.2. A Critical Discussion of the Findings

The phenomenological component of my theoretical framework for this study required that I should refrain from making any assumptions and judgments or imposing my own ideas of the experience of being single on the participants. Additionally, the feminist component compelled me to reflect critically on my findings. Specifically, a feminist viewpoint sensitised me to view gender as a social construct. Furthermore, I had to be cognizant of the heterogeneous nature of women, and also of single women as a group. Thus, each participant's experience was approached as unique and contextual (especially with reference to gender norms). Moreover, from a feminist perspective, I aimed to identify the ways in which dominant ways of knowing, such as those embedded in heterosexual and gender norms, shape people's experiences. In addition, with this research I endeavoured to raise consciousness about the social position of single women, hoping to foster an awareness of their shared experiences, and how they can stand together as a group. Against the backdrop of these principles, I would like to highlight the following two issues: the prevalence of dominant ideologies and norms in how women described their experiences, and the tension that women often experience between autonomy and connectedness.

6.2.1. The prevalence of dominant ideologies and norms.

6.2.1.1. The hegemony of romantic relationships.

When describing their experiences and perceptions of being single, the participants mostly spoke in terms of the *lack* of a relationship. This was especially evident when they described how they defined being single as *not having* someone who is committed to you, whom you can expect things from and do things with; *not having* a companion whom they could take for granted; and *not sharing* a physical space and physical contact. Furthermore, the participants often compared their own experiences to how couples would have

experienced the same situation. As such, it is possible that the current participants are vulnerable to constructing identities by which they define themselves (and are defined by others) through what they are not: they are *not* wives, *not* mothers, *not* living a fulfilling life. By defining themselves in terms of what they are not, they are at risk of creating deficit identities (Reynolds, 2011) through the use of the Heterosexual Relationship and Family Life discourse⁵⁰ (Addie & Brownlow, 2014).

The above is indicative of the lack of a *single discourse*, and also the dominance of an *in*-relationship status and the heterosexual ideology of marriage and family. The lack of a single discourse and the conceptualization of being single as the opposite of being in a relationship have been highlighted as problematic in previous literature and studies. As a result, single people do not receive the same amount of attention in research as couples do (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). It also entrenches the dominance of a romantic relationship within the relationship hierarchy. Thus, being in a romantic relationship was still seen by the participants as the ideal and desired state, especially for women. A romantic relationship was perceived as a way of being that would make the participants happier than they are when they are single, and which would also make their lives easier than they are now. This is in line with the ideology of heterosexual couple hood, marriage and family (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). In addition, the participants' persistent comparison of their own experiences with those of couples is suggestive of the idea that their experiences are only valued in as far as they can be *compared* to those of couples. Thus, the participants seemed unable to perceive being single as an equivalent state of being which could also bring meaning to their lives. Instead, they constructed their identities as secondary to that of marriage, family and motherhood (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). Therefore the questions that are raised are: What would a singlehood

⁵⁰ Within this discourse woman identifies as a member of a nuclear family with great responsibility to other family members. She does not make independent life choices; instead her choices are mediated by the needs of her partners and/or children. This life role of family responsibility is supported through major social institutions, is legally validated and celebrated in cultural rituals (Addie & Brownlow, 2014).

discourse entail that could successfully challenge the dominant discourse of romantic relationship and how do we go about developing and encouraging such a discourse?

Asset and deficit identity through discourse.

In their study⁵¹, Addie and Brownlow (2014) used critical discursive psychology to identify what they termed the “Independent Single Woman” (p. 421) discourse which their participants used to create an asset identity for themselves. Through this discourse they create an identity of a woman who is:

... in a relationship with a broad network of friends and extended family, and chooses to have or not have intimate relationships. ... [her] decisions are not primarily mediated by the needs of other family members, and she represents herself to others as a woman who values the freedom of making her own life choices and is satisfied with her life. ... [this life role] has no role in major social institutions, does not need to be legally validated and is not celebrated *per se* (p. 429).

A similar model of *ohitorisama* was highlighted by Dales (2014)⁵². However, the *ohitorisama* model does not necessarily focus on single women *per se* and places much emphasis on economic consumption (as opposed to freedom). Consumption is both the means and the end goal, through consumption women assert their economic capacity and by consuming alone they challenge notions of appropriate conformity which discourages sole social engagement of women. *Ohitorisama* is also a strategy which increases resistance to shame for not conforming to the norm – single women overcome obstacles by using their agency to claim legitimate social space (Dales, 2014).

⁵¹ Please note that this study was published after the initial completion of this Thesis, yet was added post-hoc due to the great value which it added to the development of a singlehood discourse.

⁵² Please note that this study was published after the initial completion of this Thesis, yet was added post-hoc due to the great value which it added to the development of a singlehood discourse.

On the other hand, the “Heterosexual Relationship and Family Life” (p. 428) discourse position women within the heterosexual partnered relationship and either anticipating motherhood or as mothers of children – something which the current participants lack. This in turn leaves single women vulnerable to creating (or being positioned as having) a deficit identity, and is a repertoire which has proved to be very powerful and (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). In the current study it is clear that the participants mostly relied on the Heterosexual Relationship and Family Life discourse which is similar to the *dominant couple narrative* (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005) and is indicative of the current participants’ lack of a singlehood discourse.

It is clear then that the Independent Single Woman discourse is limited in the sense that it has not necessarily been internalized by all single women, nor is it available to all single women. This is in accordance with Edley (2001) who noted that some repertoires are more available to some people for meaning making than to others because some ways of seeing the world have become culturally dominant. More specifically, the Independent Single Woman discourse rests strongly on the capacity for freedom – both to do whatever single women wanted, and the economic/financial ability to be independent and secure (see also Dales, 2014). Additionally, Dales (2014) argues that even though the discourses of single women may be more focussed on independence, as with *ohitorisama*, they often remain tied to the prospect of marriage. As such, even though progress has been made in developing a singlehood discourse, it is not yet readily available to all single women; and in terms of the current study was not yet prominently used nor appeared to be internalized by the participants. As noted by Dales (2014): “The agency engendered by new discourses of femininity is not insignificant ... the existence of a new trope of womanhood in itself brings hope – but there is a unequivocal gap between the ideal and the lived reality” (p. 237). Additionally, even though some single women may position themselves as independent women through the use of the Independent Single Women discourse, it does not mean that

others also necessarily position them as independent single women – they are also positioned by others outside of the single milieu (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). As such, single women are often positioned as outsiders by others and are ascribed a deficit identity due to the lack of a partner or children. If single women do identify with the singlehood discourse, they often also have to defend their choice of deviating from the norm (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). It is thus not only single women who need to progress to the use of a singlehood discourse; it should also be adopted by the broader society.

6.2.1.2. Prevalence of traditional gender norms.

The participants seemed to have internalized some of the gender norms associated with emphasized femininity (Connell, 1987; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). For example, the participants perceived the physical appearance of women to be important, whereas they valued the ambition and economic status of men. Similar to other studies (Dales, 2014; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014), some participants mentioned in particular that a man must at least make more money than they do and be ambitious in order to be considered as potential partners. This is in line with the hegemonic norms in which femininity is associated with physical attractiveness and masculinity is defined by success and ambition (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Furthermore, the participants also described sex that is void of an emotional connection or commitment as less satisfying than sex with a romantic partner. This is similar to the emphasized femininity often portrayed in popular media. Emphasized femininity, among other things, underscores the importance of emotions and commitment in women's lives, and especially in their relationships (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Additionally, the participants also appeared cautious in discussing their sexual activity, possibly due to fear of judgement. This may be indicative of lingering patriarchal values in which women are expected to be virtuous, whilst men are encouraged to explore their sexual freedom (see also Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Women who do not follow these patriarchal norms and involve themselves in roles considered quintessentially male, risk being considered unsuitable

for marriage by men (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Thus, regardless of the progress that has been made regarding gender equality in certain spheres and the vast array of feminist literature, hegemonic gender norms still seem to remain prevalent among this group of educated, white, South African women. It would therefore be worthwhile considering how tertiary institutions could do more to encourage women to challenge these dominant notions.

6.2.2. Women, autonomy, and connectedness.

The participants framed being in a relationship (or connectedness) as a danger to their autonomous (or separate) selves. Being autonomous – having freedom and choice – formed part of their asset identities which allowed them to act independently and exploit what they perceived to be the advantages of singlehood (Addie & Brownlow, 2014). In accordance, they appeared to associate being in a relationship as merging their own identity with that of another to the detriment of their own identity and their autonomy. This was especially evident when they described the possible threat a partner (or a romantic relationship) would pose to their freedom (see also Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). It could be argued that they overstated their autonomy, independence and freedom, whilst understating their wanting for the care of a partner. Even if this framing functioned as a coping or defence strategy against the negative connotations of singlehood, it is noteworthy that such a dichotomisation of autonomy and connectedness resonates with existing theories.

This tension between autonomy and connectedness has previously been previously conceptualized by feminist researchers in terms of Gilligan's idea of the 'connected self' and the 'separate/objective self'. These two selves align both with 'traditional' gender stereotypes and Erikson's developmental theory (in particular stage six); in which men are seen as autonomous individuals who develop a separate self, whereas women remain connected (Fisher & Embree, 2000). The sixth stage of Erikson's developmental theory occurs from the end of adolescence to about 35 years of age, and involves the conflict between intimacy and

isolation (Louw & Louw, 2007). During this stage human beings establish their independence in order to live and function as mature autonomous and responsible adults. The formation of intimate relationships (both sexual and close friendship relationships) encompasses feelings of caring and commitment and is an integral part of this stage. When the conflict of this stage is resolved, individuals can display emotions that involve intimacy; they do not fear losing their own identity by merging their own being with that of another (Schultz & Schultz, 2000). On the other hand, when this conflict is not resolved, characteristics of isolation are internalized (Louw & Louw, 2007). Young adults then avoid social contacts and reject people since they fear that intimacy will be a threat to their ego identity (Schultz & Schultz, 2000) – which includes their autonomous self (Louw & Louw, 2007). The basic strength which develops during this stage is love which Erikson considered to be the “... greatest human virtue ... fusing of oneself with another person” (Schultz & Schultz, 2000, p. 170).

Feminists, however, have pointed out the implied gender identity bias of Erikson's theory: young boys form their masculine identity through separation and individuation from the mother, whilst girls' feminine identity does not depend on this separation but is rather threatened by it. Intimacy thus threatens male gender identity. Even though Erikson's theory does value the development of intimacy as part of identity development, it is still subordinate to the formation of autonomy – the qualities deemed important in adulthood such as autonomous thinking and clear decision-making are associated with the masculine gender identity (Fisher & Embree, 2000). Adulthood and identity formation thus value the separation of the individual from others more highly than the connectedness to others. Therefore, it could be argued that if women pursue equal status with men, they would also need to value their autonomous selves more than their connected selves. Accordingly, the participants in this study seemed to have the perception (or used it as a coping or defence strategy) that strong, educated and independent women should prioritise autonomy. This may also be conceptualized in terms of Lawrence Haworth's theory of a “shallow” (p. 269) autonomy in

which the commands of others, in this case of society, are followed (Fisher & Embree, 2000). On the other hand, they also seem to have a “deep” (p 269) autonomy, a more profound sense of self-rule by which they have decided to reject the rules of others – for example, the manner in which they seemed to *reject* society's rules that women should be dependent on men. However, the different levels of autonomy are not always distinguishable, especially not when verbally expressed (Fisher & Embree, 2000).

Larrabee, however, points out that autonomy and connectedness need not be an either-or dilemma. She states that each of us “... encompasses both a unity and a multiplicity, a singular identity and multiple selves” (Fisher & Embree, 2000, p. 267). In other words, resolving the conflict between autonomy and intimacy would imply internalizing both a separate and a connected self, celebrating both our autonomies and connections. Both men and women should thus be encouraged to integrate both connectedness and autonomy into their sense of self. The dichotomy of two senses of self (a masculine separate self versus a feminine connected self) needs to be continually challenged, and a merged sense of self into one integrated whole should be encouraged.

6.3. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Besides various limitations, the current study also highlighted certain aspects of being single which require further research. These are discussed in the following section.

6.3.1. Lack of comparable literature.

The current study has some limitations, most notably the lack of comparable literature. In most cases, the available literature on the topic presented one of three problems: firstly, the definition of *single* in terms of who was included in the single population. In other words, terms such as *never-married*, *single*, and *not-married* were used interchangeably in the discussion of the current study when referring to other studies, depending on which term had been used in the particular study being referred to. However, as previously discussed, this is

problematic because the terms cannot be used interchangeably and the term used often refers to a population group that is different from the current group. Secondly, most of the studies were done in different social and cultural contexts. Markedly, the majority of studies on the prevalence and experience of single women were done, to my knowledge, in more traditional countries such as Israel, Indonesia, and China. In some of these countries arranged marriages have been the norm until very recently, and in some ways they can also be regarded as being more patriarchal in their views and treatment of women. This means that comparability is limited due to the increased freedom and rights of South African women. Lastly, some of the studies also focussed on single women from a different age group, often aged 60 and above. Due to the different norms and societal expectations of these women when they were deemed to be of *marriageable age*, comparisons with the current group are also limited.

6.3.2. Generalizability.

A second limitation is the generalizability of the current study to other cohorts within the South African context, since the group of participants is quite small and homogeneous. Even though it was not stated as a prerequisite, the current study consisted only of white women, a minority group in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Future research regarding women's experience of being single should be conducted across various social milieus such as culture, ethnicity and socio-economic status. It seems particularly important to explore the experiences of single women who live in lower socio-economic circumstances because these women are likely to have lower educational levels and thus limited financial means to support themselves. They may therefore value a male partner as a source of financial support and security.

6.3.3. Depth of analysis.

Corresponding to the aim of phenomenological research, the principal purpose of the current study was to present an in-depth analysis and nuanced description of a specific group

of women's experience of being single. However, since a master's thesis in the Faculty of Arts is restricted to a maximum of 50 000 to 55 000 words, I had limited space in which to do so. Consequently much detail was left out and I could not further investigate some findings in as much depth as I would have liked to. It is my belief that further analysis using both my own data and new data gathered by other researchers is warranted regarding the following:

- (i) the implementation (or lack thereof) of single women's freedom, as well as a discourse analysis of the specific choice of words used when describing this freedom;
- (ii) the difference in perceived support from a partner in comparison to that of family and friends;
- (iii) the experience of single men (as mentioned earlier, research on the experiences of single people is scarce whilst stigmatization is rife). I am of the opinion, though, that researchers should take care lest the gender bias of the stigmatization of single people lead to a bias in research. In other words, the experiences of single men must not be mitigated as an important research topic purely because it is assumed that their experiences are not as negative as those of single women.
- (iv) the prevalence, if present, of discrimination and marginalization of single women within the workplace;
- (v) the sexual attitudes and behaviours of single women; especially among religious women; and lastly,
- (vi) single women's acceptance and internalization of their single status or identity: the question of why and when single women stop searching and/or hoping to find a partner.

The above recommendations do not exhaust the choice of possible future studies and were merely made in line with the main body of results. When the content of Appendix 7 is also taken into account, a myriad of possible studies could be added to the list above.

6.3.4. In response to previous limitations.

As has been mentioned several times in the current study, previous research on single people is limited and four limitations have been put forward. I have attempted to respond to all of them in the paragraphs that follow.

Firstly, the definition of who counts as single is problematic and confusing at best. Within the current study I attempted to give a clearer definition of who was included in the sample in order to counter this limitation whilst simultaneously allowing the participants to give their own definition of being single as is required by the phenomenological framework of this research project. Succinctly stated, being single was defined as *not being in a relationship, the complete lack of a (formal/official) partner*. Yet, by no means do I claim this definition as the ultimate definition of being single, nor that this definition would necessarily apply to other studies or accepted by other cohorts and societies. In other words, this definition of being single is limited to those who accept it as their definition. Nonetheless, the advantage of this study is that it at least clearly defines who was included in the *single* population and it was not merely accepted that there is a universal understanding of who counts as a member of the single population.

Secondly, a limitation of previous research and literature was that single people were generally merely used as a comparative group to establish whether people in a relationship are better off than single people. Even though I attempted to avoid this limitation by purely researching the experience of single women rather than simply comparing them to people who are in a relationship of some sorts, the participants derailed my attempt to a certain degree because in numerous cases they themselves described and perceived their experiences

in comparison to those of couples. It is thus possible that the divide of *singles versus couples* has been so internalized and integrated by Western society that there is no easily definable or readily available manner in which to study the experience of being single without it. As such, I urge future researchers to continue the quest of giving single women a voice of their own and also to fast-track the development of a *single discourse*.

Thirdly, previous research has seldom attempted to determine the accuracy of the stigma of women's singlehood. And lastly, previous research has not allowed single people to be active participants in a qualitative study of their own experiences. It is my belief, however, that I have successfully managed to respond to these limitations since I refrained from imposing any preconceived ideas and notions on my participants. Furthermore, they were active participants in a qualitative study of their own experiences.

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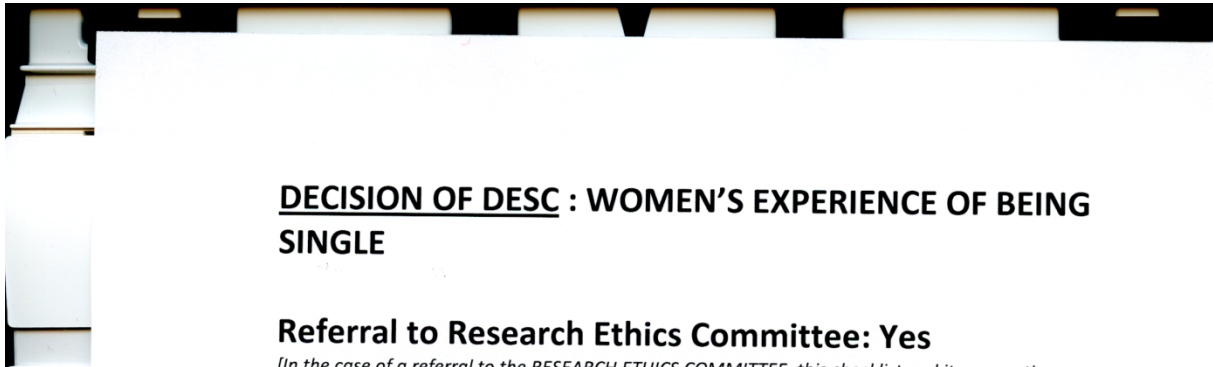
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Departmental Ethics Screening Committee Approval



DECISION OF DESC : WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF BEING SINGLE

Referral to Research Ethics Committee: Yes

[In the case of a referral to the RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE, this checklist and its supporting documentation should be submitted, as well as the full application for ethics review, together with its supporting documentation, avoiding unnecessary duplication of documentation. Also list the ethical risks that are related to the research proposal that is submitted for review, together with the DESC's proposals to avoid or mitigate these ethical risks. Clearly indicate in a note exactly what ethical clearance is requested for.]

If no referral is required, state any DESC conditions/stipulations subject to which the research may proceed (on separate page if space below is too limited): *[Or stretch table below if required]*

Any ethical issues that need to be highlighted?	Why are these issues important?	What must/could be done to minimize the ethical risk?
Interview with participants and possible effect on participants.	Some sensitive issues may arise that may trigger further emotions and thoughts.	Ensure that support is available, if needed by participant.

Prof. SA Kagee	Sakagee
Print name of Departmental Chair	Signature of Departmental Chair
Date: 10/4/2013	
Prof AP Greeff	Alph
Print name of second member of DESC	Signature of second member of DESC
Date: 10/4/2013	

DOCUMENTS TO BE PROPERLY FILED IN THE DEPARTMENT AND (E-)COPIES OF DESC CHECKLIST SEND TO SU RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE OFFICE. ON RECEIPT OF THIS COPY, THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT WILL ISSUE A RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE REGISTRATION NUMBER.

Appendix 2: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (HUMANIORA) Approval



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**Approval Notice
New Application**

03-May-2013
Van Der Watt, Alberta ASJ

Proposal #: HS911/2013
Title: WOMENS EXPERIENCE OF BEING SINGLE

Dear Miss Alberta Van Der Watt,

Your **New Application** received on **11-Apr-2013**, was reviewed by members of the **Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)** via Expedited review procedures on **03-May-2013** and was approved.
Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: 03-May-2013 -02-May-2014

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number** (HS911/2013) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218839027.

Included Documents:

DESC form
informed consent
Revised research proposal
Letter of response
Research proposal
REC Application
interview schedule

Sincerely,

Susara Oberholzer
REC Coordinator
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form for Individual Interviews

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**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A SINGLE WOMAN

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by ASJ van der Watt from the Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University. The results will contribute to Master Thesis in Psychology. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a single woman aged 30 – 40 from the Stellenbosch region, have at least one degree, and are informed by Christian beliefs.

For the purpose of this study single is defined as, and limited to: (i) the complete absence of a committed romantic relationship for the past two years; (ii) no serious dating for the past two years – in other words, the participant has not dated the same person more than twice in the past two years, with the intention of forming a committed relationship; (iii) and the participant has not been on more than 12 romantic dates in the past two years – that is, she has not been on more than one romantic date every two months.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to determine and understand the experience of being a single woman, from the perspective of the single woman.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, it will entail the following:

- A convenient time and convenient, private and safe venue will be negotiated with you for an interview which will be conducted by the researcher. The interview will last approximately between 60 – 90 min and will be audio-recorded.
- If necessary, you may be asked for a follow-up interview.
- The last ten minutes of the interview will be spend on a debriefing conversation in which you will be asked how you experienced the interview.
- You will also be asked to recommend research participation to other potential participants and ask them to contact the researcher.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

During the research process it is possible that you might feel some discomfort when due to discussing your single life. It is also possible that you may become aware of problems or issues that may need professional assistance. In order to address this possibility, all participants will be provided with the contact details below of organisations that will be able to provide free or affordable counseling services: LifeLine Southern Africa (021 461-1113); and Stellenbosch Unit for Psychology (021 808 2944).

You may terminate your participation in the research study if you feel too uncomfortable to continue.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Through the research study I will gain a better understanding about how women experience being single, and also how other close interpersonal relationships work.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will not receive payment for their participation.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping the transcribed interviews in a secured file and in a locked room. No data will be made available to anyone outside the research team.

Audiotaped data will not be made available to anybody outside of the research team; however participants who wish to review the tapes will be allowed to do so. Audio-taped data will be destroyed once it is no longer needed by the research team.

Results from the research will be published in the final Thesis; however no identifiable information will be printed and the confidentiality of research participants will be maintained.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Dr Elmien Lesch (Supervisor) at el5@sun.ac.za and 021 808 3455, or Alberta van der Watt at 14520036@sun.ac.za and 072 408 8025.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE
--

The information above was described to [me/the subject/the participant] by [name of relevant person] in [Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other] and [I am/the subject is/the participant is] in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [me/him/her]. [I/the participant/the subject] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [my/his/her] satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [name of the subject/participant] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [name of the representative]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other] and [no translator was used/this conversation was translated into _____ by _____].

 Signature of Investigator

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The interview procedure will be as follows:

- The session will be recorded for future use and analysis. The recordings will not be listened to by anybody but the researchers.
- Please feel free to speak freely and openly, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions and no judgments will be made based upon your answers.
- All data gathered will remain confidential, anonymous, and will only be available to the researchers involved.
- If at any time during the interview/focus group you wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so.
- If you understand the procedure and agree to continue, please read through, fill in, and sign the informed consent form.

The interview questions provided will only be used as a guideline for the first level of interviewing and will allow for the participants to freely express their feelings and perceptions. After the initial interview, follow-up questions will be asked, if necessary, to explore the participants' experience of being single within various life areas including family, friends, occupation, finances, recreation, sex, and children.

Guiding questions:

- Do you think of yourself as a "single" person? Why do you say you are single?
- What is it like to be single?
- What do you think about other people who are in a romantic relationship or who are single?

- Do you think women experience being single differently from men? If so, why and how?
- Do you think your age/education/religion have any influence on your experience of being single? If so, why and how?
- Do you think that you miss out on some things by being single and/or are some of your needs unfulfilled?

Appendix 5: A Short Description of Each Participant's Dating History**5.1. Anja**

Anja only referred to one specific guy she dated whilst still studying. They “had something on” twelve years ago for a few weeks. He left her without giving her a reason. However, she believes that his father told him to end their relationship because he was studying and working and their relationship was a distraction.

5.2. Bella.***5.2.1. Bella's relationship with Ben.***

Ben is the man whom Bella dated most recently. She had a relationship with him for about two months but called it an “instant message relationship”. Ben was five years younger than she was, and is divorced with children. According to Bella, he ended their relationship because he had commitment issues because his ex-wife had cheated on him.

5.2.2. Bella's relationship with Brian.

Brian is the person that Bella sees as her last boyfriend. They dated six-and-a-half years ago (at the time of the interview). According to Bella, he was of a different faith and a refugee who wanted her to mother him. They were in a relationship for about seven years with a one year break somewhere in the middle. She says that he once wanted her back so badly that he was willing to convert; however, she told him that that was not how things worked. In the end he started to hang out with the drug dealers of the city where Bella lives, and according to her, she made sure that when she ended things he took all of that with him.

5.2.3. Bella's relationship with Bertus.

Bella's relationship with Bertus is purely sexual, and she calls him her lover. She met him on a boat trip and, after getting very drunk one night, they decided to have a sexual relationship and set the ground rules for what would be allowed and what not. They still have

this relationship and Bella still holds that she will never enter into a real/romantic relationship with him.

