Author:
Yan, Phyllis Fung Ling

Title:
A study of the experiences of working single women in Hong Kong.

A STUDY OF

THE EXPERIENCES OF WORKING SINGLE WOMEN

IN HONG KONG

YAN Fung Ling, Phyllis

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with
the requirements of the degree of Doctoral Degree of Philosophy in
the Faculty of Social Sciences

July 2001

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the experiences of single women in Hong Kong from contextual and developmental perspectives. Thirty single women were interviewed using a feminist approach. The findings of this study indicate that single women face some different but also some similar developmental tasks as do married women. They fulfil developmental tasks of working, establishing friendships and securing accommodation. The women also experience stresses arising from singlehood and from their work. An individual woman's appraisal of the situation was significant in determining whether singlehood or work were or were not stressful. Singlehood, instead of being a problem to a woman, might be regarded as a challenge. Single women in this study reveal that they enjoy their lives outside the confines of marriage. They have social support and their participation in employment has enhanced their social status and independence.

The experiences of single women in this study are also closely related to their experiences in the wider social environment: with their family members, friends, colleagues, and church-mates, and in their socio-cultural context. Their perception of the attitude of those in these different parts of the social environment had in one way or another, significantly affected how they felt about themselves as single women and how they saw their role in their own family, their work place and their social network. Most of the women perceive the general social attitude toward singlehood to have changed towards being more liberal in Hong Kong nowadays. Not all the women, however, feel well accepted by their immediate social circle or society. Emphasis in this study was also placed on how the single women cope with being single. Patterns and themes identified are illustrated by narrative data.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ii

I would like to extend my hearty thanks to the following people, without whom this thesis could not have been completed:

To God for giving me perseverance and wisdom. It made all the difference.

To Professor Phyllida Parsloe who has been, and will continue to be, mentor and friend. Without her intellectual questioning and affectionate caring, this doctoral thesis could not have developed in the way it did. She gave it ground to stand on, and its success is a tribute to hers.

To the thirty single women whose words appear in this work are, in a very special way, its primary authors. If they had not trusted me with their life stories, this thesis simply would not exist. To all these women, I give enormous thanks.

To my family members who have contributed all kinds of assistance throughout the long and difficult process. I am grateful to them all.

To my friends, for sharing my struggles, seeing my strengths, and giving me constructive comments.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED: .... DATE: ....

WORD COUNT: 7,989

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1

Introduction

<u>Personal and Clinical Experience</u>

Now aged 42, I am the only single person among my six siblings. I come from a working-class family where marriage is highly valued. It has always been the tradition that daughters leave home after getting married. Since I am single, I choose to live with my parents. I am totally responsible for the household expenses. Other siblings make a monthly contribution to my parents. Among my siblings, I am the one who has the highest academic achievements and I am employed in a highly paid occupation. I can maintain interaction with family members as I feel some sense of support. However, my circle of friends is constantly changing. Some of them have married and a few have emigrated.

Over the course of my life, I have experienced a mixture of panic and depression as I anticipate moving into a "never-married" category. In my early thirties, I romanticized marriage and expected to get married as soon as possible. Labeled a "career" woman, I was not treated as one who was eager to marry. I once turned down a "blind date" arranged by my elder sister. The urge to get married has become less as time passed by. I do not feel any pressure to get married except during some family's gatherings, such as wedding banquets. Up till this moment, I have not yet made a definite and final decision to rule out marriage.

Although I have turned down some dating activities, I have remained open to the possibility of marriage. The failure to get married has not eroded my belief in the value of a long-term marital relationship, probably because I do not see it either as a failure or as my personal fault. And facing a life of singlehood, I have every confidence in myself that I can handle whatever challenges lie ahead. My major concern at the present moment is that the chance to meet suitable guys has become slimmer.

While waiting for the chance to come, I have experienced pressure to get married

1

from people who matter to me, my family and friends. My parents seem happy to have my companionship. Nevertheless, I have come to realize that they also have other feelings. Once, when there was a discussion about my future, my parents expressed concern that it was a worry for them. Even though I have reassured them I can take care of myself, I must admit that I do have some anxiety about my future sometimes. I have tried to submerge these thoughts as the time has not yet come to be overly concerned about them. But I realize that in fact I have to work to plan for my future. By doing this, my parents' worries will be lessened.

Meanwhile, I find myself always concerned about establishing and improving the relationship between myself and those who are significant to me. I have taken it as my responsibility to take the initiative to expand my social circle. Probably, because most of my friends are single, I feel comfortable with my single status in my social circle. Never have I heard directly anything nasty about myself. I also have been very lucky that pressure from my family and relatives has become less. I believe that my family and friends' attitudes are crucial in supporting me in facing my singlehood. For my part, I would have said that most of the time I actually enjoy leading my life as a single woman.

To me the more difficult part is to deal with other people who might not know about my marital status. I did not know how I should best respond when people like my neighbors or passersby assume that I am married and call me Mrs. X. Although I do not feel anything wrong with being single, I believe that other people may not feel the same. I sometimes had no opportunity to make it clear, thus I just acted as if I was Mrs. X. A single woman may have to go through such embarrassing situations.

It seems to me that some people may associate single women with something incomplete. When attending some wedding feasts, relatives and friends exclaimed what a loss it is that I have not got a husband. Some even advised me against getting overly obsessed with my academic and professional advancement. While working in my previous employment, some colleagues gave the strong impression that they thought it is better for a woman to secure a husband rather than a job. They tended to pay attention to the difficulties in leading a single life (but married people also have problems!) and rarely did they look at the creative ways that single women have lived their lives.

As a social worker, over the last few years, I have worked with single women during the counseling process. One example sticks in my mind. A single woman, aged 38, was employed as an assistant manager in a multi-national firm. She was very successful in her job and was doing well financially. However, recently she had felt increasingly depressed and empty. She decided that she could not solve the problem on her own and sought counseling. During the counseling, she stated that she had considered marriage in the past but had never found the right man. She regretted her decision not to marry, and now when her career was less demanding, new desires for intimacy had emerged. For the first time, she felt ready to marry and raise a family – desires that earlier had remained subordinate to urges to achieve and succeed. She now wondered whether she should have married earlier and had children. She was unsure whether she could be happy as a single woman for the rest of her life.

In addition to counseling, I also had the chance to meet other single women in interest and socialization groups, which were specially designed for young adults. Some of them were professionals and others were working in clerical and service occupations. They enjoyed their single lives but they also longed to have their own families.

During these years, clients and their concerns have become integrated into my life. When I decided to pursue studies with the intention of obtaining a doctoral degree, I anticipated writing a dissertation, which would, in some way, be related to the issues of single women in Hong Kong. My personal experience as a single woman and a series of clinical experiences lead me to believe that singlehood has become a viable option among women. Women will consider remaining single for the sake of furthering study and their career. With work, they may feel adequate enough to support themselves. They may have a social life and a social network. How they perceive marriage and singlehood may also influence their marital choices. They may meet stresses in leading their single lives and how they cope with them also deserves study. Before conducting a field study, I decided to select several areas, namely, social life, social network, perception of marriage and singlehood, work, coping strategies and physical/psychological health for a literature review.

The Phenomenon and Significance

Women are single, in the sense of not married, for a variety of reasons. The increased availability, acceptance and use of contraception and abortion allow for heterosexual intimacy without marriage. One of the main factors influencing singlehood as an option for women is the availability of careers. Careers provide new roles for women. They bring women new aspirations; women are no longer confined to the house. There is also a continuing trend among women to gain professional and high level qualifications. Some of them delay marriage or remain unmarried for the sake of career advancement. It is clear that social researchers (e.g., Adams, 1971) associate the single career women with higher levels of intelligence, education and occupation. Professional single women are seen as financially independent and upwardly mobile. Very few researchers give reasons for working-class women remaining single and the perspective of these women does not seem to have been recorded.

At the end of the twentieth century and start of the twenty-first century, singlehood, as an abstract sociocultural concept and as a lived experience, is replete with competing imperatives in western societies. A series of important social changes have begun to lead to some renegotiations of the meanings of singlehood. The second-wave feminist movement in particular has instigated a reassessment of the definition of singlehood. Singlehood, for example, is commonly portrayed as a major opportunity for women to earn money and become financially independent. In contemporary societies, however, there are several paradoxes and tensions inherent in the meanings of singlehood that have implications for the ways in which women practise singlehood. While society has become more tolerant of people choosing a range of options and living in diverse ways, Thornton (1989) indicated that the future of women is still largely conceived in terms of marrying and having children. Singlehood is a more acceptable option; but it does not necessarily appear to be an attractive one (Gordon, 1994). Work choices are provisional and are strongly determined by the goal of further economic security among the women. In my opinion, women who are actively pursuing their careers not only experience work stress, but are also at the receiving end of social criticism for their "inappropriate" behavior. It is clear that work provides women with economic independence and the option of remaining single, it may also result in stress. The stress mainly derives from the problems of adjustment between traditional and new

roles. It is multi-dimensional, involving the individual, family, workplace and society. The stresses at different levels reinforce and affect one another.

Because of the predominance of the married state in our society, single status seems to be a residual category. In the 1980s, little research was carried out on single people. According to Baruch et al. (1983), never-marrieds are described as "statistical deviants who have been virtually ignored in social theory and research" (1983:3). As their numbers increase, single people have become the topic of social investigation. The majority of books and articles that address the concerns of singles are either first-person narratives ("This is what happened to me!"), psychological studies that purport to understand the single phenomenon, or self-help manuals on coping with the problems of being single. Many of the latter concentrate on how-to-find-a-mate, implying that aloneness is the main concern of all singles. But all these quotes bear an air of discrimination to me. For example, the author of a 1984 Cosmopolitan article, "Sketches from Single Life," describes a single woman's home as a place where nights are chilly and roaches waltz insolently over the dish drainer, no matter how clean you are or how much poison powder you put down – and where breakfast is a baloney sandwich and dinner a bowl of cornflakes. Home is where she feels loneliest (cited in Anderson & Steward, 1994).

Such material, however, fails to view the facts and issues through the eyes of a single adult. Some studies perpetuate damaging half-truths and stereotypes. Sociologists, human-development researchers, psychologists, and educators must address the single phenomenon from new perspectives. As long as they continue to regard single women as somewhat of an anomaly, the varied realities of their lives will remain unknown.

In this study, I choose single women in Hong Kong as the target group. As is well known, Hong Kong is a world-famous commercial city-state. Recently, people are getting married at a later age. It is increasingly common for men and women to stay longer in education and start work when they grow older, thus forming families at relatively older ages. As shown in Table 1-1, from 1981 to 1996, the median age of first marriages rose from 24 to 27 for women, an increase of three years. In general, the median ages of men and women when they marry for the first time have been increasing.

Table 1-1: Median Age of Men and Women at First Marriage

Year	Men	Women
1981	27.0	23.9
1986	28.0	25.3
1991	29.1	26.2
1996	30.0	26.9

Source: Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (1994), Marriage and divorce trends in Hong Kong 1981-1993, *Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics*, & Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong in Figures 1988-95 Edition.*

Over the past twenty years, there has been an increase in the proportion of never-marrieds in the population and a decrease in the proportion of married people, particularly among females. According to Hong Kong Government census/by-census findings, the proportion of never-married females has steadily increased. In 1976, 2.8 percent of women aged 35-39 had never married, compared with 2.2 percent for the age group 40-44. In 1996, the corresponding figures reached 14.6 percent and 9 percent respectively. But there has not been an increase in the ratio of girls to boys over the past 40 years.

Most studies of single women are either conducted in Western societies or are highly quantitative in nature, and therefore overlook the deeper cultural meaning of singlehood for Hong Kong working women. This still remains a largely under-researched area, which definitely warrants more intensive studies. In order to begin to address this, I have endeavored to carry out an exploratory study of the experience of the single women in Hong Kong.

The present study is significant in the following aspects:-

1. The study has academic significance. This is apparent when it is realized that there are few concepts or theories of singlehood. The results generated from this study can give additional insights to the study of singlehood.

2. This study has policy and practice implications. The data obtained can enable human service practitioners to understand better the experiences of single women

and generate ideas about what could be included in educational and developmental programs. Recommendations for policy and practice, to meet the needs of single women, will be made.

3. The study critically examines the historical and socio-cultural context, both in traditional Chinese society and in contemporary Hong Kong society, and the impact of singlehood.

Focus of Study

In the 1950s and 1960s, a number of eminent theorists held the views that being a wife and mother were appropriate roles for women. For single women, there were few clearly defined positive roles in society except perhaps that of the kind maiden aunt, godmother, parent caretaker, and devoted secretary. Marriage was generally conceptualized as the only normal course in life. There were and still are no rites of passage for single women. Singlehood has very few synopses to mark its trail. The theory of structural functionalism advocated "role differentiation" of gender (Parsons, 1956) and the developmental perspectives (e.g. Erikson, 1963; Havighurst, 1972) emphasized developmental stages and tasks. However, these theories were criticized for the rigid classification of gender roles and the support of women's dependency. Barrie Thorne (1982) challenged the rigidity of the biological differences between the sexes, which is the backbone of the theory of structural functionalism. She argued that gender is essentially socially created, rather than innately determined. Because of a strict division of gender roles, women were confined to the domestic spheres. Similarly, life-cycle theories, which emphasize an underlying sequential order and similarity, are criticized because their analysis is of biological and social inevitability, irrespective of individual differences.

Single women, living in a culture in which the majority of people are married, cannot help but evaluate their lives in relation to the institution of marriage. It is important to examine the meaning that the dominant culture assigns to marriage. In addition to the cultural impact, an understanding of the family's experience of an individual also helps to shape the experience of the single woman. A large majority of people in Hong Kong are Chinese and therefore there remains a traditional Chinese

heritage. One dominant norm, which applies particularly to women, is that they are expected to get married and bear children. The social and economic changes resulting from industrialization and commercialization bring women access to greater educational and work opportunities. Free dating and marriage are advocated. However, the cultural and family ideologies still influence women's attitudes towards marriage and family. Most families see the eventual marriage of their children as part of the natural evolution of the family. Thus, in inquiring into the working women's experiences of singlehood, it does not make sense to separate the person from the context in which she is living and has grown up.

The aim of this study is to understand the experience of singlehood among women within the changing socio-cultural context of Hong Kong. I focused on selecting several areas, namely, their social life, social network, perception of marriage and singlehood, work, coping strategies and physical/ psychological health. My intention, in conducting this study, is to seek comprehensive stories from the respondents of how they perceive and describe singlehood as their lived experience. The word "perceive" implies something about singlehood. The state of singlehood is perceived differently by different women, and differently by the same woman at different times in their lives. The word "describe" refers to what singlehood is and means for the respondents.

In order to achieve my purposes, a qualitative research method based on feminist ideology is used in this study. Since women's experience has been ignored and even distorted (Stanley & Wise, 1993) and the study of the experience of single women in Hong Kong has been little developed, I am more interested in understanding the respondents' experience than in the testing of hypotheses. The intention is to relate to my respondents and not just ask them to talk generally about themselves.

Such a research method focuses on collecting data in order to explore and describe working women's experience of singlehood. The research was conducted between April 1996 and January 1997 and a total of 30 working single women were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were used and each was tape-recorded, with the consent of each respondent. The Chinese-written transcript was then translated into English. Along with the process of data collection, I read through each interview in order to identify the units of meaning and assign them to categories. Then the similarities and differences were identified in an attempt to detect relationships between the categories.

I have to admit that these are ways in which my modes of interpretation have been influenced by my personal relationships and lived experiences. But, in a more than reciprocal return, my study of the experiences of other single women has given me an opportunity to reflect upon my own experience of being single, and to explore the social grounding of my own ideas. In May 1997, a follow-up questionnaire was sent to the 30 respondents; these were all returned between May and June 1997. The data collected through the research process will be used as the basis for a deeper understanding of the experience of singlehood in working women in Hong Kong.

Specifically, the study of single women's experiences has the following four objectives:

1. By exploring each woman's experience of singlehood, to test out the idea that singlehood is perceived differently by different women, and differently by the same woman at different times in their lives.

2. To explore single women's work experience, to understand what satisfaction and stress they gain from their jobs.

3. To look for what has currently been omitted in social science writing and strive to fill some of the gaps.

4. To give ideas about what can be included in practice and policy programs for single women.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter One presents an introduction and overview of the purpose and focus of the study. Chapter Two is devoted to a review of some previous studies about single women. The major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings are reviewed to identify the phenomenon of singlehood among women and point out under-researched areas that deserve more attention. Chapter Three describes the general concepts of work and characteristics of working women. The historical development of women's labor participation, their present job distribution, barriers and factors preventing their employment, and their work-related stresses are elaborated upon. Chapter Four explores the cultural and family contexts of Hong Kong and their impact on the single

women's experiences. Chapter Five presents a research methodology for the present study. Chapters Six to Nine present the data collected from the study, and how the findings differ from the literature on singlehood and women's work experience. Chapter Ten is the core chapter of the thesis in which I will attempt to generate a Chinese conception of singlehood from the data collected. Chapter Eleven includes a summary of findings, and recommendations for future studies.

Review of the Literature about Single Women

Who are the single women? The literature offers no consensual definition of the words "single women". Some researchers simply define them as never-marrieds and others include divorced, separated, and widowed people (Adams, 1976). Some distinguish between the labels unmarried, single, and unattached. Others simply state that singlehood, like marriage, is an alternative to or choice of intimate relationships (Libby, 1977). According to Stein (1976), "single" is a word used to categorize a vast and divergent group of persons in order to treat them on the basis of one common criterion – their non-marriage. Among the recent literature, Lewis (1994) stated that "single" refers to a heterogeneous group encompassing three main categories – always single, divorced, and widowed. She continued to refer to "single" as: "women in long-term committed relationships; women dating or not dating but who hope to marry; women who hope to find a partner but have no intention of being legally wed; confirmed singles who have no intentions of ever dating; and nuns and others with a religious mandate to remain celibate" (1994:170). In this study, I take "single" to mean "not married and never been married".

The literature review in this Chapter has two parts: (a) a review of studies of singlehood; and (b) an examination and appraisal of the major theoretical approaches developed in western societies. The major aim of the present review is to assess the current state of the knowledge of singlehood, with particular emphasis on the major theoretical approaches and empirical findings. Other aims are to note the conceptual and methodological issues involved, identify knowledge gaps, integrate and distill the findings and insights of previous investigators, and point out areas for developing research in Hong Kong.

Studies of Singlehood

In this section, I shall review the literature on the experiences of single women,

covering the causes of singlehood, the choice to remain single, their lifestyle, the stereotypes attached to them and their psychological adjustment.

Etiology of Singlehood.

Stein (1976) identified some of the pushes and pulls towards and away from singlehood and marriage. He described negative factors that might draw a person from a situation as "pushes" and the positive factors that might draw a person toward a situation as "pulls". The "pulls" toward singlehood included career opportunities, variety of experiences, self-sufficiency, sexual availability, exciting lifestyle, freedom to change and experiment, mobility, sustaining friendships, and supportive relationships such as men's and women's groups, group living, and specialized groups. Pushes toward singlehood included suffocating one-to-one relationships, obstacles to self-development, boredom, unhappiness and anger, role playing and conforming to the expectations of others. Stein also listed pulls and pushes toward marriage, most of which involved economic, emotional, and sexual security, and the influence of parents. Similarly, Simon (1987) gave the following explanations for the growth in singlehood among women: (1) increased female participation in the labor market and working women becoming more financially independent; (2) increased availability, acceptance, and use of contraception and abortion making heterosexual intimacy without marriage more likely; (3) the cultural impact of feminism and the gay rights movement; (4) more unmarried women than unmarried men in their 30s and 40s resulting in a scarcity of marriageable men; (5) unavailability of eligible men as a result of advanced education and careers among women. Educated and career women preferred to marry men of equivalent or superior education, and of a similar or slightly older age.

Among those factors, the economic ones are perhaps the most commonly heard. As women have had more education, moved into the workplace, and become capable of supporting themselves, in far greater numbers than ever before, they have felt less pressure to get married to achieve financial security. Adams (1971) suggested that for a single woman's successful adaptation, she must be economically independent and socially and psychologically autonomous and she must have a clear preference to be single. Several studies (Spreitzer & Riley, 1974; Carter & Glick, 1976) indicated that

12

the frequency of the intention not to marry or postponement of the desired time for marriage increased with education. An examination of the characteristics of working single women showed a bimodal distribution; one group was young and uneducated, and the other group was older and better educated. Many of those in the younger group were likely to marry at some later time, whereas many of the more educated, older group were likely to meet Adams' criteria for successful adaptation for remaining single. There was also a continuing trend among women to gain professional and high level qualifications. Some of them delayed marriage or remained unmarried for the sake of career advancement. By the same token, careers provided single women with more opportunities to strive towards individuality and autonomy. Gordon (1994) also agreed that well-educated, professional women were more likely to remain single than other groups of women. She gave the following explanations: (1) these women were economically reasonably well placed to remain single; (2) they had studied for a relatively long time, had postponed marriage and thus ended up single; (3) they had concentrated on building their careers and paid less attention to relationships; and (4) the available pool of partners had narrowed as men tended to marry down in age and women tended to marry up. The issue of the significance of work leading to singlehood will be discussed in Chapter 3.

To summarize, the factors explaining the increase in numbers of single women as shown by the captioned literature included the pursuing of advanced education, the emphasis on career achievement, and their growing economic independence, etc. In the literature on single women, many researchers focused on developing an overall theoretical formulation about why people had chosen to delay their marriage or remain single. However, I speculate that factors affecting people's decision to postpone their marriage or remain single may be different. The decision to delay marriage may be one of the contributing factors leading to singlehood. It thus deserves further study.

Singlehood as A Choice

Stein (1978), in his work, attempted to include the elements of choice and permanence of choice about singlehood. He classified single people according to whether singlehood was voluntary or involuntary and whether it was stable or

temporary. These categories assumed that we could determine the extent to which single people wanted or did not want to be single at a particular time, and the extent to which they defined the single state as a temporary one or a relatively stable one. Such a classification was a way of identifying and determining the extent of a single woman's probable commitment to a single life. One category was named as "temporary, voluntary single" and another group called the "stable, voluntary singles". These two groups of single women valued singlehood and took it by choice. The only distinction between them was that single women in the latter group had no serious intention of marriage at all, whereas those in the former group would examine each offer of marriage as an authentic opportunity. The other two groups were called the "temporary, involuntary single" and "stable, involuntary singles" respectively. These two groups of single women did not want to be single. The "stable, involuntary singles" had not found a mate, and had come to accept being single as a probable life situation. Shostak (1987) also developed similar typologies to Stein's in classifying single people. Within the group who were unlikely to marry and/or who had become committed to singlehood, Shostak (1987) differentiated between the "resolved" (those who had chosen to be single) and the "regretful" (those who would wish to marry but seemed unlikely to do so). Among the temporarily singles, he similarly differentiated between those who were voluntarily and involuntarily by labeling them as the "ambivalents" and the "wishfuls" respectively. According to Spurlock (1990), a woman's decisions to remain single or not changed over time.

In both the studies by Stein (1981) and Shostak (1987), the considerations and decisions to remain single were viewed from a cognitive development point of view. However, it seems difficult to assess an individual's intention to be single. Some women may delay getting married but they may not determine to be single. Except for those who choose singlehood out of conviction and with commitment, it seems difficult to have their choice of singlehood confirmed. Moreover, personal decisions can never be separated from the cognitive evaluation of the social reality. Further researches tapping into single women's perception of the values, attitudes, norms and demands of the outer environment in the decision making process are needed. For instance, positive attitudes toward women choosing singlehood lead to more women considering taking this as one of the options in addition to marriage.

Adams (1976) agreed that age regulated social opportunity and therefore, to a large extent, determined options for living and personal and social aspirations. Levinson et al. (1974) suggested that the years from the early 20s to about 28 were the period for shifting one's life focus from the "family of origin to a new home base in an effort to form an adult life of one's own" (1974:246). Some single women might consciously postpone their marriage in order to acquire higher education or career advancement. Possibilities for getting married still existed. By their late 20s, most women, who were still unmarried, might experience intense societal and parental pressures to marry. When they were in their 30s and over, some single women began to recognize the possibility of permanent singlehood, because the number of single men of an appropriate age had become less and their married peers would be caught up in a web of their social and domestic activities (Adams, 1971). Even those whose first preference was marriage were compelled to adjust to their single life. But Adams (1976) also suggested that those women who remained unmarried past 30 "are beginning to build up economic independence, an investment in work, and a viable value system that allows them to identify and exploit major sources of personal and social satisfaction in other areas than marriage and the family" (1976:778). Campbell (1975) found that single women over 30 tended to be contented with their lives. He explained that "because the longer a woman remains single, the more she likes it, or at least adjusts to it, and because she is more likely to hold a satisfying, better-paying job and to have a well-defined career." Loewenstein et al. (1981) replicated what Campbell said. However, some respondents in their study reported difficulties; a lack of companionship or sexual partners, having the sole care of family members, making decisions alone, financial problems, loneliness, and fear of the future.

Lifestyle of Single Women.

Some researchers focused their attention on the lifestyle of single women. Stein (1976) conducted a survey of single adults and some reported that they had achieved a viable single lifestyle. Those who had a viable lifestyle were middle-class and well-educated, had stable incomes to provide the basis for their independence, and had a wide circle of friends.

Work can be very important for single people, not just as essential bread-winning but to bring a measure of fulfillment. With work, single women can afford to purchase their own living place. According to Spurlock (1990:26), housing was less likely to be a problem for single women who were economically secure. However, high rents, safety and discrimination were problems for single women who lived alone. While owning one's living place gave a sense of dignity, single women could also feel a comparative sense of coldness and emptiness.

While work constitutes obligatory adult social roles in our culture, friendship constitutes an optional social role. For single adults, friends and friendship networks constituted a major source of social support (Adams, 1976; Starr & Carns, 1972; Weiss, 1981). The importance of close, caring friendships, based on free choice and developing into a sense of mutuality, were emphasized by single adults (Stein, 1976). Friendships and networking with other single women took up a significant amount of time and provided considerable pleasure and support for many single women (Spurlock, 1990). Most single women made friends with those who were also single. It is suggested, by social comparison theory, that people are motivated to validate their notions of social reality by comparing their own performances and opinions with these of other people (Wills, 1985). Some needed to talk to friends from a similar background and this was considered to be one of the best ways of alleviating feelings of loneliness and depression (Gouldner & Strong, 1987). Although single women needed other friends of same marital status, Anderson & Stewart (1994) found that they also wanted friendships with married women. The respondents of Anderson & Stewart's study revealed that married women were more dependable since single women tended to abandon friends if they were dating a man. Married friends who had children also offered single women the pleasures of family life.

The literature also discussed how single women related with opposite-sex friends (Wilkinson, 1995). Some studies indicated it was easier for single women to make friendships with people of the same sex than the opposite sex. According to Stein (1976), the reason was that dating patterns set limits on the degree of openness and honesty between men and women, and limits were also placed on friendships between

the sexes. The study of Frieze and his associates (1978) also suggested three reasons. Firstly, most single women were employed in sex-segregated occupations, such as clerical work, domestic work, nursing, teaching, and social work. Therefore, friends who came from their work setting would probably be women. Secondly, women were easier to confide in than men because of women's capacities for empathic listening and nurturance. They often engaged in more intimate conversation and more self-disclosure. Finally, they reported that close relationships with men usually led to sexual advances. Indeed, they often encountered a cultural taboo against single women forming too close a bond with married men. In spite of the cultural taboo or the limitations imposed upon single women in interacting with friends of the opposite sex, the single women in the study of Anderson & Stewart (1994) reported that their lives were so full that they simply did not want to spend their spare time dating with opposite-sex friends.

Stereotypes of Single Women.

In the past, it was commonly held that marriage and motherhood were essential to feminine fulfillment; women who remained unmarried suffered from stereotyping. From the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, single women, no matter their age, were labeled "old maids." During the 1930s and early 1940s, single women were usually referred to as "spinsters." The 1950s and 1960s saw an increase in the number of single adults in America as a result of the growing trend to postpone marriage for advanced education. During the 1970s, sexual freedom permeated the prevailing morality as a result of more effective means of birth control. It led to the development of the "swinging singles" stereotype. During the 1980s, the literature used the following words to describe singles: growing, affluent, introspective, hardworking, health-conscious, altruistic, and mobile. Each quality added a new dimension to our concept of singlehood as we entered the 1990s (Koons & Anthony, 1991). It appears that the stereotype changes with each decade, but the challenge facing us today is determining to what degree any stereotype is accurate and to what degree it is a collection of myths.

There is some literature about the stereotypes of single women. Baker (1968)

compared the personal and social adjustment of 38 never-married women and 38 married mothers. The data did not indicate any characteristic personality pattern unique to the never-married women, and thus certain contemporary stereotypes insisting that marriage and motherhood were essential to feminine fulfillment were not supported. Etaugh and Malstrom (1981) also conducted a study to examine perceptions of the personal and professional characteristics of individuals of varied marital status. Drawing evidence from previous studies, Etaugh and Malstrom hypothesized that singlehood was a less desirable and less natural state than marriage. Fifty-six female and 112 male college students between the ages of 18 and 21 were chosen as subjects. They were asked to read a brief description of a person and rated the individual on 20 seven-point bipolar scales that described personal traits (e.g. sociable, happy, secure) and professional performance characteristics (e.g. dedicated to career, professionally competent, successful in job). They then rated one of eight persons who were described either as male or female, and either as married, widowed, divorced, or never-married. The results of this study supported the hypothesis that the married individuals were perceived more favorably than all groups of unmarried individuals.

The results of these studies provided empirical evidence for the existence of stereotypes about the characteristics of married and unmarried persons. Certainly, some single women were unhappy, but so were some married women. However, these two studies are now quite old. As a result of their research data, Anderson & Stewart (1994) became convinced that the stereotyped portrayals of single women were grossly exaggerated and often fictitious. Although most women, at some point during their lives experienced feelings of depression, misery, or desperation, these feelings did not dominate their life stories. They also concluded that the cultural images of single women were in fact cultural myths (Anderson & Stewart, 1994:15). Gordon (1994) also reported that single women have been stereotyped both as 'old maids' and as 'city singles'. These stereotypes marginalized single women in family-centred societies. In the midst of changes in family forms, the position of single women was changing. But they were also fraught with tensions and contradictions during the process of change.

Psychological Adjustment of Single Women.

Surveys were conducted to study psychological well-being and its relationship with sex and different marital statuses. Bernard (1972) argued that marriage was more beneficial to males than to females, and that some symptoms of psychological stress were more frequent among married women than among those in any other marital status. However, Glenn (1975) suggested that the psychological benefits of marriage were strong enough to outweigh the stressful consequences. The benefits especially referred to the companionship in marriage. He further spelt out that women exceeded men in both the stress and satisfaction they obtained from the marital relationship. This thus indicated that the relationship between marital statuses and psychological well-being among married and single persons remained equivocal, indicating a need for a detailed and more current examination of singlehood.

Gigy (1980) undertook a study to explore the similarities and differences in the self-concepts of single and married women. The results of the study did not support the description of single women as having lower self-esteem and a negative self-concept. Instead, the single respondents gave reasons for not marrying such as self-assertiveness, determination, or independence. Single women placed a high value on personal growth and achievement whereas the married women chose good interpersonal relations. Single women rated significantly higher on a positive sense of self-determination. They appeared to be able to withstand the negative social sanction associated with their status. Since the study found no significant differences between the single and married women, it was a strong indication that the stereotypes were not valid. Nadelson and Notman (1981) agreed that the changing role and increased reproductive control had given women greater choice about the direction of their lives including their future marriage. Baruch, Barnett and Rivers (1983) conducted a study to examine the effects of marital status and employment on life-adjustment. In their study, women who were married and had children and a high prestige job had the highest level of well-being. However, they concluded that a high prestige job rather than a husband was associated with well-being. They also suggested that being single was in itself not a predictor of a lack of well-being, but that being single and in a low prestige job was.

Researchers have also attempted to study single women's inner feelings, perceptions and experiences. Loewenstein et. al (1981) conducted an exploratory study by semi-structured interviews with 60 single women between 35 and 65 years old. They were interviewed about the satisfactions and stresses of single status. The majority of women in this sample could be considered highly satisfied or reasonably content, with only 15 percent experiencing dissatisfaction, with their lives. The data suggested that some single women led a satisfactory, fulfilling life without the alleged benefits of sex, marriage, or motherhood. Burnley and Kurth (1992) conducted a study to examine aloneness and loneliness. It was often assumed that persons who were alone were lonely. Therefore, persons who lived alone or were not formally attached in an intimate relationship (e.g. singles, widowed, divorced) were often assumed to be lonely. Although most respondents in the study lived alone and spent a considerable amount of time alone, they did not report feeling lonely. They had developed social support networks among friends and kin and did not necessarily anticipate loneliness as they grew older. Marital status was not necessarily an appropriate independent variable in assessing loneliness. Never-married women might spend time alone, but they were not necessarily lonely. Their social relationships and lifestyle provided protection from loneliness although they might spend a considerable amount of time alone. Adams (1976) noted that single women had to come to terms with the possibility of current periods of loneliness in the course of achieving psychological autonomy during singlehood. The single woman had to come to grips with reality and develop her life plans.

Not only the individual single woman, but also her family was apt to experience anxiety about her singlehood. Kaslow's (1992) study was conducted mainly to ascertain the attitudes of the over 30 and not married women about their singlehood, and their perceptions about their parents', friends', colleagues' and siblings' attitudes about their being unmarried. Their attitudes toward marrying in the future were also explored. Most of the respondents held positive attitudes toward singlehood, appreciated their accomplishments, and enjoyed their freedom, autonomy and independence. However, they had mixed feelings about what they did not have – partners with whom to share intimate feelings and thoughts. Not only the individual single woman, but also her family was apt to experience anxiety about her singlehood.

Kaslow (1992) suggested that the single woman had to share her dreams with her parents. At the same time, their disappointment over the possible lack of a son-in-law and grandchildren must be acknowledged. Being able to talk this through helped to clarify any misunderstanding and reinforce their support of one another.

To sum up, the causes of singlehood, a choice to remain single, the stereotypes of their lifestyle, and their psychological adjustment are significant aspects of the experience of women in the process of singlehood. However, while a number of studies of single women have been conducted, little research has been done to examine the experience of the single men. The scarce literature on single men suggests that fewer stereotypes were attached to single men than to single women. According to Schwartzberg et al. (1995), men rather than women are socialized to take their finances seriously. They revealed that "high achieving women are frequently seen as hard-bitten, while successful men were thought to be good catches" (1995:8). Koons and Anthony (1991) studied single men who were affiliated with the Christian church. When responding to the question "what was the greatest disadvantage of being single", their highest-ranked answer was loneliness. When asked to respond to what they considered the greatest advantages of being single, their responses were (1) freedom and mobility; (2) time to pursue personal interests and hobbies; (3) social life in general, such as eating out, entertaining; and (4) privacy. The responses of these single men seemed to coincide with the findings of single women. Further studies to compare the experience of single men and women are needed.

Perspectives on Studying Singlehood among Women

The analysis here will be confined to mainstream theories and perspectives that are relevant to singlehood. These are (1) developmental perspectives; (2) the contextual perspective; (3) role/socialization theories; (4) perspectives on human needs; and (5) feminist theories.

Developmental Perspectives.

According to major developmental perspectives, life progresses sequentially along a continuum of stages "from cradle to grave" with one stage built on top of the other. Deficits during earlier stages can hinder full development in later life. The life issues that emerge at each stage derive from biological, social, and psychological sources.

Erikson (1963) described eight life stages, each with its time of ascendancy and characterized by a conflict between two polarities of a psycho-social kind. In stage six, which occurred in early adulthood, the developmental issues suggested by Erikson were "intimacy versus isolation." After finishing the search for identity, the adult was ready for intimacy and was able to commit himself/herself to a close, long-term relationship. The conflict that occurred during middle age was the crisis of "generativity versus stagnation." Generativity was the giving of one's energies to others. The generative person made efforts to foster the development of others through responsible parenthood, mentoring, generating ideas, and productive activity. The other end of the spectrum was stagnation, or self-absorption.

Another developmental theorist, Havighurst (1953) explained human development in terms of eight stages. Each stage was characterized by a set of tasks. The specific developmental tasks of early adulthood were: (1) getting started in an occupation; (2) selecting a mate; (3) learning to live with a marriage partner; (4) starting a family; (5) rearing children; (6) managing a home; (7) taking on civic responsibility; and (8) finding a congenial social group. Marriage became proof of maturity, the only acceptable way to move into the adult world. Deviation in performing this transitional task became pathological.

Levinson et al. (1978) focused on relatively universal, age-linked developmental periods that unfolded in an orderly sequence. They began a longitudinal study with a group of 40 men, aged 35 to 45, which represented a wide variety of occupational and social characteristics. Levinson and his associates explored in depth six distinct periods, of which each was closely linked to age. These six stages were:

1) Early adult transition or leaving the family (ages 16-20);

2) Entering the adult world (ages 21-29);

3) Settling down (ages 30-34);

4) Becoming one's own person (ages 35-39);

5) Mid-life transition (ages 40-42); and

6) Re-stablilization (ages 43-50).

Each period was characterized by its developmental tasks. For instance, during the settling down period an individual was concerned with establishing a place in society and with advancing toward their goals. Levinson and his associates also suggested that each of the three major adult stages was preceded by a five-year period of transition that enabled an individual to shed the dominant behavioral characteristics of previous stages and become a more mature individual. They described the life cycle in terms of crisis management, with major tasks to be achieved during stages that lasted approximately 15 years each.

From this brief review of the developmental perspectives, it is evident that research and objective materials on single people, especially women, are lacking. Freud and Erikson omitted research on single people. Havighurst built up his theory of adult development on the marriage model. Five of the eight tasks he assigned to early adulthood required a marriage relationship for an individual to grow into a "healthy" young adult. Levinson's perspective was based only on the development of males, and his theories were based on the experiences of those who were married or divorced. In his later research, Levinson (1989) suggested that the hypothesized patterns operated in women's lives as well. Roberts & Newton (1987), after a review of four dissertation studies, found that women progressed through the same developmental periods at roughly the same ages as the men in Levinson's work. However, despite similarity in the timing of the periods and the nature of the developmental tasks, both the strategies for addressing the tasks and the outcomes were different for women in these samples.

The developmental perspective has been challenged because of its apparent simplicity - that is, its lack of fit with the complexities of people's lives and its overtones of determinism (Allatt & Keil 1987). If we follow these views, we tend to

judge an individual, at least in part, according to the position he or she holds on a chart of so-called normal human development. Everyone is supposed to be pigeonholed into a role that reflects certain cultural values. According to such standards, there continues to be strong cultural pressure for people to opt for marriage. Especially for females, marriage is usually portrayed as a norm, a desirable goal to be achieved as soon as possible. Parents may disapprove of serious career commitments that may reduce their daughter's marriageability, and other people may label single women as "aggressive" women. Such pressure is perhaps sufficient to discourage a young woman from taking further steps toward independence and self-realization. It may be why some single women report great pressures during their late 20's when they strive for more autonomy and career advancement (Wilkinson, 1995).

In response to the over-simplification of the developmental perspectives, the life spiral model introduced by Etzkowitz and Stein (cited in Stein, 1981) suggested that development was not necessarily related to chronological age. Life was an ongoing process with themes and patterns that repeated themselves. Such a model might reflect varying patterns of adulthood more accurately by accommodating a pluralistic universe of adult life styles and structures, incorporating both traditional and alternative roles in the life course. This enabled us not to view the single women who chose alternate paths of adult life as deviants. The focus was on identifying the presence or absence of traditional patterns, on the emergence of new roles, and on alternative sequences of new and old roles.

In addition to over-simplification, developmental perspectives were based on a biological and social analysis that ignored individual differences. The woman who postponed marriage might reduce her chances of ever marrying. The shrinking pool of unmarried men might make it harder for a single woman to find an appropriate mate when she got older (Frieze et al., 1978). Moreover, after she reached the age of 30, our societal definitions of attractiveness might make her less physically attractive to men. On top of that, a woman might need to consider the long-range consequences of remaining single. She had to work out her life plan and goals. Therefore, the nature and extent of social changes that affected the lives of adult women, as well as the emergence of new adult roles, called into question the validity of the life cycle model

composed of stages.

Contextual Perspectives.

The contextual perspectives view adulthood primarily in relation to the context within which it occurs. Bertaux (1982) illustrated the importance of context. He suggested ways to help people identify the social factors that might lie at the root of some of their personal problems. Researchers like Rosenbaum (1979) and Kanter (1977) first challenged the popular view attributing the mid-life crisis to an individual's confrontation with aging. They suggested an alternate view that focused on the impact of organizations on individuals. Some recent theorists have begun to examine the impact of context on an individual's life in a broader perspective. A popular view of the impact of context came from Hagestad & Neugarten (1985). According to them, nearly all cultures celebrated rites of passage for birth, puberty, marriage, death, and other predictable punctuation marks of the life-course. A full understanding of these transitions required an examination of cultural norms and age constraints as well as consideration of three kinds of time: individual, family, and historical (Hareven, 1992). Individual time was the life-course through which individuals followed age-differentiated roles and events. Family time referred to the changes over the family life course that came with the intersection of individuals and family biography and transactions between the family, economy, and state. Historical time referred to the historical context in which people were located. Members of the same birth cohort shared a similar socio-historical background. For instance, a decision to have a baby appeared to be an individual couple's decision; yet the decision was dependent on the social and demographic factors operating in the couple's culture at a particular time.

It also seemed that historical context or trends had a definite impact on the chronological and social norms for age-appropriate behavior. Norms appeared to be blurring and loosening up in today's society (Neugarten & Neugarten, 1987). Such blurring of age-defined roles and tasks represented flexibility and freedom for many. However, when people maintained traditionally defined internal timetables that were at odds with their actual situation, they might be susceptible to anxiety and conflict.

Based on the contextual perspectives, in exploring an individual woman's experience of singlehood, it was necessary to consider how she incorporated prevailing ideological notions about femininity and marriage. Marriage was a marker for the culture, family, and self in the expected progression from dependency to adulthood. If the milestone of marriage had not been achieved, it could have a profound impact on one's sense of place in the surrounding social milieu, one's position in the family, and one's evaluation of self. For the majority of people and the culture as a whole, couplehood remained the desired state (Staples & Johnson, 1993). As long as marriage was the standard, single people were pushed to the margins of a married world (Simon, 1987). Marriage, as an institution, represented a desire for intimacy. It also created the context for the sanctioned way of expressing sexuality, raising children, and becoming part of the family-oriented community that was society's norm. The absence of marriage thus left the adult in uncharted territory, where there was no legitimate social role beyond a certain age.

Besides the wider social context, the family was perhaps the most powerful context influencing a person's life (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). To parents, their children's marriage could be a signal that they had successfully reared them to "mature adulthood," especially in the eyes of the surrounding culture. Therefore, in considering these underlying cultural and family ideologies, single women were placed in a position of "marginalization by society" and "deviation from family's expectation" (Gordon, 1994).

Role/Socialization Theories.

Gender role theories suggest that, since men and women are socialized differently, they will end up performing differently. At the root of this social phenomenon is the idea of gender role socialization.

(1) Definition of gender role

Angrist (1969) reviewed gender role definitions in terms of the predominant meanings of role as position, behavior, or relationship. When gender role was defined

as a position, it usually involved the division of labor by gender in structural groups. Sets of expectations arose from positions that one held (Sales, 1978). For instance, men were responsible for earning income while women had to take care of children and do household chores. When it was defined as behavior, gender role tended to refer to personality, abilities, and preference without regard to context. Men were regarded as assertive, while women behaved in a gentle, "feminine" way. Gender role could also be defined as a relationship in which both male and female might learn how to interact with one another. Kilmartin (1994) added that gender roles also included norms and stereotypes that had emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and unconscious components. They were deeply ingrained in individuals, families, social customs, laws, and institutions.

(2) Acquisition of gender-role stereotypes

How are gender-role stereotypes acquired? Ashmore & DelBoca (1981) suggested that gender-role stereotypes should be regarded as cultural constructs, transmitted to the individual through some, usually unspecified, processes of socialization.

First, we learn our gender-roles from agents of socialization. The basis of gender identity is established in a person's childhood, particularly in the family, at school, with peers, and by the mass media. Various socialization agents may influence an individual at different stages of development. For instance, he/she will rely mostly on parents during his/her early childhood, peers and schools are particularly significant during late childhood and adolescence, and the mass media exert a continuing influence throughout the life cycle. These socialization agents gradually shape the unique male and female's characteristics. Men are described as competitive, aggressive and task-oriented, whereas women are required to be submissive, gentle and family-oriented.

Second, groups and inter-group relations acquire gender-role stereotypes. As suggested by DelBoca & Ashmore (1980), the analysis of gender-role stereotypes could not ignore either the individual level (e.g. gender-role attitudes and prejudice against women) or the societal level (e.g. institutional arrangements that discriminate on the

basis of sex). For instance, sex typing of the professions reflects sex ranking. Medicine, law, and engineering are sex-typed as male occupations; nursing and social work are female professions. Male professions are more prestigious than female professions. Nolen-Hoeksema (1990) suggested that women who entered male-dominated professions would be defined as social deviants since they assumed roles that violated the stereotypic expectations for "feminine" behavior. They were placed in a stressful situation. Even if a woman succeeded in a task, people tended to attribute her success to luck. But when a man did well at a task, they tended to attribute his success to ability.

(3) <u>Gender-role stereotypes of male/female</u>

As discussed by O'Neil (1982), one of the features of the masculine stereotype was a persistent preoccupation with work, accomplishments, and eminence. Many men associated masculinity with competition, achievement, ambition, and success at work, status, wealth, power, and influence. A variety of social and cultural forces also encouraged men to be inexpressive. They were urged to deny the experience of most of their emotions. Vulnerability and direct expression of feelings would look feminine in the eyes of others. Because of the fear of femininity, gender-role stereotypes restricted affectionate behavior between men. Interpersonal closeness among men was prohibited. On top of these gender-role stereotypes, the masculine socialization process was wholly oriented to preparing men for the working world. Men were banished from their homes and were encouraged to devalue domestic work. It was thus no surprise that many men were not very relationship oriented. They spent most of the time on tasks away from their families.

As with men, gender-role stereotypes are also imposed on women. First, women had been regarded traditionally as inferior to men. They could not develop their humanity to the fullest extent without fusion with a male personality (Baker, 1968). Gender-role stereotypes thus assigned women to dependent, passive, and irrational roles. Baker's findings were further developed and supported by social role theorists. Nolen-Hoeksema (1990) suggested that women acquired a sense of helplessness and defeat, and frequently experienced a lack of control over important outcomes. Second, Hirsch

28

& Rapkin (1986) suggested that the feminine personality is destined by nature to domestic pursuits. It was primarily through marriage and motherhood that a woman must fulfill herself as a person. For women, marriage brought security and established their identity – not as persons in their own right, but as someone's wife. The entry of married women into the paid labor force had not substantially lessened their responsibilities towards home and family. The principal burdens of multiple roles seemed to fall disproportionately on women.

(4) Stereotypes of heterosexual relationship

Frieze et al., (1978) suggested that society assumed that there were distinct differences between males and females in interpersonal relationships. Boys, during the socialization process, had been indoctrinated with the message that females were inferior. Men remained dominant in many spheres, for instance, taking the initiative in dating and proposing marriage. In selecting an appropriate mate, men tended to select those who were less educated and competent than they were. Men were often threatened by a woman who was more successful than they were. For a highly successful woman, this might severely limit the pool of men she could socialize with. As a result, women with strong, independent personalities were bypassed more often than their sisters with less outstanding qualities (Knupfer et al., 1966). Even in a husband-wife relationship, the husband was the "head of the household" whereas the wife was expected to submit to her husband.

Such gender role socialization theories had shaped and/or influenced the structure and dynamics of society in a number of ways. For instance, the main function of gender roles was to help people categorize events. However, people tended to overgeneralize and thus stereotyped the characteristics of male and female. Gender-role stereotypes took the form of unquestioned, socially shared beliefs and images of how men and women were (Pleck, 1981). When women assumed roles that violated the stereotypical expectations for "feminine" behavior, they were placed in a situation that was potentially stressful for themselves and others (Frieze et al., 1978).

According to Wilkinson (1995), single women were characterized as self-sufficient,

independent, enjoying their privacy, and as putting their own needs first. These characteristics were opposite to the traditional norms which encouraged women to become compliant, dependent, selfless, and to put the emotional needs of others before their own. Their income provided single women with the basis for their independence and self-sufficiency. They enjoyed the freedom of choosing how to spend their money. Unlike married women, they need not be tied down to joint financial decisions. Yet, they might experience pressure because they had to take total responsibility and make all decisions.

Besides the unique characteristic of independence, single women typically deviated from the feminine norms of marriage. They had not embarked on a socially prescribed role, either by choice or by chance. The people around them might disapprove of them. People often reacted negatively to social deviance, because it created difficulties in their own role performance (Frieze et al., 1978). Single women became an awkward group when they intruded into the coupled community. They also encountered difficulties in interacting with their family, friends and relatives. For instance, parents were deprived of the chance to have grandchildren so they might impose certain kinds of pressures upon their single daughters aimed at forcing them towards marriage.

Single women also experienced stresses resulting from the stereotypes of heterosexual relationships. Men were placed to occupy high status positions, exercise primary decision-making and political power, and also tended to be dominant at interpersonal levels. These were some of the impeding factors leading to women being less achievement-oriented than men. Successful achievement was not only unexpected for a woman, it might also be considered unfeminine, both by herself and others (Hoffman, 1972). Some studies also suggested that female successes were more likely to be attributed to unstable factors such as luck or effort. A single woman was faced with a dilemma. It seemed acceptable for her to take her "feminine" role in the organizational structure. But if she appeared to be competent in her job, she might experience a certain amount of adverse pressure associated with being labeled an "oddity".

Due to rigid gender-role stereotypes, single women might experience stress resulting from overt and covert discrimination. The above paragraph suggested that women experienced stress from sex segregation in jobs that reflected sex ranking. It was argued that men and women had different talents and personality characteristics that made them suitable for different jobs. Women were nurturant and patient, which better prepared them for service positions. Men were assertive, analytical and decisive, which made them better for business, law and medicine. Even though some professional fields accepted a high proportion of female entrants, prejudice still prevailed. Another emotionally damaging type of discrimination against women in the working place was sexual harassment (Hamilton et al., 1987). Davidson & Earnshaw (1990) quoted the definition of sexual harassment from the Trade Union Congress as follows: "... repeated and unwanted verbal or sexual advances ... made by someone in the workplace which are offensive to the worker involved, which cause the worker to feel threatened, humiliated, patronized or harassed, or which interfere with the worker's job performance, undermine job security, or create a threatening or intimidating work environment." Many women were forced to tolerate sexual harassment because they could not afford to quit their job. Single women especially had to maintain their job for the sake of their economic security. They coped by ignoring or avoiding harassment. But the situation usually escalated (Crull, 1984) and led to stress.

Role/socialization theories provide a thorough analysis of how roles are learned during the socialization process through such agents as family, school, church, and mass media. A set of role constellations helps to govern people's behavior. Gender role stereotypes exert a strong influence upon people. These may be regarded as exceptions when they differ from the stereotypes. As mentioned, men are expected to control their emotions but they appear to lose their temper more easily. Similarly, women tend to play contradictory roles at home and at work. The norms themselves also create conflicting messages. For example, society agrees that it is exceedingly difficult for women to earn self-respect in their traditional roles. However, the norms of marriage and maternity have meant that few women can achieve self-esteem if they do not marry and have children. The definition of gender-role reflects period and cohort effects as well. Given the substantial amount of change in the meaning of gender-role (i.e., the expectations surrounding women's and men's lives) that has

occurred in recent decades, it is difficult to determine whether earlier findings about gender-roles remain evident today. Rapidly changing social norms and values require that researchers consider and document the potential implications of gender-role variations in their findings. Furthermore, researchers need to consider individual variations in defining their role.

The Perspective of Human Needs.

Marriage is a normal developmental task or state for adults. It can help to fulfill their economic and psychological needs. For the individual, marriage is a means for the fulfillment of personal desires for happiness, companionship, security, and children. There is also the support to self-esteem in the confirmation of being desired.

Glenn (1975) found from three US national surveys that married persons were happier than divorced, separated, or never-married persons. He found that the difference was somewhat greater for females than for males. Besides the fulfillment of personal needs for happiness, marriage could solve the problem of loneliness. The desire to have children fueled some women's wish to marry as much as, or more than, their need for social status, companionship and financial security (Hafner, 1993). Moreover, in a marriage, a partner's evaluation was salient in determining each other's self-esteem (Schafer & Keith, 1985). It is understood that a lack of normative and institutional support may erode the self-esteem of an individual. Self-esteem is formed from interaction with others and through interpretation of the responses of one another. The couple's interaction can lead each to feel loved and esteemed.

It is clear that marriage is a marker for the culture, family, and self in the expected progression from dependency to adulthood. People could enjoy psychological and economic benefits in marriage, and thus it remained prominent in many young women's ambitions as the basis of personal happiness and female fulfillment (Chandler, 1991). To follow the logic of Chandler's thinking, the absence of marriage may therefore leave the single women in uncharted territory, where there is no legal social role beyond a certain age. Feeling "deviant" with regards to marital status may create a burden for single women.

As with the developmental perspectives and role/socialization theories, the perspective of human needs stresses the significance of marriage. It is regarded as an institution in which emotional and economic needs can be fulfilled. As suggested by Davies (1995), marital status was a social structural arrangement that affected well-being by shaping one's support network, economic situation, life events and health behaviors.

However, when considering the increasing divorce rate and diversity in family's forms, this perspective may not be adequate to explain such phenomena. In the absence of a spouse, how do individuals (e.g. single women) enjoy a sense of social cohesion, integration and regulation that promotes longevity, supportive social networks, emotional stability and health. Several studies (Bernard, 1972; Gigy, 1980; Baruch et al., 1983) suggested that being single was not an independent variable of women's well-being. Some other intervening variables may lead to the need fulfillment of single women. Thus, the pattern of well-being among single women deserves further attention from researchers.

Feminist Theory.

What is feminism? There has been no single definition of feminism. Different scholars have their own views. These include:

"The advocacy of the rights and equality of women in social, political and economic spheres, and a commitment to the fundamental alteration of women's role in society" (Bullock & Stallybrass, 1977:231).

"Feminism begins with the premise that women's and men's positions in society are the result of social, not natural or biological, factors... feminists generally see social institutions and social attitudes as the basis for women's positions in society. Feminism is a way of both thinking and acting... Feminists see women's status as socially, not biologically, caused. Therefore, they believe that women's status is subject to change." (Andersen, 1993:4)

33

Although there is no agreed universal definition, most feminists would be able to share a "baseline" definition. The baseline starts with the recognition of gender inequality and the disadvantageous position of women in the society that is rooted in discrimination based on gender perpetuated by political, social and economic systems. The major tenet asserts that the family upholds and reflects the patriarchal culture of society, which emphasizes male domination and female subordination. Furthermore, gender inequality is supported and reinforced by the social, economic and legal structures that are deeply entrenched in the history and traditions of Western societies.

Feminists often use the concept "patriarchy" to describe heterosexual relationships. What is patriarchy? According to Gittins (1993), patriarchy was about power and presupposes "inequality, subordination and dependence" in relations between men and women, in marriage and beyond. The institution of patriarchy originated in agricultural societies. By the system of patriarchy, the males inherited property from their fathers and passed it on to their sons. This system thus developed the social and economic dominance of men. Women were confined by their roles to marriage and maternity. After marriage, they took up the traditional activities of caring for children and doing household chores. Women's domestic relationships and their role within reproduction weakened their bargaining position in the labor market (Chandler, 1991). Women who worked were generally regarded as supplementing the family income. The concept of patriarchy influenced the lives of all women, both in the family and work setting. Working women were perceived as being unfit for male-dominated professions due to their feminine attributes. Job segregation was the basis of men's control over women's labor since it led to lower wages for women (Walby, 1990). Epstein (1970) found that women still belonged to a minority group that had not gained full acceptance from fellow employees, employers, and the organizational structure. It therefore resulted in their low aspirations for career advancement.

Gender socialization is considered to play a key role in legitimizing the superordinate-subordinate relationship between men and women. Since childhood, women had been taught that the natural and legitimate tasks for them are marriage and motherhood, whilst other activities are forcefully restricted or denied. Most feminists

thus argue that parents treat their children in sexually differentiated ways and children tend to internalize stereotyped images. They identify and enact them and gender roles become a central feature of adult personality.

Even though there have been considerable social and legal changes in the status of women, it is doubtful whether the changes have significantly modified the patriarchal ideals in the family and in society. Social policies and agency practices reflective of patriarchal attitudes still remain and inadvertently help to maintain the prevalence of gender inequality. However, they stress the significance of marriage and family formation to women.

Feminist theory underscores the socio-cultural context that implicitly legitimizes gender inequality against women by men. Specifically, it alerts us to the influence of the patriarchal legacy and how gender inequality can be created and maintained, in part, by public and social policy.

By reviewing the feminist literature, it is clear that much effort has been invested in understanding women's subordination and exclusion from or marginalization within a variety of cultural and social arenas (Jackson & Jones, 1998). Feminists are interested in presenting the scenario of how men oppressed women and how women suffered from the impact of patriarchy. As a result, many studies explored the experiences of single mothers with dependent children, of women receiving unequal treatment at work, etc. On the other hand, few of them (e.g. Gordon, 1994) studied the experience of single women. The experiences of single women and single mothers might be different due to their diverse backgrounds. Moreover, the theory has been attacked for ignoring any notion of individual human actions that mutually interact with structural determinants (Health et al., 1986:294).

Feminist research methodology is founded on the principle that all men and women are potentially active agents in the construction of their surroundings. This perspective emphasized the legitimacy of women's subjective experiences and the use of qualitative research methods which had produced work rich in detail that could help to elucidate women's experiences from their own perspectives (Kirkwood, 1993; Yllo,

1983). Instead of appearing as a "neutral" data collector, the feminist researchers encourage dialogue with the informants. Through dialogue, the researchers seek to construct a coherent account of the understandings of the experience of the informants.

Critique on Current Approaches to Singlehood

The existing literature on singlehood and the diversity of theoretical approaches to it are clearly evident. Despite the changes in marital and familial formation over the last three decades, the influence of traditional theoretical perspectives on singlehood remains significant. However, new perspectives are required. It is necessary to determine if the developmental perspective is adequate and sufficient to describe the experience of single women throughout their 30s and 40s. We need to consider how and if single women's anxiety and conflicts arise as a result of differences between traditionally defined internal timetables and the context in which they find themselves. Marriage, as a marker for the individual to become a mature adult, can create a feeling of "marginalization" by social context. Role/socialization theories and the perspective of human needs pigeonholes people's self-fulfillment into getting married and having their own families. Feminist theory is also criticized for its oversimplicity in explaining singlehood.

Most of the research undertaken is very limited in the insights it offers into the ontology of singlehood. Except for the feminist approach, most of the prevalent theoretical approaches have relied heavily on evidence provided by survey methods. It is necessary to understand women's perspectives and experiences through their own eyes. Qualitative methods using interviews provide such understanding.

As yet, local studies in Hong Kong are rare. In conducting further studies, we cannot apply the theories developed in Western countries to Hong Kong since to do so would obscure the unique structural and cultural differences among societies. The concepts of singlehood delineated in Western literature have been developed within a cultural context that is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is unlikely that these concepts and models of singlehood can be directly transferred to the Chinese cultural

context that is rooted in the Confucian tradition. Moreover, given the "structural tightness" (Boldt, 1978; Pelto, 1968) of Chinese society, the Chinese are strongly influenced by their cultural heritage and have a high tendency to subscribe to the values and orientations commonly shared by Chinese people. The lack of sufficient critical scrutiny of the relevance of such assumptions can lead to erroneous interpretations of findings (Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Levinson, 1989). A dynamic understanding of singlehood locally should include a systematic and in-depth exploration of the perspectives of single women.

Singlehood is by no means an objective entity. The subjective interpretations are influenced by the standards and norms which the individuals concerned use to evaluate singlehood. Therefore, it is essential that we should attempt to understand the interpretive frameworks within which such assessments are made and within which the meaning of singlehood is determined. These frameworks constitute the cultural context of singlehood. The insights, which I have gained from my personal experience as a single woman and working experience with single women, enrich my plan of inquiry. Details of how singlehood is being perceived in the socio-cultural context of Hong Kong will be discussed in Chapter Four. This cultural review has sensitized me further towards the topic under study. It has also brought my assumptions into the open in order that subjective biases in analysis may be minimized.

Chapter Summary

The studies of singlehood in the last two decades can be grouped into several areas. The first area attempts to give definitions of singlehood and document the incidence and prevalence of singlehood. In the second area, social scientists and researchers are interested in identifying the factors contributing to singlehood. Factors are found to include the growing economic independence of women, more reliable birth control, the social acceptance of cohabitation without a marriage commitment, and the emphasis on career achievement. The third area examines the formation of stereotypes and its impact on single women. The last area studies the lifestyle and psychological adjustment of single women and their coping with singlehood.

An examination and appraisal of the major theoretical perspectives that help to explain the phenomenon of singlehood has been presented. These five perspectives are (1) developmental perspectives; (2) contextual perspectives; (3) role/socialization theories; (4) perspectives of human needs; and (5) feminist theory. In reviewing the current state of knowledge on singlehood, the conceptual and methodological issues have been noted.

Apart from feminist theory, the theoretical perspectives tend to support the view that marriage is a desirable state for people. While marriage and parenthood provide many automatic structures and rituals to locate one's life along a fairly predictable course, singlehood has very few signposts to mark the trail. Demographic data, however, show that the number of single women is increasing for a variety of reasons. No matter what factors lead to their unmarried state, single women are embedded in the cultural context and share the collective ideologies of their culture. They may have difficulty separating themselves from the larger cultural ambivalence about the single state. They may experience pressures in defining their role in the married world. Single women will make various responses to this situation. How they take the meanings of marriage and singlehood, and how they react, are the areas that need to be explored in this study.

Much of the literature agrees that work has provided women with the options of delaying marriage or remaining single. The next chapter will discuss the characteristics of work and its significance to women.

Chapter 3

Review of the Literature about Women's Employment

In Chapter One, I noted that one very significant factor leading to singlehood being an option for women is the availability of careers. Paid work means economic independence. Employment obviates the need to rely on parents, siblings, extended family, or friends for money. Economic self-reliance, in turn, purchases social autonomy. In order to understand the experience of working single women, it is necessary to highlight the role of work and its significance in leading to singlehood.

In this Chapter, the general concepts of work and the characteristics of working women will first be delineated. A specific section will discuss the historical development of women's labor participation and their present job distribution. New trends in women's labor participation will be highlighted with particular attention to the growing numbers of single working women. Barriers preventing women from participating in the labor force and their social factors will be elaborated. Satisfaction and stress that are derived from work will be considered.

What is Work?

There are definitional problems concerning the meaning of the term work. Work can take many forms and people often take for granted that, when they talk of work, they are referring to the same thing. In general, work can be divided into two main types: paid and un-paid. Paid work is often referred to as employment and consequently employment often has a narrower meaning than the term work. According to Jacques (1967), work, in its broadest sense, was defined as "the exercise of judgment or discretion within prescribed limits in order to reach a goal or objective". It referred to any task-oriented activity whether self-initiated or not, and said nothing about reward and remuneration. However, employment was defined as "the exchange relationship which exists between employer and

employee, where the employee is rewarded, usually in financial terms, for the performance of work" (Pilling, 1988:187).

Since the word "work" has also come to be synonymous with paid work (Gittins, 1993), a woman who was undertaking a full day's household activity was not assumed to be working unless she received monetary reward. Workplaces were strictly demarcated from the home and from family life (Beechy, 1992). "Housework" was commonly regarded as invisible. Nevertheless, there have been some challenges to the idea that domestic tasks were inferior to employment. Among diverse arguments, Marxists argued that while housework had no direct relation to capital and produced no surplus value, it created values through creating and servicing the labor power, i.e. male wage earners and future wage earners (Gittins, 1993). In other words, as wives, women provided services of cooking, cleaning, and clothing as well as psychological support for husbands; as mothers, they physically and emotionally cared for their children (Collins, 1988). For the purposes of the following discussion I am taking work to mean paid employment.

Why was women's working experience often different from men's? There were unrecognized beliefs about women's involvement in work. Prather (1971) suggested that women were regarded as uninterested in earning a living or in establishing their economic independence. They were put in a dependent status, dependent on father, husband, and son. There was also an unrecognized belief in society that women did not intend to work throughout their life. They would stop working after getting married or when caring for children. Even if they worked, they would work on a part-time basis. Moreover, women's work often referred to jobs such as teaching, nursing, social work, secretarial work, and manual occupations including cleaning, catering, etc., which were defined as female jobs. Actually, social, economic and ideological factors interlock with one another. The different theoretical perspectives will be discussed later in this chapter. In the following, the characteristics of working women and the development of their participation in the labor market will be delineated.

Who are the Working Women?

As I have discussed in the preceding section, women have been regarded as "invisible workers", whose labor and skills were considered insignificant in relation to those of men. Many studies of the workforce used the term "heads of household" to refer to men, whereas the phrase "secondary earners" was used to refer to women. If women worked, it was often expected that their work would be a secondary activity – that is, they would have a "job" rather than a "career".

A number of forces encouraged women to participate in the labor force. These included an accelerated demand for female labor through the growth of service and technical jobs, lower fertility rates, and the need for a good standard of living. In order to understand how the female work force developed, its historical development will be reviewed.

Historical Development of Women's Labor Participation.

Historically, men tended to be physically bigger and stronger than women and women's reproductive role confined them to the home (Kilmartin, 1994). In hunter-gatherer societies, men did the hunting and women did the gathering. In agricultural societies, the farmer needed to be relatively far from home; thus this largely became the man's job. Women were encouraged to reproduce more offspring in order to provide more help in the fields. They were also principally responsible for the domestic tasks.

With the advent of industrialization, a good deal of labor required physical strength. The sex-based division of labor became sharper than ever. Women assumed domestic duties, and men secured paid employment outside of the home. In times of labor shortages, more women took external employment. For example, during times of social upheaval, such as wars, women were drawn into the labor force to act as a reserve army (Hesse, 1979).