5.3. Danny.

5.3.1. Danny's relationship with Dirk.

Danny's first relationship was with Dirk. He was 14 years older than she was (she was about 27 or 28 years old when they dated) and worked at the same department where she worked. According to Danny, this was one of the reasons why she kept the relationship a secret from all but a few close friends. Danny says that she knew from the beginning that he did not want a relationship, because he was an easy-going person and enjoyed his freedom. It is unclear why the relationship ended, but it is likely related to their different lifestyles and the fact that he did not want a relationship.

5.3.2. Danny's relationship with Dan.

Dan was one of the few people who knew about Danny's relationship with Dirk. He supported her in her relationship with him, and she also confided in him after the relationship had ended. After he moved to an overseas country, a mutual friend informed her that he was going to send her a letter proposing a relationship and also marriage. Some of the reasons he provided was that she was the type of person he thought he could spend the rest of his life with, and also that he wanted to move to New Zealand to work there, and being married would make getting into the country easier. Danny decided that he was a good guy with integrity and so accepted his proposal. However, after flying to him in the foreign country (having paid for her own ticket) he told her a few days later that he did not find her attractive anymore, that he was not ready for a relationship, and he was repulsed by her. Danny could not fly back to South Africa immediately, and had to stay a couple of weeks in the same home as Dan.

5.4. Ella.

5.4.1. Ella's relationship with Edmund.

Ella dated Edmund during her first visit to Europe. However, at that time she still believed you did things “according to the book”, and their relationship ended because she did not want to have sex with him.

5.4.2. Ella's relationship with Edward.

With Edward, however, the situation was different from the circumstances with Edmund. Ella did not have a problem with premarital sex anymore, and did not even mind a non-monogamous relationship. They dated for about six months, whilst he still saw other people. She is not clear as to why the relationship ended, though it is most likely because she returned to South Africa.

5.4.3. Ella's relationship with Ed.

Ella sees Ed as the last person she dated – which was during 2005 – and they were together for about seven months. However, not a lot of people knew about their relationship. This was mostly because he was a Black South African man and his family would not have approved of their relationship. She also did not tell her family about it. In the end things did not work out and they did not find it worth the effort to tell their families.

5.5. Gretal.

5.5.1. Gretal's relationship with George.

Gretal mentioned that she had had two relationships, and that she had she briefly dated one man. George was the first she mentioned. Gretal and George were friends before they briefly dated whilst in England. However, Gretal believes he was never really fully committed to the relationship because he wanted to go to a different developed country, which he did in the end. After he left her, she came back to South Africa.

5.5.2. Gretal's relationship with Gert.

Gretal refers to Gert as the “charismaniac” she once dated. They were also friends before they started dating. Their relationship ended after he prayed to the Lord who told him that this relationship is not what He wanted for them.

5.5.3. Gretal's relationship with Gerrie.

Gretal was never in what she calls a relationship with Gerrie. He had recently become widower at the time Gretal dated him. He also had a child. According to Gretal, he basically told her she was a good option – possibly as a mother for his child. However, after telling him that she would not invite herself over to his house and that she only invited herself to her close friends' homes, he did not make contact again and started to see the sister of his late wife.

5.6. Haley.

Haley does not consider that she had had a relationship with either of the men mentioned below. However, she described her interaction with each of them after being asked to tell me more about her dating history.

5.6.1. Haley's relationship with Hans.

Hans is the person Haley feels like she once connected with eight or nine years ago. It happened one evening while they had dinner at a mutual friend's house. However, after a while Haley started to feel uncomfortable and was afraid he might kiss her – in the follow up interview she dismissed this and explained that she was scared he would find out about her past or saw her vulnerabilities. After this she excused herself and left. She still regrets this.

5.6.2. Haley's relationship with Henry.

Henry was one of the dates her friends organized for her for a residence ball at university. As part of the evening, they went to a very expensive restaurant with the group.

Here he asked her to help pay for her own drink. This did not bother her, because she knew the restaurant was expensive.

5.6.3. Haley's relationship with Hannes.

Haley met Hannes at a cell-group of the church and enjoyed his company. This was until he asked her to tell him "about herself" and also until he asked her to pay for her food on their third date.

5.6.4. Haley's relationship with Hendrik.

Haley says she enjoyed spending time with Hendrik because he paid for everything, even for expensive coffee and a [music] concert. However, once they started seeing each other once a week, or when he started contacting her every second day it became too much for her. She did not want him to get to know about her past.

5.6.5. Haley's relationship with Hennie.

Haley's relationship with Hennie was much the same as it had been with Hans. She spent some time with Hennie. She experienced him as making an effort with her, paying for everything and wanting to make her comfortable by asking her what she wanted to eat and drink. However, when he paid her a compliment by saying that she is nice, she started to feel uncomfortable.

5.6.6. Haley's relationship with Henk.

Henk is the first man with whom she shared a physical embrace. According to Haley, she had had a lot of wine to drink the one evening and started talking to Henk. He then took her to his flat and indicated where his bed was. She interpreted this as him "having plans" and told him she did not want to. After this he said "Okay, let's just make out then". Haley says this is the "farthest" she has gone physically with a man.

5.7. Jane.

Similar to Haley, Jane defines herself as “single her whole life”. This is because no one has ever asked her out officially. However, she does describe the following relationships she’s had with men.

5.7.1. Jane’s relationship with Jack.

Jane had a relationship with Jack for two and a half years, even though she knew he did not want a serious relationship. She also later found out that he was married when she asked him to go to a wedding with her, and he did not want to for fear that his wife may find out. However, she still continued the relationship, which was also sexual, despite her being “the other woman”. Between the first and the second interview Jane decided to end her physical relationship with Jack, whilst still remaining friends.

5.7.2. Jane’s relationship with John.

Jane met John after she moved back to the family farm because she was fired from her work for being too fat and blonde. She thought their relationship was more serious than he did and she later found out that he had cheated on her. However, she believes their relationship helped her to feel more confident and better about herself; and she also enjoyed the fact that he did not ask too many questions.

5.7.3. Jane’s relationship with Jeff.

Jane had a similar experience with Jeff who also made her feel more comfortable with herself. At 54 he was much older than Jane (she was 32 at the time). However, according to Jane, he also just used her for sex and she found out via his e-mail that she was number three on his list. Yet, she still describes her experience with Jeff as “good”.

5.7.4. Jane's relationship with James.

Jane describes James as the person she thought she would marry one day if he asked her. She also told her sister about him. However, on her birthday she caught her sister making out with James on the lawn. She did confront her sister about this; however her sister could never give her an answer as to why she did this.

5.7.5. Jane's relationship with Jeremy.

Lastly, Jane had a one night stand with Jeremy whilst she was in a European country. She calls this experience as very traumatic because he was only the second person she had ever had sex with. They were both extremely drunk. She lost her job because of this incident (her boss caught them in the lift together) and she was also pregnant. For a while she thought she'd have to go back to South Africa immediately, but did not. Instead she went to a doctor who gave her several pills to drink in order to abort her pregnancy. The pills made her very ill and for about ten years afterwards she only had her periods about once or twice per year. Only one of her sisters knows about this. About 14 years later Jane saw Jeremy at her guest house for the first time after their encounter. However, she pretended not to know who he was. He never knew about the pregnancy either.

Appendix 6: Extra Information

6.1. Being single means not being in a relationship.

6.1.1. *Going on a date, being in love and loving someone.*

There were no comprehensive definitions of going on a date, being in love, and loving someone since not all the participants contributed to the definitions. Furthermore, Haley did not believe in love and provided her own definition for what people call love, and her definition of *going on a date* also varied from that of the other participants. However, it is still important to mention the definitions provided because they influence the experience of the participants who provided the definitions. Furthermore, as will be explained, it would appear that to the participants *being in love* and *going on a date* are precursors to being in a relationship. Hence, these concepts also form an important part of understanding how a relationship develops and by default, what is not happening in the lives of these particular single women.

Anja started by explaining that: "... a date is when you, well, when a guy and a girl go out, well someone in whom you romantically [pause] or potentially could be interested in, go out [pause] and [stutters] do something together." Thus, it would seem, as if to Anja a date implied the possibility of a romantic interest or even relationship. Similarly, Danny described a date as having "... the potential for something to develop, something more to develop. Um, dating for me, there is some level of interest; there is some level of attraction." Assuming that the "something more" referred to a relationship; it is relatively safe to say that Danny saw dating as the precursor to a possible relationship. Bella and Gretal, however, explicitly linked going on a date to the possibility of forming a relationship. Bella said:

... but if you date someone it is like kind of the precursor to be in an actual relationship. Like, I would say there's [demonstrates stepwise with hands] going on a date, deciding "okay, I want to go on another date", and then "you are

dating”, and then when you see “okay [pause] this works”, then it becomes a relationship.

Similarly Gretal said: “For me, a date is when you go and drink coffee, or eat, or see a movie, or whatever, with the idea to get to know each other better to possibly be in a relationship.”

Whilst going on a date seemed to be a precursor to a relationship, for four participants, it differed from a relationship for Danny and Ella. They explained this difference as a lack of expectation. Danny explained:

But it's not, you don't expect anything, um, more, you know? And there's no commitment, or, you don't have to be loyal to that person. If you never want to see them again, you don't have to. ... it's not a formal committed relationship.

Ella's explanation of the lack of expectation differed slightly, she said: “But there're no expectations. ... But without, without expectations. So then, if it doesn't work out, then then you aren't angry at each other...” Thus, for Danny and Ella going on a date did not necessarily imply a resulting relationship, yet it is necessary to go on a date before you can be in a relationship. On the other hand, Haley's description of what constitutes a date varied from those of the rest of the participants. To Haley, going on a date seemingly had no romantic connotation. She said:

Date is when someone asks you formally: “Are you available for coffee or breakfast on Friday afternoon or Saturday morning?” ... It's with any one, I have a date with a colleague, or a date with a girlfriend... Yes, so a date is when you make an appointment with someone.

In the same way as *going on a date* is a precursor to being in a relationship, *loving someone* seemed to follow after *being in love*. This is with specific reference to Bella and

Ella. Ella explained that: “But, so the one leads to the other almost for me. Um [pause] it, it, it’s evolution for me, yes.” Furthermore, she explained that loving someone took work and there were a certain amount of “fireworks” involved. She said:

Love isn’t the feeling, its devotion, not emotion type of [pause] you know, it, it takes a lot of work. ... Um, it is almost my [stutters] you know, my fireworks, it is not that hallelujah moment [laughs]. It must be about effort. You want to feel wanted, want to feel wanted, yes.

This links to Danny who called being in love “... that exciting feeling, um, you know where you just want to call a person all the time”. Yet, to Danny the most important aspect of being in love was that it is unconditional; “... you don’t have to think about it, um, regardless what, what’s going on with that person. You just care about them and you know it’s unconditional”. Bella had a similar idea as Ella that love follows being in love, yet she did add the extra component of the possibility of marriage. She explained: “... in love; is sort of if you have just met someone, and you’re in love, and then you love. ... like someone with whom you can potentially think you can marry one day, eventually.”

Contrary to the other participants Haley no longer believed in love; she said:

Indeed, I no longer believe in this love story which is sold to people. I have a whole... I want to call it something completely different... I have a whole different definition for it. ... But okay, there is not something like love.

However, Haley did not only express her lack of belief in romantic love, she also believed that even friends do not love each other, it is something else:

... if you meet someone, even if it is just a friend ... it is a feeling of euphoria.

And, um [takes a deep breath] I think so, so people call it love. But it is, it’s more, it is actually something else, but now they call it love.

Thus, what Haley then defined more as a feeling of euphoria, people tend to call “love” because, according to Haley: “...it is nice to be with someone”. Furthermore, she also thought that the people who still call this feeling “love”:

... are not smart enough to think about it further. They go home now and will continue to think that they love their husband or love their wife. ...and if you think about it hard enough, you will not experience it [love].”

To Haley then, relationships had nothing to do with love – it has everything to do with what two people can offer each other – but you are never in love with a person.

6.2. Holding on to the “you can” freedom.

6.2.1. You can do whatever you want

Aside from enjoying their freedom because “you can do whatever you want”, two of the participants also linked this freedom to what was expected of them. For example, Bella said: “Sometimes I get home really tired and then I think: ‘Gee, at least there isn’t someone who wants something from me now.’” In much the same way, Gretal said: “...if I think how many times I come home, very tired because I’ve worked with people the whole day, then I don’t have to give someone else attention.” Thus, both Bella and Gretal associated the freedom of being single to not having to give attention to another person when they did not feel like doing so.

6.2.2. Maybe I’ve spoken too harshly; maybe I won’t lose my freedom

The participants also seemed ambivalent about whether they would lose this freedom when they entered into a relationship. Anja said: “... if I think about myself, I’ve been single for years now. And, so you must give up your freedom. And you won’t give it up just for anybody.” Likewise, Haley said: “Like fear for all of the freedom I am going to lose if I actually find someone.” Ella also seemed to hint at the fact that if you were in a relationship,

you would not have as much freedom: "So, then they [coupled friends] say: 'Gosh but it's nice, you can do all of these things' ... they are thing they can't do anymore ... But, they can't, they have a husband to ask." However, at a later stage, Ella seemed less certain about the freedom of couples. She said: "Oh, on the other hand I feel like: 'Well, you [coupled friends] can also do this, you just have to sort it out with the other person' ..."

During the interviews, it became apparent that five of the participants felt that a partner could interfere with the freedom they currently experience because they are single. Anja described a partner as "... someone whom you have to report to". Likewise, Bella suggested, when speaking about her freedom, that a partner was: "... someone [I] have to tell what I'm doing, where I'm going, when I'm going to be back. That type of thing. ... someone you have to take into account..." Similarly, Ella mentioned having to report to, or take into account, a partner: "You must take the other person into account. You know, if you want to go out then you must at least send an SMS and say: 'I'm coming home later tonight' type of thing..." Furthermore, Ella also had a concern regarding what she would be able to do if she had a partner. She explained: "... you must accommodate the other person [a partner]; so maybe the other person won't like classical music, they wouldn't want to watch that, they'd rather go and listen to '30 Seconds to Mars', then you must go along."

Jane also has concerns that a partner would tell her what she may or may not do. She stated that: "And usually then they [a partner] are like: 'You may not see these people, or you may not go there, or you may not do this...'" By the same token, Haley said that a partner was: "... someone [whose] permission [I] have to ask before I do anything ... before I bring something home, before I take out a DVD 'do you want to watch this?' or so ..." One of Danny's greatest concerns regarding a partner was the constraints he would place on her time available to "push forward" in her career. She explained:

It's difficult for me to imagine a partner right now, because I'm at a stage of my career now where I need time to do my research, I need time to prepare my lectures, I need time to publish, um, so I, I don't see yo-, where a partner would fit into that. Um, and I don't want to threaten that, you know.

In the same way, Ella expressed her concern that a partner could possibly interfere with her chances of taking career opportunities. According to Ella, when: "... such an opportunity comes your way, you say: 'Yes! Go for it.' And you don't have to say: 'Ah, sweetie, sorry I'm [stutters] going away again.'"

However, there are subtle differences in the way Danny and Ella expressed this concern, which might be of importance. Firstly, Danny spoke exclusively in the first person, whilst Ella mostly expressed her concern in the second person. Secondly, Danny explicitly mentioned that a partner could possibly pose a threat to her ability to move ahead in her career; whilst Ella only implied the interference of first having to explain to a partner why she was leaving again. It would thus appear as if Danny experienced or perceived this threat a partner posed to her career as more personal or just more strongly; whereas Ella distanced herself from the way in which a partner might interfere in her life. Notice, however, how neither Danny, nor Ella made any reference to the support a partner could provide in their quest to advance in their careers. On the contrary, when asked about the possible support a partner could give, Danny exclaimed:

Oh! I don't know, I didn't think about that. That would be nice, ja, I'm not used to having support in my life, apart from my colleagues. So ja, I don't, I didn't even think about that. When you mentioned I suddenly thought of it, so, but that's interesting.

Thus, there seems to be some ambivalence regarding the experience of having a partner whom the participants felt they would have to report to or accommodate a partner, or

even the fact that a partner might interfere with their careers. The participants used the strong word of stating that it is a *must* to report to or accommodate a partner.

6.3. A partner means obliged companionship and shared activities.

6.3.1. *Why we don't like this and would rather share it.*

Haley and Ella explained why they do not like to do certain activities alone. For example, Haley said:

But I don't want to do that [riding a bike in the mountains] alone, for the f-, the first reason for me is because it is dangerous to go alone, because here they steal your bike from underneath you. And another reason is just [slight laugh] to ... sometimes then a person needs someone who can challenge you, like: "No, but you can do this hill." Or, or, you, or, or actually better: "You can't do this hill", then I can show them that I can do the hill [slight laugh]. [Takes deep breath.] Or just like, um "Gee, this hill is long, I think I'll get off my bike and rather push my bike", but then someone else says: "No, it is not so bad, we can ride it out". ... It is just rather a challenge because you will have to find someone who is almost in your, I want to say the same situation as you, because, say for example I have someone who goes cycling with me, but it is a married person; then that means that that person will have other responsibilities to whomever they are married to or are in a relationship with. [Takes deep breath.] Um, so, the ideal shall be to [pause] yes, to get someone also from the singles crowd to do that with.

By switching between speaking in the first and second person, Haley suggested greater insight into exactly why she did not want to do certain things alone – even though at face value it could simply appear as if she did not want to go cycling alone. When mentioning her own safety and proving herself to someone, she spoke in the first person; however, when speaking about being challenged by someone or her bike being stolen, she switched to the

second person. This could possibly indicate that, in truth, Haley simply wanted to feel safe and prove herself to someone else; whilst she did not like to be challenged, nor having her things taken from her. Ella also explained why she would rather share things with someone:

... but it would definitely be nice if there were someone to share it with, you know. You know because then you can, afterwards, talk about it. And say: "Ah, do you remember?" and you have that shared frame of reference and so forth. ... It is always better to, a, an experience is better when shared, always. ... And I refuse to not do it, just because I don't want to do it alone. So, then you do it on your own. But, um [pause] any experience is better when he is shared, because then you can, afterwards, if you have that memory, that that memory, then you can share it with someone.

By speaking in the first person, Ella seemed rather adamant that she did not want to miss out on certain things simply because she did not want to do them alone. However, she distanced herself from sharing an experience with someone by speaking in the second person and also using possibility words such as "can". This could simply be because she did not have someone to share an experience with. However, it could also indicate that she did not see herself sharing an experience with someone – either because she did not really want to, or because she did not foresee the opportunity of sharing an experience.

6.3.2. Why wedding specifically are so bad.

Aside from the difficulty of finding a partner, Gretal and Haley mentioned two other specific reasons for why they experienced weddings as being particularly difficult social events to attend. Firstly, Gretal mentioned how going to a wedding alone had some practical implications:

Ah, it's more the practical things of going alone to a wedding: Next to whom do you stand; next to whom do you sit, with whom do you dish up; with whom do

you dance? And then that idea of: “Here are *another* [emphasis] two people who are getting married, and not I”, yes, [sighs]. ... I don't go anymore, I, um [laughs], I disappear, I really disappear. I've decided it's over. ... No, no with the throwing of the bouquet, I'm crazy about weddings ... Um, but I am, I don't stand to catch the bouquet anymore, I, I disappear to the bathroom or something [laughs]. ... I think I makes me feel things about myself which I don't like, so I don't know what the other people think, um, but for me it makes me feel things about myself which isn't nice ... Um, this idea of, I am the oldest one standing here, and we are just seven, and all the others are matrices or first years [laughs], yes, to me it feels like a show horse who stands in the middle, a stud cow, I must stand and catch flowers, yes...

When speaking about the practical difficulties of going to a wedding alone, Gretal spoke in the second person, distancing herself from it. However, when she spoke about the questions she started asking herself, and how she felt – especially at the throwing of the bouquet – she switched over to speaking in the first person. This could possibly indicate that she experienced the self-doubt and feeling like a stud cow, more intensely than she did the practical difficulties. Differing from Gretal, who claimed that it was not what others think – but how she felt – which was a problem at weddings, Haley described how the expectation of society and what others think was one of the main reasons she disliked weddings. She said:

The fact that it is a ... in the first place it is a male friend, and I don't know his friends. ... Um, because the whole time I shall have to pretend. If I go with someone I must pretend: “I am comfortable with this person, and I know this person very well”. But at this stage I don't know anyone well enough to be comfortable with him. ... this whole thing of the type of crowd where I'm going. It will be the type of crowd who will expect of me to take someone with. ... So,

then I will, even though it might appear as if I'm extremely self-confident and that I don't mind being single [slight laugh] but in a situation like that it is awkward ... but yes, it is that whole think of, um, I will be single in a couples environment. And um, I don't think I'm strong enough to just be [pause] myself there. ... because they are going to a wedding now which is about other people, so they won't necessarily focus on it immediately, but people will very much remember that they met someone who is not like them. But [sighs] yes it sounds, it sounds now as if I'm not okay with being single, but I am okay with it; but I will just avoid situations which don't make it okay.

Haley's belief that people will remember her as the single girl – in other words, someone who is different from them – could be linked to Gretal's sense of feeling like a stud cow at the throwing of the bouquet.

6.3.3. But it wasn't always like this.

For whatever reason the participants found doing things or going to events alone difficult, at least four participants mentioned that had not always been as difficult. They mainly gave getting older, and not having so many single friends anymore, as reasons for why it became so difficult. Anja combined the two reasons when she said:

But especially in my age it starts to become very difficult, because a lot of people around you are married now, and a lot of them also have children. So, socially it starts to become very difficult. [Pauses, sighs, and pauses again.] It, I realize there are a lot of people, the older I get the more, the more people will [pause] they want relationship; they want to do things with couples. So this one will [pause] and they like to invite couples.

Ella also explained how she did not always have the problem of not having someone to do things with:

And for a very long time it wasn't a problem at all, because you could share with your friends. But as my friends get married or go into relationships, you know, become involved, and a person has fewer and fewer friends who are available [yawns] to just [pause] um, come along to a concert or, go to a movie, just in the spur of the moment, you do rather find, that a lot of the things you have to do alone, or not do it at all. ... and previously I, you know, if I was invited to a wedding or event then I'd phone one of my friends and say: "Hey, do you want a free lunch?" type of, you know. And then you, you'd have someone with who you can chat and it's not awkward, you don't have to impress each other.

In a less elaborate description, Greta also mentioned it being more difficult now than it had been earlier to go to weddings, for example: "In the beginning it was easy because then we had student friends who went together. Um, and then it started to become more difficult." Similarly, Haley mentioned how the presence of single friends at a wedding used to make things easier; however, she also mentioned a different strategy she has now developed to make such events "nice":

... because I also have other girlfriends who are single, um, it wasn't an issue to go alone, because we sat together at a table. Yes, so, it was actually enjoyable, because then I could be myself, because they were my best friends. ... Like, there I don't care to go alone, because I usually make sure that I come late and by that time everyone is so drunk they don't care who they're talking to [nervous laugh]. So that is very nice.

6.4. (Un)wanted attention from the right man.

Apart from describing their experiences and perceptions of the attentions of men, men's sexuality, and men's experience of being single, the participants also spoke in general

about why they entered into relationships with men, why the relationships ended, men and their education, and enlightened or old-school men.

6.4.1. Why a relationship started.

On occasion, Danny, Ella, and Gretal mentioned why a relationship started. According to Danny, her first relationship started because “there was an attraction between us, almost instantly”. This is almost reminiscent of the *love at first sight* idea which is often portrayed in the popular media. Ella elaborated on why she believed that she had been attracted to Edward:

Um, but we were very good friends. I think that was part of the attraction for me, he was a very interesting man, um, very, um, involved in, in politics and, and so forth, so we had very interesting conversations, and so forth and, but very attractive man. ... I didn't want a long-term relationship, so it kind of suited me that he didn't want anything serious.

Whilst Ella does say that it suited her that Edward did not want a serious relationship, her word choice of it “kind of” gave the impression that she did not feel too strongly about this. It is thus possible that she did in fact want a more serious relationship with him. Similar to Ella, Danny also entered into a relationship with one of her friends; however, it appeared to be rather different from the “immediate attraction” she had felt with her first boyfriend. She explained how her relationship with Dan started and also provided some information on why it started:

... he got to know me better and he decided this is the type of person that he would want to spend the rest of his life with ... Um, and then I decided: “Yes, I would like to be in a relationship with him”. At the time I wasn't really attracted to him, but I felt like he was a good man [pause] that he had integrity, and so I decided: “Yes, let's give that a go”. ... one of the issues he raised was that if we were married it would be easier to get into [country]. Ah, not [country], um [country].

In the same way, Greta described Gerrie also telling her that she was “a good option” for him. According to Greta, he said the following to her:

... he really wanted to get to know me a lot better, um, he basically expressed it like I'm a good option [laughs] and that he wanted me to visit them regularly.

Then I said [pause], oh, he also told me that he felt attracted to me, and whatnot...

It is interesting that both Danny and Greta were almost *labelled* a “type of person” whom men find attractive as a possible partner.

6.4.2. *The end of a relationship.*

The participants also mentioned varying reasons for believing that a relationship had ended. Anja said: “He left me. And, I have ideas, but, um, I think his father said: ‘Stop it’. ... Because, he was busy with work and he was busy studying and it was a distraction.” Differing from Anja, Ella was not unsure of the reasons why her relationship with Edmund had ended. She described it as follows:

... we thought differently about a lot of things. Um, it was more a cultural thing, you know. Because he was French, and he thought differently about things and, he was not a Christian ... it ended because he wanted to take things to a physical level which I didn't want to.

Similarly, Greta described how her relationship with Gert had ended: “... and then he went away to go and pray about the relationship and he returned and said: ‘No, the Lord does not want this for us.’” However, the end of Greta's other relationship, with George, had not been influenced by religion. According to Greta things ended when “...he went to [country] with a green card.”