The period after the Second World War is regarded as a time when there was very significant and rapid developments in women's employment in both Britain and the United

41

States.   As the 1950s and 1960s progressed, there was an increase in numbers of married as well as single women in employment in Britain (Yeandle, 1984).   Most of the demand for female labor now came from the rapidly developing service sectors, e.g. clerical and sales jobs.   Opportunities for women in manufacturing industry and in electrical engineering were also developing.   The rate of increase in women's participation in paid work slowed in the early 1980s due to economic recession.   By 1990, in the United States, the growth in women's labor force participation had slowed even further, as continued economic stagnation and job losses in traditional occupation such as the retail trade took a toll on women's employment opportunities (Dunn, 1997).

The greatest change has occurred in the work rates of married women.   The influx of women, especially married women, into paid employment accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s when the women's movement played a role in making paid work appear more desirable to married women.   In 1901 in the United States, only one ever-married woman in ten was economically active.   By 1971, one in two were active in the labor force (Hakim, 1979) and in 1979, married women made up 56 percent of all women in the labor force (Wallace, 1982).   Women formed more than 40 percent of the workforce in Britain (Nicholson, 1993) in the early 1990s.   The second major change was in the pattern of women's participation in the labor force.   A new pattern of women's employment was termed the "two-phase" (bi-modal) working life.   This referred to a period of reduced participation in economic activity over the childrearing period interposed between periods of higher employment activity (Ward & Silverstone, 1980).   Caring for children, to a large extent, affected women's employment.   Some married women with children under five were likely to stop working or take up part-time jobs.   The same situation has also occurred in Hong Kong where women who entered the labor force had to work part-time or to take work back to home.   However, a major benefit of part-time work was that it gave women the flexibility to combine paid work with domestic commitments.

Although the trend first appeared in Western industrialized nations, the phenomenal growth in female labor-force participation has also been observed in many developing countries.   Overall, about one of every four females was in the labor force in Latin America (Junsay & Heaton, 1989).   Increasing numbers of women have also been economically active in Asian countries like Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka.

On the average, female labor-force participation is slightly higher in South Asia than in Latin America. In contrast, the Middle East has very low rates of female labor force participation ((Junsay & Heaton, 1989).

High rates of female labor force participation are also apparent in communist communities. For instance, as suggested by Lapidus (1985), in order to alleviate the growing labor shortage, a campaign was launched in the early 1960s in the former Soviet Union to attract more women into the labor market. By mid-1970s, this had brought an additional 25 million women into the labor force. Later in the 1980s, almost 90 percent of women were employed. Similarly, in the People's Republic of China, most urban women between the ages of 20 and 50 have had full-time employment since the 1980s (Wolf, 1985).

<u>Distribution of Women's Employment.</u>

It is very clear that paid employment for women has changed their traditional work pattern. Women now make an important economic contribution to their family income. As classified by their level of skills and qualification, two groups of working women are distinguished. They are professional and working class women. Professionals refer to those who possess a systematic body of theoretical knowledge acquired through a protracted period of formal training. The professions are also governed by a norm of altruism or a service orientation. For the sake of discussion, there are two broad categories of professions: male-dominated and female-dominated. It is difficult to give a definition of working-class women since changes in technology may lead to the redistribution of occupations within work force divisions. Working-class occupations are classified into two main categories: manual and non-manual.

(1) <u>Women in Male-dominated Professions</u>

Male-dominated professions refer to those dominated by men and which were traditionally "out-of-bounds" to women. For instance, engineering and astronautics were male-dominated professions. With the increasing rate of female participation in the labor force, more and more women were participating in male-dominated professions such as

43

architecture, medicine, economics, law, accounting and pharmacy (Colwill & Lips, 1988). With certain notable exceptions, however, they were found at the bottom of the hierarchy. They tended to be segregated into the lower-status specialties and less prestigious employment contexts (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990).

According to Stromberg & Harkess (1988), women physicians were over-represented in pediatrics, anesthetics, and psychiatry, and under-represented in surgery, aerospace medicine and urology. Women were still concentrated in the lowest-status and traditionally nurturant primary care specialties (Bauder-Nishita, 1980). As reported by Epstein (1981), women lawyers were concentrated in government jobs, and in research rather than litigation. These were the areas in law that were likely to be less rewarded financially and to be lower in professional prestige. Regardless of where they worked, women tended to occupy lower status positions. In private practice, they were concentrated in less remunerative specialties, were less likely than men to become partners during the course of their careers, had little decision-making power in firms, and earned approximately two-thirds the income of men (Rosenberg, Pelstadt & Phillips, 1997). Women had achieved representation in college and university professorships. However, according to Reskin & Phipps (1988), women tended to work in less prestigious institutions than men did. They continued to be paid less than their male colleagues. They were found to teach more courses, and this tended to adversely affect their ability to do research and to write. They also had fewer resources for research.

(2) Women in Female-dominated Professions

In comparison with male-dominated professions, more women were and still are found in the female-dominated professions. Nursing, teaching, and librarianship are the examples. Spitze (1978) observed that workers in female-dominated fields in general were poorly compensated, considering their training, experience, and responsibilities. Donovan (1980) also found from salary structures that there was only a US$2,000-a-year difference between the earnings of trainee nurses and those with 20 years' experience. Furthermore, women in female-dominated professions were relatively powerless within their employing organization and with their clients. They were regarded as dispensable and very easily replaced (Ritzer & Walczak, 1986). Since they were denied professional

recognition, they were subject to control from all sides, whether by the public, public groups of layman, or their administrative superiors (Toren, 1969). One undeniable problem faced by women in female-dominated professions was the restricted opportunity for advancement. This was partly due to intra-occupational sex segregation. It was consistent with the study of Ritzer & Walczak (1986) that women in female-dominated professions often worked under the supervision of male professionals (e.g. nurses/physicians; teachers/principals).

(3) Women in the Non-manual Sector

The non-manual sector is synonymous with the white-collar occupations. Women who work in clerical and "pink-collar" jobs such as secretarial positions, bookkeeping, sales, or food service are included in this sector.

One distinguishing feature of the non-manual sector is that it is female-dominated. Take clerical work as an example. This was once the province of men. With the introduction of the typewriter, women entered clerical jobs. According to Davis (1982), typewriters were first introduced with "type girls" to demonstrate them. Women who operated these machines were first called "typewriters", although today, the term is used to describe the machine, not the worker. Clerical work has thus gradually changed from being completely male-dominated to highly female-dominated. Part-time jobs are common in sales and service work, especially in retail sales, cleaning, and food services.

Besides being female-dominated, "low income" characterizes the non-manual sector. Within white-collar and service categories, women earned about three-fifths the wages paid to men in the same occupational groups (Fox & Hesse-Biber, 1984). The pay level for clerical work was usually much lower than for male-dominated occupations such as police officer, building inspector, and plumber which required similar or lower levels of education (Opprenheimer, 1968). A saleswoman's salary was small and was generally not enough to live on; her livelihood therefore depended on her ability to sell to customers and earn commission. Likewise, waitresses received a small amount of income and mostly depended on tips. Their low income might relate to their part-time and intermittent employment.

Women in the female-dominated non-manual sector also lack opportunities for advancement in the organizational hierarchy. In many clerical offices, there are only two levels in the hierarchy: the supervisor and the workers. According to Gutek & Bikson (1985), there was quite often only one supervisor for a large number of clerical workers. The clerk found she needed additional skills to move beyond her entry-level job, but she could rarely obtain these skills at her job. Supervisors of clerical workers rarely had an opportunity to advance into the higher-paying, higher-prestige managerial or professional occupations. The next level often required professional expertise that the clerical supervisor generally lacked. Similarly, restaurant jobs do not provide opportunities for advancement. Restaurants typically do not promote women to management positions. The study of Berheide (1988) reported that waitresses had to change to higher-priced restaurants where tips were greater if they hoped to improve their status and earnings. For the saleswomen, the career ladder is almost non-existent. As we have mentioned, some women in sales and service occupations are employed on a part-time basis. These occupations therefore penalize women for part-time employment by lowering their wages.

(4) <u>Women in Manual Sector</u>

The term "blue-collar workers" is used to refer to those who do manual labor: skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled laborers. These occupations emphasize manual skills. Carpenters, motor mechanics and sewing machine operators are examples of this category.

In comparison with professional, technical and managerial workers, those who worked in the manual sector were less well paid. Most often, they were paid on a piecework basis. New technology has also led to decreasing skill levels for blue-collars workers. Their work was also found to be physically hard and dangerous, with little security or respect. Women had always been underrepresented in the skilled labor market. They have been largely excluded from the skilled craft occupations and have been concentrated in low-paying unskilled jobs. In the US, between 1900 and 1970, the proportion of women amongst skilled laborers generally ranked between 2 and 3 percent. By 1982, women represented 7 percent of skilled workers (Ritzer & Walczak, 1986).

Women worked primarily in manufacturing. Within the manufacturing industry, women were concentrated in clothes-manufacturing firms. The majority of jobs in these firms were semiskilled operative occupations, characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, high work pressure and the constant threat of unemployment. No formal training was necessary prior to employment and thus there were employment opportunities for women with little education, training and experience. Most women worked primarily for money even though the wage was low. They tended to work temporarily. Some young women planned to leave when they married and had a family. Only married women whose children had grown up or were attending school had a continuous participation in this labor force. Most operative jobs remained labor intensive, and piecework continued to be a primary method of production. Some might find the piecework a source of stress and pressure.

It is clear that women are concentrated in particular areas of work. The distribution of women's employment is found to be similar across industrialized countries. In Britain in 1983, women constituted a high proportion of certain occupational categories. They made up 67 percent of professional and related workers (education, welfare and health), 77 percent of clerical (non-manual), 76 percent of catering, cleaning, etc., 59 percent of selling (non-manual) and 45 percent of painting and repetitive assembling etc. occupations (Dex, 1987:8). American women were found to be heavily concentrated in clerical occupations. They also had high proportions in professional and higher-grade non-manual occupations (Dex & Shaw, 1986:29). From the data, it could be seen that both American and British women clustered in female-dominated occupations. According to the Hong Kong 1991 Population Census, the majority (28.8%) of Hong Kong women took up clerical jobs (295,986), particularly women between 15 and 34. The other two major occupations were service workers and shop sales workers. There have been some changes since the industrial restructuring in the 1990s. While the majority (29.5%) of Hong Kong women still took up clerical jobs (357,172), fewer women (13.51%) were employed as service workers and shop sales workers (163,596). Instead, according to the Hong Kong 1996 Population By-census, more women (23.51%) were likely to be employed in these occupations, including sales and services occupation, laborers in mining, construction, and manufacturing (284,568).

The phenomenon of occupational distribution also occurred in communist bloc and developing nations. According to Lapidus (1985), women in the USSR accounted for three-quarters or more of the labor force in the service sector and only one-quarter of the labor force in construction and transportation. Vertically, women were found to predominate in the lower and middle levels, but were underrepresented in supervisory and managerial positions. Women in developing countries also experienced the adverse effects of occupational segregation. Junsay & Heaton (1989) gave examples showing professional women were still concentrated largely in three sectors of employment – teaching, nursing, and social work – even though their overall participation in technical and professional jobs was increasing. Some women with college or university education were also found to hold low-level jobs, such as domestic helpers, salespersons, etc.

Barriers to Women's Employment

As I have noted in the paragraphs above, the nature of women's participation in the labor force continues to differ greatly from that of men, keeping working women economically disadvantaged, lower in status, and burdened with multiple role demands. Although on average in Western countries for example, Hong Kong women are now almost 50% of University entry, they continue to tend toward stereotypically female occupational fields.

What are the Barriers?

There are a number of barriers which keep women economically disadvantaged in the occupational fields. These include the following:

(1) Occupational Segregation

The first barrier is the continued occupational segregation. Occupational segregation exists when jobs in the labor market are distributed to different groups of people to the extent that one cannot speak of a single labor force in which all are equally in competition with each other for the same jobs (Hakim, 1979). The factors which might differentiate

groups in the labor force can be personal, and sex is one of them. Occupational segregation on the basis of sex exists when men and women do different kinds of work.

Data often showed that a majority of women were concentrated in clerical positions (Hesse, 1979). While women made up two-fifths of all professional and technical workers, they tended to be concentrated in the more "nurturant" professions as teachers and health workers. There was limited movement of women into male-dominated fields. Women were less likely to be managers and administrators, and represented only about one-fifth of these workers. Besides occupational sex-typing of jobs, women were given no or fewer opportunities for advancement, whereas men usually held top positions in the hierarchy. Bogan (1993) explained why women tended to be more disadvantaged at work than men regardless of the job they did. One reason was, "... Many [women] get locked into dead-end jobs and are hampered in their progress by their employers' selection and promotion procedures which may well be based on outdated attitudes to women at work" (Bogan, cited in Templeton, p.10). Let us take secretarial work as an example. The progression prospects were few. Women might also be given little access to on-the-job training and were therefore rendered ineligible to apply for higher positions. It was often presupposed that jobs that required caring for others and nurturing small children fitted the feminine traits. Women, it seemed, were allowed only vicarious rather than direct achievements (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990). They might therefore rarely be put in positions of authority.

(2) Tokenism

Pressure faced by the "minority or token groups" may also be another kind of barrier to female participation in the labor force. As noted by Colwill & Lips (1988), women in non-traditional occupations often found themselves holding token positions – positions in which they were treated as symbols or representatives of their sex. In Kanter's sociological study of Indsco (1977), the token women were seen primarily as "women" rather than "workers". The roles that token women played included: mother, sex object, pet of the organization, and the iron maiden. These four roles shared two common characteristics: they carried a representation of the female gender role, and they did not allow women to play their worker role. With such dilemmas and contradictions, token

women could face numerous stresses. Since they had few female role models, they might also feel lonely. Their greater visibility could lead to tremendous anxiety, and feelings of vulnerability could impede behavior and undermine self-confidence (Ehrhart & Sandler, 1987; Ware, Streckler & Leserman, 1985). The strain of constantly striving to maintain a superior level of performance might result in exhaustion and discouragement.

(3) Pay Equity

In the labor force, there is a notion of "pay equity" that deters women from participation. Although the concept "equal pay for equal work" is supported by legislation, it has yet to become reality for all women and men. O'Connor (1971) found that waitresses usually earned significantly less in tips than waiters. In addition, numerous researchers have shown that jobs in which women predominated paid substantially less than jobs in which men predominated (Gutek, 1988). It has also been argued that employers would prefer a male to a female employee. Furthermore, they would react to the pressures to pay women for the real worth of their work by refusing to hire women at all (Block, 1984). Although the concept of equal pay for work of equal value is considered to be an economic issue, it may provide a clue to the devaluation of women.

Why Barriers Exist?

After a sketch of the work history of women and the barriers to their participation in the labor force, it is natural to ask why these barriers exist. Underlying the social phenomenon, there are social, economic and ideological factors interlocking with one another.

(1) Impact of Gender-role Stereotypes

The impact of gender-role stereotypes may be one of the factors which interferes with women's participation in the labor force. Archer & Lloyd (1985) suggested that gender-role stereotypes might exert a direct influence on women's occupational achievements by barring or strongly discouraging them from entering a particular occupation, and they might strongly affect the aspirations and motives of men and women in relation to the world of

work.

First of all, gender-role stereotypes exert a wide influence on beliefs about the suitability of men and women for certain occupations. For example, masculine adjectives such as self-confident, forceful, enterprising, assertive, rational, and tough are those that are typically viewed as linked to success in high-status occupations. Adjectives associated with women such as soft-hearted, sentimental, talkative, gentle, fussy, dreamy, and emotional are generally regarded as unsuitable attributes for high occupational achievement. Therefore, women tend to be concentrated in professional, clerical and service work, whereas men tend to be concentrated in managerial, craft and laboring work. Some employers may argue that they are willing to hire women if they have the same abilities as men. It is easy to place women in a double bind. If the women exhibit the masculine characteristics deemed essential for the job, they are then called "unfeminine", "aggressive" or other derogatory names. But if they do not demonstrate these "masculine characteristics", they may be considered inadequate for the job. This double bind typifies some of the difficulties women face if they take up high-status occupations. In fact, it is not surprising that these difficulties exist. The image of woman as a sexual object emphasizes physical attractiveness and de-emphasizes other attributes such as intelligence, creativity, ideas, and so on. As suggested by Prather (1971), there was also a belief that "beauty and brains do not mix". Moreover, women carry with them the servant image and thus they are considered suitable for the nurturing and care-taking occupations.

Secondly, gender-role stereotypes also influence evaluations of men's and women's work performance. Women are regarded as less motivated or interested in their work. They are said to be more content with intellectually undemanding jobs, and more interested in social ties with other workers than with power/authority. It is said that their primary and main reasons for working are to obtain the basic essentials rather than pursuing a career. They may not like or be fit for managerial positions. They thus cluster in occupations such as clerks and secretaries. Working-class women are often criticized by their male co-workers as not being fit for manual jobs because of their physical weaknesses.

Finally, the most pervasive belief is perhaps that a man's responsibility is to go out to work and a woman's duty is to look after her family. Women's participation in the labor

force may be affected by whether or not they have children, and is most crucially affected by the age of the youngest child. Some research supports this. It is still assumed that a woman's work outside the home should not interfere with her domestic duties in caring for her husband and particularly in caring for her children. Women's paid work must fit in with their domestic role. If role conflict exists, women are encouraged to quit working or take on part-time jobs. The study by Betz (1993) showed that family responsibilities affected the kinds of jobs women took by limiting their investment in education and/or on-the-job training, the number of hours they worked, the continuity of their labor force attachment, and their ability to pursue opportunities for advancement.

(2) Women's Negative Self-image

A second factor may be women's self image. Women tend to be socialized to accept the beliefs that they are less assertive and more dependent than men are. In addition to the influence of the family and the education system, the reason why such beliefs persist may be that journals and other media tend towards bias or exaggeration. Socialization to traditional feminine values can result in lower occupational aspirations for women. As suggested by Anderson & Stewart (1994), women might thus be socialized not to prepare for a career or not to pursue it wholeheartedly if they sought a career, but to regard the career as a short-run venture until marriage and motherhood occurred. The view of themselves as inferior and lacking in intellectual and other skills necessary for success prevented many women from trying. Moreover, many women would self-select occupations consistent with their self-image; thus leaving unchallenged traditionally masculine fields (DeLamater & Fidell, 1971). A self-fulfilling prophecy could therefore develop among women because they saw few successful role models.

Do the women themselves recognize any discrimination in their workplace? The answer is yes. How do they react? Crosby (1982) conducted a study to examine the effects of sex discrimination on women's well being. She found little evidence that salary discrimination led to depression in women. Crosby explained that women in her study might acknowledge that they were discriminated against as a group, but at the same time seldom reported personal experiences of discrimination and deprivation. They might be happy to have a better job than other working women. More than that, they might believe

that they deserved discrimination because of an internalized conviction that women were inferior to men.

(3) The Power of Patriarchal Structures

A third reason for the barriers may be the power of patriarchal structures. As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, patriarchy was defined by Walby as: "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990:20). In her book, Walby also described the changing nature of patriarchy from the nineteenth to twentieth century. In the 19th century, women were simply excluded from public life. In the 20th century, they were merely segregated (Walby, 1990). Patriarchal structures still had a great impact on the different patterns of women's employment careers. The choice of careers available to individual women was much influenced by institutional arrangements (Yeandle, 1984). Besides limiting women's career choices, patriarchal values also imposed an over-arching influence on wage inequality according to sex and socialization of the labor force. As discussed, occupational segregation is a systematic exclusion of women from more advantageous positions within paid work. Women are more likely to take up a nurturing and supportive occupation, e.g. nursing.

In the above analysis, I have delineated the historical development and distribution of women's employment, the barriers preventing women's participation in employment, as well as the multiple factors underlying the phenomenon.

Many researchers, analyzing the women's employment and their barriers, have attempted to highlight the different characteristics of males and females. They have also tried to establish a direct correlation between different attributes of male and female and the various barriers such as "occupational segregation", "marginalization", "tokenism", "pay equity". But such an approach tends to ignore the abilities of women and the growing job demands upon them. For instance, owing to occupational sex-typing of jobs, women tend to be concentrated in the more "nurturant" professions such as nurses and social workers. It is assumed that they cannot perform their jobs independently that they have to seek advice from other people. However, there is evidence of a different phenomenon. Marshall referred to the study of Severin & Becker (1974, cited in Marshall, 1980) which

described the role of psychiatric nurses who took on the role of consultants managing patient referrals. They successfully handled 66 percent of new patients, organizing their treatment plans, without calling for further advice. Social workers, too, are experts who offer help or take responsibility for the management of social, interpersonal, or personal problems of people. According to Eaton (1980), the service provided by social workers in the United States depended on a professional assessment of client needs.

In the recent literature, there are inconsistent findings about the phenomenon of occupational segregation. According to Hakim (1998), in U.K., the pattern of occupational segregation has now been declined, which implies the disappearance of occupations exclusive to one sex. However, DeLaat (1999) found that women and men were still segregated into distinct careers, despite a reduction in the overall amount of such segregation in the past few decades. According to 1990 U.S. census data, the ten most common occupations for women were: secretary; elementary school teacher; cashier; registered nurse; bookkeeper; nurse's aide; salaried manager, administrator; sales representative; waitress; and salaried sales supervisor. For men, the list was as follows: salaried manager, administrator; truck driver; salaried sales supervisor; janitor; carpenter, apprentice; sales representative; construction laborer; cook; supervisor, production occupation; and automobile mechanic. It is thus evident that different scenarios exist. Whether occupational segregation persists or not depends on the change of women's self-image and status in the society. Women's self-image and status may be entirely culturally determined, rather than genetically governed, and researchers and commentators continue to debate this.

Rewards of Work on Women

Work has been considered as one of the most important activities of human beings, and carrying out tasks within the environment is essential to the survival of the human race physically as well as psychologically (Argyle, 1972). Work occupies 'a substantial proportion of most people's lives and has often been taken as a symbol of personal value: work provides status, economic rewards, and a means to realize self-potential' (Grint, 1992:1). Working is often regarded as a symbol of normal functioning and ability.

For women, work has become an important part of their development. They derived their rewards or satisfactions from the following items:

Economic Independence.

First, work can provide women with economic independence. By studying the work and family life of women during the pre-industrial era, Tilly & Scott (1987) found that it was economically difficult for women to remain single and independent. Female wages were only one-third to one-half of male wages. The only way for a woman to achieve a measure of economic security was to marry. If she did not marry, her position was strange. In the 19th century, the choice for the women was again to be married. Never-married women had very limited job opportunities. Most were domestic servants, and were easily exploited by their employers. Others were forced to be prostitutes. Confronted with a choice between getting married and becoming a prostitute or a domestic servant, it was not surprising that most women sought marriage (Hafner, 1993). By getting married, they might avoid poverty and degradation. At the same time, they became totally subjugated to their husband. According to Leonard & Speakman (1992), from the mid 19th to the early 20th century, middle-class occupations and the professions began to open to women. But Leonard & Speakman did not mention what these occupations and professions were. From the first half of the 20th century, it became acceptable for middle-class women to be employed until they married or had children. Women who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s were encouraged to abandon the idea of achieving status and security through marriage. Instead, they were encouraged to lead independent lives, and to compete directly with men for privilege and status. Such a change of ideas and attitude was attributable to the increased educational and employment opportunities for women and the feminist movement.

Working-class working women also gained economic independence although most of the jobs were relatively lowly paid. Money was a primary reason for blue-collar women entering the labor force, and a major source of job satisfaction (Rosen, 1981; Walshok, 1981; O'Farrell & Halen, 1982). According to O'Farrell (1988), the majority of women operatives took pride in contributing to their families. In Howe's (1977) study of five

traditional female occupations – beautician, saleswoman, waitress, clerical worker, and homemaker – earning money was found to be one of the motives for work.

New Dimensions of Self-confidence.

In addition to economic independence, work also enables women to achieve new dimensions of self-confidence and a sense of pride in their ability to support themselves or contribute to the support of a family. When we meet people for the first time, we are likely to be defined in terms of our jobs, which have become the main basis for deciding social status. Interestingly, women are sometimes asked, "Do you work?" or "What does your husband do?" These questions typically reveal an expectation that women are unlikely to work, especially if they are married. As suggested by Walshok (1979), work also provided some release from constant association with young children, in addition to enjoyment of social life on the job, and pleasures of workmanship. For single women, a network of support in the workplace might be particularly important.

O'Farrell (1988) found the machine operators took pride in doing their jobs well. In Walshok's (1981) study of the women in non-traditional blue-collar jobs, his respondents received rewards for having done something constructive, and by having a product that people noticed and valued. One woman machinist described her "sense of accomplishment after a hard day's work – I can say to myself 'Hey! I did that!'" (O'Farrell, 1982:39).

Attainment of More Than One Source of Gratification.

As a result of paid employment, women can have more than one source of gratification. Women agree that the role of full-time homemaker is not highly valued. If they are not employed outside the home, their only source of gratification is from their families. They may not feel happy especially when there is family discord and they may not be able to find another source of support. Northcott (1981) found that employed women appeared to be happier and healthier than homemakers. Coleman & Antonucci (1983) also suggested that employed women at mid-life had higher self-esteem and less psychological anxiety than did homemakers, and they also reported being in better physical

56

health. As revealed by Nieva & Gutek (1981), women workers in general valued the relationships provided by work more than men did. For working mothers, work provided an opportunity to meet and form friendships outside of the family. Some of the respondents in Howe's study (1977) agreed that relationships with co-workers were an essential factor in taking up and remaining in their jobs.

In sum, work is important to the working women. Besides monetary reward, work can help a person develop a sense of identity and a positive self-image. By work, they can share experiences and contact with people outside the family. The workplace can become a place to meet people, converse, and perhaps form friendships. It seems that work brings to the women positive values. However, the stresses and problems that exist in work may counteract these positive values.

Stress of Work on Women

Work may be a significant source of stress, and that stress may have serious consequences for mental and physical health. Cooper & Marshall (1976), House (1974) and Kasl (1978) analyzed several potential sources of stress. These categories included working in a climate of uncertainty and ambiguity (e.g. devaluing traditional skills, job insecurity, etc.), pressure from the organization (e.g. to maintain services in an unsatisfactory physical environment), from management, clients, colleagues, other organizations and agencies, and pressure from oneself to meet one or more basic needs. Continuing working beyond safe stress levels could lead to serious physical and psychological conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, ulcers and depression.

In the following section, I will discuss the stresses faced by women at work as described by the literature.

Deskilling.

The first source of stress most commonly faced by women workers is "deskilling". A twin concept "proletarianization" was introduced by Glenn and Feldberg (1977). It

meant that "... work is organized around manual rather than mental activities, tasks become externally structured and controlled; and relationships become more depersonalized."

Women in white-collar jobs gradually found their work being degraded and deskilled. Let us take clerical work as an example. Clerical work was traditionally viewed as a white-collar occupation superior to a blue-collar job because of "clean physical surroundings, emphasis on mental as opposed to manual activities, reliance on worker's judgment in executing tasks, and direct personal contact among workers and between workers and managers" (Glenn & Feldberg, 1977). However, the growing size of organizations and various technological changes, especially the revolutionary impact of the computer, have served to trivialize old skills and reduced the opportunity to learn new skills. Clerical work is therefore organized around manual rather than mental activities. Tasks have become externally structured. More serious than this, the use of computers in the office may have led to the loss of clerical jobs. Women in sales and service occupations have also found their jobs boring and simple. According to Berheide (1988), women in sales and service occupations felt themselves no longer superior to blue-collar jobs; they had become "second-class" white-collar workers. It was thus clear that a distinctive stress that had developed was "status panic" among the women in non-manual sectors.

Poor Pay and Limited Upward Mobility.

The second common work stress on women is related to poor pay and limited upward mobility. Why are women poorly paid and their upward mobility limited? According to the "sex-role spillover" perspective, women were more passive, less work-oriented and less concerned with advancement. Employers therefore limited the advancement opportunities of clerical workers. Seeing few options and career prospects for themselves, women clerical workers found their work boring (Colwill & Lips, 1988). They did not expect to be in the work force for a long period (Gaskell, 1981). Women in sales and service occupations also experienced similar kinds of stress. Employers often treated waitresses as easily replaceable. They would hire and fire the waitresses, depending on the business environment.

Sex-typing of professions appeared to have a great deal of influence on women's entry

58

and advancement in male-dominated professions (Nelson & Quick, 1985). Due to their alleged feminine attributes such as nurturance, empathy, and support, women were perceived not to be fit for male-dominated professions which tended to demand aggressiveness, competitiveness, and risk taking. Women were constrained by perceptions and stereotypes about their abilities and capabilities and by attitudes about the appropriateness of their occupational participation (Fox & Hesse-Biber, 1984). Such a perception could block women's mobility and become a source of stress.

Work relationship.

"Relationships with colleagues" is the third source of stress encountered by working women. According to Payne (1980), the quality of the relationships that employees had at work had been consistently linked to job stress. In assessing relationships with co-workers, communication was one of the major factors. Leiter and Maslach (1986) described two kinds of communication between co-workers: informal and work-related communication. Work-related communication was not sufficient to improve co-worker relationships. Instead, informal communication was most likely to alleviate job stress. Simon et al. (1967), in their study of women with a Ph.D., found that they appeared to be accepted as professional colleagues, but they were seldom included in informal chats at tea break or lunch time. Working-class women also encountered stress in work relationships. According to Colwill and Colwill (1988), women in blue-collar occupations experienced more stress from relationships with co-workers than women in other occupations. Blue-collar women who were pioneers in male-dominated jobs indicated that they faced resentment from co-workers and supervisors.

Lack of Job Autonomy.

A lack of a sense of control (autonomy) over work may also be another source of stress. Karasek (1979) developed a two-dimensional model. Essentially his model indicated that psychological strain resulted from the "joint effects of the demands of a work situation and the range of decision-making discretion (job control) available to the worker facing those demands" (Karasek, 1979: 298). It therefore implied that the more control a worker had over the conditions of her employment and the tasks she had to accomplish, the

more satisfying the job became. Women in professional occupations encountered the stress of lack of job autonomy. It is the nature of the professional structure that reduces autonomy. If the boss is a man, the woman lower down may feel that they are the objects of patriarchy. Similarly, working-class women also suffered from the stress of lack of autonomy over work. According to Ritzer & Walczak (1986), women in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs were more likely to be alienated and exhibited a higher degree of alienation than workers in higher-status professions.

Tokenism.

As I have noted, "tokenism" may be a barrier to female participation in the labor force. It is also noted in the literature as one kind of stress on women at work. Why does tokenism create stress for women? As stated by Colwill & Lips (1988), "the token status places one in a particularly visible, and this vulnerable position, and both male and female token may find it difficult to relax and do their jobs as competently as they would be capable of doing under less adverse circumstances" (1988:303). According to Kanter (1977), tokenism created stress because the token position contained several dilemmas and contradictions: they were treated as representatives of their group, yet as exceptions from their group; they were visible, yet backstage; they stood apart, yet were stereotyped.

Men are dominant in the professional and managerial occupations and the male members share a common "understanding" about rules and styles of competing, bartering, and succeeding. Professional women may have to bear the burden of coping with the role of being the "token woman". They may feel isolated from the circle of male boss and colleagues if they do not take the initiative to participate. As defined by Laws (1975), token academic women were double deviants. This was because women deviated from gender norms by their career commitment and again by aspiring to succeed in a male-dominated profession. They got co-workers' attention just because they were women, not for any real achievement. They had to show competence in their work on the one hand, but also not engender resentment from their male co-workers. Despite the growing number of women participating in the professions, they were still scarce, especially at the top levels. The lack of role models for women made them feel isolated and increased pressure.

Kanter (1977) attempted to create a theoretical explanation by discussing differential treatment in terms of how group structure shaped interactions and influenced patterns of male-female interaction. Although Kanter's work focused on women in nontraditional white-collar jobs, her views could be applied to women in manual jobs. In the male-dominated manual sector, women often feel like outsiders and are lonely. Like token women in the professions, they were unlikely to have any female co-workers or female role models (O'Farrell, 1982).

Meeting Two or More Significant Role Obligations.

Another source of stress is role strain resulting from the difficulty felt in meeting two or more significant role obligations. According to Fox & Hesse-Biber (1984), professional women experienced the stress of multiple roles, particularly in the context of a lack of previous experience to serve as a source for managing these roles. Conflict between career and family roles could be particularly high for professional women. Data showed that professional women still assumed primary responsibility for home and childcare activities (Googins & Burden, 1987). Among married couples, fathers reported spending 10-15 hours less each week on home and childcare tasks than full-time employed mothers. Time management problems, however, did not completely explain role strain. The role problem lay in an inability to meet both family and career role demands fully.

In sum, there are potential sources of stress faced by working women, including deskilling, poor pay and limited upward mobility, work relationships, lack of autonomy, tokenism and meeting two or more significant role obligations.

Rewards and stresses on women that are derived from work have been mentioned. As we have noted in the previous sections, female workers may share similar sources of stress with their male counterparts. But there is evidence that male and female workers have different reactions to the same work setting since they are assumed to be exposed to distinctive socialization experiences (Mortimer et al., 1988). Gender differences in attitudes towards work conditions may also be related to the unequal power and opportunity between women and men at home and at the workplace, as women usually have an inferior

status in male-dominated occupational positions (Kanter, 1977).

Besides gender, social class and educational background are also likely to have an impact on attitudes towards working conditions. An individual's social class is often measured by their occupation. As we have mentioned in this chapter, women are classified into professional and working class. They may attach different values to the different work dimensions; for example to the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of work. Professional women tend to stress the importance of intrinsic outcomes such as autonomy, achievement and control, while working-class women seem to emphasize extrinsic job satisfaction such as pay and security. Working-class women are often found in the lower ranks and in lowly paid jobs due to occupational segregation. They may be in a "marginal" position with very limited upward mobility. Therefore, what they value most will be the monetary rewards.

Professional women may encounter similar kinds of stresses from work as working-class women. For instance, stress will result if working women meet stressful relationships with colleagues and lack of control over their work. But there may be qualitative variations in individuals' subjective appraisal of the rewards and stresses at work. Little research has been done to examine the experience of working women in Hong Kong. The differences between professional and working-class women in encountering rewards and stresses at work, in the local context, deserve further exploration. The present study is hence designed to begin to fill this gap in the literature.

Work and Singlehood

As we have noted, industrial and technological advances have created new occupations and have increased employment opportunities. With women's participation in the labor force, it has become generally acceptable to study women's occupational mobility. Their social status is no longer defined in terms of their husband's occupation, but their own. Among the working women, a sizable number has chosen to postpone marriage or remain single. What are the factors associated with singlehood among working women? Are there any differences between single and married women in

encountering rewards and stresses at work?

Factors Associated with Singlehood among Working Women.

From a review of literature, it seems that there are two factors associated with singlehood among working women, namely: changing views of marriage and work, and the family orientation of single women.

(1) Changing Views on Marriage and Work

Clearly, education has a significant influence on the changing views of marriage and work among women. Women now have access to more vocational training or higher education. Higher education actually helps to change women's work orientation. The findings of several studies (Spitze, 1978; Kanouse, 1980) showed the positive impact of higher education on work orientation. Spitze found that the length of college attendance or vocational training significantly increased the preference for employment. On the other hand, young women who did not go on to college or job training but took jobs directly out of high school, might be more likely to view their work as a mere "job" to which they had little attachment. Kanouse and his colleagues found that for some women, going to university or college increased their instrumental orientation.

During the 1950s and 1960s, working-class girls were still educated largely for a domestic role. Marriage and maternity were their prevalent norms. Owing to their low educational standard and limited training, they tended to be employed in manual jobs. Most of them worked for economic necessity. They regarded work as temporary and marriage usually appeared to be attractive. For them, marriage often seemed the only way to escape from monotonous work. With the expansion of educational training and work opportunities, perspectives on marriage and work have changed. By the end of the 1960s, new demands were being made for women's right to have an equal education to men and equal treatment within school (Arnot, 1992). In Britain, this movement was reflected in the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, which made it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sex in education, as well as in employment and training. Regardless of practical constraints, some working-class women have had access to education. Higher

education and more training gave them a chance to aspire to non-manual occupations such as clerical and office work, and to take up jobs where basic literacy was required. In order to seize their chance and a promising future, they might choose to forego marriage.

(2) Family Orientation of Single Women

The change of work orientation among single women also alters their orientation to marriage.

Traditionally, woman's status derived from her role combination of wife, mother, and homemaker. She was expected to receive her main gratification in the home on a primary level of person-oriented and expressively oriented relationships revolving around her husband and children. Marriage was thus considered to be the principal goal of woman, including the professionally trained woman. The unmarried woman was considered a social deviant if she outwardly rejected marriage for a "career" (Theodore, 1971:9). In a study of college graduate women, Almquist and Angrist (1970) found that single women were more "career salient" than married women. "Career salient women turned away from intimacy and an intensely people environment to the world of ideas, solitary pursuits, the manipulation of things, more impersonal relations with people" (1970:243). Sokoloff (1981) also found that those who remained single were more likely to pursue atypical careers. She remarked: "single women put their energies into developing higher status professional lives rather than investing energies in their families" (1981:249-50). According to Anderson & Stewart (1994), there was a tendency for women to remain single for the sake of career advancement.

There is a dearth of studies explaining why working-class women choose to be or remain single. Allen's (1989) retrospective study of never-married working-class women indicated that the practice of having one daughter stay at home and look after the household and the elderly, dependent relatives continued from the 19th to the 20th century. Hareven (1977), before Allen's studies, also showed that the single women in the working class followed a life course that was consistent with a familistic ideology. An individual family member was obliged to ensure the autonomy and survival of the household, even if sometimes they had to delay or sacrifice their personal desires. Girls, especially the eldest

64

ones, were prepared to work hard at home and in the labor force in accordance with the survival needs of their family. Because of their overriding family responsibility to work or care for parents, women tended to delay or avoid marriage. Later on, they were unable to find a mate whose age, personality and background were compatible to them. Therefore, their personal options have been limited by their family responsibilities.

It appears that single women tend to delay or avoid marriage for the sake of family and/or pursuing schooling and employment. It does not imply that women rule out marriage as a possibility. They may not have found the right man by the time they receive training. They take up an occupation, thinking they will work there temporarily until they get married. Over the years, as their right men fail to appear, they simply continue to do their best in their roles as a daughter and a worker. Simply speaking, women may not make a conscious decision to be single.

Rewards/Stresses of Work on Single Women.

There has been more literature about stress experienced by working single women than about their rewards. For the majority of the single women, work has a positive effect on their self-concept since they can gain autonomy in their daily tasks. It seems likely that it is one of the main rewards working-class single women derive from their singleness. Unlike married women, whose family lives usually revolve around their husband and children, they can shift their attention to other aspects, particularly work. However, it is also argued that some single women may live with family and have to care for their elderly parents and other family members. It seems that the responsibility of looking after elderly parents usually falls to the single daughter. More stress will be experienced when they have to look after sick family members. Further exploration of this area is required.

Stress in single women may often be related to their work since it is from that they derive the main satisfaction. They attribute importance to work. As I have mentioned before, male-dominated professions are out of reach of most women. Even though women may be recruited to these professions, they are usually confined to lower grades. Most of them therefore work very hard to show their competence on the job. Mandelbaum (1978) found that single women physicians worked longer hours weekly,

worked more continuously, obtained more board certification, and achieved higher professional status than their married colleagues. In addition to demonstrating competence, the other main reason for single professional women to work very hard is connected to what could be termed the concept of "working like a man". They worked hard and long hours, it was easy for them to fall into the habit of spending late evenings at the office and of taking more work back home (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). Establishing a clear borderline between their time at work and outside work could be difficult for professional single women (Gordon, 1994).

Their state of singlehood may even put them under a certain amount of adverse pressure associated with being labeled as an "oddity". Most of their female co-workers are married and their conversation may be about domestic issues and children. As revealed by Gordon (1994), single women could be on the margins of social interactions. Other married co-workers insistently inquired about the reasons for their singlehood. If the opportunity arose, they invited the single women to meet their families in order to introduce them to potential partners. In addition to their social relationship problems with female co-workers, single women felt particularly stressed in relating to male co-workers. In a study of women in an auto plant, for example, Gruber and Bjorn (1982) found that sexual harassment on non-traditional jobs was most severe for women who were either unmarried, young, black, or in lower-status jobs. Therefore, single women might be among the group most vulnerable to sexual harassment. However, few of them reported this or complained for fear of getting laid off.

Unlike their professional sisters, working-class single women had to bear the traditional stereotypical image of being the "old maid" who could not get a mate. Nobody seemed to empathize with them or show understanding or speak up on their behalf. Their chances of getting married became slimmer with their growing age. Cherlin (1980) suggested that women who did not continue in college probably entered the marriage market at an earlier age than those who did. Therefore, many of the women with lower education who were still single in their 20s might have already been unsuccessful in finding a marriage partner. They might have a lower probability of succeeding in the marriage market in the future. Social pressure from family members and friends to get married imposed stress on single women.

66

Besides gender, social class and educational background, marital status may also interact with work conditions in effecting psychological functioning. As we have noted, many married women have to combine domestic and work roles. Some may therefore argue that single women enjoy more benefits than the married women in respect of freedom and greater opportunities of promotion in work. However, single women could not avoid stress although they could avoid conflict between career and marriage demands. A number of studies (Pearlin & Johnson, 1977; Kessler & Essex, 1982) showed that single women were stressed because of their inability to translate "career salience" into status attainment. Although the study of Fong and Amatea (1992) found no obvious difference between single and married professional women in respect of career commitment, job satisfaction, and use of personal resources, the former group had significantly higher levels of stress symptoms. It was because single women had to do their jobs competently in order to maintain a feeling of security and self-esteem. They would let their work consume them and they would work long hours.

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter, aspects of work have been described in several sections. The first examines the historical development of women's labor participation and their present job distribution. It is clear that women's participation in the labor force is on the increase. However, the existence of social phenomenon forms barriers to women participating in the labor force. Underlying the social phenomenon, there are social, economic and ideological factors interlocking with one another. These factors are: (1) impact of gender-role stereotypes; (2) women's negative self-image; and (3) power of patriarchal structures.

In the second section, rewards and stresses that are derived from work among women have been mentioned.

In the third section, the emergence of a group of single women has been discussed. With changing work roles and economic autonomy among women, some of them may choose another option – to postpone marriage or not to get married. Reasons why they choose singlehood and their experience of stress and rewards have also been evaluated.

Chapter 4

Singlehood, Marriage and Work of Women in Hong Kong

".... Hong Kong does not take to the west,
although it does take from the west...."
(Agassi & Jervie, 1969:161)

Hong Kong, while being an international city where both eastern and western cultures meet, has a predominantly ethnic Chinese population. Until June 30, 1997, it had been under British colonial administration with a typical associated social hierarchy. In the traditional patriarchal Chinese culture, women were in a subordinate position. Female inferiority had been officially enshrined for over 2,000 years in Confucian ideology, in which a woman's major role was to produce sons to perpetuate the male line. Within their socially ascribed role, they were thus not expected to participate in other spheres of life. Therefore, there was an abundance of sayings such as "a woman without talent is virtuous" (Hooper, 1984). While this ideology still has influence, the forces of westernization, industrialization and capitalism also influence women.

The rapid social and economic development of Hong Kong from the 1950s to 1990s significantly changed the lives of its men and women. These changes include increasing educational opportunity, more job opportunities for women, and changing family structure along with a growing awareness of the concept of gender equality. At the same time, a higher percentage of women have become better educated; they have taken jobs, built up their careers and realized their aspirations as individuals along side their duties in families as parents and carers of other family members. While some of these changes have benefited women, the effects of others are questionable. The aim of this chapter is to understand how women live and interact within the changing social and economic context of Hong Kong. Some studies of the impact of socio-economic change on women and family relationships will be discussed. The chapter will also look at the phenomenon of single women in Hong Kong and the pressures encountered in their singlehood. Cultural notions of femininity and marriage will be discussed.

The Hong Kong Context: From 1950s to 1990s

The 1950s: The Era of Early Industrialization.

The entrepot was the foundation of Hong Kong's economy before the 1950s. Under colonial rule, the Hong Kong Chinese were socially and culturally segregated from the British and European communities (Leung, 1996). They were allowed to retain their cultural values and practices. There are few studies of the condition of women in pre-industrial Hong Kong, but the deprivations and discrimination they experienced can be inferred from Jaschok's study (1988) of concubines and bondservants (*mui tsai*). *Mui tsai* [a form of slavery] refers to a young girl owned by a family not her kin who worked as a domestic drudge until the owners disposed of her in marriage or in any other way they saw fit. These girls were acquired in different ways. Sometimes they had been abandoned, and knew of no parents. Sometimes their parents had died. Some poor families just wanted one less mouth to feed, and gained some money by selling their daughters (Jaschok & Miers, 1994). In order to ensure that there were sons to continue the husband's family line, the first wife chose a *mui tsai* who would produce an heir but pose no threat to her control over the household. The *mui tsai* who was chosen became the concubine. The first wife could still secure her senior status in the domestic hierarchy since she became the boy's rightful mother, and ensured that she had a son to look after her in her old age.

With the establishment of the Communist regime in China in 1949, a great wave of refugees fled into Hong Kong and brought along with them the necessary resources of new labor, capital, and technical skills and experience needed for industrial development. Subsequent to the Korean War and the United Nations embargo on trade with China, Hong Kong could no longer depend on the entrepot trade, and had to turn to the development of various industries in order to compensate for its economic losses in trade. Among various contenders, the textile industry emerged as a source of economic growth and provided men and women with semi-skilled employment opportunities (Ng, 1986).

It is true that the economy benefited substantially from the "refugee" injection of

capital, entrepreneurial talent, and technical knowledge. It also provided a cheap and docile labor force for manufacturing industries. Among them, there was a well-known group of domestic servants called *shunde majie* (so called "black and white amahs"). Jaschok (1984) researched into the lives of these unmarried domestic maids – their origins, upbringing, status and social connections in their hometowns before immigration. These unmarried domestic amahs came from Guangdong Province. Besides domestic help, they also engaged in many kinds of work: pan washing for tin ore, rubber tapping, pineapple factory work, hawking and construction. In some cases (exact number could not be traced) these women chose the life of a spinster and swore oaths of chastity and formally renounced marriage. Jaschok (1984) suggests that tens of thousands of women refused to marry and this unusual population of marriage-resisting spinsters vowed to be unmarried (*zishunu*) consciously, freely, and willingly. When they grew older, many moved from their natal homes into communal dormitories, vegetarian halls (*cai tang*) or spinsters' houses (sometimes called "old aunt houses" or *gupowu*) (Jaschok & Miers, 1994).

The 1960s: The Era of Flourishing Industrialization.

From the 1960s, Hong Kong's economy was heading towards more advanced industrialization. Hong Kong's initial industrialization was made possible by a combination of changes in the global economic environment and in the international geo-political sphere (Chan et al., 1995). A well-established international subcontracting network plus a good transport and communications system facilitated the incorporation of Hong Kong into the global manufacturing system. Secondly, the long economic boom in advanced capitalist countries and the resultant world trade expansion, particularly in the markets for standardized manufactured commodities, made it possible for the emergence and growth of local export-oriented manufacturing (Appelbaum & Henderson, 1992).

With flourishing industries and economy, women began to participate in the labor force. There were a great number of females participating as out-workers mainly for small factories. These factories mainly produced electronics, textile and garment products. Among the female labor force, a majority was young women who came from working-class families.

The 1970s: Expansion of Financial and Service Sectors.

The adoption of an export-oriented growth strategy exposed Hong Kong to new external constraints in the 1970s. The oil shock of the early 1970s ushered in a period of slow growth and instability in Hong Kong's major markets. There were quotas on textiles and apparel exports in the 1960s, but then protectionism spread to other sectors. Small factories with limited capital, however, were poorly equipped to take the initiative of switching to technologically advanced forms of production. At the same time, the expansion of the financial and service sectors led to the creation of more white-collar, better-paid middle class jobs and significantly increased the opportunities for upward mobility.

Industrialization is said to have impinged on the Chinese family in Hong Kong, changing its form, functions and internal relationships. It resulted in the predominance of the modern nuclear family and a more symmetrical type of husband-wife relationship. The data collected by Podmore and Chaney (1974) suggested that by this time relationships between husband and wife, and parents and children, were more consistent with the norms of the Western conjugal family than the traditional Chinese family. For instance, 98 percent of the respondents agreed that husbands and wives should consult each other about important decisions; young people preferred to negotiate with their elders instead of showing undeviating obedience. Together with improvements in education and a liberal social outlook, these were important factors in facilitating female participation in paid employment. Wong's study (1977) confirmed the above phenomenon. With the increase in gainful employment of married women, wives were found to gain a relatively more equal status vis-a-vis their husbands and to maintain a collaborative relationship with them rather than one of individual autonomy or dominance.

The pioneering work of Salaff charted some of the dynamics of the family wage economy and its significance for young female family members in Hong Kong through the 1970s (Salaff, 1981). She argued that one major feature of Hong Kong families was their centripetal nature. Salaff noted that working daughters quit school early in life and participated in the then emerging manufacturing and service sectors. Young women

71

regarded the family group's interest as over-riding their individual wishes and desires, their income making an indispensable contribution to the total family income pool. Salaff documented vividly the sacrifice these working daughters made in terms of truncated education. As these stories illustrated, women of the younger generation were at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. Their economic power and work experience helped to improve their position in the family, yet both Chinese tradition and modern industrial-colonial structures strengthened the role of males as heads of the family, thereby limiting the status of working women and keeping them under restrictive family obligations.

The availability of education and training was another factor leading to women's improved status. Since the 1970s, with the implementation of compulsory education in Hong Kong, more people have access to educational opportunities. Women who missed these opportunities in their earlier years could re-educate themselves through activities such as adult education courses (She, 1979).

The 1980s – "Feminization" of the Tertiary Sector.

The second half of the 1980s witnessed a rapid decline in the manufacturing sector. Its share of GDP dropped from 22.3 percent in 1986 to 15.2 percent in 1991. At the same time, the contribution of the tertiary sector steadily increased during this period. Trade, restaurants and hotels accounted for 21.3 percent and 25.4 percent of the total GDP in 1986 and 1991 respectively, while the figures for the financial and business sector were 17.3 percent in 1986 and 22.7 percent in 1991 (Chan et al., 1995). The same period also witnessed an increasing "feminization" of the tertiary sector. For example, about 96,000 women entered the trade, restaurants and hotels, and community, social and personal sectors.

Women's economic roles were also reflected in the occupational structure itself. According to the Hong Kong 1991 Population Census, clerical workers made up the largest occupational category (28.8 percent). Of the female labor force, 21.7 percent was engaged in elementary occupations which require very little skill, including sales and services, and as laborers in mining, construction, manufacturing, agriculture and fishing. Service work and shop sales work was performed by 12.5 percent of the female labor

force. 68.6 percent of clerks were female. Women also made significant representational gains in the occupational categories of "professional, technical and related" and "administrative and managerial workers".

The increased number of women participating in the labor force, however, did not appear to lessen the pressures on them at work. Cashmore (1989) conducted a study of the experiences of successful career women in Hong Kong in the late 1980s. Thirty-five successful women were interviewed about their perceptions and experiences of the problems unique to women. An ambivalent inside story was revealed. Aided by their liberal education or family background, they had all been able to break into traditionally male positions. They took pride in their achievements and no longer believed women to be severely disadvantaged in their rightful pursuit of a career. However, at the same time, they reported the existence of a male work culture and network that precluded their full participation. Many also talked about the pressure of being a mother and career woman, and that ultimately they would put family obligations ahead of their careers. When there were childbearing and child-rearing requirements, women's employment experience and pattern might be affected (Choi, 1993).

The 1990s - The Restructuring of Industries.

In response to international industrial restructuring in the 1980s, the manufacturing industry in Hong Kong declined. Towards the end of 1990s, this decline caused a tremendous dislocation among Hong Kong workers, especially women workers who had formed the majority of the industrial labor force in the past. The relocation of factories reduced the number of jobs available to women because most of the manufacturing factories moved to Mainland China. Even worse, it resulted in a further casualization of low-income women's work, underemployment and unemployment. Many women workers encountered difficulties in seeking jobs in the service sector since they had little or no experience in these occupations. They had gone through very dehumanizing experiences in seeking jobs, facing age discrimination (it was difficult for women to find jobs when they were over the age of 30) and unreasonable demands on their educational levels. These women faced keen competition in the job finding process, too.

The study by Chan et al. (1995) of the impact of the industrial restructuring on working women found two common features in the lives of most of their respondents. Firstly, all but one of 35 respondents entered paid employment early in life. Most workers started off as unskilled operators, moving on to become semi-skilled operators, and finally ending up as lower level supervisors and quality controllers. Over 80 percent had only primary education. They sacrificed their chance of an education and an individual career, not only for the immediate needs of the family as a whole, but typically for an investment in the future education of younger siblings. Secondly, almost all the respondents experienced a certain degree of improvement in status and independence from their family over the years. They themselves accumulated some personal skills, a social network and economic assets. They began to have their own savings, to expand their own social circle, going to picnics and parties. The industrial restructuring in Hong Kong had impact not only on their occupations but also changes in their life patterns and social relationships. They had to receive re-training before they could resume new types of occupations.

The Changing Status of Women in Hong Kong

During the previous decades, industrialization has enhanced the social status of women in Hong Kong. However, it appears that the vestiges of traditional norms still persist strongly. The position of women in the traditional Chinese society is analyzed as follows:

Women in Traditional China.
(1) Socialization

There is a general impression that the women have always occupied a very low place in Chinese society. What little they had was due to their relationship to males in their family as they matured through the life cycle. The subordination of women was an essential feature in a patriarchal society dominated by men. Formalized from the Chou Dynasty (1122-221 BC), with the implementation of rites and ceremonies, men had control over all the important functions, political, economic and educational, in society. The patriarch in the family was also the official head and representative of the family who had enormous authority and power. Some evidence of women's

subordination was found in the classical literature.

In the <u>Four Books</u> of Confucius and his disciples (600-400 BC), the inferior status and position of women relative to men was discussed in detail, for example:

"Man is the representative of Heaven, and is supreme over all things. Woman yields obedience to the instructions of man, and helps to carry out his principles. On this account she can determine nothing of herself, and is subject to the rule of the three obediences. When young, she must obey her father and elder brother; when married she must obey her husband; when her husband is dead, she must obey her son. She may not think of marrying a second time. No instructions or orders must issue from the harem. Woman's business is simply the preparation and supplying of drink and food. Beyond the threshold of her apartments, she should not be known for evil or for good. She may not cross the boundaries of the State to attend a funeral. She may take no step on her own emotion, and may come to no conclusion on her own deliberation."

According to Book of Odes (date is unknown):

When a son is born,
Let him sleep in the bed,
Clothe him with fine dress,
And give him jades to play with.
How lordly his cry is!
May he grow up to wear crimson
And be the lord of the clan and the tribe!

When a daughter is born,
Let her sleep on the ground,
Wrap her in common wrappings,
And give her broken tiles for her playthings.
May she have no faults, nor merits of her own;
May she well attend to food and wine, ·
And bring no discredit to her parents.

In Ho's (1986) comprehensive and critical review of the Chinese patterns of socialization, it was noted that differentiation of status between males and females began in childhood. In traditional Chinese society, women basically had to serve an instrumental and supportive role in managing the home and supplying male heirs (Koo, 1985). Sons were preferred to daughters by the parents. Only sons had the right to the family's property. Sons were expected to contribute to the family's economic security and provide a source of support to parents in old age. Daughters, on the other hand, were considered a liability since they would sooner or later get married (Gallin, 1984). Male descendants were necessary for the lineage to survive, whereas raising a

daughter was considered a luxury or a money-losing business.

Gender affected the differential educational attainment of sons and daughter in traditional Chinese society. In the early Han Dynasty, a girl who was born in a poor family had no chance of obtaining a decent education. If she was fortunate enough to be a daughter of a well-to-do man, she would have been taught to read and to write under a governess or a master. She had to learn Confucian classics, poetry, embroidery, painting, and music, as well as household duties (Tseng, 1992). Girls could attend school, but did so less often than boys. While brothers were encouraged to continue into higher education, their sisters were told by their parents that they should find work as soon as possible after they had finished the legal minimum of education in order to help support the family. Through this socialization process, boys and girls were prepared for their prescribed adult roles in accordance with *li-chao* or the rules of propriety governed by the five cardinal relationships, with their parents as role models. Segregated and rigid sex-role differentiation began in early childhood. Failure to adhere to the prescribed patterns of sex-role differentiation was rare and regarded as highly deviant. A woman was taught to be humble, submissive, courteous and the importance of maintaining her chastity was stressed. The eldest daughter was expected to be a role model for her younger sisters, to share the domestic chores with her mother, and be willing to sacrifice herself for the family. She was taught to defer to males, even those younger than herself. Thus, the submissive female personality was developed from early childhood experiences and reinforced by the many attendant messages she received in her family-of-origin (Wolf, 1972).

(2)   Women's Status and Subordination

We read in a poem called "The Peacock" (date is unknown, cited in Tseng, 1992):

At thirteen I could weave silk,
At fourteen I learnt to cut out a garment,
At fifteen I played Kung Hou [a musical instrument],
At sixteen I finished the Book of Odes and other classics,
At seventeen I married thee.

The above account came from an educated girl. The final destiny of the Chinese women was always marriage. There have been various sayings that reflect Chinese values towards marriage. Women had to take up their roles of bearing and nurturing

children, and be responsible for the household chores. The primacy of their roles in the domestic sphere as homemaker and mother meant that they were mainly prepared to be good wives and obedient daughters-in-law. Unmarried women were almost unknown, unless the betrothed man should die before the marriage and the girl choose to become a virgin widow. The girl was not only married to the man, but she was also pledged to his family, to serve its aged, to tend its young, and to care for its various relatives. Women who remained single or failed to produce a male heir after marriage normally had no status in the family or society (Tseng 1992). Not only were they deprived of legal and political rights, they were also barred from educational opportunities, economic activities outside the family, and had no right to inherit and manage property. Since women were totally dependent on men socially and financially, they were placed in a subordinate position, which was also supported by Confucian ideals.

In a comprehensive review of women's work, marriage and culture in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong, Watson (1994) described how some women were able to avoid and resist marriage through delayed marriage, compensation marriage or rejection of marriage. In delayed, transfer marriage, the brides stayed with their natal families after marriage for a year or so and delayed living with their husbands. An extreme form of delayed marriage was compensation marriage. In this type of marriage, the brides refused to consummate their marriages. Instead, they bought girls, mostly young maidservants, as concubines to fulfill their conjugal duties. These women returned to their husband's homes only in old age or at death. Through this arrangement, women acquired the status of wife-mother, the status of an ancestress worthy of worship, thus ensuring themselves a peaceful afterlife. Other women renounced marriage altogether. Reference (e.g. Jaschok & Miers, 1994) has already been made to women in the Pearl Delta who developed sisterhoods in local girls' houses and how some formalized these bonds by taking the vows of a *zi-shu-nu* (or sworn spinster). A variety of reasons have been suggested for marriage avoidance or resistance in the Pearl River Delta, namely economic independence of women made possible by the sericultural and the silk industry, male out-migration, long-standing local institutions, and cultural practices (particularly girls' houses, unmarried women's festival associations, and strong sisterhoods), and non-Han religious influence in the area. Nonetheless, these exceptions in Chinese history involved only a small

proportion of women in traditional China.

Women in Contemporary Hong Kong Society.

The social status of women has improved during recent decades. Such changes are probably due to a combination of factors, particularly an increase in employment opportunities and availability of education.

(1) Increase in Employment Opportunities

During the past three decades, a substantial increase in the participation of females in the labor force as a consequence of economic development has been seen. The rates of labor force participation of women have increased except in the younger age group 15-24 and the older age groups 50 and above. The decline in the younger age groups has been because of longer schooling, and in those aged 55 and over, because of earlier retirement. The proportion of women in the labor force increased from 42.8 percent in 1971 to 43.6 percent in 1976, 49.5 percent in 1981, 51.2 percent in 1986 and 49.5 percent in 1991 (Table 4-1). In 1996, it stood at 49.2 percent (Hong Kong 1996 Population By-census).

Table 4-1 Labor Force Participation Rate, 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1991 (in %)

Age	Sex	1961	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991
15-19	M	54.3	50.4	43.0	45.2	37.9	35.2
	F	47.9	56.4	47.2	42.6	33.6	28.6
20-24	M	89.2	90.2	87.8	90.9	88.3	84.8
	F	51.1	69.5	71.8	79.7	83.7	82.9
25-34	M	97.8	98.4	97.7	98.3	97.6	96.5
	F	33.9	39.6	47.7	56.8	64.8	68.4
35-44	M	98.3	98.6	98.4	98.6	97.7	96.9
	F	38.0	38.7	42.9	53.4	57.9	57.0
45-54	M	96.9	96.6	95.0	96.0	94.1	92.9
	F	42.1	38.9	36.9	46.7	49.1	49.1
55 &	M	73.6	70.1	61.1	60.3	71.4	90.6
over	F	20.7	24.2	22.4	24.9	28.6	31.9
Overall	M	90.4	84.7	80.4	82.5	80.9	78.7
	F	36.8	42.8	43.6	49.5	51.2	49.5

Source: Adapted from Wong (1995), *Women and Work: Opportunities and Experiences*, (Table 2.1, p.50).

Two features can be discerned from Table 4-1.   First, the labor force participation rate of women increased rapidly between 1961 and 1981, and then it remained at around 50 percent.   Second, the male group had a fairly consistent and high labor force participation rate across the age groups.   In comparison, the labor force participation rate declined for women between the ages of 20 and 24.   By the time they reached 55 years or older, about three out of four women had dropped out of the labor market (Wong 1995:49-50).   In 1991, among the group of working women, about 40 percent (39.9 percent) were married (Hong Kong 1991 Population Census).   The differential participation rate between men and women has been accounted for by various authors as being due to marriage, childbirth and child-rearing in a woman's life cycle; the unresponsiveness of the workplace to the particular needs of families; the wage differential between men and women and the limited child care services available for families in Hong Kong (Pearson & Leung, 1995).

In 1991, 31.25 percent of women were employed in manufacturing, 26.66 percent were employed in community, social and personal services, and 24.08 percent were in the wholesale, retail and import/export trades, restaurants and hotels (Table 4-2).   It can be seen that a small majority of female workers were employed in manufacturing industries.   With industrial restructuring, more women have shifted to the service sectors.

Table 4-2 Percentage Distribution of Working Women by Industry

Industry	1991
Manufacturing	31.25
Construction	1.09
Wholesale, retail and import/export trades, restaurants and hotels	24.08
Transport, storage and communication	4.35
Financing, insurance, real estate and business services	11.23
Community, social and personal services	26.66
Others	1.34
Total	100.00%

Source: *Hong Kong 1991 Population Census (Main Tables)*, p.115.

Women's economic roles are also reflected in the occupational structure itself.   In 1991, clerical workers made up the largest occupational category (28.8 percent).   21.7

percent of the female labor force was engaged in elementary occupations including sales and services and as laborers in mining, construction, manufacturing, agriculture and fishing. 12.5 percent of the female labor force did service work and shop sales work. 4.9 percent and 3.0 percent of women were employed in the occupational categories of "managers and administrators" and "professionals" respectively (Table 4-3).

Table 4-3 Percentage Distribution of Working Women by Occupation

Occupation	1991
Managers and administrators	4.9
Professionals	3.0
Associate professionals	11.3
Clerks	28.8
Service workers and shop sales workers	12.5
Craft and related workers	4.4
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	12.7
Elementary occupations	21.7
Others	0.7
Total	100.0%

Source: *Hong Kong 1991 Population Census (Main Tables)*, p.110-111.

Table 4-4 shows that even in the better paid occupations, women's gains have not been impressive and there is still great gender disparity. In 1991, for every ten professional males, there were five females; and for every ten male administrators/managers, there were two females.

Table 4-4 Gender Disparity in Selected Occupational Groups, 1976 and 1991

Occupation	Female-Male Ratio 1976	1991
Professional/technical	0:4	0:5
Administrative/managerial	0:1	0:2
Teachers (primary & secondary schools)	1:7	2:7*
Clerical workers	0:7	1:5

* The 1991 classification does not include secondary teachers nor primary school principals.
Source: One per cent sample of 1976 and 1991 *Hong Kong Population Census*; Adapted from Wong (1995), *Women and Work: Opportunities and Experiences*, p.57.

(2) Availability of Education

Education is another important factor leading to the upgrading of the social status of women in Hong Kong. Improvements in school provision and attendance rates over the years have greatly reduced illiteracy among women. At the very least, all young people aged 6 to 14 are entitled to nine years of free compulsory education. The illiteracy rate of women dropped over the past two decades. In 1971, 37.0 percent of women had received no schooling. By 1991, this figure was drastically reduced to just over 22.2 percent. Of those who have graduated from a tertiary institution with a degree, women have again increased their number and proportion. In 1971, 0.84 percent of women held degrees. In 1991, the percentage had increased to 3.0 percent (Table 4-5).

Table 4-5 Changes in the Educational Attainment of Women, 1971-1991
(in %)

Year	Illiteracy rate	University Education
1971	37.0	0.84
1981	29.1	1.54
1990	23.8	2.8
1991	22.2	3.0

Source: From 'Working women in Hong Kong' by S. K. Lee (1991). *Hong Kong Economic Journal Monthly*, p.45.

The phenomenon of no schooling had been virtually eradicated amongst young people. By 1986, the educational attainment of women had essentially reached parity with men amongst young people. The 1991 Census Statistics indicated that the enrollments of boys and girls in the 15-19 age groups in secondary, matriculation and university education were similar (Table 4-6).

Table 4-6 Enrollment of Boys and Girls in Secondary, Matriculation and University Education in 1991 (in percentage)

Sex	Secondary	Matriculation	First degree
Male	52	47.5	52.2
Female	48	52.2	47.8

Source: Census and Statistics Department (1991), *Hong Kong 1991 Population Census*.

However, it is imperative to note that there are still marked differences in educational attainment among the middle-aged group (40-49), and particularly in the older age-group (aged 50 and above). With reference to Hong Kong 1991 Population Census (Main Tables, pp. 78-79), in 1991, 13,507 out of 296,827 women (4.6%) within the 40-49 age group had university education in comparison to 27,838 out of 341,915 men (8.1%). Thus, almost twice as many men as women had university education.