6.4.2.1. Break-up and new perspectives.

Apart from mentioning specific reasons for having been cast aside, or for ending their relationships, the participants also mentioned how the break-up made them feel and the influence previous relationships had had on them now. Firstly, Bella described her reactions after ending her relationship with Brian – seemingly because of fundamental differences, including religious differences:

... ah, my ex-boyfriend was a horrible, nasty dude. And after that I really felt like I didn't want to go that far and have so much trouble ... And after that I was, I, I was rather exhausted and I really just thought: "I don't want to do that again" ... I had that one very bad relationship and after that I really didn't feel like it again. And I think like people, the longer you stay single, how [pause] I would say it's not like you built walls or something [demonstrates with hand], it is just your standards become higher, and um, you become more set in your ways. ... and then it becomes all the more difficult to think: "But [pause] ooh, do I really want you in my space? Because my space is nice, and I'm used to my space."

Bella then made the following comment:

I rather saw with Ben, I'm more adaptable than I thought. ... There's obviously stuff on which one can't compromise ... it doesn't work, because that is not who I am. And I, even if you are the most wonderful person ever, I'm not going to change. It is too different from who I am. ... It is, I think a person can adapt to anything.

It would thus seem that there is some ambiguity with regards to whether Bella could or would be willing to adapt or not. Although she did say she was more adaptable than she thought she was, she was also very adamant about not changing certain things for anyone.

Even when she did say she believed that “one” could adapt to anything, she speaks in the third person, thus distancing herself from the ability to adapt to anything.

Jane also touched on whether she would change or not: she mentioned that even though things had been “strained” between her and Jack after ending their sexual relationship, she did not have to change or adapt for him:

... we are just friends now ... it's just like, someone goes to unwind at ... it's one of the big reasons why Jack and I are still friendly, are friends, because I can go to him and I can just *be* [emphasis] who I want to be, I can walk around in my pyjamas till 12 o'clock and no one will bitch and moan about it. And I can [pause] just relax...

The participants also mentioned experiencing other feelings such as disappointment and regret after the end of a relationship. For example, Danny explained how she felt after her relationship with Dirk had ended:

... even though I knew it wouldn't go anywhere, it was still hard, you know, when I finally realized that was over. ... I was very disappointed ... And I think it was almost like an addiction that suddenly had to come to an end, because of that high feeling that I had ... when that ended, it was like, you know, it was like I had withdrawal symptoms

Danny's description of how she experienced her break-up with Dan was, however, very different:

... it [the psychologist] was an independent person. ... So that was very helpful and he helped me to see, you know, he helped me to look at things objectively. Because I was looking at it very subjectively: “I'd done something wrong ... there's something wrong with my personality, I don't, I'm not attractive ... I don't

look a certain way". Um, and he helped me to challenge those thoughts. So I think, it was helpful, um [sighs]. I still don't feel like I'm a 100% where I should be... [but] I've made progress.

However, it took Danny some time before she went to speak to a psychologist. She described going through the following process after Dan had ended their relationship:

... it was quite a shock actually, you know, 'cause we, we'd set a date for the wedding and, um, then suddenly, you know, we had to call it off. And then, suddenly my life changed ... Then I had to come back here and rebuild my life here, so it was quite a shock ... The time that I was in [country], I was still hoping this is some kind of a joke [laughs slightly], you know... He's overreacting; it will get better ... For a few months I was still in denial about it ... for a long time I was like: "Um, it's nothing, it's just a break up, you need to get over it." then it got to that point, where I actually couldn't get out of bed and I couldn't do my work. So I had no choice, I either had to see someone or I was going to lose my job. ... Um [sighs and pauses] I've, well, I did cry a lot, um, I did cry a lot. And, um, I did go into depression. ... Um, I, I really did. I did see a psychologist after that. I was on antidepressants for a while, um ... I have bad days that I still get upset about it. ... So it's a work in progress but I think, I've, yeah, I've actually done well for myself, in the mean time I've finished my doctorate, and I've now been promoted to a lecturer so I think I have you know, made steps to improve myself ... so when that relationship ended, it was really, um, a process of mourning, it was like a death, to be honest, you know, it felt similar to when, to when my dad died, to be honest, that same type of pain ...

From the above, it would thus seem as if Danny went through four different stages, including shock, denial, depression and realisation before the process of recovery started. It is

important to notice that the possibility of losing her job was what seemingly led Danny to seeking help. She also defines her improvement in terms of her career. Comparing the end of a relationship to the death of her father (to whom she was she was closest) is also a very strong comparison to make.

Differing from Danny, Haley gives the impression of regret:

... and I should have just done it. ... And, um [pause] of [pause] I can remember that I like stood up, and just excused myself and said: "I must go home now" ... And I think that's where I made the mistake, I should have stayed. And um, yes, like I say, I regret that.

Although she did not necessarily regret the end of her relationship with Edmund, Ella stated that she was rather angry with him. She said: "Then I told him: 'Take a hike'. [laughs] ... So, then things ended and I was rather angry with him." Similarly, Gretal expressed her anger with Gert when things ended with him: "And it, um, it also made me very, very angry, because I think it was a human decision and he went and dragged the Lord into it." Yet, anger was not the only emotion expressed by the participants. For example, when things ended with George, Gretal describes the experience as follows: "...So it was an absolute um [laughs] heartbreak. Very, very, very bad." Thus, Ella, Gretal, and Haley experienced a varied array of emotions, including anger, regret and heartache, after their respective relationships had ended.

A last aspect of the participants' experience after breaking up with their partners was that they gained a new perspective on the failed relationship and learned from the experience. Anja described how she felt a few years later when she saw her ex-boyfriend for the first time: "I know a saw him at a later stage a few years afterwards and realized but [pause] and I, I remember that little bit of realization: 'But, listen here, it was [pause] maybe a bit better.'" In comparison to Anja, who sounded rather unsure about whether it truly had been for the better

(through her word choice of a “little bit” and “maybe a bit”), Gretal seemed more sure when, with hindsight, she explained her relationship with George:

Today I also know, if I look back and see the path he's on now, um, we couldn't have made each other happy. Not that someone must make you happy, but I couldn't have offered him what he needed, and I don't think he could have offered me what I needed either.

Similarly, she explained how she perceived her relationship with Gert since the break-up: “But again, when I look back today and I know, um, uh, the stuff [pause] for example he's a total, total workaholic ... totally, and I still exercise at his gym and I see it still hasn't changed.”

Danny and Jane referred to the lessons they had learned from past relationships and how they would change their approach to a relationship or a break up in the future. Danny described what she had learned from her relationship with Dan:

That's definitely a lesson I learned from the whole thing with Dan, is that, you need to take these things slowly. Don't rush them just because you feel, you know, um, it's expected, that you've reached this, a certain age ... I've realized now; take your time, get to know the person, get comfortable with the person, don't feel pressured to be in a relationship.

Danny only hinted at society's expectation that women of a certain age should be in a relationship and should settle down. She experienced this as pressure to be in a relationship with Dan. According to Danny, she has learned that, regardless of expectations, one needs to take things slowly and first get to know the person. Differing slightly from Danny, Jane described how she would now approach a break-up differently:

Now in the past, what I would have done, I would have gone out and picked someone up ... and I would have had a whole bunch of one-night stands and whatever, and I decided now, that is not the pattern I want to follow, it doesn't work for me, because I know I will get stuck at on or another stage and hurt myself, just, through the whole situation. So I just decided for six months, no ... Yes, I have decided not to do the wild rebound thing. ... it didn't really work for me. So why would I now, and I *know* [emphasis] it is a pattern that I follow, and I *know* [emphasis] I will just get hurt in the end by following that pattern of behaviour. So, now I'm making a conscious effort to not repeat that pattern. I'm not saying I won't meet someone, um, and maybe make out with him, or whatever, but I definitely won't just, again, just sleep with someone.

6.4.3. Other negative experiences of men.

The participants also referred to other negative experiences with men. Greta mentioned a unique experience with Gert, which she did not like:

... I've had to deal with a charismaniac and I'm completely put off there. So now it's again this fine balance between, I almost want to say, a modest Christian who believes in grace [slight laugh] and not self-earnings [laughs].

Jane also mentioned two experiences she had with men which she did not like. Firstly, she made the following general comment:

And like flings that I've had, it, I always say: "Two weeks, and then it's not nice anymore". [laughs] Because the, they always start like: "Rather do it this way" or "Not that..." Or, they will never say it directly, but they always make you feel guilty. I *hate* [emphasis] that.

This harks back to Jane's view (which is also a recurring theme) that relationships imply a certain limit to her freedom, especially when one has to consider what a partner would say and do. One should also note that Jane does not simply say that she *dislikes* it; she uses the very strong words, "I *hate* that", and also emphasises the word "hate". It is thus very clear that Jane does not want anybody to dictate her time and behaviour to her. Her second comment referred to her encounter with Jeremy:

... it was nasty [pause] that evening, was, very traumatic for me, because [pause] it is the second person, or the second time and the second person with whom I've had sex in my life. We got very, very drunk. ... I got fired from my job, I was pregnant ... I had an abortion. ... Not pleasant... but it [abortion medication] made me very, very sick It really didn't go well.

Simply by looking at the strong words used by Jane to describe the events leading up to the abortion (such as "traumatic" and "nasty") and her experience afterwards (such as "not pleasant", "very, very sick" and "really didn't go well"), it is clear that the experience was not one that she would like to repeat. Whilst it cannot be assumed that having a partner to support her in the process would necessarily have made the experience better, easier, or more bearable, it is safe to assume it would at least have been different. Thus, I believe that there is plausible reason for further research to investigate how women in a different relationships experience having an abortion in order to develop specific programmes to aid women in different types of relationships to cope with their experiences.

6.4.4. The Internet experience.

Three participants explained their views and experiences of men with reference to Internet dating. Anja, Gretal, and Haley have tried to find a partner online (and thus to end their single status); yet, Gretal was the only participant who still had an active online account. Until now, however, none of them has been successful and their experiences of the type of

man one meets online have seemingly not been positive. Anja gave three descriptions of dates with men she met online:

... the one chap lived at home. And for me it was ... very weird, because he wanted, he takes you out but buys himself tea, yes. ... You don't take a girl out, well, I don't know. ... In the end I drank Dry Lemon or something [pause and laughs] because I didn't want to be here like drinking alcohol. ... I don't want someone who still lives at home.

Anja described her second date as: "A chap took me out to the Spur [laughs] ... I had to drive all the way to Tygervallei [pause] to go to the Spur!" And lastly, Anja described: "And, there was another bloke/chap, whom I met, and he, um [pause] showed up 40 minutes late, or 30 minutes or something like that. And I only had an hour."

It seemed that Anja was unimpressed by the type of man that she met online; she appeared to expect a man to at least live on his own, choose a proper restaurant, and arrive on time for their dates. Furthermore, Anja gave the impression that she felt she had to adapt to the men by not ordering alcohol, driving far to go to a restaurant she seemingly does not like, and having to wait for a man when she did not really have time. On the surface it appeared that Anja still valued some patriarchal ideas, even though she gave the impression that she did not approve of patriarchal ideas when they applied to the education of women (i.e. men's independence and that men should make an effort or compromise when going on a date).

Gretal also gave examples of two men she met online who had both lied to her:

I have chatted to guys whom I've later realized lied to me. Um, a guy who just wants to chat online, some don't want to meet necessarily. ... then it becomes drawn out and bad. And it's actually how I caught the one who lied to me.

In the second interview, Gretal gave the following description of her experience:

And at that time someone started to chat with me, and *again* [emphasis] after chatting for a while two things happened: I realized he was lying about where he lives ... and secondly, he [sighs] sent me a rather vulgar video.

Notice how Gretal did not refer to the people she met online as “men”, but used the lesser or younger term “guys” to speak about them. She only allowed the use of the word “man” when she spoke about the “type of man” she wanted. In the same way Anja did not speak about men but describes her dates as blokes/chaps, yet she spoke about the “type of person” she wants. This could possibly suggest that they experienced the type of men they met online as *lesser* men than what they would prefer.

Differing from Danny and Gretal, Haley did sometimes – albeit not all of the time – refer to the men she met online as “men”, however, she did also refer to them as “chancers”:

... I did try the Internet. Good Lord, if you want to see a bunch of chancers [laughs] then you must go on those sites. ... Like, say I definitely do *not* [emphasis] want a black man ... you will not believe how many black men still try ... But it just shows the chances they take. ... I will say: “I definitely do not want a guy older than 42”, and then there will be a guy of 46 who tries the whole time, and he sends messages, and then I think: “But I did say I don’t want that.”

Haley almost seemed exasperated at the men who did not follow or respect her preferences for a certain race and age.

6.4.5. Men and my education.

When speaking about men, Anja and Jane made specific reference to their education. In general it appeared as if they find that men are unsupportive or behave in an annoying manner with regard to their education. Anja was the first to suggest this by saying:

... my grandfather believed that women should not [go to] university, should not even finish school. My guardian still believes to this day that I should not be an [occupation]. ... but there are still men who ... who want the wife to be at home.

Later, when Anja spoke about writing her dissertation, she said: “It was [pause] in some aspects very traumatic. My supervisor left 18 months after I had started. He knew beforehand [pause] and he didn't take it into account at all.”

Note that when speaking in general, Anja refers to “women” who should not finish school or who should stay at home. However, when she made specific reference to her career or her dissertation, she spoke in the first person. This could possibly indicate that, although she was aware of the general patriarchal attitudes of a lot of men (where women should “stay at home”), she also experienced this in a more personal and direct manner. Jane also referred to her education when speaking about men in general:

... men in general think I'm a dumb blonde. ... But I [stutters] give that impression a lot. ...er, laugh at their silly jokes, pretend that you don't understand. ... And it's easier that way. ... Because otherwise they always start, especially when I say ... I'm in the [humanities] business then they start all these [pause] irritating remarks and [pause] I don't like that. And it is easier to pretend you are dumb, than to constantly try and argue with them about something. ... They react especially badly when they find out I studied [humanities], because a lot of the ... you come from that patriarchal system: “Oh, are you messing with everybody's heads again, do you really think you can make a difference?”

6.4.6. Enlightened or old-school men.

Three participants described another, slightly hidden, of their experiences or perceptions of men. This concerned the increasingly murky waters of the old school, more patriarchal nature of men versus what Bella called “enlightened” men. Bella had a slightly

more positive perception of men than the other participants, even stating that “not all men are bad”. However, she still exhibited some contradiction in what she said: “Most men, whatever they say, anyways still believe that the man should make the money. So, it is intimidating, I suspect...” At a later stage, Bella said:

And I think, luckily in this day and age, that men feel as if they can do the same. And they can expect that same type of emotional support. ... I think it made me feel more like: “Okay, these men are a bit more enlightened”. I still made the food and did all that shit, but yes. Um, it was a very good learning experience because I really think [pause] men pretend in some way. But, when just men are together, they, they don't really just sit and scratch their balls and fart [laughs].

There was some ambivalence in the two quotations above: on the one hand Bella seemed to believe that not all men were bad, that they were enlightened and knew they could expect emotional support from a partner. On the other hand, Bella mentioned that men still wanted to be the ones who make the money, and that she still had to make “the food and d[o] all that shit”, which is more in line with the old school patriarchal perceptions of men.

Differing from Bella, Haley described what men want:

... or that's another thing of: “She can give me children” ... they like ... a type of obedience. Or maybe also [stutters] dependence. ... I know that a lot of men like helpless women because then they feel like knights in shining armour because [gasps]: “Ah [drawn out], I opened your phone for you and put in the battery” ... Then they feel very macho and manly, but yes, I think if they see a woman can do it for herself, then they wonder why they are there then.

Jane also made a reference to this obedience:

... I think a lot of men could maybe feel threatened by it [pause] because if I don't want to do something, I will not do it ... *And* [drawn out] I don't think a lot of men like that, they want you to say: "Yea and amen", and I just don't do that.

6.4.7. A man's attention.

Both Danny and Haley mentioned that they enjoyed it when men paid for them. Danny explained this as:

... little gestures like if we would go out somewhere, he would always pay, um and he would plan the date, and I thought that was very romantic, um, I really enjoyed that ... but I think I've got some old-fashioned values and to me, I really value it and I appreciate it if a guy does pay for a date, that makes me feel very special, um, it makes me feel like a lady ... I just think that's a nice gesture and I like that type of chivalrous, um, manners

Haley also mentioned appreciating it when men paid for her:

... And I remember he came to me and said: "But you must also take out some money now, I don't think I have enough" [laughs]. But I have, it was actually, it was, we knew it was ridiculously expensive when we went. ... Hendrik was also very, very good, because he didn't mind paying for everything. *Everywhere* [emphasis] he paid for everything and he took me to places like [wine estate], to a [artist] concert, and afterwards he paid for very expensive coffee at [restaurant] I think it's more a, from examples and what other people tell. Like they, if they go out then someone pays for them, or I read Trompie and Saartjie books when I was a child. And in them *Trompie* [emphasis] always paid for his girlfriend, or Saartjie's boyfriend always paid for her. And I think it's about, I

think deep inside me I actually wish to be nurtured like that. I think that's where it comes from. ... actually it is not necessary for someone to pay for me, because I, I can pay for myself. It's just the idea of: "Um, I did ask you on a date now, so I must make it enjoyable for you, so I will also pay."

Thus, the participants seemed to enjoy the attention of men (in the romantic sense of the word) and also interacting with them. These actions elicited feelings of excitement, happiness and increased their self-confidence. It follows then that they disliked feeling that the attention paid to them or the investment in them was inadequate. With reference to George, for example, Gretal stated:

I was a hundred percent into the relationship; I really think I gave a lot emotionally. Uh, yes, and I don't think he gave a lot, because he was already on his way to [country]. ... yes, I do overinvest, and then afterwards I, I feel like I get too little out of it. So maybe I overinvest with an expectation that I am unaware of.

Similarly, Ella explained wanting to spend more time with Ed:

I sometimes just felt like I wish he felt that we could just go out as friends, and go and do stuff together, because, for example, in the seven months we were together I think we only went out together twice ... *he* [emphasis] was very uncomfortable with it. So, [sighs] it was rather bad for me ... So the only thing that really bothered me, was that we did not, not do more things together.

Ella continued to explain why things were complicated with Ed:

... yes, [sighs] it was, it was complicated ... like people just thought we were friends, like we were in the same group of friends, so it was a bit complicated [laughs] because he didn't want people to know that we were together ... I

introduced him to very few people as my boyfriend and he didn't introduce me to anyone as his girlfriend. So because it, you know, it was a bit complicated ... he was, he is, he is black, and he did, his whole entourage and family had an issue with it ... but he wasn't comfortable with the fact that people knew we were together, because he knew his whole family would have a *big* [emphasis] issue with it.

It would thus appear that neither Gretal nor Ella felt that their partners had invested as much time in them as they would have liked.

6.5. We are educated and independent women!

6.5.1. I can only date certain men.

6.5.1.1. Thus they must be educated or at least ambitious.

Whilst explaining why she could only date educated men, Bella gave the following description of how she experienced being asked on a date by a man she did not believe to be her equal:

... but just like: "What do you think we have in common because your world is so small?" [Demonstrates with hands.] And it is mostly smarter people whose worlds are bigger, they can speak about anything. Um [pause] so [sighs] it is not necessary, it, it's, your upbringing and your IQ are ..., obviously lay the foundations for it. Um [pause] but, you must at least be able to hold a conversation about most things. And understand things and have insight about things. ... If you don't ge-, uh, maybe even more important than that is, is drive and ambition. Because [sighs] yes. It is immensely frustrating if, if someone is also happy with the fact that they know nothing and aren't going anywhere and they do nothing about it.

The example she provided about the date she went on is indicative that she truly did not want to date someone who is not as smart as she is. However, Bella also stated that it was not necessarily a person's IQ that was important, but rather knowledge, drive and ambition; and also the ability to have a conversation with her. This appeared to be of particular importance since Bella used the strong words of "immensely frustrating" to describe how she felt about ignorant people who did not seem to care that they were ignorant.

6.5.1.2. A woman's education and income may threaten men.

Bella gave another explanation – besides from it being an "issue" or the traditional values of society – for why she wanted a partner who made more money than she did. Bella would actually love not to have to work at all:

It would be fabulous for me if I, if I didn't have to work at all [laughing]. I've got plans ... But, I shall really [pause] if I find someone tomorrow who earns enough money so that I don't have to work, I will be so happy. Not that I don't like work, but I have other things to do ... I have [pause] um, such small charity projects which I run in my own time and kind of a bit with my own money ... It will be fabulous for me if I can just do that.

There is some contradiction underlying what Bella said: on the one hand she did not want to intimidate men with her education, wanted a man with as much ambition as she had, and was rather adamant about female rights and equality (as can be spotted throughout her dialogue); yet, on the other hand she would find it "fabulous" to have a partner to take care of her and the finances so that she could do what she wanted and quit her job. Gretal perceives herself being "too much" as part of the reason for why she was single. When asked whether she ever thought about doing something about being "too much", Gretal replied:

Yes, gee. [Pause] I say yes now, but I haven't decided that I'll do something about it. Um [sighs] um I think it has left me, to a great extent, at a place where I

inhibited myself a bit, I know it sounds very, it sounds like someone on Oprah, much like a victim type, [laughs], but I've realized, for example, that in the last three years I could have done a lot more with my finances than I have... I could have saved for a deposit on a house, and somehow I prevented myself, and I realize now that it is because I almost wanted to force myself to not go bigger. ... and exactly the fact that I'm holding back a bit and that it makes me very unhappy. Um, yes, because I hold back in many ways. Exactly maybe because I don't want to be too much, then I hold back, yes.

Gretal also explained how she sometimes held back:

I think, um, gee, definitely financially [pause]. Um, but definitely with finances and um, with my way of socializing as well. Um [pensive silence] how, for example I would be in a conversation and many times [pause] almost choose to just remain quiet, while I know that I don't agree at all, or something like that. Maybe it is just good social skills, but a big part of that is holding back. ... I don't think I made a definite decision about it, it's more just a feeling of, sometimes it is just easier for me to [pause] to [clears throat and pauses] just to remain quiet, even if I know what I want to say or feel or, express. Um, maybe exactly because I'm scared of being too much.

6.5.1.3. Enlightened or old school.

Another, slightly hidden, experience or perception of men which three participants described were the increasingly murky waters of the old-school, more patriarchal nature of men versus those Bella called "enlightened" men. Bella – who has incidentally never tried Internet dating – had a slightly more positive perception of men, even stating that "all men are not bad". However, she still exhibited some contradiction in what she said: "Most men,

whatever they say, anyways still believe that the man should make the money. So, it is intimidating, I suspect..." At a later stage, Bella said:

And I think, luckily in this day and age [that] men feel as if they can do the same. And they can expect that same type of emotional support. ... I think it made me feel more like: "Okay, these men are a bit more enlightened". I still made the food and did all that shit, but yes. Um, it was a very good learning experience because I really think [pause] men pretend in some way. But, when just men are together, they, they don't really just sit and scratch their balls and fart [laughs].

There is some ambivalence in the two quotations above; on the one hand Bella seemed to be of the opinion that men were not all bad, they were enlightened and knew they could expect emotional support from a partner – they did not always have to be the strong ones. On the other hand, Bella mentioned that men still wanted to be the ones who made the money, and that she still had to do make "the food and did all that shit", which was more in line with the old-school, patriarchal perceptions of men.

Whilst Bella still made some reference to the few "enlightened" men out there, Haley and Jane made no such reference. Haley and Jane mentioned a certain form of obedience. Haley described what men wanted as:

... or that's another thing of: "She can give me children" ... they like ... a type of obedience. Or maybe also [stutters] dependence. ... I know a lot of men like helpless women because then they feel like knights in shining armour because [gasps]: "Ah [drawn out], I opened your phone for you and put in the battery" ... Then they feel very macho and manly, but yes, I think if they see a woman can do it for herself, then they wonder why they are there then.

Jane also made reference to obedience:

... I think a lot of men can maybe feel threatened by it [pause] because if I don't want to do something, I will not do it ... *And* [drawn out] I don't think a lot of men like that, they want you to say: "Yea and amen", and I just don't do that.

There are differences and similarities which I believe are noteworthy here. Firstly, aside from mentioning obedience, Haley also mentioned men wanting women who were dependent – even for something as simple as opening a phone – and who could give them children. This description seemed similar to almost a caveman type of situation where women were perceived as unable to do anything for themselves and their sole purpose was to bear children.

Secondly, Haley and Jane seemed to feel strongly about this perception of men by speaking in the first person, saying "I know" or "I think". Yet, when they discussed their perceptions they switched over to speaking in the second person referring to "helpless women" or "you must", creating a distance between themselves and this perception of men. This is most likely because neither of them agreed to the idea that they had to be the obedient and dependent woman, especially since they both saw themselves as independent and educated women.

6.5.2. It helps me cope with being single.

6.5.2.1. Maybe I'm too busy.

Whilst the participants felt that their education and jobs helped them to cope with being single, Anja and Bella also suggested that this might be part of the reason for why they were single. Anja did not say this directly, though, but only hinted at it when she said the following when asked about her dating history:

Well, [pause] at school it was very difficult for me, I was at a girls' school ... um, and [pause] then I studied engineering for four years, so there it was also difficult

for me [pauses and sighs]. Um [pause] even if there were a lot of guys, it, the course isn't exactly the easiest.

There was a sense of resentment towards her education in the way Anja said the above. Her years of studying engineering also seemed to weigh particularly heavily on her because of the sigh she gave before saying "difficult". It would thus appear as if Anja almost *blames* having attended a girls' school and studying a very difficult course (which can be safely assumed was very time consuming and did not allow for much social activity or distraction) for her lack of dating experience, and to an extent for being single. Differing from Anja, Bella did not simply hint at her job being a reason for why she was single, she explicitly stated that being too busy possibly contributed to her not having a family – which includes not having a partner: "... we once had this conversation: 'The reason why I don't have a family, is most likely because I'm at work the whole day, in order for you to be with your family the whole day!'"

6.5.2.2. *Other good things.*

Aside from keeping her busy and being something she could come back to after her engagement ended, Danny's work also provided her with a type of family. She described how she was closest to her colleagues at work:

Um, here at the moment, um, the people that I talk to the most are probably my colleagues. And it's because their personalities are such that they are very interested in my life and [pause] ja, how I feel about things, um, you know, so they ask me about things like relationships and, and family et cetera. ... the environment we have here at work is very much a family type of environment. So, ja, and I think, I'm very lucky that I have a good relationship with my colleagues, ... um, so I think that helps to fulfil that need to a certain extent, is having a good relationship with my colleagues ... I'm not used to having support in my life,

apart from my colleagues. ... um, [sighs], well, last year when someone broke into my apartment [laughs], the first person I contacted was, was my boss. And I don't know why, you know. 'Cause that's not something I would usually do. I should have called the police first, but [laughs] for some reason I called her first.

In the following quotation, Ella described how education can be linked to a form of equality:

I think obviously the more, the more educated you are and the better the job you have, the easier it is to have equality, you know. So in a corporate setup I think there is a lot more equality than, you know, in the lower ranks of society, you know, the, the working class. Yes, because what can a woman do without her having a university degree, not much you know, it's just domestic type of things. ... but it also depends on your level of education I think ...

Furthermore, Ella mentioned how her education had helped her to challenge the view of society that getting married and having children was of the utmost importance. She said her travels abroad were specifically influential:

I think that by, by knowing more, one thinks differently ... But the people whom I look up to, and the person, and, and the type of ideals I aim for are a lot broader I think then, you know, just the normal family, child et cetera et cetera. So yes, no I definitely think my education, the fact that I went abroad was, you know, the fact that I studied and that type of thing. Um, the fact that I lived in Europe [pause] um, it has, has definitely allowed me to question all these things, in any case. Or it has caused me to question it, I almost want to say, because it isn't accepted in France, you know, that you will, that you will marry for example ... It is a decision to never have children and society looks at it differently than they will do here in South Africa, because we actually live in a very traditional society.

6.6. Missing out on sex.

6.6.1. *On pre-marital sex.*

6.6.1.1. *I'm waiting.*

When asked to elaborate on what waiting has protected her from, Greta explained:

Yes, it sounds like a heavy word, it was rather bad for me, I have almost, most of my girlfriends in my life until now um, were really virgins till they got married. And then the other day, two of these friends with whom I spend the most time, it was the weirdest timing, on the Wednesday the one tells me, and on the Friday the other one; they, they were in a relationship where they had been in a sexual relationship for a long time. And then told me how painful the breakup is afterwards, you're bound on so many more levels. And now you've, I almost want to say, experienced something you can't get anymore. So I think in that way ... yes, I there there's comes a lot of hurt with it. For me it remains something which still belongs in the marriage, within the safety of marriage.

Greta continued to describe the "safety of marriage" and also how she was aware that saving herself for marriage did not guarantee her anything. She said:

I think emotionally, yes. I am smart enough to; I think keep away physical diseases; but um, emotionally definitely. Yes I don't know, if, if I can make it, yes, I think for me to, to have sex is more or less to marry, like it was in the times of the Bible. And I also realize it's, uh, an *old fashioned* [emphasis] way of thinking, but up until now it has protected me, it has also deprived me of things, probably, I'm curious, but it has protected me. ... Yes I've rather, um [pause] with that also *again* [emphasis] realized [pause] but I've realized it again, nothing is guaranteed, I'm not entitled to anything, the fact that I spared myself and um, I

almost want to say live a healthier, purer life [pauses] um, it guarantees me nothing. ... The exact same friend, who has been in a sexual relationship for long, told me now she doesn't want to marry a divorced man. And then when she said this I was angry, because it felt to me that *I* [emphasis] may say that, she must be satisfied with other things than me. And I just realized again, there, there are no guarantees, it is not a right, it is a privilege, yes.

It can safely be assumed that what Gretal was referring to is the wish to marry a virgin, like herself. However, it also seemed as if she knew this was not likely and she would be privileged to have her wish granted. Furthermore, Gretal seemed to be aware that a virgin of her age was not a general phenomenon. She described a situation in which her doctor did not want to believe her:

Um [pause and slight laugh] it's clearly, um, not such a known, phenomenon [laughs] because with the treatment I must receive now [pause] um, I must almost take two pregnancy tests within two weeks [laughs], okay it is procedure [pause]. But I, I could see, when I told the specialist it is really not necessarily for him to test me, then on the one hand he [said he] hears what I say, but on the other hand doesn't believe me at all. Yes, so I just, actually laughed and realized [long pause] we are a rather special species [laughs] ... So on the one hand it is procedure and on the other hand [pause], I saw disbelief in his face, and maybe it is a projection of my other things; but I could see he doesn't believe me, and he sent me for the tests, and I have to pay for them.

6.6.1.2. There's a right time and way.

Danny is of the opinion that one must be ready and comfortable before having pre-marital sex. When asked to explain what she meant with "ready", Danny said:

That's such, that's such a deep question! And it's something that I thought about. As I get older I'm thinking about it more and more. And I, I realize that for me what that means is knowing 100% that the person I'm being intimate feels exactly the same way about me, is as invested in me, loves me as much as I, as I love him. That, that's what it means for me. ... Acceptance, 100% acceptance.

Furthermore, Danny stated that she would only be in monogamous relationships. She explained why:

Just in terms of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. Um, my experiences are, I'm a very loyal person, um, and my experience has been just, I've always been in monogamous relationships. I can't imagine anything else. So, I don't judge people that, yah, see more than one person, not at the same time, but over time. But, it's not for me personally.

6.6.1.3. Oh well, why not?

Haley's opinion that pre-marital sex was not wrong was most likely linked to the fact that she neither believed in religion, nor in the institute of marriage anymore. She explained her perspective as follows:

But I definitely think differently about it and I don't think that it is wrong. [Clears her throat.] But for me it is, it is difficult to think that I would just sleep with anybody. It is, um, it comes back again to that, um, what we, we just spoke about religion and um within religion it is like; it's just acceptable to have children once you are married. So within the structure, it makes complete sense to me that you must raise a child within a structure; because, um, I'm trying to explain, explain this quickly and simply now. But [sighs] um [sighs] yes, it's like [pause] say now a man and a woman are married, then they are, they signed on paper that they are together, and then, then it is a more secure environment to have a child; because

the mother and the father have undertaken to stay together, and it's in writing. And, but now one knows now that it's not to say, well, people go around or people decide they don't want to be married anymore and then they just leave ... Like why can't people then just decide between themselves to commit? And say we are together now so let's have a child now. ... I don't think it would be wrong, because there's, according to me, actually so many marriages which are wrong. And, people just do what they want, but because they have a piece of paper. It doesn't matter what they do wrong. So, why must one necessarily be married then like, before they can have sex? [Laughs nervously] No, it's not, I, I would definitely not say it's a *sin* [emphasis] to, to sleep with someone before you are married, I wouldn't say that.

It should be noted that Haley mostly refers to having children instead of having sex. Thus it would seem as if Haley only considers sex in terms of having children and not, for example, as a pleasurable or recreational activity. Her explanation for why pre-marital sex is not a sin is also closely linked to her apparent disbelief and dislike of the institute of marriage, that she further distanced the conversation from the actual act of having sex. When she did speak about the corporeal act of having sex, she either expressed how difficult it was to imagine herself doing it, or she switched over to speaking in the second or third person. All of this is indicative of her discomfort as far as the topic of sex is concerned. Notwithstanding, Haley made it clear that even though she had no problem with pre-marital sex, she had never had sex with a man when she described her short encounter with Henk:

I drank a lot of wine that evening. And then, and then I [nervous laugh] I still [pause] yes, if I drink a lot of wine then I become, I think I become myself more; I become more like an extrovert like I want to be; because I'm actually an introvert. ... I started tal-, talking to someone there; and yes, ah, it was the first time that I

was in a physical embrace with a man. It started at the pub and he took me to his flat which was nearby. And, uh, I could see he, he had plans. Because he said like: "Here's the bed", and it is just, it, so I said: "But I don't want to"; and he said: "Okay just kiss then". .. it has, it is, that's my [only] dates and the furthest I've ever gone physically.

Haley's encounter with Henk has some similarities to the situation in which Bella and Bertus started their sexual relationship, albeit with very different outcomes:

I actually have a very amazing lover ... And we spoke about it, we've known each other for a while, and then we got really drunk at a party one day, and we started talking about it, and, we've been shagging ever since.

As far as Haley is concerned, the presence of alcohol appears to have given her the ability to become who she actually wanted to be and also to act upon her sexual desires.

Differing slightly from Haley, Bella did not mention that alcohol helped her to be the person she wanted to be, however it would appear as if it allowed her and Bertus to *take the leap* and act on a conversation they have had about being friends with benefits.

Ella also did not believe there was anything wrong with having pre-marital sex and explained that her religion used to have an effect on her sexual activity; however, age has liberated her:

Look, when I was younger for example you know, it, in my early 20's you know, I mean I am, I am Christian; I grew up in a Christian home, so the whole think of you don't have sex before marriage, and all those things ... So it definitely played a role before, um, but like I say age is a very liberating thing, so I care a lot less to, also what *people* [emphasis] expect of you, you know. Like, if I'm comfortable with, with, with myself, you know, and, and I make my own choices which aren't

based anymore on what other people expect of me, you know. um, but sure when I was younger, you know, so-, like 19, 19, 20, 21, still thought: "Right, you know, I will probably marry one day, so I'll wait till then", and that type of thing you know. So it definitely had an influence on, on how you approach relationships and, and how you perceive relationships, you know. So, then you think everyone is a potential like long term relationship, and it will be the one, and that type of thing. Um, but with time that also becomes less important.

Furthermore, Ella did acknowledge that that there might be reason for someone to wait:

I think it probably depends on what one wants in life. You know, if you want to marry and have children, especially if you plan on doing it at a relatively young age, then it is probably but, you know, e-, e-, I don't see the worth in it to wait, you know, if you now feel you will find someone within who you can share your life and so forth. But I also think like I, like I say, as a person gets older, it is liberating you know, and I, I've let it go, because I don't have that picture, you know. So I [pause] would I marry? It will probably only be around 40 or 45 and there's no way I'm waiting that long [laughs] So, at a stage I decided it is part of life and I want to experience all aspects of life. So I can't hold to that and say: "Oh, I will not have sex before marriage", and if I don't plan on getting married, because then it means I will become a nun; and that is not what I wanted for myself. So I've let that go. I decided, it is not the most important thing to me; and if people are not satisfied with that or if people are not happy about that, then it is their business.

This is contrary to Greta, who made a similar comment about wanting to know what having sex was like, and who was not willing to let go of what she believed in:

Then, then she said her friend always said she doesn't want to die curious [laughs]. Now, um, on the one hand I also joke about it, sometimes I'll say I don't want to die curious. ... it [waiting to have sex] has deprived me of things, surely, I am curious. ... On the other hand um, I realize, I think there could have been so much more, not difficulty with it, but I, I won't be able to just sleep with someone, for the sake of it, um.

6.6.2. We still miss out.

6.6.2.1. What we do about it.

Bella had a sexual relationship with her friend Bertus. However, she explained the difference between having sex with Bertus and having sex with Ben by first explaining her relationship with Bertus:

I actually have a very amazing love that unfortunately or maybe fortunately lives very far away, because he would have made me mad. ... But to [pauses and sighs] if in any way I had other feelings, and I can really honestly say: "I've never been in love with him", he's fabulous, and he shags fabulously, and we enjoy talking, and we talk on the phone for hours. Um, but it's really, I think we've perfected friends with benefits. ... that's why I think it works; because, we've sorted it out beforehand. Before we shagged for the first time, we knew exactly where we stood. I told him exactly and he told me exactly, and we were happy with it, and it still works.

Bella also described her reaction when Bertus once showed supportive behaviour towards her:

Um, [pause] yes [pause], it freaks me out a bit, a little bit, actually; because, that's not what I want from him, or expect from him. Um [pause], but [pause], he's very

supportive, which is nice. Um [pause], and I think it freaked me out, I think we've reached that point again where it's okay. ... I don't expect it from him, but I get more support from him than I th-, sort of thought I would.

Lastly, Bella described how sex with Ben was different:

There is definitely a difference between sex with someone which is just for fun and games, and someone whom you really care for. So, [sighs and pauses] people can switch that part off, but at a stage then you also realize: "Yes well, this is just shagging." [Pause] So, you get the physical pleasure out of it ... like with Ben it was different. It was like we were together the whole day; and, and, it is kind of like [starts laughing] not like "shagging all day", but it's kind of, it's an extension and it's nice. Where with Bertus, if he in the, wanted to stay here for the day, it would kind of freak me out, because I would think: "But what do you want?" Um [pause] so yes, its, it's nice and all, but it's like 50% nice, and with Ben it was 90% nice; because [pause] it is the, it was very emotional. Where with Bertus it is ooh, very nice, and then you go home.

After explaining that simply having sex with men was not enough and that there was a difference between simply having sex and making love, Jane explained how sleeping over, and the morning after, was one of the most intimate aspects:

Well, for me like I just said, for me, there is definitely a divide between sex and making love, with making love you sleep over; and tomorrow morning you wake up with the person, and you sort of share the morning, and you have like, must face, not must face, that which happened last night, or through the night, it's still there. So, for me it's more intimate, the morning after is more intimate for me than the whole sex thing, so, I, I avoid it if I'm not ready for it. It takes me very long to trust someone, to actually do that. ... I will, then, it will definitely be a

longer term, type of, I will know him a lot better. It's like, for me, the, the sleeping over thing, it's just like, it's basically a one night stand, I don't want to see him, ever again, and, with, if you are in a type of relationship, the it is, actually nice for me now.

In slight contrast to Jane's last sentence, she continued to explain that she was careful not to move in the direction of "making love":

... um, to be honest, I'm a bit careful to go that way, because then, it's then when I become involved, so I prefer [laughs], just sex because if I start to become emotional, then I become attached, and then I find it difficult to get over the person if it doesn't work out. So I try not to take it there; but it happens after a while [pause]. You, you just bluff yourself, actually.

6.6.3. It's still uncomfortable.

After admitting that she found talking about sex uncomfortable, Danny continued to explain how most people, according to her, were more lenient about men talking about masturbation, for example. She said:

Um, I think there's a lot of like, people don't want to talk about that, you know. They don't want to think about it, especially women. I think with men, everyone knows men masturbate and it's like not a big deal, you know. It, people even joke about it. In almost every movie someone refers to it. But I think for women, people are a bit, they don't understand it; I think they think it's a bit weird.

Furthermore, Danny also alluded to how she experienced other's perceptions of her and feeling some guilt at what others might think of her. Danny first explained her perception of how people might have reacted if they had known about her relationship with Dirk:

Well I think they would be quite shocked, I think people have this perception of me that I'm a very, you know conservative, good little girl, that just you know does everything right, and that doesn't, who is not a sexual being, to be honest. I think that people have this perception that, I'm a nerd, yeah, that, you know, I don't have these types of feelings, and especially not for an older man, you know.

She additionally explained why being called "prudish" by Dan was one of the worst things he did:

Um, I think it suggest that, you know, I'm the type of person who is just not a sexual being, and I was offended by that, because I am, I am a human being and I have feelings and desires. I just felt [pause], you know, and that was really a judgemental thing and I think it was so [pause], um, it made me feel ugly and unattractive um, um, yeah. So I think it just, it was a very, personal attack, I, I found, yeah.

On a slightly different note, Jane described how she sometimes felt after having sex with someone:

Jane: Yes. [Laughs] Like, I am actually a bit fucked up. Like, I really didn't do the relationship thing at all. I don't like people in my space. I was total defensive and I have quilt like you can't believe. So I will, like the first time that I with someone, like the first time that I slept with Jack, at three in the morning I sneaked out [pause] - that is what I did.

Interviewer: While he slept?

Jane: Yes, that is what I do, did; and the last year and a half it got a bit better, I would actually do the sleep over thing now, and [pause] which was a big thing for me.

Interviewer: Okay and why did you sneak out?

Jane: Because the morning-after thing, I just can't do it. Uh-uh. ... For me it's terribly embarrassing and uncomfortable, and [pause] because if I wake up, I am [pause] I am very disorientated and everything is loud and the light is too bright and I'm not really with it and then to deal with something like that is just like horrible for me.

Interviewer: So you basically didn't want Jack to see you like that?

Jane: No, no it's not that, I just wanted, I didn't want to deal with him then. ... Yes, obviously you obviously feel, you feel like a slut, you just picked someone up and slept with him, it's again like, it probably comes from the religion thing and how you were raised ... Yes if I want to know it or not.

In the second interview, Jane continued to explain her guilt feelings:

Jane: You obviously feel guilty if you do stuff like that, the, you think: "*Slut*" [said drawn out, almost teasing], but, it, it's, it probably comes from religious, and, and, values which you learned when you were young. [Pause] Um [pause] it doesn't necessarily influence my behaviour, but I do feel guilty about what I do.

Interviewer: Um, do you think you'll ever get to the point where you don't feel guilty?

Jane: Um [long pause] I don't have a clue, I think it's definitely becoming less I think, but, I shall always wonder about it.

Interviewer: Okay, and when you say wonder now, wonder what?

Jane: Like what people, it bothers me, how can I say now? I feel guiltier than other people will find out what I do, than that I myself feel guilty about it.

6.7. Reasons for being single

6.7.1. *We have standards and requirements.*

Bella, Ella, and Gretal hinted at, or mentioned directly, certain conditions that they needed to be fulfilled before were willing to date a man. Bella mentioned an incident where she went hiking with someone and realized that a similar lifestyle was important:

But it's more lifestyle type of things. Um, I have now, that's also one of the reasons why I later realized it would not have worked with Ben; because I need someone who is out-doorsy. Because, I went to hike with a friend the other day, who moaned the whole time, because he thought there would be a path. ... And that put me off so much ... So, its stuff like that. It sounds like, yes [sighs and pauses] ts-, it must be someone who gets that. Um, I won't be able to date someone who is a clubber. I've tried that before, and it, it, it doesn't work.

The manner in which Bella sighed and paused gave the impression of someone who was weary of seeking a partner who understood her and her lifestyle. Jokingly, Ella made the following comment:

... I always joke, I tell people the reason why I'm single is because I want just three things in a man, but I haven't found them in the same man yet. I want a Frenchman, a vineyard in the French countryside, um, a yacht and a French, a European passport. [Laughs] I will settle for two out of the three.

Whilst Ella does say the above jokingly, it is possible that there is a hint of truth in what she said. It is likely that the request for a French vineyard and a yacht is indicative of her love for France; and possibly also a partner who would obviously then have a good income. Whilst this was said as a joke, the influence of it is still possible. Lastly, Gretal described a

prerequisite she had indicated on the Internet dating site: "And I don't think I had any non-negotiable things, just smoking, that is completely non-negotiable."

6.7.2. And we simply don't know why and how.

Another possible reason for why some of the participants were not really actively seeking a partner was because they simply did not know where to start looking. In addition, Bella and Jane said they simply did not know why they were single. When asked where she thought she would find a partner, Anja laughed and said: "... it's difficult [pauses and laughs], it's difficult, yes, it's difficult. I don't know." Gretal replied in a small voice and with a slight laugh "...I don't know..." when asked where she thought she could search for a partner. In a similar way, though in a stronger and more exasperated tone, Jane answered: "The Lord only knows". Furthermore, when asked why she was single, Jane replied: "I don't know, I really don't know why [pause]. I really can't answer you why I am single." Similarly, Bella seemed at a loss as to where to find a partner:

I have no idea [pause] I don't have a clue, it is very difficult. Um [pause] and luckily, this is now one of those misfortunes of: "Misery loves company", see I, many men and women with whom I'm friends are in the same position of: "Where to you find someone?" ... Someone forwarded something to me the other day, which says: "We're all looking for someone whose demons can play nicely with your demons". Whatever! [Pause] So everyone has issues and everyone has [pause] has no idea where to start looking for someone with whom you [pause] can share that. ... But it, also the more things I do the more I wonder: "In this entire terrible number of things I do, why I haven't met someone who is worthwhile yet?"

Furthermore, Bella also could not give an answer as to why she was still single:

If I knew that [starts laughing], you and I wouldn't have had this conversation now. I have no idea, because, um [pause] if I, of all my friends who, who are single, they are all successful, intelligent, various levels of attractive people [pause] not like psychotic or anything really crazy [pause] and it just doesn't work. So, I have no idea.

Anja, Greta, Jane, and Bella all seemed to be at a loss as to why they are single. Bella seemed especially perplexed since she cannot even see that there was specifically something wrong with her and her single friends to hint as to why they were still single. Anja and Bella also made the comment that it is “difficult”. The word “difficult” most likely indicates that they experienced finding a partner difficult. The participants seemed almost exacerbated as to why they are single or where to find a partner. Their body language was pertinent when they talked about this aspect: their posture slumped or they also tended to slacken their posture – almost slumping – or throw their hands hopelessly in the air when asked why they thought they are single, or where they thought they could find a partner. Furthermore, I almost got the sense that if they at least knew why and/or why, they would feel that they have more control over the situation which would be better for them. In other words, because they were strong, independent, and educated women, they would think of a solution to the *problem*. Their body language and the resulting atmosphere are, unfortunately, not accurately portrayed in the audio recordings or transcriptions of the interviews. It must be noted that this is a very subjective part of the findings and the fact that it cannot be shown limits the accuracy of the interviews. Nonetheless, as the researcher, I deemed the sense of being at a complete loss an important part of their lived experience –and also saw it as a link to why they possibly continued to seek the *fault* within themselves.

Appendix 7: Units of Significance Not Added To Results Section**7.1. My family and being single.**

The participants' experience of their families and especially their parents were so varied it was hard to find much similarity at first glance. However, it was possible to discern differences between the experiences with different family members (in other words the family in general, consisting of mothers, fathers, and sisters). Another theme which occurred was: death in the family. Slightly risking the objectivity of the study, the above themes can be further divided into generally *good* or *bad* experiences.

Some of the participants commented on how they experienced and perceived their parents' opinions of their relationship status and how their parents may have influenced their current relationships status. Ella said:

They are fine with it; they are really fine with it. In the past I have spoken to them about it and told them not to expect grandchildren from me [laughs] ... they know that I want to do my own thing and they support me in it. I think my, *my* [emphasis] own parents know me well enough to know I just do my own thing.

On the other hand, Danny said: "... and I think maybe she did think I would get married early and have children early, you know, and have someone to look after me as such."

Along the same lines, Greta said:

... I have mentioned [about doing Internet dating] to my parents in a desperate moment, a sad moment [laughs] yes. ... my father still believes I will find someone, he says he and my mom both still pray for my partner [laughs]. And that's actually what I want, a life partner, it's yes. I think, I often make sure they know I'm still trying [laughs]. ... So I think they know what goes on in my heart, reasonably.

Ella and Gretal's experiences of family support are somewhat in contrast to the results of research that finds that single women experienced feeling *invisible* to their families (Sharp & Ganong, 2011) since they knew that their families preferred them to marry (Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Situmorang, 2007; Wang & Abbott, 2013), as was the case with Danny. However, these studies were conducted in the United States of America, Indonesia, and China respectively; hence comparability is limited. Importantly, Gretal's account of her parents' responses to her singlehood indicates implicit pressure from them for her to find a man and marry. Furthermore, and similar to the current findings, single women whose families were more supportive of their singlehood also had more contact with their families of origin (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). On a different note, Haley and Jane made indirect and direct mention of the influence their parents have and have had on their current relationship status. Haley mentioned her mother's influence and comments:

...she told me in so many words that: "If you are fat, you will not get a husband"
... if I wanted to know about relationships, obviously I was silenced immediately
... I think it is where my development was stunted a bit ... I can't get it out of my head, let's say the reprimands I got from, from my parents; that, anything that moves in that direction, in the direction of a relationship of physical contact; that I tell myself: "But something is going to happen here for which I'm not ready"
[sighs] ... I know it is, it won't be the, it is maybe not the main reason, but um, it definitely has an influence. ... like the idea was, was, created of that, that marriage is necessarily unhappy [slight laugh]. And that two people will necessarily break each other down [deep breath]. So, it has, it has played a role, but it is not, it is not the main reason [pause]. But [sighs], wait, if I must be very honest now [pause] I think [pause] I think it is, it is maybe, it has made the biggest contribution th-, that I'm were I am today.

Similarly, Jane described her parents' relationship:

Yes, my father is very, very patriarchal and, a-, conservative. Yes [pause]. Yes. I think it is also one of the reasons why I've maybe never been in a serious relationship, because I refuse to deal with crap like my mother does. I refuse. There is no way in hell that I would do something like that. ... I will not, at the beginning of a relationship introduce anyone to him, something I'm not sure of, I won't do it Yes, because, with my father, if you want to tell him something like that, it will have to be committed, otherwise, because he will, um, make a helluva racket, so you must make it worth the effort.

The influence of parents' marriages on women's desire to marry was previously reported in other studies. One study reports that more than 66% of participants mentioned that their parents' marriage had influenced their desire to marry, especially if they experienced and perceived their parents' marriage as unhappy and conflictual (Ferguson, 2000). In much the same way, Haley and Jane mentioned being reluctant to enter into relationships since they did not want the type of relationship their parents had.