The educational experience and opportunities for girls and women can have profound effects on their employment and career opportunities after graduation. As Choi (1993) argued, equal access to education did not mean equal educational opportunities or gender equality. Through a detailed analysis of the data on women's participation at university, secondary and post-secondary technical/vocational training, and teacher (primary) training, she demonstrated that gender segregation exists and there were marked differences between males and females in their educational opportunities. For instance, at the university level, women's participation in the traditional male-dominated and more prestigious fields (such as engineering and medicine) was still very limited. In contrast, there was a high concentration of women in arts subjects. It was mainly in the field of social sciences and business administration that women had made significant gains. Even if women had high educational attainments, they usually had less favorable career opportunities than men after graduation.

(3) Implications

What are the implications of the changing status of women in Hong Kong? The attitudes of society towards women working outside the home have been changing. The status and occupational opportunity for women has also been recognized, and the wife is no more just the affiliate of her husband. It is quite common for women to participate in the labor market. According to Ho (1984), the increase in the proportion of married women in the labor force implied that there has been a change in the primacy given to homemaking as woman's major responsibility. Based on my observation, some of the duties can be performed by the imported domestic maids from China and South East Asia, namely the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. The availability of domestic maids may help the married women be partially or completely free from

domestic responsibilities. However, it may just be that some women have added paid work to housekeeping. As expected, married women have to take the responsibility for childcare and parenting. A small percentage of men are willing to share these responsibilities. Further study is required of women's changing roles and how women maintain harmony between work and home responsibilities.

Trends in Marriage and the Phenomenon of Single Women in Hong Kong

The female labor force expanded considerably over the last two decades because of a set of interrelated factors. Among these are two key factors: the strong demand for labor subsequent to industrialization, and a rise in women's educational level. Whether such changes have led to the improvement of women's status in Chinese society has been questioned, but they nevertheless opened up a new alternative to marriage for women: singlehood. However, the choice to remain single inevitably brings with it considerable pressure. In the following section, pressures that are experienced by single women in Hong Kong will be discussed.

Pressures on the Single Women in Hong Kong.

First of all, pressure derives from the conflict of changing roles. It is quite obvious that women's changing educational, occupational and marital roles have not yet created parallel changes in attitudes and adjustments to role expectations. The continued strong belief in the traditional roles of women has been an impediment to change. The cultural norm for Chinese women was to marry and reproduce, and families socialized their daughters to fulfill these expectations.

What are the people's attitudes towards marriage and the family? From Table 4-7, one can see that people are more accepting of younger people remaining single than of older people doing so. By the time people are over 30, there appear to be stronger expectations and pressures that they should become married. It is also noticeable that people are more accepting of people in the older age range (50 and above) not being married than they are of those in the middle age range (30-49). Those women who remain unmarried may feel a certain social pressure. Their job experiences are not found to be better than those of married working women even though they may be able

to concentrate more on their work. Single women display a much lower level of specialization than men at the professional level.

Table 4-7 Attitudes towards Marriage Norms By Age (in percentage)

	Very much against accepting	Against accepting	It depends	Accepting	Very much accepting	Don't know/ No opinion	Total	(N)
Men remaining single								
Below 30	5.7	17.7	31.9	35.5	2.1	7.1	100.0	(141)
30-49	2.2	35.5	30.1	19.1	1.1	12.0	100.0	(183)
50 & over	---	47.9	18.8	22.9	---	10.4	100.0	(96)
Women remaining single								
Below 30	5.7	19.9	30.5	34.8	1.4	7.8	100.0	141)
30-49	1.1	41.0	30.1	17.5	0.5	9.8	100.0	(183)
50 & over	2.1	40.6	25.0	21.9	---	10.4	100.0	(96)
Cohabitation								
Below 30	6.4	20.6	29.8	35.5	4.3	3.5	100.0	(143)
30-49	6.0	38.8	23.5	26.2	0.5	4.9	100.0	(183)
50 & over	8.3	52.1	18.8	13.5	1.0	6.2	100.0	(96)
Childless marriage								
Below 30	2.8	19.1	31.9	36.9	3.5	5.7	100.0	(141)
30-49	2.2	35.5	29.5	26.8	1.1	4.9	100.0	(183)
50 & over	4.2	51.0	25.0	25.6	1.0	3.1	100.0	(96)

Source: Westwood et al. (1995). *Gender and Society in Hong Kong: A Statistical Profile.* Table 3.10, p. 57.

Second, pressure may derive from loneliness and lack of support. Most often, it is the responsibility of the unmarried daughter to take care of aged parents and dependent family members. In addition to the difficulty in being able to afford to rent or purchase an apartment, they may live with their parents. Then they may have to adjust to living alone after the death of parents and may be lonely. Unmarried daughters are also likely to make every effort to help other siblings and relatives when they are in need.

Third, pressure may originate from practical issues such as housing, money for the future. Professional single women have more economic resources for such expenses

than their working-class sisters.   As discussed before, most of the working-class single women are in low status and low-paid jobs.   A majority of them work on the operative and unskilled level.   These jobs are characterized as transient with low wages, lack of security and fringe benefits.   No pensions will be granted regardless of the length of working years.   The question of how to be economically sufficient in the future may create major stress.

The foregoing is only a preliminary discussion.   Working class single women in Hong Kong may share similar pressures with other single women.   A major consideration is the dilemma between traditional norms and changing roles of single women in the socio-economic-political context in Hong Kong.   Further empirical research on this aspect is necessary.

Provision of Community Services

There is no comprehensive community service for working single women.   Local organizations and social service agencies provide services to women.   Each of these organizations has its own frame of reference and focus of work.   I am going to sketch below the main features and work of these community groups/organizations, and then highlight some programs that are directed to the needs of working single women.

One of the oldest women's organizations in Hong Kong is named the Hong Kong Council of Women (HKCW).   Since its establishment in 1947, this organization has been concerned with women's status and their position in society and the family in Hong Kong.   Most of the Council's members are middle-class.   Its direction and work are largely service oriented, focusing on empowerment of women as individuals. It has a history of lobbying for changes in legislation concerning women.   The first significant effort of the HKCW was its alliance with other groups to change the marriage law in 1971.   Monogamy was officially proclaimed as the only legal form of marriage under the Marriage Reform Ordinance.   The HKCW also helped women to gain the right of inheritance.   Later, it worked with other groups to recognize the rights of women through legislation, including the right for rape victims to remain anonymous and to testify in camera in court, optional separate taxation for married women and

maternity benefits for working women (Yau, Au & Cheung, 1992). The Council later extended its work to include direct social service for women. One example, Harmony House, which provides a refuge for battered women, was established in 1985.

In the 1950s and 1960s other women's groups were formed including the Hong Kong West Women's Welfare Association and the Hong Kong and Kowloon Kaifong Women's Association. Most members were wives of influential men. They worked hard to contribute to charity, building schools and running homes for the elderly.

In the 1970s, women began to participate in the traditionally male-dominated professions. Groups, which addressed the question of how to adapt to these professions and occupational organizations for women in different professions, began to develop. Some professional women's organizations like the Zonta Club, Professional Business Women's Association and the Federation of Women Lawyers emerged. These female professionals formed their own networks, commented on issues from a professional perspective, and also participated in some charity work.

Another women's organization, the Yan Ngai Society, whose membership comprises mainly housewives in the middle-lower socio-economic communities, was set up in 1981. With a primary aim of supporting housewives, the Society organized recreational activities for members and community participation such as hospital visits.

The Association for the Advancement of Feminism was formed in 1984 with the following aims: concern for women's problems, promotion of women's awareness, enhancement of women's self-development and social participation. The founding of the Association marked a new stage in the women's movement in Hong Kong as it dared to use the term "feminism." In the current years, the Association set consciousness-raising of women at the grassroots level as their main priority.

In recent years, many other women's organizations have emerged. There are the Hong Kong Women Christian Council, founded in 1988, and the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association, founded in 1989. Apart from exploring the theology of women, fighting for equal religious rights for women and promoting women's awareness among female church-goers, the Hong Kong Women Christian Council also actively joins

forces with women's groups to participate in campaigns on social policies affecting women and in the promotion of equal rights for the sexes. With the membership of factory workers and union workers, the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association set out to uphold optimistic and positive attitudes in working for the rights of women workers. Their activities include promoting education of women for their own rights and advocating women's participation in political and social affairs.

Most of these women's groups/organizations are set up with a concern for women's problems. There are also other women's groups with a service orientation. They include the Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) set up in 1920, the Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club (1938), Tuen Mun District Women's Association (1976), and the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres (1985). The YWCA is engaged in social services and is concerned about the situation of women. The Federation of Women's Centres, due to rapid expansion, became independent from the Hong Kong Council of Women in 1992. Its aims are to promote the rights and status of women through lobbying, collaboration with other groups and development of resources. The Women's Centre offers a wide range of services for women to minimize their life stress, to develop their competence and to promote their own empowerment. The activities include telephone and individual counseling, education programs and publicity campaigns to raise women's consciousness.

Women's groups were established with the aim of offering services to the less fortunate, and to raise women's awareness to fight for their own rights in employment, education and in families in which inequality still exists. Most often, the target of these women's groups are married women, housewives and women workers. With the increasing number of women who opt to delay their marriage or remain single, there are some other developmental and social groups which have been organized by social service agencies (both governmental and non-governmental) to provide services for single women. Most of these groups are organized by social services agencies, such as Caritas-Hong Kong, Yang's Memorial Social Service Centre, Lutheran Social Service Centre, etc. Participation has been encouraging. Besides providing opportunities to make new acquaintances, the content of the support groups includes an understanding of single lifestyles and stresses. Stress management programs have also been developed with the specific needs of single women in mind. Individual and group counseling

services have been offered by professionally trained social workers in the women and family service centres.

Chapter Summary

The main purpose of this Chapter is to understand how women live and interact within the changing social and economic context of Hong Kong. With industrial and technological advancement, more women entered the work force. This brought about dramatic changes for women in the socio-economic area as well as in other spheres of life. However, continuous gender-stereotyping in the community hinders women's participation in employment. Beliefs about women's mental and social inferiority still persist. Women are expected to get married but not to advance in their socio-economic status. It is also recognized that taking up a high-status and well-paid job may be detrimental to a young woman's marriage prospects. Therefore, women in Hong Kong face a dilemma - either to pursue occupations that allow the possibility of remaining single or maintain the feminine role with marriage as the desired future.

It is suggested that singlehood is becoming a social phenomenon. More people choose to postpone their marriages and even not to get married. Nevertheless, single women cannot avoid pressures. Underlying these pressures, there exist cultural notions of femininity and marriage. On the one hand, there are various attempts by single women to construct their own identities. On the other hand, they have to straddle the old and the new, male and female, and Chinese and Western definitions of womanhood.

A Review of the Literature Review

In chapters two to four, I have described the literature on single women, the meaning of work, the characteristics of professional and working class single women, and the meaning of singlehood in the traditional and contemporary social context of Hong Kong.

Most of the studies I have found were undertaken in Western countries between the 1970s and 1990s. During these decades, the position in the West changed greatly and there were major shifts in family forms. Some literature points to the elusive nature of 'the western family'. More options became available to women apart from marriage. It became common for couples to live together as well as to have less permanent sexual relationships. As indicated by the limited literature, Hong Kong has some similar features but also some different ones from those suggested in the Western literature.

The situation in Hong Kong resembles that in the West in some ways. For instance, both cultures support monogamy, the sexually exclusive union of one man and one woman. In 1970 monogamy laws was introduced in Hong Kong. Moreover, the age of marriage is similar and tending to become later. According to the statistical information available, the median age for males at first marriage was 27.8 in 1971, but was 29.1 by 1991. The corresponding median ages for women at first marriage were 22.9 and 26.2. In both Hong Kong and western countries, the cultural norms for women to marry and reproduce are still strong and remain alongside an increasingly open attitude towards different marital options. As in the West, Hong Kong is now more accepting of affairs and extra-marital sex. During my time as a social worker in a family service centre, cases of women involved in extra-marital affairs were increasing. The social workers set up a hot line but it was difficult to locate the actual participants. It seemed that extra marital affairs are becoming more common but they are still not openly discussed. Compared with the West, it is less common for couples to live together as well as to have less permanent sexual relationship.

Besides the ambivalent attitudes toward sex outside of marriage, there are also some other differences between Hong Kong and the West. Kinship relations and obligations to kin and especially to parents seem to be stronger in Hong Kong. As mentioned in my personal account, it has always been the tradition that daughters leave home after getting married. Since I am single, I choose to live with my parents. I am totally responsible for the household expenses. The literature in Hong Kong also suggests that daughters will forego marriage for the sake of family welfare. For example, the study of Salaff (1981) revealed that her respondents (young women in Hong Kong) regarded the family group's interest as overriding their individual wishes. Such relations with kin and their obligations to them may contribute to women staying single

and also structure the life of those who are single. According to the Western literature, the percentage of young adults living at home has increased moderately. The economic consideration or the need for emotional support or the need for help with child rearing may lead young singles to choose to live with parents. But the phenomenon of living with parents seems to apply to the young adults only. I suspect that the single women in older age groups do not feel they should live with their parents and may feel less pressure to care for parents or assume financial responsibility for them. Of course, housing is difficult to obtain which may contribute to some women living with parents.

A synthesis and critique of the studies suggests:

(1) Based on the literature review in the previous chapters, a comprehensive study into single women's social life, social network, perception of marriage and singlehood, work, coping strategies, physical/psychological health is necessary. In conducting my study, I chose these topics for the research interview and questionnaires.

(2) Most of the studies have been undertaken in foreign countries. Local studies of single women are virtually non-existent.

(3) There is a dearth of studies of working-class women and the factors leading to their options of marriage or singlehood.

(4) It is suggested that a qualitative research method can be used to promote greater understanding of the individual single woman's experience in their immediate and cultural context.

(5) Current social trends indicate that the status of women has been improving over the last three decades in terms of educational attainment, employment rates, occupational status and wage earning. However, there are other sources of stress arising from intrapersonal, interpersonal and external factors.

There is still a need to develop indigenous knowledge about the experience of singlehood of working women in Hong Kong. One approach is to select and test

empirically some of the major theories or hypotheses to see how adequately they are confirmed by the data. Another approach is to conduct an exploratory study to describe and explore the experience of singlehood among women. Gathering and analyzing data can identify particular patterns or themes embedded in the data.

Chapter 5

Research Methodology

The last chapter shows that women encounter many ambivalent attitudes about being single. How do they feel about these attitudes? How do they react? There are currently no studies reflecting the views of Hong Kong's single women on these issues.

The main objective of this study is to explore the experience of singlehood for women. It is necessary to look at single women's experiences in relation to their work and support network. In fact, work and support networks provide a link between singlehood and society's demands. In Chapter Two, it is noted that the number of single women is increasing. However, their needs may be overlooked, and many people still hold an ambivalent attitude towards them. In Chapter Three, work is seen as an important activity for human beings and is regarded as a positive factor in human development, both physically and psychologically. However, there are problems with the organization of work in both capitalist and communist societies. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the situation faced by single women in Hong Kong appears to resemble, in many ways the situation in other capitalist societies. The study therefore needs to ask how women view and feel about being single, and how work experience affects their single life.

In this Chapter, I will discuss the research methodology, which I have adopted for this study. I will first explain the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology, and then I will discuss the reasons behind my choice of a feminist approach. Subsequently, I will present the detailed process of the study, which will be organized into three phases: the preparation and exploration phase; the interviewing phase; and the data analysis phase. I will then discuss the credibility of the research findings and the research process. Finally, the socio-demographic characteristics of the study sample will be described.

The emphasis in this study is on a woman's own appraisal of the experience of singlehood. A good understanding of singlehood requires an appreciation of the cultural context. To capture the complexity and connections in these women's worlds, this study adopts a qualitative approach. I choose a qualitative research method since it allows me to discover the "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things", rather than the "counts and measures of things" characteristic of the classical quantitative methodology (Berg 1989:2-3).

Central to classical quantitative research is an underlying belief in positivism and a concern with the testing of theories through "scientific" modes of inquiry. The positivist philosophy and its approach to scientific activity rest on several key philosophical assumptions. These are (1) the claim of value-free scientific activity, (2) the requirement of subject-object separation, and (3) definitions of scientific objectivity. Logical positivism asserts the possibility of value-free theory and science based on the use of reason. In societies where power is organized hierarchically (by class, culture, or gender), there is no possibility of an impartial, disinterested, value-neutral perspective. Reviewing the models and concepts traditionally employed, considerations of gender are implicitly excluded. The masculine model is the normative reference against which women are to be measured. DuBois succinctly defined the basic issue by stating, "we literally cannot see women through traditional science and theory" (1983:110), because the masculine model reflected the experiences only of men. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that such a model only reflects the experiences of white, middle-class men. Logical positivism also built on the epistemological assumption of the possibility of separation of the observer from the observed, and of the knower from the known (Lincoln & Guba, cited in Wood, 1990). However, it appeared that both the observer and the observed were influenced by the same sociocultural factors. Research objects gazed back at the researchers (Harding, 1991). Finally, positivist approaches to science assumed that there was an objective world of facts and universal laws. However, it was argued that these approaches did not detect commonly held assumptions or biases.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, produces findings not arrived at by any statistical procedures or other means of quantification. As stated by Strauss & Corbin

(1990), qualitative research is not just research about person's lives, stories and behavior, but also about interactional relationships. The data collected cannot be generalized to a population but gives access to the assumptions and logic of the respondents. The respondents, unlike those in quantitative research, are not chosen to represent the larger world.

Why is a qualitative research method employed? According to Eichler (1987), qualitative methods were particularly appropriate for exploring subjective experiences about which little was known. Researchers wanted to explore people's experiences because they were not sure whether the old categories and conceptualizations were accurate or not. Qualitative research methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world. Such methods are employed when researchers do not have conceptual categories and concepts that seem to explain behavior or experiences. They want to illuminate and get a better idea of certain categories by using qualitative research. Ruckdeschel (1985) made a good summary of the core assumptions underlying most qualitative methods, and these methods were the essence of the qualitative perspective. These were: (1) people are essentially interpretative and symbol constructing; (2) knowledge is gained most directly by the process of participation and involvement; (3) reality is multi-layered and multi-perspectual; (4) perception and behavior are strongly influenced by the context in which they occur; (5) data gathering must involve the use of multiple sources and multiple methods (multimethodological).

In the present study of the experience of singlehood of working women in Hong Kong, I wish to obtain first-hand information about the perceptions of the respondents and their interaction with their social, historical and cultural context. I do not want to impose my own preconceived hypothesis on the respondents, nor do I want to fit the respondents' answers into my preconstructed categories. Instead, I prefer to listen to what Hong Kong working single women have to say in their own terms, according to their own frame of mind, and with reference to their own experiences and their own cultural context. As such, the qualitative research methodology is chosen since it allows me to proceed inductively and to study working single women and their settings holistically, and with sensitivity to the respondents' own frames of reference.

Another reason for using qualitative methods stems from their potential to offer a

more human, less mechanical relationship between the researcher and the "researched". This is contrary to the assumption of subject-object separation adopted by positivist approaches. One famous feminist researcher, Oakley suggested that the "goal of finding out about people through interviewing was best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee was nonhierarchical and when the interviewer was prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (1981:41). She emphasized a collaborative, dialogic seeking for greater mutual understanding (Lather, 1991). Also, qualitative research could stimulate "a self-sustaining process of critical analysis and enlightened action" (Comstock, 1982:387). The "reciprocity" between researcher and researched in the process of research design, data collection and analysis helped to achieve this.

The Choice of Feminist Research Method

The focus of this study is to understand the experience of singlehood of working women in the changing socio-cultural context of Hong Kong. It is essential to find out how they have constructed their lives in the context of prevailing notions about femininity, and how they have dealt with pressures pushing them towards marriage and maternity. A feminist approach is therefore chosen as the research method of this study.

Considering the fact that women's experience has been ignored and even distorted (Stanley & Wise, 1993) and the study of the experience of working single women in the Hong Kong context is little developed, I am more interested in understanding the experience of the respondents than in the verification and testing of already established hypotheses.

The women's movement emerged in the 1960s. Feminists hold that women are oppressed partly because their lives, experiences and natures are not taken as seriously or valued as much as are those of men. Feminist researchers put much effort into studying women's experiences from their own perspectives. They insist that women have to define and interpret their experiences. Unsatisfied with the "male research methodology" which stresses "objectivity" and uses mainly quantitative methods, Davis (1986) opted for the use of a "female research methodology" to recognize the primacy

of relations in the women's world. The feminist research approach acknowledged connections between different aspects of the research, between the researcher and interviewees, and the importance of understanding the experiences of interviewees with reference to the context of their lives. According to Eichler (1987), feminist research was (1) informed by a commitment to social justice for women, (2) exposed prevailing sexist biases, (3) created unbiased alternatives, and (4) constructed reality from a female perspective.

Given these goals, the feminist researcher conducts interviews in an interactive, dialogic manner that entails self-disclosure on the part of the researcher and fosters a sense of collaboration. In her study of the transition to motherhood for 55 women, Oakley's (1981) successful research strategy turned out to be quite the opposite to that of traditional research. Instead of holding an objective and distant relationship, Oakley answered questions posed by those she interviewed, thereby becoming an important source of information about the unknown and reassurance about the anxieties related to childbirth. Even after the study was over, she continued to maintain a friendship with over one-third of the participants. In Webb's (1984) study, there were many resonances with Oakley's experiences in her interviews with women. She created a context of reciprocity. She not only answered the questions that her interviewees raised, but also listened for and provided answers to unasked questions. She regarded the interview as an exchange of information. These researchers were committed to establishing authentic relationships with their research participants. They acknowledged the connection between the knower and the known, and their research was viewed as an interactive process without the artificial subject-object split that characterized an I-It encounter (Conners, 1988). Davis (1986) also held that researcher and research participants were equal partners in producing data; the researcher did not assume a superior position to subjects, who were welcome to re-define the research questions. By adopting a feminist research methodology, researchers had to be aware of their interaction with the research participants, and reflection on their own values was necessary since these influence what kind of questions were asked, how they were asked, what kind of answers were given, and how they were presented.

Stewart (1994) also suggested that researchers had to look for what had been left out in social science writing and to study women's lives and issues such as identities, sex roles, and the way in which women struggled with their social devaluation and

powerlessness within their families. Also, researchers had to consciously and systematically include their own roles and positions and assess how these impact upon their understanding of a woman's life. She also suggested that researchers needed to inquire into how a woman understands her gender, acknowledging that gender was a social construct that differs for every individual. Each woman was different, so feminist researchers must avoid the search for a unified or coherent self or voice. Conners (1988) asserted that feminist research also aimed specifically to work towards defining alternatives and understanding everyday experience in order to bring about change. Efforts were made to address issues of false consciousness and conceptual determinism.

The Research Process

I started my research with an interest in exploring the experience of singlehood among working women in Hong Kong and the ways in which they cope with their status. Based on my own personal and clinical experiences, as well as a literature review, I designed an interview guide. In the interview guide, a few initial research questions, centred on the daily life and experience of the working single women in Hong Kong, were developed. A pilot interview was conducted. With only a few amendments to the original interview guide, I then started interviews with 30 single women.

The entire research process was incremental and developmental, and the concepts and insights that emerged from the data guided the subsequent research direction. During the research process, I had constantly to adjust and modify my research strategies in accordance with the new concepts generated. It was difficult to divide the research process into clearly identifiable stages since it was basically dynamic and interactional in nature. However, for the sake of clarity in the presentation and in comprehension, the research process could be roughly categorized into four major phases: the preparation and exploration phase; the data collection phase; the data analysis phase; and data presentation phase.

The Preparation and Exploration Phase.

This phase involved the development of a sampling frame. The respondents who

were to be chosen for the study were to have the following characteristics: -

(a) Women aged 35 to 44;

(b) Have never married;

(c) Childless;

(d) Not living in a stable de facto marriage relationship;

(e) Working on a full-time basis; and

(f) Born in Hong Kong or China.

Never-married childless women in the 35-to-44-year old bracket were chosen because they grew up during the 1950s and 1960s. When they were teenagers, they had access to educational opportunities. Education could have provided career opportunities and economic independence. These women might have been aware that marriage was not essential to happiness and/or survival. In addition, they would have noticed that divorce rates were spiraling in Hong Kong. They were selected as the sample for this study because census data indicated rates for marriage substantially declined in this age group. The other reason for selecting this age group was to maximize the probability of getting "single" women instead of "not-yet-married" women as informants. I chose 35 as the lower limit because women at this age were likely to have thought about singlehood.

For the purpose of this study, the term "single women" refers to those who never-married, are childless, and are not living in a stable de facto marriage relationship. Therefore, those who are widowed, divorced, or separated would not be included. Known lesbians as well as cohabiting women were also excluded. This is because, in addition to the stigma of being single, the lesbian and cohabiting women bear the additional burdens of society's homophobia and criticism.

The respondents came from two major groups: professional and working class single women. They were working full-time.

The sample was drawn through labor organizations, women's groups, women's associations or by snowball ("reputation") sampling. Although the sample was not randomly selected, it avoided the limitations of self-selection. Participation throughout the whole study was on a totally voluntary basis with anonymity and

confidentiality always assured.

I started the data collection in 1995. In order to locate the respondents, as well as using personal networks, I contacted women's organizations such as The Association for the Advancement of Feminism, The Hong Kong Federation of Women Centres, The Hong Kong Women Workers' Association, and the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association. I met the directors of the Hong Kong Federation of Women Centres and the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association to tell them about the research. There were two reasons for my contacting these various organizations; to get respondents, but also to gather the Associations' views about the position of and attitudes towards single women in Hong Kong. They agreed that more women now chose to delay getting married. Among these, some decide to remain single. Professional women seemed to enjoy their singlehood whereas working-class women had to work hard to lead their independent lives. But they agreed that singlehood had become a viable option. I also registered as a member of these two organizations. Finally, I located respondents through social service agencies, such as the Caritas Family Service Centre, Methodist Social Service Centre and the Evangelistic Industrial Fellowship. I used a snowball sampling method. I asked the women I interviewed if they could suggest anybody else I might get in touch with. As a result, I interviewed 30 single women who were employed in a range of occupations that are listed in Chapter Nine. They were living alone, with parents or with other family members. A summary of accounts of the 30 women is given in Appendix 1. Some of them could articulate their ideas in great detail. In general, they were able to reflect on and speak about their experiences although the professional single women were more articulate than those from the working class.

As I adopted a "snowball" sampling method in my study, it was not possible to construct a sample that was representative of the population as a whole. But I tried to be open to those persons, places, situations that would provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation. However, collecting a sample of single women was not easy. This is not surprising given that, according to the statistical information available (see p. 6) only 14.6 and 9 percent of women in Hong Kong have never been married in the 35 to 39 and 40 to 44 age groups. Although I tried to include as many types of single women as possible, the women were better educated and better paid than women on average. This difficulty was somewhat

mitigated by the fact that other studies suggest that a large proportion of single women are well paid and highly educated (Gordon, 1994).

It was also difficult to get a sample that reflected the religious divisions in Hong Kong. As mentioned in the paragraph above, I started by asking non-religious organizations like The Association for the Advancement of Feminism, The Hong Kong Federation of Women Centres, The Hong Kong Women Workers' Association, and the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association. I also met the directors of the Hong Kong Federation of Women Centres and the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association to suggest people who might be my respondents. They were unable to help and in fact made no suggestions. I then turned to religious organizations and to ones with whom I had personal and professional links. Here I was more successful but since I was using a snowball sampling method these sources inevitably led to a bias towards women who were Christians. The women who were suggested to me referred me to other women with similar interests to their own. As a result my sample of 30 women contained 21 who were Christians. In Hong Kong Christianity is very much a minority religion held by perhaps 2 or 3 percent of the population. The final result was that my sample consisted of people many of whom were a minority in two senses: they were single and there were Christians.

The Data Collection Phase.

In the interviews, I did not just ask the women to talk generally about themselves, although I used a feminist style in the way I related to my respondents. I therefore used a semi-structured interview which lay between the completely structured interview and the wholly open conversational or narrative interview. Based on the literature, my own personal and clinical experience, and the views of some of the organizations I interviewed, I had decided on some areas that were likely to be important. The issues dealt with were broad and included the following areas: -

(1) Social life
(2) Social network
(3) Perception of marriage and singlehood
(4) Work
(5) Coping strategies

(6) Physical/psychological health

For the interviewing guide, please refer to Appendix 2.

The areas covered in the interviewing guide were not hypotheses but they were questions grounded in my ideas about what was important in this topic. The guide asked some open-ended questions that focused the respondent on the topic, but did not ask the respondents to answer in a fill-in-the-blank way. The interview guide served as a checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant areas were covered. It also helped develop the sequence of the questions in order to make decisions about what information to pursue in greater depth. The wording of questions was adapted to specific respondents in the context of the actual interview. With the respondents' consent, the interviews were taped so that the richness and detail of their accounts were preserved. Note-taking was used along side the tape recording. The tapes were then transcribed. An example of a full transcript is in Appendix 3. The raw data was then coded for interpretation and analysis.

(1) The interviews

Interviewing involved two distinct but complementary processes: developing rapport and eliciting information (Spradley, 1979). Rapport encouraged respondents to talk about their culture whereas eliciting information fostered the development of rapport.

Before conducting the interview, casual contacts at tea-time, lunch or dinner break were made with each respondent. A certain degree of trust and a relationship had been established. Cards including thank-you cards and Christmas cards were sent to them upon the termination of interviews. To some extent, the relationship with each respondent was maintained after the study.

The study's objective was extensively explained to the respondents prior to the interviews. The interviews lasted for one and one-half to three hours and were conducted at locations chosen by the respondents. Some respondents stuck fairly precisely to the questions asked, some elaborated on the points by giving examples, and some tended to tell their life stories. They all made an effort to cover all the issues.

There were few gaps in the data.

The interviews were conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that required my self-disclosure. Interviewing a heterogeneous group of women presented difficulties. For instance, were my questions and their answers located in different frameworks; if so, how insurmountable was the gap? These problems were alleviated by background preparation: getting acquainted with the literature about single women and about different groups of women, informal discussions with single women, and reading about methodology and experiences of interviewing women. My personal experience of being a single woman increased my interest and understanding of the interviews but also meant that I had to be particularly careful not to attribute my views and feelings to my respondents.

(2) Mailing of Questionnaires

This phase of the study involved the development of the major themes in the construction of a questionnaire. After the semi-structured interviews held with each respondent, I used the same six areas covered in the interviewing guide to construct the questionnaire. The printed questionnaire was then mailed to each of the respondents I had interviewed. The questions were open-ended. A summary of the answers is attached in Appendix 4. The purpose of the questionnaire was to triangulate my research and see whether the replies were consistent over time. The mailing and completion of the questionnaires provided an opportunity to assess my initial observations and interpretations of the participants' interview data. The questionnaire was sent to each of the respondents six months after I had met them for the interview.

The Data Analysis Phase.

The objective of qualitative analysis is to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the informant's view of the world in general and the topic in particular (McCracken, 1988:42). As Lofland & Lofland (1995) suggested, data collection and analysis can be simultaneous processes as themes in early interviews permit an ongoing process of refocusing and reconceptualization. The literature of qualitative data analysis showed that there were different methods dependent upon various orientations and emphases. In this study, the data analysis method that I chose

was suggested by Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell (1996).

In this study, data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously. Each interview was tape-recorded, transcribed, printed and preserved on a floppy and a hard disc. At the beginning, I transcribed some of the interviews myself, so that my assistants (mostly my own students) could operate according to the same principles and procedures. Language itself reflects values, beliefs and cultures. Every subtlety of language can represent very different assumptions. In the process of transcribing data, it was also important to record nonverbal language such as pauses, laughter, and excitement. Transcription was difficult since the interviews were conducted in Cantonese, a dialect that has many subtle differences from written Chinese. Interviews were transcribed into Chinese and then translated into English. In this transcription and translation process, it was difficult to keep the delicate meaning of spoken Cantonese. I also have to admit that the transcribed and translated personal accounts involved my own understanding and interpretation of the women's meaning, which can hardly be the real meaning, if there is such a thing.

In order to safeguard the respondent's identifying data, they were assigned code numbers. During the process of data transcribing and translation, I continuously read through all of the interviews, making myself familiar with the entire data set. Afterwards, I summarized each interview transcript and presented it in the form of a case study. Each case study is from 2 to 3 pages in length. The case studies are presented in the next chapter. The purpose of these case studies is to present an inclusive, yet encapsulated version of the individual experiences of singlehood. The case studies are the outcome of a rigorous analysis in which I examined each word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, and significant nonverbal communications in the protocols for the purpose of making explicit the informant's meanings.

I then started the coding process. The primary task of coding was to identify and label relevant categories of data, first concretely (in first-level coding) and then abstractly (in second-level coding). According to Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell (1996), first-level coding is a lengthy and detailed process that involved five tasks: (1) identifying meaning units, (2) assigning category names to groups of similar meaning units, (3) assigning codes to categories, (4) refining and recognizing coding, and (5) deciding when to stop. In the process of identifying meaning units, the data were

classified and compressed. A unit can consist of a single word, a partial or complete sentence, a paragraph, or more. It is a piece of the transcript that I considered to be meaningful by itself. Once the meaning units were identified in the transcripts, they were fitted together into categories. When two meaning units were found to possess somewhat similar qualities, I tentatively placed them in the same category and classified them by the same code. For distinct categories, another code was assigned. In the process of first-level coding, I became aware of the different levels of social support networks of the single women interviewed such as family members, friends, colleagues and affiliation with social organizations such as a church. I also gained some initial understanding of the costs and benefits of different social support networks to single women. I was also aware that the social support that single women received could moderate their experience of singlehood.

After the major tasks in the first-level coding had been completed, I entered into the process of second-level coding. As suggested by Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell (1996), the major task was to identify similarities and differences between the categories in an attempt to detect relationships. I found there might be a causal relationship between two categories. For example, I found that women who had a strong sense of familial responsibility consciously decided to postpone marriage. It was risky to assume that one category caused another when, in fact, the opposite might be true. In this example, it is possible that single women who had no marital partners would give more care and attention to their family's needs.

After the tasks of first-level and second-level coding had been completed, I began to develop an interpretation of my data. The ultimate goal of qualitative research is to identify any relationships between the major themes that remained consistent with the categorization schemes and meaning units that I developed earlier. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that there were several strategies for getting a sense of the relationship between the themes and the overall nature of the data. These were: (1) draw a cluster diagram, (2) make a matrix, (3) count the number of times a meaning unit or category appears, (4) create a metaphor, (5) look for a missing link, (6) note contradictory evidence. In my study, the strategy I used most often was to count the frequency with which a meaning unit or category appeared. In addition, I used scales to measure the level of work satisfaction.

The last step of data analysis was to present themes or theory. In addition to the data from the transcripts, a large amount of information was obtained from government reports. Based on my knowledge from the literature and my observation of the data, I developed some simple themes around which to organize the data. References to the transcripts and the original sources of evidence were always made to check ideas as they emerged from the process of observation and theme development. The interconnection of different themes were then examined and the patterns of inter-theme consistency and contradiction were also determined. The major themes were then formulated into concept or theory. The themes could also be reworded as questions that could become hypotheses in future research efforts. For example, one core theme was that the single women who have a sufficient number of people available to turn to in times of need are protected from stress in what might be for others stress generating situations.

Last but not the least, the returned questionnaires were also translated from written Chinese to English. Responses to the questionnaire were also used for data analysis. I analyzed the questionnaires after the interviews and used them as a check on the reliability of the analysis of the interview material. The data in the questionnaire were used to support, clarify or elaborate the data that were collected from the interviews.

The Data Presentation Phase.

Data are presented in two forms. First, for each informant a case presentation of 2 or 3 pages has been written. The individual case studies highlight the women's experience of singlehood as well as the actual life situation in which the individual experienced singlehood. This form of presentation aims to convey an appreciation of the various aspects of the singlehood phenomenon and how they constitute a lived experience.

Second, the results of the comparative analysis are presented. The various themes which emerged are listed, described and examples of the themes offered. When appropriate, it will be indicated how often these themes appeared.

A comparative analysis of the transcripts, in that it highlights the common themes of the singlehood experience, make possible a presentation of an essential conceptual

definition of singlehood based upon the experiences of women in Hong Kong.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Qualitative and naturalistic research has been criticized as being "unsystematic," "impressionistic," "exploratory," and "subjective." These criticisms are usually made by researchers who subscribe to the positivistic research paradigm and who emphasize the verification of theories and hypotheses with "objective" facts and data "scientifically" arrived at. These researchers often use such criteria as "validity," "reliability," "objectivity," and "neutrality," (Cook & Campbell, 1979) to judge the trustworthiness of the research being carried out. However, it has been argued that qualitative research cannot be judged by the same canons as those employed by the positivistic researchers, but has to be assessed by a totally different set of criteria which is congruent with, and appropriate to the qualitative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Chapter 9; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, qualitative research attempts to capture people's meanings, definitions and descriptions of events, and seeks to uncover the thoughts, perceptions and feelings experienced by respondents. Therefore, qualitative researchers do not want to rely on the predetermined and fixed application of the predictive and prescriptive requirements of quantitative methodologies. It is argued that social phenomenon and human thoughts and feelings are not static and controllable, but are continually changing in response to evolving conditions. Therefore it is naive to believe that it is ever possible for social inquiries to establish isomorphism between social phenomena since there is no absolute truth or constancy in the social world. Multiple constructed realities, rather than isomorphism, are more realistic to understand and to make sense of the social phenomena under study. Therefore, instead of using the conventional positivistic cannons to establish the trustworthiness of the research, qualitative researchers prefer to judge the trustworthiness of their research by their own criteria (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Ch. IX; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:307-315).

Issues of reliability and validity start with the process of data collection. Lincoln and Guba's article entitled "Establishing Trustworthiness" (1985) reviewed external and internal validity of designs for experimental research and then looked at "naturalistic

inquiry" (interpretive and constructivist research) presenting the comparable terms. The four terms "credibility", "transferability", "dependability", and "confirmability" are equivalent to the conventional terms "internal validity", "external validity", "reliability", and "objectivity".

Credibility of the Research

"Credibility" refers to the extent to which credible findings and interpretations will be produced. Apart from following a set of systematic procedures of data collection and data analysis, several techniques were used during and after the data collection process to ensure the credibility of my research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested techniques to ensure the credibility of research findings which included prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer-debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks. I will discuss the techniques that I have used to ensure the credibility of my research findings.

Prolonged Engagement.

"Prolonged engagement" refers to "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:301). It is believed that prolonged engagement will help minimize distortions and ensure the credibility of the data collected.

In my study, I attempted to achieve this through telephone conversations and casual contacts with each respondent. Through these contacts, a long-term relationship with the respondents was developed. These preliminary contacts provided me with valuable first-hand information and helped in reducing possible distortions in my interpretations of the data collected. Moreover, my engagement with the respondents was not confined to conducting the interview and the completion of questionnaires. I maintained contact with the respondents after the interview and completion of the questionnaire through casual contacts and correspondence. These contacts provided me with additional information by which I could judge the credibility and authenticity of the data collected.

Persistent Observation.

The technique of "persistent observation" helps in adding the dimension of salience to what might otherwise appear to be little more than a mindless immersion. While the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences in the research context, the purpose of persistent observation is "to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:304). If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth.

In my study, I enhanced the depth of my observation and sharpened my continued process of analysis through the use of a variety of techniques. These included the use of detailed field notes and theoretical memos to discipline my field observations. I also tried to set aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and to allow situations, events, and people to enter anew into my consciousness, and to look at and see them again, as if for the first time. One way of setting aside my own views was to make myself aware of what they were. For instance, being influenced by traditional thinking, I might presume that women chose to be single because they were not given the option of marrying. Thus, I had to make an effort to minimize the predispositions that I had. Besides, I had constantly to analyze and categorize the data by means of rigorous procedures in order to sharpen the framework for my observation and to gradually heighten my level of abstraction. The persistence and rigor in observation and in analysis helped to enhance the credibility of the findings and to ensure that the conceptualizations were true reflections of reality.

Triangulation.

"Triangulation" is another technique for improving the probability that findings and interpretations will be considered credible. The term "triangulation" had its origin in the metaphor of radio triangulation, that is, determining the point of origin of a radio broadcast by using directional antennas set up at two ends of a known baseline. By measuring the angle at which each of the antennas receives the most powerful signal, a triangle can be erected and, using simple geometry, the source at the vertex of the

triangle opposite the baseline pinpointed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:305). Denzin (1978) suggested that different modes of triangulation exist, including the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories.

In the present study, I used different sources and methods to triangulate my data. The use of multiple methods further helped to elaborate, clarify, and support findings. Besides interviewing the working single women to get their personal views of stress regarding work and marriage, I also interviewed some academics (e.g. Maria Jaschok, Janet Salaff), responsible people in women's organizations (e.g. The Hong Kong Women Workers' Association), social workers from single people's groups (e.g. Caritas Family Service Centre), and ministers of the church group for single women (e.g. The Alliance Church) in order to get additional perspectives on the prevalence in the population of single women and public attitudes toward such a growing group. The information collected and perspectives expressed provided me with additional information to verify the credibility of the data collected from the interviews. Furthermore, I used a variety of data collection methods, including interviews, mailed questionnaires, and reading Chinese journal articles and contemporary novels on the subject of working single women. All these efforts helped in the triangulation of my research findings. I tried to assess my data and observations critically by comparing them with other kinds of evidence on the same point. In such a way, I could further assure the credibility of my findings and sharpen my conceptualizations.

Peer Debriefing.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "peer debriefing" is "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind." Such a process helps to keep the inquirer "honest", exposing him or her to searching questions by an experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil's advocate. The inquirer's biases are probed, meanings explored, the basis for interpretations clarified. In addition, the debriefing provides an initial and searching opportunity to test working hypotheses that may be emerging in the inquirer's mind and helps the inquirer further to develop and sharpen the emerging concepts and theories.

In the process of conducting my research, I often used the technique of peer debriefing to help me sound out my emerging concepts and to sharpen my theoretical conceptualizations. I discussed my emerging ideas, no matter how immature they were, with my colleagues, and invited comments and criticism. I was fortunate to have many colleagues who were interested in my research and who were willing to provide honest feedback and criticisms. This academic discourse provided me with the opportunity to reflect honestly and critically on my viewpoints and to improve the credibility of my concepts. Last but not least, my supervisor provided feedback and criticisms to sharpen my conceptualizations and to improve the credibility of my research.

Member Checks.

"Member checks" was another technique that I used to ensure the credibility of my research findings. "Member checks" refers to "the process whereby data, analytical categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:314). Such a technique provides the opportunity to assess intentionality, and it gives the interviewee an opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations.

Realizing the importance of member checks, I re-visited half of the total number of informants originally interviewed in the first stage partly to pursue understanding of their views and perspectives, and partly to assess the credibility of the data already collected. I also discussed with some social workers who were organizing support group for singles, my major observations on the perspectives of single women and my interpretations. Their comments provided me with affirmation of the credibility of my observations and interpretations. Since I had maintained contact with a few informants after the completion of my field research, I sounded out some of them about my interpretations of the lives of single women, and their positive response affirmed the credibility of my observations.

Transferability of the Research

"Transferability" addresses the issue of generalizability of interpretive research.

Generalizability or external validity is clearly NOT the intent or object of interpretive inquiry, but a reader may want to know whether they can "transfer" the interpretations to their sample. The more there is "thick description" in the form of quotes from interviews or excerpts from diaries, or notes from one's observations, the more a reader can assess the "transferability" of the study findings to their context.

Dependability of the Research.

"Dependabiliy" is about figuring out if the research process and the findings are reliable. According to Faidley and Leitner (1993), the dependability of qualitative data relies on the account of the procedures used to collect and handle data. These include a detailed description of the context of data collection, the rapport between the researcher and the researched, the researcher's position, goals and expectations being made explicit and the guidelines for the transcription of interviews and so on. Another common method is having more than one researcher doing the same research and having the two researchers acting independently of each other. The point here is to see if they come up with the same observations/ themes/ patterns/ concepts as each other. This is sometimes called "stepwise replication". Another method discussed in the article is performing an "inquiry audit" where one asks a third party to review the research process, data, and data analysis to authenticate the findings.

In my study, before conducting the semi-structured interviews, I made brief contacts with each respondent, built up rapport and clarified the purpose of this study to them. During the process of transcribing and translating the data from written Chinese to English, two colleagues were invited to randomly review several pieces of transcribed data. If some differences in meanings were found, I referred back to the tapes and make modifications of the meanings that were close to what the respondents said. During the process of data analysis, I invited a part-time research assistant to review the research process, read the transcripts and make an independent data analysis. Then we held discussions to see whether we could come up with the same observations. By doing this, the findings could be authenticated.

Confirmability of the Research.

"Confirmability" refers again to the ability to authenticate, corroborate, and

substantiate the findings. An "audit trail" is recommended which is a way of making all aspects of one's research open to scrutiny so one could, theoretically, do the study again and come up with the same findings. Of course this makes little sense pragmatically since the study was done "in context" at a particular moment in time, but it establishes, for a reader, trust in the findings/interpretations of the author. The auditor will find out whether the interpretations are grounded in the data gathered because the auditor will have access not only to some summary quotes that the author is using to demonstrate their point in a journal article, but also to the transcripts. Other things the auditor looks for are "incidence of inquirer bias" or situations where the author's interpretations are related to their own agenda and not based on what the auditor sees in the data. The auditor also looks for "overimposition of apriori theoretical concepts" as opposed to theory emerging from the data, which would be the expected mode in interpretive research.

In this study, besides the assistance provided by my dissertation supervisor, the research assistant also helped me to ensure my interpretations were grounded in data. By frequent sharing, she also helped me to check my presuppositions in order to avoid any imposition on my findings.

With the rigorous use of the above-mentioned techniques, the trustworthiness of the research findings and the research process is therefore assured. While I do not intend to claim that my research findings are absolutely trustworthy and that they cannot be challenged in any way, I can say with confidence that adequate measures have been built into the research process to ensure its credibility as far as possible. The research process, as well as the research findings, are therefore, to the best of my knowledge, authentic and trustworthy and are able to provide us with significant knowledge of and insights into the experience of working single women.

Limitations of the Research

Each research method has its limitations as well as strengths. The great strength of the qualitative method used in this study is the potential validity of the data obtained because they are collected from in-depth interviews. As mentioned in the previous section, qualitative studies, at their best, provide an inside view of social behavior – the

meanings that are the "connecting links" (Smith and Manning, 1982:18) that make the observable (and quantifiable) patterns of behavior intelligible to the observer (Pfaffenberger, 1988:12). The subjects in the interviews were allowed to express their views, perceptions, experiences and feelings in a relaxed, informal and flexible way.

Despite the potential advantage of qualitative methods, there were situations that could undermine the validity of the study. This research has limitations. Single women are not a uniform group. They come from the professional and working classes, have or do not have religious beliefs, live alone or with families. As the research progressed and toward the end of the research, I made a particular effort to pick non-Christian and working-class single women to help extend my results. Although theoretical sampling was used to uncover as many variations from the sample as possible, the themes or meanings of singlehood which came from women who are Christians may not be the same as for other groups of single women in Hong Kong.

In my study, when asked about their perception of marriage and singlehood, Christian women revealed that they saw both singlehood and marriage as gifts from God. They also trust God will make a way for them and therefore they need not be in a hurry. Thus, they may feel less of a failure for not having attracted a man. Christians are meant to marry Christians and in this way the Christian women had a different view of marriage from the non-Christians as well as a more restricted choice. Some Christians could turn to God when they were stressed and also some of their leisure time was spent in Church activities. Whether Christian and non-Christian single women hold different attitudes toward extra-marital sex is unknown since I have no data on this subject. In the interviews, I did not feel it was possible to ask them about their sexual activities, because in my culture it would be unacceptable to ask questions about the sexual behavior of single women. But it would be fair to speculate that religious beliefs would impose constraints upon sexual behavior. The Church encourages Christians to control sexual urges and advise the women to wait and trust God and the man to initiate. The greatest reward of controlling one's sexual urges is preserving one's right relationship with God. Single women must choose to remain pure and holy in their sexual conduct. In a sense it is their way of demonstrating their faith in God to provide for all their needs – even sexual ones. Sexual purity brings a sense of well-being, the inner peace and contentment. Lacking the outlets to express their sexual needs, women sublimate them through long hours at work, by jogging, or in

strong church involvement. Generally speaking, I cannot find any differences between the Christian and non-Christian women in the sample. Actually, differences may not be as important as the similarities. It is hoped that the phenomenon of singlehood evolving from this research can provide the basis for future study of other groups of single women.

Second, singlehood is not an individual but a contextual phenomenon. By asking for women's perspectives alone, it is not possible to capture the meaning of their singlehood for their significant others, such as parents, peers and colleagues. Ideally, data collected from significant others would enable us to identify interactional and contextual variables for a comprehensive understanding of singlehood. However, due to limitations of time and resources, I confined my data to self-reports from women. I hope the data enables us to understand the perspectives of the women in leading their single lives.

Some women, especially those who came from the working-class, were not accustomed to talk freely. There was also the possibility that some women wanted to put a good face on things and to cover up their stressful experiences.

Qualitative methods are strong in helping us to understand social process and interactions and relationships (Allan, 1991). However, they lack the clarity that quantitative data can provide. A certain degree of ambiguity has to be tolerated while many "truths" are found; after all, our lives are not always neat and tidy. As Davis (1986) suggested, "This emphasis on narratives, on process, and on interconnections results in complex explanations that often appear to lack the certainty and clarity that are produced by the male model." In this study, although efforts had been made to increase the trustworthiness, credibility and transferability of data, there was still room for improvement if additional resources had been available. For example, translations of transcripts should be done and reviewed by professional translators, and back-translations should also be done.

Another limitation of this qualitative study relates to the analysis of data. Although a set of questions was prepared for the interviews, predictably the answers from the respondents were relatively messy and required the researcher to sort and winnow the data so as to identify patterns of associations and assumptions. Moreover,

there may be errors and mis-matches in the use of words when the Chinese transcripts were converted into English. Sometimes, it is really difficult to get exact colloquial English word for a Chinese slang word.

Last but not least, my hindsight may also contribute to the limitation of the study. There is a debate as to whether the researcher should maintain some distance from the subject of the study. Researchers who work in their own culture, such as those who have close relations with the subjects, may not have the critical distance from what they study. They carry with them a large number of assumptions that can create a treacherous sense of familiarity (Chock, 1986; McCracken, 1988). Some studies point to the risk of 'overrapport' between the researcher and respondents, and argue that unambiguous social distance between two parties is especially necessary when 'tough' questions must be asked and 'delicate' analyses undertaken (McCracken, 1988:27). However, there are other studies which argue against the researcher trying to hold back his or her feelings and emotions during the interviewing process. They suggest that the researcher can serve as an errand-runner, driver, baby-sitter, advocate and Rogerian therapist (Taylor & Bodgan, 1984). Moreover, the researcher is regarded as in a good position to help the respondents, who are often the 'underdogs' of society, and to advocate for their rights. As I have rich and wide-ranging experience in working with single women, I had to make an effort to maintain a balance between total disclosure and total detachment with this familiar group of people. Over time, I believe I have become less conscious of this problem.

The Sample Characteristics

The characteristics of the study sample will be described. Although determining how the sample relates to the wider population for single women is important, a comparison cannot be made as statistics of single women in Hong Kong do not exist. As the rules for reliability and validity are more relaxed in qualitative study, the statistical significance test is not the prime focus of the study.

The data and a brief explanation of the data are presented as follows.

(1) Age of the Single Women

The ages of the single women in the sample were between 35 and 44. The majority of the women was in the age group 35-39, which accounts for 53.3 percent of the single women in the sample. 46.7 per cent of them were aged between 40-44 (see Table 5-1).

Table 5-1 Age of Single Women in the Study Sample

Age	Study Sample	
	N	%
35 - 39	16	53.3
40 - 44	14	46.7
Total	30	100

(2) Educational Attainment

Twelve of the single women in the sample had received a secondary level education (see Table 5-2); eight of those finished their senior grades and four completed their junior forms. About one-tenth of the single women in the study sample attained only a primary level of education. Most had received a higher level of education. Almost half of the single women in the study had a degree, and four had postgraduate education.

Table 5-2 Educational Attainment of Single Women
in the Study Sample

Educational Attainment	Study Sample	
	N	%
Primary	3	10
Junior Secondary	4	13.3
Senior Secondary	8	26.7
Post-secondary	2	6.7
University	9	30
Postgraduate	4	13.3
Total	30	100

(3) Accommodation

The majority of the single women in the study sample were living in private housing (either purchased or rented). The percentage of the single women living in public housing in the study was 23.3 (Table 5-3). According to government housing policy, single women are not eligible for public housing until they reach the age of 60. If they can afford it, they can purchase accommodation under the Home Ownership Scheme (subsidized flats sold by the Housing Authority). In the study, 16.7 percent were living in flats bought under this scheme.

Table 5-3 Types of Accommodation of Single Women
in Study Sample

Types of Accommodation	Study Sample	
	N	%
Public Housing	7	23.3
Home Ownership Scheme	5	16.7
Private Housing (Purchased)	14	26.7
Private Housing (Rented)	4	13.3
Total	30	100

Most of the women were living with parents or other family members (Table 5-4). Eleven of the single women lived alone; some of them chose to live in the same locality as their parents or family members.

Table 5-4 Current Living Arrangement of Single Women
in the Study Sample

Current Living Arrangement	Study Sample	
	N	%
With parents/family	19	63.3
Living alone	11	36.7
Total	30	100

(4) Number of Siblings/Birth Order

As shown in Table 5-5, the majority of single women had four siblings (30 percent

of the study sample).   16.7 percent had five and another 16.7 percent had nine siblings.
13.4 percent had six and 10 percent had three siblings.   One woman was an only child.

Table5-5 Number of Siblings of Single Women in the Study Sample

Number of Siblings	Study Sample	
	N	%
Only child	1	3.3
Two	1	3.3
Three	3	10.0
Four	9	30.0
Five	5	16.7
Six	4	13.4
Seven	1	3.3
Eight	1	3.3
Nine	5	16.7
Total	30	100.0

In the study, eight of the single women ranked first and nine of them ranked the
last among their siblings.   Thirteen of them were a "middle child" in their own families
(Table 5-6).   The data suggest that eight out of 30 single women in the study sample
are a "first child".   Perhaps eldest daughters are more likely to be asked to take up
family responsibilities.   Therefore, they have to postpone their marriage for the welfare
of family members.

Table 5-6 Birth Order of Single Women in the Study Sample

Birth Order	Study Sample	
	N	%
First	8	26.7
Middle	13	43.3
Last	9	30
Total	30	100

(5)   Religious Belief

As Table 5-7 shows, the majority of the single women (70 percent) in the study
sample were Christians.   Seventeen were Protestants and four were Catholics.   Nine
had no religious beliefs.

Table 5-7 Religious Belief of Single Women in the Study Sample

Religious Belief	Study Sample	
	N	%
Protestants	17	56.7
Catholics	4	13.3
None	9	30
Total	30	100

There are several reasons for the higher percentage of single women who were Christians. Like other women they may suffer from the fact that society still makes different demands and puts different pressure upon men and women. A man is usually expected to marry a woman who is younger than him. Traditionally in Chinese societies, a woman is expected to be passive in dating. Although many women are entering the labor market, this traditional gender ideology still prevails in Hong Kong. In addition, men may have particular problems with Christian women; there are more female devouts than male ones in the Church. According to Biblical teachings, female devouts are advised to get married to male devouts who share their religious beliefs. Under these circumstances, many Christian women find it difficult to get male partners.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented my rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology as well as the reasons for using a feminist research method. My interest in understanding the experiences of single women, their attitudes and feelings about their singlehood and their perception about their significant others' attitudes about their singlehood was the basic reason for choosing the qualitative approach. My interest in setting a platform for single women to describe their experiences in their own words was the reason for choosing a feminist research method as my guiding research method.

I have also presented the four major phases of my study. The first phase was the preparation and exploration phase during which the criteria and method of sampling, and when the data would be collected were described. During the second phase, I

conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 respondents and later sent them a questionnaire. In the third phase, I carried out the data analysis using a method suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Titty, Rothery and Grinnell (1996). During the data presentation stage, a comparative analysis of the data will be presented.

Finally, I discussed the measures used by the present study to ensure the trustworthiness of the research process and research findings. Some of the techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research have been used to ensure the credibility of this research. These include the use of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks. I believe that the use of these techniques have helped to ensure the credibility of the research and to safeguard its trustworthiness. In the later part, I also discussed the transferability of the research. Two key criteria, "dependability" and "confirmability", were also discussed. Limitations of the study were also described.

Toward the end of this chapter, the socio-demographic characteristics of the single women in the study sample were described. The data indicated that most single women in the study were Christians, and had attained secondary or even higher levels of education. Although about half of the women were living in a privately-owned apartment, a high percentage (63.3 percent) was living with parents or family members. 26.7 percent of single women were the eldest daughter in their own families.

Chapter 6

The Experience of Singlehood of the Working Women
Throughout Their Life

In Chapters Two and Three, the literature about single women and their work was discussed. In addition to the literature, my personal and clinical experience, as well as the interviews I undertook with various agencies gave me ideas to take into account when considering the empirical research. In Chapter Five, I presented my rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology as well as the reasons for using a feminist research method. In this and the following chapters, themes that are derived from the six major domains, social life, social networks, perception of marriage and singlehood, work, coping strategies, physiological and psychological health of single women will be discussed.

In this Chapter, I will consider how women experience their singlehood throughout their life. Based on the research data collected, I have identified how the women experienced the following: perceptions of marriage, perceptions of singlehood, dating activities, postponing marriage, worrying about finding a mate, starting to think that they may not marry, taking alternative action, handling loss of not having children, and settling for being single. Some of these headings or themes emerged implicitly from the replies and some were actually replies to a specific question. I will present the data under each of these areas. The findings are presented in the form of quotations. In order not to alter the meaning, I have given the literal translation of the Chinese and I have not corrected the English of the quotations. The discussion will relate my findings to the concepts and theories that were discussed in Chapter Two. Reference will be made to additional literature that I found when looking for ways to understand my findings.

The Experience of Singlehood

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the developmental perspectives hold that every person

experiences critical or significant developmental tasks or events. A majority of the developmental tasks or events that the theorists assigned to early adulthood required a marriage relationship for an individual to grow into a "healthy" young adult. My research data shows how the women are experiencing the process of singlehood.

During the interview, single women were asked to give their views about marriage.

Perceptions of Marriage.

When the single women were asked what was the first word(s) that came into their mind when they heard the word "married", they gave a range of responses. Many women's responses were categorized under each heading and some fitted into more than one category.

Over one-third of the respondents used words like "happiness," "good" and "pleasant" to describe their perception of marriage.

> *Pauline:*
> *"Happiness."*
>
> *Anna:*
> *"It's a very pleasant feeling. My impression of marriage is that it is very nice.... I would like that...."*
>
> *Elaine:*
> *"I take marriage as good because God said, 'Two persons are better than one'."*

Knox (1975, cited in Lamanna & Fiedmann, 1994) listed three positive reasons for getting married: companionship, emotional security, and a desire to parent and raise children. Similarly, these quotations revealed that the women in this study gave positive reasons for marriage. My social acquaintances also felt good when talking about marriage.

Over half described marriage as a stage of life and thus their replies supported the developmental approach. Marriage was regarded as the usual way in which women established their independence from their families of origin:

Betsy:
"*Marriage is a destination of one's life voyage.*"

Betty:
"*I think it is moving to another stage of life.*"

Annie:
"*Marriage is happy and introduces a new stage in one's life. Generally, people think the process of life is: study, work, go to society, fall in love, marry, have a baby, take care of children, get a daughter-in-law. It is generally people's point of view that marriage is happy and I am one of them. Life would be imperfect if one of the developmental stages was missing.*"

These quotations were found to be consistent with the current sayings that mature adults realign relationships from parents and form their own families through marriage. It was queried how women in this study established their independence if they did not marry. It seemed that there was no clear transition point. As stated by Schwartzberg, Berliner & Jacob (1995), the shift from child to adult could be more difficult to negotiate without the boundary making ritual of marriage and the creation of a new nuclear family. Single women would thus receive pressures from their parents toward getting married.

Some also perceived marriage as requiring a sense of commitment and responsibility. Both members of the couple had to learn to grow in marriage.

Connie:
"*Marriage is established by God. It should be respected. It is for mutual sharing in life and for reproduction. However, marriage is not an ordinary myth, in which, the prince and princess live together happily. I demand adaptations in different stages, shared enrichment, mutual sacrifice and establishment. Therefore, marriage, which yields joy as well as pain, probably enhances growth too.*"

Rose:
"*Marriage should be sustained by love, but not by one party. It demands mutual acceptance, patience and responsibility. It also includes loving the relatives and the friends of the other party. The two persons should be able to withstand suffering, to support each other, to share tears, worries and joy and so on.*"

Elsa:
"*Being a Christian, I can think of some words which are related to 'married' like a whole life promise, responsibility. Besides, marriage needs preparation and commitment.*"

To these women, marital commitment implied that they say good-bye to their old lives and hello to new lives of interdependence and sacrifice. It brought with it positive connotations. Like a coin with two sides, women have to make compromises and concentrate on meeting the needs of others.

Two single women in my study gave their spontaneous negative responses to marriage. For instance:

Helen:
"Marriage is not easy and requires commitment."

Lily:
"It is a big problem of getting along with each other."

Traditionally, husbands and wives have committed themselves to each other in marriage for better or for worse. Today, however, it seems that some enter into the covenant seeing their union not as a marriage of commitment but as one of compatibility or convenience. This attitude has no doubt been encouraged by the widespread divorce laws, which make divorce legal when either the husband or the wife claims that "irreconcilable differences" have caused their marriage to break down. A few women in my study revealed that a friend's divorce or unsatisfactory marital experiences might have influenced their decision to postpone their marriage.

These quotations illustrate how the single women perceived marriage. They agreed that to get married made life complete. Since the cultural prerequisite for normal adulthood was marriage, there was an expectation among the single women that marriage would occur. Marriage, together with family formation, was considered as one of the most important life transitions. From what they revealed, single women in the study had a similar perception of marriage as their parents had. Marriage was still a very popular institution. The final destiny was always marriage. According to Gittins (1993), getting married remained an important goal. Like the respondents in Salaff's study (1976), marriage was seen as a means of fulfillment of personal desires for happiness, companionship, security and children.

Perceptions of Singlehood.

In the interviews, single women were asked what was the first word(s) they thought of when "singlehood" was mentioned. Their feelings and thoughts about being single were summarized as: (1) singlehood means not being married; (2) singlehood means a transition; (3) singlehood is becoming a common phenomenon; (4) singlehood provides freedom; (5) singlehood means independence and autonomy; (6) singlehood means loneliness; (7) singlehood brings with it ambivalent feelings; and (8) singlehood implies the need for future planning.

(1) Singlehood means not being married

Singlehood, to the women in this study, carried the meaning of not being married. For example:

Diana:
"Singlehood refers to those not yet married and live by oneself."

Annie:
"Singlehood means non-married."

Fanny:
"Singlehood means not married, alone, with no partner."

The above statements clearly show that singlehood carried the connotation of "not being married", "alone", and "with no partner." Regardless of whether they were dating or not dating, they hoped to marry or find a partner. They had no intention of "not ever being married".

(2) Singlehood means a transition

Although one of the women had made up her mind not to marry, the others would marry if a mate appeared. During the interviews, a majority reported that they had not made up their mind that they would not marry. They regarded singlehood as a period of transition to marriage. They would use every moment of singlehood and prepare

themselves for getting married. Besides, singlehood provided the women with time to pursue their educational and career opportunities, and develop other interests during what was seen as a transitional period. Such a position is illustrated in the following quotations:

Tirana:
"I have always considered singlehood as a transition. Some may take longer time. Others may take shorter. Singlehood does not necessarily mean celibacy. I've never thought of celibacy. However, I won't be in a hurry to get married. At present, I'm still single. I am happy about that. I won't be in a hurry because I trust that God will make a way. If it's God's will that I shall be single, He will comfort me and strengthen me. Being single at the present does not necessarily mean that I should be single forever. It's important that I can enjoy singlehood and develop my own interests."

Vera:
"Up to this moment, I think I will not be single forever. The most important thing for me now is to enrich myself with knowledge. If I don't seek further studies to enrich myself, I'll feel very dispirited. So now, I do a lot of practice myself. The most important thing is that we have to keep abreast of the world. I'll seek further studies to enrich myself."

Thus, the women in this study seemed not to regard singlehood as their permanent status. In considering whether singlehood would be their permanent status, the responses were complex and not easy to interpret. For instance: "If I have not met someone, I'll choose to be single at a certain moment. I don't think that being single will be my permanent status. It may be my permanent identity. But it may not. Not sure." They did not reject all chances of meeting prospective mates.

(3) Singlehood has become a common phenomenon

Increasing numbers of people are staying single. Some of the single women interviewed gave the following responses when they thought about the word "singlehood":

Mandy:
"I think it is common to be single and I feel that there is a trend as many people like being single."

Ophelia:
"There are a lot of people in Hong Kong who are single. That's not a big deal."

126

Winsome:
"When I hear the word 'singlehood', it does not signify anything special except that people say a single woman is capable of supporting herself. I haven't any other particular idea in my mind."

The changing societal and sexual attitudes in Hong Kong have made it possible for both men and women to fulfill their needs for intimate relationships without marriage. More adults chose to delay their marriages and even remain single. To the women in this study, not getting married was not regarded as a totally negative outcome.

(4) Singlehood provides freedom

Singlehood, to many of the women, carried the meaning of freedom. It provided the opportunity for them to do whatever they liked, although some were caring for someone else. About two-thirds of the women enjoyed freedom in their singlehood.

The following quotations help to illustrate the freedom that singlehood brings:

Annie:
"There is absolute freedom in singlehood. I can tell my married friends that I can visit them. It doesn't matter if they cannot come out."

Fiona:
"I am free and bound to nothing. I can enjoy a great degree of freedom. I hate to be put into bonds."

Elaine:
"I feel free in being single, I only care about my parents. I can do what I want to do. I feel very happy in being single. I can spare more time to take up more church ministry."

Susan:
"Singlehood means freedom and less hesitation when making decisions on any moves. Singlehood does not necessarily mean loneliness but independent character will be developed and capability in dealing with problems intrepidly."