7.1.1. My family in general.

At some point in the interviews, four participants spoke about their family life in general – either how it was currently, or how it used to be.

7.1.1.1. We have a good relationship, but ...

Ella mentioned that she experienced her family as loving and supportive people even though they were very different from her. She said:

... specifically because he didn't want his family to know, and I also didn't tell my family, because it also would have been an issue on my side ... But I was almost willing to tell them and face the consequences ... but my parents are

amazing people, very loving, very supportive, but still rather traditional, I think, in their way of thinking, especially my mom. [Pause] um, but my father also, you know, so. [Pause] um, there's [laughs] something which my parents do not necessarily know. ... They have a tendency to immediately react emotionally to something ... Whereas I would first distance myself and try to almost process it and be rational about it.

Gretal also mentioned supportive parents, even though she felt she was holding back and sifting because of them. She said:

... I actually had a very happy childhood ... I don't think there is anything that they do that makes me sift, I just think, I realise they feel very sorry for me [voice breaks, sniffs]. Um, yes, but there isn't something which they do. ... so it's just this absolute uncertainty, and, and again, my parents who offer to help me, and I am going to ask their help ... um, so actually it is just so grateful for them [voice breaks] ... An now it is such a privilege, but also a thorn in my flesh ... on the one hand it is such a privilege to know that I can go to my parents, and on the other hand, you would just, yes, I would have really liked [pause] to have someone there, which I almost want to say, someone who will take care of me ...

Both participants seemed to perceive and experience their parents in what could be termed a *positive light*. This was despite the fact that Ella saw herself as very different from her more traditional and emotional parents. However, seemingly because of the more traditional views of her parents, Ella still kept secrets from her parents, for example her relationship with Ed, a black man. She was also only "almost" willing to tell her parents. This could possibly suggest that keeping a good relationship with her parents was more important to her than her relationship with Ed. On the other hand, Gretal made no mention of keeping secrets from her parents or being very different from her parents. She did however, appear to

be very emotional about the support her parents gave her, and the fact that she thought they felt sorry for her⁵³. She called her parents' support both a privilege and a thorn in her flesh. On the one hand she seemed grateful that she could go to her parents for support; on the other hand it seemed to remind her that she did not have a partner⁵⁴, or "someone who will take care of me".

7.1.1.2. Creating family, or accepting your past.

Differing from Ella and Gretal, Bella and Haley did not give a general impression of *good* family bonds. Bella started by describing how she was making her own family through friends:

... I don't really have fa-, good family ties. I have very good friends. ... And the, when I was 17, I went to university, and I never looked back. I don't need them, and they don't need me. So it is very possible to [pause] to make a new family for yourself as you go along. It's a pity to not have that, but I [pause] if you never had it, and I don't think you really miss it then. Well, you miss it, because obviously I know I'm gathering a new family.

When speaking about not having good family ties or the fact that she was creating her own family, Bella spoke in the first person. However, when speaking about missing family ties, she spoke in the second person, thus creating a distance between missing family and herself. This can possibly indicate that she either did not miss her family, or even that she missed them so much that she preferred to distance herself from this due to the pain of missing her family. Whilst Haley did not speak about making a new family, she did mention

⁵³ It should be noted that a few days before the interview in which Gretal became emotional she had been diagnosed with a specific disease which could have resulted in heightened emotions.

⁵⁴ Note that the interpretation of the word "someone" to indicate a partner is based on the full version of the interview.

having bad experiences as a child and suggested that her fear of rejection was based on her past:

... all the stuff [sighs], all the bad [laughs] experiences that a person can have, I've had ... we never spoke about anything ... I could never ask about stuff, like ask normal questions, then I was silenced ... the moment you started talking about something, or started telling something that happened, then it became a helluva issue. But the real issue of um my mother who was the [used substances], that does not get mentioned, but all the other things are issues.

At a later stage Haley explained why she left when her date wanted to get to know her better:

... I think he asked me: "Tell me about yourself". That's, that's something which I don't like very much if a man asks it. ... but I think I would *now* [emphasis] I would [stutters] be honest with people and say where I come from. But, then you talk around stuff that bothers you. So say I would obviously not [tell] someone that I, at, at a certain stage I felt that, but I [pause] if I want to, if I want to be *accepted* [emphasis] then no one must know about my past.

Haley described her childhood as having experienced all the bad things you can have, both sighing and laughing as she does. During the last sentence of the second quotation, she also seemed to speak relatively disorganized. The sighing and laughing, and disorganized speech gave the impression of confusion with regards to her past and how to deal with this now. If this was so, it was also possibly influenced by the fact that Haley was, according to her recollection, never allowed to discuss "stuff" and especially not the real issue in the house – her mother's substance abuse and addiction. This seemed to have a specific influence on how much was comfortable with a man knowing about her, and also how she perceived other people will accept her or not.

7.1.2. Mothers.

The participants did not just speak about their families or childhood in general; they also made specific reference to mothers, fathers, and sisters. It was, however, only Anja and Jane who specifically referred to having a good relationship with their mothers.

7.1.2.1. We are close.

Anja described her relationship with her mother, who died a few years ago, as “very close”:

Yes well, the emotional becomes difficult, um, I lost my mother almost two years ago and we were very close, and it is something which is also now half [pause] you [pause] unless you have a friend who-, where you almost you two the, so almost that, you, ev-, every person kind of needs someone with whom they can chat. ... she was almost, she was more like a friend to me at the end. ... we did also fight rather often with each other, but, um, we had a good relationship [sighs] ... someone with whom I could talk to. Someone with whom you st-, can share stuff. ... when they lived her in Somerset West in the end, then sometimes we went to the movies. And we, you know it is stuff which I later, which you actually do with your friends as a younger person, but you also can do it with your mother later.

Even though Anja described her relationship with her mother as “good” and “close” there was a certain amount of uncertainty and incongruity which can be of importance. When speaking about the emotional pain of losing her mother, their close and good relationship, their fighting, and her mother being like a friend, Anja seemed to speak with certainty, and mostly in the first person. However, when she spoke about her mother as someone with whom she “can” share things, or “could” talk to, she switched over to the second person. In the same way, she spoke in the second person when referring to the things you “can” do with your

mother were things “you” used to do as a child with your friends. This casts doubt on whether she really did speak to her mom, share things with her, or did any of the friendship things with her mother. Another thing to notice is the second part of Anja’s first sentence – after the double pause – where she apparently spoke about replacing her mother with a friend. Aside from speaking in the second person, her speech was also rather disorderly. Whilst this could simply be a manner of speech, with Anja struggling to find the correct words to express herself, it could also be interpreted otherwise. It is possible that Anja was confused about her relationship with her mother, whether her mother was a friend, or filled the role of a parent. Furthermore, the idea of replacing her mother with a friend seemed to confuse Anja; she possibly found it wrong and confusing to want to replace her mother’s friendship, or she simply did not really have the friends to replace her mother with.

Similar to Anja, Jane also had a good relationship with her mother, though she did not elaborate on it. With reference to her mother’s death, she said: “I was 26. ... It was difficult. But you just must. ... Yes we were. We, I am much closer to my mother than to my father.”

7.1.2.2. She’s an acquaintance.

Differing from Anja and Jane, the other participants did not perceive their relationships with their mothers as good. Bella, for example, now only had a financial relationship with her mother. She said:

... sometimes then it rather feels to me: “Yes if you someone dumped you then you go and cry at your mom” and I don’t have that, but I do have [pause] 20 other people to whom I can go. ... More or less when I was in primary school I had a rather good relationship with her. And then things started to spiral down. And about when I was 13 [pause] I more or less [pause] spent an hour a week with her. So [pause] I don’t know. We have a financial relationship at the moment. I pay for her house and her water and electricity and such things.

Similar to Bella, Danny did not really have a relationship with her mother and described speaking to her like speaking to an “acquaintance”. Aside from mentioning her good relationship with her father – and this also mostly in the context of how he was different from her mother – Danny almost solely spoke about her mother and no other family members. The following is a rather shortened extract of Danny’s description of her mother:

I don't have a good relationship with my mother. And, my whole life I just haven't connected well with women, I've always connected better with men ... She's a very cold person. She's really not affectionate. She's never once said that she loves me, for example. Um [pause] not ever in my entire life. um, ja, so, she's just not a very warm open person. And she's also very judgemental. She's very critical. Um, and she tries to take over, you know. She's the type of person who, who tries to take over. And, I've seen in my life, since I move here, I'm doing much better. You know, I'm more independent, I can think what I want, I can [slight laugh] do what I want. I don't have someone trying to shape me ... It's almost like I'm speaking to an acquaintance. That's the type of relationship I have. I don't feel a closeness to her at all. I keep my distance from her ... Um [pause and sighs] I think my mom has this impression of me as a very weak person, and she really reinforces that, you know. Um, she often tells me, you know, I can't do something ... She's really reinforced in me that I can't do things. And I, slowly but surely I'm challenging that, and building my own life for myself ... the more I speak to my mother, the more I realize that, her perception of me is that I'm still a child. Um, I think she has very little faith in my abilities to do things, normal adult things ... her perception of me is still as a child. So I think she would like to have me still living at home, and doing some, you know, blue collar job [laughs], not being in academics ... I get quite uncomfortable when I speak about my mom.

Danny also described how the lack of a relationship with her mother sometimes made her feel. She said:

I think it's quite difficult. I get very lonely at times. And it's not like I have someone to speak to, you know. Ja, and I, I sometimes do wish that I had someone that I could rely on, and that, that loves me unconditionally.

Neither Danny nor Bella seemed to have good relationships with their mothers. Danny specifically kept her distance, which was even evident in her manner of speech – Danny distances herself from her mother by calling her “she” or “her” and only four times did she speak about “my mom” – in comparison to the 18 times she spoke about “her” or “she”. In the same way Bella also did not speak about *my mother* but referred to her mother as “she” or “your mother”. However, both Bella and Danny seemed to feel the loss of a relationship with their mothers: Bella because she could not cry on her mother's shoulder after being dumped and Danny because she did not have someone to talk to who loved her unconditionally. It remains questionable then, whether for Bella and Danny the love of a mother can truly be replaced.

Gretal, on the other hand, did not describe quite such a bad relationship or the lack thereof; but simply mentioned that she tended to hold back because of her mother. She said:

[My] psychologist told me my mother has a big piece of unlived life, which makes her bitter and hurts her, and I really tried to compensate for that. And also tried to hold back. [Pause] My mother studied, but immediately after that became a minister's wife and that is her for the rest of her life now [laughs]. So there's a big piece of unlived live, and I think I held back a lot, um, emotionally in terms of that I don't actually want to say how big my dreams are for an M [a master's degree], or how big my dreams are for my own practices, and such things.

Haley's description of her relationship with her mother seemed to mainly concern Haley's physical appearance, and her mother's issues:

... I also didn't have happy childhood years [pause]. But um, I, I was a very overweight child, and my mother poi-; she pointed this out to me. And she told me, she told me in so many words that: "If a person is fat then one doesn't get a husband." ... that is again how I was raised, how I was conditioned about things ... it is mainly about, about like things that my mother said. ... "See how she already looks, look how big she's getting", you know. Or say we are in the shop and say my grandmother buys me a chocolate, then: "See how Haley looks already". You see, that how I felt it is unacceptable ... I realise now that she had more than one problem, asides from her [substance abuse] which she, she also, so she stuck her finger down her throat every time she ate. ... we also have a strong suspicion that she was molested as a child, and that is why we t-, uh- the sex topic was always stopped. And it was made as vulgar.

According to Haley she had a weight issue which her mother often pointed out to her, or would make comments about. She even, according to Haley, went as far as telling her she would never find a husband if she were fat. As can be seen in Section 7.5., this has greatly influenced Haley's perception of herself. She still believes that her physical appearance contributes to her being single. Haley did, however, also admit to her mother's own issues of substance abuse and an apparent eating disorder. Furthermore, Haley suspected that her mother had been molested as a child and this was why sex was made to be a vulgar thing. It would thus appear as if Haley was, to some degree at least, aware of the fact that her mother might have projected her own problems and issues unto her.

7.1.3. Fathers.

The participants also spoke about their relationships with their fathers. It was only Danny who mentioned that she was closest to her father, whilst Gretal experienced her father as acknowledging her need for a male figure. Differing from Danny and Gretal, Anja, Bella and Haley experienced their fathers as unavailable and absent.

7.1.3.1. He's unavailable.

Whilst Anja did not voice this unavailability explicitly, what she did mention suggested unavailability:

... as child my father was not very much at the, there. He often worked over weekends ... And he also often worked till late in the evenings in the week. So, he actually wasn't ... [pause] till I was about 15 or 16, he wasn't home much [pause] when we were there ... he did, well my mother tells of how as children he played with us, and [pause] I sort of remember it, but it was never a deep relationship like with my mother. ... And it's starting now [pause] the fact that my mother isn't there, one of the positives you can see is that I now have a chance to have to get to know my father better. ... a comment she [my sister] made at a stage is, when we phoned home and my father didn't pick up the phone, you only spoke to my mom ...

Differing from Anja, Bella's father's absence was the result of her mother and sister's illness:

... my whole fa-, my family was pretty much focussed on my mother and my sister. My father tried to sort them out and I was kind of on my own ... I probably need a lot of long therapy for that ... But, uh [pause] no-, yes [drawn out], I

obviously have one or the other type of abandonment issues, but, um [pause]. It feels to me like I sort of, I've dealt with that.

Thus, both Anja and Bella's mothers seemed to have influenced their relationships with their fathers. Bella mentioned this more directly than Anja, saying that her father had to focus on her mother – hence his absence. Bella did say that she “sort of” dealt with this, but also that she “probably” needed long term therapy because of the abandonment issues she had as a result of this. Anja, on the other hand, only hinted at this. It was only after her mother died that she started to develop a deeper relationship with her father – notice how she spoke about her father as “my father” then, and not “him” or “he” anymore. Anja's sister's comment about phoning home, also gave the impression that because of the close relationship with their mother, they did not have such a close relationship with their father. Varying slightly from Anja and Bella, Haley mentioned the emotional absence of her father. She said:

... then my father made a terrible scene, and her, my father was very aggressive ...

It comes down to the fact that I took him on about what he pretends and does, it doesn't correlate ... And then I went to my father and said: “I am sorry about what I said and that I didn't really mean it”. But actually I did really mean what I said, but now for the sake of [pause] ... let me say to keep me in my father's will ... And my father was *absent* [emphasis], like um, emotionally absent ... but we never connected. We don't really connect now either. ... I believe he can drive a person to anything ... Like the idea which I have then is that, um, men are like emotionally distant. Because that is how my father is ... now I assume a lot of people are going to be like that. And uh, it's, it's awkward to think that a person can move closer or be more intimate with a man than, a-, than I was with my father.

Contrary to Anja and Bella, Haley made no reference to moving on or experiencing a change in her relationship with her father. However, her comment about apologizing to her father merely to stay in his will does give the impression that she was under the impression that he would sever ties with her. Yet, it could also indicate that this was simply what she feared he would do, and she did not want him to reject her. Haley's perception and experience of her father still influenced her and how she perceived men. She voiced awkwardness at the thought of "a person" being more intimate or closer to a man, than she was with her father. By also switching to speaking in the third person, Haley intensified the impression that this really made her uncomfortable. Haley later made it blatantly clear that she did not want a partner who is like her father. She said:

... you see, I have two examples in my life of how men should not be. The one is my father. ... he's very ... they were just never the men of the house. It's like my mother always organized everything, and she, actually she *ran* [emphasis] the whole story. It's like, when she died the other day, I could see that he could hardly tie his own shoes, because she always laid everything out neatly for him.

Haley's reason for why a man should not be like her father was because she perceived him to never actually be the man of the house. She experienced him as not being able to do anything for himself and leaving her mother to run the household. This also gave a very patriarchal image of her father.

7.1.3.2. *He's there.*

As mentioned earlier, Danny did not really speak about her father, even though she had had a better relationship with him than with her mother. When she described her father, it was also mostly in terms of how similar he was to her and, in the context of her description of her mother, how unlike her he was. She said:

I had a very good relationship with my dad. Very close. And he was also a very introverted person. So I felt like he was one person that understood me ... I enjoyed his company, we just, we liked the same things. We liked to watch sport together; we liked to listen to music together. So, I really enjoyed his company. And he was a relaxed person with me. You know, he didn't judge me, he didn't question what I was doing with my life, um, and I think he felt that I was good enough. That I, that I was doing something good with my life, um, ja, so ... I do miss him very much; I had a very good relationship with him.

It would thus seem as if Danny perceived her relationship with her father as “close” and “good” because they were very similar and he understood and accepted her – something which her mother did not do. This good relationship could have influenced Danny who “... [finds] it just so much easier to speak to a guy”. Notice how, out of all the participants, Danny was also the only one who explicitly said that she missed her father very much. Whilst Gretal did not say she was closest to her father or to any one of her parents for that matter, she did call her relationship with her father as “healthy”, she said:

... he's at a time now where I realized, where if I ask his advice, then he gives it to me. I think he realises that I maybe have that need of a man in my life. ... And I would say to my father: “Just help me, what do you think, dad?” [Laughs] And he tells me what he thinks. So I think we have a very healthy relationship.

Contrary to Haley, Gretal perceived her father as providing the male figure she wanted or needed. It seemed that because she could ask him for advice and he gave it, she perceived their relationship as “healthy”.

7.1.4. Sisters.

Another member of the family which was mentioned by four of the participants, are their sisters. With the exception of Anja (who said that the person she is closest to is her sister), none of the participants expressed being particularly close to their sisters.

7.1.4.1. We are close.

As mentioned above, Anja described her sister to be the person with whom she was the closest. Anja said:

... she's [sister] 5 years younger than me. When we were very small we didn't much, because there, there's a brother in between [pause]. Um, and we began, ah, we [pause] at 12, 14, when she wa-, me about 17, 18, we began to do things together, went shopping together ... we try to see each other. And, it's almost [pause] because a lot of things have happened in our lives together for a long time we could share [pause] them with each other, like when my mother, with my mother and stuff. And I think we are, we're not through the same thing, but a lot [pause] we went through the same situation, but we didn't necessarily deal with it in the same way ... We have, we fi-, still fight, but [pause] um, and we've made peace with the fact that we fight, because then [pause] we speak to each other ... Yes, it wa-, it [her sister's wedding shortly after her mother's death] was very stressful for me with the organizing. It was also very emotional because it was just a few months after my mother's death.

Differing slightly from Anja, Ella did not mention that either of her sisters was closest to her; however, she did describe having a close relationship with them and mentioned being the peacekeeper between the two sisters:

And they never got along, for example [laughs] when we were young, so I was always the peace keeper, you know. And they were, both were close to me, but not to each other. So that thing of being the strong one and being the one who handles the issues, I think that started as a child [laughs] because of that situation.

It seemed then as if Ella felt her relationship with her sisters, and between her sisters, shaped her into being the strong person she is today. However, whilst she did say that they were both close to her, she did not say that she was close to either of them. Anja, on the other hand mentioned her sister when asked whom she was closest to. Yet, their relationship did not start off well, seemingly because of the brother who was between them; though this is not clear.

Another aspect of Anja's relationship with her sister which is of interest is her mother. Anja said that they could share things such as the "situation" of "my mother['s]" death – instead of "our" mother's death. It would seem then as if Anja was never willing to share her mother with her sister. Lastly, Anja's comment about fighting with her sister was quite intriguing. It is not the fact that they fight but what she said after mentioning they fight which is intriguing. The way Anja mentions fighting and making peace with fighting "because then [pause] we speak to each other" gave the impression that Anja puts up with the fighting – which can also be interpreted as a bad relationship – because then at least she had someone to talk to.

7.1.4.2. We don't get along.

In contrast with Ella and Anja, Bella and Jane did not mention good relationships with their sisters. Firstly, Bella described her relationship with her sister by saying:

She's older than me. Um, she's four years older than me. She still lives with my mother. And I told her a year ago: "Don't, just don't ever contact me again [laughs], just stay away". She's really, she's [pause] if I had a choice, then I

would have put her in a-, in an institution [pause], a safe place. ... I really think she's definitely [pause and sighs] a psychopath.

Even though Bella's sister was older than she is, it seemed as if Bella who had to take care of her. By stating that her sister still lived with her mother, Bella indirectly mentioned that she then paid her living costs of since she paid for those of her mother. She also mentioned wanting to put her sister in a "safe place", indicating a sense of caring for her sister. This was besides the fact that she believed her sister to be a psychopath and telling her to never make contact with her again. It was Jane, however, who spoke the most about her relationships with her sisters. Jane always perceived her younger sister, Jessie, as better than her; and her older sister, Jill, as the opposite of her. Firstly, she described Jessie:

But I definitely have trust issues in..., because with men, I am, it's, I'm not usually very jealous or so. But if I'm interested in anyone, even just as friends, she doesn't come close. Then I don't like it. ... I was always intimidated by her, she's very pretty and very smart and very sporty and [pause] very good with horses, she was always almost, I always felt she is better, prettier or whatever than me, but that's fine. Thereafter, it was just like a confirmation to me. ... No, I did, I've asked her a lot of times afterwards: "But why did you do that?" and she couldn't really give me an answer.

Later, Jane described Jessie's reaction to hearing about her reproductive ailment:

... and she says to me: "Now what did you do to get that?" In other words she's insinuating that I slept around. Then, it's like, how she is judgemental about things like that. ... I just kept quiet, I didn't answer her. Yes [pause] Um [pause] hurt, I was like: "Okay?"

Secondly, she mentioned her relationship with Jill:

... and we are not close either. We really do not get along. She is the opposite of me. She doesn't go out, she's unbelievably religious, um, doesn't drink at all, doesn't social, doesn't smoke [pause] so yes. But she is more someone with whom I can talk for example about medical stuff; there she's a lot cooler. ... I don't know [sighs]. Um, she has more [pause] empathy I think, with that, than other people.

In order to understand the two quotations above, a bit of background information is necessary. With reference to Jessie, Jane caught James, the man she thought she'd marry one day, cheating on her with Jessie. Jane saw this as a confirmation of what she always believed: that Jessie was prettier, smarter and in general just better than her. Later, Jane also described how she felt hurt at her sister's perceived insinuation that she was sleeping around and that is why she then had reproductive ailment. On the other hand, Jill was the only member of Jane's family who knew about her abortion, and was a lot cooler about Jane having reproductive ailment.

7.1.5. Death in the family.

Of the seven participants, only Gretal's and Ella's parents were still alive and together. Bella and Danny had both lost their fathers, whilst Anja, Haley and Jane had lost their mothers. However, it was only Anja, Danny, and Haley who spoke in more detail about the death of their parents. In the following extract, Anja described how she, and her family, dealt with the death of her mother:

It took me very long, but [pause] just to, just to get to that point, my mother's not here anymore ... we found out very early, we found out about it very early, you were very lucky, lucky, but in the end it was not like that ... I did not like, because I did not live with them, I did not see it [her mother's deterioration] that much, but um, the last two months were very bad... Because they were over there,

she [her sister] was over there, she didn't on a daily basis, I had to deal with it more on a daily basis when my mother was here ... And also afterwards with my, to handle my father correctly. um, [pause and sighs] e-, well, every person handles it differently ... but I had to with him, or we had to [pause] for me, my sister and my brother [pause] we come into contact with people all the time, we did not, it's not the person with whom you lived that passed away. ... Um [pause] and, I, okay, I did it on my father's, every time I went to visit him he would tell me: "Today you will do this". So I didn't do it at my own pace, I did it at his pace ... um, to [pause] and that he v-, let him get rid of what he wanted.

Anja's description of her mother's death included some interesting aspects which should be noted. Firstly, and as mentioned earlier, Anja only seemed to have developed a relationship with her father after her mother's death. It was also only when speaking about her father after her mother's death that she used the term "my father". This is also evident here. Secondly, when Anja spoke about finding out about the disease, she spoke about "we" finding out, but "you" being lucky. It did not seem as if she associated with "being lucky" in finding out about the terminal illness. Furthermore, when speaking about dealing with the problem, or her mother's death, she spoke in the first person, saying it took "me long" to deal with it. It would thus seem as if she perceived the disease as something "we" have to deal with, but in the end "I" dealt with it. This was also intensified by her mentioning how "they were over there" whilst "I've dealt with it on a more daily basis". It is thus unclear whether she experienced her family as supportive and understanding when dealing with her mother's illness and death. Lastly, the role her father played in handling her mother's death is also of importance. Earlier Anja mentioned that her relationship with her father improved after her mother's death and hinted that this was the proverbial silver lining to each dark cloud. However, in this extract, she made it clear that she had to follow the pace of her father in dealing with her mother's death and, or so it seems, all the material possessions that remained.

Danny also mentioned how the death of one family member, her father, influenced her relationship with another, her mother. She said:

... initially we got a bit closer. Because obviously when you lose one parent you realize that, you know, you need to appreciate your parents more. And I think I really went out of my way to support my mom during that time. ... Um, ja, and I didn't get it back. And then I think I started to feel resentful. And then I realized, you know what, um, no-one cares about you, you need to take care of yourself and build a future for yourself. So that's what I've been doing since then.