These statements clearly illustrate how some of the single women had the freedom to make spontaneous decisions and to choose how to use their time. They did not necessarily have more time, but did have greater flexibility and mobility. However, single people still had jobs to do in the home. Family members turned to some of them,

assuming that they had more time and energy.   For example:

Vera:
"My friends admire me very much because I can enjoy a lot of freedom since I am unmarried.   I hear them say, 'You are unmarried, how happy and free you are! Us? Oh, we are poor!' It seems to them that I can enjoy a lot of freedom.   Have they ever thought that I have to take care of my mother and my elder sister?   The fact is that I just bury my worries and do not reveal them to my friends.   I don't want to mention my mother and sister to them very often.   They will not understand."

Winsome:
"I feel relatively free.   I feel a strong sense of obligation in taking care of my parents."

Rose:
"I live alone.   I moved out and have lived alone for about ten years.   I visit my parents every week.   Every day, after work, I have to assume daily responsibilities: shopping, cooking, cleaning, running errands, making major decisions, etc."

(5)   Singlehood means independence and autonomy

Singlehood meant a sense of independence and autonomy to some of the women because of the availability of jobs and good job prospects.   Their sense of independence had given them the assurance that they could handle the practical problems of singlehood on their own.   The following are the examples:

Nancy:
"When I talk about singlehood, I think of independence.   With the possibility of no husband and no children in the future, I think one of the most important things is to plan ahead financially."

Pauline:
"When I talk about the word 'singlehood', I think about two words: 'independent' and 'strong'.   My mother perceives that women should not be dependent on men.   Being married or not is not very important.   What's the most important for a woman is that she can earn a living by herself.   At present, I do not need to worry about my husband's loyalty.   I need not get his consent when I go anywhere or buy things."

Work provided the women with one of the ways to strive for autonomy and independence.   Their social status could be enhanced as a consequence.   In their 30s, single women often excelled in their jobs, which have now become a primary source of their identity.   The affirmation they have experienced in their careers gave them a deeper

sense of purpose and meaning.   This caused a decrease in the "must get married" anxiety they faced in their 30's.

(6)   Singlehood means loneliness

Five out of 30 women indicated that they enjoyed their freedom but at other times felt lonely.   There were many situations in which they might feel lonely.   The following are the quotations:

Lily:
"The first word that comes into my mind when I hear the word 'single' is 'lonely'. I'm afraid that I'll be very lonely when I am old.   I am afraid of being lonely from the heart, not because of no entertainment.   I live with my elder sister.   She returns home at between 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. after work.   But I return home at around 5:00 p.m. or even earlier everyday.   Once I experienced a strong sense of being lonely.   I felt bored at this time.   I really wanted to cry when I sat on the sofa alone.   I had the same feeling that I've had when I was in a foreign country.   I could withstand such feelings when abroad but not in Hong Kong.   The moment of loneliness was short. Although I have friends, I cannot ask them to go out with me everyday."

Fanny:
"Singlehood is free and boundless.   There is less responsibility to bear.   Yet it results in aloneness and loneliness.   Life without marriage and family seems to bring regret.   If a wrong choice has been made, one would be more regretful.   To be single, I have to do things myself.   I have a strong feeling that I'm just on my own. So I don't always stay in my apartment."

Clara:
"The word 'singlehood' implies loneliness.   Sometimes I really feel lonely when I see pairs of lovers.   But these feelings are not very strong.   I think everyone will have these feelings, even married couples.   Anyway, I also enjoy my freedom in being single."

Betsy:
"In the dead of night or when I am in a weak position, I want a companion, no matter whether he is good or not.   A friend is ultimately a friend.   Sometimes when I phone my friends up, they are either too busy to answer my call or are not in.   Once I rang up a friend, she said that she was feeding her baby and she asked me to phone her again half an hour later.   When I phoned her again an hour later, she said that she was lulling her baby to sleep and she asked me to phone her again thirty minutes later. But after a whole hour, I was in no mood to chat with her."

Anna:
"I am extremely busy. ... This had masked the situation.   Sometimes, I have dreams, or that my sexual drive is very high, or if a man I really desire... Here, I will have one

or two nights of dreams. ... After I have the dreams, I will pray for God's forgiveness. ... that I cannot control myself, control my intense desire for sex."

From what single women in this study revealed, they did feel lonely. They needed love, acceptance and affirmation from others. Loneliness arose from the desire to have to be someone close to; someone who was interested in their life; someone who cared about what they did and how they were. It also implies that marriage may provide a person who listens to problem. Single women, in the absence of marriage, compensate for the loss by working and getting themselves busy in order to mask their sense of loneliness. There may have been a lurking sadness, not just about having children but about being suspected of being a lesbian and perhaps about looking after parents and feeling an outsider at family functions. Instead of explicitly acknowledging their emotional and sexual needs, they used other words. Among the women, only one talked about her sexual needs openly. Those interviewed did not consider that being single made a woman prone to sexual promiscuity although some of them admitted that they faced some degree of sexual frustration, but they might be afraid of negative comments at the same time.

(7)   Singlehood brings ambivalent feeling

Most of the single women interviewed perceived that both marriage and singlehood had their own advantages and disadvantages. This was illustrated in the following comments:

Kitty:
"In marriage, there is a companion and a learning opportunity for communication. However, there will be less freedom and more considerations in everything. In singlehood, there is more freedom and more time, especially in church ministry, in which one doesn't have to consider other views and needs. However, there will be aloneness and social pressure."

Helen:
"Both marriage and singlehood are good. They have different challenges. There is freedom as well as aloneness in singlehood. However, one has to grow with oneself. The couple can grow in marriage, yet they also face many struggles. They will become more mature if both of them follow the same beat."

The primary advantage of singlehood was that the women were free to do things at any time and in any manner that they wanted. The primary drawbacks were the absence

of being special to a man, the absence of touch, and the absence of children. Ironically, many of the advantages were also listed as drawbacks. The following are some examples:

Tirana:
"First, I enjoy being single. Second, sometimes I feel lonely."

Connie:
"It's amazingly free. But I feel a sense of inadequacy. A woman's life is enriched in a way that she plays a diversified role: being a wife, a daughter-in-law, and her life becomes versatile in that sense."

Helen:
"I think both have their own advantages. I still feel happy in being single. But I hope to marry. If I don't marry, I think it will be a regret in my life."

These quotations illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of being single. They might sometimes feel lonely because of the absence of a companion with whom to share feelings and responsibilities and the problem of being alone in an uncertain future. On the other hand, they said that singlehood could provide freedom for them to engage in a range of activities and to develop friendships. They were free to make decisions for themselves. They also recognized some of the undesirable features of marriage. Some of their married friends could not bear their marriage and chose to sever their relationships.

(8) Singlehood implies the need for future planning

To live on their own, single women had to plan for their future. First of all, they were aware of the need to be in a good financial situation. Because of the high cost of land, it is not easy to afford to rent or own an apartment in Hong Kong, especially with only one salary in the household. Moreover, single women have virtually no access to public housing. Eleven of the single women in the study lived alone. Some of them could only afford to live under the Home Ownership Scheme (in flats that were built or subvented by the Hong Kong Government to encourage citizens to purchase at a relatively low price). Those who lived in a private tenement had to contribute, on average, HK$10,000 to HK$12,000 (£900 to £1,000) in rent or mortgage payments per month. If their pay was not high and there were few prospects for promotion, they worried about their future financial situation. Furthermore, apart from those who were employed in senior government posts, most would not have pensions. They therefore had no long-term

security. Some of their worries were illustrated by Diana's comments:

Diana:
"I have to live a life by myself. For example, I can't depend on other people for financial support ... I don't want to be a burden to others... I am afraid that I'll lose my working ability... I am now responsible for my household. I also worry if I do not get a stable income ... If the income is inadequate, I'll spend less."

These findings confirm earlier research. Like the respondents in Gordon's (1994) study, women in this study were able to accept their singleness. It is possible that singleness does not bear as clear a stigma as it did and that it is now easier to make a positive identification of oneself as a single person. The present study also supports what Wilkinson (1995) said – that women could learn to get the most out of the moment. In the study "Self-concept of Single Women" conducted by Gigy (1980), single women valued personal growth and achievement. However, like two sides of a coin, single women reported that they sometimes felt lonely and experienced fears about the future. The findings of this study also confirmed those of Kaslow's (1992) study. Most of the respondents of her study were well aware of the positive aspects of their life-style, took pride in their accomplishments, and enjoyed their autonomy, independence, and freedom. However, mixed with the pleasure of being in charge of their lives was some ambivalence over what they did not have – a partner with whom to share intimate feelings and thoughts in a committed, durable relationship.

Dating Activities.

In the study, only one woman said that she had not thought of marriage. She seemed convinced of the advantages of remaining single. She said:

Iris:
"I never for a moment considered marrying anyone..."

The other 29 single women did not reject all chances of meeting prospective mates although they might have turned down opportunities of dating. During their 20s and early 30s, they had been involved in dating.

Gladys:

"I've been looking for a companion since I was 20. I really expect to meet someone I like and to get married as soon as possible. My aim is to leave the family. Yet I have never met one. Although my friends have introduced men to me, I have dated for only a few times and then rejected them all. One of my friends works in a marriage agency. Her boss told her that a male client wanted to find a girlfriend. Then my friend mentioned me to his boss because we had met before. After we had a meal together, we exchanged the name cards. The man didn't call me. My friend encouraged me to phone him first. I told her that I wouldn't. I will take the initiative to phone others for business purpose only. Only for business, I will not feel embarrassed. I don't choose to remain single. The chance has not come yet."

Vera:

"I want to marry, too. Yet, I have to find a person who at least can get along well with me. I won't resist making friends with the opposite sex. Yet, we have to go step by step. I don't intend to make small gains at other people's expense. I just wanted to make more friends. But the opposite party might think that my ultimate aim is to find a suitable man to marry. If the other person thinks like that, it will set a barrier between us. On seeing that my friends are so enthusiastic on finding a companion for me, I don't have the heart to refuse them. So I don't mind attending the meetings arranged by them. Being single or not is out of my control. I believe in God and I'll let God make arrangements for me."

Betty:

"Not to get married is not my intention. But I just cannot find a suitable guy... If my family needs my financial help, I would choose to be single... My friend once introduced someone to me. At the beginning, I didn't know. After we had finished our lunch, my friend asked me what I thought about that guy. She said he wanted to make friends with me. I just said it's all right to be an ordinary friend, but if he wanted to be my lover, it depended on whether the fate of pulling lovers together fell on us or not. So later, we had several dates and I also invited him to join our gathering in church. You know, his background, occupation, everything was not bad. He was just several years older than me, but the main problem was that he was not willing to believe in God. I told him that we could become ordinary friends only."

These quotations illustrate the ways in which some of the single women engaged in dating. Some of them had tried to meet men in a variety of ways, for instance by introductions of friends and relatives. But they felt that those they met were not appropriate for them. These women, like many other people, tended to make marital choices in socially patterned ways, viewing only certain others as potentially suitable mates. They tended to look for partners who are like themselves in many ways; of similar age, religious background, and social class. For instance, women who were Christians were encouraged to choose potential partners within their own social group. Some of them would encounter social pressure to marry others socially similar to themselves and be

133

discouraged from marrying anyone too different. They would generally ascribe to the principle of "matching doors", i.e. finding those whose background and qualifications matched that of theirs. The findings confirmed the general theories about mate selection (Murstein, 1978) that homogeneous marriages remained the norm, although the increase of heterogamy was noticed with respect to religion, race, and ethnicity.

When asked how they behaved during dating activities, the women reported that they played a passive role. They seemed to follow a complex set of rules that defined traditional dating: males telephone females and drive to movies, parties, or out to dinner, where he pays (Lamanna & Riedmann, 1994). If they were assertive in initiating a dating relationship, they feared that they risked losing friendships and encouraging negative prejudice in others.

From their accounts, it seemed that these women experienced pressure from friends and family to marry. A majority of them were introduced to prospective partners by relatives and friends. When they reached their late 20s and early 30s, but had not yet found suitable boyfriends, their relatives and friends would get worried and would start to look for suitable candidates for them. In the interviews, several women said that they did not know the purpose of such dating arrangements. However, they thought the male candidates would regard such an appointment very seriously. It was presumed that a woman would not go out with a man unless she was quite certain that the man was at least a potential candidate as her future husband. It thus might create a sense of embarrassment and anxiety for the women.

Postponing Marriage.

A majority of the single women interviewed indicated that they would like to get married. To them, marriage is a life transition that everyone should go through in the normatively prescribed age range. Some also had experience of courtship. However, they had postponed getting married. During the interview, the women were asked why they were not married. Over two-thirds of the women said they had not found the right person, someone with similar high standards and values, and were not willing to settle for second best. Five claimed that they did not marry because they had never had the chance

or had missed the chance. Another five women postponed their marriage for personal reasons. Their comments are summarized in the following quotations:

(1) <u>Unavailability of mates</u>

Susan:
"At my age, all the men in the same age group have all got married. I feel the chance of getting married is becoming less and less."

Tirana:
"I'm still single because I haven't found another half to whom I can commit."

Yolande:
"I haven't met a suitable person."

These quotations supported cultural views of respective ages for marriage. It seemed common for the women to select mates of "proper age" (Dixon, 1971).

(2) <u>No chance at all</u>

Pauline:
"To marry or not is a matter of fate and chance."

Betsy:
"I think it's due to my lacking of a lucky coincidence."

(3) <u>Missed the chance</u>

Helen:
"Actually I have had a chance. But I was too stupid when I was young ... I didn't know that there were many guys who wanted to approach me."

Winnie:
"I once turned down a marriage offered by a man who was my neighbor."

(4) <u>Personal reasons</u>

Rose:
"I am shy to make friends with opposite sex. I won't take the first move to talk with men except those who are younger than me. I don't want to have any misunderstanding. I talk with my colleagues in a group or only for the discussion of company business. Most of my friends therefore are women."

Diana:
"I had a chance to get married in earlier years.   But I turned down the offer when I considered my family."

Vera:
"I worried that once a man to whom I was introduced knew about my family background, it would frighten him away because my family members all depend on me. Hence, I don't have the mood and am not eager to make friends of the opposite sex."

These quotations give explanations for the women postponing marriage.   Their further responses are analyzed into the following themes:

(a)   Pursuing Further Educational and Career Opportunities

Several women said that they grasped the chance of advancing their studies, and so they might delay looking for opportunities to get married.   The following are some examples:

Elsa:
"I am not married because I devote most of my time to work and studying, so I don't have time to find another half."

Yolande:
"I have lived alone since I studied abroad.   Upon completion of my studies, I returned to Hong Kong and started to work with the Hong Kong Police Force.   I have been a police inspector for more than ten years.   I am now in a senior position.   I am satisfied with my current job which provides me with continuous training and opportunity to learn and meet different people."

The findings presented here support the conclusions of several other researchers.   In Simon's study, among those 30 women who chose to be single, some assumed that their work commitment would be necessarily diluted or abandoned if they married (1987:44). Another study conducted by Greenglass & Devins (1982) also suggested that a woman's career commitment was a significant predictor of her educational, career, and family plans. She would defer marriage while pursuing her education and career.   Some of my respondents, particularly professional women, said they had postponed opportunities of getting married in order to pursue educational and career opportunities in their early 20s. Such findings are consistent with some studies in the 1970s and 1980s (Adams, 1971; Spreitzer & Riley, 1974; Carter & Glick, 1976; Nadelson & Notman, 1981).   As reported

by Gordon (1994), well-educated, professional women were more likely to remain single than other groups of women. Besides the literature mentioned in Chapter Two, Levinson et al. (1974) suggested that single women might consciously postpone their marriage in order to acquire higher education or career advancement. Well-educated, professional women were more likely to remain single than other groups of women (Houseknecht et al., 1987; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1989). They had studied for a relatively long time, had postponed marriage and might thus end up single. They had concentrated on building their careers and paid less attention to relationships.

(b) Unhappy Past Dating Experience

In the study, five single women revealed that they had had unhappy dating experiences. For example:

Nancy:
"When I talk about marriage, I think of "commitment". I did not think about marriage when I was in my 20s. If I meet someone I feel is the right man, I will make the commitment. I have met with such a person once, but he did not want to make the commitment. I thus believe that marriage is not an easy matter, it is an agreement between two parties, one-sided commitment does not work."

Betsy:
"In my opinion, marriage is a destination of one's life voyage. Being single is being free and unrestrained. I think it's due to my lack of a lucky coincidence. There have always been chasers around me. Yet, I don't know why my love romance often falls short at the last stage. I had a very agonizing experience in the past when my boyfriend met his death in a traffic accident. Perhaps I was greatly affected by that incident. From then on, the boys whom I got to know could only be my friends but never my lovers. I also very much want to know why my love affairs are often just one step short of success."

Winsome:
"I have different perceptions towards marriage at different ages. I'm glad to know any people who get married. When I was in my 20s, I looked forward to it. I failed in a relationship when I was twenty-something. At that time, I felt agonized and jealous whenever I heard someone getting married. In the past, I just kept on making comparisons."

For these three women, marriage was preferred, but was thwarted by various personal factors. All things being equal, they would like to have a partner or get married.

(c) Fear of Marriage

With the increasing divorce rate, women might begin to lose confidence in marriage. They might consider cohabitation if marriage is only regarded as holding a copy of a certificate. The following were some examples of this:

Mandy:
"I've heard about unhappy marital experience of my friends. If I really love a person, it's not necessary for me to marry him. I agree to cohabitation actually."

Susan:
"Frankly speaking, I think cohabitation is okay and there is no need to get married."

(d) Familial Responsibility

Several informants reported that they would sacrifice their option of getting married for the sake of their families. Examples were:

Diana:
"I am the eldest daughter and I have eight younger brothers. My father passed away when I was in my teens. Being the eldest daughter, I have a strong sense of familial responsibility. I worry that nobody can take care of my eight younger brothers if I get married... I had chances to get married in earlier years. But I turned down the offer in consideration of my family. I hold strong responsibilities in my family and I do not have time to work on relationships with the opposite sex."

Kitty:
"In my family, I am the eldest daughter. My father passed away and the family faced great financial distress. I am not married because I haven't met a suitable guy. In fact, my mother just didn't want me to get married. My family still relies on me very much... We are living in a private tenement and I have to pay the monthly mortgage loan."

These quotations reveal how some women delayed their marriage for family reasons. Salaff (1976) found a similar situation. Daughters, especially the eldest ones, had an economic obligation to their families. They delayed their marriages for the sake of the family's welfare. These findings also matched those in the study by Spreitzer & Riley (1974). According to them, first-born girls, especially in large families, might be less likely to marry by virtue of the fact that they frequently served as surrogate parents in the care of young siblings. Thus, they might have a less romantic view of marriage and

family life. Another possibility was that there were pressures on the daughters not to depart from a one-parent family.   Diana, Iris and Kitty were examples of this.

(e)   Other Reasons

In the study, several women said they had not married because of their inadequate skills in getting along with the opposite sex.   For example:

Elaine:
"I don't know how to get along with the opposite sex and I have missed a lot of chances."

Helen:
"Sometimes, I met a guy who wanted to approach me.   As I didn't know how to deal with him, I just kicked him away like a ball."

Some also attributed still being single to their occupations which were female-dominated.   These occupations included teaching, nursing, social work, etc.   Such work might limit their opportunities of meeting members of the opposite sex.   The following examples illustrate their unique experiences:

Fanny:
"I am not married because I don't get the chance.   Also I think because I'm not self-motivated enough.   I don't take the first move to seize a chance.   I wait for its coming, and do nothing.   Yet, my environment is not favorable.   Most of my colleagues and friends are women.   My choices have become very limited as time flies.   I was too passive when I was a young girl, therefore I am still single now.   I am not attractive enough.   Some girls are flirtatious.   They are a lure to many men.   The others are just too delicately pretty.   I am neither the first kind nor the second kind.   I am still looking for someone to get married to."

Anna:
"I prefer marriage to celibacy.   Chance is the key factor leading to my singlehood.   Before I become a lawyer, I worked in a social welfare agency as a team leader.   Firstly, social work itself is a female-dominated profession.   The number of male colleagues is comparatively few.   Secondary, my male colleagues treated me as the supervisor, leader, and boss.   Because of work, I do not have any chances to meet a suitable man."

Such findings are consistent with Salaff's finding (1976) that one of the factors leading to singlehood was availability of mates.   Some women employed in female-dominated

occupations might not easily get access to or locate prospective mates. The pool of suitable men for professional women seemed even smaller unless they gave up the selection criteria of "similarity". But still most women even in female occupations and with a lot of education are married.

Last, the shortage of men of a "proper" age also accounted for the delay of marriage among women in this study. A majority of those males of the respective age group are new immigrants from Mainland China. The largest influx of illegal immigrants happened in the late 1970s. Due to the economic reform, the control of the China government over illegal migration loosened and a large number of people could escape from the coastal zone of China. From 1977 to 1980, about 408,000 mainlanders came into Hong Kong and most of them came illegally (Hong Kong Government, 1980). After seven years, they became Hong Kong citizens. In the labor market, these illegal male Chinese immigrants were mostly occupied in manual labor. They became an isolated and socially immobile group in Hong Kong society. It is unlikely that the women, particularly the professional women, would choose these men as their mates. In addition, most of these new male immigrants now tend to return to their villages in Mainland China to find a partner since there is no longer any government control over crossing the border.

What proportion of the women interviewed was single by conscious choice? What proportion was single by default? In the interview, I asked, "Do you consider that you are single by choice, by chance, or by circumstances beyond your control?" The responses that they gave were ambivalent. For example: "I haven't chosen to be single. I have just had no chance at all [to be married]." "I cannot meet the right guy, and so I just choose to be single," and "I think choice and opportunity are interrelated. I think it's easy for me not to be single. I can easily get someone. But can I accept that guy? There is a choice. On the other hand, it's also because I haven't had the opportunity to meet my true love." What the single women said might be a deliberate decision to remain single or it might come as a gradual awareness and acceptance of the fact that marriage was unlikely. It is therefore clear that a majority of them had not consciously chosen to be single. As we have noted, more than half of them replied that they could not find suitable partners. Several women said that they had missed their chance and therefore they remained single. However, it is difficult to say whether or not these women have decided to remain single.

Although they have not got married within the culturally prescribed age range, a majority of them have not consciously decided to remain single. Most of the women said they wished to be married. When asked if they expected to marry before old age, about half said they did.

The findings presented here only partially support the "typology of singlehood," proposed by sociologist Peter Stein. He suggested a four-cell framework for understanding the varieties of single status. Details are depicted in Table 6-1.

Table 6-1   Varieties of Singlehood

	Voluntary	*Involuntary*
Temporary	② Never-marrieds and formerly marrieds open to but not looking for marriage	② Those are actively seeking mates ② Those who were not interested but are now looking
Stable	② Those choosing to be single ② Those who oppose marriage ② Members of religious orders	② Never-marrieds and formerly marrieds who wanted to marry or remarry, but have not found a mate – and have accepted singleness as probable life status ② Persons with physical or psychological impairment

I only found one woman who chose singlehood as her permanent status. The chances of getting married become slimmer with age so some of the women may have accepted singleness as their probable life status. The factors affecting their decision whether to marry or not are also complex. However, most of them still remain open to the chance of getting married. Stein's four-cell framework could not accommodate such women.

Worrying About Finding a Mate.

As mentioned, single women in this study had considered marriage in the past but had not found the suitable man. Some of the single women reported feeling anxious about being single. They began to worry about the possibility of not finding a mate. The

following are some examples of how the single women expressed such worries:

Annie:
"I missed all those chances. Now, no one is wooing me. I do not have any relationship that can be developed into marriage. I haven't chosen to be single. I just cannot get a target."

Susan:
"I'm approaching 40 now and I'm quite restless. All the men in my age group have got married. I feel the chance of getting married is becoming less and less, nearly zero."

Winnie:
"I would want to have a life partner if I got a chance. To be single is not that good. If I got a husband, I could share my heart with him and I could depend on him when I was old. But it's much more difficult to find a partner now."

Betsy:
"I also very much want to know why my love affairs are often just one step short of success. I hope I won't be single in the long run."

The findings presented here are consistent with the study by Levinson et al. (1974), which suggested that most women who were still single by their late 20s might experience pressure. They also support the study of Stein (1978). He reported that many men and women who remained single into their 30s said that the mid to late 20s was a period of great difficulty for them.

Starting to Think That They May Not Marry.

With advancing age, the single women interviewed remained open to opportunities of marriage, while at the same time starting to come to grips with the possibility of remaining single. The following quotations indicate their way of thinking:

Helen:
"I think that being single will be a permanent status for me but I don't want to be."

Nancy:
"If I cannot meet the right man, I will choose to remain single. I will not marry someone because I need to get married."

Susan:
"I think I'll not get married at 50 or even 60. By that time, I'll think that there is no

need to arrange such a formality."

Betsy:
"I have prepared for the worst that I might remain unmarried all my life. However, if one day, the luck of bringing lovers together falls on me and I could be fortunate enough to grasp that luck, I would choose marriage. I won't resist marriage. Perhaps that luck won't come to me until I am 50, let me start my love romance at 50."

Taking Alternative Action.

In the interviews, the single women revealed how they coped with their state of being single. The following are some examples to show what alternative actions they take:

Betty:
"I expand my social circle by actively participating in religious activities. Besides church participation, I also take part in some activities that were organized by a Christian social service organization. I attended a course which lasted for about one and half years. From the course, I learnt to build myself up. With the help of the leaders, I knew what my good qualities were. I felt that I became more optimistic and had foresight. After the completion of the course, a class union was set up. The function of a class union was to coordinate other classmates and mobilize them to be volunteers for some services. I was nominated to be a secretary who was responsible for the liaison work. I could also make use of the opportunities to get acquainted with people of the grass roots sector."

Elaine:
"I feel free in being single. I can do what I want to do... Being a church minister, I hope to devote myself to church ministry by equipping myself with knowledge. Through my pastoral care, I can show God's love to people."

Winsome:
"I like to use my leisure time to help people. Being a very active member in my church, I will make every opportunity to take part in every Church activity, such as the charity meeting in the church. I am also responsible for preparing sacraments at Easter, Christmas and retreats. I always bring news about the church from the minister to church members who are old and sick."

The findings presented here show how women coped with the state of being single. They attempted to make their present life as meaningful as possible. Some equipped themselves by attending courses and doing voluntary work in church or some social service agencies. Women in this study reported that they treasured the social circle in the church and their relationship with church-mates. They did not all belong to the same church.

Those who were Protestants belonged to a variety of denominations such as the Baptists, the Alliance Church, the Pentecostal, etc. A few of them were Roman Catholics. The Christian women in this study revealed that church life could widen their social horizon and make them more extroverted. Regardless of whether they were Christians or not, they committed themselves to develop other kinds of relationship apart from those in their own families. My findings replicate what Loewenstein et al. (1981) reported that single women over 30 tended to be contented with their lives. Many researchers (Stein, 1976; Spurlock, 1990; Anderson & Stewart, 1994) reported that single women had a viable lifestyle, and my research confirms this.

Handling Loss of Not Having Children.

Three respondents revealed that they were dealing with their feelings of loss at not having children. Some might encounter pressure from their family of origin to produce grandchildren. The following are examples:

Elsa:
"If I got married, I would like to have some children and I would enjoy the feeling of being a mother... I hope to have my own baby. I'll meet a lot of problems if I'm too old to get a baby. Moreover, I'll feel too exhausted to bring up my child."

Annie:
"I would like to have a baby if I married. But I think I've reached the age which is not suitable for me to have a baby. Furthermore, my physical condition does not allow me to do so."

As well as the limited choice of available marital partners, some of the women also face the limit of their biological time clock. With their advancing age, they had to accept the fact that soon they would not be able to think about a future in which they would have children. One of the commonest regrets of a single woman is the potential absence of children in her life. This is consistent with the findings of Anderson & Steward (1995) and Schwartzberg et al. (1995). Because of limits of the biological time clock, almost all single women start to feel pressure in their 30s to have children. It is also common for them to experience some kind of struggle, such as pressure from their family of origin to settle down and to produce grandchildren (Toufexis, 1996).

<u>Settling for Being Single.</u>

With the increasingly limited possibilities of getting a suitable mate, the majority of women in the study had to plan for a single future life. The following is an example indicating how a single woman settled for being single:

(1) <u>Establishing Career Paths</u>

Annie:
"I received social work training during my university education. After working for several years, I decided to change to my current profession as a lawyer. The training took four years of classroom study, two years as trainee, and two years of work experience. Presently, I spend my free time taking relevant courses. Similar to other single women, I am very conscientious in securing my job and future finance as well. I want to get into teaching. Therefore, I see the need to get another academic degree."

This quotation shows how a single woman may be able to advance or change her career path. According to Sokoloff (1981), work was important to single women. For them, the workplace is usually the central anchor and organizing focus of daily life. They work for a combination of reasons: to provide for their own support, to gain experience, to establish a career in the labor market, and to establish an independent and single life style, as well as to "keep busy" or to look for the "right husband". The affirmation they experienced in their careers has given them a deeper sense of purpose and meaning. This caused a decrease in the "must get married" anxiety they faced in their 20s.

(2) <u>Securing Accommodation</u>

Securing accommodation was also an important task for single women since they needed a home in which to put down roots and to feel a sense of permanence and belonging. In this study, the women expressed their sense of achievement when establishing a home. For example:

Gladys:
"The purchase of my own flat becomes my sense of achievement. I find that I have become more independent than staying with the family of my second mother."

145

Fanny:
"I have my own flat even though it is not easy for me to afford.   I invite friends to my flat on some weekends."

(3)   Deepening A Friendship Network

The women in the study revealed how they deepen their friendship networks.   This was evident from the following cases:

Betsy:
"I have seven friends whom I meet quite regularly.   Eight of us worked in the same factory 11 years ago.   However, we all quit the job one after another within one year's time.   In spite of that, we still keep in touch with one another.   It happened that the birthdays of the eight of us fall into four different months in pairs.   Hence, we at least have four gatherings a year to celebrate our birthdays.   Most of those friends are married.   Some of them even have two children.   Yet, if any of us needs help, the rest will be a Johnny-on-the-spot.   Among these seven friends, some are closer to me. Other than having regular meetings as mentioned above, we'll also have non pre-arranged meetings.   For example, if whoever is free or has two complimentary film tickets, we'd call each other to meet."

Fiona:
"As to my friends, most of them are in the same trade as mine.   For those who are not in the same field of mine, we seldom meet.   We go for dinner once to twice a fortnight... We are in tune with one another and won't care about trifles.   Well, they can ask someone to look after their families for them.   After they have got everything settled at home and have their work finished, they can come out to spend their leisure time with me.   At the same time, they would spare some private time for themselves. It's impossible for one to donate all her leisure time to her family after going off duty. Yes, some of my other married friends might say that they couldn't spare a little time to spend with me.   Yet, several friends would not say so.   We can't understand the character of a person well unless we have spent some time on getting along with her."

The findings show that single women enjoyed being together with friends.   As the single women faced the potential absence of their own families, friendship networks could take on an added dimension.   As the quality of the relationships deepened, friendships could also provide opportunities for the articulation of an adult life.   In their current situation, single women agreed that friendships provided an important counterbalance to increased concerns about finding a mate.   A community of friends could also provide a vision of a connected life that was different from the standard of married and family life. In Chapter Nine, more findings on the significance of friendship for single women will be discussed.   Research literature that contains similar findings will also be highlighted.

146

(4) Planning for the Future

In view of the possibility of leading a single life, the majority of the single women interviewed (both professional and working-class) wanted to make sure they maintained a stable job to ensure a comfortable future life.

Queenie:
"I am a secondary school teacher... I have been working in my current school for seven to eight years. I am very satisfied with my work basically... Recently, I have rented an apartment in a private tenement. I can maintain a very harmonious relationship with my family. To prepare for the future, I think it is important to plan, make savings and apply for insurance so as to reduce the burden on my family. "

Diana:
"I am a beautician and I have been working in this field for two years. I am engaging in what I am interested in. As for my job, I particularly like its flexible working hours. I can enjoy lots of freedom and I can work at home. I can engage in other work when there are no customers. Yet, the income is not stable. I can't ask a customer to start a new course if she hasn't finished the old one. So I get no stable income... But in case of financial difficulty, I may also need to change my job or take some part-time job. I have to secure a job with a stable income so that I can afford my monthly expenses. "

Betty:
"Being the only child, I have paid particular attention to taking care of my aged parents. In the absence of other siblings, I have planned how to spend my future life on my own... As my mom has bought a house in mainland in my name, maybe when I get old I will just return to China and spend the rest of life there because the living standard there is comparatively lower than that in Hong Kong. Furthermore, I have a cousin, who is an adopted son of my mother, there. By then, he will take care of me and it's quite okay. I started to think about this five years ago. The chance for me to come across a suitable person to marry became less and less, so I started to accept the reality. "

Single women in my study were middle aged and were still in the middle phase of their careers when I conducted my interviews and therefore were, theoretically speaking, still very distant from retirement. However, either due to increasing age or due to changing economic conditions, some of them have had to work out realistic plans for the future. If a single woman could pay her own way, no matter how marginally, she could afford to make choices about her life (Simon, 1987). Work was important as a way of striving towards autonomy and independence in the process of being single, as is shown by

this study and by Gordon (1994). Single women have to demonstrate resourcefulness and self-reliance if they are to lead independent lives. They have to be reliant on their own earnings and initiative. Adams (1974) reported that women who remained unmarried past 30 began to build up economic independence, an investment in work, and a viable value system that allows them to identify and exploit major sources of personal and social satisfaction in areas other than marriage and family.

Differences between Professional and working-class Women in their Experience of Singlehood

Are there any variations in the experience of singlehood between professional and working class women? Consistent with most other research findings, professional single women delayed their marriages for educational and career reasons. Working class single women started working immediately after completing their primary or elementary secondary education because of their family background and financial situation. They might have had the chance to meet men and start dating but this did not lead to marriage. Some gave up the chance of getting married for the sake of familial responsibility. It was assumed that eldest daughters had to consider their family's welfare before their own. Some attended evening courses after work in order to secure or change their jobs. Thus, they might have paid less attention to meeting and seeking suitable marital partners.

As I have noted, work provided single women with one of the ways to strive for autonomy and independence. Their social status could be enhanced as a consequence. The working women in my study were mostly matriculated and college-educated, and occupied themselves at professional jobs. They claimed that their income was stable. A number of them did clerical, sales, and service work. They made less money than the professional women and were not expecting to advance much in pay or status. Still most of the women in these manual and non-manual jobs were seriously dedicated to performing their duties well. They worked hard to secure their job and save up money for their future lives.

Women in my study often mentioned having sociable companions and acquaintances

where they worked, but rarely an intimate friend. Besides grounding themselves in their social circle, women also reported the importance of securing accommodation. Not only professional women, but also working class women reported having their own home. Eight out of 30 women purchased their own apartment. Among eight, five were professional women and the other three were working class women. The other four professional women rented their home. In facing their future lives, both groups of women in this study reported the significance of keeping in good health and saving enough money.

Discussion

The findings presented above indicate how women experienced singlehood. There were several strands of ideas that ran alongside each other with some more prominent than other at particular times. Some threads were stronger than others and the strength varied from person to person. These ideas included: (1) "Marriage is my ideal"; (2) "I expect to marry if the right man appears" (only one respondent rejected the idea of marriage); (3) "I want to have children"; (4) "I am getting too old to have children"; (5) "I will put off thinking about marriage until later"; (6) "Marriage is not something I can control".

In Chapter Two, the developmental perspectives were discussed. These perspectives have been challenged because of their apparent simplicity, because they ignored individual differences and were based on the marital model. There were no developmental models for the life stages of single women. My findings showed the complexities of the single women's experience, and it did not seem possible to force these women into a linear developmental pattern. On the other hand, they do replicate the life spiral model suggested by Etzkowitz and Stein (cited in Stein, 1981). According to them, the life spiral is a nonlinear definition of the life span. They suggested that development was not necessarily related to chronological age. Developmental stages might overlap; one might never resolve certain issues. Life was an ongoing process with repeating themes and patterns. The life spiral model suggested a sense of "the incorporation of traditional and alternative roles in the life course" (Etzkowitz and Stein, 1978:434) and the variations in a person's role commitments over the life course.

The life spiral model of adult change seemed to accommodate the variety of life-style

choices people make today. While some adults could follow fairly traditional patterns, others could shift from traditional to alternative patterns, and vice versa. For example, people might choose to marry, divorce, and then remain single. Single women might carry out different developmental tasks from those of married women. They might choose to remain single for more opportunity for personal development and increased freedom. They might lead a contented single life by establishing their support network. They might consider getting married if a right man appeared.

According to the developmental perspectives described in Chapter Two, every person goes through his or her developmental stages and faces critical or significant developmental tasks. Many of these developmental tasks are normative and predictive and may be faced by most individuals in a cultural group. The predictability and frequency of these developmental tasks ensure widespread anticipatory socialization of both the people experiencing the task and the potential support persons. Generally speaking, every person faces several developmental tasks during their life, including entry into the labor force; courtship; marriage and family formation; childbearing and parenting; caring for the elderly; and retirement. Women who were selected for this study were aged between 35 and 44 years. As they were getting older, they started to think that they might not marry. They also expressed a heightened consciousness of chronological and biological time. They accepted the reality that the chances of meeting suitable marital partners and having their own children had become slimmer. However, they still experienced different development stages and attempted to fulfill the external expectations placed on them while building new and additional roles that might enrich their personal satisfaction. Instead of fulfilling the task of getting married and bearing children, they selected and explored various options – a job, continued education, maintaining a social group and religious affiliation.

Lewis (1994) proposed eight non-sequential developmental tasks in adult singlehood, namely: (1) grounding (in the home, in the neighborhood, in a career, in finances, in a social life); (2) emotional intimacy (having close female friends, pruning close friendships, keeping them compatible with personal and professional growth, making new friendships); (3) meeting basic daily needs (for daily contact, for security, for touch, for rituals, for enhanced use of free time); (4) mutual empowerment and nurturance (nurturing self,

150

nurturing others, being nurtured by others); (5) dealing with sexual feelings (acknowledging them, numbing them); (6) grieving (accepting the ambiguity, grieving lost dreams, etc.); (7) making peace with parents (teaching them to treat the single women as an adult, resolving old issues or finding a tolerable place for them, etc.); and (8) old age (having a positive image of the single self in old age, preparing financially for old age, maintaining friendships in old age, etc.).

To a certain extent, the single women in my study seemed to be tackling these developmental tasks. Like those in Lewis's study, the women in this study grounded themselves by renting an apartment or owning a home; they lived by themselves, with their parents or with others. They also achieved "emotional intimacy" since they enjoyed a satisfying social life with different levels of friendships and felt a part of their neighborhood and community by joining in activities. In order to prepare for "old age", they spent their days at work which offered them income and, for many, personal satisfaction. They also prepared themselves financially for the future. However, only a few of them acknowledged their sexual needs. Most had not explicitly discussed their sexual feelings, but they did claim that they felt lonely. They would seek emotional support from friends to handle their feelings of loneliness. They grieved about their singleness. The single women in this study did experience pressure about being single, and tried to co-exist harmoniously with their parents or others that are significant to them.

I have to acknowledge that I did not get much material about feelings from the respondents. It would have been culturally unacceptable to express emotional and sexual feelings. It might have been possible to elicit respondents' feelings if I took the initiative to share my own. Based on this common ground, I expect that their feelings may have been a little more mixed than they revealed to me in the interviews. I would have had to know the women longer before they would have shared more intimate feelings with me. I had hoped that the women might be more willing to talk in depth if they found that I was familiar with their situation and experience. I tried to make the interview an exchange of information. I said I had some questions to put to them but they could ask me anything they wanted at any stage and I would answer as fully as I could, based on my experience as a single woman.

Lewis listed the tasks which she argued had to be achieved for a healthy adjustment to adult singlehood. It seemed that the single women I interviewed have gone through a similar process of reevaluating what they had missed and what they needed to lead a happy future life. They might decide at some time to stop waiting for their Mr. Right. However, even now, a majority of the women did not rule out marriage as a possibility. Instead of "grieving" because of having fewer chances of getting married, some of them told me that what they really let go of was the idea that being married was the only way they could be happy, or even the best way for them to live. They took charge of their lives by developing their support networks and careers. They also gave a positive connotation to singlehood.

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter, I have attempted to provide an analysis of how women experience their singlehood. Not having married does not mean that these women have negative attitudes towards marriage or singlehood. They prepared themselves for marriage. Usually, their family members and friends would make use of opportunities to arrange dates. Some temporarily postponed opportunities of marriage. As they faced increasingly limited chances of getting a mate, they had to accept the reality of singlehood as their possible permanent status. Although they would like to marry in order to have companionship, they had started to take alternative action. Some of the women used their singlehood to expand their social circle, develop their career paths, serve others and as a way towards self-actualization. The developmental perspectives were discussed. Single women were found to experience their own developmental tasks. Variations between professional and working class women in their experience of singlehood were also discussed.

In the following chapter, I will try to analyze how the women experience singlehood in their cultural and social context. At different stages, these single women may meet different demands from their family members, friends and colleagues. For some, these demands may give rise to role strains, especially when they and those they are close to have different perceptions of being single.

Chapter 7

The Experience of Singlehood of the Working Women
in their Social Context

As was noted in Chapter Four, Hong Kong society and culture have changed in many ways since the 1950s because of new technologies, expanded educational opportunities and an advanced worldwide economy. All these changes have had a profound impact in shaping values, attitudes, and moral and ethical standards. In particular, with the implementation of civic education, beliefs about the equality of members of different segments of society have developed.

However, society's attitudes toward single women cluster around several unfounded notions – myths about the nature of single women, their objectives, and the specifics of their lifestyle. As with all myths, there is an element of truth concealed in them somewhere, but they do a great deal of harm when all single women are assumed to fit the hypothetical stereotypes and when an individual single woman uses them to shape her self-image.

In the previous Chapter, I discussed how women experience their singlehood. Their reaction to singlehood plays a significant role in achieving a healthy adjustment. Their family and friends may also hold views on the status of single women. Single women, at times, may feel pressure from their significant others to get married. Society's attitudes toward single women may or may not impose further pressure on them. This Chapter will discuss how single women feel and how they perceive people's attitude toward singleness and the reactions of others to their own state of singleness. Their experiences of coping with stress arising from leading a single life will also be discussed. By quoting their own voices, I hope to get a "balanced" perspective on who single women really are and how they live.

Open Attitudes.

In the study, the women interviewed were asked what they felt were society's attitudes toward single women. Ten of the women said that the society now has a more open attitude. The following statements are some examples:

Susan:
"I think the society is more open now. People in the past would say to get married is to have someone to depend on. But nowadays, women can be on their own financially, and managing things independently. Sometimes, women are even tougher than men. They can arrange things better than men can. Because of this, society should accept that single women are no problem at all."

Mandy:
"People's perceptions have changed. Employment opportunities for women have been increased. They have become more independent."

Betsy:
"They become more open-minded on this issue. In the past, if you were over 30 and not yet married, people will say that you are a spinster. ... Nowadays, the world has changed. Our working ability has gained recognition from others. Our living circle has widened. The reason why people in the past called unmarried women "spinsters" is that they did not open themselves up to others. Eventually, they drove themselves to the tip of a horn, coupled with the fact that they lacked marriage to enlighten their lives, so their behavior was peculiar."

Single women are a significant people group and, more than at any other time in history, the numbers are increasing. However, some of the women thought that society was not concerned to understand single women. People held ambivalent attitudes toward them. Explanations for being single had often been required; in particular, never marrying was considered atypical. Single women were often left feeling out of place in society, wondering if they had missed the boat. Although the use of the old maid stereotype has declined in recent decades, descriptions by women of some of the attitudes they encountered still contained themes connected to that stereotype. During the interviews, the single women spoke of a number of different negative responses, including: (1) something is wrong with you; (2) you are not complete and/or perfect; and (3) you have no responsibilities. Their accounts are described below.

Something Is Wrong With You!

The first negative response made by the women was "something is wrong with you". The following are some examples:

Betty:
"More people are prone to late marriage. But the fact is that people still have a little bit of discrimination to this. The words like 'you failed to get married, no one would marry you.' People perceive that having a good marriage is perfect. Society will wonder why we are not getting married. The guess would be that this person might cohabit with someone, or have many sex partners, or have an abnormal personality, so no one liked her."

Elaine:
"Sometimes I feel that there is no difference between being married and unmarried. However, some people may add some discriminative labels to unmarried people. Some of them call the single women 'old maids' and think we have a morbid state of mind."

Connie:
"People tend to describe single adults as hard and tough. They get mad easily since they are not in a stable relationship. But it really depends. It matters how you take singlehood. Some people are really annoyed and upset by the fact they are single. Indeed, my sister-in-law has a sister who is still single. My sister-in-law sometimes makes her singlehood an excuse for her so-called weird behavior."

These quotations illustrate the view that single women are sexually frustrated and prone to engage in promiscuous or abnormal behavior. However, those interviewed believed that whether a woman was sane or insane, normal or abnormal, did not depend on her marital status. Some of my single friends reported that they could be the targets of suspicion, especially if developing committed friendships with the same sex. Two women living together are assumed to be in a practicing lesbian relationship.

You Are Not Complete And/Or Perfect.

The second negative reaction to the single state was "you are not complete and/or perfect". The following statements reflected people's attitude:

Helen:
"People's attitudes toward single women are more open now. There are a lot of women who delay their marriage and some of them are successful. People think that they are smart or too strong to be approached. However, most people still think that being single is worse off. It is better for single women to get married and complete the developmental stage of their life. They only feel that they are

not perfect."

Nancy:
"People who are educated see being single as a choice and it is perfectly acceptable. However, many people think there must be something wrong with you to remain single. It is not natural and it is really your own fault. Perhaps being too choosy is a main reason. In Chinese society, for a woman to remain single means a life which is not complete. This is not so much the case in Western society. I have no idea why this is the case, but it still exists. In the old days, women did not have much of a choice, financially, they needed to find someone to depend on, but nowadays, women are more independent. However, there are other factors, for example, if you remain single, you might find yourself getting sunk in your old age with no one to look after you."

Anna:
"Although these women may be named so-called strong career women, they are also respected because they serve a function. Therefore, this is a very mixed conception. They won't de-glamorize us, but respect us. But somehow, it is still expected that a woman with a husband is proper."

The findings support the view that single women were regarded as not perfect. It has long been assumed that female is the weaker sex. From a historical perspective, it was once almost an economic, sociological, and psychological necessity for a woman to marry at an early age. A woman was not fully "complete" until associated with a marriage partner. A failure to marry, therefore, might imply the inability of a woman to 'earn' a partner. Single women were reduced to second-class members in a couple-oriented society. There is still constant pressure from society to date, as soon as you are old enough, and then to move towards marriage. People tend to believe that happiness is found primarily in marriage. Being married, however, is no more an insurance policy for happiness than singleness is a guarantee of frustration and unhappiness.

Being a single woman, I remember that in my twenties or thirties the question often asked concerned when I was getting married rather than if I would marry. The common questions were usually negative, for example: "Why aren't you married?" and were insensitive and inappropriate. Men were not asked that, too! The questions highlighted the inequality of status since married people were never asked the question 'Why are you married' or 'Why are you not single?' As I get older, there is a silent assumption that I have been married or in a cohabiting relationship. So the question has then changed to 'Have you been married?' It appears almost more acceptable to have been married than never to have been married at all.

<u>You Have No Responsibilities.</u>

Some of the women said that society regarded single women as having no responsibilities. Iris made the following remarks:

<u>*Iris:*</u>
"Nothing is special.   They think that we are free from the burden of family.   I feel this concept is basically wrong.   It seems that we do not have family.   In fact, we have our own family.   You still have a family before you get married and every family has it own troubles.   They also have an impression that we have money."

Iris' statement was a good illustration of the popular image of a single woman. This image is one of a timid spinster or domineering career woman, with its association of irresponsibility.   Single women had been perceived to have fewer responsibilities than the married women.   The main difference was that single women did not have their own family and children.   In this study, the respondents did not consider that being single would be their permanent status.   In any case, these women had responsibilities.   Being a daughter, an employee, or looking after aged parents and dependents were all situations of responsibility.

From what the single women revealed of how they perceived societal attitudes toward singlehood, it seemed there existed some misunderstanding or even distorted perceptions.   The findings indicated that traditional views of singlehood were changing but that they still remained alongside new views.   Thus, single women lived with uncertainty about the attitudes, which they were likely to meet.   Even from the same person they might experience different attitudes at different times.   This might be because the situation was genuinely ambivalent – people did hold different, almost conflicting views at the same time, and this applied to single women as well as to other issues.   This supports the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.   According to Schwartzberg et al (1995), marriage was a major yardstick for normality, a marker for the self in the expected progression from dependency to adulthood and a standard of adult development.   This emphasis on marriage might have a negative impact on singlehood.

Perceived Attitudes Towards their Own State of Singleness

How do single women perceive society's attitudes towards their own state of singleness? In the study, single women developed their perceptions from the attitudes of their family members, peers or colleagues. A majority of the single women also replied that they felt pressure from their significant others to get married.

Sources of Pressure.

(1) Family/Relatives

In the study, 14 of the women interviewed revealed that they felt great pressure to marry in their 20s and early 30s. They felt it was particularly difficult to deal with family members' pressure and explain to them their individual life plan. This was especially hard as they probably did not have a plan except to wait for the right man. The following are some examples:

Betsy:
"The pressure comes from my family. My parents are old timers. They think that marriage is a route that a woman must take and there is no alternative. They are people who are very concerned with face-saving. They press me a lot on the matter of marriage but I just try to escape reality. My mother used to go to Wong Tai Sin Temple to pray and draw divination sticks for me on the first day of the Lunar New Year. She said that marriage was a destination of one's life voyage and this was especially true for women. My family once arranged a blind date for me. I was completely unaware of it beforehand. After I came to know about it, I just dismissed it with a laugh. To be frank, my mother really wants me to take that route. In their mind, I am a very arrogant person in front of my friends and my mother says that is my vital weakness as that will frighten the boys away."

Winnie:
"I was born in a big family. My family members used to marry very late. Therefore, I do not have the feeling that I am the only one who is single... Among my siblings, I am the family's favorite child. During her free time, I usually have tea and go to shopping with my mother when I have a holiday. After work, I usually go to the market to buy food or take care of my elder brother's baby... I was introduced by somebody to accept a date with a man in my neighborhood. We finally stopped dating due to some reasons... Now my mother becomes more anxious about my marriage. In the past, she didn't care about my marriage. When I take my nephew out, she is anxious to clarify that he is not my son."

Mandy:
"My family puts pressures on me towards marriage. My friends rarely ask me

this question, they are just asking because they care, that's not pressure. They care about me and they would say: 'Ha, just get married, don't keep on dating anymore!' But my family members will put different implications on saying this. My mother always says this to me, especially after my brothers and sisters have already got married. She always reminds me of this during the relatives' gatherings. She won't phone me to talk about it but will say something during relatives' gatherings. She may feel that even when she has passed away, she will worry about me the most."

Parents were the major source of pressure. For most parents, marriage appears to be a natural arrangement. Most parents learnt to accept marriage through their own socialization and attempted to pass the value of marriage on to their children. These cases illustrate that these single women encountered pressures from their family toward getting married during different stages of their lives. Parents and aged relatives worried that single women would be lonely in the future. Parents were pressurizing their single children to marry, and moreover to marry "well"; they worried that their children might select the wrong mates. Therefore, parents and relatives wanted to keep an eye on everything, including the selection of mates, getting married, and having children.

The above findings are consistent with my personal feelings as a single woman and professional experience as a social worker. Most parents expect their children to marry, and thus put pressure on their adult daughters and sons. Parents themselves can receive messages of suspicion or failure from their peers if their adult offspring remain unmarried.

(2) Friends and Colleagues

The changes required of single women to adapt to their single circumstances often increased their experience of being "out of sync" with their married peers. The differences became further magnified when their peers started having children. At this stage, some of the single women reported a feeling of panic about their singleness and being pressured to marry. Such an intense reaction usually arose due to the pressure of their biological clock and the social message that they could not choose to remain single. In the study, more than half of the single women were Christians. They, however, found suitable mates were not available because the female devout outnumbered the male devout. They also found that it was difficult for them to join group activities in the church which were organized and designed particularly for couples and children.

The following examples vividly reflect some of the strains single women faced:

Rose:
"I feel no pressure from my family toward getting married... I have an elder sister and a younger sister who are single... Anyway, I get some pressure from some of my colleagues. They teased me and said I'm an 'old maid'... If I were closer to my former classmates, who're all married, I'd feel much more pressure."

Pauline:
"I don't feel much pressure toward getting married. I am rather independent. My mother influences this. I heard about such ideas from her since I was small. ... But some people may perceive me in a different way from other women. My colleagues, the junior nurses, find me a bit odd, as I'm not married at my age. The pressure comes at Chinese New Year, as I have no lucky money for my colleague. Otherwise, I don't take my status of being single as a pressure... I think that people from my church perceive that woman should get married. Because I am questioned a lot by people in the church over my marital status. They always ask me the reason why I am not married. They think that I am very choosy in finding a partner. In church, marriage is perceived to be good... Some of my friends, especially my close friends, usually of my age will comment like this. They worry about me."

The above quotations indicate that single women were deviating from the feminine norm of marriage. They had not embarked on a socially prescribed role, either by choice or by chance. According to Frieze et. al. (1978), disapproval came from friends and colleagues, who reacted negatively to the phenomenon of singlehood because it created difficulties for their own role performance. Single women might become an awkward group when they intruded into the coupled community. When I go to parties or social gatherings I tend to talk with the men about their jobs and avoid the women who tend to talk about their children. I certainly still do this even now when most women have jobs. I am sure this makes me awkward in a coupled community.

(3) Pressure From Oneself

Some women indicated that the most intense pressure originated from themselves. This is evident from the following statements:

Daisy:
"When I see couples dining at a restaurant to celebrate Christmas, I really want to have a husband."

Anna:
"The pressure for marriage comes from within. ... The impression I have of marriage is that it is very nice. The whole society is built around sex, romance. ...

160

Everyone keeps telling me that I need this and I need that.   That I have never had that experience, then something was wrong with me."

The findings presented above show that single women felt those internal sources of pressure as a result of gender role strain.   Gender role strain was defined as resulting from real-ideal discrepancies in gender role (Garnets & Pleck, 1979).   To elaborate, Garnets & Pleck refer "real-ideal discrepancies" to "the discrepancies between an individual's perceptions of her or his personal characteristics and her or his standards for herself or himself deriving from sex role norms" (1979: 275).   Women have been taught that it was the choice of a husband, not a job that most strongly determined their future.   Not getting married at an appropriate, culturally defined "proper" age would be regarded as deviant.   Women were brought up to receive such a message and regarded marriage as their ideal.   Thus, in actual situations, their "non-married" status would bring them psychological strain.

(4)   During Important Events and Festivals

Six of the women in the study said that they felt pressure during some festivals. Like Pauline, some of them felt pressure to marry most intensely at family gatherings or during festivals and holidays.   Some preferred not to participate in those gatherings and took a trip abroad during the holidays.   The following statements illustrate this:

Diana:
"My mother and relatives often ask me when I'll get married.   Especially when I receive the red packet from them during the Chinese New Year.   They will just joke with me that this should be the last time for me to get the red packet."

Helen:
"I feel pressure towards getting married and such a feeling is particularly strong during my friend's wedding parties.   When some friends marry, I feel the pressure. During some festivals, my nephew also will ask me why I am not married."

When I was in my twenties and thirties, I often made plans for a sightseeing trip with one to two single colleagues over the holidays.   We also celebrated birthdays and Valentine's Day together.   I still do this now, but no longer to avoid encounter with relatives who impose pressures about getting married.

<u>The Perceived Responses Toward Their Own State of Singleness.</u>

(1) <u>Positive Remarks</u>

Single women reported that some people had a positive attitude toward them.
Examples were:

Yolande:
*"They regard me as a career-minded woman.   But in fact I do not rank career in
a very important position."*

Vera:
*"My friends admire me very much because I can enjoy a lot of freedom as I am
unmarried.   I only hear them say, 'You are unmarried.   How happy and free you
are!   Us? Oh, we are poor!'"*

These quotations illustrate that some of the women were seen as enjoying a lot of
freedom as they were unmarried.   They were free to develop their careers.   I support
what the single women revealed.   With no responsibility of child-care, I can
concentrate on developing my career.

(2) <u>Do Not Understand Why We Are Single</u>

Some of the single women interviewed said that family members did not
understand why they were single.   The family expected them to get married.   Some
examples are:

Annie:
*"My mother and my closest friends urge me to get married although the pressure
has become less.   They do not understand why I am still not married.   My father
does not give me pressure.   My mother would say, 'I don't understand.   Our
neighbors' daughters, though ugly and bad tempered, got married.   I don't
understand why you can't get married.'   My mother worries about my choice of
mate."*

Tirana:
*"My family expects me to get married.   They think it's better but I think they're
now absolutely disappointed with me.   Now they talk about this less.   Many
people want to know why I'm not married.   People who are older than me hope I
can have my own family.   They think a good girl should get married.   My
church-mates are also eager to introduce guys to me.   When I was almost 30, I
got some pressure."*

These quotations imply that marriage was a goal, because society, parents and

relatives perceive it as providing a high level of fulfillment (Harding, 1993). These people believe that happiness is primarily found in the fulfillment of marriage.

(3) Don't Be Too Choosy If You Want To Marry

Some of the single women said that people advised them over the selection of a mate, in order that they could seize the chance of getting married when this became possible. They thought that single women should not be too choosy. The following are some examples:

Lily:
"The people around me think that I am choosy. Indeed, they are all concerned about me. They ask me to widen my social circle."

Mandy
"Most of my friends just warned me not too be too choosy. `That means not to set too harsh criteria. They don't think that there will be a problem for me to get married."

Pauline:
"I've been questioned by people in the church over my marital status. They always ask me why I don't get married. They think that I'm very critical in finding a partner."

These quotations indicate that not having found someone was considered to be the individual's own fault with the suggestion that 'you can get married if you want to'. Similarly, I am often seen as independent and headstrong, or even aggressive and it is implied that such personality characteristics have contributed to my singlehood. For other single women, the picture might be that of a weak and vulnerable woman with no initiative.

(4) Mistaken Views

Because they do not understand the lifestyle of single women, some people hold mistaken views and assumptions:

Iris:
"They think I am free from family burdens. I feel this concept is basically wrong. As with other single women, I have my own family. I have a family before I get married and every family has its own troubles. They also feel that I have more money. I just cannot understand. They feel we do not have any financial burdens."

The myth 'single women are rich' is based on the premise that since they do not have a spouse or children to feed, they have more expendable income than their married friends do. I also experience such myths regarding my identity as a single woman. Being single does not necessarily mean one is rich. In actuality, single women have to earn enough money for a future on their own.

(5) Many Are Also Single

The social circle of many of the interviewees tended to consist of friends who were also single. From such interaction they gained the following impressions:

Anna:
"Because most of my friends in my primary circle are also single, I don't find being single to be odd. But then and again I find it is difficult to join group activities at the church. For example, the types of church camps we have e.g. pleasure camps, growth camps, intimate camps, or couples' camps are definitely not for me. Even in the growth camp, there is still age limit; no one should be over 40. So, what is left for me? Not very much. But we are quite well adjusted. The ones who weren't able to adjust have left the church."

Susan:
"I am not quite sure about my colleagues and they seldom ask me about not being married. But I can talk openly with my friends whom I have known for a long time. We feel the same way. We do not necessarily have to get married. And we do not aspire to this. We will analyze this too. We can go on trips together. We talked about this question at the airport during our last trip. Some said that they didn't long to get married any more at their age. We take our unmarried status as fate and we do not take it so seriously."

More than half of the single women interviewed were Christians. Some of the messages about being single came from the church where Christian single women often felt marginalized as marriage and the family formation were regarded as "holy" and "good". They felt undervalued in church. As was noted earlier, they could not involve themselves in church activities, which were specially designed for couples and families. Single women often came along with other single friends because married friends had their own families to take care of. Besides, companionship with other single women increased their support for one another.

(6) Negative Attitudes

Reactions about singlehood could be indicated by direct or indirect words or

actions, or by inference. The latter was often more difficult to confront. Negative attitudes toward single women could be very hurtful. Examples of those negative attitudes were:

Fanny:
"They think that I'm weird though they don't say it."

Diana:
"Pressure came from the perception of others about why I had not yet married at my age. Some of them were not concerned about my feeling. They called our group of single women "spinsters", thinking that we were very awkward. Colleagues in the factory called me an "old maid". I was not happy in facing this kind of pressure."

Winsome:
"Some friends who didn't know me well would think I'm capable of leading an independent life. Someone would say something bad to me and query what was wrong with me."

It was thus evident that attitudes from family, friends or colleagues were diverse. Some single women were blamed for being too choosy over the selection of mates. This supports Lewis's (1994) study of single women over 30 years of age. She found that society placed the blame on single women for not having a husband, accusing them of being too fussy or not trying hard enough to build a relationship.

Coping with Pressures about Being Single

In the study, most women agreed that the pressures about being single had lessened compared with when they were in their 20s. However, they still faced such pressures. When I analyzed the data about the ways of coping with being single, I found they could be categorized into (1) active coping; (2) seeking social support; (3) acceptance; (4) do your part, don't care about it; (5) turning to religion; (6) developing a positive self-concept; and (7) managing stress. However, it must be noted that the categorization was by no means inflexible. There were occasions when the women who I perceived as primarily using one particular coping strategy, for example, active coping, would resort to other strategies. Classifying a woman into a particular category only meant that she was generally inclined towards one way of coping with the pressures about being single. The different approaches are described below:

<u>Active Coping.</u>

One strategy used by the interviewees is active coping. "Active coping" referred to the process of taking active steps to try to remove or circumvent the stressor or to alleviate its effects. Among the 30 cases interviewed, Elsa, Winsome, Betty and Nancy were some of them who used "active coping". These women will take direct action to get around the problem. Examples are:

Elsa:
"I don't think there is any pressure on me to get married. However, my mother and elder sister always arrange some dates for me. I think that it is useless. I told my sister that such arrangements make me feel uneasy and I asked her not to do that again."

Winsome:
"I'd try to ask others not to put pressure on me. I'd asked my brother-in-law to see if he had any colleagues whom were not yet married. It might sound like a joke. I asked him with a smile but I would give it a go if someone arranged meetings like this. I tend to respond to pressure or a gesture of concern in a direct, overt manner, rather than avoiding it. For instance, if someone suggests introducing a friend, I would go."

Betty:
"I should be more concerned with my appearance. I don't want to give a bad or dirty impression to others. Also, I cannot be upset always. I have to show my happy and lively side. I feel that this will avoid any prejudice from others. They'll perceive me as a more independent woman."

Nancy:
"Up until now, I am not particularly worried about the future, I feel there is a solution to every problem. I think the important thing is to plan ahead financially, that is important, in fact it is so important since even if I were married, I would need to plan ahead financially. I would not feel comfortable asking my future husband for money."

The findings presented here show a range of different ways of "active coping" including: initiating direct action, increasing one's efforts, and trying to execute a coping attempt in a stepwise fashion.

<u>Seeking Social Support.</u>

Many women said that they coped with the pressures about being single by seeking support from the people around them, especially friends who are single. The following are some examples:

Connie:
"I have some friends who remain single and who impose less pressure on my getting married. There are quite a number of church sisters who are at an age suitable for marriage. The church has run some activities for them, taking care of the single people. The church has organized a camp and seminars to provide single people with support. One of them is "Pursuit of Aesthetics." The camp was a wonderful one. The organizers were so thoughtful that they had already decorated the place with flowers and other decorations, making us feel as comfortable as possible."

Lily:
"I feel bored since most of my friends are married and have different interests to me. It is meaningless to force myself to join their activities. I have joined a group for single people. At first, I joined the group with the motive of finding a suitable guy to date. In the group, I found some people whom I could get along with. Some seminars whose theme is enjoying adult life are also organized by the group."

Janice:
"I have more than 10 friends who are single whom I can visit at any time."

Rose:
"In my family, except my elder brother, my other two sisters are still single. My mother has not put any pressure on me to get married. Also most of my friends are single and I feel no pressure from them. I get a lot of emotional support from them."

The above quotations indicate that informants relied on their friends who also remained single and therefore had a range of reference points. Generally women said that they felt more pressures on occasions such as wedding ceremonies, relatives' gathering, church meetings, and alumni meetings. For some single women, their social contexts helped them to cope with their situations better. From other single women, they sought advice, information and assistance. This could create a sense of support between them.

Acceptance

Acceptance was also mentioned as being important. For example, accepting their status of being single could help them to cope:

Tirana:
"At present, I'm still single. I am happy about that. Being single at present does not necessarily mean that I will be single forever. It's important that I can enjoy my singlehood and develop my own interests."

Iris:
"Marriage is an utmost holy event. It's a blessing to get married, and it's also a blessing to be single."

Betty:
"No, I don't mind. At the beginning, when I heard phrases like no one wanted me, I'd feel a little unhappy. But now, I'm completely insensitive to it."

Gladys:
"I'll say let it be natural. I can do nothing about it."

Do Your Part, Don't Care About What Others Think.

In coping with other people's unfavorable attitude towards them, most of the women felt that since they could not control what others say or think, it was better for them to do their own part and not care about other people's attitude.

Some interviewees cope by exhibiting a "don't care" attitude. Examples are:

Diana:
"Not happy of course. I didn't care. I just thought that they didn't understand me. It was no use for me to quarrel with them. So I just pretended that I heard nothing."

Kitty:
"I just didn't care about them. Not a great pressure, just a minor one. I don't care about it."

Mandy:
"I don't care about it. If I don't answer them, they won't continue to ask."

The above quotations show that some single women learned to adopt a "don't care" attitude to deal with pressure toward marriage.

Turning to religion.

In my study, a majority of the single women were Christians. When they sought help, they would turn to God. For example, they would pray and thought that this was useful. They felt that their single status was out of their control and getting married or remaining single was in the hands of God.

Connie:
"I sometimes feel lonely. And then I'd talk to God. I also share my feelings with my friends; we laugh and talk about it. I'd laugh and ask whether I should get myself a maiden's flat. I sometimes wonder if God is listening to my petition. I ask but He does not answer me. I sometimes feel like having a debate with God on this."

Tirana:
"I have always considered singlehood as a transition. If it is the will of God that I shall be single, He will comfort me and strengthen me."

Developing A Positive Self-concept.