It seemed as if Danny felt like she had made a real effort to support her mother after her father's death, which resulted in them getting "a bit closer". However, this still seemed rather one-sided since the effort, according to Danny, only came from her. She did not feel as if her mother provided her with the same support. This left her feeling resentful, and seemingly also encouraged her to take care of herself and to build a future for herself. On the other hand, the death of Haley's mother is shrouded in mystery, and also played a part in Haley's perceived acceptance by others. She described her mother's death as follows:

Yes, and why she did it [laughs] my brother and I, we can joke about it now or we suspect it is because she was married to my father. ... Ah, we also actually wonder about that still. My father got the doctor so far to write "natural causes" on her death certificate So, they can't on her [sighs, laughs] death certificate write "she's a [substance abuser]". They must, they also suspected it, its liver failure ... And, and, and my father didn't want the doctor to do a, to cut her open afterwards to look.

As discussed earlier Haley's past played an important role in how she perceived others to accept her, she said that if people were to accept her, they should not know about her past. She also did not like talking about her past. Her mother's substance abuse and addiction

played a big part in her past. Haley said that they are still uncertain about what caused her mother's death because her father seemed to have convinced the doctor to write "natural causes" on the death certificate and they suspect liver failure. She also said they could not write "substance abuse and addiction" on the death certificate. Though, it would appear as if this was what they actually suspected happened. If this was so, it is also possible that Haley indirectly blamed her father for her mother's death since her mother abused and was addicted to substances "because she was married to my father".

7.2. Age – Children, partners, and a little bit of good.

The participants did not mention their age unless they were referring to the possibility of having children or finding a partner. Age was also described in terms of the liberating and maturing role it played in two participants' lives. In the following section it is important to note the manner of speech used by the participants when describing their own age or the concept of ageing. Ella and Gretal refer to their own age or getting older by speaking in the first person, giving the impression that they are at ease with their age and ageing. However, Anja and Haley almost exclusively spoke in the second person when referring to aging and their own age, creating a distance between themselves and their dialogue regarding their own age and ageing and thus giving the impression that they were not comfortable with their own age and ageing. Lastly, Danny and Jane suggested a sense of ambiguity by speaking in both the first and second person when referring to their own age and ageing. It is therefore unclear whether they are comfortable or not with the concept of ageing and all it entails.

7.2.1. Finding a partner.

Five participants mentioned the influence their age had on the possibility of finding a partner. Anja described:

At 35, there isn't, in [town name] it is [pause] you, you've got people of [pause] you've got many people till about 27, 26, 27. And thereafter you start, most people who are still here in their 30's are, are [pause and sighs] married with children. There is, there isn't a lot of single people in town. And there also aren't a lot of people in that age group. ... men also go, [pause] women date older men, and men date younger girls. And there are usually always available younger girls on the fringes.

Even though Ella said she was not worried about her age, or about finding a partner, she found that other people tended to worry for her, she said:

Yes, I think it becomes largely-, as I get older the people around me might become a bit worried, or they start to wonder a bit more: "But why are you still single?" Because if you are single at 25 it is still okay, you know ... Um, so a person still sort of thought at 25: "Ah, it's okay", now that I am in my 30s people are like: "You must start to make a plan".

However, Jane found it increasingly important to find a partner as she got older:

It definitely becomes more difficult as you get older. ... Like I think it becomes more important to me to have a partner the older I get. A lot of times I think my development, like my social development was a bit slow. ... Because I am now, I think like someone in their 20s should actually be [laughs], I do the dating thing now.

Danny said her age might start to have an influence as she gets older:

But, how will I feel, you know, 50 years from now [slight laugh], when I'm in my 80s, when I'm sitting in the old age home, or wherever. You know, and I don't have anyone; no children to phone me, no one will be around anymore. Um, my colleagues won't be around, my students won't be around [slight laugh], my friends might be around if I'm lucky. Um, ja, so that's something that I think about sometimes. But, I'm not old enough yet that I think it bothers me so much. Um, it might change, you know, in 10 years' time, or 20 years' time.

Differing from the four participants above, Gretal did not mention the influence her age would have on the possibility of finding a partner. Rather, Gretal said:

... I realize the older I get the chance of my meeting someone who is divorced or who has already lost his wife increases, I realize that... the age that I am now is, I am almost 32 now and men start to show signs of being my age ... But the men start to get grey hair and, yes, so I, I realize it is reality and, starting to look at it differently... I realize, the older I get, the bigger the chances are that, for me to mix with men who have been married before. I joked about it the other day and said: "At least a divorced man is angry with his wife; a widower still loves his wife" [laughs] so [pause] so maybe I'd rather choose the divorced man than the widower. Um, obviously it would be nice for me to meet someone, who, more or less has the same history as me, although I realize that is a fairy-tale idea. So I am rather open, for many things. ... my opinion [is] though, a bit tainted, but like I say, I shall be open for it. Yes, I can't see myself rejecting someone *just* [emphasis] because he is divorced; I don't think so, no.

7.2.2. *It is not all bad.*

When asked about the effects of age and personal growth, Ella felt that age could be liberating concept:⁵⁵

I would probably say before I was 25 ... maybe cared more about what people think of you, and like trying to do things right, you know, want to try and please other people and live your life according the expectations of others. I think like I think age is a liberating thing ... um, but like I say, age is a very liberating thing for me, so I care a lot less, also what *people* [emphasis] expect of you, you know. Type of if I am at ease with, with, with myself, you know, and and I make my own choices which are no longer based on what other people expect of me.

However, Gretal felt that age made it both easier and more difficult to be single. She said:

Yes, I think, um, I think the older I get, the easier and the more difficult it becomes for me to be single. More difficult in the sense of life phase, other people progress and for me it feels like I don't progress. Um, I feel stuck ... But on the other hand, I think probably with maturity and as I sort out issues for myself and with my psychologist and so, it feels like I also, I cope better with it. I um [pause] living with myself is easier than it was in the past ... it is as if my girlfriends and I look younger and younger, because we are almost more at ease in our skins.

7.3. Settling – Those who can't be happy by themselves

Not all of the participants mentioned *settling* to be of any great consequence and it was only Ella who used the specific term. However, when the participants did speak about

⁵⁵ The quotation to follow is an extract from our discussion regarding religion which Ella then steered into the direction of, or linked to, pre-marital sex; and should thus also be understood within this context.

settling they did so in great seriousness and seemed to have rather strong opinions about it.

Asides from Greta, the other four participants generally considered people who settle as people who are in a relationship – usually a bad relationship – simply because they cannot be single. When asked whether she thought she handled being single well, Anja replied:

I think so yes, be-, well [pause] maybe, um, there are people who ge-, serial, must be in serial relationships... No, I don't want to be in a relationship where I don't, where I don't, which at that stage I don't feel is right for myself. ... I think it is also people who are happier with themselves, and has confidence in what they in their own situation, and people who also themselves don't, they don't sell themselves out. Because I think there is, there is a lot of people who are just in a relationship, just to be in a relationship, and not because they want to be with that person. ... [sighs] I think it's not necessarily people who are permanently single, but they are, you get people who jump from one relationship to another relationship. That's not me. ... you jump from one relationship to another one just because you don't want to be alone, which means you end up with maybe the wrong people. Which means you are then actually not happy with it.

Whilst Anja was adamant that she could not be in a relationship with someone if it did not feel right – in other words she was not willing to settle – she also suggested that people who were in serial relationships were the people who could not cope with being single.

Similar to Anja, Haley also mentioned:

And [clears throat] and because I know one can, people can also be happy on your own, I won't feel that I first-, I don't want to be like them, because many people are in like a relationship or married because they feel that's the only way how they can be happy. [swallows] So, in that way I don't want to be like them.

It is important to note that, when describing people who can cope with being single, Anja speaks in the third person; distancing herself from this concept. In a similar way, Haley spoke in the third and second person when she mentioned that a person can be happy on their own. It is possible that both Anja and Haley simply spoke about this in general. However, there is a moderate possibility that neither Anja nor Haley associate themselves directly with the concepts they discussed.

Differing slightly from Anja and Haley, Jane made specific reference to people who would rather be in a bad relationship than be single:

No, I am very happy for them. ... Yes. Except if it is a crappy relationship, it is just like [pause] that is something with which I have an issue. Many people would rather be in a bad relationship than in no relationship. And with that I don't agree at all. ... Yes. Or from my perspective, if it really is that way, I don't know. But I will not deal with such crap.

However, Ella was the most vocal regarding the concept of settling, believing that the people who chose to settle frequently did not understand why she remained single:

But I also have many friends who are in unhappy relationships, and with that I have a very big problem. That they just stay because they don't want to be alone. They are scared of being alone ... That they almost sort of take what they can get ... they "settle" [pause] for something less than what is right, because they feel there's no other possibility or because they don't want to be alone. So um, and that I have a big problem with. ... women or even men who are in unhappy relationships because they don't want to be alone. That thing of settle, and I always say to people: "You know, you're [pause] you're first prize, you must look for your first prize, don't just take what you can get. Don't go for Mr Right Now, you know. Wait for the person who is right for you, who makes you feel good and

who treats you right". ... I am rather strict about that, in terms of if I am actually with someone, even if it's just casual, then it must be someone who respects me and treats me well. ... and I always say: "You are someone's jackpot, wait for yours [pause] don't settle."

Ella also gave an explanation for why she believed people will settle for Mr Right

Now:

... women or even men who are in unhappy relationships because they don't want to be alone. ... people, especially women I think, are afraid of being alone ... But I feel they, have almost, take what they could get at that stage, wasn't Mr Right, was Mister Right Now. And society says it's not v-, it's more acceptable in society almost, to be a bit slutty and have plenty of relationships and be with someone, rather than to say: "No but I [pause] don't agree and I rather go my own way than I, what as, less than what I think I deserve."

Furthermore, Ella was of the opinion that her friends who have settled did not understand her choice to be single:

... but there are a few of them [my friends] whom I feel, they settled. ... it usually come from people who are in relationships, which according to *me* [emphasis], isn't necessarily the right relationship. It's very ironic for me, understand. ... But my friends, who have settled, according to me [laughs], don't understand my choice to be alone.

As a last thought, Ella said that she would rather be alone than settle for something which she felt was not right:

I would rather be alone than to settle, it feels more honest to me ... But to be with someone for the fact of being with someone, *rather* [emphasis] than to be alone,

then I am rather alone and happy, than miserable and with someone. ... it mustn't be like: "Gee, okay, we are together now, you are here and I am here, and [pause] people try", type of think [pause] it is unacceptable for me. Then I'm rather alone.

7.3.1. A different perspective.

Differing from the other participants, Gretal described what she perceived as settling:

Gee, I hate the idea [of never finding a partner], I don't entertain him too much ... because that would probably mean that I must now almost get my things in order as if I'm never going to find someone. Financially I try to make provision for myself, but simply because [pause] a financial planner told me: "These days no woman, whether she is married or not married can depend on a man's pension and stuff, a woman must look after herself". So I try to do that.

Thus, to Gretal, settling did not involve being in a relationship you did not really want to be in; for her it involved almost accepting that she would have to get her things in order and looking after herself.

7.4. Friends – It depends.

Another recurring theme was the role friends played in the participants' lives, and how they were perceived and experienced. At first glance, the participants appeared to convey that they had good friends; however, on closer inspection the *good* seemed to vary according to two general aspects, including: The *but...*, with some facets that follow, and the relationship status of the friends and the participants.

7.4.1. I have good friends.

In general, six participants mentioned that they had good friends. Anja, for example, said: "... I have a friend here at work. If things are going really bad and I have to suddenly vent, I can go to her. I also have [stutters] another good friend also to [stutters] whom I can go." Bella also described her good friends: "I have very good friends ... so there are good, I have enough good people who support me. If tomorrow I feel as if I [pause] can't get out of my bed, then I can phone someone." Similarly, Gretal mentioned the support she got from her friends: "I get support, um, understanding, I think people who enjoy me, and I them obviously ...". Likewise, Ella mentioned her good friends' understanding: "But my good friends understand me and [pause] know me and don't have a problem and know I am on my own now and that's how I do things." However, later in the interview Ella said: "...even my good friends with good intentions, I think, also hope now you know, silently, that I will meet someone, and quieten down, and settle down. "

It is interesting to note that both Anja and Bella feel that they "can" go to their friends when they needed support from them, whilst Gretal simply states that she "get[s] support". This difference gives the impression that they do not necessarily seek it out, even though Anja and Bella know that they have access to support. On the other hand, Ella appears to feel that her friends understand her singledom and that she does things on her own. However, silently they still wanted her to find a partner. It is possible that Ella experiences this as true support, since her good friends wish for her to also find a partner, but do not voice it and accepted her choice to be single. Ella also made specific reference to two of her friends whom she called her "soul sisters". First explained her view of *soul mates*:

... but [the idea of] soul mates is almost for me less romantic and in French you say [says French word], which means "soul sister", you know. And in my life I have met two people with whom I feel I have that, and incidentally they're both

w-, both women, but it's really not a romantic thing. But it is just that I know that tho-, those people understand me, without me having to explain myself to them; and we have a friendship that that is very deep and even though we do not see each other often, I know that they are people I can walk the path of life with.

She then continued to describe her two soul mates:

But we are both into academics and we are both independent, and we are both rather cautious of telling too many people that we are closet romantics. ... And then the other friend, let me say, understands my heart ... it's much less of an intellectual thing than it is about [sighs] profound [sighs] mutual respect and, um, for one another. And, um, yes, it feels to me like she, she understands my heart ... so, I always say I don't have a sentimental vocabulary ... and, with her, it is not necessary to word things, she understands.

Based on her description of them, Ella appears to believe that she has friends who meet both her intellectual and emotional needs.

Differing slightly from the participants above, Danny and Haley placed their good friends in the context of family. Firstly, Danny said:

I also think of family very broadly. Um, if I have a friend, if I had a very close friend, for example, and we decided to move in together; that would be my family ... Um, I started to make friends now. I have a gay friend that I'm very close to at the moment [pause] And ja, he's the type of person that I think I could possibly move in with.

In the second interview, Danny said:

I've started to wonder, you know, if I need, do I need to open myself more to relationships, not necessarily a romantic relationship but friendship to start off

with, you know, to have that support system, um, and to have a family, you know, just to have people that are part of your life, who share in your experiences, your good and your bad experiences, who give you support

Notice how, even though Danny said that very close friends were like a family to her, it did not appear (from her choice of the word “if”) as though she really had any such friends; with the exception of the gay friend. Yet, it did appear as if what she said in the first interview may have influenced her way of thinking because she seemed to have come to the realization that she needed more friends and to build a family relationship with them. In a slightly different way, yet still in the context of family, Haley described her relationship with her older female friends:

... I have rather a lot of older friends, like aunties who are my friends, and I also call them by their names. And so I have, I have always wanted to deny it, but I think it's more because I want a mother-figure. So, I will say something like eh: “When my mom died, I experienced this and this”, and then it is just part of the conversation, it does not become a heavy topic. So, I would say yes, um, like the relationships that I have are enough. My relationships with the older people.

Later in the interview Haley described her relationship with her younger friends:

A lot of times then I am, sometimes I am deliberate, and then I will say something which makes people uncomfortable because I check people out and then I think: “Oh, there's your weakness” and then I say something about it. And then I can see how they dance around like a cat on a hot tin roof. And [laughs], and um, and it is what I experience with the, with my younger friends, but it is not like that with my older friends, that's nice.

Whilst Haley seemingly suggested that a reason for having older friends was her want of a mother figure, the more prominent reason appeared to be the equality and safety her older friends provided. By mentioning that she called her older friends by their first name,⁵⁶ Haley gave the impression that she would like to make it clear that they were *equal* friends, and their relationship lacked a power dynamic. Furthermore, she seemed to experience them as more understanding of topics such as the death of a parent; a topic which her younger friends appeared to turn into a “heavy” topic. Lastly, Haley appeared to enjoy not having to point out the weaknesses of her older friends as she did with her younger friends.

7.4.2. I have good friends, but...

As would be expected, the participants did not just describe good and happy experiences regarding their friends. They also described situations and experiences which were less than satisfactory. These experiences covered a range of situations, including the shortcomings of friendship compared to having a partner, insensitive comments from friends, their friends' attempts at setting them up, and how the participants themselves always seemed to have to make the effort of seeing their friends.

7.4.2.1. ... their support is not the same.

Two participants expressed that even though they had good friends, it was not the same as the support of a partner. Anja said it was: “Maybe not a 100% the same.” Similarly, Bella said:

But a person reaches that point where you feel [sighs] it, you become a burden to your friends if you [pause] where from a, from a partner expect it almost ... there's definitely a difference in the [pause] type of support you can expect ... it is not

⁵⁶ Within the Afrikaans culture, it is customary for younger people to call older people “tannie” or “oom” and not by their first names; much like in the olden days when young people called older people “sir” or “madam”.

something which I feel you can phone a friend and say: "But, but I had a bad day at work." It is almost expecting too much. ... Because everyone we know, and everyone with whom you have a good relationship, have a good support network and whatever; they have one other person. So you are somewhere on a hierarchy in their life, you're not number one. So, when the tsunami strikes then [laughs] you will stand alone.

... *they make comments.*

Three participants described situations in which their friends did or said something which they experienced as insensitive, judgemental, or pestering respectively. Bella, for example, mentioned:

And then she said to me we should please go there for a weekend because then she and her husband, and two other, um lesbian couple, um, they can go there, there're two double chalets ... and then there's a single one in which I can stay. Then I just thought [pause] that's a bit insensitive. ... I'm getting tired of going out with couples.

Danny, on the other hand, mentioned a situation in which she recognized a judgement made by her friend:

... she said: "maybe you and Dale should consider having a baby together". So, in that moment she made the assumption that I'm not going to get married and have a, a, a baby with a ma-... So ja, in that moment I realized that, that that's was a judgment. That was a form of prejudice right there. So ja, that, that's just one example.

Lastly, Haley described a pestering comment one of her friends made:

And then she was silent for a while and looked at me and she said: “No, no, no, it is time that the two of you start getting your own whelps!” Whelps! And then I told her: “Um, listen here I am not your cat. I might have a child, but I will not have babies.” ... so yes, that is what, yes the people pester you ... it makes me feel abnormal.

In all three incidents, being single seemed to play an important role in how the participants experienced and perceived the comments of their friends. Bella appeared to be tired of going away for weekends with couples because she was always relegated to the “singles chalet”; almost like an outcast or the proverbial fifth wheel. Danny on the other hand, took her friend’s suggestion of considering having a child with Dale (her gay friend) as an assumption and a judgement that she would always be single, and possibly also that as a single woman she could not have a child. Lastly, Haley seemed almost indignant at her friend’s comment regarding the fact that it was time to have her own children. Yet, it was especially the word “kleintjies” which seemed to irritate Haley. However, the nuance of the word “kleintjies” – which is often used in Afrikaans society to refer to a litter of puppies or kittens – is somewhat lost in translation. It is unclear whether it was the animalistic nature of the word, the number of children implied by the specific choice of word, or the fact that other people also pestered Haley with comments about having children, which Haley found most disturbing.

7.4.2.2. ... *they try to set us up.*

Four participants also described how their friends would try to set them up with someone. The participants did not always seem to like this, and often wondered at the intentions of their friends. Anja, for example, said:

... some of them, I think, feels sorry for you and they feel sorry for their buddy and then: “Let put these two together” and [demonstrates two people being placed

together with her hands], without actually thinking about what you would actually like in someone.

Gretal gave a very similar description of being set up:

...friends who want to introduce me to people. So, I try to see it as a compliment... Because I have friends who, who almost have the pain now of: "People don't want to introduce me to other people. Or people don't make the effort to" [pause] So, I see it as a compliment. ... what was a terrible eye opener for me was ... people see matching criteria as two things; [laughs] first, you are different sexes, you are a male and a female and you are both single, perfect match [laughs]. So um, it is really bad for me, the people I have been introduced to ...

However, Bella's friends have apparently stopped trying to set her up, something for which she expressed her gratitude:

Luckily we are not at the point anymore where people try to fix me up with other people. Because it, that just gets weird sometimes. Sometimes it works, it is nice and so on, but sometimes then I think: "What made you think this is a good idea? ... Really [pause] did you now, what made you think this would work? Don't you understand me? Are you stupid?" ... I think some of my friends have completely noble intentions, and the rest is: [pause] "We must fix you up with someone because, because, it worries me." It's about you, it's not about me. And that annoys me ... Yes, it is almost strange, but actually it is none of your business, so I don't really understand what your point is.

Lastly, Ella also gave the impression that it was the friends who did not understand her who tried to set her up with someone:

Because, a few of my friends, but these are now the not-so-good friends, or the friends with whom I'm almost not friends anymore; they constantly just want, like: "I'm gonna fix you up on a date", you know. And they feel almost like it is not right that I'm on my own.

There are a few things which are important to note. Firstly, there were the matchmaking criteria with which Anja, Gretal, and Bella did not agree because it appeared as if their interests and likes were not taken into account; all that seemed to be important was relationship, status and sex. Secondly, it is important to note how the participants perceived the intentions of their friends. Anja simply thought it was because her friends felt sorry for her, and their other single buddy. On the other hand, Bella and Ella mentioned it was more about their friends and their friends' views, than about them. This annoyed Bella and left her puzzled as to why it should worry her friends since it is none of their business. Ella, on the other hand, felt that it was the people who did not know her who tried to set her up. She also gave the impression that she did not remain friends with people who wanted to set her up because they did not understand or accepted that she was single. Lastly, Gretal and Bella, at any rate, mentioned that it was not all that bad. Gretal "tries" to see it as a compliment, because at least her friends still wanted to make an effort with her. Similarly, Bella mentioned that it does sometimes work out, and that some of her friends have noble intentions.

7.4.2.3. ... we have to make the effort.

Lastly, two participants expressed the feeling that they had to make the effort to see their friends, or to get support from them. Bella said: "I think that is also what makes that [pause] you don't [pause] reach out necessarily, because it is, its effort."

Gretal gave a more elaborate description of her experience:

... but it [being single] creates a funny dynamic in friendships also, because it is often as if the single person, that is me, is the one who should make the effort. I

am the one who must drive for a social. I am the one who must pitch up for a social. In the mean time I have great difficulty in getting them to me, because they have children. It is probably a different situation, but still, they are my married friends ... I think they expect it. I don't think it is an outspoken expectation that they say I have time and therefore I must make the effort, um, but I still think it is the unspoken expectation, maybe ... Unwritten rule, yes. I have an easy life and I have to make the effort. ... I think it sometimes makes me feel unvalued and misused ... I think the support I get is sufficient to the point that *I* [emphasis] mobilize it. So I, *I* [emphasis] say to someone it is not going well with me, let's chat a bit.

From the above it seemed as if Bella found it an effort to reach out to her friends and to get support, which was why she thought people do not do it as much. However, all of this is said in the second person, which created a distance and gave the impression that Bella did not truly associate with what she said. Gretal, on the other hand, did not create this distance by speaking in the second person. She seemed quite adamant that she experienced an unwritten rule where had has to be the one to make the effort, even just for a social visit. Even though she did admit that for her married friends, who have children, it might be more difficult to find the time to visit her; she still expressed feeling misused and unvalued.

7.4.3. Coupled friends.

Gretal's comments from above were not the only comments which indicated a difference between *couples* and *single* friends. All of the other participants described that there was a difference. Two themes specifically are relevant here: invitations and unburdening change; and frustration.

7.4.3.1. Invitations and unburdening change.

Anja described certain criteria for spending time with her coupled friends. She said:

Especially because my girlfriends often have husbands, and they, you are [pause] then [pause] if I am not good friends with them, then sometimes it also becomes just [pause] we go out when they are not there, when the men are away, or something like that ... and I sometimes get the feeling [pause and sighs] now and then, you are invited: "Ah, she's single so let's..." you know, like in they just feel sorry for you or something.

Ella on the other hand, described a change in confidences from her friends who have partners. She said:

Because, because with many of my friends, they phone *me* [emphasis] if they have a bad day, you know. Now that they are in relationships it is probably less, but when they were in relationships, in the whole friendship circle I am the one who was phoned, when it was a bad day...

Whilst the two accounts differ, they both gave a sense of a certain amount of exclusion. It appeared as if Anja felt that her friends either feel sorry for her – because she as single – and will then invited her along; or she was excluded from her friends if *she* was not good enough friends with the husbands. Anja sighed as she said this which could possibly indicate that she really did not like the way her friends in relationships treated her. Ella also gave the feeling of exclusion from her coupled friends; she was no longer the person they confided in after a bad day.

7.4.3.2. Frustration.

Two participants described a type of frustration they felt with their married or coupled friends. For example, Ella said:

So, many of my female friends they ... talk to me about a new recipe, or something pretty which they bought for the house, and then I just sit there and I

listen, and I smile, and I am happy that they are happy, but I could not care less. I am very interested in politics and reading and philosophy and those types of things. So it is especially with my female friends I think difficult to still have those types of conversations with if they are in a long, in a *long-term* [emphasis] stable relationship. ... Ah, it's frustrating. ... But on the other hand I also have friends who are interested in various different things. So you, you just juggle it, because after all, you don't love your friends just because of what they are interested in, but who they are as people.

Similarly, Gretal described a certain amount of frustration with her friends. She said:

I am a bit frustrated in my friendship circle at the moment ... um, my work is incredibly draining for me at the moment, really very draining. And I think if I social then, then I really want uplifting and cheerful company which really, yes, is also light; and I struggle a bit to get that, amongst my married friends. They have their own battles to fight. ... So I think it is frustration, maybe I want too much. Yes, I think that might be it.

The two participants seemed to experience frustration with their married friends due to the change in topic or type of conversation (Ella), and the type of company they were (Gretal). This led to Ella's juggling her friends and Gretal's wondering whether she was not maybe expecting too much from her friends.

7.4.4. Single friends.

Six participants referred to how they perceived and experienced their single friends – or how their coupled friends were not. These participants felt more comfortable with their single friends, whom they felt were more understanding of their single status, more available for social interaction, and did not perceive them as a threat.