Some interviewees developed a positive self-concept. Examples are:

Connie:
"After reading some books on singlehood, I feel that remaining single is not extraordinary. I'd read and find out more about my present lifestyle: it's pretty free and I gain room for self-development. Being single isn't a bad thing if we can be positive."

Susan:
"If it is my will to stay single, I can take the outcome. No matter what I do, there will be criticism. You can't please the whole world. I don't need to get the consent of people around me. The most important thing is how I feel about it."

These findings indicate that some respondents, by developing a positive self-concept, could cope with the pressures of being single. They created a view of their social world, and established an appropriate and positive value system.

Managing stress.

When stress was inevitable, some of the women had found their own ways to deal with it. Clara claimed that she went on a trip by herself, so that she could be free from being bound by her relatives' visits during the Chinese festivals. Janice also liked to read and listen to soft music. It seemed that this served as a means to express her feelings.

Clara:
"I join my friends to travel during holidays."

Janice:
"I like soft music... When I listen to music, I feel quiet and comfortable."

169

As mentioned above, different women adopted different measures in handling pressures about being single. The most obvious and straightforward strategy was to alter the situation that was perceived as threatening. Some made themselves as conventionally attractive as possible, through stylish dressing and make-up. This was in order to erase images of single women as ugly and out-of-fashion. Some other women devalued the importance of marriage and looked at the positive aspects of their single status, including freedom, independence, pride and self-respect, the pursuit of career goals, personal growth and friendship, etc. Turning to friends for emotional support or praying to God could alter internal sensations.

The findings presented here support the thesis that a network of friendship provides a major source of social support for single women (Adams, 1976; Starr & Carns, 1972; Stein, 1976). The coping strategy of seeking support from other single women was also found in the studies conducted by Wills (1985), Thoits (1986) and Gouldner & Strong (1987), which I have discussed in Chapter Two.

Differences Between Professional and Working-class Women Towards Singlehood

The data indicated that both professional and working class women enjoyed singlehood. It seemed that there was no great difference in people's attitude toward their singlehood. Their peers appreciated their freedom.

The professional single women appeared to be bright, attractive, competent, assertive, ambitious, and articulate. Their work provided them with a high level of self-confidence. They were selective in the men they dated, looking for men they could truly respect and have fun with and with whom they could share their dreams, thoughts, and feelings. They set high standards for themselves and were not willing to compromise extensively just to ensure having a partner. The following cases illustrate this:

> *Mandy:*
> "I am an accountant and am mainly responsible for supervising the accounts department. I can afford my daily living independently. I'm living alone and I take care of everything by myself. I really enjoy living alone and the freedom to be alone. If I lived with my family, my mother would come to my room to urge me not to sleep at mid-night. Yes, it is very free to be single. Although I sometimes feel a little bit lonely, I can entertain myself by seeing movies or watching*

videotapes at home. There are many reasons for me not getting married. Sometimes, it's been the timing (chance/opportunity) problem, or on some occasion, it's been because I didn't want to marry the man in question. When I have been with someone for a long time, the problem is that I no longer feel safe, or know many of his weaknesses. I just think that if I really love a person, it is not necessary for me to marry him. I agree with cohabitation."

Nancy:
"I work in the Personnel Department and my job duties include recruitment of staff, employee benefits. I have lived alone for quite sometime. People say my standards are too high and I am too strong. I agree with their remarks. They are right; I am not an easy person to deal with. It is good that my last relationship did not work out, because that was not my style. In the long run, I would have ended up very unhappy. I will not get married because of a need to marry. No matter what my friends think, they can say I am choosy, very difficult to please. I am the one who will decide whom I am in love with."

Pauline:
"I am now working in a hospital as a ward manager and I have been in this post for about two years. When I was working in the gynecology ward, I witnessed many marriage failures. Some women were deserted by their husbands, some have undergone abortions and their husbands did not show any concern about them. So marriage may be good and may not be good. Therefore I am very careful in finding a partner. You may not guarantee a happy marriage, but at least, I do my best to be careful in finding a partner. At present, I do not need to worry about my husband's loyalty. I do not need to get his consent when I go anywhere or buy things. While I am single, I have less worries and more freedom in spending my own money."

The working-class single women in the study were employed as salespersons, domestics and clerical workers. They were not career-oriented when compared with the professional single women. They had missed their chance to get married. Some of them said that they could not find a suitable partner. Thus, my findings supported what some researchers said: working-class women found it more difficult than middle-class, educated professional women to see singlehood as an option (Allen, 1989; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1989). Working-class women remained single not by choice but by circumstance, despite efforts to find a husband. Nevertheless, they enjoyed being single. My findings do not support the picture, described by other researchers, that working-class women who remain single become bitter, disillusioned, and pessimistic.

Because working class women were financially worse off, they experienced some negative attitudes toward being single. Such attitudes could be illustrated by the following quotation:

Winsome:
"When single women are in a lower social level, people think about them in a negative way.   They say, 'Are you here to seal the stove?'   They say, in a nasty way, that the woman must have some problems.   But if the single women are of a high social level, it isn't a problem.   I think that there is a difference in background and social level."

Discussion

According to the role theorists, women have been defined in relation to men. Men provided the norm and women were the other (De Beauvoir, 1972).   Romantic love, partnership, marriage and motherhood formed the cultural context of women and resonated in representations of them.   These representations formed a framework within which personal lives and subjectivities were constructed.   Locating themselves outside families provided opportunities for women, but also placed them in a contradictory and difficult position.   Such ambivalent attitudes could be transformed into so-called "stereotypes".   Stereotypes formed a "fiction" of single women.   The stereotypes represented continuities and changes in the position of women without partners.   Traditionally, once a single woman no longer seemed likely to find a husband, she was referred to as spinster, or "old maid", derogatory terms that indicated a diminished social status.   Nowadays, the stereotypes attached to single women also include "career-minded women", "superwomen", etc.

As in Western countries, stereotypes were also attached to single women in Hong Kong.   As mentioned in Chapter Four, developments within the Chinese community and in its relationship with the British colonizers laid the foundation for the evolution of Hong Kong culture in later years (Leung, 1996).   Confucian beliefs influenced the ideologies and ways of life of the traditional Chinese.   They also shaped the gender-role and relationships between males and females.   Marriage was regarded as the cultural and social norm.   The 1960s and 1970s saw an increase in the number of single adults (both men and women) as a result of a growing trend to postpone marriage for advanced education or career development.   Labels such as "career-minded women" or "superwomen" were attached to single women.   During the 1980s and 1990s, more women opted to remain single.   Influenced by television shows and product advertisements that depicted single adults as affluent, society began to accept or

admire their lifestyle. Labels such as "yuppies", "single nobles" were used to describe single adults. It is thus evident that the stereotypes or labels attached to single adults have at least been extended to include some positive images.

In my study, some single women experience role stereotypes. Some are positive and others are negative. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to determine to what degree the stereotype is accurate and to what degree it is based on an inappropriate collection of myths. It is obvious that society needs to rewrite some of its cultural norms. However, this seems unlikely since family remains the bedrock of society.

From the findings presented above, some single women in this study experienced role strain or conflict because of their state of being single. They revealed that their experience of role strain arose as a result of ambiguous and incongruent definitions of the status of being single held by themselves and their significant others. For instance, parents might impose certain kinds of pressures towards marriage on their single daughters. Such findings were consistent with the literature in Chapter Two depicting roles and stereotypes of single women. Thus, a given role was experienced as stressful not because of anything inherent in the role itself, but because it was incompatible with other important social roles.

One point that also deserves attention is that the reaction to these role strains also varies among different single women and at different stages of their life. Some women in this study might think of being alone with great fear, and they might have sought a mate to fill the perceived void. Some might not do so. The literature considered in Chapter Two does not mention this. Here, I would like to elaborate my findings. Some single women in this study might have accepted their parents' dream of getting married as their own. They have been socialized to believe that it was only a matter of time before they took their rightful place in the comfort of hearth and home. Since some women have not found 'Mr. Right' by the time they finished schooling, they worked temporarily with the hope of getting married one day. Over the years, as the chances of meeting 'Mr. Right' reduced, some women had to accept the reality that the chances of meeting suitable marital partners were becoming slimmer. Instead of fulfilling the task of getting married and bearing children, they selected and explored various options – a job, continued education, social group and religious affiliation. The sense of satisfaction that they gained from work and social networks could

compensate for the loss of what they might have achieved from marriage.

Chapter Summary

At the beginning of this Chapter, I attempted to portray how stereotypes about singles developed. As was noted in Chapter Four, the culture in Hong Kong has changed in many ways over the past several decades. These changes have had a profound impact on shaping our values, attitudes, and ethical standards. In particular, the demand for gender equality has influenced our beliefs about certain segments of society.

In the later part of the Chapter, society's attitudes, including those from their parents, relatives, and friends, toward single women as shown in the data in the study was analyzed. The analysis shows that these single women experienced a range of reactions, which in turn affected their own self-image. Their self-perception, to a certain extent, mirrors society's attitude. The way in which single women handle pressures toward marriage was also described.

Chapter 8

Single Women's Social Support

In this Chapter, I will analyze the single women's lifestyle. The significance of social support to single women will also be analyzed. Single women's different social networks, including the support given by their family members, their friends, colleagues and their church members will be analyzed. I will also discuss the different forms of social support provided by these different social networks and analyze the issues underlying these supportive relationships.

Lifestyle

A person's lifestyle includes personal hobbies, living conditions, and their primary group relations. The lifestyle also has a kind of interdependent relationship with economic circumstances. It is influenced by the relations between a person and his or her obligations and responsibilities as they make an impact on day-to-day living. The purpose of inquiring about such aspects of single women's lives has been to underline the nature of social conditions and group constraints on their lives, in spite of their being "single". This study also attempts to show the major features of such a lifestyle.

Hobbies and Leisure Activities.

Twenty-nine out of the 30 women in this study spent a great deal of time on work – for full-time workers, 8 to 9 hours a day, five to six days a week. Each woman was asked how she usually spent her free time. Five out of 30 women replied that they were occupied by work and did not have any spare time. For instance:

Susan:
"I am now working in a completely different field as compared with my last job. Since my boss is not interested or enthusiastic about her job, she leaves all the work to me. I am working from Monday till Friday. Moreover, I often work late in the evening. I have the impulse to run back to the office and get things done. I have this impulse even on Saturdays or Sundays."

Helen:
"I am a social worker in a family service agency. I find the cases become more complicated and demanding. I am so busy that I don't have any spare time. I find my leisure time seems to be less and less. I am so busy that I cannot find any spare time."

Elaine:
"I am a church minister and I have recently changed positions to work in my current church. I have to take time to adapt to the church environment. Therefore, I do not have any spare time. If I do have some spare time, I will go for a walk."

Five other women reported that they gave up some of their hobbies because of limited time. For example:

Betty:
"I love playing Chinese musical instruments, writing Chinese calligraphy and painting. But I don't have time."

Fanny:
"I don't have time to go hiking."

These single women did not have spare time because they were busily engaged in their work. Some of the professional women worked until late in the evening. Gordon (1994) found that the reasons for working hard varied between professional and working-class women. Women from middle-class backgrounds who enjoyed success in their work were more likely to emphasize job satisfaction and the high personal standards they wished to meet. Women from a working-class background worked hard for financial reasons. Davidson & Cooper (1992) indicated that it was easy for working single women to fall into the habit of staying late at the office and taking more and more work back home. From my findings, I would want to ask whether having no spare time is typical of Hong Kong or whether it is a device which these women use to make sure they never have time to think/feel lonely/depressed. This question deserves further exploration.

When these women were free from work, they engaged in a range of activities. Some preferred out-door activities such as hiking, biking, swimming, playing badminton, etc. Others preferred in-door activities like reading, watching television and listening to music. Three were involved in community service. The following quotations provide some examples:

Clara:
"I play tennis with my friends on Monday. If I have time on Tuesday, I'll go to church to practice the piano. On Wednesday, I attend courses. Every Thursday, I practice the electric keyboard and piano. I'm responsible for holding a cell group in church and the meeting is held every Friday. I practice gymnastics with my friends or play ball games on Saturday. I have many hobbies. I like reading, swimming, playing tennis, badminton, squash and table tennis. Apart from reading books, I read newspapers and magazines every day. I also like writing drama scripts and calligraphy. I have a lot of work at home. I do not worry about the days after retirement. I like taking courses, so I will not stop reading."

Queenie:
"I spend much time reading newspapers and watching television. I am also a movie-goer. I like both Chinese and foreign films. I love sports, such as swimming, playing badminton or table tennis. I'll also go to watch drama and dancing performances. I love Chinese orchestras, especially those with vocal performances. If my friends are free, we'll go to these sorts of events together. If they are not, then I'll go alone if I really love that particular movie."

Ophelia:
"I don't have much leisure time. But sometimes I've got to study at night and also to participate in some community service. I like swimming and playing badminton. Now, I go swimming on my own most of the time. I find it's more comfortable to swim alone, no need to find someone to go with. I go swimming very often these days, twice a week."

These quotations show how active some single women were in their social circle. They spent their time after work partaking in different hobbies. Seven women said that they enjoyed group activities but eight of them preferred solitary pursuits, as the following quotations illustrate:

Winnie:
"I usually have tea and go to shopping with my mother when I have a holiday. After work, I usually go to the market to buy food or take care my elder brother's baby. My holidays are on weekdays. When I've got time, I'll go to Ocean Park with my family. Some of my friends have already married or they do not have holidays on weekdays, therefore, it becomes difficult to call them out."

Kitty:
"I am always with my family during my spare time. I watch television, read newspapers, or help my family refit their clothes. I seldom go to see movies alone as my mother needs my company."

Susan:
"I go shopping on Saturdays. On Sundays, I go to the restaurant with my old classmates. When it is autumn, we do something very healthy things, such as hiking but we'll choose easier trails to go on. I also love traveling because I can learn a lot more. It is better to have a partner with me when I want to know something more. If I don't have a partner, it's easier to get bored. I find myself

confined to small groups, since I can't manage to cope with a large group of people. I am not that kind of talkative person, unless there is a very common topic, a topic which I'm very familiar with, or I have the same kind of hobbies as the rest of the group does."

Yolande:
"My interests are varied but this doesn't mean that I always have time to engage in all my interests. My interests include shopping, visiting friends, or chatting with friends. I always enjoy being on my own and doing what I am interested in. Swimming and jogging are my hobbies. It's not easy to have friends to come with me. So I usually go alone. Anyway, I very much enjoy jogging alone."

Women would engage in activities like reading books, shopping, jogging or swimming alone. For some outdoor activities, such as travel or picnicking, women reported that they would like to have companions. They would not go alone to sports that required opponents such as badminton. Seven of them reported that it would be better to have a partner although they knew it was not easy to find one.

Yolande:
"It's not easy to find a friend to come with me. So I usually go alone."

Annie:
"If there are companions, I would go for picnic. But it is difficult to have companions. People like to stay in bed late during rest days because they do not usually have enough sleep... Only one or two companions would be enough for a picnic but sometimes I cannot find even one."

Apart from spending their free time with friends and family members, many were also members of organizations. Over half of the women interviewed were Christians who were involved in church activities. Similar responses had been recorded in Chapters Six and Seven. Some said that having a religious belief helped them considerably. Some examples are:

Diana:
"The church members care for me very much. We have dinner and go on outings together."

Vera:
"My family and I all become Catholics. We have some wonderful connections with the Catholic religion. I have attended a few sessions of preaching classes."

Elsa:
"I usually get together with the church friends every Sunday. Last week, we held a camp and we met every day. I need not to do anything to fill up my time. Being a Christian makes me full and contended."

These women indicated that their religious affiliation was important to them and a few attributed their satisfaction with singlehood to their faith in God. This religious affiliation may have helped protect the women from loneliness.

Those who were Christians could also pray to God in times of troubles. The following are some examples:

Kitty:
"I am used to praying to God. Since I'm unable to think when I feel worried, I prefer to calm down and pray."

Yolande:
"Pray to God. As a Christian, I have to seek God's will."

Winsome:
"I am a Catholic. I will arrange a time to talk to the Lord and share all my worries with Him when I am distressed. I believe that He will show me the way and guide me through every trouble."

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Stein (1976) conducted a survey on single adults. Those who had a viable lifestyle were middle class, had stable incomes, and had a wide social circle of different friends. In my study, this also applies to working-class single women. For instance, Annie and Fanny, who had spent their years of employment in factories, had secured stable incomes and maintained a wide social circle. They saved up their money for future use.

Single Women's Household.

A single working woman is no different from her married colleagues in terms of the work-place setting. Married and unmarried persons share some responsibilities and expectations but they differ substantially in their living conditions. The husband and children form an immediate circle in a married working women's life. What is a single woman's experience? Do they live with either their parents, or other members of the family? If not, are they sharing a home with friends? Or are they living alone?

Among the 30 single women interviewed, 13 lived with parents; six with another family member (e.g. elder brother or sister, etc.) and 11 lived alone, either in privately owned, rented apartments or under the Home Ownership Scheme. None of them lived with friends.

Nineteen of the 30 single women were living with family members. They may have achieved a limited freedom from dependency in the economic sense, but are still living in the traditional family structure. Ten women were responsible for dependents. For example:

Betty:
"*My parents need my financial help.*"

Vera:
"*It's impossible for me to go for long trips with them. If I go on a trip, who will take care of my family?*"

Kitty:
"*We live in private housing. We need to pay the monthly mortgage loan. I may do whatever I like after my younger brother finishes his study and starts to work.*"

. Moving away from the institution of marriage and being economically independent offers women the chance of structuring their lifestyle on their own. At the same time, their life is not that of an isolated individual devoid of personal relations with family members. The findings are consistent with Allen's (1989) study that reported on the practice of having one daughter stay at home to look after the household and the elderly, dependent relatives. It also seems to support the findings of Salaff (1976) that daughters had to bear economic responsibility for their families.

For those women who live alone, home is a place where they can relax, be at peace, engage in "private" activities such as reading, listening to music, sewing and knitting, renovating and decorating, watching television, etc. The following quotations illustrate the advantages of living alone:

Fanny:
"*I get the sense of control in having my own apartment. When my buddies visit me, we feel free. We can really enjoy ourselves.*"

Mandy:
"*Being single is very free. I always love to entertain myself, by seeing movies and watching videotapes at home.*"

Home as a private, personal area was important in establishing the independence of single women. They were able to make decisions about how much housework to do, what standards to set and when to do it. This is an important aspect of being in control

of one's life.   At the same time, they encountered difficulties in living, including (1) being alone/loneliness; (2) financial burden and crises; (3) handling daily business alone; and (4) social discomfort.   They described their difficulties as follows:

(1)   Being Alone/Loneliness

Although those single women who lived alone welcomed going home to get away from the tensions of their more public roles, several of them said they did get lonely. Nobody was there to show appreciation, support and encouragement.   When they were sick, they would miss people's care and concern.   Mandy was an example:

> *Mandy:*
> *"Sometimes I feel most lonely when I get ill.   I want someone to take care of me and at least to ask about me."*

(2)   Financial Burdens and Crises

It is not easy to afford to rent or own an apartment in Hong Kong.   Connie was one example:

> *Connie:*
> *"I've used up my savings to purchase my present flat under the Home Ownership Scheme.   However, I underestimated the cost.   When my budget was used up in decorating the house, I asked my friend in Singapore to lend me money."*

(3)   Handling Daily Business Alone

Four of the 30 women in the study pointed out that they had to deal with repair and maintenance tasks, like repairing electrical appliances, toilets, etc.   They would ask for assistance from family members or pay for the repairs.   For example:

> *Gladys:*
> *"I have had to be solely responsible for the purchase of household furniture and moving to the present apartment."*

> *Rose:*
> *"I want my man to fix the pendant lamp.   That's what I really want.   This comes to me when I clean my floor."*

(4) Social Discomfort

The women had to learn how to respond to the reaction of others. Some would consider or be concerned about their physical safety if they lived or went out alone. They had to bear other's suspicion that they were lesbians if one of their female friends stayed with them.

Helen:
"Recently I had a friend living with me. She looks boyish, so I felt pressure when living with her. Although the neighbors didn't say anything, they might think that I have a special preference. That's my worry."

The quotations above indicated that single women found pleasure in having their own homes. Their remarks confirmed Wilkinson's (1995) views that owning one's home gave a sense of dignity. They agreed that going home could help them to feel relaxed. However, they would also get lonely being on their own. They indicated that there was nobody at home with whom they could share their feelings. From what the women said, their experiences did not resemble the type of loneliness described by Weiss as an unpleasant, gnawing feeling.

Being Attached and a Sense of Community

During the interviews, the single women indicated that they could gain different kinds of support from family, friends, and colleagues.

Relationship with Family Members.

Social support from family members was crucial to the single women, whether or not they were living with their family. The majority of the working women interviewed relied heavily on their family for both practical and emotional support. For some of the women, their families constituted the principal source of support. They also believed that their families would be their major source of support if they remained single for the rest of their lives. The following quotations show how some of the women perceived support from family members:

Queenie:
"I lived with my sister's family until recently, when I moved out and lived alone. My mother visits me sometimes and stays with me. I have a close relationship with my family; we meet every weekend. I share my difficulties or joys with them. And my family would provide me with practical help when needed. For instance, they helped me to move to my present abode."

Lily:
"I was born in a big family. I am the second child among the six children in my family. I am living with my elder sister in an apartment in a public housing estate. I have regular gatherings with my family and our relationship is good. I treasure the time spent together with family members. Most often, I prefer to talk of secret things with my elder sister but not with my friends."

The data indicated that the women received several different kinds of support from their families. These were:

(1) Economic and Material Support:

Economic support includes the direct giving and lending of money, the sharing of financial resources, and the indirect sharing of resources that have economic implications. Economic assistance is very much a daily reality that existed for most single women, especially for those who lived with family members.

In the study, more than 20 women lived with their families. These single women contributed a fixed amount each month towards household expenditure. If they suffered an economic crisis, they would receive financial assistance from parents or other siblings. The following are typical examples:

Janice:
"I run a shop to make curtains for home use. I have a very good relationship with my family members. I am living with my elder sister. Since most of my family members are Christians, we often meet together on Sunday in the church. I also have a lot of friends. If I meet an economic crisis, I will never ask my friends to lend me money. I will ask my parents and other siblings. This is because my parents can solve the problem. I do not need to ask my friends."

Mandy:
"I am living alone but I maintain frequent contact with my family members. I phone them every day. I also visit them frequently. If there is a crisis, I will seek help from my family."

Diana:
"I have worked in a factory for nearly 20 years. In 1993, I was dismissed because of economic restructuring in Hong Kong. Then I could not find another

factory job.   With support from my family members, I attended some courses and I finally took up a job as a beautician. "

(2)   Practical Support

This refers to the provision of assistance with practical tasks, such as moving flats, being cared for when sick, etc.   The following are some examples of families' provision of practical support:

Pauline:
"I am the youngest daughter in my family.   I have long been under the protection and nourishment of my family.   I live separately from my parents with one elder sister who is also unmarried.   I visit my parents during the weekend.   As I grow older, I make less contact with them.   It is difficult to identify love among family members, as the Chinese are not very expressive.   The most obvious form of support is practical stuff."

Queenie:
"I can maintain a good relationship with my siblings.   We have about two gatherings per month.   I share my difficulties or my joys with them.   And they would be glad to offer their help.   Recently, I moved to my present living place with the assistance of my family members. "

Mandy:
"I enjoy living alone.   If I lived with my family, my mother would come to my room to urge me to sleep at mid-night.   I like to watch videotapes alone at home. I would spend my spare time in the way I like.   However, I need family member's care when I get ill. "

(3)   Accommodation

Out of the 30 women whom I interviewed, 19 lived with parents or with siblings. Eleven lived alone but if necessary, the family would try to squeeze space in their apartment to accommodate the single women.   The following is a typical example:

Fanny:
"I live alone in a suburb area.   The traffic is not convenient.   It is also not safe for a woman to walk alone on the streets at night.   Therefore, I stay at my elder brother's living place when I work late.   I can stay with my brother's family whenever I like. "

(4)   Emotional Support

Emotional support means understanding, listening, talking, and helping people to

put their lives in perspective. Members of the family are an important source of emotional support. They were available to talk in times of difficulties and can be turned to when there is a need for intimacy. The emotional support given by the family is evident from the following illustrations:

Kitty:
"I am the eldest daughter in my family. My family members and I are very close. We meet one another daily in one house. We have good emotional bonding and we respect one another. Also, we sometimes express grievances and opinions. Yet sometimes there is a little conflict. During my spare time, I stay at home to accompany my mother. I can count on my family."

Helen:
"I am the middle child among the five in my family. My father and two younger brothers have migrated to Australia. Only two elder siblings and myself live in Hong Kong. Presently I live alone. I maintain contacts with my siblings by paying regular visits to them. Recently, I visited my sister every week because of my illness and my moving home. When I was sick, I lived with them for three days. Our relationship is very harmonious."

Some of the women said that they felt at ease when they were at home. However, it was interesting to note that while the women appreciated the support given by their family members, few of them felt that it was necessary to express their appreciation verbally to them. Instead, they preferred to express their appreciation by spending more time at home, by buying food or toys for nieces or nephew, or by helping with household chores whenever they were free.

From the findings presented above, the forms of support provided by their families to their daughter or sister were influenced by the single women's conception of their families' roles. These conceptions and expectations played an important part in reinforcing the families' involvement in the single women's personal world. These women saw it as more appropriate to ask for and receive economic and material support from their families than from their peers. However, they also expected that their families would respect their privacy which meant that they could live independently and not become a burden to their family. For example, Nancy remarks: "I have lived alone for quite sometime. It's better if I live separately from my mother. We get on better if I only see her weekly. Sometimes, I will call her if I'm not able to visit, and she'll call me if I don't call her."

<u>Relationship with Female Friends.</u>

The friendships single women had were also important in their daily life. Among the 30 women I interviewed, more than 10 reported an extensive social circle. The following are some quotations:

Iris:
"I have a wide scope of friends including former colleagues and classmates. I also have made frequent contact with church brothers and sisters."

Winsome:
"I feel that I have many friends. I have all kinds of friends I like. I have friends whom I can confide in telling them about the kind of people I have met lately, things that annoy me, etc."

Fiona:
"As to my friends, most of them are in the same trade as mine. I seldom meet with those who are not. I go for dinner once to twice a fortnight with those who are."

Anna:
"I believe that if a few more friends were added to my life, I'd not be able to manage my time. I don't expect that much out of my friends. I believe we all have different lifestyles. I only accept what they can afford, then I am satisfied."

While most of the women had a wide circle of friends, some also had close friends in whom they could confide. Some still had primary or secondary school classmates as intimate friends. These intimate friends played a crucial role in providing emotional support and advice, as the following quotations illustrate:

Nancy:
"I am a very head-strong person, I do not accept suggestions easily. I only listen to people whom I really trust. There are not a lot of people I can really trust, and I feel sometimes it is not fair to take your problems to many people. I have been thinking about a spiritual partner. It is good to have someone to provide me with guidance and direction. I have met people in my life who have helped me a lot to deal with some major problems. Their numbers are limited; most of them are from the church or people who I have known for a long time. With old friends, I do not have to pretend who I am. Obviously, I have changed over the years, but they have accommodated my changes because, they have known me as I was, so to speak."

Anna:
"My only three closest friends in Hong Kong have the same faith as I do; Christian. We met in university, when we attended the same Christian fellowship. When we came back to Hong Kong after university, we kept in touch with each other. Therefore, I treasure these three friends. I challenge myself all the time, and I will show my work to all my friends. But when I am at work, I cannot do that. I

must draw a line between my colleagues and myself. But back to my friends, I would say I had a dream last night, and they will all laugh. They understand and accept me. □ I'll tell them that I flunked my examinations, and they'll say something to please me. When I flunked my first examination, I really didn't want to tell anyone. I was so ashamed. I never flunked any examinations before. But when I told them, they really accepted me and prayed for me. I felt secure. They finally encouraged me to retake the examination. Also, another year my boss fired me. I have been fired from jobs before. Since I'd been protected at a young age, when I'd been fired this time I was really discouraged. But my friends accepted it and prayed for me. Well, these were the worst situations in my life so far."

Connie:
"I have regular gatherings in church. My church members are my support. Besides, I maintain a very good relationship with my primary schoolmates. We have kept in touch ever since we knew each other. We have contact from time to time even though sometimes one of us furthers her study, or goes somewhere else. We are busy with our own work, having different jobs. Despite all this, whenever we see one another, we feel close to one another. I think it's precious to have friends like this."

It can be seen that some of the women in the study had friends who were their old classmates or neighbors. According to them, they selected and maintained relationships with them because they could share their religious beliefs, and thus understand and accept one another. Moreover, their relationship was of long duration, often extending over a time span of 20 years. They had gained a deep understanding of their friends' characters through the years. They had already screened off those whom they regarded as untrustworthy and had selected the ones in whom they felt they could confide.

Some women also reported that they treasured friends whom they could trust. Tirana's comments are an example of someone who clearly longs for confidants:

Tirana:
"I think I have enough friends. I'm still searching for some real friends, who believe in the Lord. I find I don't have any friends with a life-long commitment with me."

However, some women said that they did not have close friends or that the number of their close friends reduced as they became older. These women usually spent more time with family members. The following are some examples:

Vera:
"I don't have too many friends, not to say bosom ones. Our life voyages are

different. Some of them are married. I don't even meet very often with those who are unmarried. I wish I could have more friends. I am not an extrovert. I am not interested in playing mahjong. I am not good at sports, either. I am neither an active nor a quiet person. I can't even perform well in a karaoke session. Also, I had an unpleasant experience on seeking help from one friend. Every time when I had a conversation with her, she would interrupt my speech and dig at me and make me feel very unhappy. Our points of view might differ from each other. It's meaningless to make friends with her. I prefer to mix with those who are willing to discuss and help solve the problems for me."

Winnie:
"Sometimes I go shopping or have tea with my friends. It depends on their time schedule. If we have holidays at the same time, we will get together. Some of my friends are already married or they do not have holidays on weekdays, therefore, it becomes more difficult to call them out. Besides, it's odd to contact friends if they don't call me. I do not have many friends that I can share my heart with. I dare not share my heart with the new friends with whom I have become acquainted in recent years. I must find that they're trustworthy. Anyway, I have to help my mother to do household chores and take care of my nephew."

Elsa:
"I don't have many friends after coming back from England. Most of them have emigrated to other countries. My colleagues are mostly in Shenzhen (an economic zone in Mainland China which is located close to Hong Kong) where I worked after I finished my studies in England. Now I am teaching in a drawing school and there are only three people in this school including the boss. I am busy preparing the curriculum and teaching the children. I really cannot afford the time to make friendships. That's why I do not have as many friends as I would like."

These quotations illustrate some of the reasons why some women did not have close friends. Family matters might occupy them and time may be limited. Sometimes, their introverted personalities might also play a part in their lack of close friends. They might feel disappointed or frustrated in maintaining friendships, or because of lack of opportunities and resources, they might not be able to develop or strengthen their friendship with others. All these factors contributed to their lack of motivation to develop a peer circle.

There are various forms of support provided by their female friends to single women. These included emotional and practical support; help with making connections, opportunities to socialize and an opportunity to be oneself.

(1) Emotional Support

Emotional support seemed to be the type of support most valued by the women in

the study. Some said that they had at least one intimate friend in whom they could confide. All such friends were female and were former classmates and colleagues. The women would approach friends for consolation when they felt upset. These intimate friends would listen to them, support them and provide them with encouragement and advice whenever they were in need. The following are examples:

Betsy:
"First, we've known each other since we were working in the factory. They know my personal background and style of living well. They know my happiness and unhappiness. I feel relieved in getting along with them. I can have heart-to-heart talks with them not only about my personal stuff but also things that happened to the other members of my family."

Mandy:
"I agree that I've enough good friends. I can get support from them. When I feel blue, I'll talk to my friends first."

Tirana:
"Last year, I was depressed for a long time. At that time, I wanted help from a couple in the church. You see, when I have problems, I need someone to pray for me. They're those buddies. They'll pray for me. But we don't always sit together and pray. We pray together by phone. Sometimes, they ask me to pray for them too."

Vera:
"I've a friend who is married. She is very nice. She works for the government. She is quite well educated and has gained quite a lot of experience from her work. She said that if I had any problems, I could phone her at any time and she would share them with me."

Close friends provided the single women with listening ears and with valuable advice. Their rapport had evolved over a long period of time and was firmly grounded. It seemed that all the women interviewed had at least one person on whom they could rely for emotional support. Their confidants might be siblings, colleagues or friends. The common features shared by these confidants included the long duration of the relationship, the frequency of contacts either face-to-face or by phone, similarities in background, and the absence of ulterior motives.

Although these women were not yet married, they had to shoulder multiple role expectations. It was thus natural that they needed someone intimate with whom they could share their concerns and problems. It seemed that these confidants had proved to be highly effective in helping the single women to air their problems, and in providing valuable advice and guidance where necessary. These friends had helped

the women face daily challenges more effectively.   It is consistent with the findings of Brown & Tirril (1978) that close friends may be a protection against depression.

(2)   Practical and Instrumental Support

Seeking practical support from friends was common, although it was even more common to seek help from family members.   It was only when family members were not readily available that the single women would seek help from their friends.   The following were some examples:

Betty:
"I remember in 1994, I told my friend whom I had known for only one year that I was unemployed.   She helped me to locate a job immediately and arranged for an interview.   I was successful in the job interview and was offered the job, despite the fact that my chances were ruined by my ex-employer at the very last moment."

Diana:
"When my budget was used up in doing up the flat, I asked my friend in Singapore to lend me HK$30,000.   I only tried once before to ask my friends to lend me money.   She is very close to me; otherwise, I wouldn't have asked her.   It is embarrassing to ask somebody since they may not be ready to offer help."

Connie:
"I have several friends to count on in times of crisis.   They are friends in church and primary classmates.   They helped me to overcome some financial difficulties during my last trip to China.   I was out of budget.   I had spent some money on health problems before the trip.   One of them offered financial help and I realized how helpful she was, though I didn't take the money in the end."

There were some conditions under which these women turned to friends for practical and instrumental support instead of family members.   First, friends had to be very close to them.   Second, family members were not readily available.   However, when the women had received practical support from their friends, they usually felt indebted and wanted to return the favor if possible.   For example, Betty shared her religious beliefs with her friend who introduced her to a job.   Pauline liked to entertain at home as a way of expressing her appreciation for her friend's help.

(3)   Making Connections:

Friends were especially helpful in making connections.   The more friends one had, the more resourceful one became.   Those who had more friends were usually in a more advantageous position.   For example:

Helen:
"I already have enough friends. If you asked me to make friends in a group activity, I don't think I would. But if you asked me to just have a casual talk with somebody and become friends naturally, I think that's not difficult for me. I have more than ten friends whom I can trust to talk to when I need them. I can trust my colleagues and church friends to help me out in a crisis. When I am very upset, I will choose to talk to different guys dealing with different issues. Yes, I have many resources."

Clara:
"Most of my friends come from church and some are my colleagues. I think I have enough friends but I don't mind having more. Since I am a sociable person, I have many friends. Since I like reading, I can easily participate in my friends' conversations. I have many friends whom I could visit at any time, without waiting for an invitation. For instance, we go to one friend's home because he lives alone. My friends and I have the key. I have many friends like him. Others will come out to have dinner together if they have time. I really have someone who could help me out in a crisis. One of my fellowship members helped me to design this office."

Yolande:
"My social network is very broad as it includes my classmates from secondary school and university, the brothers and sisters from church and my colleagues. I meet the church members once a week. But I meet friends from school less often. I keep on making new friends. In fact, I am easy to make friends with and this helps my single life a lot."

These quotations illustrate the advantages of having a large network of friends who are emotionally as well as instrumentally important. The more extensive the network of friends that one had, the more support resources that one could draw upon. Though the "friends" mentioned by Helen and Clara were acquaintances rather than intimate friends, these friends were instrumental in providing needed resources at crucial moments. Indeed, this corresponds with the research findings of Liu and Duff (1978) on "the strength of weak ties". They asserted that the larger the network, the more effectively information and resources could be communicated between the members of the network. Although there is only a little research on the advantages of "weak ties", my data suggest that they are emotionally as well as instrumentally important.

(4) Socialization and Integration

Social gatherings with groups of friends were frequent among the single women. Some women said that they met their friends more frequently than their relatives. Examples are as follows:

Susan:
"I meet my siblings more frequently than my relatives. Also, my relatives live in all parts of Hong Kong. I meet childhood friends, old colleagues and old classmates quite often. Two friends are my neighbors. I know their family very well. That makes it easier for us to get in touch. When it is New Year time, we get together to play mahjong. Though we are not keen players, this serves as the best way to kill time and have fun. It is some sort of destiny or just a coincidence; we have lived in the same district since we were kids. I only have to take photos next door and we can look at them together. We have known each other's families since we were kids. We greet each other whenever we meet. It is very lucky that we can keep in contact for such a long time."

Queenie:
"I love to be with a lot of friends. I love to chat with friends, go hiking or go to movies with them. I enjoy the moment with friends. I have friends who I could visit at any time because some of my old classmates are still not married, the same as me. That's why we could easily find the time to see each other. Since I live alone, my friends can come any time they want."

Lily:
"I join my friends to play badminton every week. I think that's enough since I have my own work to do. About three to four friends welcome my visiting them at any time. Since their flats are too small, I can't visit them at any time."

Many of the women indicated that they often met friends who were their colleagues at work or fellow church members. Some also met with old school classmates in groups once or twice a year. When friends met, they would usually gather for some activity such as picnicking, hiking, taking a trip, dining at a restaurant or at somebody's home. Those who lived alone would invite friends to their home.

However, with their work and other obligations, single women did not find it easy to squeeze in time to meet one another, although they maintained contact by other means. The following is an example on how one single woman kept up her relationship with her friends:

Anna:
"I treasure those three friends whom we've recognized as good friends for a long time. We don't have a fixed schedule to see each other. We don't like to have a chat on the phone. We are all very independent, and we don't need to report to each other on our daily activities. But whenever we have a crisis, then we know whom to contact first. We will ask for each other's support. We don't rely on each other. Our social circles don't overlap and we all attend different churches and hold different jobs."

(5) Being Appreciated and Feeling Comfortable

Some women said that they could be totally themselves when they were with their friends.   They also felt that friends really appreciated them as a person.   They also felt comfortable with their friends and believed that they could show them total acceptance. Some examples are:

Betty:
"I think most of my friends who appreciate me won't tell so with words."

Queenie:
"To befriend me, they will not get anything substantial.   But we think that we are comfortable with each other, and that's why we accept each other.   We use our actions to prove that we are real friends."

Relationship with Male Friends.

Of the 30 single women, more than half found no difficulty in making friends with the opposite sex while the others did not find it easy.   The following examples help to illustrate the two different pictures:

Nancy:
"I will treat all my friends the same way.   There is no difference between female and male.   I am quite open-minded.   I find by just talking to girlfriends the view is rather one sided.   I like talking to men, they offer me different perspectives on life."

Gladys:
"I just don't know why it is more difficult to get along with male friends.   I still have opposite-sex friends, but deal with them more for business matters."

Nancy's quotation indicated that one of the advantages of interacting with male friends was to enlarge her perspective.   On the other hand, Gladys talked of her difficulties in getting along with men.   The relationship between single women and their male counterparts is strongly influenced by their conception of their own roles in daily interaction and dating.   For instance, they may take a passive role in making male friends.   However, since I only interviewed single women but not their male counterparts in this research, I can only present the single women's perspectives and their expectations of men.   The following are some examples:

Helen:
"With opposite-sex friends, I think I seldom take initiative to start conversations."

Rose:
"It's really rare for me to make the first move to talk with a man. Even though I may like the guy, I am still reluctant to do that. Usually I go out with a group of colleagues. We seldom talk about anything personal, just company business and gossip."

An analysis of the data collected showed that the women tended to take a passive stance. They expected the males to take the initiative in dating. They were probably influenced by stereotypes of heterosexual relationships where the man takes the initiative in dating and proposing marriage. Traditional Chinese values, which are transmitted through the informal socialization processes, and especially through parents, also encouraged women to be passive in relation to men.

Some of the single women interviewed thought that males started friendships because they wanted sex or to get married. This deterred women from approaching or starting conversations with the men. Examples are:

Betsy:
"I find that it is very difficult for me to make friends with the opposite sex because they might have a pre-set aim in their minds that their making friends with a girl is a precursor to developing into a courting couple and then a married couple."

Vera:
"The opposite sex has a different expectation in the course of making friends. Men intend to meet a suitable lady and get married as soon as possible."

Relationship with Colleagues.

Some of the single women interviewed had spent a considerable period of time in their present job and regarded work as very important. Those who had stayed for a shorter period in their current job were making every effort to keep the job. All tried their very best to adjust to their work environment. They also attempted to develop and maintain relationships with their colleagues and their boss and to avoid any unnecessary conflicts in the work place. The following are some examples:

Winnie:
"I find that there are conflicts of interest among my colleagues. I feel that it is not worthwhile for friendships to be ruined because of this. As I think that working happily is valuable, I will try to avoid having conflicts with others."

Mandy:
"I seldom get involved in leisure activities with my colleagues because we don't have common hobbies and interests. But I try to maintain a good relationship with them."

Among the 30 women interviewed, however, only a few said that they had a good relationship with colleagues or their boss.

Pauline:
"I can get along with some peers and some of my subordinates in a harmonious way. We are so close that we always share our work experiences. However, my relationship with my supervisor and other paramedical staff (especially the doctors) is just average. The content of communication is confined to our work."

Queenie:
"The working environment makes me feel younger. I get a lot of support from my colleagues."

Rose:
"I have a good relationship with my colleagues, especially with those of the same sex. They are young. I am very active in the office and always joke with my colleagues. Sometimes I feel quite happy (when there is less stress at work)."

Most of the women interviewed said that they had a distant relationship with colleagues. For example:

Betty:
"I only have purely working relationships with my colleagues, never mentioning closer relationships."

Iris:
"We are quite isolated. We talk less about our lives but more about our jobs."

Lily:
"Our relationship is fair. I hate colleagues who get into my business."

Anna:
"Over the long span of my career (more than 20 years), I have only kept one or two colleagues as friends, due to my laziness. Our teamwork is okay. On the whole, I still need to work independently and solve my own problems."

In fact, some could not be themselves with their colleagues. For example:

Winsome:
"I am agonized when I see deceitful people. It's not a problem to me. I was working in the commercial field and I could accept the way people behave there. But now I am working in a social service setting, I cannot accept my colleagues being mean to others. I feel angry with it."

Kitty:
"I can tell the relationship with colleagues is the problem I meet at my work."

195

Despite the generally rather distant picture of work relationships given by a majority of the women, some spoke of the support they received from work colleagues. The support included practical as well as informal social support. The following are the major types of collegial support identified in the data:

(1) Practical and Instrumental Support

Single women met their colleagues every day and they received practical support from them. A few of them mentioned this support:

Betty:
"As a stock dealer, calculations are very important. By calculating the sum, the client can consider whether it is worth making the investment. Sometimes, clients will ask for my advice. But since I am not interested in calculations, I'll consult my colleagues or managers instead."

Helen:
"In order to handle problems at work, I talk to colleagues, my supervisor, etc., or take some courses."

Tirana:
"I don't like administrative work. It's so tedious. I have problems in time management. The workload is very heavy and I spend less time scheduling supervisory sessions for my subordinates. I have asked for help from my superior and then the problem has been solved."

(2) Socialization and Emotional Support

A few of the single women had been working in the same workplace and had known their colleagues for an extended period of time, and had a firm foundation for their relationship. As well as attempting to maintain a harmonious and supportive relationship at the work place, they also chatted with their colleagues. The following are the women's own descriptions of their collegial relationships:

Queenie:
"I maintain a fair relationship with my colleagues. We will go hiking and camping. At work, we show support to one another."

Susan:
"I have a very good relationship with my colleagues. They are young. I am very active in the office and always joke with my colleagues. Sometimes I feel quite happy."

Rose:
"My colleague is good to me.   She is very supportive."

These relationships seemed to serve the function of relieving tension and providing emotional support for the single women.

Among this group of women in my study, it was usual for them to have friendly relationship with their coworkers.   They could get on well with colleagues who could provide certain kinds of support.   The colleagues were important to make days pleasant and make them feel a valued person.   However, few of them indicated that they would confide their deepest feelings with their colleagues.   Both the professional and working class women often mentioned having sociable companions and acquaintances where they worked, but rarely an intimate friend.   Most of the women considered the friendly interaction at work part of the attraction of being employed outside the home, even though the relationships were, for the most part, quite superficial and fleeting.   In conclusion, these support relationships were kept for the work place and did not continue if either left the job.

Relationship with Church Members.

Twenty women in this study participated actively in church activities.   They enjoyed good fellowship with fellow church members.   Some talked about their experiences as follows:

Connie:
"I have most of my social life in the church.   I can count on my fellow church-goers in times of crisis.   I remembered they helped me to overcome some financial difficulties during my last trip to China. ... I was out of budget.   I had spent some money on health problems before the trip.   One of them offered me financial helps."

Elsa:
"After I came back from England, I found that most of my friends had migrated to other countries.   My colleagues are mostly in Shenzhen where I worked after completing my studies in England.   Now I'm teaching in a drawing school where there are only three people including the boss.   Therefore, I do not have many friends.   I usually get together with my church members.   In front of them, I can totally be myself.   I think that they really appreciate me as a person."

Yolande:
"I keep on making new friends.   My social network is very broad and it includes

*my schoolmates from secondary school and university, church members and my
colleagues. Among them, I meet my church members once a week."*

The data indicated that the women received several different kinds of support from
church members. These were:

(1) Socialization and Integration

Socializing with church members was a regular pastime for these single women.
Many indicated that they interacted frequently with church members socially and for
recreation. The following descriptions from the interviews vividly captured their
church life:

Connie:
*"I have plenty of friends. I have regular gatherings in church. I serve there.
They are my support. I have also joined the prayer group in which I pray for the
ministers and their work."*

Elsa:
*"I usually get together with my church friends. I like telling jokes and we feel
happy when we meet. I think that they appreciate me a lot."*

Yolande:
*"I cannot separate most of my social life from my church life. My services in
church and fellowship with church members are my social life."*

The activities at church constituted an important source for socialization and
integration and helped the women to live their single lives although some of the women
mentioned problems with the couple-focused nature of church activities. Such
comments were quoted earlier.

(2) Emotional Support, Advice and Guidance

Women in the study mentioned that they had sought emotional support from
church members. Because of similarities in religious beliefs, they would often give
emotional support to one another. Most often, they gave support by praying together,
or provided advice supported by Biblical verses. The following are some examples:

Gladys:
*"I will share things with my fellowship friends who may listen to me when I am
distressed."*

Rose:
"I get emotional support from one of my church friends.   She is so nice that she prays for me and sends me letters.   When I read her letters, I am really touched by the soothing words."

The findings illustrate the support given by the church-mates to single friends. When they felt stressed, some of them would like to pray alone and with some other Christian friends.   Religious belief, to certain extent, could help to alleviate their stress.

Benefits and Costs of Social Support

Benefits of Social Support.

Among the 30 women, more than half would approach their family members or friends if something was bothering or worrying them and they did not know what to do. The following quotations illustrate how their networks have provided the single women with the resources needed when they had problems:

Annie:
"When I am distressed, I will share my problems with my friends.   I will take their advice if it is acceptable and do my best to find a solution.   If the result is not desirable and no remedy has been identified, I will simply accept the reality and plan for my future."

Susan:
"Whenever I encounter a problem, I will approach friends and business associates for assistance.   They are all very helpful and they know my plight and will render their assistance.   Luckily, all my colleagues are very co-operative and work very closely with me like a team.   Therefore, whenever there is any unrehearsed assignment, all my colleagues are ready to work hard with the same goal of accomplishing the assignment."

Tirana:
"When I am distressed, it would be helpful to share my problems with my friends. I would take the advice of my trustworthy friends.   However, the sharing has already been a healing process when I expressed my emotions openly."

Betsy:
"Most of my problems come from my job.   Perhaps I will chat with a friend at night.   My sharing may not necessarily involve the problem I am facing. However, insights will usually come just by chatting.   Although not every problem has been solved, it is fortunate that throughout the years somehow insights have come and problems have been solved.   I believe that there is always hope in the

end."

In these four quotations, the women show how they are dependent on their network of family members, friends, and colleagues for instrumental and emotional support. If these women were in need of help, they would almost immediately approach their own support network for assistance. Indeed, their support networks constituted their most reliable and immediate social circle that they could fall back upon when they were worried over work or other life events.

Costs of Social Support.

But social support is not a one-way process. In the study, women reported that people in their social support network could make demands on their resources and energy. The following quotations are illustrative:

Iris:
"I find it easy to talk with others on my topic. But gradually, I found that many people were using me to kill time. I started to realize this after I reached 35 when I began to feel my physical ability could no longer sustain this."

Vera:
"I am worried that once a man who has been introduced to me knows about my family background, he would be frightened away because though my family does not consist of a lot of people, they all depend on me for their living. ... Hence, I am not eager to make friends with the opposite sex. Unless one day, the luck of drawing a lover falls on me, or at least, I meet someone who is in tune with me."

One cannot usually receive support without also providing it. Some women were living with their parents or siblings and were expected to look after them. This is vividly illustrated by the following cases:

Betty:
"I am the only child and the chief financial supporter of my family. With my parents' increasing age, I have to save money for their future. I take my family's financial needs into consideration when I consider whether or not to remain single. I have thought about changing my current job for more than ten years. However, given my Form Five qualifications, I am afraid that I cannot find a better job. If I change jobs, I have to start anew. In addition, I am afraid that my parents will worry about me."

Betsy:
"I am not in a haste to find a husband because I have to take care of my younger sister; she may suffer a relapse in her condition at any time. Therefore, my sister resists from making friends with the opposite sex. My mother said to me

worriedly, 'I don't know when you will marry, nor do I know what your future plans are, she (your sister) is merely a girl. Although her brothers treat her well, we can't guarantee that her sisters-in-law will treat her well, too. After all, you two are sisters, I hope you will look after her.' I have always borne my mother's words in mind."

These two cases are of single women who have had to take up responsibilities for caring. Some either moved closer to their parents or made frequent visits to them. Some women reported a strong expectation by parents or siblings that they, as single women, would assume the main responsibility for caring for them. The cases of Diana and Kitty are examples of how the eldest daughter took up the family's responsibilities:

Diana:
"Being the eldest daughter in my family, I have a strong sense of familial responsibility. I worried that nobody would take care of my eight younger brothers if I got married. I turned down an offer of marriage because of the impact on my family. I hold great responsibilities in the family. ... I have not had time to try to work out relationships with the opposite sex. I had an urge to share family responsibility."

Kitty:
"I am the eldest daughter in my family. Since my father passed away, I have shouldered the family responsibility. I know that my mother worries about who will pay for the mortgage loan, even though she has never said this. I think that after I get married, I will pay less or even not be able to contribute to my family. I seriously rank my family's needs as top priority when considering my marriage."

Difference Between Professional and Working-Class Single Women
in the Context of Social Support

As I have mentioned, both professional and working class single women in my study have strong social networks. But there were some differences between these two groups of women in their network of relationships.

Both professional and working class single women depended on their friends for support. Professional single women sometimes developed a circle of friends and acquaintances in the same profession or business. Clara, who was a dentist, talked at length about the fact that her "best friends," including men, were in the same profession and that she saw them regularly at various types of meetings or seminars. But this was not always the case. Nancy, who was a personnel manager, seldom joined with the

friends in the same professional field after work. She preferred to make friends from a different circle so as to develop other areas of interest. As these professional women moved ahead in their careers, they had built up a network of friends along the way; some of whom they thought would be friends for life. Helen and Tirana had established a network of friends who were social workers. Some of these professional women earned substantial salaries that allowed them to purchase a flat. Others preferred to rent an apartment. They would think of buying only if they found the flat they particularly liked. Their financial resources permitted them to spend money on themselves and on doing things with each other, such as frequently dining out, going to the theatre, movies, sports events, travels. Some of them took vacation trips together. These professional women worked hard and enjoyed the fruits of their labor with equal intensity. They spent long hours at work. They could balance their social life with solitary pursuits, such as reading and keeping up with the news. A shortage of time was reported to be the key problem in the development and maintenance of the friendships among these women. However difficult it seemed to be to keep these friendships going, this group of professional women seemed to be making an effort to create and maintain a circle of friends. For instance, they kept talking on the telephone or paying visits to one another occasionally or during weekends.

Working class single women, on the other hand, were more reliant on family and friends for support than professional single women. Eleven working class single women chose to live with their parents or family members whereas eight professional women lived with their family members. As I have mentioned earlier, working class single women, particularly those who were eldest daughters, were expected to carry family responsibilities. They had to take care of aged parents or dependent family members. Also a few of them had to support their family to pay the mortgage loan on the house. Those who lived separately still paid regular visit to their parents. Several of them had saved enough money to make the down payment on a flat although they still had to pay the monthly mortgage. Their own living place could provide them with privacy. They were also free to invite friends to their living place on weekends or holidays. In their leisure time, they also joined other friends to dine out or to attend courses in the evening. Instead of taking overseas trips, they joined together to take a short trip to Mainland China.

<u>Discussion</u>

The findings presented above are consistent with the literature about social support that suggests that single women can have a large social network. The women in this study reported that primary groups including family, friends and colleagues provided the most important social support for them. This finding supports Cassel's (1976) findings. As well as having access to a large social network, the women also reported having confidants, in line with the work of Brown & Tirril (1978).

House (1981) conceptualized four broad classes of social support. These are (1) emotional support, involving empathy, love and trust; (2) instrumental support, involving behaviors that directly help the person in need; (3) informational support, involving information that is useful in coping with personal and environmental problems, and (4) appraisal support, involving information that is relevant to self-evaluation or social comparisons. The findings of my study coincided with House's in that each single woman received different kinds of social support. Among all the kinds of support, women of my study stressed the significance of emotional support. A majority depended exclusively on friends, while others depended on both friends and family. Most friends were women, the majority of whom were single. A few depended only on their family for emotional support. Parents were the most frequently mentioned family members who provided social and emotional support. Those who were living alone found it more convenient to invite friends home. Similarly, they found it easier to visit friends who were not living with their families. Some women maintained connections with friends whom they had met during childhood and adolescence while others developed new relationships. They recognized the necessity of mutual effort to establish and keep friendships going. This finding is consistent with Stein's (1976) study which indicated that women could develop a sense of mutuality, intimacy, sharing, and continuity from close and caring relationships.

Some women in the study indicated that most of their friends were single. This is also consistent with the studies by Stein (1976) and Frieze et al. (1978). Their contacts with married friends had become fewer since they did not have common topics of conversation. More than 15 women found it was easier to make friends with people of the same sex than with those of the opposite sex. One of the reasons for this was that most were employed in sex-segregated occupations, such as clerical work, service

occupations, nursing, teaching, and social work. Therefore, friends derived from work settings would probably be women. One of the chief sources of friendship for some single women was their workplace although few women said that they got on well with colleagues. Collegial relationships constituted the largest network of friends. Next was the network formed in church, service groups, etc. Secondly, women were easier to confide in than men because of women's capacities for empathic listening and nurturance. With female friends, single women often engaged in more intimate conversation and more self-disclosure. Finally, single women often encountered a cultural taboo against forming too close a bond with men who were married.

In this study, relationships in single women's lives give meaning to singlehood and moderate any stress in their experience of being single. Family members, friends, colleagues and church members may be expected to share both positive and negative experiences of singlehood.

There is a consistency in the findings on the direct effect of social support. Several studies revealed that social support has a positive influence on people's health regardless of their levels of stress. In other words, social support may play a role in insulating people from exposure to stressors and in fostering good health and morale (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Bloom, Asher & White, 1978). Some other researchers argued that social support might moderate the relationship between stress and well-being. This model is termed the buffering model (Cohen & Wills, 1985). During stressful times, individuals with low support will show negative effects whereas those with high support will show less negative effects since their support "buffers" them from the effects of stress. Several researchers suggested that social support could condition or buffer people's response to stressors and moderate between stress and illness (Gottleib, 1983; Cassel, 1974; Cobb, 1976).

From what the single women in my study said, social support could have a moderating effect on their psychological well-being. This supported much of the literature on social support (e.g. Pearlin et al., 1981). With social support, individuals can buttress their self-esteem and mastery in the face of hardship.

As mentioned earlier, receiving support and care is beneficial to the psychological well-being of an individual. At the same time, it makes constant demands on an

individual's resources and energy.   Women are said to be more emotionally responsive than men to the quality of interpersonal ties (Belle, 1987).   The stress-buffering effect of social support may be somewhat stronger among women than men (Wethington & Kessler, 1986).   This greater sensitivity to emotional support can be rewarding, but the absence of high-quality emotional support can make women feel stressed.   Riley & Eckenrode (1986) found that maintaining a large social network was advantageous only for women with higher levels of resources.   On the other hand, networks might appear more harmful for low-resource women, who presumably had greater difficulty in responding to the needs of network members.

This study found that it was assumed that the respondents would take up the role of carers for aged parents.   Data clearly indicated that these women provided a great deal of both financial and emotional support.   Among them, three were eldest daughters. They did not resist such a responsibility and regarded it as a way to reciprocate the support which they had received from their older generation.   The findings are thus consistent with current literature on social support.   In Western literature on Community Care, there has been discussion of single women as carers.   In Hong Kong, a study conducted by Salaff (1976) and Chan et al., (1995) reported that single women would be the main financial and emotional carers for elderly parents.   This means that in families where there is a single daughter, she and not her married siblings will be the main carer.   However, judging from the experience of the women, it was obvious that caring for aged parents and dependent family members was by no means an easy task. This was especially so in view of the lack of financial resources among the working class single women.   This aspect deserves further research.

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter, I have provided a detailed overview of the major types of relationships which the women had and the dynamics underlying these relationships. It was evident that the majority of the women were very active in their social circle. They maintained a good support network with their family members, friends, colleagues and church members.   Some also treasured an intimate relationship within their immediate circle.

Support from family members was one of the most important relationships for the single women. According to my research data, the major forms of support provided by family members to the single women were economic and material support, accommodation, practical support, advice and guidance, and emotional support. It seemed that single women usually tended to ask for economic support from family members rather than friends.

Social support from friends was another important source of support for these single women. They hoped to have as many friends as possible. At the same time, they wanted to have some intimate friends. It was interesting to know that intimate friends were often previous classmates or people whom they had known since childhood and whom they could trust for emotional and, sometimes, economic support. As well as making friends with other single women, some also were male friends. They were generally rather traditional in their conception of their own roles in social interaction with the opposite sex.

A few of the women depended on colleagues for support. As a majority of women were Christian, they received emotional and practical support from church members. These forms of support could, to a large extent, help them to moderate any stress in leading their single life. In the later part of this chapter, the benefits and costs of social support were discussed. Differences between professional and working class single women in the context of social support had also been discussed.

Chapter 9

Work and Single Women

The analysis in the previous Chapter gives the impression that the single women in the study had access to a rich network of support in many aspects of their lives. This support could help them to reduce the impact of the predictable or unpredictable stress of leading a single life. Among the sources of support, collegial support was one of them. At work, some could find emotional and practical support, socialize and feel part of a group.

In this study, 29 out of 30 women were in paid work. The remaining woman had just resigned for personal reasons and she planned to resume work in the immediate future. Her previous work experience was taken into account in the analysis. In the interviews, the women talked about the nature of their jobs, and their rewards and stresses. The findings are discussed in this Chapter.

Categories of Work

The jobs held by the women are listed in Table 9-1.

Table 9-1 Occupations of the Single Women in the Study

Respondent	Occupation	Notes
Annie	Accounts Clerk	Employed, working-class
Betty	Clerk	Employed, working-class
Connie	Social Work Assistant	Employed, professional
Diana	Beautician	Self-run business, working-class
Elaine	Church Minister	Employed, professional
Fanny	Garment Technician	Employed, working-class
Gladys	Insurance Agent	Employed, professional
Helen	Social Worker	Employed, professional

Iris	Research Officer	Employed, professional
Janice	Draper	Self-run business, working-class
Kitty	Church Minister	Employed, professional
Lily	School Clerk	Employed, working-class
Mandy	Accountant	Employed, professional
Nancy	Personnel Manager	Employed, professional
Ophelia	Physiotherapy Assistant	Employed, working-class
Pauline	Senior Nursing Officer	Employed, professional
Queenie	Secondary School Teacher	Employed, professional
Rose	Secretary	Employed, working-class
Susan	Personnel Assistant	Employed, professional
Tirana	Social Work Supervisor	Employed, professional
Yolande	Senior Police Inspector	Employed, professional
Vera	Health Care Assistant	Employed, working-class
Winnie	Cleansing Lady	Employed, working-class
Winsome	Telephone Operator	Employed, working-class
Anna	Solicitor	Employed, professional
Betsy	Merchandiser	Employed, professional
Clara	Dentist	Self-run business, professional
Daisy	Assistant	Family-run trading company, working-class
Elsa	Drawing Teacher	Employed, professional
Fiona	Sales Supervisor	Unemployed, working-class

In Chapter Three, the characteristics of professional and working-class women were described. In this study, using these pre-mentioned characteristics, namely, possessing a systematic body of theoretical knowledge acquired through a protracted period of formal training and are also governed by a norm of altruism or a service orientation, 17 were classified as professional; seven worked in the occupations of teaching, social work, nursing; three worked as lawyer, accountant, dentist; two were ministers; two were employed in administrative work, one was an insurance agent; another a merchandiser and one was a senior police inspector. The other 13 were classified as working-class women. Six worked in clerical jobs; four in service occupations; two were craft workers (curtain making and garment technician); and one

was a cleaner.

The women in the study had, to date, spent most of their working life in employment. In the following section, I will portray the characteristics of these professional and working-class women based on an analysis of the data.

<u>Women in Professional Occupations.</u>

There were five women in "male" occupations, while the others were employed in traditionally female-dominated professions.   The following case examples are used to illustrate their experiences in daily work.

(1)   <u>Women in Male-dominated Professions</u>

Six women in the study were in what were traditionally male professions; namely, the dentist, police inspector, lawyer, church minister, and merchandiser.   Some of their work experiences are illustrated in the following excerpts:

<u>Clara:</u>
"I have been a dentist for about 10 years.   I received my dentistry training in Australia.   I run a dental clinic by myself.   I really enjoy the job although it causes me great pressure.   The prospect of dentistry is not good because there are a lot of dentists in Hong Kong.   The clinic running costs are very high.   In the past, most patients wanted to consult a male dentist.   However, there has been a great change over these years that more patients would want to consult a female dentist.   Patients comment that female dentists are more careful while male dentists are rather rude."

<u>Yolande:</u>
"I have been a police inspector for 12 years.   I was promoted to a senior police inspector after a series of screening tests.   By working in different sections, I can continuously learn and meet different people.   As most of my colleagues whom I supervise are male, I have to be strong when interacting with them.   I have to give commands in a very firm tone showing that there are no grounds for negotiation. If a problem arises over my inadequacy in understanding male colleagues' feelings, I will seek advice or learn from my second in-charge.   Anyway, I am confident in handling relationship problems with my colleagues."

<u>Anna:</u>
"As a lawyer, I am responsible for handling all kinds of legal transaction such as land purchase cases.   I sometimes get stuck at work and I have to solve the problems independently.   I have to work very hard on each case.   If clients are satisfied with my work, they are willing to settle the bill right away.   I feel discriminated against at work because of my sex."

Betsy:
"My field is dominated by males. We are often required to work outdoors, so preference has always been given to male workers when offering employment. Hence, the relationship between my colleagues and I is merely a working one. Our talks are confined to work only."

These excerpts show that these women felt that they were perceived as unfit for male-dominated professions because of their feminine attributes. In order to cope with prejudice and gender stereotyping, they needed to work hard and appear strong. The first three women were satisfied with their job performance and continued to pursue higher positions or to seek recognition.

Betsy's account reveals the problems encountered by sales representatives: lack of integration into a male world; stereotyping by men; visibility as the "first" women; being token females; lack of female role models; and lack of a support system for women.

(2) Women in Female-dominated Professions

There were 7 women working in female dominated professions. Five had been promoted to a supervisory position. They were also responsible for middle-level administration. However, they still had to report to their superiors, who were mostly men. One woman in academia (Janice) held an academic rank and was required to assist with some administrative duties. Two women (Elaine & Kitty) were working as church ministers. In most instances, it was the pastors, who were mostly men, who were responsible for the church administration. The following excerpts illustrate these points:

Pauline:
"I have been a nurse since completing my secondary education. I took up the position of ward manager for two years. Being at a middle-level, I will express my opinion to my supervisor before the implementation of any policy that might influence the ward. Although nursing administration is in a female hierarchy, the nurse administrator and I have to follow the doctor's orders."

Queenie:
"I am a secondary school teacher. In the new school term, I will take up the post as a guidance mistress. I understand that guidance work is not easy because of their complexity. My school is in the middle of re-structuring and I find my work demanding. However, I have to follow the school principal's advice in

implementing new projects in the school."

Kitty:
"I have been working as a church minister for nearly 12 years. I am mainly responsible for paying visits and teaching. In the church, there is a belief that the female ministers are assistants to the male pastors. Paternalistic ideologies are found to be dominant in the church tradition."

Pauline and Queenie liked their jobs because of their intrinsic rewards, collegiality, and their desire to serve the patients and students. These nonpecuniary rewards were important sources of satisfaction. However, like other nurses and teachers, they could not make final decisions or expect the support that most professionals had: adequate equipment and materials, clerical assistance, and other services. Kitty's account revealed that she worked as an assistant minister to the pastor and was responsible for education and other church ministries.

(3)   Women in Managerial Occupations

Only two women in the study occupied managerial positions. They could make decisions but carried other burdens, as Nancy's case illustrates:

Nancy:
"I work in the Personnel Department and my duties include staff recruitment and employee benefits. I have been in this post for one year. I like the job because I can help my colleagues create a better working environment. I particularly like to make decisions. There is no one to help me and I am on my own most of the time. If I am constantly asking for help, my boss will hire someone to work for the department. At work, I appear to be cool and seldom join my colleagues' activities after work."

Nancy was responsible for personnel management in a department which provided support services and was dominated by female staff. At work, Nancy could exercise autonomy and she was satisfied with the work and her performance. As the person in-charge of a unit, she appeared to be strong.

Women in Working-class Occupations.