7.4.4.1. They're the same and available.

Anja described other single people and two or three of her friends:

... well, they are in the same boat as I am [laughing] ... But um [pause] yes it [pause and sighs] I know they are in the same position as I am ... I do have a rather good friend who is also single, as old as I am, and we do a lot of things together. So, um, we, in that way we do get to a lot of the things ... the one friend with whom I also, she's also here and I speak rather [stutters] often with her, she's also lost her mother previously. And the other friend was going through much the same process with her mother-in-law.

In the same way, Bella described two of her close friends – the second being the person whom she was closest to:

... my one friend, for years we were in the same boat, and she now got a helluva nice girlfriend who is fabulous, and fun, and merry and everything. And so, she doesn't count anymore. ... A friend of mine who is more or less in the same position as I am. ... And we look after each other rather well...

Ella also described the availability of her single, and younger, friends:

... especially now that I am getting older and my friendship [pause] circle settles. It, it is almost a bigger issue that *I* [emphasis] am not in a relationship, it is that my friends are no longer available. So I [stutters] see a tendency in a bit o-, my, my new friends are predominantly a bit younger than I am [laughs] because, because that means they are still available ... to do things ... They are not in a, set in a relationship ... the friends of my age or a bit older are, they are married and busy having children or already have children. And that just means they are less available ... that thing of companionship which I also said now a person has *less*

[emphasis] of ... Yes, like I say, it is a bit, it is a bit co-, complex at this stadium. It is a bit because of the fact that so many of my friends are married now, so, a person has *less* [emphasis] of it.

Along the same lines, Greta said:

... grateful [laughs] very grateful [laughs] um, I think it is the people who, um, I almost want to say are on top of my social list and I on theirs, because it is the people you know who can socialize every Friday or Saturday nights. Someone who, if they really have nothing else can come to you or you can get to them ... Whilst my friend who is now in a relationship has other priorities, her boyfriend is now her priority. Yes so I am grateful for them, and they are getting scarcer and scarcer [laughs] ... Yes, and guys who are so soft and soft spoken and so uncomfortable, that the one time in a restaurant the waiter brought the bill to me, on a blind date [laughs]. It was horrible, and no one, no one understood, *just* [emphasis] my single friends did.

Jane also mentioned the availability of her single friends. She said: "The other *advantage* [emphasis] of other single friends is, you can go out with them much more."

Lastly, and differing slightly from the rest, Haley described her reaction regarding other single women:

Then I always wonder: "But what's wrong with you too?" Like: "I know what's wrong with me, but what's wrong with you?" [laughs] No, then um, in a way I feel stronger in their company; because, it almost feels like, it sounds very militaristic, but like a *front* [emphasis]. Like a: "We are together now!" So [pause] Yes, so, if someone wants to do something to us, then we are a bunch who can withstand it.

There are two themes of importance here. Firstly, three participants expressed almost a sense of cohesiveness with other single people. Whilst Anja has a more or less despondent way of saying they were in the same position – involving some pauses and sighs – Haley appeared to be more excited about her fellow single friends. She gave the impression that they were *sisters in arms* – but because there was something wrong with them. Notice how she argued that because she believed there was something wrong with her and that was why she was single, it implied that there was something wrong with other single people. She also seemed curious to know what was wrong with other single people. Also note how Haley almost *expected* people to want to do something to them – based on being single – and how she was now prepared for this in the company of her fellow single ladies. Differing slightly from the others, Greta expressed that only her single friends understood why she found it so terrible to be handed a bill at a blind date.

The second theme from the above quotations is that of *availability* of single friends – or by default, the *unavailability* of coupled friends, as mentioned by five participants. Interestingly enough, both Anja and Bella made reference to “relatively” good or close friends. The use of the word “relatively” could indicate that it was only in comparison to their other friends – coupled or not – that these single friends were seen as good. Furthermore, Bella also mentioned another friend who “doesn’t count anymore” because she was no longer single. All of this gave the impression that whilst they said they were closer or better friends with their single friends, it was still doubtful. In the same way, Ella also created doubt about the real influence relationship status had on her friendships. Whilst she expressed quite adamantly that the biggest issue for her was the availability of her coupled – and older – friends; she did switch over to speaking in the third person when mentioning that companionship which she now had “less” of. This could be interpreted in various ways: She did not really find a difference or experienced less companionship; she did not really miss the

companionship; she never really had all that much companionship to lose; or, it could simply be a manner of speech.

Whilst Anja and Bella mentioned their “relatively” friends, Gretal and Jane mentioned their “can” friends: They both said they “can” see them more often or social with them, and Gretal even mentioned the requirement of “if they really have nothing else”. However Gretal expressed being grateful that she still had single friends because they did become less and less, presumably as they entered into relationships. As to why there seemed to be some ambiguity and uncertainty pertaining the true value and availability of their single friends, I can only venture to guess. It is possible that even the friendship or companionship of single friends were not experienced as sufficient by the participants; they still longed for the companionship of a partner.

7.4.4.2. Mate poaching.

As the last subtheme of Friends, two participants made reference to being seen as a threat of ‘mate poaching’. Anja mentioned:

... I know there are people with whom I was friends at a point who don't, I don't want to say they didn't like it ... and maybe it was because of the fact that they feel threatened by you ... well, they are scared of you, you are going to take their boyfriend away, but that is not my way, not my modus operandi ... No, it did not, she did not tell me that, but I think that, there was a friendship that died and I think it was maybe [pause and sighs] ... it is just a gut feeling. It was just something I had a feeling about.

Ella also described the loss of friendships because of the perceived threat of mate poaching:

The one woman is intimidated by me ... But she is very intimidated by ... type of, sees me as a threat and I really don't know why but she probably does. She does! Like she, she doesn't like me. I also don't really like her either. [sighs] Um [clears throat], so with the consequence that we don't spend time together anymore ... but otherwise that relationship has disappeared. Simply because the woman doesn't like me ... It is a pity, it is really a pity, because like I say, this this person [stutters] with whom I don't really have contact anymore, we were really, really very good friends ... And now it is a pity that we are not friends anymore, you know. But his wife just completely, you know, decided I'm a danger zone. ... For me it is, it is a pity that you lose such friendships you know ... Because people believe in, and I don't know if I necessarily agree or not, but a lot of people believe that platonic friendships are not possible [pause]. And society also tells us it is not appropriate... And I think, no, yes because I have unfortunately lost people in my life because fiancé's or wives who are really not comfortable with it; but it was simply platonic. But I don't know if women the maybe, um [pause] feel threatened... I find it regrettable ... there are three specified, male friends who disappeared from my life, and we were, at differed stages in my life, very, very good friends.

Despite the fact that both participants spoke about the perceived experience of mate poaching, the intensity of the personal experience differed. Anja mentioned one case where she had lost a friend because of the supposed threat posed, whilst Ella mentioned three specific cases, elaborated on a case, and spoke mostly in the first person. Anja thus created a distance, whereas Ella did not.

In conclusion, the participants had various opinions, experiences, and perceptions of their friends. On the one hand they said they had very good friends, but on closer inspection,

some ambiguity was picked up. There was also a caveat when it came to their friends; their support was not the same, they sometimes made insensitive comments and judgments, their friends tried to fix them up – whether the participant wanted them to or not – and the participants felt as if they had to make the effort. Furthermore, the participants seemed to distinguish between their single and coupled friends. Some participants mentioned that invitations and unburdening changed when their friends entered relationships. They felt they were either not invited, or only invited because their friends felt sorry for them. On the other hand, some participants also felt a certain amount of frustration at the change in conversation and the type of support they could expect. Lastly, the participants spoke about their single friends. They expressed their feelings at having friends who were the same as them and who understood their situation and was more available. Yet again some ambiguity could be detected at the availability of their single friends. Two participants also mentioned the phenomenon of mate poaching and how this was not a threat with their single friends.

7.5. Physical appearance.

A recurring theme when discussing their reasons for being single was the influence of their physical appearance. Not all of the participants perceived it to play a role, whilst others considered it to be of great importance. However, the participants did not solely speak about physical appearance in terms of a reason for being single, but also discussed it in terms of what their perceptions or experiences are of what men want in general, and even – in the case of Jane – what companies wanted.

7.5.1. To some degree physical appearance is important.

According to Anja, her physical appearance played a role in the reason why she was single, but only “to some degree”. She continued to say:

... I think the attraction is there rega-, you know it is there or not, because sometimes I look at two very ugly people and they like each other, and they are happy together. ... We will hope then ... that you are not off-putting to someone.

Danny also spoke about physical attraction. She and Jane suggested that physical attraction and appearance, respectively, did play a role in terms of finding a partner, but only initially – even though they both also contradicted this at a different stage in the interview.

Danny said:

I think in the beginning it's important. It's very difficult to go out on a date with a stranger or if you don't have any attraction. But then what I've noticed with Dan is that over time you learn to love someone and then it's, you don't focus so much on the physical attraction anymore. So I think initially yes, later no.

Along the same lines, Jane said: "... I think men are first attracted to what they see, and then the rest follows." There are differences, however, which should be noted. Firstly, Danny did not make specific reference to physical *appearance* per se, but spoke about physical attraction, whilst Jane explicitly referred to what men *see* – which would mean *appearance*. Secondly, Danny did not make specific reference to whether men or women should be attracted; she seemed to speak about attraction between two people in general. On the other hand, Jane plainly stated that "men" were the ones who were initially attracted to someone's physical appearance.

7.5.2. Physically there is something wrong with me.

Gretal, Danny, Jane and Haley mentioned that they sometimes wondered whether they were physically attractive enough. Gretal said that after a breakup she wondered whether she was good enough and "... before *enough* you can put plenty, plenty, plenty of other words, am I not pretty enough?" Whilst Gretal only wondered at her physical appearance, Danny

specifically mentioned one break-up where physical attractiveness and her appearance were given as a reason for the breakup. She described:

... he also said he realizes he's not attracted to me, [pause] um, and he actually said that he's repulsed by me ... Ja, it was a horrible time ... I was looking at it very subjectively, ... 'there's something wrong with [me] ... I'm not attractive', I, you know 'I don't look a certain way'. ... he used those exact words that he wasn't attracted to me that was one of the reasons why he broke up, why he ended the engagement ...

This seemed to have a lasting effect on Danny:

Um, for a long time it really bothered me, and like I told you last time, I saw a psychologist about [pause] um, about it. I still have my ups and downs, I wouldn't say I'm completely over it, I still question myself and [pause] um, when I did put up a profile on the, in the Internet dating site, I just, I felt like I wasn't attractive enough ... it's hard for me, to date and to approach men because I don't feel like I'm attractive enough.

Jane also experienced rejection based on her physical appearance; however, the rejection was within her workplace:

... in the end I was fired because I am fat and blonde. I don't fit the profile. ... I was destroyed ... The day it happened was horrible ... I drank some pills and passed out, and went to sleep and packed my things and went to the farm...

In both instances the participants described the experience of being rejected based on their physical appearance as "horrible". It would appear as if they both also suffered an emotional blow as a result of this rejection. Whilst Danny admitted to the lasting effect, Jane did not. However, it is still possible that this experience influenced her opinion of the

importance of physical appearance to men and what they were attracted to in women. When asked about possible reasons for being single Jane said– amongst other things: “I have wondered about that ... Um [pause] obviously how I look. Maybe there is something wrong there.” At a different point in the interview, when discussing the fact that one of her previous boyfriends said he did not want people to see them together; I asked her what she initially thought the reason was. She replied: “Well, firstly I thought it was physical, how I look, because I’m fat.” It is no wonder then that Jane described what men want as: “A beautiful body [laughs], boobs [laughs], yes um, that’s just my experience.” Similar to Danny and Jane, Haley had an experience where she felt rejected based upon her appearance. She described the following incident at a social gathering:

... then he looked at me and then he looked at her again, and in the end he takes her and he gives her a hug. Uh, she’s pretty small and petite, so that is [laughs], that’s what men want.

Whilst this rejection was not as explicitly verbalised based upon physical appearance, it is still important because that was the way that Haley perceived and experienced it. Throughout the interviews it also became apparent that Haley had a strong opinion that physical appearance was very important to men and played a major role in the reason why she was single. Haley gave an extensive description of the importance of physical appearance, but only a select few quotations was provided:

... they [men] want people who look like models. ... I have always believed there is something physically wrong with me, like how I look ... because, firstly: I am bigger than the average woman ... men don’t like to choose a woman who, in the first place, is bigger than them. And they have a certain norm. Because, they have a certain idea in mind, and I believe the idea is placed in their minds by socie-, by society and the media it gets placed in their minds. So because of that I’m looked

over ... she [my mother] told me in so many words: "If you are fat you will not get a husband". ... it is just bad for me that a person then [pause] that what actually makes me very unique that I don't look like other people, but that someone now chooses to rather take what everybody else takes ... Then I read about why some people choose certain people ... it is a lot about appearance ... One of the things is that a person must be symmetrical, or symmetry is very important. And I am not symmetrical ... and then I felt ugly ... if you look at models, like, um, you get perfect people that [pause] so, so yes you do get perfect people. ... this is also just my experience and how I perceive it, so [sighs] I don't know personally if I've ever seen a symmetrical person in front of me. But um, but because you can read in a book: "So big and so far", the, therefore I believe you get perfect people.

From the above it is clear that Haley felt very strongly about the significance of physical appearance. However, there are some important aspects, as well as ambiguity. Firstly, Haley had a very specific opinion of what men, and people, wanted physically when selecting a partner: People who look like models (later described as "perfect people"); a woman who was not bigger than him; and someone who was symmetrical. Secondly, for every physical aspect which Haley perceived as important, she found herself to be lacking: She was bigger than most women, and she was not symmetrical and therefore not as perfect as the models that she viewed as the standard. It was also Haley's belief and experience that she was "looked over" or "not taken" because there was physically something wrong with her. Lastly, Haley provided explanations for where the norm for what was physically appealing came from: society and the media placed the idea into the heads of men. As a young child, her mother had enforced the idea, and the existence of models and books served as proof that perfect people exist. This in essence means that Haley is also influenced by the media, just as men are. It is no wonder then that Haley seemed to have internalized the norm

of what a person should look like, and that she felt ugly when she looked at herself. She also appeared to search for confirmation of her beliefs regarding the significance of physical appearance in order to give an explanation for why she was single and why she believed what she did.

Furthermore, Haley was not the only participant to point a finger at the media with reference to the demands placed on women's physical appearance. Ella was also of the opinion that men were more inclined towards physical appearance and were greatly influenced by what the media portrayed. She said:

Um, but the media tells us, you open any magazine, whether it is a men's magazine or a women's magazine, and there is a specific picture of how a woman must look ... it is more about the physical for men, so men are physically a lot more attracted to a woman than a woman is to a man, according to me. ... Um, men are physically attracted to women ... um, and susceptible to influence from the media which tells them what ideal beauty is.

However, Ella also mentioned that it was essentially women who were more critical of themselves and each other:

... women are unbelievably critical of themselves, and critical of each other, men are far less critical of women ... we are our own worst enemies, towards ourselves and towards each other. ... someone once told me: "A women dresses in the morning not for the men at her work, but for the other women at her work ... you compete against all the other women". And it's actually terrible ... we are in a society of you always want to be more beautiful and thinner and younger, and [pause] than the next woman. Because, we are always almost in competition with each other, I think it is ridiculous ...

For Danny and Gretal how they felt about their own physical appearance also seemed to be influenced by their relationship status – and for Gretal, her feelings regarding being single. Danny described that she felt “more confident in my appearance and my attractiveness” when she was in a relationship. Gretal, on the other hand, gave a more complex explanation for the association between her relationship status and physical appearance:

I have just realised in myself that the times that I feel at ease with being single, are the times that I find it easier to make an effort with myself. It's actually weird how it works the wrong way round. And the time that I feel lonely, and down with being single, those are the times that I almost have trouble with myself to make sure that I make an effort with my appearance; so it works a bit inversely, hey? It, um, I want to believe that I actually have enough self-respect to make myself neat and beautiful even if I don't have someone ... But on the other hand I also realise that the times I was in a relationship, it was almost more enjoyable to take care of myself for someone ...

It would thus appear then as if, for Gretal, her acceptance of being single had a profound influence on how she felt about her physical appearance.

7.5.3. Other things are also important.

Five participants said that physical appearance was not the only important thing; there were other factors which were important. Anja said: “... I think it also largely has something to do with your personality ...” In contrast Ella, Gretal and Jane did not mention personality per se, they did discuss a certain amount of confidence. Ella said:

I think any women who looks after herself, and who has confidence, is beautiful. And, it does not matter what shape she has, a woman, who feels love, and confident with herself, can be beautiful ... I think you must just have confidence in

yourself in who you are, and that should be enough. And you don't have to a, look a certain way to, to find love, or to be happy...

Similarly, Gretal said: "I think I pick it up, it's just conversations with my brother, my friends and so, that guys do actually look deeper than skin deep, right, um, and not *just* [emphasis] for looks and a pretty girl appearance ...". Lastly, Jane mentioned: "And I think, to a certain degree, confidence; I think men like someone who is confident." Although the participants said that it was not just looks that counted, it remained questionable whether they truly believed what they said. With the exception of Gretal, the participants started off with saying "I think" or "I feel", but then switched over to speaking in the second or even third person. It would seem then as if they did have this opinion, but that it did not apply to them.

In conclusion, physical appearance seemed to be a significant aspect for the participants. Danny, Jane, and Haley experienced rejection based upon their physical appearance, whilst Gretal, Danny, Jane and Haley sometimes wondered whether their physical appearance was not a reason for why they were single. For Danny and Gretal, their relationship status – and the acceptance of it – also influenced how they felt about their physical appearance, or the effort they would put into it. Lastly, five participants spoke about how it was not just the physical appearance which was important; yet, at closer inspection there appeared to be some ambiguity regarding this.

7.6. Treatment by society because of being single – pity, asking questions, and blaming us.

As the interviews unfolded it became apparent that the participants perceived a very specific form of treatment by society – a treatment that they believed was based upon their relationship status.

7.6.1. They feel sorry for us.

Anja described why she believed society felt sorry for her:

... and I sometimes get the feeling [pause, sighs and pauses again] or now and then, you get invited: "Oh, she's now single so let's" you know, like in they feel sorry for you or something like that. ... I know they feel, [sighs], people feel sorry for you in a different way, people feel sorry for you.

Notice, however, how Anja distanced herself from the sympathy of society by speaking in the second person. This could possibly indicate that Anja did not truly believe or experience society feeling sorry for her; or, she simply did not want them to feel sorry for her and thus found it necessary to distance herself from it. Danny also experienced the feeling of people feeling sorry for her. She said "I think there are people who almost feel sorry for me and wonder like: 'Why's she still single?' ..." Similarly, Ella described:

So people worry for me. Definitely, you know, so it is just that thing of a stereotype, people always think: "Oh shame," you know "You're single, oh shame, we must find you someone". ... a lot of times people will ask me: "Oh, you are single? Oh, don't worry, we will find you someone".

Elaborating more on why she believed people felt sorry for her, Haley explained:

The people who have all of these perceptions, about that it is necessarily b-, people have, I get the idea that people have a perception, my perception of people's perceptions is that they think that for me necessarily, that it places me in a worse position in society.

Haley continued to explain that people also assumed there was something wrong with a single person which contributed to why they pitied single people:

... people think a person is alone [counts on fingers], and people think you are sad and lonely, and [clears throat] people think you are a, you are not complete, and people think you can; there's some things that you can't do as a result of, because you are not like involved with someone. And, and people think, um, if a person does something alone they think there's something *wrong* [emphasis] with you, because in their reference framework you can, for example, just go to a restaurant and eat if you are two people. So that is why people sometimes frown if you tell them you went alone to a place to eat [clears throat] or, um, sat a alone in a coffee shop. ... Yes, and people think o-, okay, people think there is something wrong with a person.

It is important to note that throughout the above quotation, Haley mostly spoke in the second person and occasionally switched to the third person, creating a distance between what she said society believed about single people. It is possible that this was because she believed society held this believe about single people in general and thus did not describe it as a very personal experience (in which case she would have been speaking in the first person). However, it is also possible that Haley distanced herself from this criticism because she did not believe it to be true. Haley challenged the notion of there being something wrong with someone who goes to a restaurant or coffee shop alone:

But I can't, I can't understand, I think they just never, haven't tried it, because it is one of the most enjoyable things that there is to do: To go and drink coffee alone, read the newspaper, or read a book, or do a Sudoku, or [pause] it is like a type of peace one finds there.

Whether Haley truly did find peace when going to a restaurant or coffee shop alone, was unclear. Her use of the words “one” would give the impression that she did not truly identify with what she said, nor with the peace she found when going to a coffee shop or restaurant alone. This left a feeling of vagueness as to whether she was trying to convince herself or society that it is worth going to a coffee shop or restaurant alone. Danny also got the feeling that people felt there was something wrong with her:

Um, but now, [sighs slightly] I get the impression some people feel sorry for me, um, they wonder if there is something wrong with me ... Um, it makes me feel, I won't say inferior, but it's like: “Yah, what is wrong with me, why don't I get to experience that?”

It would thus seem as if Danny started to internalize the perception she believed society had of her.

7.6.2. What's with all of the questions?

The idea that there was something wrong with them was also often implied within the multitude of questions with which at least three participants were bombarded. However, some of the questions still appeared to be fairly neutral and not loaded with blame. For example, Ella explained her general experience of meeting new people:

... it is usually an issue if you meet new people, like at weddings or whatever. If they ask you: “Oh, tell me something about yourself”, and I tell them and at a stage they will ask: “And is there someone in your life?” ... You know it's always a question and then always an issue and people say: “Oh, don't worry, you will find someone”, then it is like: “No, but I'm not worried”.

Jane also explained:

And everybody always ask you: “Why are you not married yet?” ... Then I say: “No, I’m in-between”. ... I think it bothers me more that it bothers *other* [emphasis] people that I’m single. ... Like I say, it’s more a problem for other people that I’m single because they are like: “[gasp] Why are you not married yet?”, or: “You are really becoming an old maid” ... you are judged ... Yes, I become fed up to make jokes about why you are still single, I do not like it. They are surprised because I am not married yet, period.

When asked why she said she was “in-between”, Jane gave the following explanation:

Ah, it is just an easy way to tell them I’m not married yet, because it’s very weird for people. So then I make sort of a joke about it and then they drop it. ... Yes, if someone asks me once then it is fine by me, but if you like, many people ask me: “Are you single?”, if I say: “Yes”, then: “[gasp] But why?” Then I am like: “Um, I don’t know.” And then, some of the older people [pause] “How old are you?” Then the next question is, then it is: “Tick tock”. Then, if you actually say: “No, I don’t really want children.” [pause] Then they are like really shocked. ... I try to keep it with a low key answer or to make a joke about it or something like that.

There was, nonetheless, some ambiguity as to whether making a joke about her relationship status was truly “easier” for Jane. She also only “tries ... sort of” a joke, instead of simply *joking* about it. This would suggest then that to Jane, her relationship status really was no laughing matter at all. Similar to Jane, Haley also experienced being asked how:

... everybody often nags you. Like: “Why are you not married?” or [clears throat] “When will you get someone?” ... It is this small town in the country side. And there it is the norm of: you complete school; and you marry a Boer [farmer] there; and you have strings of children ... yes the people nag a person; like [clears throat] because they do it, and most of the people do it, and you don’t do it, then

obviously a person is out. ... it makes me feel abnormal. Um [clears throat], because, um, now I don't have this thing that everybody has, I don't have it. So, it makes me feel out.

Notice how, similar to Jane and Ella, Haley spoke mostly in the second or third person when she described the questions being asked, and why they were being asked. However, she switched to speaking in the first person when she elaborated on how this made her feel "abnormal" and "out". Throughout the rest of the section the trend continued in which participants spoke in the second or third person when describing how society treated them – apparently because of their relationship status – but switched to speaking in the first person when they described how this made them feel. In general, this gave the impression that the participants either disliked this treatment so much that they felt they had to distance themselves from it; or the participants were of the opinion that this experience was not unique to them; hence they did not personalize the experience by speaking in the first person. Whichever it may be, the fact of the matter still remained that the participants claimed to experience a specific kind of treatment from society based upon their relationship status; treatment which resulted in an array of different feelings (and it is safe to say that the feelings are negative) that the participants did personalize as their own.

7.6.2.1. Apparently I'm to blame for being single.

Differing from the above experiences and description of various questions being asked, four participants provided examples of how people would ask them (or sometimes even tell them) what was wrong with them and why they were single. Ella described three such incidences:

Um, when I moved from [town] to here, then someone said to me: "It is good that you are going to the [province], you will find yourself a good husband there". Then I was like: "But I'm not going, it has nothing to do with that". So I think ...

[people] start to think: “No but, you must now [pause] you must stop your nonsense now.” ... other people start to think: “But no man, now there’s, it’s not right anymore”.

Ella provided another example:

... the people that rather think, you know, it is now weird, you know, and a few people have asked me whether I like men or you know, why, why am I single, type of what is my *problem* [emphasis], you know. What, what do I actually want now, you know.

According to Ella, people questioned her sexual orientation because she was still single, implying that she had a problem. Yet, it is unclear what Ella referred to when she mentioned “my problem”; did she refer to society wondering what her problem was, or was it that Ella saw being homosexual as a problem? Similar to Ella, Gretal also believed that people questioned one’s sexual orientation when that person was still single at a certain age. She said: “But I think other questions people ask are probably about homosexuality...” If this was true, if society did in fact question a person’s sexual orientation based on their relationship status, why was it so? Within the question of sexual orientation there are three assumptions: single people are homosexual; homosexual people are single; and only heterosexual people can be in relationships. Ella described a last incident where people wanted to help her because they felt sorry for her due to the fact that she was single:

Ah, that thing of like: “Don’t worry, you will find someone”, or you know: “You must just wear a little bit more make-up, or you must just do this. Gee, I know so and so and so and you know, he is actually a nice guy”. And like, then people almost feel they must actually help you now, that there is a problem with the fact that you are single, the people will help you now.