The women in the study who were in working-class occupations were classified into two categories: non-manual and manual. The non-manual occupations included the clerical and service sectors. The manual occupations included skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled laborers.

As I have noted in Chapter Four, because of inadequate support from the government and the banking sector, Hong Kong's local industrialists, especially small and medium firms, failed to upgrade themselves to technologically advanced and capital-intensive production during the period between 1986-1993. Because of the opportunities offered by China's Open Door Policy, the dominant restructuring strategy of local manufacturers since the mid-1980s has been the continuation of horizontal expansion of the labor force in the form of plant relocation to Shenzhen and other parts of the Pearl River Delta. In addition to relocation, manufacturing firms are reducing their scale of production or closing down existing plants. As a result, the number of jobs in the manufacturing sector has been reduced. After losing their jobs, women have taken up new jobs in the service and tertiary sector working as receptionists, clerical or office workers and shop assistants, etc. In this study, about 10 single women worked in the clerical and service sectors – the so-called white-collar occupations, and half had changed from manufacturing occupations. The following quotations show how these women experienced their jobs.

(1)   Women in the Non-manual Occupations

Rose:
"I am a secretary in a firm which manufactures textile products and garments. I work under a boss but my workload is so heavy that I feel like a departmental secretary. Besides the heavy workload, I feel mostly frustrated by my ignorance over some specific terms in the garment industry. As a result, I often make mistakes."

Annie:
"I work in the payment section in my company. My duties include handling payments, invoices, delivery notes and documents. I find the job is overloaded and boring. I once thought about finding another job with better pay, a better environment and less work. Considering my qualifications, I cannot apply for those jobs and thus I remain in my current job."

Betty:
"I am a stocks dealer whose main duty is to help clients to confirm orders. I joined this field in 1979. I feel the work is more stressful during the peak season. I don't think I have any chances for promotion. I can change my job to become a floor trader whose work might be more demanding. With my Form Five standard, I cannot find a better job. Therefore, I have decided to stay in my present job."

Women in white-collar occupations reported having low incomes. They also lacked opportunities for advancement. Their work was monotonous. Considering

their limited academic qualifications, they had chosen to stay in their jobs (although they found them boring) in order to secure financial stability. If they were laid off, it would not be easy for them to find another job with equivalent income. Financial security seemed to be particularly important to single women. Most of the women chose to stay, but some like Rose attempted to change her career path. She once left a secretarial job in order to run a shop with her sister. After two years, she resumed work as a secretary because she was not making enough money in the shop.

(2) Women in Manual Occupations

Winsome:
"I can learn little from my job as a telephone operator. It is monotonous indeed and no skills are required. I am afraid that I will be laid off or transferred to another unit."

Fiona:
"I have recently quit my job as a sales supervisor because my boss failed in his business and the shop closed down. I might rejoin the trade if the employment conditions were good. However, given the poor economy, I am afraid that it will not be easy for me. Shops only recruit younger girls and want them to work on a part-time basis."

Women in blue-collar occupations reported that low pay; lack of skill; lack of training programs; poor working conditions; limited upward mobility; high unemployment and high turnover rates characterized their jobs. Because of their low educational standard and limited training, some women were employed in manual jobs. They were likely to be at a disadvantage in their jobs. In order to aspire to non-manual occupations, they treasured education and training. For example:

Vera:
"I have taken up a job as a health care assistant. Since my academic qualifications are not high, I feel that I am lucky to find this job. I have to take up my job very seriously. The most important thing is to enrich myself with knowledge. If I don't pursue further studies, I will feel dispirited."

Fanny:
"I had worked in a factory since I was a teenager. But I tried hard to attend evening school until I completed my secondary education. Later, I successfully become a technician in the textile and clothing industry. I am now a regional technical supervisor."

These excerpts show how women made an effort to take up jobs where basic literacy was required. Once they acquired these new jobs, they worked hard.

Only two women in the study were working as skilled laborers; Janice as a curtain technician and Fanny as a garment technician. They could not avoid discrimination. The following is a vivid example:

Janice:
"My job is to make curtains for home use. I have experienced discrimination at work. It is because there are few women in this field. Only a few work in measuring and installation. The customers doubt I can take up the project. They ask if the decoration man is my husband. Generally speaking, when a shop offers decoration and curtain making, people assume it is run by a couple."

Entry into the Labor Force

The majority of the single women in this study had joined the labor force between 10 and 20 years ago. Some had stayed in the same job, some had been promoted and some had changed jobs. The duration of their current work is listed in Table 9-2.

Table 9-2 Duration of Present Work of the Single Women in the Study

Respondent	No. of Years	Respondent	No. of Years
Annie	2	Pauline	2
Betty	1+	Queenie	8
Connie	7	Rose	1
Diana	2	Susan	3+
Elaine	3	Tirana	10+
Fanny	3	Yolande	12
Gladys	5	Vera	4+
Helen	15	Winnie	2
Iris	15	Winsome	13
Janice	8	Anna	4
Kitty	12	Betsy	16
Lily	2	Clara	10+
Mandy	16	Daisy	9
Nancy	1	Elsa	0.5
Ophelia	13	Fiona	8+

The working-class women entered the labor force immediately after completing primary and junior secondary education. Nine of the women (Annie, Diana, Fanny, Janice, Ophelia, Vera, Winnie, Winsome and Fiona) obtained jobs in factories, largely electronics or textile manufacturing, and most of them stayed in the same unit for over 10 years. Such industries were flourishing during the 1960s and 1970s in Hong Kong. Most spent 10 years or longer in these jobs. Some had been promoted to supervisory positions. As mentioned before, due to computerization, advances in technology and the relocation of production lines to less developed countries, the job opportunities in the manufacturing sector in Hong Kong were greatly reduced. From 1986 to 1991, 179,000 workers lost their jobs in the manufacturing sector, and nearly two-thirds of these were women. Redundancy, retrenchment, insolvency and the cessation of business were the major factors contributing to these job losses. Nine out of the 30 women in this study lost their jobs in the period from 1986 to 1996. They said that dismissal and taking up a new job was stressful for them. The following are some examples of the pressure these working women suffered:

Diana:
"I had worked in the garment manufacturing factory since I completed my Form 2 education. I was later promoted to supervisor. I had made a lot of friends and acquaintances there. With the stable income, I could travel abroad with friends once a year. After my dismissal, I experienced difficulties in resuming the same job in a factory. I later decided to undertake facial treatments training. But I find the income of my current job is not stable and I seldom take a long trip as before."

Winsome:
"My current job is a telephone operator. Before, I was a supervisor of a production line in a factory. I had to supervise about 20 girls. Due to the business shrinking, the factory I worked in was closed down. With a friend's introduction, I found my present job. But there is not much to learn in this job."

Winnie:
"I was introduced to the current cleaning job in a residential club by my colleague. Before, I worked in a factory until the business was terminated. With my primary education and work experience in garment manufacturing, it is difficult for me to find a satisfactory job. But I have to work in order to earn a living."

These examples illustrate how these working women had to leave jobs with which they were familiar. It seemed that they were easily replaceable and could be hired and fired depending upon the way the business fluctuated. The women took time to adjust to their present jobs.

The professional women entered their jobs after graduation from college and university education. In this study, seven women (Elaine, Iris, Kitty, Nancy, Tirana, Anna, and Elsa) undertook post-graduate education and attained master or doctoral degrees. They spent some years in professional training. This finding is consistent with the study of Houseknecht, Vaughan & Statham (1987) that women who were single for longer periods of time tended to be more advanced in terms of educational progress in graduate school than women who were single for shorter periods of time. The professional women stayed in the same job or field for a shorter period than the working class women. The following extracts illustrate the different paths taken by the professional women:

Anna:
"I received social work training when I attended university. Upon graduation, I took up a social work profession and have been promoted to supervisory rank. Later, I decided to attend Law School. At present, I am a solicitor."

Elsa:
"I was a nurse. Then I was admitted to the teaching institute. After I had finished training there, I went to England to study drawing. After I returned to Hong Kong from England, I joined a television company producing cartoons. Now I am a teacher of children's drawing."

Susan:
"After completion of my secondary education, I enrolled in a secretarial course in a commercial school. I then worked as a secretary. During these years, I continued to take courses to equip myself with knowledge in business. Recently, a company has employed me as a personnel assistant. My major duty is to coordinate the jobs of different units and assist my boss to make decisions. I also have to travel for business purposes."

These extracts suggest that the education and training the professional women acquired were central factors in the development of their attitudes toward a career. Some of them postponed marriage to advance their education and pursue higher levels of occupation. According to Treiman and Terrell (1975), single women did not face the same home and childcare demands as married women, and their total amount of labor force experience closely approximated to that of men. The data in this study support what Treiman and Terrell (1975) said.

I have discussed how women entered the labor force. I want to look at their experience from another aspect – job satisfaction and stress.

In the study, women were asked about their satisfaction with their job. "Job satisfaction and stress" was assessed by several open-ended questions, the first of which was "Taking into consideration all the things about your job, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with it?" A 10-point scale was used to assess the level of job satisfaction. The overall intensity of perceived job satisfaction ranged from 0 (no satisfaction was perceived) to 10 (highest satisfaction score). These findings are summarized in Table 9-3:

Table 9-3 Perceived Score of Job Satisfaction of Single Women in the Study

Respondent/ Professional (P) or working class (W)	Perceived Score of Satisfaction	Respondent/ Professional (P) or working class (W)	Perceived Score of Satisfaction
Annie (W)	7	Pauline (P)	7
Betty (W)	8	Queenie (P)	8
Connie (P)	7-8	Rose (W)	5
Diana (W)	7	Susan (P)	7
Elaine (P)	5-6	Tirana (P)	8
Fanny (W)	6	Yolande (P)	10
Gladys (P)	8	Vera (W)	8
Helen (P)	8	Winnie (W)	5
Iris (P)	9	Winsome (W)	7
Janice (W)	8	Anna (P)	7
Kitty (P)	7-8	Betsy (P)	7
Lily (W)	5	Clara (P)	7-8
Mandy (P)	6-7	Daisy (W)	8
Nancy (P)	7	Elsa (P)	6
Ophelia (W)	10	Fiona (W)	6

"P" stands for "Professional Women"; "W" stands for "Working Class Women"

If 5 is taken as the mid-point of satisfaction, about three-quarters of the women were reasonably satisfied with their jobs. The average level was between seven to eight. Two women (Yolande and Ophelia) gave a score of 10:

Yolande:
"I would rate 10 for my job. I particularly like the job rotation. I can meet many different people and try different posts. I feel good that I have tried so many different types of work."

Ophelia:
"I have been a therapist assistant for thirteen years. I am satisfied with my job. Considering my low educational background, I'm very happy to have a job like this. If I quit, I'm sure that I would not be able to find a job as good as this. I will give it 10 marks. I particularly like the regular office hours."

Three women had below average levels of job satisfaction. They gave a score of 5. The statements of these women are quoted below:

Lily:
"My job is quite simple. I deal with parents of students and do clerical work. I can handle this smoothly. That is why my job cannot offer me any satisfaction. I feel bored sometimes."

Rose:
"I am a secretary. I feel okay with my work. I am all on my own but the workload is heavy. I think the level of satisfaction is around five or six."

Winnie:
"I have been a cleaning worker for nearly two years. I need a job to earn a living. I will give five marks to describe my sense of job satisfaction. My present job is quite boring indeed. I have nothing to do. The working hours are not that good."

Among these women, Lily, Rose and Winnie are working class. They gave score 5 when ranking the levels of satisfaction. The data thus provided evidence that levels of job satisfaction were low among working-class women during the period under study.

What Do Women Like About Their Jobs.

Job satisfaction was elaborated through the use of an additional question: "What things do you particularly like about your job?" The sources of job satisfaction mentioned by the respondents came from the job itself, from the work environment and from personal factors.

In the study, the aspects of the jobs the single women particularly like are "the nature or content of the job", "meeting and helping people", "self-actualization", "hours of work", "colleagues and the working environment" and "earnings and fringe benefits".

From what they revealed, both the professional and the working-class women who were highly satisfied with their jobs were likely to mention an intrinsic aspect, a dimension of their work which stemmed from the content of the job, their capacity to do the work, their responsibility or independence, chances for advancement, or the attainment of sense of actualization. Over one-third of the women also mentioned an extrinsic factor — a dimension of their job related to the context in which the work was performed. Among the extrinsic factors, women liked a job which provided a stable income, or regular and flexible working hours. Some women gave different factors of work satisfaction at the same time.

The following are some descriptions of what women in this study like about their jobs:

(1) Meeting and Helping People

Nine women said that they liked to meet and help people at work. They wanted to know that what they did would have desirable outcomes for other people. Their responses are described in the following statements:

Vera:
"As I am working in a hospital, I have to be careful about everything. I'm responsible for checking the ECG, cleaning the breathing apparatus and tidying. I have much satisfaction and a sense of excellence when the patients give thanks and appreciation for my patience and kindness. I like to communicate with the patients."

Gladys:
"I have been an insurance agent for six years. I am satisfied with the job because it helps me to enlarge my horizon and expand my social circle."

Elaine:
"As a church minister, my job satisfaction mainly comes from the Christians who have been under my pastoral care. I am also glad that I can help them to experience God so that they may show their love to God and to people and be able to serve the ministry."

219

These quotations show how some of the women wanted to meet people through the services they provided. One woman, Gladys, who was an account clerk for several years, decided to change to work as an insurance agent in order to expand her social circle and to meet different kinds of people.

(2) Self-actualization

In the study, six out of 30 women said they liked their job because they could meet challenges, assume responsibility, make creative decisions, overcome obstacles, and use a wide range of talents and aptitudes. They could achieve psychological growth and maturity in a process of self-actualization. Some quotations illustrate these points:

Connie:
"The present job offers me many opportunities for actualizing my talents and for exploring the external environment. When I discover that my clients have become mature and have been changed, I experience a great deal of pleasure. People are changing but that brings a lot of challenges. It is precious that my life-view has been broadened when I listen to the stories and life experiences of my clients. The most important point is to assure the value and the meaning of my present job."

Kitty:
"As a church minister, I have to meet church members from different walks of life. My confidence is enhanced through working. I find my job suitable for me and I'm competent at it. I also gain acceptance from others. I can also get along with many people of different ages."

Clara:
"I'm glad that I can communicate with people. I always get along with people from different backgrounds in my present job. I have great satisfaction when I discover that after they have received my dental treatment they wear a big smile on their faces."

Elsa:
"I am happy when I see the active and kind responses of children. I am amazed when I discover their unexpected creativity. I am also pleased when I am told by their parents that they always draw pictures at home and talk about me. I am satisfied with my job when I can design a creative, vivid and exciting curriculum. Besides, popularity of my course and progressive performance in my students are also important to my job satisfaction."

(3) Nature/Content of the Job

One of the most important intrinsic factors for the women was the content of their work. In the study, six women reported this was the aspect of work that they liked best.

A few quotations will illustrate this point:

Anna:
"As a solicitor, the most satisfying part is the diversity of the tasks that I do. And it's very challenging. The satisfaction comes from having cases done well, having cracked hard nuts and solved my client's problems."

Nancy:
"As a personnel manager, I have to make decisions. And I like that."

Fanny:
"As a garment technician, my satisfaction usually comes from a solved problem and the recognition that achieves from my colleagues. When I can accomplish a task completely, I can easily feel satisfied."

Women liked their jobs because they had control over them. They could exercise their abilities in decision-making and problem-solving during the process of their work.

(4) Hours of Work

In the study, six single women mentioned their preference for either regular or flexible working hours.

Ophelia:
"I particularly like the regular office hours of my work."

Diana:
"I am working as a beautician in my living place. The working hours are flexible. I can enjoy lots of freedom. I can engage in other work when there are no customers."

These quotations indicated that stable or regular hours can motivate working-class women to engage in their jobs.

(5) Colleagues and the working environment

Another important aspect that women liked about their job was the quality of interpersonal relationships with co-workers, subordinates, and clients. Four out of the 30 women mentioned that they derived satisfaction from a friendly social environment. This can be illustrated by the following examples:

Mandy:
"In my job, I act like a 'sandwich' between supervisor and colleagues. On the

one hand, my supervisor does not encourage a close relationship between colleagues. On the other hand, I find it difficult to mobilize other colleagues to accomplish a task effectively in the appointed period. On the whole, I can maintain a good relationship with colleagues."

Betsy:
"Since the company I work for has its production lines allocated outside Hong Kong, we are often required to go to Southeast Asia for business. Although it would be inconvenient for many of my colleagues, especially those who are married, to travel, I am glad to do this only when it is infrequent. I can make use of the time in transit or in my hotel room to read and to think. It is also stress-reducing when I can leave my heavy workload behind for a short period."

(6) Earnings and fringe benefits

In my study, two women mentioned their feelings about earnings and fringe benefits:

Annie:
"I am satisfied with the salary given my qualification."

Fanny:
"Basically, my job is quite good. I particularly like the pay."

These quotations indicated that monetary reward has become an important incentive to some women to continue with their employment. Remuneration can be a major incentive to work, for working-class single women.

Working-class women in the study indicated that they were satisfied with their jobs. A range of factors is associated with a high level of job satisfaction among them. Some were satisfied by the intrinsic rewards of their jobs while others also mentioned extrinsic factors. The conclusions from the data analysis in this study are similar to those of Andrisani (1978) – that motivations of working women were too complex to be characterized in simplistic unidimensional terms.

What Do Women Dislike About Their Jobs.

The primary measure of job stress was elaborated through the use of a question: "What things do you particularly dislike about your job?" An additional question: "Have you ever had any problems with your work?" was asked. Women mentioned different sources of dissatisfaction that came from the job itself, from the working

environment and from personal factors. These included "work overload" "work underload", "lack of knowledge", "no chances for career advancement", "income/fringe benefits", "relationship with superiors", "relationship with colleagues", "relationship with subordinates", and "organizational structure and climate".

Women in the study reported various problems that they encountered at work. These included "relationships with colleagues and with their boss", "work overload", "lack of knowledge", and "discrimination at work". The kinds of problems that they encountered were found to be similar to what they disliked about their job. It seems difficult to distinguish the twin concepts of "job dislikes" and "problems at work". Instead of putting them into under separate sections, I will discuss them together under the major themes:

(1) Work Overload

Eight of the women mentioned the heavy workload and/or having to work under time pressures.

Annie:
"The job is too much to be done in the time available."

Rose:
"I most dislike my heavy workload.   Where there are important meetings, there will be more work."

Betty:
"I'm so tired working in the peak season.   The pressure is so great that I'm afraid of buying stocks at the wrong price."

With the increasing emphasis on work efficiency, women in this study revealed that their work places were making increasing demands on them. Three women mentioned that they disliked having to carry out administrative tasks and write up reports. For example:

Elaine:
"I really don't like to do administrative work."

Tirana:
"I don't like administrative work.   It's so tedious."

When asked what kinds of problems they had, five women complained that their work load was heavy and they had too much to do. For instance, Connie stated, "Since I am a centre-in-charge, I have to handle different types of job. I am always involved in conducting front-line services so there is no time for me to make plans and encourage better coordination among programs and centres. In brief, I have too much work to do but too little time to do it."

(2) Work Underload

In contrast with the other women, two mentioned that their jobs were boring:

Winnie:
"My present job is quite boring indeed. I've nothing to do."

Winsome:
"Not much to do. What I can learn is too little. It's monotonous indeed."

These accounts revealed that women in this study found their work extremely mundane and unexciting although they tried their best to adjust to their work environment.

(3) Lack of Knowledge

Some women mentioned the problems created by their inadequate knowledge. They reported that their knowledge and training were inadequate to meet the requirements of the job:

Betty:
"I don't have a high educational level. I don't understand some difficult words relating to the stock exchange."

Susan:
"They are not to my knowledge. I've to work with Mechanical & Engineering consultants. But if two consultants tell me two different ways to insert a pipe, whom should I listen to? I simply don't have the knowledge to distinguish between who is right and who is wrong."

Rose:
"I know nothing about garments. There are too many specific terms. Nobody teaches me. I'm not expected to know that but I have to because of my job."

Vera:
"My problem arising from work relates to the operation of the machines."

Winnie:
"Since some users of the residential club are English-speakers, the main problem arising from work is that I cannot understand and articulate in English."

It was evident that some of the women in this study had to make adjustments to new demands by working harder, acquiring necessary skills and qualifications, and investing more energy in their jobs. They knew very well that if they did not make constant improvements in their work performance, they would not be able to compete with others and would soon lose out in the rat race.

(4) No Chances for Career Advancement

Some women were constrained by their location in jobs with "short" chains of opportunity. They were concentrated at the low end, in peripheral positions and in marginal ranks. For example:

Winnie:
"My present job is quite boring indeed. I have nothing to do. At work, I can have a lot of time for reading books and knitting. I don't think there are any advances for promotion."

Annie:
"I am confident in taking on duties including handling of payment, invoices, delivery notes, and documents. But there are no more chances for me to advance or transfer to another department."

These women had limited chances for advancement. According to the "sex-role spillover" perspective, women are more passive, less work-oriented and less concerned with advancement. Employers may therefore limit the advancement opportunities of women clerical workers. Seeing few options and career prospects for themselves, women clerical workers may find their work boring.

(5) Income/Fringe Benefits

In general, financial gain could act as an incentive for people to continue with their work. As mentioned, the levels of remuneration gained from the white and blue-collar occupations were relatively low. Moreover, the professional women in this study were not all satisfied with their income:

Anna:
"The work as a solicitor is highly pressured, demanding in time and energy. The pace is fast and the tension is high. So are the stakes. Mistakes are very costly. Money is the most dissatisfactory part. I've no extra money to buy anything. I wish I were better paid. But I'm worried that I still cannot do much at this point. I'm 43 years old and it's difficult to move."

Clara:
"The prospects for dentists are not good because there are a lot of dentists in Hong Kong. Clinic running costs are very high. As a dentist, it's easy to make mistakes. The consequences are very serious. It's quite a hard job."

Gladys:
"Sometimes it's not easy to find clients to buy insurance. The competition is keen now."

Mandy:
"The Malays have better benefits than us. They have their Provident Fund but we don't. They have more than 30 days annual leave but we have only the maximum 21 days."

(6) Relationships at Work

Twelve out of 30 women mentioned problems arising from relationships with superiors, colleagues, subordinates and customers although a few women thought they had satisfactory relationships with bosses and colleagues. Three of them specifically mentioned disliking gossips.

(a) Relationships with Superiors

This theme is about the extent to which management is supportive of their employees and encourages them to support one another. A few women reported that they had good relationships with superiors. In this study, five of 30 women mentioned a lack of support and encouragement from superiors.

Susan:
"Even if I know what should be the right way to do something, I can't act on it because I don't have the approval. I can't override my boss and just do something I think is right because even if it is right, my boss does not necessarily like it if you do it for her."

Annie:
"My supervisor does not support me. What I need is appreciation and support from others."

Elsa:
"My boss is a mean person and she doesn't know anything about art. I suggested that we should provide the students with materials they wanted. However, my boss said that we should limit the materials because they will be wasted if the students don't use them properly. In my opinion, this will limit the students' creativity. This is the thing I don't like about my job."

(b) Relationships with Colleagues

"Relationships with colleagues" refers to the extent to which colleagues are friendly and supportive of one another. Four women in this study mentioned disliking having to deal with colleagues. Three of them particularly disliked gossip and/or office politics.

Kitty:
"I probably have difficulty in communicating with my colleagues. One of my colleagues always has problems in understanding what I intend to say. There is little support from my colleagues. I feel isolated. In fact, I'm scared of relationship problems. I am unhappy when conflicts arise in communication."

Iris:
"I pay less attention to my job. I only take the responsibility of finishing my task... I dislike someone walking into my office to say bad things about others."

Betty:
"I don't like gossip in the office."

Nancy:
"I hate office politics. It's time wasting and doesn't achieve anything concrete. I try to stay out of it and avoid trouble."

Judging from the accounts of these women, they seldom confided their deepest feelings to the colleagues. They seldom shared personal issues and secrets for fear of embarrassment and the possibility of their secrets becoming public knowledge. Therefore, they tended to maintain a certain distance from their colleagues in terms of their deeper feelings.

(c) Relationships with Subordinates

Relationships with subordinates were reported to be generally good. However, there were occasions when the informants met difficulties in relating with subordinates.

Fanny:
"Sometimes, the factory workers don't do their job and turn a deaf ear to what I say."

Yolande:
"It's about human relationships. As a female supervisor, I have to know how to get along with my male colleagues. In fact, I'm in a minority in the police station."

As was suggested in Chapter Three, if women are in a minority in the organization, they can be labelled "token" women, being viewed as symbols of their sex rather than as individuals. The disadvantages associated with the role of the token woman include increased performance pressure, visibility, being a test case for future women, isolation and lack of female role models, and exclusion from male groups. Spencer and Podmore (1987) have described the position of women in the professions as "marginalization". Some women in my study experienced marginality because of their small numbers and their visibility in their work. They were often isolated and lacked in peer support. They had to face the strains of coping with prejudice and gender stereotyping. My study confirmed what Spencer and Podmore (1987) said.

(7) Organizational Structure and Climate

A number of the single women mentioned work overload. Many felt that they had to take on heavy workloads in order to prove their competence and get their superiors' recognition. It is also interesting to note that working-class women – particularly those who were laid off from previous jobs and started new jobs – lacked confidence and were worried about job security. They feared the possibility of being laid off again. Therefore, they put a great deal of effort into working harder. For example:

Vera:
"Sometimes, I have to perform those tasks even though they're not within my scope of duty. As you may know, the competition for jobs is very great. After 1997, the hospital posts will be filled by Chinese from the mainland."

Annie:
"In considering of my standard, it's not possible for me to change to another new job again."

Some of the women who occupied managerial or professional positions also mentioned problems arising from their lack of control in the work environment and lack of consultation and communication. For example:

228

Pauline:
"The part that I dislike the most in my job is that I know too much about the hospital policies and policy-making procedure. Policies that are implemented do not match with resources, such as manpower or new equipment. Policy implementation does not get the staff support. I will feel sorry if I have to carry out those policies. If I express my view to my supervisor, I may offend her. On the other hand, I will feel sorry for my colleagues if we implement the policy. Conflict thus occurs."

(8) Discrimination at Work

Several women in the interviews said that they felt discriminated against or inconvenienced because they were single. Their responses are shown in the following quotations:

Helen:
"The participants (married couples) lose confidence in my delivering marriage enrichment programs to them."

Betsy:
"I was once deprived of the chance of getting promoted merely because I was unmarried. If I had been promoted, I would have become an assistant to the manager and been required to travel from place to place with him to meet customers. In fact, I was competent in that post and was fit for promotion. However, the manager said that since I was unmarried while he was married, coupled with the fact that we were more or less of the same age, he was worried that something might go wrong if we went abroad for business together. Anyhow, my promotion was finally rejected primarily because I was unmarried."

Each woman's subjective experience of the intrinsic and extrinsic features of her job had a significant impact on her overall satisfaction and stress. There are variations in each individual's subjective appraisal of their working conditions. Whether paid work has satisfaction or stress depends on the nature of the working conditions and subjective appraisal by the workers of their work (see Table 9-4).

Table 9-4 A Typology of Job Satisfaction and Stress

		Subjective Appraisal by Worker	
		Positive	Poor
Working Condition	Good	18	0
	Poor	6	6

Work was viewed positively by some women. By creating goods, services and relationships, it could offer positive opportunities for a person's psychological and social development. However, some workers might experience alienation if the objective work conditions were incompatible with their needs and values. They would, therefore, be dissatisfied with their jobs. In consequence, this would have a negative impact on their work performance as well as on their non-work life. In the long run, this could also result in increased production costs in terms of high labor turnover, increased absenteeism, poor quality, reduce productivity and other such manifestations, in line with Fox's (1980) work.

Handling Stress Arising from Work

The women in the study adopted various strategies to handle the stress arising from work. I found they could be grouped into the following categories:

Setting Priorities.

In response to the problem of work overload, respondents coped by setting priorities. Examples are:

Connie:
"I have to set priorities."

Tirana:
"I'll give more scheduled supervision to my staff. This is what I can offer my colleagues."

Working Harder.

In order to solve the problems arising from the demands of the job, Gladys, Rose and Anna suggested:

Gladys:
"I just continue to work hard."

Rose:
"Just do it. Work like crazy. Nothing else can help."

Anna:
"*I must achieve a certain amount of work so that my clients are willing to pay. If they are happy with my work, they are willing to settle the bill right away.*"

Facing and Handling the Problem.

Rather than withdrawing, both Nancy and Yolande would face and handle the problem squarely:

Nancy:
"*When I have troubles in my mind, I think about the most effective way for me to internalize the problem and deal with it myself. I have to decide when to let go, and not to worry about it. I can compartmentalize my life pretty well. This is part of my strategy of coping with life, to separate my personal life from my work life.*"

Yolande:
"*I will take the difficulty as a challenge which provides me with an opportunity. When the same difficulty arises, I can manage this with my previous experience. I adopt a positive attitude in coping with difficulties.*"

Seeking Outside Help (for Instrumental/Emotional Purposes).

In order to update the knowledge they needed in their work, Susan and Clara sought outside help.

Susan:
"*I go to the mechanical and engineering consultant. Nobody in the office including my boss can help me. They are more or less like me, and know nothing about the problem.*"

Clara:
"*I attend some seminars during which I meet other dentists. We talk for a while. I think this is good because we can exchange our professional ideas.*"

Other women turned to their superiors or colleagues for help when they faced problems at work. Examples are:

Fiona:
"*Sometimes, customers are very unreasonable and they pick faults intentionally and make complaints against you. I will refer them to the head office.*"

Elaine:
"*I'll talk to one of my colleagues to get emotional support.*"

Ventilation and Emotional Control.

When faced with problems with colleagues, some women said that their coping strategies were:

Fanny:
"To control my own emotions."

Lily:
"I'll try to bear it. If I cannot tolerate it, quarrels will arise between colleagues. On the contrary, if I can tolerate the problem, the relationship between colleagues will be better."

Personal Diversion Techniques.

Some women in the study mentioned strategies that could help them to switch off and try to cope with the situations that arose, hence, warding off stress. Examples are:

Betsy:
"Most of the problems come from my job. I will leave them aside for some time and then enjoy a full lunch (I usually have a quick and simple lunch!). I will also walk along the street."

Anna:
"Doing sports is very important. If there were no sports, I would not be able to cope."

What is noticeable in their responses is that instead of handling the stress at work by suggesting organizational strategies, women in the study tried to control or give vent to their negative emotions. The women reported various kinds of coping methods that helped them towards problem solving or alleviating stressful feelings. The most common approach was the use of problem solving strategies or attempts to influence the environment. Setting priorities, working harder and so on were some of the examples of this. Apart from these, women also used other coping strategies such as praying, doing something that women liked, self-talk, acceptance and taking time-out. These were commonly used by the women to make themselves feel more at ease when facing with stressful situations. These activities helped the women in my study to switch off and try to cope with the situations as they arose, hence warding off their stress. Social support also provided an outlet for women in venting their stress. Seeking advice or assistance from colleagues and superiors were also regarded as significant ways of help in handling problems at work. Such support not only provides women with "tangible

resources" such as advice or knowledge, but also provides emotional support when facing problems arising from the job.

Besides asking them how they dealt with stress at work, I also inquired how they coped with the stress arising outside of work. The question was termed as "something on your mind that was bothering you or worrying you". The Christian women commonly mentioned praying as a useful strategy. For example, Yolande would let go and leave it to God when difficulties arose. Social support was also mentioned by 22 women as a way of helping them give vent to their emotions and provide them with information during a stressful time. Usually, social support came from friends, family and other church members. However, Winnie said that she would not take the initiative to share problems with friends unless they asked her. Janice reported that she usually dealt with stressful situations on her own and shared them with her family later. Swimming, doing sports, listening to music, and watching television were also regarded as some of the most effective coping strategies for Fanny, Gladys, Nancy, Anna and Daisy. To the single women in this study, cognitive techniques helped them to face their daily hassles. For example:

Iris:
"I think introspection is very important. When I calm down and think, I find the solution easily."

Clara:
"I'll analyze the whole matter first and think about the solutions."

Physical/Psychological Health

In this study, I wanted to know how the women would describe their state of health. I felt it was necessary to get a profile of the health of the 30 women. The question I asked: "Did you suffer from any disease or feel sick over the past month?" Some of the women reported that stresses or problems at work could directly or indirectly affect their mental and physical health. The physical/psychological outcomes mentioned by the women are summarized in Table 9-5.

Table 9-5 Physical/Psychological Outcomes of Single Women in the Study

Respondents	Physical/Psychological Outcomes
Annie	I have not had any problems in the past month.
Betty	I have felt a pain in my stomach for a long time. I suppose it is related to my job. It is due to my irregular eating habits, and tense working environment.
Connie	I'm okay, except that I have the flu.
Diana	Hyperthyroxine is a chronic illness. A tumor has been identified near my thyroid gland.
Elaine	I have been suffering from flu for two weeks. Besides, I do not feel at peace and I am looking for the reasons for my agitation.
Fanny	Basically, I feel very well in my body and my soul. I have been suffering from a skin allergy.
Gladys	There were some pimples on my lower jaw a few months ago. They were caused by hormone imbalance.
Helen	I have a problem with my backbone. It'll take longer to recover if I don't have enough rest.
Iris	I suffer from asthmatic bronchitis. My level of intestinal acid is too high in the evenings, although it remains normal during the daytime.
Janice	I feel tired and sometimes cannot sleep. Certainly, I have stress.
Kitty	I have a stomachache. When I'm tense or upset, it tends to break out. I have less time to sleep.
Lily	I always cannot fall asleep. I feel nervous these past few months.
Mandy	I have been very nervous for the past month. I'm so weak that I suffer from flu and diseases in the gut. I have lost weight too.
Nancy	Physically, I think I am very fit, far fitter than I was two years ago.
Ophelia	No, only sore throat.
Pauline	No. My health condition is fine.

Queenie	Probably I'm too busy. I have been suffering from a mild flu since the first day of my holiday. I'm recovering my strength now.
Rose	I don't feel any trouble psychologically. I suffer from influenza and do not feel well. Furthermore, I suffer from German Measles.
Susan	Dry eyes. This problem might be derived from heavy workload and going through tons of documents everyday.
Tirana	Tumors have been identified in my uterus; I was identified as anaemic.
Yolande	My physical health is quite good. I cannot sleep, only when there is a change in my working hours.
Vera	I have been coughing and suffering from bronchitis for two months. Sometimes I attribute my illness to my age or the hospital environment.
Winnie	I have had intestinal inflammation, colds and influenza.
Winsome	I have a blood problem that makes me feel dizzy at times. I also have a gynecological disease.
Anna	I have back pain. If I am handling a very serious court case, I will suddenly wake up in the middle of the night.
Betsy	No. I do not have any problem with my health.
Clara	The only problem I have is in sleeping. I know I have pressure.
Daisy	No. I am fine with my health.
Elsa	I have sleeping problem. I may be too nervous during the daytime.
Fiona	My health is okay.

About one-third of the women claimed to be in good physical health although they might have suffered from colds or flu. The others suggested that work might be a significant source of stress, and that stress might have serious consequences for their mental and physical health. Most of the effects of stress were psychological and most frequently manifested themselves as sleeping problems (e.g. nightmares, being unable

to sleep well and so on), or emotional problems (e.g. feeling depressed, frustrated, agitated, overwhelmed, and so on). Some women reported physical sickness of different kinds when they were feeling tense after completing heavy work demands. For example, Betty, Kitty, Queenie, Yolande, Anna, Clara and Elsa reported that they often felt stress during or after busy periods, after which they often felt sick. The period of their sickness could last for as long as two weeks. The respondents did not report the health consequences of work stress documented in the literature, which include diastolic blood pressure, serum cholesterol, increased heart rate, and cardiovascular disease. Nor were any major behavioral outcomes such as smoking, drug use, escapist drinking, performance decrements, absenteeism, and job turnover reported by the women in this study.

As mentioned in the beginning of this Chapter, many women experienced career transitions due to economic restructuring in Hong Kong. In this study, Annie, Diana, Janice, Vera, and Winnie encountered job changes, transfers, and layoffs. Among them, Diana was likely to be most stressed since she had to continue to pay for her own flat and her income as a beautician was not enough to support her monthly installments. She tried every way to find a job but in vain. One of the environmental support measures that she had was her family's financial support.

Differences Between Professional and working-class Single Women
in their Working Experience

Work Orientation.

When compared with working-class single women, those who took up professional occupations were likely to complete more schooling, to plan to work in the labor force, and to aspire to higher-ranking jobs. Working-class single women faced many barriers to occupational attainment. They might have to work to contribute to the family's finances at the expense of their schooling. Studies conducted by Garrison (1979) reported that girls from working-class families were less likely than boys to aspire to high educational attainment even if they had high academic ability. As a result of these constraints, they could not gain access to professional training opportunities. In my study, some women (e.g. Fanny & Kitty) overcame these barriers and attained

higher educational standards. They viewed their education as a means of attaining economic security and social status rather than as an avenue for self-fulfillment. The data echoes Komarovsky's (1982) study.

Level of Job Satisfaction and Stress.

Job satisfaction depends on the nature of the objective work conditions, and subjective appraisal by the workers of their work.

Some studies found differences in the level of satisfaction from work between professional and working class women. For instance, some US studies have shown that white-collar workers tended to stress the importance of intrinsic outcomes such as autonomy, achievement and control, while blue-collar workers seemed to emphasize the extrinsic aspects (Kohn & Schooler, 1969). Studies in Britain have shown that workers in lower-prestige occupations were typically satisfied with the material rewards they received from their job and were not bothered by the repetitive work they had to do (Goldthorpe et al., 1968). In Hong Kong, there were few studies that linked the individual characteristics of the workers with the subjective experience of their work.

In my study, both professional and working-class single women found most satisfaction from the intrinsic rewards of their jobs although some also mentioned extrinsic factors. For example:

Annie:
"My satisfaction comes from accomplishment in every task, a regular income and a stable job."

Anna:
"The satisfaction comes from having cases done well, having cracked hard nuts and solved someone else's problems."

Pauline:
"My satisfaction comes from the cooperation of people, the fruit of collective efforts, a solved problem, or someone's benefit from our help."

Vera:
"I have much satisfaction and a sense of excellence when the patients give thanks and appreciation to my patience and kindness."

It seemed there was no difference between the two groups of women. Thus, my

conclusions do not support the findings of some other studies. Comparisons are made difficult because, unlike other studies, the respondents in my study were all single women. In planning their future, both the professional and working class single women stressed the importance of extrinsic job satisfaction such as pay and security. They had to work for a stable income and secure future. So long as they had work, single women did not need to rely on parents, siblings, extended family, or friends for money. Economic self-reliance, in turn, could purchase social autonomy. They could afford to make choices about their life. The most typical example was that they could afford to purchase or rent an apartment.

Women in this study said that they experienced various sources of job stress including pressure from the organization (e.g. to maintain a satisfactory performance despite a heavy workload), from management, clients, and colleagues, and pressure from themselves to finish the tasks in an efficient way. No differences were found between professional and working class women in the level of job stress. For example:

Elsa:
"I feel quite tense when I take all the burdens from a full-time teacher. I'm exhausted. I cannot bear my boss who always pick on minor mistakes."

Yolande:
"I would be stressful if I have to finish some tasks alone in a very short period of time. Also I have to handle some uncertainties."

Fanny:
"When I have to face difficulties in my job, stress will come. If I cannot solve the problem immediately, stress may increase. If I cannot work out the solution in an efficient way, psychological stress may increase, too."

Lily:
"I do not feel stressful about my tasks but I feel stressful about human relationships in my office. I do not mind to have a heavy workload because I can finally finish it some day. However, human relationship is a great problem in my life."

One question asked: "Are these sources of job stresses related to being female or being single?" Women in this study had to face the dilemma of being female if they worked in male-dominated career settings or advanced to top positions. They also had to maintain a balance between their professional and private lives. The stress of these situations is common to both single and married women. It was argued that single women might be vulnerable to taking heavy job responsibilities and long working hours.

They would also have no husbands to count on if they got fired. They felt stressed since they had to save money for their old age. Actually, until the introduction of Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Hong Kong had little or no provision for elderly people.

Chapter Summary

In the previous chapter, it was clear that friendship was necessary for the well being of the single women. In this Chapter, we have seen that some attempted to develop positive relationships with supervisors and establish friendships with colleagues so that the workplace could be more enjoyable. Participation in social activities could help to release stress or ease problems encountered at work.

The women in my study spent long periods in the work force. The data indicated that working-class women had been in the labor force for longer than the professional women. It seemed that single women enjoyed more benefits than the married women in respect of freedom and greater opportunities for promotion in work. However, they experienced "good" and "bad" aspects in their work. Cultural attitudes had an impact on the professional women when they selected male-dominated professions and managerial positions. Similarly, working-class women were not encouraged to join the manual sector. The conflicts stemmed from a clash between the gender role demanding nurturance, empathy, and support, and occupational roles demanding aggressiveness and competitiveness. The women in the study also encountered certain problems at work. These included work overload, difficult relationships with colleagues, and inadequate knowledge and skills for their work. The stress at work could affect women's physical and psychological health. In facing problems, they adopted different methods to cope with the stress. Methods included setting priorities, working harder, seeking emotional and instrumental help from superiors and colleagues, and personal diversion techniques.

Chapter 10

Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Singlehood

In the last four Chapters, I have presented the major findings of the research. The Chapter on the experience of singlehood of women throughout their life helped to illustrate the fact that a majority of women wanted to be married and spent years seeking and waiting for a marriage partner. Some had postponed their marriage for a variety of reasons. They knew that the chances of meeting suitable marital partners had become slimmer, but they did not say they would turn down a marriage opportunity should the right man came along. In the Chapter on the experience of singlehood in context, society's general impressions of single women were discussed. People held different and conflicting attitudes towards single women. In the Chapter on social support, I have identified the various sources of support the women had and demonstrated how rich these were. The Chapter on work identified the fact that a woman's career was significant in the experience of singlehood.

In this Chapter, I am going to conceptualize the experiences of single women. It was pointed out in Chapter Two that the field of singlehood research lacked a comprehensive theory of singlehood. What is a theory? As stated by Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, a theory is "a set of abstract principles that can be used to predict facts and to organize them within a particular body of knowledge" (1995:4). In an attempt to develop a theoretical framework to help to organize the data I have collected, it is also important to say that some concepts grow out of and include insights from current theoretical perspectives. In actuality, these perspectives overlap, interact, and build upon one another. The theoretical approaches, which I plan to discuss, are contextual and developmental approaches, and ideas drawn from the theories of stress and coping.

A Contextual Approach to Understanding Single Women's Experience

Concepts derived from the contextual perspective help us to picture the

experiences of single women in a holistic fashion.   Firstly, individual experiences were conceptualized as occurring within the supportive networks of the single women's family and relatives, friends, colleagues, church-mates; these networks in turn were embedded in the socio-cultural context.   The three levels of self, family and peers and society deeply interpenetrated one another.   As there was continuous inflow and outflow between the three levels, the experiences of the single women could not be understood as isolated phenomena, and had to be examined in the context of and in relationship to the larger systems. (Figure 10-1)   The three levels of the context will now be examined.
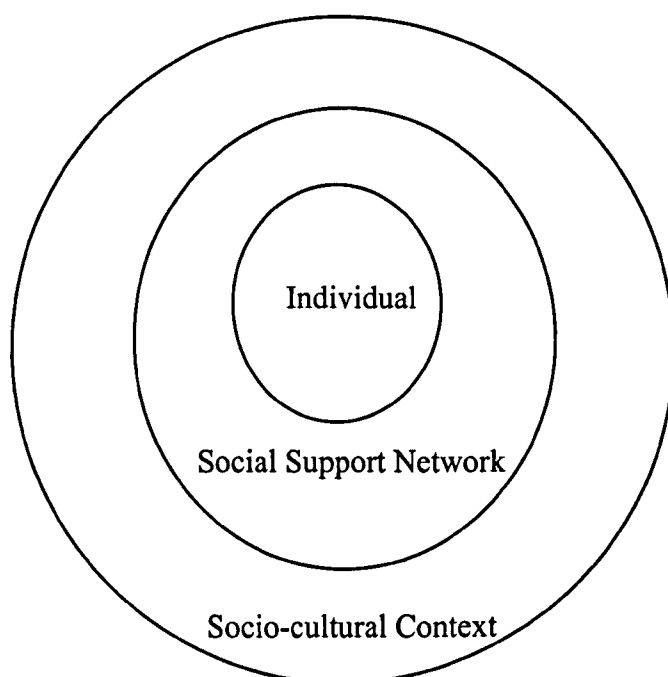
Figure 10-1 The Individual in the Context

Individual Attitudes Toward Singlehood.

In the interviews, single women were asked what was the first word(s) they thought of when "singlehood" was mentioned.   Their feelings and thoughts about being single were summarized as: (1) singlehood means not being married; (2) singlehood means a transition; (3) singlehood is becoming a common phenomenon; (4) singlehood provides freedom; (5) singlehood means independence and autonomy; (6) singlehood means loneliness; (7) singlehood brings with it ambivalent feelings; and (8) singlehood implies the need for future planning.   Their quotes are illustrated in

All of the women gave such accounts at some point or another when describing their experiences and feelings related to singlehood, and many articulated them constantly as a means of making sense of their experience and presenting themselves as single women. Some of these accounts were more dominant at different points of the women's experience, while others competed for prominence simultaneously. While, for example, the women seemed to see singlehood as something that meant 'not being married' or 'a transition', the notion that singlehood implied 'the need for future planning' was also commonly espoused at the same time. While it was not easy to interpret singlehood as their permanent status, women saw being single as requiring much preparation and thinking about appropriate financial arrangements. This intensified when women saw their chances of getting married become slimmer.

According to the developmental perspectives, adults have to face developmental tasks and single women are no exception. Moving to separate accommodation is an obvious transition and may be the single equivalent of marrying. But about two-third of my respondents continued to live with their parents. For them, taking financial responsibility for the home might be a way of establishing independence and adult status.

The women also appeared to have taken up the idea that singlehood 'has become a common phenomenon', seeing more women choosing to delay their marriages and even remain single. However, the notion that 'singlehood brings ambivalent feelings' was also mentioned. Women in this study said that singlehood could provide freedom for them to engage in a range of activities and to develop friendships. They were free to make decisions for themselves. They also recognized some of the undesirable features of marriage. Some of their married friends could not bear their marriage and chose to sever their relationships. They also identified the disadvantages of being single. They might sometimes feel lonely.

Using the contextual perspective allows us to see how the single women incorporated prevailing ideological notions. Their own attitudes to singlehood were influenced by cultural images and attitudes of significant others to singlehood since they did not live isolated from the rest of society.

In the study, single women developed their perceptions of singlehood from the attitudes of their family members or relatives, peers, colleagues or church-mates (Figure 10-2).
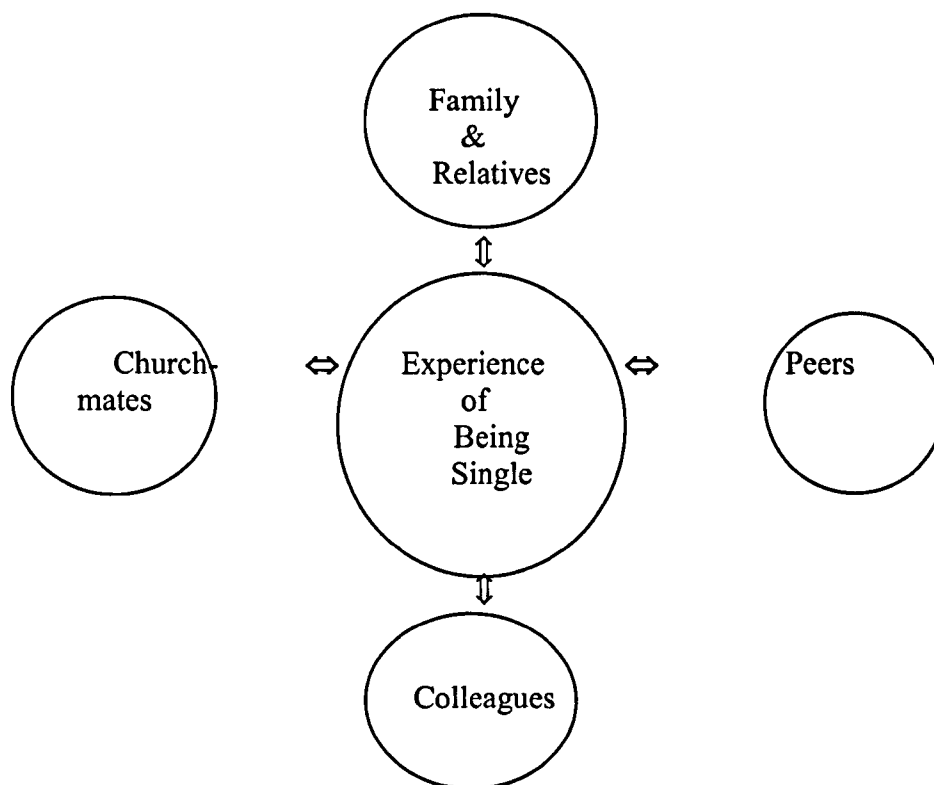
Figure 10-2   How the Experience of Being Single is Shaped

From the interviews, we can identify various attitudes of family and relatives, peers, colleagues and church-mates towards the single women.   Some were accepting while some had reservations. I am going to draw from the experience of some informants, whose cases have already been presented in the previous Chapters.   These women were chosen because in each case their family had tried to influence them to marry or to remain single.

Annie:
"My parents worry that nobody will take care of me when I get old.   What my parents mind is that I may not have a companion to discuss with in the future."

Nancy:
"According to my mother, it is really hopeless for me to find anyone to marry when I've passed the age of thirty.   It's impossible to get married when I'm forty or fifty."

Iris:
"*My family has not given me any pressure to get married. It is because my grandfather's sisters did not marry. My father is happy with my current status of being single. My elder siblings got married at her 40s. Actually, my father likes me to be his companion.*"

Pauline:
"*Two of my elder sisters remain single and all of them are the financial providers in the family. My mother perceives that women should not depend on men. It is important for a woman to earn a living by herself. If marriage cannot bring joy and happiness, my mother prefers me and my elder sisters not to get married.*"

The four cases quoted above point to the influence of family members on single women's perceptions of singlehood. Annie's family would be afraid that she would become lonely in the future. Nancy might be influenced by her mother to accept an age limit for getting married. The family perception of singlehood of Iris and Pauline might impose less pressure on them to get married.

According to Carter & McGoldrick (1989), the family is perhaps the most powerful context influencing a person's life. It not only transmits cultural messages but also transforms them to fit the particular generational legacies regarding the meaning and role of marriage that are specific to each family. Most families define the eventual marriage of the children as part of the natural evolution of the family. It can signal to parents that they have successfully reared their children to "mature adulthood," especially in the eyes of the surrounding culture. Family ideology was also found to be a significant factor influencing the decision whether or not to marry. Some of those who were the eldest daughter had to work to support the family and stay at home to take care of parents and dependents. Diana and Kitty are examples.

Diana:
"*I have a chance to get married in earlier years. But I turned down the offer in considering the family benefits. Actually, I did not have time to try out that relationship since I've been occupied by the family's business.*"

Kitty:
"*I won't consider to get married before my siblings have finished studying and secured satisfactory jobs. My mother also does not want me to get married. She is afraid who will pay for the mortgage loan after I get married.*"

Besides family members, attitudes of friends, colleagues and church-mates also influenced single women's perception of singlehood. For example:

<u>Elsa:</u>
"Most of my friends are single, and therefore I don't feel any pressure."

<u>Susan:</u>
"Most of my close friends are single. A few of us are living in the same neighborhood and we often visit our families or one another."

<u>Pauline:</u>
"My church-mates perceive that woman should get married. A lot of them often ask me the reason why I do not get married. They think that I'm critical in finding a partner. Some may say that I'm too ambitious in my career. In the church, marriage is perceived to be good."

<u>Mandy:</u>
"Some of my friends divorce or separate after ten years' marriage. It seems to me that they marry for the Marriage Certificate. Some of them get involved in extra-marital affairs. I don't really trust marriage. It is a pity that the children have to bear the outcome of divorce. They are really the victims."

These four cases quoted above point to the influence friends have upon the perceptions of singlehood. In this study, single women mentioned that having friends was important to them. They wanted very much to have one close friend or a few very good friends, not just a circle of sociable companions. With friends, they could share common interests and activities. For them, the pattern of having a special friend of the same gender starts early in life. A number of childhood friends had never lost touch with each other. From the data, I could not speculate that single women were more likely to keep their childhood friends than married women. But I think that when women got seriously interested in a man they might have less time or emotional energy to spend on their former women friends.

At the same time I could speculate that the women mostly mixed with friends who were single although the data did not give the answer. Friendship with single women could provide a safe haven from negative experiences instigated by others. By getting along with other single women, their lifestyles could be reinforced and interests could be pooled. They joined together for shopping, picnicking, attending evening courses or interest classes, and partaking in voluntary services. Their social status as "deviants" became less obvious. Some single women in the study indicated that they felt estranged from their married friends. They expressed a feeling of "otherness" when with their married friends. They found no comfort in looking around and discovering that they were the "only ones" who were not married and without their own families. But unhappy marriages of friends could reinforce a positive connotation of

singlehood.

A majority of women in this study made friends in church. However, some of them reported that church friends who were married might impose a certain pressure on them for being single. According to Harding: "Such Christian writing and teaching which relates to marriage and the importance of family, though biblical, can reinforce the feeling that marriage is God's best. The shadow of that teaching produces a subtle message – singlehood is second best" (1993: 26). Moreover, the church might add to the pressure by teaching the importance of being 'equally yoked with believers'. In my experience, since most churches in Hong Kong have a surplus of women over men, statistically many Christian women have faced the reality of a single lifestyle. In fact, Harding continued to point out that the biblical views of singlehood were different from society's view. Marriage and singlehood were regarded as gifts of grace. It seems to me that the church has put single women in a difficult situation by conveying a "double-bind" message to them.

It was usual for single women to have relationship with their coworkers, but less usual for them to refer to these colleagues as their close friends. Most of them maintained working relationships or a minimum level of friendship with colleagues. They wanted to get rid of gossip or negative comments on their being single. Some reported that they got much pressure from colleagues to get married.

Single Women in Their Socio-cultural Context.

In Chapter Seven, how the respondents in the study perceived the attitudes within their social environment towards singlehood and towards single persons of both sexes was discussed. How such attitudes were connected to their experience of singlehood was evaluated. The single women in this study were brought up in Hong Kong. They brought with them a set of cultural gender-role ideologies, a framework of relationships which included family and friends, a routine which gave meaning to their lives, expectations about how others would behave, etc. The traditional feminine role had confined women to marriage and maternity. The changing societal and sexual attitudes have made it possible for both men and women to fulfill their needs for intimate relationships without marriage. More adults chose to delay their marriages and even remain single. Accordingly, most of the single women felt that singlehood

was no longer uncommon. Most of them also claimed that they had not experienced any outright discrimination.

Despite the perceived change in social attitude toward singlehood, the women felt, in one way or another, that the acceptance was not absolute. Chapter Seven showed how single women saw society's general impression of them. These reactions included: (a) "Something is wrong with you!"; (b) "You are not complete and/or perfect!"; (c) "You have no responsibilities!". It seemed that adjusting to the single state was complicated by the persistence of these negative reactions. The women might be asked why they remained single. People might think that they were choosy. Part of the problem might be that single women were not viewed as having chosen their single state. It was assumed that if anyone had asked them to marry, they would have accepted. Even the women who took up professional occupations were rarely viewed as enjoying what success they might have achieved. They might receive positive labels such as "career-minded women", "yuppies", "single nobles", but there was still a belief that single women could not be fulfilled. Some people might appreciate the women's single state but at the same time encourage them to get married.

Most studies of single men and women have been conducted and reported as if the experiences of both sexes are the same. A single man, beyond a certain age, also suffers from a decrease in status and power, as he is seen as less stable or as not fitting the corporate model of family man. Without a woman, his masculinity may also become suspect, further decreasing his status (Gordon & Meth, 1999). In this study, however, a very different picture was revealed. Some of the women essentially felt that the social attitude towards men and women being single was by no means similar, and often disadvantaged the single women. A number of women thought that the people in Hong Kong society held different values towards single men and single women, and hence perceived these two groups very differently. As discussed in Chapter Four, getting married has always been the expectation of women in Chinese societies. It was not until recently that women had access to educational and work opportunities so that they could support themselves independently. According to role/socialization theories, a man and a woman were expected to play different roles in society. Similarly, society still places different and ambivalent expectations on single women. The interview data illustrate society's attitudes towards single women:

Nancy:

"Society holds different attitudes towards single men and single women. It's not a big deal for a man to remain single. However, for a woman to remain single means a life which is not complete. Many people think there must be something wrong for you to remain single. It is not natural and it is really your fault. Perhaps being too choosy is a main reason. If you remain single, you may find yourself getting sunk in your old age and there is no one to look after you especially when you are sick."

Anna:

"The society holds an ambivalent attitude towards the single women. It is known that women nowadays are very career-minded, and very independent. They serve a function to a certain extent. But somehow, it is still expected that a woman with a husband is proper."

These accounts suggest that people in society might still disapprove of single women and react negatively to what they saw as social deviance. This suggests that theories of stereotyping may be useful if being single is regarded as deviant. Stereotypes almost invariably lead to discrimination. There is increasing evidence that stereotypes may have other deleterious effects: they may actually motivate the stereotyped person to behave in a manner consistent with the stereotype. Psychologists refer to this process as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Women in this study seem to me to be in triple jeopardy of being stereotyped. This is because these women deviate from gender norms by their career commitment in a man's world, by not being coupled and again by having no children. First of all, single women in this study worked diligently to assert themselves and earn their living financially in a man's world. Their qualities of self-sufficiency and independence, however, were opposite to the traditional norms that encouraged women to become compliant and selfless. Society might not question a man's focus on his career, but might see a hardworking career woman as overcompensating for not having a family or not being suitable for family life. High achieving women are frequently seen as tough, while successful men are thought to be good catches (Schwartzberg, Berliner & Jacob, 1994). The work of Holder & Anderson (1989) suggests that a single woman might have more opportunity to devote herself to a career and money-making, without the encumbrance of a spouse or children, but she would still make less money than her male counterpart. Besides being stereotyped as a woman in a man's world, the respondents in this study were not just unmarried but were also without any permanent relationship. They did not have partners, in today's jargon. Without a "partner", the woman has been judged incapable of operating at peak performance. Indeed, from a historical

perspective, it was once almost an economic, sociological, and psychological necessity for a woman to marry at an early age. Furthermore, churches have often preached that a person is not fully "complete" until associated with a marriage partner. Women had been reduced to second-class members in a couples-oriented society. These half-persons were destined to live in a kind of limbo until they could finally locate "God's will" for them. For the unmarried women, life became a quest for the "missing piece" – which was usually defined as "husband." The absence of marriage appeared to leave the adult in undefined territory, where there was no legitimate social role beyond a certain age. Without the structural shift of marriage to change one's place in the larger community, the single women might feel locked into age-inappropriate roles as expectations regarding behavior were shaped by their single status. Add to this the fact that they did not have children and they were really different from the majority of women for whom one of the cultural mandates was to reproduce offspring.

I think single women have been emerging from their deviant status in much the same way that some other marginal stereotyped groups, like the disabled, gays and blacks have been. The idea of deviance also links nicely with the way single women cope. Details of how single women cope with singlehood will be discussed later in this Chapter. There are two sides to deviance, the response of other people and the extent to which the so-called deviant comes to see him/herself as being deviant.

In sum, to argue that the single women are no longer stigmatized is to misunderstand their experience. To be sure, singlehood is now less deviant in a statistical sense than it was a decade ago. Certainly, the changing family and social structure in Hong Kong during the recent years has resulted in unprecedented changes in the position of single women, but some of the stigma remains.

The Impact of the Changing Social and Economic Scenario on the Single Women in Hong Kong.

According to Gordon, single women were stereotyped either as "old maids" who were unable to "get a man", or as "modern city singles" who had not wanted a man (1994:1). She suggested that these two stereotypes "old maids" and "modern city singles" represented continuity and change in the position of single women. Similarly, the position of single women in Hong Kong is changing. The women in my study

seem to be located on a shifting continuum which runs from single women being clearly deviant to their being an accepted part of society. They have not reached the end of this continuum and their present position is characterized by uncertainty, ambivalence and opportunity.

In considering the changing position of single women, we need to take into account the social, ideological, economic and political context. One important notion integral to the Chinese family structure - the belief that a daughter will eventually get married and leave the natal families, and bear children - has not been altered by the changed social status of women. The women in this study face a divided history. The games and teachings and examples set in childhood prepared many of them for what was then the traditional female world: they would grow up to be wives and mothers; their place of work would be the home and their goals would be to produce and maintain a family. Their aims were to be loved and to be chosen, and then to care for others through their love. "Feminine," during their childhood, had a special meaning, and evoked a powerful control over their behavior, their wishes, and their needs. Ambition, competition, independence and strong-mindedness could threaten femininity. With femininity threatened, they faced the unacceptable alternatives of exclusion, loneliness, and ostracism. Yet the current generation of women enter adulthood with very different ideas about what a woman should be, what she could be, and what she wanted to be. However little the world around them has changed, however rigid are career structures, family practices, or personal habits, these women have different ideas about themselves, and face new challenges to their self-esteem and their sense of identity.

Education and participation in the labor market have afforded women a degree of financial independence which makes the option of remaining unmarried more feasible. The data in my study do not conclusively find an improvement in the position of single women resulting from financial independence. However, I do not wish to deny the very real transformations that have occurred: single women enjoy lives outside the confinement of marriage; they have peer support, and their participation in employment has enhanced their social status and independence. Therefore, this generation has more financial independence than ever. My argument can be summed up this way: Single women have made a number of personal gains: most have more freedom and more options apart from marriage.

A Developmental Approach to Understanding Single Women's Experience

Developmental Tasks of Single Women.

The developmental perspective also helps us to picture the experiences of women in the process of singlehood. According to the developmental perspective, an individual progresses through predictable developmental stages. As mentioned earlier, the adult stages involve the issues of identity (vs. role diffusion), intimacy (vs. isolation), generativity (vs. stagnation), and ego integrity (vs. despair). According to these stages, with no partner and children, single women could seem to become arrested at a pre-adult stage and never be able to move on. However the single women in my study did seem to have found ways to grapple with issues of identity, intimacy, genenerativity and integrity. The ways in which they approached these developmental tasks was through work, friendships and finding/making a home.

(1) Work

By work, single women could get out of the confinement of domestic pursuits. It provided them with one of the ways to strive for autonomy and independence. Their social status could be enhanced as a consequence. When they were in their 30s, single women often excelled in their jobs, which now became a primary source of their identity. The affirmation they experienced in their careers or hobbies had given them a deeper sense of purpose and meaning. This caused a decrease in the "must get married" anxiety they faced in their 20s. In planning for their future lives, these women could have a sense of control over their singlehood and have developed the necessary coping mechanisms and attitudes over a lifetime.

The women in my study were mostly matriculated and college-educated, and held professional jobs. They claimed that their income was stable. Women in the caring professions reported that they got the need of generativity met by their work for others. A number of them did clerical, sales, and service work. They made less money than the professional women and were not expecting to advance much in pay or status. Still most of the women in these manual and non-manual jobs were seriously dedicated to

performing their duties well. Although differing in the monetary rewards from their jobs, both professional and working class women had something in common – performing work duties well helped to give a sense of satisfaction and strengthen identity. Having sufficient money could protect them from the anxiety about their competence to survive as an individual.

(2)   Establishing Friendships

Single women were greatly concerned about developing and maintaining friendships. Many of the women had developed strong relationships with their friends and they had provided steadfast support for each other during critical transitions in their developmental stages.

As we have seen, for women in this study, the pattern of having a special friend of the same gender starts early in life. A number of childhood friends had never been out of touch with each other. Having friends was important to the women in this study by providing them with companionship. The data that I have used to explore the contextual approach was also relevant to the developmental approach.

The women in my study usually had friendly relationships with their co-workers, but less usual for them to refer to these colleagues as their close friends. Both the professional and working class women often mentioned having sociable companions and acquaintances where they worked, but rarely an intimate friend. Most of the women considered the friendly interaction at work part of the attraction of being employed outside the home, even though the relationships were, for the most part, quite superficial and fleeting. In some instances, however, the women found that there was actually not a single individual among their coworkers in an office with whom they could have been friendly, even if they had wanted to.

Many of the women in this study also reported that they treasured relationships with church-mates. The women did not all belong to the same church. Those who were Protestants belonged to such denominations as the Baptist, the Alliance Church, the Pentecostal, etc. A few were Roman Catholics. The Christian women in this study revealed that church life could widen their social horizon and make them more extroverted. When they felt stressed, some of them would like to pray alone or with

some other Christian friends. Religious belief, to a certain extent, could help to relieve their stress.

(3) Securing Accommodation

By getting married, women live away from their parents and establish their independent and adult status. It then seems difficult for single women to establish independence if they continue to live with their parents and family members. Securing accommodation is thus an important task for single women since they need a home to put roots down and to feel a sense of permanence and belonging. Moving to separate accommodation is also an obvious transition and may be the single equivalent of marrying. In this study, the women expressed their sense of achievement when establishing their own home. Not only professional women, but also working class women reported having their own home. Eight out of 30 women purchased their own apartment. Among these eight, five were professional women and the other three were working class women. Four other professional women rented their home.

What of those single women who stayed at home? The women in my study shouldered financial responsibility which also symbolized a transition point. By making a financial contribution and other practical assistance to parents and family members, the women could prove their independence and reverse the childhood pattern of dependence on parents.

Coping Through the Experience of Singlehood

We can see that the single women in this study had to face many challenges, not only arising from their supportive network of relationships but also from the attitude of society and the demands of social reality. Although some had more pleasant experiences than others, and some had more confidence in their singlehood than others, all of them had survived. Adaptability had the advantages of allowing single women to adjust more easily to change and to avoid being locked into outmoded behavioral patterns.

In this study, how the women coped through the difficult times has been examined

and the findings discussed in Chapters Seven and Nine. The difficult times came from pressures toward marriage and stress at work. Difficult times there might be, they were seen as challenges instead of problems to the single women in their families and in the social context. Emphasis was hence placed on how the single women coped through the challenging times of their singlehood. It also focused on an individual's experience. My analysis showed that the women had attempted, it seemed successfully, to cope with their challenges as single women.

In studying how the single women felt about themselves and how they dealt with pressure towards marriage and stress from work, their thinking about their own situation, and the meaning they attached to their experiences seemed to be important. For example:

Connie:
"Singlehood means freedom, more room for actualizing oneself, and meeting one's ambitions. I also agree that singlehood is more acceptable in modern society. I don't feel any great pressure to get married from my immediate social circle."

Ophelia:
"I enjoy my single life very much. I perceive that one is free from bondage and stress from the family in singlehood."

Yolande:
"I feel very satisfied with my job. My present job is so good that I cannot find another. I especially like the job rotation in which I can met different people and attempt different posts."

Janice:
"I'm happy with my job. Actually, I like both making those things and the contact with people. However, I feel it is stressful especially when I have insufficient time. In front of customers, I have to make myself patient and must accommodate and accept their ideas."

It is clear that experience of singlehood and work was a subjective phenomenon. Emphasis was placed on the person's own appraisal of the situation. Sometimes they themselves might be the source of their own stress. They might set themselves unattainable goals or standards of behavior, and continually failing to achieve them could lead to guilt, low self-esteem and strain. The role of appraisal and the attribution of meaning were found to be important in defining the experience of singlehood and work. Therefore, whether singlehood and work were stressful experiences or not was an individual matter. We cannot generalize in a judgment that all single women leading their single lives are stressed.

Secondly, the findings in my study indicated that experiences of single women were not static, but changed over time. For example, the pressure that family members and relatives put on them to get married decreased as they got older. For example:

Annie:
"I feel pressure from mother and relatives although it is not serious now."

Connie:
"I felt pressure from my aunt to get married, but now I don't feel any great pressure to get married from my immediate social circle."

Whether or not work was experienced as stressful also differed from time to time. For example:

Winnie:
"One of the problems I encounter at work is that I cannot communicate with the foreign customers because of the language barrier. I try to solve the problem by using body language. With frequent contact, the customers and I have become friends."

Annie:
"I don't have any special expectations from my job. What I need is appreciation and support from others. Recently, I've gotten recognition from my boss's wife."

Thirdly, the individual's subjective perception of singlehood was also determined by her evaluation of the amount of available resources. In my study, a major resource was support from family members and friends. For example:

Lily:
"When I am upset, my family and close friends can give me support."

Mandy:
"When I feel depressed, I'll talk with my friend first. With my close friends, I can totally be myself."

Pauline:
"In order to cope with single life, I'll develop other forms of relationship including family members and friends."

Tirana:
"I enjoy being single... At times, I feel lonely. I find relationship with friends is my source of support."

Among the single women interviewed, it was evident that talking with friends and family was seen as particularly important. It seemed important to have at least one

female friend or relative with whom it was possible to arrange time for face-to-face talking or a relaxed telephone conversation. In many instances the women had developed a primary relationship with one or two other women by keeping in touch with them and communicating about everyday matters. For these women, the value of a good friend went far beyond the pleasure of mere sociability. They counted on their friends for guidance and comfort when they were facing difficulties. They felt there was someone they could call and talk to openly when they wanted to air their personal problems and were confident that they would be listened to when they needed to talk. My findings are consistent with those of Jong-Gierveld (1985); talking with a friend was one of the best ways to alleviate feelings of loneliness and depression. The other side of talk was listening, and being a listener was not always easy or convenient.

Besides the social network, the socio-cultural environment had also, of course, shaped the single women's perception and coping resources. The single women recognized the socio-cultural environment in their appraisal of their situation, and considered how the "single women" as a minority group, fitted into the dominant married culture. The current social climate makes it less likely that all other people will see single women as deviant and this may make it less likely that single women will feel themselves to be deviant.

To summarize, the analysis of the experience of women indicates that the singlehood process might or might not occur as or be perceived as a stressful event. It depended on two variables, namely, an individual's perception and the coping strategies; these are shaped by the socio-cultural context. In addition, perception of stress could change from time to time. My analysis is found to be consistent with the studies of Lazarus & Folkman (1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model of stress and cognitive appraisal, the occurrence of potentially stressful events was only one component of the stress process. Such a model emphasized a transactional process by which individuals adapted to events by viewing them as subjective phenomena that had impact on their psychological well-being. One's primary and secondary cognitive appraisals of the events, and one's coping strategies were also important components that led to the final adaptational outcomes. According to Lazarus and Folkman, primary cognitive appraisal referred to the perception of the event, i.e. positive, negative or irrelevant. In addition, individuals engaged in secondary appraisal during which they assessed their resources for coping with the event. Hence it was not useful to

focus merely on events that could not be changed without looking at how the women shaped their experiences through their perception of the events and their coping efforts.

In addition, Lazarus & Folkman (1984) suggested that coping modes could be problem-focused and emotion-focused. In problem-focused coping, the person would focus on the specific problem or situation that had arisen, trying to find some way of changing it or avoiding it in the future. Sometimes, the person could change something about himself or herself instead of changing the environment (Atkinson et al., 1996). In emotion-focused coping, the person would focus on alleviating the emotions associated with the stressful situation; even if the situation itself could not be changed. People tried to prevent their negative emotions from overwhelming them and from engaging in actions to solve their problems through behavioral strategies, e.g. engaging in physical exercise, and cognitive strategies, e.g. reappraise the situation (cognitive appraisal) (Atkinson et al., 1996). In coping with work stress, it is interesting to find that the coping modes adopted by the single women in this study were palliative (minimizing individual distress) rather than instrumental (changing the environment). Such a finding seemed to be linked to the stereotypes of gender responses. The women have been socialized to communicate their feeling, and express intense emotions directly. On the other hand, men who expressed intense emotions too openly were usually judged as immature, unstable, or unreasonable (Nichols, 1975 cited in O, Neil, 1982).

Conclusion.

In this study, women's own attitudes toward singlehood were very much influenced by their immediate social circle and the larger socio-cultural context. If the society and significant others had an open attitude, single women could perceive the advantages of being single. On the other hand, a more critical attitude would impose a certain degree of pressure upon single women. Women agreed that society has adopted a more accepting yet ambivalent attitude. By the same token, how women coped with singlehood was influenced by how they perceived singlehood. Women recognized the stress they have encountered during their experience of singlehood. But they regarded those stresses as challenges and showed confidence in facing them.

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter, I have attempted to construct a conceptual framework of singlehood through the eyes of the single women interviewed. Through the analysis, it was discovered that the women perceived singlehood as "not being married", "a transition", "a common phenomenon", "freedom", "independence and autonomy", "loneliness", "ambivalence", "the needs for future planning". The individual experiences were conceptualized as occurring within the supportive networks of the single women's family and relatives, friends, colleagues, church-mates, which in turn are embedded in the socio-cultural context.

This study also indicated that women fulfilled developmental tasks such as working, establishing friendships and securing accommodation. The women also experienced stress of singlehood and work during the process. An individual woman's appraisal of the situation was significant in determining whether singlehood or work was stressful or not. Singlehood, instead of being a problem to a woman, might be regarded as a challenge. The analysis of the findings contributed to the insights of previous work on stress and coping.

Chapter 11

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study was conducted in an attempt to understand what being single is like for women who perceive themselves as being or having been unable to marry as yet. I was not contented with the past approaches to the study of the experience of singlehood which used negative stereotypes to depict singlehood as an undesirable option. I chose to explore the women's own conceptions of singlehood. Based on the analysis of the findings, a comprehensive framework to study the experience of singlehood was developed.

In this Chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings of the study for social work policy and practice in the socio-cultural context of Hong Kong. Based on the insights of this study, a number of recommendations are made to help single women. Now I would like to review some the major findings of this study.

Summary of the Research Findings

The findings of this study showed that the women' experiences were closely related to their experiences in the outer environment: their family members, friends, colleagues, and church-mates, and their socio-cultural context. Their perception of the attitude of these different levels of their social environment had in one way or another significantly affected how they felt about themselves as single women, how they positioned their role in their own family, work place and social network.

For various reasons, both professional and working class women postponed getting married or remained single. Consistent with most other research findings, professional single women delayed their marriages for educational and career reasons. Working class single women started working immediately after completing their primary or elementary secondary education because of their family background and financial

situation. They might have had the chance to meet men and start dating but this did not lead to marriage. Some gave up the chance of getting married for the sake of familial responsibility. It was assumed that eldest daughters had to consider the family's welfare before their own. Since most worked in occupations which were female-dominated and most of their colleagues were women, it might not be easy for them to meet suitable men. Some attended evening courses after work in order to secure or change their jobs. Thus, they might have paid less attention to meeting and seeking suitable marital partners.

As indicated by the findings, the women perceived the general social attitude toward singlehood to have changed to be more liberal in modern Hong Kong, though there were still some reservations. Some also felt that the experiences of professional and working class single women were different. The data suggested that different values applied to these two groups of single women. Stereotypes such as "career-minded women", "superwomen" were attached to those women who occupied high ranking occupations and could be financially independent. They might be regarded as choosy in selecting their mates. For the working-class single women, however, most responses were ambivalent.

It seemed that those with more personal resources, like jobs with stable income and promising prospects, and strong support network, saw being single more positively than those with fewer resources. Working-class single women were likely to have fewer resources than professional women. In this study, apart from one woman who recently resigned from her job as a sales supervisor, the other women were all in full-time jobs. Working-class single women adjusted well to their work although some of them felt their jobs were boring and they had no opportunities for advancement. Owing to economic restructuring in Hong Kong, working-class single women were anxious about the possibility of being laid off. They therefore worked very hard to keep their present jobs. In addition to work, single women were strongly attached in networks of relationship. Professional single women were found to have professionals or at least better educated friends. Working-class single women, however, had stronger attachments to family members than their professional counterparts. More professional than working-class single women purchased or rented their own home. Regardless of these differences, however, both professional and working-class single women reported that they enjoyed their single lives. Professional women might find

their life satisfying and be proud of their accomplishments. This also applied to the working class single women in this study. It could be concluded that professional women were better adjusted to being single than working-class women were.

The findings of this study indicated that single women were able to lead their lives independently. They faced different but also some similar developmental tasks as other married women. In face of the challenges posed by their family, relatives and friends and the social environment, the single women in this study had all survived successfully as the accounts of their lives and their feelings showed. The findings show that the women had made active efforts to enhance their social support network, and to secure their jobs. Though they could not possibly alter attitudes of people around them, they had come up with many strategies to cope with these challenges. These coping strategies seemed to have developed through time, as the respondents learned from their experiences and figured out what worked for them. In addition, these strategies seemed to reflect not only the women's personal characteristics but also the influences of their social context, as could be seen from the cultural wisdom as well as religious wisdom contained in them.

The Needs and Situations of Single Women

As a result of my inquiry, the essential themes of the meaning of the single women's experience became apparent. These themes will further an understanding of their needs and situations and have implications in the following areas:

Academic Implications.

As mentioned in Chapter One, there are few concepts or theories of singlehood. The results generated from this study can give additional insights to the study of singlehood.

(1)   Developing a comprehensive model for single women

In Chapter Two, developmental perspectives, contextual perspectives, role/socialization theories, and perspectives of human needs and feminist theory were

discussed and critiqued.

Single women in this study show the complexities of their experience. Instead of behaving according to the stereotypes, they hope society in general and people close to them will regard them as individuals with unique experiences. They admit that they may be deprived of the intimacy of a partner in marriage. But they also try to build themselves up and enjoy different types of social support. Single women no longer depend on husband and children to confirm their own identities. However, they are still expected to perform a care-giving role for their parents and other family members. From this study, a new and integrated perspective of understanding the experience of single woman is deemed necessary.

(2) Conducting more well-established research on single women

The present study aimed to examine how women perceive their single lives. A recapitulation of the limitations of this piece of research will help to pinpoint areas for further research. First of all, as pointed out in Chapter Five, one limitation of this study is that I managed to interview only thirty single women. Other researchers can enlarge the sample and interview more single women. Single women with more varied backgrounds can be included since different groups of single women may have different lifestyles. For instance, lesbians in a committed relationship may report their status as "single". Their perception of singlehood deserves further study. Secondly, the gender issue is the theme of this study. However, gender includes both male and female. To investigate gender identity and patriarchy more deeply, single men should also be studied. Lifestyles and coping styles might differ between single men and single women. Studies to clarify the differences between different types of single women and between single women and single men should also be fruitful and rewarding. Thirdly, further research is also needed to clarify the difference between single women and married women. For instance, what differences exist in the personal or professional goals and lifestyles of single and married women? What differences exist in the social support of single and married women? What is the psychological well-being of these two groups like? Fourthly, this study is qualitative in nature. It aims to discover patterns and insights. However, I consider that quantitative research also has a role to play. Indeed, writers and researchers nowadays consider that qualitative and quantitative research are not mutually exclusive (Sherman, 1992). Questionnaires

could be designed to test hypotheses about the lives of single men and women. In my opinion, supplementing qualitative research with quantitative investigation should help to make the analysis more complete.

(3) Conducting a comparative study between male and female single persons

The significant difference in social attitude towards male and female single persons noted by the respondents calls for our sensitivity to the differences in experiences of the two sexes. It suggests that research of single persons should take note of this sex difference instead of aggregating the experiences of men and women together. For instance, women are more likely than men to establish systems of support for themselves and are therefore more inclined to experience higher levels of life satisfaction than men. There may be similarities or differences between men and women leading to their singlehood. There may also be similarities between men and women regarding the advantages and disadvantages of being a single adult. People's acceptance of the singles lifestyle as a valid exception from the norm of society may also vary between single men and women.

(4) An extension of feminist perspectives

Single women are regarded as a "forgotten", "invisible", and "marginal" group. Their situations and needs are often neglected or misunderstood. Negative stereotypes may affect the self-identity of single women. As a feminist, Gordon (1994) conducted a study on single women with the intention of finding out how they have constructed their lives in the context of prevailing notions about femininity, and how they have dealt with pressures towards marriage and maternity. The single women in her study reported being tense and contradictory during the process of establishing autonomy and independence. According to Gordon (1994), there were still continuities in the position of single women.

Feminist research is committed to expose prevailing sexist biases, create unbiased alternatives, and/or construct reality from a female perspective. By applying a feminist perspective, a researcher plays a role as a resource and support instead of appearing as a "neutral" data collector. Dialogue is encouraged rather than the observation or experimental manipulation of people. My experience was similar to

Oakley's (1981). The women took an active role in redefining the relationship with me. I also attempted to learn and use the women's own language in understanding the analysis and drawing out the meanings, values and motives.

(5) Developing an indigenous understanding of the experience of singlehood

Studies of single women are scarce and most have been conducted by researchers in Western societies. Singlehood is a social phenomenon. Little attention has been paid to the social, cultural and symbolic dimensions of singlehood. Women who are single may have many concerns arising from their marital state. Their major source of pressure derives from the discrepancy between their single state and the cultural expectations of singlehood and marriage. The results generated from this study can provide some understanding of the needs and pressures, if any, encountered by single women in Hong Kong.

Policy Implications.

The age cohort that I have chosen for this study might have adapted to being single as a permanent state. But only one saw it that way – the rest said that they might get married if the chance came their way. Apart from emotional needs, getting financial security for their future might be another reason for the women to get married. During the interview, they acknowledged explicitly their worries about financial security in old age. Their economic situation after retirement might create problems like finding an affordable place to live, meeting medical expenses, or facing the self-esteem problems resulting from declining resources. There are no retirement pensions available to employees either from the government or work organizations in Hong Kong. Currently, the Government offers Social Security, which is a means-tested old-age assistance system and those aged people whose savings are insufficient to make both ends meet are eligible to apply. However, the amount is too meagre to cover the general expenses of elderly people. It was said that the Government could not "afford" a general retirement system unless it was set up as a contributory plan. There are also no occupational pension plans offered by most companies. Retirees did not have any pension until the recent introduction of Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF). The MPF is a compulsory retirement plan implemented by the Hong Kong Government to help ensure a financially sound retirement for the retirees. Under MPF both the employer

and employee make regular mandatory contributions into an employee's account, with benefits being payable at retirement. But the amounts of benefits do not seem adequate to cover the expenses of retirement and old age. Besides, an aging population will also face increased health costs. More comprehensive policies about old age and occupational pensions need to be implemented.

It is impossible to keep the promises made to the retirees without larger tax increases on the young, and also reducing the share of the budget spent on all other social needs. Numerous proposals have been made that would scale back benefits, and some would use individual savings accounts or increased government surpluses to try to increase government saving and, eventually, to replace lost benefits. An alternative might be investing trust fund money in the stock market with a presumed higher return than on government bonds. Another suggestion might be distributing health care vouchers to the elderly to help them buy their own health insurance or to help them pay any additional deductibles or coinsurance.

Besides taking up the responsibility to make regular mandatory contributions into an employee's account, employers are also urged to enhance the employment opportunities for older workers, male and female. It has often been recognized that older workers perform tasks better or can be an advantage where, for example, customer relations, sheer expertise or team-work are involved. Training should continue to be provided to workers until the end of their career in order for them to remain motivated and productive. The policy has been to strengthen the relation between wages and productivity, regardless of the age. Moreover, part-time and flexible work is likely to improve the productivity of older workers, reduce absenteeism and increase motivation.

Last but not least, the Government should educate people to save for retirement rather that to consume what they earn and in many cases incur credit and other debt. People also need to anticipate unexpected expenses and put aside sufficient money. As mentioned before, the process of aging and the associated health changes typically generate additional demands for medical expenses. Regardless of whether it is life, disability, or health, many individuals continue to remain uninsured or underinsured. The purchase of appropriate insurance protection plays a major role against the loss of income, personal assets, and substantial expenses for such items as medical care, etc.

Single women may, at times, encounter unequal treatment at work. Examples have been given in earlier chapters. One area that deserves special attention is the unemployment and underemployment which are common since the economic recession in Hong Kong. Women cannot be exempted from such experiences. Like other women, it seems difficult for single women to secure a job with a stable income. They may face the problem of age discrimination. If they are employed, they may work on a temporary basis. Their pay is low and there is a reduction of fringe benefits.

At present, existing housing policies discriminate against single people. Single women are among those who suffer most because of their relatively weak economic position and their vulnerability to sexual assault. Those single women who are employed in senior posts in either government or non-government organizations can be granted a housing allowance. However, no housing allowance is provided if a single woman is on study leave whereas for a married man/woman the benefit continues. There is no policy aimed at reducing gender inequality in relation to housing. In reality, given the abnormally high rents in Hong Kong, many single women face housing problems or suffer from problems arising from their living conditions. It is only recently that single people were able to apply for public housing units. However, the provision is still inadequate.

It is true that social policy changes are one way to meet the neglected needs of single women. However, unless public concern is aroused about the needs of the growing population of single women and the public alters their views and perceptions about the value of single people, only limited success can come as a result of policy changes.

Practice Implications.

The direct practice applications from this research are many, and stem from the enhanced understanding of the experience of singlehood.

(1) Awareness of the issues by human service practitioners

An awareness of the issues and problems confronting single women is important for human service practitioners, since these issues touch the lives of many families in one

way or another. The personal and unique experiences of the single women are important factors to be considered in assessing their needs. Human service practitioners must not pathologize singleness. We must adopt the attitude that single life is a legitimate choice and a viable, alternative style of living. The more understanding we have about single women, the less we are prejudiced against them. If we are biased, we will underestimate the strengths of single women and their satisfaction with their lives. We will also miss the special issues that these women face and fail to reinforce the legitimacy of their choices. Both practitioners and single women need to recognize there are advantages and disadvantages to both single and married life. Practitioners should be sensitive to situations that the single women encounter, but should also be aware of a vast array of individual differences.

(2) Helping Women to Come to Terms with the Single State

It may be important for practitioners to help single women recognize and/or resolve their ambivalent feelings towards being single. They may have postponed getting married for their own reasons. They bring with them a number of emotional reactions. Practitioners need to encourage single women to express their emotions and the pressures they experience. Their attitudes toward their lifestyle need to be explored since these will impact on how they develop and maintain their identities. Their self-concept will be affected by the stereotypes that are attached to single women. They must come to terms with their single state. Only then can they begin to address the fact that their singlehood may be a permanent one.

Coming to terms with the single state means helping women reconnect with their strengths and the joys available to them and helping them modify their primary identities to highlight other roles (friend, career woman, aunt, etc.) which can contribute to a viable life and a place in the community. They need to be encouraged to meet new people (not just men) and extend their social support network.

(3) The Need for Stronger Support Networks

The development of a support network is imperative for women who live outside the boundaries of marriage. Besides encouraging single women to maintain their existing networks, human service practitioners should encourage them to develop new

friends and acquaintances who can help them establish a new life.   Single women may join groups which are organized for single women or single adults by churches or social service agencies.   In these groups, they can make new friends and learn new skills for coping with ordinary tasks.   By participation in a new social circle, single women can establish their own place in society and build up a network of resources.

(4)   Bolstering Individual's Resources to Face Stress

Individual women may face pressures arising from their state of being single, as well as work and daily hassles.   The development of an expanded support network may be particularly beneficial to women facing stress.   The bolstering of an individual's resources can help them to stay healthy under future stressful conditions.   Practitioners can help women to reduce avoidance coping and to adopt active coping.   As suggested by Lewis & Moon (1997), single women may be encouraged to differentiate stereotypic images from those that are valuable and appropriate for them, and to substitute old expectations by new options.

(5)   Dealing with Family Relationships

Family members can provide support for single women.   They can provide psychological support and instrumental help in managing household and daily tasks.   However, they may also inadvertently cause problems or stress.   Parental pressure for single women to marry may stimulate guilt or anger.   Practitioners can encourage single women to share their dreams, goals and ambitions with their parents and family members.   By mutual communication, the families' disappointment over the possible lack of sons-in-law and grandchildren must be acknowledged.   Being able to talk it through can help to clarify any misunderstanding and reinforce mutual support.   Single women can also negotiate new roles with family members.

(6)   Dealing with Issues Arising from Work

As mentioned, work has become a primary source of satisfaction and identity among single women.   Any problems arising from work, including discriminative treatment, underemployment and unemployment may have a tremendous impact on social identity and financial security.   It is especially middle-aged adults who suffer

job loss during economic crisis. Social work practitioners should be aware of any crises arising from work and help single women to face them. Besides re-training courses, strengthening collegial relationships and the provision of stress management programs are needed. Single women may also pool their resources, expertise, knowledge and skills so that they can adapt to the changing work environment. They could also set up a well-organized insurance plan since a majority of employees in Hong Kong will not receive any pensions upon their retirement.

Recommendations

The following suggested new or modified modes of services for single women require the involvement of and support from government and non-governmental organizations (including women's bodies, churches, etc.). The recommendations in this section will be somewhat elaborated and include a discussion of their applicability in the context of Hong Kong.

The Development of Programs for Single Women.

By implementing developmental and educational programs, single women can be provided with knowledge, information, skills and support to help them to cope with their singlehood more effectively.

In Hong Kong, some social service agencies provide a group work service and mass programs for single adults and some social workers conduct casework or counseling sessions. However, these services are sporadic. On the whole, the programs for single adults have not been systematically and extensively implemented in Hong Kong. Due to the shortage of funding, "single adults" are not included as one of the "focused" groups for implementation of Family Life Education Programs. More funding from government to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is needed. Moreover, social work practitioners can organize single women to form groups.

The Rendering of Individual and Family Casework/Counseling.

Changes in the contemporary family include greater cultural variation, diverse

formats, older first marriages, permanent singlehood, and aging marriages, all of which have implications for individual and family casework/counseling.

First of all, it is necessary for both casework practitioners and clients to be aware of the negative impact of societal messages and the organization of social institutions as well as to realize their impact on the meaning single clients give to their lives (Schwartzberg et al., 1995). Needless to say, it is important for practitioners to understand singleness in order to provide balanced treatment for adults who are involved in relationship decision making. It is also significant that practitioners who specialize in relationships should be knowledgeable about the unique issues, the ambivalence, and the advantages and disadvantages of single living across the life span (Lewis & Moon, 1997). Furthermore, it is vital for them to understand the ways that singleness interacts with friends and family members. They also need to be conscious of the unique family-of-origin issues common to single women (Lewis & Moon, 1997).

It is suggested that therapists should be general professionals first, then continue their education in specific problems and specialties. Some therapists should specialize in working with single women.

The Implementation of Courses and Seminars.

Community education programs need to include information that can help combat the stereotypical images of single adults, such as lonely old maid, aggressive career women, etc. A greater recognition and legitimization of the single lifestyle would help in eradicating some of the barriers to social and personal interaction.

Women, in facing their singlehood, may feel anxious and may have no person to turn to for advice. They may need activities that cause them to explore the horizons of knowledge and learn new ways of managing their lives. Practitioners can meet these important needs by offering specialized courses and seminars for them. These could include: the single-women's identity, effective interpersonal skills, managing your finances, sex and being single, handling work stress, and maintaining physical and psychological health. Such activities will be especially beneficial to single women since they can address their needs for intellectual growth and emotional development.

In the implementation of programs for single adults, practitioners should recognize that some of those attending will be in search of the perfect mate. While practitioners should not encourage pairing off, they should not disapprove of it. Single adults, by participating in these educational activities, can learn skills which would be useful in getting on with the opposite sex and managing their future home.

The Provision of Modified Mass Programs.

Social welfare agencies, including churches, have implemented programs from traditional perspectives that have essentially been couple and marriage-oriented. Programs for single adults are inadvertently neglected or even rejected. For example, family picnics or retreats, and "sweetheart banquets" on Valentine's Day can leave the single adult feeling alone and isolated. An authority or expert will be invited to deliver a talk on some popular topic to a large group of adults. Although there are times when this approach is appropriate, it should never be the major way of acknowledging the educational needs of the single adults. Practitioners should consider the unique needs of the single adults; small group meetings are one of the suggested modes.

The Expansion of Supportive Groups.

Group experiences are found to help women face singlehood. In establishing groups, practitioners have to take into consideration the diversity of backgrounds single women bring to the group. They can take advantage of this variety by encouraging discussion, interaction, and involvement. It is suggested that a large group breaks into small groups and all share their feelings. In such a supportive environment, single women can learn social skills, build up their self-esteem and become more assertive, and acquire specific skills like handling finances, etc.

Mobilizing Single Women to Launch Voluntary Services.

Most single women have their own strengths and talents. Practitioners can organize them to design and implement community projects. There are plenty of opportunities for service within the community. For instance, one group of single women plan a Fun Day for "latch-key" children. Regular visits to aged homes or hostels for mentally handicapped adults are also suggested.

Postscript

The process of conducting this study has been very inspiring to me as a social worker and a single woman. Some of the findings have reflected my own experiences in singlehood, while some have brought my attention to phenomena that I have previously never realized. The study has not only enriched my understanding of single women in general, but has also helped me to understand myself. I devote myself to continue with my effort in the area of single women, be it either in the form of dissemination of knowledge or from insights gained in this study. Further research and practice will be done!

Chapter Summary

Drawing from this study's findings, this chapter discusses the implications for practice in working with single women. In the first place, how the experience of being single is shaped is discussed. Further understanding of the needs and situations of single women are also discussed. Such understanding has different implications for social workers who work directly with single women, non-governmental organizations (church, women's organizations and social welfare agencies) who provide services for them, and the government who makes policies which underpin the development and improvement of these services. Implications for further studies of single women are also presented. Finally, a number of recommendations are made.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, M. (1971). The single woman in today's society: A reappraisal. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 41*(5): 776-786.

Adams, M. (1974). The single woman in today's society. In A. Skolnick & J. Skolnick (Eds.), *Intimacy, Family and Society.* Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Adams, M. (1976). *Single Blessedness: Observations on the Single Status in Married Society.* New York: Basic Books.

Agassi, J. & I. C. Jarvie (1969). A study in westernization. In I.C. Jarvie & J. Agassi (Eds.) *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited.

Allatt, P., & Keil, T. (1987). Introduction. In Allatt, Keil, Bryman & Bytheway (Eds.), *Women and the Life Cycle: Transitions and Turning points.* London: The Macmillan Press.

Allan, G. (1991). Qualitative research. In G. Allen & C. Skinner (Eds.), *Handbook for Research Students in the Social Sciences.* London: The Falmer Press.

Allen, K. R. (1989). *Single Women/Family Ties: Life Histories of Older Women.* London: Sage.

Almquist, E. M., & Angrist, S. S. (1970). Career salience and atypicality of occupational choice among college women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 32,* 242-249.

Anderson, C., & Steward, S. (1994). *Flying Solo: Single Women in Midlife.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Andrisani, P. J. (1978). Job satisfaction among working women. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 3*(3), 588-607.

Angrist, S. S. (1969). The study of sex roles. *Journal of Social Issues, 25* (Jan.), 215-232.

Appelbaum, R. P., & Henderson, J. (Eds.). (1992). *States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim.* Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publication.

Archer, J., & Lloyd, B. (1985). *Sex and Gender* (2nd edition). Cambridge University Press.

Argyle, M. (1972). *The Social Psychology of Work.* Great Britain: Penguin Books.

Arnot, M. (1992). State education policy and girls' educational experiences. In V. Beechey & E. Whitelegg (Eds.), *Women in Britain Today.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ashmore, R. D., & DelBoca, F. K. (1981). Conceptual approaches to stereotypes and stereotyping. In D. L. Hamilton (Ed.), *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behavior* (pp. 1-35). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Atkinson, R. L. et. al. (1996). *Introduction to Psychology,* (12/e), USA: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Baker, L. G. (1968). The personal and social adjustment of the never-married woman. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 30*(Aug.), 473-479.

Baruch, G., Barnett, R., & Rivers, C. (1983). *Lifeprints.* New York: New American Library.

Bauder-Nishita, J. (1980). Gender specific differentials of medical practice in California. *Women and Health, 5,* 5-15.

Beechey, V. (1992). Women and employment in contemporary Britain. In V. Beechey & E. Whitelegg (Eds.), *Women in Britain Today*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Belle, D. (1987). Gender differences in the social moderators of stress. In Barnett, R. C., Biener, L., & Baruch, G. K. *Gender & Stress*. The Free Press.

Berg, B. L. (1989). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Berheide, C. W. (1988). Women in sales and service occupation. In Stromberg, A. H. & Harkess, S. (Eds.), *Women Working: Theories and Facts in Perspective* (2nd edition). Mayfield Publishing Co.

Berkman, L. F., & Syme, S. L. (1979). Social networks, host resistance, and mortality: A nine-year follow-up study of Alameda County residents. *American Journal of Epidemiology, 109*, 186-204.

Bernard, J. (1972). *The Future of Marriage*. New York: World Publishing Company.

Bertaux, D. (1982). The life course approach as a challenge to the social sciences. In T. K. Hareven & K. J. Adams (Eds.), *Aging and Life Course Transitions: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (pp. 127-150). New York: Guilford.

Betz, N. (1993). Women's career development. In F. L. Denmark & M. A. Paludi (Eds.), *Psychology of Women: A Handbook of Issues and Theories*. Westport, CT: Greendwood Press.

Block, J. H. (1984). *Sex Role and Ego Development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bloom, B. L., Asher, S. J., & White, S. W. (1978). Marital disruption as a stressor: A review and analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 85*, 867-894.

Bogan, M. (1993). Difficulties facing working women. In E. Templeton (Ed.), *A Woman's Place ...? Women and Work*. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.

Boldt, E. D. (1978). Structural tightness and cross-cultural research. *Journal of cross-cultural Psychology, 9*, 151-165.

Brown, G. W., & Tirril, H. (1978). *Social Origins of Depression*. New York: The Free Press.

Bullock, A., & Stallybrass, O. (1977). *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. Britain: Fontana.

Burnley, C. S., & Kurth, S. B. (1992). Never-married women: Alone and lonely? Specific issue: The sociology of emotions. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, 18*(2), 57-83.

Campbell, A. (1975). The American way of mating. *Psychiatry Today, 9*, 37-43.

Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (1989). *The Changing Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy* (2nd Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Carter, H., & Glick, P. C. (1976). *Marriage and Divorce: A Social and Economic Study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cashmore, E. E. (1989). *The Experience of Successful Career Women in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Department of Sociology, University of Hong Kong, unpublished manuscript.

Cassel, J. (1974). Psychosocial processes and "stress": Theoretical formulation. *International Journal of Health Service, 4*(3), 471-482.

Cassel, J. C. (1976). The contribution of the social environment to host resistance. *American Journal of Epidemiology, 104,* 107-23.

Chan, K. W., Fong, Y. H., Fung, K. K., Hung, S. L., Ng, C. H., Pun, N., & Wong, M. W. (1995). The impact of industrial restructuring on women workers in Hong Kong. In *Silk and Steel: Asian Women Workers Confront Challenges of Industrial Restructuring.* Hong Kong Committee for Asian Women.

Chandler, J. (1991). *Women without Husband: An Exploration of the Margins of Marriage.* Macmillan Education Ltd.

Cherlin, A. (1980). Postponing marriage: The influence of young women's work expectations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 42*(May), 355-365.

Chock, P. P. (1986). Irony and ethnography: On cultural analysis of one's own culture. *Anthro, 59*(2): 87-96.

Choi, P. K. (1993). Women. In P. K. Choi & L. S. Ho (Eds.), *The Other Hong Kong Report* (pp. 369-400). Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Cobb, S. (1976). Social support as a moderator of life stress. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 38,* 300-14.

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310-357.

Coleman, L. M., & Antonucci, T. C. (1983). Impact of work on women at midlife. *Developmental Psychology, 19*(2), 290-294.

Collins, R. (1988). Women and men in the class structure. *Journal of Family Issues, 9,* 27-50.

Colwill, N. L., & Colwill, H. D. (1985). Women with blue collars: The forgotten minority. *Business Quarterly, 50*(2), 15-17.

Colwill, N., & Lips, H. (1988). Issues in the workplace. In Lips, H.M. (Ed.), *Sex & Gender: An Introduction.* Mayfield Publishing Co., California: Mountain View.

Comstock, D. (1982). A method for critical research. In E. Bredo and W. Feinberg (Eds.), *Knowledge and Values in Social and Educational Research* (pp. 370-90). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Conners, D. D. (1988). A continuum of researcher-participant relationships: An analysis and critique. *Advances in Nursing Science, 10*(4): 32-42.

Cook, T., & Campbell, D. T. (1979). *Quasi-experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues for Field Settings.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Cooney, T. M., & Uhlenberg, P. (1989). Family-building patterns of professional women: A comparison of lawyers, physicians and post-secondary teachers. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51*(3), 749-58.

Cooper, C. L., & Marshall, J. (1976). Occupational sources of stress: A review of the literature relating to coronary heart disease and mental health. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 49,* 11-28.

Crompton, R., & Sanderson, K. (1990). *Gendered Jobs and Social Change.* London: Unwin Hyman.

Crosby, F. J. (1982). *Relative Deprivation and Working Women.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Crull, P. (1984). Sexual harassment and women's health. In W. Chavkin (Ed.),

Double Exposure (pp. 100-120).   New York: Monthly Review Press.

Davidson, M. J., & Cooper, C. L. (1992).   *Shattering the Glass Ceiling: The Women Manager.*   Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Davidson, M. J., & Earnshaw, J. (1990).   Policies, practices, and attitudes towards sexual harassment in UK organizations.   *Personnel Review, 19*(3), 23-27.

Davies, L. (1995).   A closer look at gender and distress among the never married.   *Women and Health, 23*(2), 13-30.

Davis, L. V. (1986).   A feminist approach to social work research.   *Affilia-Journal-of-Women-and-Social-Work.* Spring, pp.21-47.

Davis, M. W. (1982).   *Women's Place is at the Typewriter.*   Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

De Beauvoir, S. (1972).   *The Second Sex.*   Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

DeLaat, J. (1999).   *Gender in the Workplace: A Case Study Approach.*   Thousands Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

DeLamater, J., & Fidell, L. S. (1971).   On the status of women.   In L S. Fidell & J. DeLamater (Eds.), *Women in the Professions: What's All the Fuss about?* Beverly Hills: Sage.

DelBoca, F. K., & Ashmore, R. D. (1980).   Sex stereotypes through the life cycle.   In Wheeler. L. (Ed.),   *Review of Personality and Social Psychology.*   Sage Publications, Inc.

Denzin, K. (1978).   *The Research Act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods.*   New York: McGraw-Hill.

Dex, S., & Shaw, L. (1986).   *British and American Women at Work: Do Equal Opportunities Policies Matter?*   London: Macmillan.

Dex, S. (1987).   *Women's Occupational Mobility: A Lifetime Perspective.*   Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Dixon, R. B. (1971).   Explaining cross-cultural variations in age at marriage and proportions never marrying.   *Populations Studies, 25* (July), 215-254.

Donovan, L. (1980).   Survey of Nursing Incomes, Part 2. What Increases Income Most?   *RN 43*, 27-30.

DuBois (1983).   Passionate scholarship: Notes on values, knowing and method in feminist social science.   In G. Bowles & R. D. Klein (Eds.), *Theories of Women's Studies* (pp. 105-116).   London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Dunn, D. (1997).   *Workplace/Women's Place: An Anthology.*   Roxbury Publishing Company.

Eaton, J. W. (1980).   Stress in social work practice.   In C. L. Cooper & J. Marshall (Eds.), *White Collar and Professional Stress.*   John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Ehrhart, J. K., & Sandler, B. R. (1987).   *Looking for More Than a Few Good Women in Traditionally Male Fields.*   Washington, DC: Project on the Status and Education of Women.

Eichler, M. (1987).   The relationship between sexist, non-sexist, woman-centred and feminist research in the social sciences.   In G. Hoffman Nemiroff (Ed.), *Women and Men: Interdisciplinary Reading on Gender* (pp. 178-215).   Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside.

Epstein, C. (1970). *Women's Place --- Options and Limits in Professional Careers.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Epstein, C. F. (1981). *Women in Law.* New York: Basic Books.

Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood & Society* (2nd Ed.). New York: Norton.

Etaught, C., & Malstrom, J. (1981). The effect of marital status on person-perception. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 43* (Nov.), 801-805.

Etzkowitz, H., & Stein, P. (1978). The life spiral: Human needs and adult roles. *Alternative Lifestyles, 1,* 434-46.

Evetts, J. (Ed.). (1994). *Women and Career: Themes and Issues in Advanced Industrial Societies.* Longman.

Fong, M. L., & Amatea, E. S. (1992). Stress & single professional women: An exploration of causal factors. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 14*(Jan.), 20-29.

Fox, A. (1980). The meaning of work. In G. Esland & G. Salaman (Eds.), *The Politics of Work and Occupations.* England: The Open University Press.

Fox, M. F., & Hesse-Biber, S. (1984). *Women and Work.* Mayfield Publishing Company.

Frieze, I. H., Parsons, J. E., Johnson, P. B., Ruble, D. N., & Zellman, G. L. (1978). *Women and Sex Roles: A Social Psychological Perspective.* W. W. Norton & Company.

Gallin, R. S. (1984). The entry of Chinese women into the rural labor force: A case study from Taiwan. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 9*(3): 383-398.

Garnets, L., & Pleck, J. H. (1979). Sex role identity, androgyny, and sex role transcendence: A sex role strain analysis. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 3,* 270-283.

Garrison, H. H. (1979). Gender differences in the career aspirations of recent cohorts of high school seniors. *Social Problems, 27,* 170-85.

Gaskell, J. (1981). Sex inequalities in education for work: The case of business education. *Canadian Journal of Education, 6*(2), 54-72.

Gelles, R. J., & Cornell, C. (1985). *Intimate Violence in Families* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Gigy, L. L. (1980). Self-concept of single women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 5*(2), Winter, 321-340.

Gittins, D. (1993). *The Family in Question: Changing Households & Familiar Ideologies.* The Macmillan Press Ltd.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Glenn, E. N., & Feldberg, R. (1977). Degraded and deskilled: The proletarianization of clerical work. *Social Problems, 25,* 52-64.

Glenn, N. D. (1975). A demographic looks at American families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37*(Aug.), 594-601.

Goldthrope, J. H., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F., & Platt, J. (1968). *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behavior.* Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press.

Googins, B., & Burden, D. (1987). Vulnerability of working parents: Balancing work and home roles. *Social Work, 32,* 295-300.

Gordon, B., & Meth, R. (1990). Men as husbands. In R. Meth & R. Pasick (Eds.), *Men in Therapy: The Challenge of Change* (pp. 54-87). New York: Guilford.

Gordon, T. (1994). *Single Women.* London: Macmillan.

Gottlieb, B. H. (1983). Social support as a focus for integrative research in psychology. *American Psychologist, 38,* 278-287.

Gouldner, M., & Strong, M. S. (1987). *Speaking of Friendship: Middle-class Women and Their Friends.* New York and London: Greenwood Press.

Greenglass, E. R., & Devins, R. (1982). Factors related to marriage and career plans in unmarried women. *Sex Roles, 8,* 57-72.

Grint, K. (1992). *The Sociology of Work.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gruber, J. E., & Bjorn, L. (1982). Blue-collar blues: The sexual harassment of women autoworkers. *Work and Occupations, 9,* 271-97.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In Norman, K. D. & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Gutek, B. A., & Bikson, T. K. (1985). Differential experiences of men and women in computerized offices. *Sex Roles, 13,* 123-36.

Gutek, B. A. (1988). Women in clerical work. In Stromberg, A.H. & Harkess, S. (Eds.), *Women Working: Theories and Facts in Perspective* (2nd edition). Mayfield Publishing Co.

Hafner, J. (1993). *The End of Marriage: Why Monogamy Isn't Working.* London: Arrow.

Hagestad, G. O., & Neugarten, B. L. (1985). Age and the life course. In E. Shanar & R. Binstock (Eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences* (2nd Ed.). Mimeograph.

Hakim, C. (1979). *Occupational Segregation, Research Paper No. 9, November.* London: Department of Employment.

Hakim, C. (1998). *Social Change and Innovation in the Labor Market.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hamilton, J. A., Alagna, S. W., King, L. S., & Llyod, C. (1987). The emotional consequences of gender-based in the workplace: New counseling programs for sex discrimination. *Women and Therapy, 6,* 155-182.

Harding, L. (1993). *Better Than Or Equal To? - A Look at Singleness.* UK: Word Publishing.

Harding, S. (Ed.). (1993). *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hareven, T. K. (1977). Family time and historical time. *Daedalus, 106,* 57-70.

Hareven, T. K. (1992). Family and generational relations in the later years: A historical perspective. *Generations, 16*(3), 7-12.

Havighurst, R. (1972). *Developmental Tasks and Education.* New York: McKay.

Havighurst, R. J. (1953). *Human Development and Education.* New York:

Longmans, Green & Co.

Health et al. (1986 November). The domestic violence service: A new experiment in South Australia. In S. Hatty (Ed.), *National Conference on Domestic Violence Proceeding, Vol. 1* (pp.289-309). Canberra, ACT: Australia Institute of Criminology.

Hesse, S. J. (1979). Women working: Historical trends. In Feinstein, K.W. (Ed.), *Working Women & Families*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Hirsch, B. J., & Rapkin, B. D. (1986). Multiple roles, social networks, and women's well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*(6), 1237-1247.

Ho, D. Y. F. (1986). Chinese patterns of socialization: A critical review. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The Psychology of Chinese People* (pp. 1-37). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Ho, S. C. (1984). Women's labor-force participation in Hong Kong, 1971-1981. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 46*(4), Nov., 947-953.

Hoffman, L. W. (1972). Early childhood experiences and women's achievement motives. *Journal of Social Issues, 28*(2), 129-155.

Holder, D. P., & Anderson, C. M. (1989). Women, work, and the family. In M. McGoldrick, C. M. Anderson & F. Walsh (Eds.), *Women in Families: A Framework for Family Therapy* (pp. 357-380). New York: Norton.

Hong Kong Government (1980). *Hong Kong Population Census.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hong Kong Government (1991). *Hong Kong Population Census* (Main Tables). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hong Kong Government (1994). *Hong Kong 1994 Annual Digest of Statistics.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hong Kong Government (1994). *Hong Kong 1994 Monthly Digest of Statistics.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer

Hong Kong Government (1995). *Hong Kong in Figures 1988-95 Edition.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hong Kong Government (1996). *Hong Kong 1996 Population By-census.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hong Kong Government (1998). *Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hooper, B. (1984). China's modernization: Are young women going to lose out? *Modern China, 10*(3), July, 317-343.

House, J. (1974). Occupational stress and coronary heart disease: A review and theoretical integration. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 15*, 12-27.

House, J. S. (1981). *Work Stress and Social Support.* Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Houseknecht, S. K., Vaughan, S., & Statham, A. (1987). The impact of singlehood on the career patterns of professional women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49*(May), 353-366.

Howe, L. K. (1977). *Pink Collar Workers.* New York: Avon.

Jackson, S., & Jones, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Contemporary Feminist Theories.* Edinburgh

University Press.

Jacques, E. (1967). *Equitable Payment*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Jaschok, M. (1984). Great-Aunt Yeung: A Hakka Wage Laborer. In M. Sheridan & J. Salaff (Eds.), *Lives, Chinese Working Women*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Jaschok, M. (1988). Grieving for the dead, grieving for the living: Funeral Laments of Hakka Women. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jaschok, M., & Miers, S. (Eds.). (1994). *Women & Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude and Escape*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Jong-Gierveld, J. (1985). Loneliness and the degree of intimacy in interpersonal relationships. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Personal Relationships. 4: Dissolving Personal Relationships*. New York: Academic Press.

Junsay, A. T., & Heaton, T. B. (1989). *Women Working: Comparative Perspectives in Developing Areas*. Greenwood Press, Inc.

Kanouse, D. E. (1980). *Effects of Post-secondary Experience on Aspirations, Attitudes and Self-conceptions*. Santa Monica: Rand.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Karasek, R. A. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*, 285-308.

Kasl, S. V. (1978). Epidemiological contributions to the study of work stress. In C. L. Cooper & R. Payne (Eds.), *Stress at Work*, New York: Wiley.

Kaslow, F. W. (1992). Thirty-plus and not married. In Wainrib, R. R. (Ed.), *Gender Issues Across the Life Cycle*. New York: Springer.

Kessler, R.C., & Essex, M. (1982). Marital status and depression: The importance of coping resources. *Social Forces, 61*, 484-507.

Kilmartin, C. T. (1994). *The Masculine Self.* New York: Macmillan.

Kirkwood, C. (1993). *Leaving Abusive Partners*. London/Newbury Park: Sage.

Knupfer, G., Clark, W., & Room, R. (1966). The mental health of the unmarried. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 122* (Feb.), 841- 851.

Kohn, M. L., & Schooler, C. (1969). Class, occupation, and orientation, *American Sociological Review, 34*, 659-678.

Komarovsky, M. (1982). Female freshmen view their future: Career salience and its correlates. *Sex Roles, 8*, 299-314.

Koo, L. C. (1985). The (non) status of women in traditional Chinese society. *Bulletin of the Hong Kong Psychological Society, 14*, 64-70.

Koons, C., & Anthony, M. (1991). *Single Adult Passages: Uncharted Territories*. Baker House Company.

Lamanna, M. A., & Riedmann, A. (1994). *Marriage and Families: Making Choices and Facing Change* (5th edition). Wadsworth, Inc.

Lapidus, G. W. (1985). The Soviet Union. In J. Farley (Ed.), *Women Workers in Fifteen Countries*. Cornell University.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the*

Postmodern. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Laws, J. L. (1975). The psychology of tokenism: An analysis. *Sex Roles, 1,* 51-67.

Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). Coping and adaptation. In W. D. Gentry (Ed.), *Handbook of Behavioral Medicine.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Lee, S. K. (1991). Working women in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Economic Journal Monthly, 176,* 44-51. (In Chinese)

Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (1986). Role structure and burnout in the field of human services. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences, 22,* 47-52.

Leonard, D., & Speakman, M. A. (1992). Women in the family: Companions or caretakers? In V. Beechey & E. Whitelegg (Eds.), *Women in Britain Today,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Leung, B. K. P. (1996). *Perspectives on Hong Kong Society.* Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Levinson D. J., Darrow, C. M., Klein, E. B., Levinson, M. H., & McKee, B. (1974). The psycho-social development of men in early adulthood and the mid-life transition. In D. F. Ricks, A. Thomas & M. Roff (Eds.), *Life History Research in Psycho-pathology* (Vol. 3). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Levinson D., Darrow, C., Klein, E., Levinson, M., & McKee, B. (1978). *The Seasons of a Man's Life.* New York: Knopf.

Levinson, D. J. (1989 May). Speech at University of Maryland, College Park, National Conference, New Options for Adult Counselors.

Lewis, K. G., & Moon, S. (1997). Always single and single again women: A qualitative study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 23*(2), 115-134.

Lewis, K. G. (1994). Single heterosexual women through the life cycle. In M. Mirkin (Ed.), *Women in Context: Toward a Feminist Reconstruction of Psychotherapy* (pp. 170-187). New York: Guilford.

Libby, R.W. (1977). Creative singlehood as a sexual life-style. In Libby, R.W. & R.N. Whitehurst (Eds.), *Marriage and Alternatives: Exploring Intimate Relationships.* Scott, Foresman and Company.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Loewenstein, S. F., Block, N. E., Campion, J., Epstein, J. P., Gale, P., & Salvatore, M. (1981). A study of satisfactions and stresses of single women in mid-life. *Sex Roles, 7*(11), 1127-1141.

Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing Social Settings: A guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (3rd edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Mandelbaum, D. R. (1978). Women in medicine. *Signs, 4*(1), 136-145.

Marshall, J. (1980). Stress amongst nurses. In C. L. Cooper & J. Marshall (Eds.), *White Collar and Professional Stress.* John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

McCracken, G. (1988). *The Long Interview.* Newbury Park: Sage.

Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd edition). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mortimer, J. T., Finch, M. D., & Maruyama, G. (1988). Work, experience and job satisfaction: Variation by age and gender. In J. T, Mortimer & K. M. Borman

(Eds.), *Work Experience and Psychological Development Through the Life Span.* American Association for the Advancement of Science: Westview Press.

Murstein, B. I. (1978). *Exploring Intimate Life Styles.* New York, N.Y.: Springer Publishing Company.

Nadelson, C. C., & Notman, M. T. (1981). To marry or not tot marry: A choice. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 138*(10), 1352-1356.

Nelson, D. L., & Quick, J. C. (1985). Professional women: Are distress and disease inevitable? *Academy of Management Review, 10,* 206-218.

Neugarten, B. L., & Neugarten, D. A. (1987). The changing meanings of age. *Psychology Today, 21,* 29-33.

Ng, Sek-hong (1986). Perception of sex discrimination in employment and the 'class' context: The case of Hong Kong female workers. *British Journal of Sociology, 37*(3), Sept., 307-334.

Nicholson, J. (1993). *Men & Women: How Different are they?* (New Edition), Oxford University Press.

Nieva, V. F., & Gutek, B. A. (1981). *Women and Work: A Psychological Perspective.* New York: Praeger.

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1990). *Sex Differences in Depression.* California: Stanford University Press.

Northcott, H. C. (1981). Women, work, health, and happiness. *International Journal of Women's Studies, 4,* 268-276.

O'Connor, C. M. (1971). Wages and tips in restaurants and hotels. *Monthly Labor Review, 94*(July), 47-51.

O'Farrell, B., & Harlan, S. L. (1982). Craftworkers and clerks: The effect of male co-worker hostility on women's satisfaction with non-traditional jobs. *Social Problems, 29*(3), 252-265.

O'Farrell, B. (1982). Women and nontraditional blue-collar jobs in the 1980s: An overview. In P. A. Wallace (Ed.), *Women in the Workplace.* Boston: Auburn House Publishing Company.

O'Farrell, B. (1988). Women in blue-collar occupations: Traditional and nontraditional. In Stromberg, A. H. & Harkess, S. (Eds.), *Women Working: Theories and Facts in Perspective* (2nd edition). Mayfield Publishing Co.

O'Neil, J. M. (1982). Gender role conflict and strain in men's lives. In K. Soloman & N. Levy (Eds.), *Men in Transition: Theory and Therapy* (pp.5-43), New York: Harvard University Press.

Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In J. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (pp.30-61). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Oppenheimer, V. (1968). The sex labeling of jobs. *Industrial Relations, 7,* 219-34.

Parsons, T. (1956). The American family: Its relationship to personality and the social structures. In T. Parsons and R. Bales (Eds.), *Family: Socialization and Interaction Process* (pp. 3-33). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Payne, R. (1980). Organizational stress and support. In C. L. Cooper & R. Payne (Eds.), *Current Concerns in Occupational Stress.* New York: John Wiley.

Pearlin, L. I., Lieberman, M. A., Menaghan, E. G., & Mullan, J. T. (1981). The stress

process. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 22*(Dec.), 337-356.

Pearlin, L. I., & Johnson, J. S. (1977). Marital status, life strains and depression. *American Sociological Review, 42,* 704-715.

Pearson, V., & Leung, B. K. P. (Eds.). (1995). *Women in Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Pelto, P. J. (1968). The study of man: The differences between "tight" and "loose" societies. *Transaction*, April, 37-41.

Pfaffenberger, B. (1988). Microcomputer Applications in Qualitative Research, *Qualitative Research Methods, 14.* London: Sage.

Pilling, S. (1988). Work and the continuing care client. In A. Lavender and F. Holloway (Ed.), *Community Care in Practice.* Chicester: John Wiley and Sons.

Pleck, J. H. (1981). *The Myth of Masculinity.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Podmore, D., & Chaney, D. (1974). Family norms in a rapidly industrializing society: Hong Kong. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 26*(May), 400-407.

Prather, J. (1971). Why can't women be more like men? In L. S. Fidell & J. DeLamater (Ed.), *Women in the Professions: What's All the Fuss About?* Beverly Hills: Sage.

Reskin, B. F., & Phipps, P. A. (1988). Women in male-dominated professional and managerial occupations. In Stromberg, A. H. & S. Harkess (Eds.), *Women Working: Theories and Facts in Perspective* (2nd edition). Mayfield Publishing Co., California: Mountain View.

Riley, D., & Eckenrode, J. (1986). Social ties: Subgroup differences in costs and benefits. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*(4), 770-778.

Ritzer, G., & Walczak, D. (1986). *Working: Conflict and Change* (3rd edition). Prentice-Hall.

Roberts, P., & Newton, P. M. (1987). Levinsonian studies of women's adult development. *Psychology and Aging, 2,* 154-163.

Rosen, E. I. (1981). *Bitter Choices: Blue-collar women in and out of Work.* The University of Chicago Press.

Rosenbaum, J. E. (1979). Tournament mobility: Career patterns in a corporation. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*(9), 220-241.

Rosenberg, J., Pelstadt, H., & Phillips, W. R. F. (1997). 'Now that we are here': Discrimination, disparagement, and harassment at work and the experience of women lawyers. In D. Dunn (Ed.), *Workplace/Women's Place: An Anthology.* Roxbury Publishing Company.

Salaff, J. W. (1976). The status of unmarried Hong Kong women and the social factors contributing to their delayed marriage. *Populations Studies, 30*(3), 391-412.

Salaff, J. W. (1981). *Working Daughters of Hong Kong.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sales, E. (1978). Women's adult development. In Frieze, I. H. et al., *Women and Sex Roles: A Social Psychological Perspective.* New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Schafer, R., & Keith, B. (1985). A causal model approach to the symbolic interactionist view of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48,* 963-969.

Schlossberg, N. K., Waters, E. B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with Theory* (second edition). New York, N.Y.: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.

Schwartzberg, N., Berliner, K., & Jacob, D. (1995). *Single in a Married World: A Life Cycle Framework for Working with the Unmarried Adult*. New York: W. W. Norton.

She, L. (1979). *The Chinese Women of Hong Kong: Past, Present and Future*. Presented at the Circum-Pacific Convention of I. F. U. W., Tokyo.

Shostak, A. B. (1987). Singlehood. In M. B. Sussman & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Handbook on Marriage and the Family*. New York: Plenum Press.

Simon, B. L. (1987). *Never Married Women*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Simon, R., Clark, S., & Galway, K. (1967). The woman Ph.D.: A recent profile. *Social Problems, 15*(Fall), 221-236.

Smith, R. B., & Manning, P. K. (Eds.). (1982). *Qualitative Methods*, Handbook of Social Science Methods, vol. 2, Cambridge: Ballinger.

Sokoloff, N. J. (1981). Early work pattern of single and married women. In P. Stein (Ed.), *Single Life: Unmarried Adults in Social Context*. N. Y.: St. Martin's Press.

Spencer, A., & Podmore, D. (Eds.). (1987). *In a Man's World*. London: Tavistock.

Spitze, G. D. (1978). Role experience of young women: A longitudinal test of the role hiatus hypothesis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 40* (Aug.), 471-479.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Spreitzer, E., & Riley, L. E. (1974). Factors associated with singlehood. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 36*, 533-542.

Spurlock, J. (1990). Single Women. In Spurlock, J. & Robinowitz, C.B. (Ed.), *Women's Progress: Promises & Problems*. New York: Plenum.

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*. London, UK: Routledge.

Staples, R., & Johnson, L. B. (1993). *Black Families at the Crossroads: Challenges and Prospects*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Starr, J., & Carns, D. (1972). Singles in the city. *Society, 9*(4), Feb., 43-48.

Stein, P. J. (1976). *Single*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Stein, P. J. (1978). The lifestyle and life chances of the never-married. *Marriage and Family Review, 1*, 1-11.

Stein, P. J. (Ed.). (1981). *Single Life: Unmarried Adults in Social Context*. New York: St. Martin's Press

Stewart, A. J. (1994). Toward a feminist strategy for studying women's lives. In C. E. Franz & A. J. Stewart (Eds.), *Women Creating Lives: Identities, Resilience and Resistance* (pp. 11-35). Boulder, CO: Westview.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Stromberg, A.H., & Harkess, S. (Eds.). (1988). *Women Working: Theories and Facts in Perspectives,* (2nd edition). Mayfield Publishing Co., California: Mountain

View.

Taylor, S.J., & Bodgan, R. (1984). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Method - The Search for Meaning* (2nd edition). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Theodore, A. (1971). *The Professional Woman.* Cambridge: Scheukman.

Thoits, P. A. (1986). Social support as coping assistance. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 54*(4), 416-423.

Thorne, B. (1982). *Feminist Rethinking of the Family: An Overview.* New York: Longman.

Thornton, A. (1989). Changing attitudes toward family issues in the United Sates. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51*(Nov.): 873-893.

Tilly, L .A., & Scott, J. W. (1987). *Women, Work, and Family.* Menthuen.

Toren, N. (1969). Semi-professionalism and social work: A theoretical perspective. In Etzioni, A. (Ed.), *The Semi-professions and their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers.* New York: The Free Press.

Toufexis, A. (1996). When the ring doesn't fit: Women who say no to marriage. *Psychology Today, 29,* 52-56.

Treiman, D. J., & Terrell, K. (1975). Sex and the process of status-attainment: A comparison of working women and men. *American Sociological Review, 40*(Feb.), 174-200.

Tseng, P. S. (1992). The Chinese woman: Past and present. In Li Yu-ning (Ed.), *Chinese Women: Through Chinese Eyes.* New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.

Tutty, L. M., Rothery, M. A., & Grinnell, R. M. (1996). Analyzing your data. In *Qualitative Research for Social Workers* (pp.89-110). Toronto: Allyn & Bacon.

Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Wallace, P. A. (Ed.). (1982). *Women in the Workplace.* Auburn House Publishing Co.

Walshok, M. L. (1979). Occupational values and family roles: Women in blue-collar and service occupations. In Feinstein, K. W. (Ed.), *Working Women & Families.* Beverly Hills: Sage.

Walshok, M. L. (1981). *Blue-collar Women: Pioneers on the Male Frontier.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Ward, A., & Silverstone, R. (1980). The bimodal career. In R. Silverstone & A. Ward (Eds.), *Careers of Professional Women.* London: Croom Helm.

Ware, N. C., Steckler, N., & Leserman, J. (1985). The choice of a major among undergraduate women. *Journal of Higher Education, 56,* 73-84.

Watson, R. S. (1994). Girls' Houses and Working Women: Expressive Culture in the Pearl River Delta, 199-41. In M. Jaschok & S. Miers (Eds.), *Women & Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude and Escape.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Webb, C. (1984). Feminist methodology in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 9,* 249-256.

Weiss, R. S. (1981). The study of loneliness. In Stein, P. (Ed.), *Single Life: Unmarried Adults in Social Context* (pp.1015-24). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Westwood, R., Mehrain, T., & Cheung, F. (1995). *Gender and Society in Hong Kong: A Statistical Profile.* The Chinese University of Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.

Wethington, E., & Kessler, R. (1986). Perceived support, received support, and adjustment to stressful life events. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 27* (March), 78-89.

Wilkinson, H. (1995). *Beyond Singleness: How to Make Better Relationships.* London: Marshall Pickering.

Wills, T. A. (1985). Supportive function of interpersonal relationships. In Cohen, S. & S. L. Syme (Eds.), *Social Support and Health.* Orlando: Academic Press, Inc.

Wolf, M. (1972). *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Wolf, M. (1985). The People's Republic of China. In Farley, J. (Ed.), *Women Workers in Fifteen Countries.* ILR press, Cornell University.

Wong, A. K. (1977). Planned development, social stratification, and the sexual division of labor in Singapore. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 7*(2), 434-452.

Wong, T. W. P. (1995). Women and work: Opportunities and experiences. In V. Pearson & B. K. P. Leung (Eds.), *Women in Hong Kong* (pp. 47-73). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Wood, K. M. (1990). Epistemological issues in the development of social work practice knowledge. In L. Videka-Sherman & W. J. Reid (Eds.), *Advances in Clinical Social Work Research* (pp. 373-390). Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers.

Yau, B. L. L., Au, K. C., & Cheung, F. (1992). *Women's Concern Groups in Hong Kong.* The Chinese University of Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.

Yeandle, S. (1984). *Women's Working Lives: Patterns and Strategies.* London: Tavistock.

Yllo, K. (1983). Sexual equality and violence against wives in American states. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 14*(1), 67-86.

APPENDICES

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS OF 30 SINGLE WOMEN

Personal descriptions and reflections of thirty women upon their experience of singlehood are recorded. Interviews were conducted in Chinese and then translated into English for analysis. In reading the data, the reader should keep in mind that an ethnographic present tense is used when describing the informants. The individual case studies are arranged according to the sequence in which the interviews were conducted. In order to protect each participant's anonymity, pseudonyms have been used. I have also included in the studies some of my personal observations and feelings. These are included as specific data which give the reader an awareness of how I was experiencing the process, as well as the role I was playing.

<u>Annie.</u>

Annie, aged 36, is the eldest daughter among four. She is working as an account clerk. Her duties include handling payments, invoice notes and documents. She got acquainted with me through an introduction by a social worker at the Methodist Social Centre where she has joined an activity. Before the formal interview, two prior contacts have taken place. During the interview, Annie is open and willing to share her experiences and perspectives with me. Sometimes, she is not quite clear about some questions. She also sometimes shifts away from the topic and shares more of what is for her an interesting area, such as her current job. Clarification and further probing from me are needed.

Being the eldest daughter in her family, Annie can discuss daily issues with her parents and younger sisters. She can maintain a satisfactory relationship with friends. Sometimes, she reveals that she cannot make the effort to make too many friends. Annie changed her job last year. She adjusts well to the working environment and the relationships with her colleagues are very well. When with her friends, Annie will not be the one who initiates conversation but she can get along with them in a harmonious way.

To Annie, marriage would be happy and would introduce a new stage in one's life. Generally, people think the process of life covers: to study, to work, to go into society, to fall in love, to marry, to have a baby, to take care of the children and to get a daughter-in-law. Life would not be perfect if one of these is missing. She has not chosen to be single. She just has not met a suitable person. If she cannot meet a suitable one, she considers to remain single. Even if she is married; she will not want to have a baby since her biological condition is not suitable. Anyway, she does not think that to be single will be her permanent status. She feels pressure from her mother and other relatives although it is not serious. Parents will worry about her making the wrong choice over the selection of a mate. They also worry that nobody will take care of her when she is getting old. Annie therefore tries to maintain her daily life independently in order to mitigate her parents' worries.

Annie has worked for many years. She had worked in her previous company for over ten years. She has not had any career plan. Rather, she hops from job to job as opportunities present themselves and most frequently discovers interests and capacities along the way. Job experience has been accumulated in this way. Her academic

qualifications are not high enough to apply for higher-paid jobs. If she decides to look for another job, it may take her 1 or 2 months to find a new job which may also require her to work further away from home and require more traveling time. She has given up the idea of quitting her current job because the final outcome may be the same as the current situation. Annie also reveals that she has no special expectations from her job. What she needs is appreciation and support from others. Recently, she has got recognition from the boss's wife. Although she does not have a sound career plan, Annie is good at saving for the future. When she was laid off from the previous job, she did not get herself into any financial crises.

Annie seldom feels emotionally depressed. She seems to be a stable and optimistic lady. During our meetings, she gives me a happy feeling. She has good physical health apart from problems with an old wound to her leg.

Betty.

Betty, aged 37, is the only daughter of her aged parents. She is working in a stock company. Her present job is to help clients to confirm orders. She is the breadwinner of her family. With the increasing age of her parents, Betty has to save money for them for their future. She will take account of her family's financial needs when she decides whether or not to remain single.

As the only child in the family, Betty has an intimate relationship with her parents who expect her to spend her free time with them at home. She takes an active part in ministry and she is a secretary of a working youth team. As a Christian, she admits that her religious beliefs help her to become more extroverted. She is so active in her religious circles that she cannot afford time to meet friends. She maintains contacts with her friends by telephone and plays a role as a listener. She is willing to accept help from friends. During the interview, she revealed that her friend once helped to introduce her to a new job when she was dismissed. She really found the meaning of friendship from this experience.

To her, marriage is a gift from God. If God sends her the gift, she will gladly receive it. If it is the will of God that singlehood is better than marriage, she will accept singlehood joyfully. Her parents worry about her future if she has nobody to marry. Betty agrees that she will consider getting married if she finds both parties feel good about one another. But still family's responsibility ranks as the first priority in her list of considerations. She accepts and appreciates the kindness of her friends in arranging blind dates for her. She does not feel this kind of introduction as a sort of pressure. She recognizes the good intention of friends. She would reject a man who is not willing to become a Christian.