In a similar way, Greta described how she experienced the implied blame for being single and receiving advice on how to change that. Firstly, she described some of the advice she received:

Women are very quick to give advice on how to get a husband. Or if I make food and take it to work someone will say to me: "Ooh, your food is so nice you can marry". Almost as if marriage is a skill. ... but I don't think to get married is necessarily rocket science, even though I haven't managed it yet [laughs] ... Yes, so people often describe it as a skill and that puts me off a lot. ... yes, but those who have been married the longest have the most advice to give, then she said: "It's like a lion hunting a deer. The lion must do the hunting, but the deer must come out every now and then for the lion to see it" ... so, I've received that kind of advice. Yes and the all types of advice like: "You have to get out, do you at least get out a bit?"

Greta described at a later stage in the interview:

We will often hear, and when I say we now, then I speak on behalf of a few friends as well, we will often hear we are picky ... Very negative, very negative, because, it um, um, it almost rings a bell of snobbishness, you think you're better than [pause] yes. Although, I have thought, when they tell me I'm picky, then I wonder if they are then very easy to please or what [laughs] very cheap or what. Yes so, I really try to keep a cool head and to not pressure myself about the [pause] the things others say. ... ah, and then you do always get the odd secretary who will say: "Why are you not married yet, you are so nice and pretty, you're probably picky." And I don't bother with that [laughs] no.

Whilst Greta said that she did not allow all of these questions to bother her, she also admitted to being well aware that according to society there was something wrong with single women of her age; and that people will continue to ask questions. She explained:

I think there is something wrong with us in terms of the fact that we do not fit in with the model of society. From around by 30 you have to be settled, and settled involves a home and car and children and wife. I, I think I don't fit in with that, no, and what is what is wrong with us. But I think the other questions which people ask are about homosexuality and pickiness and things like that.

Likewise, Haley linked being nagged by people to not fitting into the model set by society:

And the other thing that is bad I that people, yes, people think there is something wrong with a person. Because, because I don't fit in the little boxes which society's put there. ... I get the idea that people think there's something wrong with me, because everyone always nags you.

7.6.2.2. My career got in the way.

Asides from being picky; two participants also experienced their focus on their careers receiving the blame for why they were still single. Danny described how she experienced the perception others had of her: "They wonder is there something wrong with me, am I, I'm like an overachiever, I want to achieve more in academics than in other areas." It is important to notice that whilst she started this statement as the perception of society, and a question they asked, she switched over to simply stating that her job was more important to her. This gave the impression that she either agreed with the perception of society, or she has internalized the excuse of blaming her career for her lack of a relationship. Differing from Danny, Ella spoke more generally than when describing society's perception of single career oriented women:

You know, women who are alone are the if you look for example at popular media you know, if a women is single and strives for a career, then she's a bitch ... a good example of that is for example *The Devil Wears Prada* ... And the others are always: "Ah, the search for love is actually what a person wants at the end of the day" right. Even if your career is important to you, and in all the movies then you see, ah, in the end the woman always finds her love at the end of the day. That thing of, yes, that is what one must strive for, that that is what, um that's what is expected of us, yes.

Ella distanced herself from this criticism by speaking in the second person – which she also did in the subsequent quotation – and then Ella continued at length regarding the double standards applied to single men and women with respect to their careers:

I just think it is the, the expectations of society. You know, um, if a man is 35 and single, it is because he's focusing on his career, and he wants his money for himself ... And actually it is cool, you know, he's a bachelor, but there's nothing wrong abo-, with that, you know. It is also actually about languages, you know "bachelor" is such a good word, but the female equivalent "spinster" that is such a negative connotation ... Like a woman of 35 and single who focuses on her career and so forth you know, then there's something wrong with her, you know. And everyone tells her: "Now when are you getting married?" and "You must marry now" and you must, you know, "We will get you a husband". And everyone tries to *fix* [said with lots of emotion] her with a man, you know. Meanwhile there is nothing wrong with it you know, it is a choice which a person makes, you know ... That type of thing which you will *never* [emphasis] say to a man, you know. It is almost normal if a man is single because he is focusing on his career, he still

have lots of time you know. But women have less time, because they must pop out children and all that, and that type of thing ...

7.6.3. Job discrimination.

Bella and Jane also perceived discrimination in the work place based on their relationship status. According to Jane it was about the stability of someone who was in a relationship – and the implied instability of a single person. She explained:

Professionally I would say, in some occupations maybe, because, it gives an impression of stability, which could be important, career wise for some people. ... I think if you, like, work for a big company where you work a lot with the public, and big contract work, I think then they will more easily appoint someone who is stable, um [pause] I don't know how else to explain it. I just think it gives a better impression for a lot of people, in, that aspect. Like I say, it proves stability, you will not just move from job to job.

Differing slightly from Jane, Bella explained the unwritten and unspoken assumptions of the workplace:

And um, there's the expectation, and I think it is like that in most occupations, because everyone whom I talk to in the same situation say the same thing. I don't have children, nor a family, then it is expected that you shall work in December. ... in fact, at [company] in Johannesburg, it was said that: "People with families get preference for December holidays." ... the people in relationships and with, especially with children, uh [sighs and pauses] they can, they can pick up their children from school over lunch, and um [drawn out and pauses] I don't blame them, that's just how the system works. But, it's things like that which makes a person, then start to feel resentful, towards other people. ... it is almost, it is a 50/50 because the company creates the cap, and people take it. The company

won't say: "Oh, but the people with families get December, so I give you Easter", and the couples [pause] don't either. There's the exp-, expectation from both sides that you shall be there, because you in any case don't have someone at home. ... I think almost it was [name of celebrity], who said: "Women can only do good [pause] in the workplace if they have good support at home". ... everyone was astounded that, in the first place that someone can still say something like that, and that they thought we could publish that in our newspaper. ... I think people are very sensitive for discrimination against people based on their religion, their race, their gender, their sexual orientation; but there's not [pause] feeling of but you're discriminating against me because I'm single [pause] that idea does not exist for people.

When asked how this made her feel, Bella replied: "[sighs] Uh, abused [laughs] Yes, and it is really, I don't know if it is the only sector, but it is really what everybody will tell you."

7.6.4. Why they are like this.

Four participants explained why they thought society treated or perceived them the way they did. The explanations ranged from the ignorance of society, projection and jealousy, to a explaining that it was simply the way society was. Firstly, Anja seemed to not know, nor care why society felt sorry for her: "... I don't always see why. ... I don't know, it is their problem [laughing] how they see me actually. Um, [sighs and pauses] thing probably depends on what b-, which other people, um..." Notice how Anja leave the sentence hanging, which leaves it unclear as to which people's opinions about her seemingly did matter.

7.6.4.1. It's actually their fault.

Differing from Anja; Danny, Ella and Gretal had their own theories about why society treated them the way they did: in general, they were pointing a finger at society. Danny was of the opinion that it was simply because of the way society was set up:

Um, there are times that I get a bit resentful you know, and I think it's because of the way that society is set up, especially in our generation with Facebook and everything. People are constantly putting their relationship in your face ... obviously they only present the good side of it. They don't put when they have fights ... And also in public when you see people holding hands, and you can't help but feel a little bit sad that you're not a part of it, you know. So um, I have some resentment ... I think it's all over. Um, it's in magazines, it's on TV. I mean, if you switch on it's almost every programme, it usually revolves around some or other romantic relationship; also movies and in music as well ... and that's why we have restaurants and coffee shops and bars. It's for people to meet. So I think, I think it's all over. And just the way society is set up in terms of [pause] if you go shopping even, um, most things are in bulk; it's designed for families, you know. And that's something that I've noticed being a single person when I go shopping [laughs slightly] I've always, I've always got stuff left over, you know, food left over; because everything, everything is designed for families, and say with cars and houses, etcetera , insurance, everything is designed for families. So I think it's just, it's just the way that the world works.

From the above quotation it would seem as if resentment, and not sadness, was the main emotion evoked in Danny by the way society was set up for couples. However, Danny also believed that there were "those who I think are... slightly jealous of me, because of the freedom I have. The options that I have in my life, they, they don't have that." Similar to

Danny, Ella contended that society simply did not understand or allow for single people and that their sympathy did not always come from a good place. She described her perspective:

Um, but I think society doesn't really allow for you to out of free will ... don't understand that I'm single by choice. It is not, out, out of lack of choice, it's out of choice ... But it doesn't always necessarily come from a good place. Sometimes people are just a bit bitchy. Yes. Or sometimes from other women, I think if they, you know, almost a bit on the one hand wish, are not necessarily happily married or not necessarily so happy where they are, then they look at you and then they're maybe a bit, not jealous, but they are maybe a, you know they have mixed feelings kind of. Then sometimes it comes from a nasty place. Then they say: "Oh, but actually you must marry now, that just what you should actually do with your life", because they want you to be the way they are.

In the same way, Gretal believed it was often the unhappily married people who had the most to say about her being single. Yet, differing from Ella, Gretal experienced them discouraging her from marriage:

The people who have the most opinions about me being single are the women who are married [laughs] who very often project their own frustrations about their marriage unto me, and explain to me why it is very good to not be married, or, tell me for example that I'm picky, whilst I know they are not happy in their marriages. So, it has really actually hurt.

Differing slightly from Ella – who did not really admit to experiencing any emotions based on the reason society treated single people the way they did – Gretal admitted to it really being hurt sometimes. However, it is unclear whether the treatment or the reason for the treatment hurts her. Reason aside, it is clear that the participants experienced society feeling

sorry for them, nagging them with questions loaded with blame, and even discrimination in the workplace.

7.7. Being Christian – It doesn't matter, but it does.

Five participants had a Dutch Reformed upbringing, with Anja and Danny having been brought up in Catholic and Methodist homes. However, it should be noted five participants changed their beliefs, to some degree at least. Yet, religion, or the lack thereof, still had an influence on their experience of being single. Firstly, the participants mentioned what they did not like about religion. This then led some of them to ask questions about religion or to change their beliefs. Thirdly, the participants discussed what the influence of religion was on their experience of being single and related concerns.

7.7.1. There are things of religion we don't like.

When asked which aspects of religion troubled them the most, many of the participants indicated that the prescriptive nature of religion was of most concern, especially those aspects regarding intimate relationships. Furthermore, Ella and Haley also did not agree with the hierarchy of sins and the idealistic picture the church expressed respectively.

7.7.1.1. It is too prescriptive.

Anja said she was “not a very good Catholic”. When asked why, Anja replied:

I haven't been to church in a long time. ... There're a few things which don't make sense to be a 100% ... For example birth control, ideas. ... There are a few, but in every church there is no unfo-, there are such things now. ... There are a few um, with which I don't agree. ... Also they [pause] um, shall for example [pause] um, their attitude towards divorced people. If someone, if [make] a mistake, they are a bit unforgiving. ... birth control yes, I mean I don't think we

can with; we can't afford to bring more people into this planet. And on, even on a personal, on, on one one, a level of person to person, people can't continue, they can far more, people can't afford to have three, four children, two children, three children. Um, I don't think I, I think people often get divorced too quickly these days. But, if it really doesn't work [pause], it is better for everyone I think to, because it does not help to be with someone and it makes you unhappy.

One thing which is important to note is that when Anja mentioned the unforgiving nature of the church, she switched over to speaking in the second person. It is possible that this was because she was in fact specifically referring to the unforgiving nature against people who wanted to divorce (of which she is not part); however, it is also possible that she disliked the unforgiving nature so much that she wanted to distance herself from it.

Similarly, Danny mentioned her dislike for the prescriptive ways of religion:

I don't like religions that are very prescriptive when it comes to relationships. You know, if you should have pre-marital sex or not, and what's the role of the woman in the relationship, et cetera, et cetera. ... And I don't let religion prescribe to me how I manage a relationship. I let the, the moral basis is a guide, but it's not a rule.

By distancing herself from the prescription of church by speaking in the second person, Danny highlighted her dislike for the prescriptions. This was further entrenched by the fact that she switched over to the first person when she mentioned her dislike for these prescriptions and how she would not allow religion to prescribe to her. On a slightly different note, Haley did not like the relationship she was supposed to always have with God, since she would then never be able to be in a relationship, presumably with a man:

... it doesn't sound to me if any person is every ready for a relationship if you are in the church, because it, you must always have a relationship with God ... but it constantly made me doubt in myself. Or, um, I shall never be able to go into a relationship, because I'm not ready for it yet, and that book said; in that book there were prescriptions like, things like, um: "Don't go and drink coffee alone with a man, go in a group".

Haley distanced herself from people who were in the church or who had a relationship with God by speaking in the second person. However, these prescriptions of having a relationship with God and when you are ready for a relationship seemed to have had a very personal effect on Haley. According to Anja, Danny, and Haley, the Catholic church or religion in general, thus prescribed how you should socialize with men, when you are ready for a relationship, whether you are allowed to have sex or not, what your position as a woman is in the relationship, that you are not allowed to decide whether you want children or not (or by default you should abstain from sex completely) and lastly, also whether you are allowed to end a relationship or not.

7.7.1.2. It fools us with hierarchies and falsities.

Ella did not mention the prescription of relationship relevant issues, but mentioned the hierarchy of sin – with pre-marital sex being the worst – implied by most churches. She said:

Um, yes, [sighs] I just decided, you know, there's, it is not for me, it feel to me [pause] in general people choose [long pause], people have a way of wanting to arrange sin on order of importance, you know ... I feel do what you the the, do what you want as long as it doesn't hurt other people and you know what is right for you and you sort yourself out. .. But I also feel yes, like you can go and say: "Oh, but it is a terrible thing to have pre-marital sex", and then it is not a terrible thing if you are simply a bitch. It is the same for me, you know. So it, so yes,

there, there's thi-, it you know, it's maybe not what God wants from us, but there's, if feels to me like there're worse things actually, you know. ... but for me it's about: "Be a good person, do your best in live and s-, sort out your own case with God".

Two things are of note when analysing Ella's statements: firstly, she rather spoke about what she believed, instead of what the church or other people consider sin; she spoke in the second person which distanced her from what she said which could be an indication that she did not truly believe what she said. Secondly, in the process of criticising the hierarchy of sin which many people suggest is the case – with pre-marital sex being one of the worst sins – Ella implied her own hierarchy when stating that "there're worse things actually".

The participants also disliked the church's picture of relationships. Haley mentioned her dislike for the idealistic beliefs which were instilled by the church regarding how relationships should be. She described this as the "filminess" of religion:

I know precisely what I feel and how I think about it, but um [pause] I, I realized that um, one must all that, I almost want to say filminess of the religion, you must discard that and look realistically at thing. Like: "Here you have a man and her you have a woman, and they differ; and they will have a quarrel, and they will fight a bid; and to be in a successful relationship you must, a person will have to a lot; a person will have to work at it."

In the above quotation Haley suggested that the church – it can be assumed especially the Dutch Reformed Church in which she was raised – preaches that a relationship will necessarily always be happy and without the requirement of hard work.

7.7.2. So we don't believe anymore or ask questions.

It was this disagreement with some of the prescriptions and filminess of religion which contributed to the participants' questioning religion, with some even moving away from religion altogether. Haley, for example, did not believe anymore:

Currently I don't have a religion. Currently I am, I think I can say agnostic, I, I, I think I can almost say atheist. But it is very, it is, I don't like saying it aloud, because people get like judged. No one knows it.

Haley then explained how she came to reject Christianity:

... the whole religion, the whole Christian religion setup in which I grew up, I realized it is a farce. And that, um, it is, it is not like um, the husband and the wife love each other and they are so happy. It is, it is more a hope of the *must* [emphasis] to be so happy. ... I really started to think about things. And I started to think about things ... But at a specific state of my life it felt to me like I don't dare question things. And then one day, I decided I won't go to church any more, and I started to wonder about things. And I saw there didn't, nothing happened to me. There will not be any fire to engulf me or something. And it is [sighs] it resulted in me trying to reason about some things, in a logical way, rather than to colour it in and explain it through symbols ... Personally I think all of our lives could be better if we that, tried to get rid of that filminess. And um, many times, people would rather go and sit, and they will try and pray things right, but I feel it is our duty to go and do something about it. .. For me it is, I don't know if I can say ideological, it's, it's also probably not the right word, but that's what I, what I'm working on, or, to rather do something than just hope and pray for it.

What Haley said above was most likely influenced by her childhood. Growing up in a Dutch Reformed Church, and relatively unhappy home in a small town, Haley was taught to

never ask questions. It also appeared as if the specific congregation she was in also taught her that *love conquers all* and that a marriage would necessarily be happy and without much effort. Nonetheless, it is Haley's experience that is important. It is most likely that her parents' unhappy marriage influenced her greatly to question what was taught in church.

Differing from Haley, Ella did not explicitly state that she was no longer a Christian, she did, however, describe how she used to do things by "the book" (with reference to the Bible) but has been liberated:

... to a certain degree probably yes. Um [long pause] when I was younger it was rather a big thing for me. Type of, I would now, you know, do my own thing but I would be right now, and you know. Doing things according to the book and, and so on, but I mean. Cared more, maybe what people think of you, and of doing things correctly you know, want to try and satisfy other people and live your life according to the expectations. I think like in I think age is a liberating thing. So for me it is more now I am not single because of my religion.

Jane was also not religious anymore; however she does explain that she still believed in a higher power:

I'm not religious at all ... So for me it is about, I believe in a higher power, but I don't necessarily believe in the church [pause] and especially the people of the church. ... so, I basically believe don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you. ... No, I think everyone of us are good and bad and, the good should win, or well it usually wins [pause] and through that I've had to pay; because I don't see the bad, that's another thing, everyone always tell me I'm gullible and naïve.

7.7.3. Religion is not a replacement.

Another aspect of religion which two participants mentioned was the link between religion or God, and having someone who loved you. Bella specifically mentioned that God did not replace a partner:

No. I think in, in where religion is concerned it gives you almost: “Oh, at least I’ve got God, so I don’t need a man”. [pause] Eeehh. [long pause] No [laughing]. I think that’s also a, it’s an illusion, then you must go and become a nun, because then it is [pause] that gives you enough.

Along the same lines, yet varying slightly, Haley mentioned that many people probably believed in God because then at least someone loved them. She explained:

... maybe, maybe it comes, maybe it is here that I now bring in the religion I church thing a bit – what um, those people of um, “if no one likes you, God still loves you” and then [takes deep breath]. There’re the ways that preachers can preach [pause] that a person feels like absolutely euphoric, it’s almost as if someone like a [pause] I almost want to say throws a cloth over the re-, receptors or something of your brain. Then, then it doesn’t communicate nicely. Like then you have this erroneous impression of certain things.

Two things are of importance to note here: firstly, Haley’s use of the word “euphoric” to describe the feeling some people get when listening to a sermon. “Euphoric” was also a word she used to describe what love actually was, yet she did not believe it. Secondly, Haley mostly spoke in the second person when she mentioned this feeling of euphoria or the erroneous impressions people often get as a result. She thus distanced herself from what she said. This could either be an indication that she did not really believe in what she say, or that she had such a dislike for these sermons and their effect that she wanted to dissociate herself from it. It seems prudent, however, to mention that whilst Haley was not religious anymore,

and seemed to have a rather strong dislike for the church; she also had one positive thing to say about belonging to a religion or a church. She described this as follows:

And, so a person sees religions also like, if a person is in a church you have a very good support system. And you can very easily, you ask someone: "How did you hear about this person who could take you to the hospital, and you, or who took you to the doctor when you couldn't drive because your foot was broken?" "I got someone from the church." So there's a network of people [deep breath].

The example used by Haley to describe what is good of being in a church is reminiscent of what she describes as the good things a partner could provide; someone to assist her and to do things for her. She also spoke in the second person when she mentioned the support network provided by a church which could possibly be influenced by her own lack of such a support network and the fact that she seemingly did not have someone to ask assistance in doing things for her.

7.7.3.1. But it has a good effect.

Haley's questioning of religion and all it holds, and the resulting disbelief, has had a positive effect on how she experienced being single:

Yes it did. It has a, it, it has a positive effect ... it has, it gave me, uh, my religion gives me a realistic perspective about how it will be if I will be in a relationship. ... but to tell myself: "But, I don't actually miss out." Because it feels to me like other people live a lie, and I'm at least true to myself.

Along the same lines, albeit from a religious person, Anja's religion helped her to accept who she was, and it also gave her hope of one day finding a partner. She said:

... I think it has helped me, more with becoming myself. ... Um, that I [long pause] that I maybe, you know, that I make peace with myself and how I am,

because until 22, 23 you are, I wasn't like that. Where, like you get older, you have a lot of peace with yourself. ... What I am, you know, that you [pause] I am an engineer, I am in a men's, it's a nerdy type of work, you know those types of things. It is what you are, and it is how I was made. ... Yes, because I know there, well I believe there is someone for me out there [long pause] um, and that when the time is right I shall, I shall meet that person, but yes.

Gretal also mentioned that her religion helped her to believe that she would find a partner one day. However, she also mentioned that she sometimes found it hard to keep believing:

I think um, religion maybe strengthens the princess complex which us girls have sometimes. Where, a person almost waits for the knight ... I joke sometimes and say that the Lord can come and drop him on my balcony from a helicopter if it must be so [laughs], because I believe that God can do it. But I realize that it does not take my share away. I must get out, I must meet people, I must open myself. ... someone once told me, okay we know that in Genesis it says God said Eve would long for a man [pauses and laughs]. I believe He placed the longing in my heart, and that because I have the longing, I believe that He will make sure my life works out like that. I can't think that He would be so cruel as to place the longing there whilst he knows I'm not destined to have someone. So I, I *must* [emphasis] believe it. I don't always believe it with my whole heart and not even with my whole head, but I try to believe it ... saying that, if I must also quote from the Bible now, it is also a thorn in my side, is, is the whole struggle with being alone and why, why me?

Gretal's statements can be linked to Haley's perception of religion's prescriptions and views regarding relationships. Firstly, Gretal mentioned that being religious could increase

the princess complex in which it was believed that God would simply provide a knight in shining armour, you just had to believe. This is very similar to Haley's perception and experience of religious preaching, in which prayer provides a sense of comfort and control. However, contrary to Haley, Gretal did mention that she was aware of the fact that she would also have to do her part and that she could not just sit around and wait. Secondly, Gretal's insistence that she "*must* [emphasis] believe" that God will give her a partner rings a bell of how Haley perceives that "it is more a hope of the *must* [emphasis] to be so happy".

7.7.3.2. And it influences who we date.

Furthermore, religion influenced three participants when it came to who they were willing to date. Bella described the influence a difference in religion between her and Brian had, and her decision never to date outside her religion again:

People think fundamental difference between people are solvable, you can get over anything. You can't. Um [pauses and sighs] he's, he was, mmm well he is probably still Muslim, and at the beginning it didn't matter, but it does become an issue. ... And it just feels to me my, my previous experience has made me very weary, I don't think I shall really have a relationship with someone who, who another, belongs to any other religion. It's just difficult. Because, as I said, a person thinks it doesn't matter, but it does.

Bella continued to explain how she found it refreshing recently to date Ben, who was a Christian:

And um [pause] it is also this person whom I dated briefly [pause] it was very refreshing for me, because, ah, almost the first time we went out together he told me he feels like he's living like a rock star and he thinks he must go to church a bit more often, and then he did, like he's me, Methodist ... Now, it happens so seldom, it's nice to [pause] to know some is, is on such a level, he's where you're

at. Um [pause] because it's really, the majority of the people whom I know are totally anti-religion. So it, uh, it definitely, you can say what you want, it matters.

However, whilst Bella said that religion was very important, she also holds that something which plays a bigger role in whom she was willing to date was racism:

Yes, religion plays a very important role, but the thing which I've realized which plays a bigger role is politics, good old racism ... I don't know, I think if you [pauses and sighs] any signs of racism mean you're anyway not the person whom I will be interested in the least. So then you're off my list immediately.

Comparably, Danny also felt that it was not religion per se which was important, but the moral basis it provided:

Um, [sighs] I think what religion does more than anything is it gives you a certain moral base. ... Um, but I think, as I said, your religion gives you a moral basis, and based on that you, you act in a certain way. So yes, I, I think it does. Um, I expect certain moral behaviour from a partner, you know, because of my background, because of my religious background, and the type of person that I am. So, yes, I do think it plays a role. But it's not a deciding factor.

Gretal did not want to date outside of her religion. Furthermore, she wanted her partner to also believe in the same way she did:

I think it plays a role, um, definitely I don't want to have someone who is not also a Christian like me ... so I really want someone who knows about grace. Someone who realizes that we're all actually just broken and that we need so much grace ... I really want someone who serves the Lord; I don't think I shall even be able to just date someone who doesn't serve the Lord. I don't think it's the relationship's place, or marriage is the place to convert someone. I once heard someone saying:

“Marriage is not a mission field” and I agree. No, so religion plays a role. ... Um [laughs] but now I’ve also joked in the past and said I don’t want a man who tells me on the first date the he’s a Christian, I want to be able to realize it [laughs] because I have dealt with a charismaniac I’m, um, completely put off there. So now it is again this fine balance between, I almost want to say a modest Christian, who believes in grace [small laugh] and not in self-deserving.

Thus, even though the participants mostly said that religion did not play a dominant role in their lives anymore, there was still evidence of the lingering influence of their religious upbringing.