Betty has been trading stocks in the stock company for sixteen years. So far, she has not had much job satisfaction. She will feel satisfied if she can help her clients to get a better price in the stock market. As the stock market is an exchange of money, it leads to psychological stress. Her job demands speediness and precision. She once had the intention to change her job but her academic standard was too low. She only maintains working relationships with her colleagues who gossip a lot about other people in the office. Fortunately, she can get appreciation from her supervisor and boss and she feels no stress from the top level management. Presently, she has to save money for the whole family but she does not have much income reserved for that purpose.

Due to an accidental bending of her spine, recently Betty has suffered from pains in the back and the knees. It makes her worry that she will not be able to take care of her parents in the future. Her religious beliefs do help to relieve her worries.

Connie.

I located Connie through contact with the agency where Connie is working. She is an officer-in-charge of a non-subvented agency whose main client groups are from the industrial sector. Before the interview was actually held, informal contacts had been made during which a preliminary relationship had been established. The interview was held at Connie's office. With her sincere and cooperative attitude, the atmosphere of the discussion was harmonious.

Connie is the youngest in her family. Her parents passed away when she was in high school. She has three elder brothers. She lives with her third elder brother and his family. She seldom meets either of the other two brothers. She has spent most of her life in the church where she gets lots of support. During the interview, Connie agrees that she has had different kinds of good friends during different stages of her life. She maintains a very good relationship with a primary schoolmate. She thinks that she needs different kinds of support in different areas. She realizes that friendship is mutual give-and-take. It really takes time. She has some friends who remain single and that imposes less pressure on her to get married. Religion helps her a lot to overcome loneliness in leading her single life.

Besides church members and her primary schoolmate, Connie finds friendships in her working place. She finds the job in the agency very meaningful. It offers her many opportunities for actualizing her talents and for exploring the external environment. When she discovers that her clients have matured and have changed, she experiences great pleasure. She really enjoys the work. Her job stress comes from a heavy workload, shortage of manpower and incompetence.

Connie has a positive attitude towards singlehood. To her, marriage is not a myth as it is in the "Cinderella" story. It demands adaptations in different stages, shared enrichment, mutual sacrifice and establishment. Singlehood means freedom, more room for actualizing oneself, and meeting one's ambitions. She also agrees that singlehood is more acceptable in modern society. She doesn't feel any great pressure to get married from her immediate social circle. Anyway, Connie is open to any opportunity of marriage. If all conditions remain unchanged, she keenly expects to have a lifetime partner. Nevertheless, she is confident she can live happily alone.

Having worked in the agency for 7 years, she will launch her study plan in the near future. She has decided to receive training in a theological seminary. She has confidence in accepting the challenges ahead.

Diana.

Diana's younger brother introduced her to me. An informal contact had been made prior to the interview to take place at her home. During the interview, one of her good friends visited her. As she is also unmarried, she also accepted my invitation to participate in the study. Another interview would be held later.

Diana is the eldest daughter and she has eight younger brothers. Her father

passed away and her mother is presently living with one younger married brother in the New Territories. As two other younger brothers are living in the neighborhood, Diana helps to tidy up their house in her free time. She is now living alone in a private tenement under the Home Ownership Scheme. She can maintain a very close relationship with family members. Besides family members, Diana can relate well with some friends and church members. During the interview, she agrees that she is easy-going though an introvert. She does not take the initiative to seek help. She has become more active since becoming a Christian. Religious belief has changed her personality and strengthened her support network. She meets church members quite often.

Diana was affected by the economic restructuring in Hong Kong; she was laid off from her previous factory job. She had worked in the factory for nearly 20 years. This job provided her with a stable income and she could have a trip once a year. After her dismissal in 1993, she could not find another job in a factory. With support from family members, she attended some courses and she finally has become a beautician. She presently provides facial treatment to customers at her own home. During the interview, Diana expresses her worries that she will lose her working ability. Her income is not stable. Therefore, she is seeking another job that would provide her with a stable income.

As the eldest daughter in her family, Diana has a strong maternal sense of responsibility. She is worried that nobody could take care of her eight younger brothers if she married. She reveals that she had the chance to get married in earlier years; but she turned it down after thinking about the problems of her family. She also admits that she has not seized chances to meet men. Presently, her major concern is to maintain good health and a stable income if she lives a single life. She has to earn money to cover the monthly expenses including the loan repayment for her house.

Elaine.

I met Elaine through a friend's introduction. After reviewing the Interview Guide and preliminary contact, Elaine agreed to be one of the interviewees. The interview was conducted at her working place (the church).

Elaine likes sports very much. She used to play badminton at a public park every morning. She feels energetic after playing sports. She also likes traveling but she has no spare time. She goes to the Peak or the New Territories. She lives apart from her parents but with her elder sister. For the sake of convenience, she plans to live alone in a rented apartment that is near to her new working place. She makes frequent visits to her parents. Elaine and her sibling join together to have a meal at the parent's living place once a week. She has a very close relationship with her family. Her elder sister is the one with whom she can share her innermost feelings.

Apart from family members, Elaine has a few close friends from her first church and theological seminary. If they do not have time to meet one another, they keep in touch by telephone. She also treasures relationships with primary schoolmates and they still maintain contact. However, Elaine does not have much spare time to spend or chat with friends. As she only starts recently working in her present church, she has not built up any relationship with the church members. She sometimes feels that interpersonal relationships in the church are complicated. In making friends, she finds some problems in getting along with men. She can only talk with a man who is older

or younger than she is. She has tried to overcome this, and she is making progress now.

Elaine is happy with her singlehood. She feels free being single. She can have more spare time to take care of her parents and do what she wants to do. Under the influence of her religious beliefs, she thinks that God plans marriage for her. She lets God show her the way and prepare a suitable partner for her. She hopes the partner can help her ministry. She also admits that she does not take an active role in dating and she even sometimes avoids further contacts with the opposite sex. She may have missed a lot of chances. She agrees that she faced pressure to get married several years ago. Pressures came from her family and relatives, married friends and church-mates. In recent years, she does not have much pressure nor experience any negative views about her identity as a single woman.

Elaine is a church minister. She finds she has insufficient time for her ministry. Sometimes, the heavy workload makes her feel stressed. She can get support from her colleagues.

Fanny.

Fanny got acquainted with me through the introduction of another interviewee who was her colleague in the factory. The interview was conducted at her home.

Fanny, aged 40, is the youngest one in her family. Her parents passed away. She can afford her own flat. Due to the long distance between work and home, she stays with a brother's family. She sometimes invites friends to her flat on weekends. Since her parents passed away, her siblings seldom meet together except during some festivals or special occasions. They keep contact with one another by talking on the telephone. Fanny is active in participating in social activities. In her social circle, she usually takes the first move when she first meets someone. But when she does not want to say anything, she can be very passive. She has 3 or 4 close friends. She prefers to solve problems herself first instead of asking help from friends.

Fanny reveals that she is open to marriage. She is not married since she did not get the chance. Actually, chances to meet men are limited since her work place is female-dominated. Usually, she does not take the first move to seize a chance. She once met someone who was introduced by friends. She thinks she is not attractive enough to meet men. As a single woman, she thinks that she must be independent in leading her life. She must keep herself in good health to maintain her working ability. At present, she enjoys her single life.

With primary educational standard, Fanny worked in a factory. She continued to attend evening classes. Finally, she completed Form 5 education and successfully changed to work as a technician in the textile industry. She can therefore avoid facing the crisis of dismissal as a result of economic restructuring. She can still keep her relationship with the previous colleagues in the factory. The aspect of the present job with which she feels most satisfied is its salary. She experiences stress when she has to face difficulties in her job. If she cannot solve the problem immediately, stress may increase.

Basically, Fanny keeps healthy by swimming. She always shares problems with her family and her colleagues so as to gain some insight.

<u>Gladys.</u>

Another interviewee introduced Gladys to me. The interview was conducted at her new living place. She is living alone in a self-owned apartment that she purchased under the Home Ownership Scheme.

Gladys is the youngest daughter of her mother. Her elder sister is living abroad. Gladys visits her mother once every two weeks. She always feels unhappy during the visits. She once suggested that her mother should live with her but her mother refused. To Gladys, purchasing her own flat gives her a sense of achievement. She has become more independent. During the process of buying and moving to the present abode, she felt supported by her friends, who gave her much assistance. Her friends include schoolmates and other church-mates. Gladys used to be passive in making friends and therefore her social circle is quite limited. When she was young, her parents were strict and limited her friends. She particularly finds difficulty to meet with the opposite sex. Changing her job to be an insurance agent helps to enlarge her horizon and expand her social circle.

Gladys is not married because she has not found a suitable person. She discloses that her friends have introduced her to someone many times. She still cannot find a suitable mate. She indicates that she is eager to get married. But she will get frustrated and upset after dating. She is not willing to take any initiative in the dating process. She believes the chance will come to her finally. Therefore, she will consider meeting someone through other people's introductions. She really hopes to have a man at home so that he can help to repair and maintain family appliances. According to her, people perceive unmarried women as pitiful. She feels pressure to get married even though her friends appreciate her freedom to be single. The recent marriage of her younger brother imposes increased familial pressure on her.

Gladys has undertaken accounting work in an office setting for quite a long time. She became an insurance agent in recent years. She enjoys the current job since she can expand her social circle. At the same time, she feels job pressure since the competition is very keen. She has to work hard to reach the job target. The work stress causes an imbalance of her hormones.

<u>Helen.</u>

Helen is my old colleague. When she was asked to be a respondent, she had no hesitation at all. The interview was held at her work place.

Helen is the middle child in her family. Her father and two younger brothers have emigrated to Australia. Only she and two elder siblings are living in Hong Kong. Helen lives alone in an apartment that she has purchased under the "Home Ownership Scheme". She sometimes visits her siblings. Helen agrees that she has a wide social circle and her relationship with peers is intense. Most of her close friends are her colleagues and church-mates. She meets them nearly every week. She will share her innermost feelings with these close friends. She finds no great difficulties in getting along with opposite sex friends; but she prefers to talk with those who are younger than she is.

To Helen, both marriage and singlehood are good. They have different

challenges. Marriage should be a joy. It is also a commitment that is really not easy. There is freedom as well as aloneness in singlehood. She reveals that she has lost some chances to get married when she was younger. Later, some men approached her but she found they were not suitable for her or some of them were not Christians. If she has a chance, she will not choose to be single. She particularly feels the pressure to get married when she attends the wedding party of her friends. She also feels pressure from her relatives who ask for red packets of lucky money, lai see, during the Chinese New Year. It is because lai see is only given by married people. Speaking of her opinion about people's attitude towards single women, Helen agrees that they are now more open-minded. Some women choose to be single. However, most of the people think that single women are worse off. As a social worker, Helen also feels a certain degree of pressure at work when she has to counsel a married couple or deliver a talk on marriage enrichment. She feels happy to be single but she also finds a loss in her life.

Helen is a social worker and she has been working in the present social welfare agency for over 10 years. She likes to meet her clients but finds the paper work tedious. She also feels a lot of stress when she handles difficult clients or when they are in crisis. She deals with stress by idling, shopping, prayer, sharing with God, buying her favorite food, eating a lot, and sharing with friends.

In recent months, Helen's health has been a problem. She suffers from bronchitis, flu, cold and fever, cold sweat. As she has moved to a new home, she finds purchasing furniture and decorating stressful.

Iris.

Iris agreed to be one of the interviewees after she reviewed the Interview Guide. She also suggested that the interview took place where she lived.

Iris is the youngest daughter of the three children. Her father is retired and her mother had passed away. After marrying, her elder sister migrated to Canada with her husband. Her elder brother and family are living near Iris and they spend time together sometimes. Iris reveals that she does not have many relatives in Hong Kong. Most of them are either living in Mainland China or have emigrated overseas. She has a very good relationship with her father. Among her social circle, she has frequent contacts with other church members. She meets schoolmates and old colleagues about once a year. She says that friends welcome her and her invitations always result in a good response. Recently, she wants to keep a distance from friends who cannot see things at her level. Among her peer group, she has a close relationship with two church sisters.

Iris experiences no pressure to get married from her family. In fact, there is a family history of not getting married. Her elder siblings got married in their 40s. Her father likes her to be his companion. She has not thought of marriage. She holds a positive attitude toward "singlehood". She will also be very happy if she can remain single. She finds that there are a lot of church sisters who are single and they are facing much pressure. She thinks that if she takes it easy, there will not be any pressure.

She has been working at a tertiary institute for years. She is now in the position of Research Officer. She enjoys a lot of freedom in her current job. Her job

satisfaction comes from the appraisal of her supervisor and the feedback from her students. She encounters no special difficulties arising from her job.

Iris has a positive life attitude and copes with problems in an optimistic way. Religious beliefs help her handle unhappiness. She will leave a problem for some time and light will probably be shed on it. She will share with some confidants. Most important of all, she will pray to God.

Sometimes, Iris suffers from Asthmatic bronchitis and the level of her intestinal acid is too high. Overall, her health is normal.

Janice.

I got acquainted with Janice in church. She agreed to be interviewed after reviewing the Interview Guide. The interview was later held at her work place.

Janice leads a simple life. She goes swimming and hiking in her spare time. She also likes reading and listening to soft music. She lives separately from parents but with her elder sister. Every Sunday, they meet together at the church. Janice stays with her parents during the weekend. Apart from her elder brother, other family members are Christians. They do not have much opportunity to see this brother except for their parents' birthday and the Chinese New Year. Besides family members, she has more chances to meet church members. She has more than 10 friends who are single whom she can visit at any time. If she feels unhappy, she will talk with 2 to 3 good friends. Since she has started to run her own business, she finds she meets friends less often. She is really busy at her work. However, through work, she can contact people from different backgrounds.

When I invite Janice to express an opinion on "singlehood" and "marriage", she is not articulate and needs probing. When she is asked why she is not married, she responds that the chance has not come yet. She therefore does not think about marriage. Since no opportunity arises, she has no choice but to be single. She will not take singlehood as her permanent marital status.

She runs a shop which mainly makes curtain for home use. Before that, she has been making clothes for more than 10 years. She feels curtain making is strange to her since she has not worked in this field before. With her positive working attitude, she is happy with her job. Actually, she likes both making those things and the contact with people. However, she feels it is stressful especially when she has insufficient time. In front of customers, she has to make herself patient and must accommodate and accept the customer's ideas. Moreover, she meets a certain degree of discrimination at work since there are few women working on installation of curtain rails.

Janice has a strong support network that includes her family, friends and church-mates. She can get comfort from them but she thinks that the ultimate comfort is from God. Through prayers, she can face her busy life, her work and daily problems. She enjoys sound health.

Kitty.

Kitty gets acquainted with me through a friend's introduction. The interview was held at her office. Apart from some telephone distraction, the interview proceeded

smoothly.

Kitty is the eldest daughter in her family. Except for one of her younger sisters who is married, she and her other siblings are now living with her mother in a self-owned apartment. They have purchased this apartment under the "Home Ownership Scheme". Soon after her father passed away, Kitty's family depended on social security benefits for their living. Subsequent to her graduation from secondary school, Kitty has been working to support the whole family by herself. She is a family-oriented person and she puts the welfare of her family in front of her own. She spends most of her spare time at home. She likes to be in the company of her mother. She has a close relationship with all family members. Her peer group includes past colleagues and schoolmates. Unless friends go along with her, Kitty does not join in social activities and will not go to the cinema alone. The rest of her social circle is confined to the brothers and sisters in the church. Kitty says that she has become more active since she joined the church. However, she does not want to be too busy. She therefore prefers to be with family members when she is off work.

Kitty will refer to "freedom" and "lonely" when she first thinks of singlehood. She is not married since she cannot meet the right man. She considers her family's need if she were to get married. For instance, she will wait until her elder brother finishes his studies and is doing a job with a satisfactory salary. Her mother also does not want her to get married. It is because Kitty is the most obedient daughter in the family whom the mother can trust and rely on.

Kitty has been working in her present job as a church minister for nearly 12 years. She gets general satisfaction from her job. However, she finds relationships with colleagues are her problem. During the interview, Kitty frankly shares her unhappy experience with the interviewer. She also has to behave properly when she is working in the church. Sometimes, she finds it inappropriate to share with church-mates any job frustration that is related to the church. Whenever she meets problems, she chooses to share them with family members. She also prays to calm herself down. Kitty also admits that stress will lead to her suffering from stomachache. She also feels depressed, as the muscles of her waist have been painful. She believes that she is too busy and has too little time to sleep.

Lily.

Lily met me during a gathering organized by a club. She is a member of this club that provides activities for unmarried adults. I was invited to be a guest speaker. Afterwards, Lily initiated contact with me and expressed interest in being one of the interviewees. The interview was held at Lily's living place.

Lily was born into a big family. She is the second youngest among the six siblings in her family. She is living with her elder sister in an apartment in a public housing estate. Lily has regular gatherings with her family and their relationships are said to be good. Most often, she prefers to talk about intimate matters with her elder sister. When she is upset, her family and close friends can give her support. Lily says that her social circle is getting smaller since some of her friends have emigrated to other countries. She has recently joined a group for single adults. Lily frankly admits that she wants to meet a suitable man, so she joins the group. Later on, she found someone with whom she can get along in the group. She goes with her friends to play badminton, and for hiking, singing and dancing. She sometimes goes to the

community center to do some voluntary service.

Lily has a very positive attitude towards marriage. She believes that she can share happiness and unhappiness with her spouse in marriage. On the other hand, single life can have more freedom. However, she feels lonely sometimes since she cannot get someone to listen to her. She hopes to get married but she is afraid of being hurt if she cannot find a suitable partner. During the interview, she reveals her mixed feelings about the choice of remaining single or getting married.

Lily is working as a school clerk. Her main duties are dealing with parents and doing clerical work at the school. She can manage the work and meet the job requirements. She does not feel any stress from work. But she feels stressed about the relationships with colleagues in her office. She will try to tolerate it or share it with her superior. Although her superior cannot help her and the problem cannot be solved, she wants him to know about it.

Lily is a nervous person and trivial issues easily trouble her. She will do some reading, have snacks or leisure walks to relax herself. Sometimes, she talks to those who can help her, but she does not want to disturb others. Generally speaking, she has good health.

Mandy.

I recognized Mandy through an introduction of a common friend. We had informal contact prior to the formal interview held at her working place. During the interviewing process, Mandy was open in sharing her opinions and perspectives. However, as there were some problems with the cassette recorder, the interview had to be started over again.

Mandy is the eldest daughter in her family. She has been able to afford to purchase a private tenement and she is living alone. Her parents and siblings are living in the neighborhood. Her mother often calls her on the phone. During the interview, Mandy shares her troubles about living alone. For instance, she has difficulties changing the water pipe and she agrees that a husband can help her to do all the heavy household chores. Although she lives alone, she tries to visit her family once a week. If she has a crisis, Mandy will seek help from her family.

With her pleasant personality, Mandy finds it is easy to make friends, especially with the opposite sex. She wants to make more new friends who come from different walks of life. She agrees that 3 good friends are enough. She can get support from friends. When she feels depressed, she will talk with her friends first. With her close friends, Mandy says that she can be totally herself. They can really understand her and appreciate her as a person.

Regarding her plans for marriage, Mandy says that she has no chance to meet a suitable partner. Knowing the unhappy experiences of her married friends, she has lost confidence in marriage. She reveals that her married friends often quarrel over minor events. Anyway, she still hopes to marry if the chance comes. At present, she is happy with her single life and she knows how to enjoy every moment. She will sometimes feel lonely especially when she is sick. Mandy feels pressure from her parents to get married. They worry about her being alone when her siblings have already got married.

Mandy has been an accountant for years. She has worked in the present firm for over ten years. Despite her difficulties in getting along with her superior, she is happy in her present job. She is satisfied with the present working environment and has no intention of changing to another job. When she finds something wrong at work, she will complain to her superior. However, she will share the problem with friends and seek their opinion. Also she will let herself calm down and think over the problem. She feels most stressed over work when she has to finish the annual accounts of the office.

Nancy.

Nancy approached me and agreed to be an interviewee of the study since she was interested in the research topic. The interview was held at her living place. She was told about the purpose of the study, the process of the interview and that all she said was strictly confidential. Later, Nancy read the transcript and agreed to edit it.

Nancy is the youngest daughter of her parents. She has lived alone for quite a time. She went to the United Kingdom to attend college and then to work. Nancy reveals that it is better if she lives separately from her mother. She sees her once a week or a fortnight. Nancy has a lot of acquaintances but she does not have a lot of good friends. She has found friends are those who maintain contact without special reasons. She has one very good friend whom she has known since kindergarten. Most of her friends are church members. She does not really socialize with her colleagues after work. With her apparently cool appearance, she thinks that it takes quite a while for someone to get to know her. Since she has lived overseas, she is rather open-minded and she can talk with opposite-sex friends and interact with both Chinese and Western friends.

To Nancy, marriage is a good thing and it is great to meet someone with whom she can share her life. She believes that most women like to get married. She is still open to marriage. The important things are to find someone she loves and that both parties want to make a commitment. For a woman to remain single means a life which is not complete. Nancy gets pressure from her mother to get married. According to her mother, it is really hopeless for Nancy to find anyone to marry when she has passed the age of thirty. It is not possible to get married when she is in her forties or fifties. But Nancy will not get married solely because there is a need to get married. She agrees that it is important to plan ahead financially.

Nancy is working in the Personnel Department. She has to supervise staff, and is also responsible for recruitment and handling employment benefits. Generally speaking, she is satisfied with her job performance. The only thing she does not like is the office politics. However, she does not feel any stress since she tries to stay out of politics and avoid trouble. Being in-charge of the Personnel Department, Nancy is on her own most of the time. There is no one to help her to handle the office hassles.

When something is troubling her, Nancy will talk with friends. She will face the problem and try to deal with it herself. According to Nancy, her health is good. She frequently does exercise in order to keep herself healthy.

Ophelia.

Ophelia agreed to be an interviewee after an introduction by a colleague. The interview was later held at her work place.

Ophelia is the eldest daughter and the only one who is living with her father. All of her siblings have married and live apart. Her family members get together and have dinner only on her father's birthday or during some festivals. She says that her mother was an important binding force in the family that helped to bring all the members together. Since her mother passed away, they seldom see one another. Ophelia's social circle is limited, includes friends from the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and her work colleagues. Ophelia has been a team member of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade for 20 years. She usually joins with her friends to go traveling and hiking. She can get along with her colleagues in a harmonious manner. She is not the kind of person who would approach others and befriend them. She describes herself as self-reliant so that she seldom depends on friends to work out problems.

Ophelia enjoys her single life very much. She perceives that one is free from bondage and stress from the family in singlehood. She has prepared herself to be single. But she will consider getting married if she meets a suitable partner. Relatives have put pressure on her to get married but this seems to be less recently.

Ophelia's job is a therapist assistant in a residential home for the elderly people. She has been working at the present job for thirteen years. She is so satisfied with the job that she gives job satisfaction full marks. She understands that she cannot find another job as good as the present one with her low educational qualifications. Sometimes she feels fatigue at work, but she tries to manage it by going swimming, watching television, and doing relaxation exercises.

When she finds something that troubles her, Ophelia shares this with her friends. She will also put aside trouble for a moment so that she can relax and look for solutions. Ophelia takes care of her health. She always goes swimming. She is healthy so she always has a smiling face.

Pauline.

Pauline is my fellow church member. Prior to the interview, she has been briefed about the purposes and the areas to be discussed. The interview was held at the church on a Sunday. During the interview, Pauline was open in sharing her perspectives and experiences of being a single woman.

Pauline is the youngest daughter in her family. She has long been under the protection of her family. She lives separately from her parents with one elder sister who is also unmarried. She visits her parents every weekend. Besides her family, her social circle also includes friends from her church and job. She usually chats with her colleagues or schoolmates after work. She also joins in church activities and ministry. In addition, she enjoys talking with her elder sister and visiting her parents. Whenever any needs arise, she can approach her friends and family members for assistance. Even though they cannot offer her substantial help, their listening and emotional support has helped to resolve her unhappiness. At work, she can get along with some of her subordinates in a harmonious way.

As a Christian, Pauline believes that God makes marriage for people. She says that marriage is perfect if there is respect, love, acceptance and unity in God. It would be fine being single if one has not yet found a loving companion. She believes that whether she marries or not depends on firstly opportunity and secondly, choice. To get married, she should firstly get a chance to know a man. Then there comes a chance for her to appreciate him. The second consideration is whether she chooses him or not. Pauline agrees that she will not marry just because she wants to get married. She says she does not get any pressure from her family to get married. Two of her elder sisters remain single and all of them are the financial providers in the family. Her mother thinks that a woman should not be dependent on a man. It is important for a woman to earn a living herself. If marriage cannot bring joy and happiness, her mother prefers her and her elder sisters not to get married. Pauline plans for her future and to become more independent in order to ease her parent's worries. The sources of pressure that she has comes from her friends, her subordinates and the church members. They perceive that it is better for her to be taken care of by somebody. To cope with singlehood, Pauline has to develop other relationships so that her needs to be taken care of can be fulfilled. She has to learn how to tolerate the feeling of loneliness.

Pauline has been a nurse for many years. She is now working in hospital as a ward manager. Her job satisfaction comes from the cooperation of people. Her ambition of caring for others can be achieved through her job and this is what satisfies her most. Stress comes from her boss who offers little support and help. She feels that middle management is really a tough job. She tries to bridge communication between her supervisor and subordinates. If problems arise, she will calm herself down or seek advice from friends. The most important strategy is to pray to God. As she gets older, Pauline finds herself becomes weaker and less healthy.

Queenie.

I met Queenie through an introduction by one of her colleagues. During the initial contact over the phone, Queenie was open to being interviewed. I interviewed her at my home.

Queenie has a big family of six siblings. She lived with her sister's family, but recently, she has moved and lives alone. Her mother visits her sometimes and stays with her. Queenie reveals that she has a close relationship with her family; they meet every weekend. Her family will provide practical help when she needs it. For instance, they helped her to move to her present living place. Queenie has friends from university and work colleagues. Most of them are schoolteachers as she is. She finds it easier to have a common topic to talk about. When she feels upset, she can talk to her close friends who provide her with spiritual and emotional help. Queenie can get along with her colleagues in a harmonious way. Her colleagues often show verbal appreciation of her and her work. However, Queenie says she is often too busy to meet friends since she has to finish her work on Saturday and Sunday.

To Queenie, to marry or not is a matter of fate and chance. She will consider getting married if she meets the right person. But she would not mind being single forever because she would rather not get married if the guy was not the right person. She would not get married just because she has to get married. She does not feel any great pressure to get married. Her students care about her and always ask her whether she feels lonely living alone. In their minds, getting married is the best thing and it should be her best choice. However, she accepts her identity as a single person. She

feels free, comfortable and has less worry being single now.

Queenie is a teacher in a secondary school. She has been working in the present school for seven and eight years. She has recently taken up the work of student guidance. Generally speaking, she is satisfied with her present job. She is most satisfied with the working environment. Getting together with students makes her feel younger. She also gains satisfaction from a sense of security in the cooperation of her enthusiastic colleagues. However, conflict in the office is inevitable. The work of students' guidance is tough and she cannot provide adequate support and teaching for the students. The new extra duties induce considerable stress in her. She tries to relax.

When she feels upset or distressed, Queenie finds it is not easy to manage her emotions. She prefers to go to see movies or read a book. After she calms down, she would share the problem with her best friends and seek their advice.

Rose.

Rose got acquainted with me at church. After Rose changed to another church, contact was still maintained. Rose showed lots of interest in being one of the interviewees after she knew about the study. The interview was held at my living place.

Rose is the third child of the four in her family. She has been living apart from her parents for about ten years. She is now living in a private tenement that she purchased. She visits her parents every Sunday afternoon. Her social circle is confined to her work and church. She has only 2 or 3 friends, who know one another intimately. Rose says that she is passive in making friends. Knowing her introverted personality, her friends always take the initiative to make contact with her and to show their concern for her. She is also shy in making friends with the opposite sex. She says that she does not take the first move to talk with a man. She does not want to have any misunderstanding. Most of her friends are women. Rose has a good relationship with her colleagues, especially those of the same sex. In the office, she always jokes with her colleagues.

Rose thinks she has difficulty in getting close to men. She will consider getting married if she finds the one she loves. Single life provides her total freedom. But she also feels lonely. She may feel a sense of self-pity on special days such as Valentine's Day, Christmas, Mid-Autumn Festival and birthdays. In her family, except her elder brother, the other two daughters are also single. Her mother has not put any direct pressure on her to get married. But she also expresses worries over her marriage in front of other relatives. Some of her colleagues tease her and say she is an old maid. As most of her friends are single, she gets almost no pressure from them. If she meets her former classmates, who are all married, she feels much more pressure. Sometimes, she thinks most pressure comes from herself. She is afraid to face the reality of growing older.

Rose has been a secretary in a big firm for more than a year. She finds the workload is heavy. Since she has no understanding of the nature of the job of the firm in which she is working, she is afraid to make mistakes. She does not think she does her job very well and thus she feels stress. As her boss is busy with his work, she has to handle problems by herself. She enjoys good relationships with her colleagues.

When she has worries, she will ask for help from others, including her friends, colleagues, or even her boss. Sometimes, she will simply ignore the problems if there is no solution. If she has nobody with whom to share the problem, she will pray for it.

Rose has recently had some physical problems. They include swelling of her fingers, suffering from nerve pain, German Measles, and influenza. She constantly seeks advice from doctors and a physiotherapist. She worries about her health a lot.

<u>Susan.</u>

I met Susan at a wedding banquet. Susan is my secondary schoolmate. After briefly introducing the purpose and the content of the interview, Susan agreed to be one of the interviewees. The interview was held on Saturday at my work place.

Susan is the youngest one in her family. She is now living with her father (mother passed away) and one elder sister who is also unmarried. Other siblings who have married do not visit them frequently. Her relatives are living quite far apart and so they seldom meet together. She says that she meets her friends more often than her relatives. Susan does not have a wide social circle and most of her close friends (schoolmates and colleagues) are single. A few of them are living in the same neighborhood and they often pay visits to one another. She never makes conscious attempts to have more friends because she has a very busy life and most of the gatherings are arranged during weekends and are mainly gossip sessions. She can find someone to help her whenever she gets into trouble.

Susan agrees that the main factor in getting married is whether she has met the right person. She took a "wait and see" attitude before the age of 35. But now she is approaching 40, she is quite restless. At her age, all the men in the same age group have got married. She is feeling that the chances of getting married are becoming less and less, nearly becoming zero. She will accept her singlehood as her permanent status. To her, singlehood means freedom and less hesitation when making a decision on any moves. Singlehood does not necessarily mean loneliness but one will develop an independent character and be capable of dealing with problems. She does not experience any pressure to get married. She thinks whether pressure exists or not depends on how one sees things. Basically, some women feel pressure because they are scared of being asked the question about marital status repeatedly. But she is feeling okay about that and this is the truth. She does not feel there is anything wrong about not getting married.

Susan has been working as a secretary and recently has changed to be a personnel assistant. The present company is dealing with construction which is something completely new to her. Her boss leaves all matters to her without any definite directives. Then she will be annoyed and feels very depressed. Pressure comes from all directions but it gives her challenges. When she can solve problems, she is relieved and proud of herself. In the work place, she finds that relationships with colleagues are very good although it is only a collaborative and working relationship.

She will face problems squarely and take a positive attitude to handling them. She will seek opinions from her friends. When there is a problem at work, she will approach the business associates for assistance. She will not blame herself or her working ability.

Due to her heavy workload and the many documents she has to read, Susan says that she has been suffering from dry eyes for two to three years. It is uncomfortable, and even painful at times. She is now receiving treatment to improve this. She easily gets tired after a whole day at work. Therefore, she has to take leave and travel abroad in order to regain her energy.

Tirana.

Tirana is my old colleague. She had no hesitation in accepting an invitation to be one of the interviewees of the study. She was interested in the study. By mutual agreement, the interview was held at my office. During the interview, the conversation was interactional with mutual sharing between us. The atmosphere was harmonious.

Tirana likes both indoor and outdoor activities such as reading, seeing drama or dances, and playing badminton and swimming. She is the only daughter who is still single in her family. She is living alone in an apartment in a private tenement. She visits her parents every weekend and stays with them until Sunday. She will then join the Sunday School at the church. Since her siblings got married, they seldom meet together. Their relationship is said to be harmonious. Most of her friends come from church and the work place. She participates actively in the church. Her church-mates are kind enough to remember her needs in their prayer. Her old colleagues are her best support. She will also have lunch or dinner with one or two friends who were her schoolmates in primary school. Tirana thinks that she has got enough friends but she still tries to find a "life-long committed" friend. As she has a very busy life, she finds it is difficult to maintain contacts with friends. It is necessary for her to make extra effort.

Tirana describes the word "single" as staying alone and having many things to do. She is still single because she has not found her significant other to whom she can commit herself. In considering being single, she thinks choice and opportunity are interrelated. She thinks it is easy for her not to be single. She can easily meet someone. But she may not accept that man. There is a choice. But she does not get the opportunity to meet her true love. She sees singlehood as a transition. She has to make good use of this period. Tirana also perceives that people accept singlehood as one of the options. But they still think it is better to get married. Regarding the future, Tirana says that she will be very lonely. Therefore, she has to establish her relationship with friends who are her source of support.

Tirana has been a social worker since her graduation. She is now a social work supervisor. She gains a lot of satisfaction from the job since her superior has given her the opportunity to actualize her potential. On the other hand, she is experiencing stress from the job itself. She finds insufficient time to finish her work. She has to deal with many trivial things as well as the mass media. When she feels stressed or distressed, she will write it down and pray to God. She also finds it helpful to share with her friends.

In recent years, Tirana has had some physical problems. Two tumors had been identified in her uterus and a small operation undertaken. She was also identified as suffering from anemia. However, she can still remain calm and her religious beliefs have helped her a lot.

<u>Yolande.</u>

A common friend introduced Yolande to me. We met together in a church gathering and Yolande reviewed the "Interviewing Guide" before the formal interview took place at her office. Yolande was interested to know the scope and the work schedule of the study. I explained the details at the beginning of the interview.

Yolande has a wide variety of interests and hobbies, such as reading, swimming, and jogging. It is not easy to have friends to come with her, so she usually goes alone. She spends most of her spare time at church joining the fellowship meeting and other church ministry. She is presently living alone. She does not have a close relationship with her parents, siblings or indeed other members of the extended family. Instead, she takes an active role in making friends and maintaining contact with them. She also enjoys a harmonious working relationship with her colleagues. She also tries to make an effort to cultivate a better understanding among her Christian brothers and sisters at her work place.

Yolande frankly says that her wide social circle can help her to enjoy single life a lot. On the one hand, singlehood offers her a lot of freedom and she, being a Christian, can do more of God's work. On the other hand, she has to deal with many practical problems if she continues to live a single life. For example, she reveals that she has to handle leaking taps or car tyres. At the present moment, she has not considered being single in the long run. She will get married if she meets a suitable person.

Yolande is a senior inspector. She has been working in the police force for 12 years. She is very satisfied with her job. She remarks, "My present job is so good that I cannot find another." She especially likes the job rotation in which she can meet different people and attempt different posts. She has worked in different sections during the previous years. This has provided her with continuous training and opportunities to learn and meet different people. In the present job, she is mostly satisfied that she has finished a big project. Her recommendation and advice have led to the promotion of her subordinates. However, she will feel stressed if she has to finish some tasks alone in a very short period of time. Something, which comes from uncertainty, will create a lot of stress for her. Yolande can bear the work stress. She has not suffered any physical problems.

Yolande reveals that she likes to adopt a positive attitude in coping with difficulties. When she has problem at work, she will seek advice from her superior or other colleagues. She will also talk about it with friends and pray to God to solve the problem for her.

<u>Vera.</u>

I met Vera through an introduction by an unmarried woman who is also an informant. The interview was held at her home and her elder sister, who is blind, also joined in the conversation some of the time.

Vera has an aged mother and an elder sister. With her increasing age, her mother has moved to live in an old people's home. She returns home for some time during the week. Her elder sister is blind and she has to stay at home. She earns a living by working as a private tutor. Her elder brother committed suicide by jumping from a

height.   Vera meets the sister-in-law's family at church every Sunday.   Although her elder sister is blind, she can help Vera to analyze situations.   Her elder sister makes remarks like: "Two heads are better than one.   My sister has a cool head."   Mainly Vera shoulders the whole family responsibility.   She does not feel unhappy taking care of her aged mother and blind sister.   In fact, they have become her incentive to work harder.   Generally speaking, she has a good relationship with family members.

Apart from her colleagues, Vera seldom meets friends.   She does not have many friends.   She explains that she and her friends have grown up and they do not have the need to pour out their innermost feelings or grievances to others.   During the interview, she shares an unhappy experience when she has made friendship with someone.   This unhappy experience has made Vera doubt the value of spending time with friends.   She finds it difficult to find a friend to whom she can reveal her innermost feelings.   She sometimes goes with her friends to activities such as concerts.

Vera does not expect to be single until her death.   A matchmaker once introduced her to a man.   But she would let nature take its course.   She thinks that men might have different expectations in the course of making friends.   They intend to meet a suitable lady and get married.   Therefore, this will create a barrier to her making friends with men.   She also admits that her needs to take care of her mother and sister may prevent men from approaching her.

Vera is working in a hospital.   She is responsible for checking the ECG (Electric Cardiogram), cleaning the breathing apparatus and tidying up.   With her hardworking attitude, she has taken on the duties required by a higher rank.   However, she receives the same salary.   She likes to meet a variety of patients and talk with them.   However, the great demands of her job make her feel stressed.

Since she starts to go to the Catholic Church, she finds that religious beliefs help her understand herself more.   She can take a positive problem-solving attitude to handle any difficulties she encounters.

Winnie.

I know Winnie through an introduction by her cousin who is also a single woman. She prepared for the interview beforehand.   With her consent, the interview took place at my living place.

Winnie comes from a big family.   Her parents, seven siblings and herself are all living in the same flat in a public housing estate.   She is the fifth child.   She was born and brought up in a boat family where daughters are supposed to be respectful to family. Winnie respects her mother very much.   She helps to do the household chores and takes care of nephews.   Among family members, she claims that she has the closest relationship with her mother.   She has an outgoing personality and finds no difficulties in getting on with friends.   People call her "Adult Child".   She used to go traveling and hiking with friends.   Since her present job requires shift duty, she finds it difficult to meet friends.   Most of her friends are married and have their own families, but she maintains contact with these old friends.   She can share with them and seek help from them.   However, she is unhappy and fed up with the gossiping of some friends. Therefore, she prefers to stay at home after work.

Winnie is open to marriage. She is not avoiding marriage but she just has not met a suitable person yet. She says that to be single is not good. If she gets a husband, she can share her heart with him and she can depend on him when she is old. But she feels that it is much more difficult to find a partner now. Her mother is becoming anxious about her future plan of marriage. Her close relationship with her mother is also a reason for her to remain single. Since she always stays with her mother and nephew, she misses the chance of dating or getting to know boyfriends. But she can not let her mother stay alone at home.

Winnie, after working in factory for a long time, has changed to take up a cleaning job at a residents' club. She has gained no satisfaction but considerable pressure from the job. One of the problems she encounters is that she cannot communicate with the customers because of the language barrier. She tries to solve the problem by using body language. With frequent contact, she and the customers become friends. However, she likes a job that can provide her with a stable income.

Winsome.

Winsome is my old colleague. She did not show any doubts about accepting my invitation to be one of the interviewees. She was open in sharing her experiences as a single woman. The interview was held at my living place.

Winsome was born into a large family. She is the middle child. Presently, she is living with parents and two younger sisters. Since her mother suffers from the effect of a stroke, her siblings visit her every week. 10 and more of them will visit on a roster every Sunday because her handicapped mother needs their care. She believes that the family relationships have improved in the last two years. However, she seldom joins the gatherings of other relatives since she does not feel like mixing with the crowd. Winsome is very active in church activities. She is responsible for preparing the sacraments at Easter, Christmas and retreats. She also brings the news about the church from the minister to the church members, the elderly and the sick on a voluntary basis. Apart from getting together with family members and church friends, she meets the friends she knew 20 years ago.

Winsome has missed a chance to get married in the past. She will wait for a second chance and get married. At present, she enjoys being single. She can have a lot of free time to keep her parents company. She has a strong sense of obligation to take care of them. Some of her friends do not understand why she still remains single. She is used to this response and waits for another chance to come.

Although she has been working as a telephone operator at her present company for thirteen years, she expresses a lot of dissatisfaction. She is not happy with the job but it is difficult to find another. She finds the job monotonous and her colleagues not friendly enough. Looking ahead, she is worried about changes in her job. She lacks confidence in her working ability and is concerned whether her salary is high enough to support the family's expenses. She feels it is a bit of burden caring for her aged parents.

Religious beliefs have helped Winsome to cope with the problem. Being a Catholic, she can talk to the Lord and share all her worries with Him when she is distressed. She believes that He will show her the way and guide her in every trouble. Sometimes she will share her sadness with her friends and family members.

In recent months, Winsome has had some trouble with her physical health.   She failed a blood test for 'qi' a month ago indicating a deficit.   She suffers from frequent headaches and dizziness and is anxious about irregular periods caused by age.   She is now receiving treatment.

<u>Anna.</u>

Through the introduction by a colleague, I approached Anna to invite her to be one of the interviewees of the study.   An informal meeting was conducted prior to the formal interview.   After reviewing the interview guide, she agreed to be interviewed at her office one evening.   Both of us talked easily during the interviewing process.

Anna spends her leisure time on swimming, bicycling, and roller-skating.   She also likes to attend plays, operas, musicals, and concerts, and to listen to music.   She is also busy attending some courses after work.   She is living with her mother and one younger brother.   Her two other siblings are married and currently living abroad.   She tries to have at least one meal with her mother and younger brother each week. Although the three of them seldom talk, they have a good relationship.   Her closest friends are her three university schoolmates and church-mates.   She can tell them almost everything and get support for her frailties and wounds.   She can also count on them for emotional support.

Anna prefers marriage to celibacy.   Chance is the key factor leading to her singlehood.   She will probably remain at this single stage.   Therefore, she must remain as healthy as possible.   She should also enlarge her interests.   Presently, she receives no pressure about marriage since her friends and church fellows are either single or married but keep telling her not to rush into marriage.   Her mother also does not put pressure on her.   The only source of pressure originates from herself.   In fact, society holds an ambivalent attitude towards the single women.   It is known that women nowadays are very career minded, and very independent.   They serve a function to a certain extent.   But somehow, it is still thought that a woman with a husband is proper.

Anna was a social worker, but now is a solicitor.   The most satisfying part of her work is the diversity of the tasks and having done cases well.   As the work is highly pressured, it demands much time and energy.   The work pace is fast and she feels high tension.   She is overworked but the wage is not high enough for her to have extra money to buy things.   She has to learn to cope with financial insecurity.

Whenever Anna has a problem at work, she has to work and solve the problem independently.   If it is really bothering her, she will go swimming, take long bike trips and listen to good music.   She will pray to God.

Recently, Anna finds her back pain is on the increase.   She has consulted a chiropractor.   Her left knee is also painful.   Also, she is really tired so that she will fall asleep anytime.

<u>Betsy.</u>

Her old friend introduced me to Betsy. The interview was finally held at my office in between Betty's tight schedule. The first time, I forgot to turn on the cassette recorder and felt deeply apologetic at causing Betty inconvenience.

Betsy is the eldest daughter in the family. After completing Form 6, she started to work to support the family. At present, she is living with her parents and three younger siblings. There is strong cohesion among family members; all of them sit down together for dinner on Saturday nights. Besides her family, her social circle includes her colleagues, 2 or 3 old schoolmates and 10 or more former colleagues of different generations. They normally keep in touch regularly by phone. They will prepare simple snacks and get together at someone's home when there are celebrations, such as a birthday or a newborn baby shower. Betsy likes to make friends with people with different careers. However, she finds it is very difficult to make friends with the opposite sex because they may think that their aim in making friends with a girl is to develop as a courting couple and then a married couple.

To Betsy, marriage is a destination of one's life voyage. Being single is being free and unrestrained. She is unmarried because she has not had a lucky coincidence. She will not hesitate to choose marriage, but she is prepared to be single. Her family members have been putting much pressure on her. She tries to show them that she is all right, so there are no grounds for them to force her to make that choice. In fact, her mother is gradually learning from her friends, relatives, neighbors, the TV and the newspapers that marriage is no more a 'permanent free meal ticket' for women. There is no life guarantee for a marriage. Her mother gradually accepts the idea and says to her, 'All right, if you choose to remain single, I'll respect your choice!' Betsy enjoys being single at the present moment.

Betsy is working as a merchandiser in the garment trade. She is so busy that she often travels to cities in Mainland China or Asia. She is in a minority in the workplace since most of the colleagues are male. She enjoys the autonomy of her job. The agency she is working for has confidence in its staff to carry out their duties. She also enjoys working in a team. The real difficulty she has encountered in her work is perhaps how to deal with interpersonal relationships. She tries to avoid having any rivalries with colleagues since this can cause stress. Generally speaking, the job provides her with both challenges and satisfactions.

Betsy finds most of her worries come from her job. She will put them aside and not think about them. She never brings her worries over work home. She will have a good sleep and very often she will think of a solution to the problem. She will also chat with a friend at night and from what insights will usually emerge.

<u>Clara.</u>

I met Clara after being introduced by a third party and she agreed to be one of the interviewees. The interview was held at her office (a dental clinic) during her lunch time. At the beginning of the interview, Clara appeared anxious about the process of the study. I spent several minutes explaining the details to her.

Clara is very busy at work and with church activities. She likes playing ball games, swimming, reading and writing drama scripts and calligraphy. In her family,

she is the eldest daughter. All her siblings have been married and she is currently living with her parents. The relationship is said to be fine. She gets support from them in every aspect. Most of her friends come from her church and some of them are her colleagues. Most are Christians. With her outgoing personality and sociable manner, she thinks that she can make friends easily. Since her professional field is male-dominated, most of her colleagues are male. Her relationship with them is satisfactory, but she does not share much personal information with them; the contacts are only for business.

Clara thinks that she does not marry because she has had no chance. She is happy and satisfied with her present condition. She feels free to do everything she likes. But sometimes she may feel lonely. It would be good if she could find a partner. She is open to marriage. Her family puts no pressure on her to get married. The only source of pressure comes from herself.

After she finished her professional training, she has begun to take up dentistry as her occupation. She has been working for over 10 years. Although the job is often very pressured, Clara really enjoys it and has a strong sense of satisfaction. In her present job, she can meet people from different backgrounds and communicate with them. She gets the greatest satisfaction when she discovers that after the patients have received the treatment they wear a big smile on their faces. When sometimes a good treatment does not yield the best result, Clara will feel pressure. Furthermore, there is financial stress. The running cost of a clinic is very high and she has a large expenditure every month. Competition is keen because there are a great many dentists in Hong Kong. When the workload is light, she will be tense. However, the conditions are often out of her control. As she is a single person, she will not have a serious economic burden. Her siblings have the economic ability to support her parents.

If something is bothering Clara or worrying her, she will analyze the whole matter first. She will also ask her friends for their opinions. She will also pray with them. Her hobbies such as playing the piano or playing ball games and other sporting activities, watching TV, and listening to music help her to release her stress.

Generally speaking, Clara is in good health except she sometimes has bronchitis or coughing. She suffers from insomnia in the hot summer.

Daisy.

Daisy is my secondary schoolmate. After meeting at a wedding banquet, Daisy agreed to be one of the interviewees of the study. The interview was held at my work place.

Daisy's life is simple: going to work and leaving work. If she is available, she will have lunch with friends. In her spare time, she usually makes phone calls, watches TV and reads books or magazines. Daisy is the youngest daughter in her family. She is living with her parents. Her second elder brother and his family are living very close to them, just upstairs. Her eldest brother and his family will visit them once or twice a week. Actually, they often meet because of business. Most of her friends are schoolmates or are abroad. As she is not very active, she has only a few friends and they are female. She will share her innermost feelings only with her sister-in-law and one or two friends. She does not believe she needs many friends.

One or two confidants will be enough.

To Daisy, marriage implies responsibilities and love, whereas singlehood refers to freedom and boredom. She believes that "fate" is a very important factor in why she is not married. She has not planned to be single. But she will not feel sad if she has no chance to marry. Some pressures from her relatives exist to remind her to get married. But she feels that the pressure becomes less, as she grows older. Some other people think it would be better if she had a partner. For her, being single can mean having more time to accompany her parents.

Daisy works for her father who runs a trading company. She has been working at the present job for about eight to nine years. The work pressure is not great and she need not work for the whole day. She feels bored with the family members because they usually talk about the family business whenever they come together.

If something is bothering or worrying her, Daisy will calm herself down and control her emotions. She will watch TV to think about the problem or even go to sleep. Mostly, she does not like to talk to others. She thinks that some problems need to be solved by her. She does not want others to know much about her. If she really wants to chat, she will look for somebody to do so with.

Daisy says that she has nothing wrong with either her physical or psychological health.

Elsa.

Another interviewee introduced Elsa to me. They attend the same church. For the sake of convenience, the interview was held at the living place of my sister. Elsa appeared a little bit anxious at the beginning of the interview. After several minutes, she began to become more relaxed and openly express her views.

Elsa is at present living with her parents and younger brother. Her 4 elder sisters and 1 younger sister have been married. She has the best relationship with her fourth sister; her relationship with the others is fair. Her social circle is limited because she cannot locate her friends after she came back from England. Most of them have immigrated to other countries or moved away. She needs some time to settle down. She also has a fair relationship with her friends. At work, she is the only person under her boss. She trusts her very much. Her other colleagues are part-time instructors. They seldom have time to meet one another because they need to attend classes. If she was trapped in a crisis situation, Elsa could ask for assistance from her elder sister and her friends.

Elsa feels that there is much more time, space and freedom in singlehood. She can do what she wants to do. It also allows her to equip herself, to heal herself psychologically, and to grow fully. Elsa will not choose to be single. However, for the time being she has not met the person to whom she can get married. If she meets someone whom she thinks is suitable for her, she will get married. She does not feel any pressure toward getting married although her mother and elder sisters arrange some dates for her. Most of her friends are single.

Elsa teaches children how to draw pictures. She has a strong sense of responsibility toward the job and she always designs and adjusts the curriculum to suit

the children's needs. She is happy when she sees the active and kind responses of children. She is amazed when she discovers their unexpected creativity. She is also pleased when the children draw pictures at home and talk about her. Yet, she feels quite tense when she takes the entire burden of being a full-time teacher. She is exhausted. She cannot bear her troublesome boss who has no knowledge in art. Sometimes, the children's parents are over-demanding and some students are too little to handle the drawing.

If something is bothering her, Elsa will remain silent and walk around in order to think up some solutions. She will pray continuously and sing hymns. If she is in a dilemma, she will try to talk to her friends. Since she is nervous during the daytime, she has sleeping problem. She suffers from bronchitis, a nose allergy, and periodontal disease.

Fiona.

Fiona was introduced to me through our common friends and the interview was held at her friend's living place.

Fiona was born into a big family. At present, she is living with her parents. Her siblings return home for dinner once or twice a week. Her father does not like to go out for dinner. As for her friends, most of them are in the same trade as she is. They go for dinner once or twice a fortnight. According to Fiona, it is quite easy for her to make friends with others. She can keep a friend's secret and therefore they are in tune with one another. Those close friends often give mutual assistance to one another. They can also pour out their innermost feelings to each other. All of her close friends are married and they still spend time together. They sometimes take the initiative to ask her to come out to have fun with them, for example, if their children's examinations are over, they will ask her to come out with them.

To Fiona, to marry is to settle down whereas to remain single is to be free. She does not want to get bound up. She has been leading a free life since infancy. Fiona is satisfied with her present condition and she has never planned for marriage. At the same time, Fiona cannot say for sure that she will remain single throughout her life. She hopes that she can find a life companion later. Pressure to get married however comes from her aunts. She feels very annoyed when she frequently hears those words. She will talk less with them.

Fiona worked as a sales supervisor in a fashion shop until recently she quit the job. She had held that post for more than eight years. She could enjoy a high degree of freedom in her work. The company that she worked for was quite relaxed in staff management. As she was related to the boss, she could enjoy privileges. Moreover, when she had a good working performance and made money for her boss, she felt satisfied. However, she would feel dissatisfied when her boss turned a deaf ear to her advice on the design of the clothes. In the sales shop, she would come across some unreasonable customers who always picked fault intentionally. She quit her job because her boss' business failed and the shop closed down. She really wanted to take a break and relax. When the interviewer asked her whether she would rejoin the trade in the future, she said it depended on the employment conditions. If they were good, she might rejoin the trade.

When she is upset or in difficulties, Fiona will do her best to solve her problems.

If the problem is not a serious one, she will lock herself in a room and listen to music. Several hours later, she will be all right. If the problem is a serious one, she will find someone to pour out her feelings. Generally speaking, her health is all right except for common diseases such as colds and laryngitis.

INTERVEWING GUIDE　面談指引

I am a Ph.D. student in the University of Bristol, I am now conducting a study naming "The Working Single Women in Hong Kong and their Experience of Stress". Thank you for your participation in the interview, as your opinions will be valuable to the study and other single women.

I guarantee that all your personal information will be kept strictly confidential. Please feel free to give your opinions and answer the questions.

您好！本人現在正進行一份博士研究論文，題目是："香港勞工單身婦女及其所面對的處境"。謝謝閣下答允接受訪問，我相信您的意見，一定對這份研究及其他單身婦女有所裨益。

閣下所提供的資料，一定絕對保密，敬請自由分享及作答。

I. Social Life　社交生活
1. How do you usually spend your free time?
   你平時如何消磨空閒時間？
2. What any things else do you do?
   除了上述以外，你還會做其他事情嗎？
3. Do you have any other hobbies?
   你有沒有其他嗜好？
4. Are you a member of any social clubs and/or organizations?
   你是否是任何社交團體／組織的成員？

II. Social Network　社會網絡
1. What is your current living arrangement?
   你平時的居住安排如何？
2. If living alone, how often do you get together with relatives?
   若獨居，你多久與親戚相聚？
3. How often do you get together with friends?
   你多久與朋友相聚？
4. Do you have as many friends as you want, or would you like to have more friends?
   你是否有足夠的朋友，或者你喜歡有多些朋友？
5. Is it easier for you to have friends (same-sex or opposite sex)?
   你覺得自己容易結交朋友（同性或異性）嗎？
6. How many friends do you have whom you could visit at any time, without waiting for an invitation?
   你有多少朋友是你在任何時間都可以探望，而且不需要事前得到對方邀請？
7. Whom can you really count on to listen to you when you need to talk?
   當你有需要傾談時，有誰你可以真正值得信靠的？

8. Whom could you really count on to help you out in a crisis situation?
   你遇著危機時，有誰你可以真正信賴，並且去接受對方的援助？
9. Whom can you count on to console you when you are very upset?
   當你感到情緒低落時，有誰可以給你安慰？
10. With whom can you totally be yourself?
    跟誰在一起，你可以成為真正的自己？
11. Who do you feel really appreciates you as a person?
    你覺得誰會真正欣賞你，因為你是你？

III. Perception to Marriage & Singlehood　　　　對婚姻及單身的觀感
   1. What is the first word(s) that comes into your mind when you hear the word "married"?
      當你聽見「結婚」一詞時，你會馬上想起甚麼詞彙？
   2. What is the first word(s) that comes into your mind when you hear the word "single"?
      當你聽見「單身」一詞時，你會馬上想起甚麼詞詞彙？
   3. Why are you not married?
      你為何不結婚？
   4. Do you consider that you are single by (i) choice; (ii) chance; (iii) circumstances beyond your control?
      你考慮單身，是基於(i)選擇；　(ii)機會；　(iii)控制範圍以外的？
   5. Do you think that being single will be a permanent status for you?
      你是否想過單身會是你永久的身份嗎？
   6. Do you feel any pressures toward getting married?　If yes, what are they?
      你是否對結婚感到有任何壓力？若有，是甚麼？
   7. How do you usually do?
      你日常會做甚麼，處理這些壓力？
   8. As you were growing up, did you and your friends talk about marriage? What was said?
      在你成長的階段，你有否與朋友談論過婚姻？有關甚麼？
   9. How do you feel society regards single women?
      你覺得社會如何對待單身女性？
   10. How do you feel society regards you as a single woman?
       你覺得社會如何對待你這樣一個單身女性？
   11. How do you feel about yourself as a single woman?
       你對自己作為一個單身女性，有甚麼感受？

IV. Work　　　　工作
   1. What kind of job are you doing?
      你是做甚麼工作的？
   2. How long have you been working in the present job?
      你做這份工作有多久？
   3. Take into consideration all the things about your job, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with it?
      綜合來說，你對現在的工作滿意還是不滿意？程度如何？
   4. What things do you particularly like about the job?
      你對現在的工作，最喜歡是那方面？

315

5. What things do you not like about the job?
   對於工作的那一方面你是不喜歡的？
6. Have you ever had any problems with your work?
   在工作上，你曾否有任何困難？
   a) If yes, what was that about?
      若有，是關於甚麼？
   b) What did you do about it?
      你如何去應付？
   c) Did you go to anyone for advice or help about it?
      你有沒有向任何人諮詢意見或請求幫助？
   d) If yes, whom did you go to?
      若有，是何人？
   e) How did it work out?
      你最後如何解決這些困難？
7. At work, have you ever felt discriminated against because you are single?
   (Probes: hiring, salary, promotion, invitations to work-elated activities, etc.)
   作為一位單身女性，你是否在工作上遇到任何歧視？
   （提示：聘請、薪金、升職、被邀請參加與工作有關的活動等）

V. Coping Strategies　　　　　　　　應變的策略
If something is on your mind that is bothering you or worrying you and you do not know how to do, what do you usually do?
若你有煩擾或令你擔憂的事情，你通常會採取甚麼行動？

VI. Physical & Psychological Health　　　　　　身體／心理健康
In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?　If yes, what are they?
(Probes: trouble sleeping, nervousness, shortness of breath, hands sweating, heart beats hard, etc.)
在過去一個月，你有否在身體／心理方面有任何毛病？若有，是甚麼？
（提示：難於入睡、精神緊張、呼吸急促、掌心出汗、心跳加劇等）

VII. Demographic Characteristics　　　　　　背景資料
1. Age or age group (within 5 years)
   年齡或年齡組別（五年之內）
2. Place of birth
   出生地點
3. Number of siblings
   兄弟姊妹數目
4. Birth order
   出生排行次序
5. Education
   教育程度
6. Religion
   宗教信仰

INTERVIEW WITH BETSY

- How do you spend your leisure time?

- I am very fond of reading (remark: solitary pursuit) and have had that habit since I was a student. We can borrow books from public libraries without this costing us a penny. Once I have a book in my hand, I will be wholly absorbed in it and the time will fly very easily. I often travel abroad for business by air and reading is a good way to while away the time in a journey. I am interested in all kinds of books such as novels, martial arts fiction, prose; comments on current events, travel guide books, etc. I can even read through each page of a monthly magazine for credit card holders. Sometimes, when I have a picture in my hand, I can have a good look at it from different angles. One point I would like to mention is that I have a strong preference for Chinese books. This is because my English standard is up to Form 6 level only and I understand that I have a long way to go if I want to master the language well. However, in my years, if one could attain Form 6 education, it was really not bad and I worked hard to achieve this level because at that time, my family's financial situation was not good. After I started to work, though I knew that my academic qualifications were not so high, I didn't seek further studies because my attention had been diverted to work and I couldn't concentrate on studies again. Yet, I did try to force myself to read English books. I went to the Swindon Book Centre to buy some simple English storybooks to read. In the end, I found that English books could hardly be as attractive as the Chinese books. For me, no matter how difficult the Chinese books are such as verses, ditties, odes and songs - the four forms of poetry, I can understand them. I don't mean that I can't understand English books. The point is that I lack the patience to finish reading them while I often wish I could have such patience.

- Other than reading, how do you spend your leisure time?

- I'll go on sightseeing trips. Having worked hard for years, it is necessary to go on a pleasure trip to relax. When I was in Form 6, my family's financial condition was very poor and I made a promise to both my mother and myself that one day, if I went out to work, I would look after my family well. So, after I started work, I gave the lions share of my income to the family for household expenses. It is not until quite recently that I have saved some money and I'll visit other countries if I have holidays. By doing so, I can, on the one hand, have an understanding of the customs and practices of other countries. On the other hand, I can temporarily put all my work in Hong Kong aside. I needn't remember which day of the week it is when I am on holiday. The only thing I need to remember is the date of my return flight to Hong Kong. So, going on pleasure trips is a good way to relax and while away the time.

- Have you joined any social organizations?

- No, I haven't.

- Earlier on, you mentioned your family. Do you live with your family?

- Yes.

- Your parents? And, who else?

- Yes, I live with my parents and my six siblings including one elder brother, three younger brothers and one younger sister.   My elder brother married ten or so years ago.   He has one daughter who is now studying Form 1.   One of my younger brothers, who is the fifth child in the family, also got married.   He has two children and one of them is newly born.   The rest of my siblings are unmarried and we live together with our parents.   In another words, I am now living with my parents, two younger brothers and one younger sister.

- Your elder brother and one of your younger brothers are married.   Do they pay visits to their parental home weekly?

- Yes, they do.   It's an unwritten rule in our family that no matter rain or shine, we'll sit together for dinner on Saturday nights.   Even when my sisters-in-law were pregnant, they came to our home for dinner on Saturday nights.   If any of us really can't attend the dinner, we will inform the rest well beforehand.   When we sit together for dinner, we talk of everything or organize family gatherings to celebrate our parents' birthdays or for our own birthdays.   We'll take those opportunities to sit together for dinner, throw parties in my brothers' homes, have outings, go out to take photos, etc.

- Shall we go back to our talk on friends?   How often do you meet your friends?

- I have seven friends whom I meet quite regularly.   The eight of us worked for a factory 11 years ago and we were colleagues.   However, we all quit our jobs within one year of each other.   In spite of that, we still keep in touch.   It happened that the birthdays of the eight of us fall into four different months in pairs.   Hence, we have at least four gatherings a year to celebrate our birthdays.   Like little children, we send birthday cakes and gifts to one another.   When we got to know one another, we were young girls.   Now, 11 years later, most of my those friends are married.   Some of them even have two children.   Yet, if any of us needs help, the rest will all be there to help.   Among those seven friends, some of them are friendlier with me.   I'll also have non pre-arranged meetings with them, for example, if I got two complimentary tickets for a film, I'd, on the spur of the moment, phone my friend and ask her to go for the film with me.

- Other than those seven friends, do you have any other good friends?

- Yes, I have two old secondary schoolmates.   We were Form 6, graduated in 1978 and have known one another for nearly 20 years.   One of them is married.   She immigrated to another country some time ago but after she had gained citizenship of that country, she came back to Hong Kong.   Now, I still keep in touch with her. She sometimes phones me during office hours to have chats with me.   Yet, what we chat with each other about are trifles.   This is because she has her own family and she spends most of her time on her husband and her children.   Yet, she still does her best to snatch a little leisure from her busy life to spend a Saturday or Sunday afternoon with me to reveal her innermost feelings to me.

- Do you wonder whether you have enough friends or not?

- Well, I have quite a lot of friends and more than ten of them can be regarded as my good friends. If you ask me if I have enough friends or not, my answer is that all comers are welcome. All my good friends are female. Perhaps because I am unmarried, I found that it was very difficult for me to make friends with opposite sex because they might pre-set an aim in their minds that the reasons they are making friends with a girl is to develop into courting couple and then a married couple with her. In order to prevent married guys from getting into trouble, they can hardly develop their friendship with you. I understand this and would not force any people to do anything against their will. The friends, whom I mix well with, such as my seven friends, were all in the garment trade in the past. Now, some of them are married and have become housewives, one of them has changed her job and became an insurance broker and some of them have opened their own shops and became proprietresses. The majority of them are still in the garment trade. In fact, I also very much want to make friends with people who are not of the garment trade because that could help me to understand the lives and experiences of people in other trades.

- So, you in fact very much want to make friends with people from other circles. Is this the reason why you can easily get on well with others?

- I think so.

- No matter whether they are your colleagues or friends of different sex?

- Yes. However, since I am unmarried, I can hardly have heart-to-heart talks with friends of the opposite sex. For me, to gossip with them on trifles whilst having dinner is perfectly all right. After the dinner, we'd say good-bye to each other and that's all. God knows when the next dinner will come. My field is dominated by men. Perhaps, as we are often required to work outdoors, preference has always been given to boys when offering employment. Hence, the relationships between my colleagues and I are merely that of colleagues. Our talks are confined to the work only. When we go out for dinner after going off duty, we chat about the TV programs, the current news or the speeches given by the four top SAR Chief Executive candidates. Yet, I could hardly reveal my innermost feelings or my inside world to them.

- Is it correct that you will reveal your personal matters to friends of the same sex but not to those of the opposite sex?

- Yes.

- Why is it that you can only pour out your innermost feelings to friends of the same sex?

- First, we have known one another for a long time. They know my personal background and style of living well. They know when I will be busy and when I will be free. They know when I will be available to come out to dinner or for gatherings. We understand one another very well because of our long acquaintance. Things have changed a lot in these ten years. Ten years ago, we were all innocent girls. Now, ten years have passed and we have become mature and sophisticated women. Though we didn't spend each of our days with one another, any major events or changes that happened to us within the current year could easily be spread

and heard among the rest. They know all my happiness and unhappiness. I feel relieved in getting along with them. If something good has happened to me such as getting promoted or having pay rise, I'll inform them at once. If I have been scolded severely by my boss for my failure in doing business resulting in the company suffering a loss of a hundred thousand of dollars, I'll pour my grievances to them as well. I can have heart-to-heart talks with them not only about my personal things, I can also tell them what has happened to members of my family. I also have a clear picture about the background of their families such as how many siblings they have, what their occupations are. Hence, I can free my heart to them.

- Is that of any help to you? To take an example, if you come across any difficulties or are drawing to a crisis, will you seek help from those friends?

- I think if I want to ease my anxiety, I'll go to them. However, if I come across any financial difficulties, I'll first resort to my family for help instead of my friends. This is because I often see good friends turn hostile to each other over money. No matter how long you have known a friend, 10 years or 20 years, once there are disputes over money, the friendship will turn sour. For the family, this is different. This is because they know why I need the money and what crisis I am going to solve with that sum of money. If they have confidence in me and are willing to support me, they will lend the money to me. I can't imagine how I can tell my friends the amount of money I need to ease the crisis, which is often the cause of misunderstanding. Anyway, I believe that one day, if I really encounter difficulties and need someone to ease out my anxiety, my friends will surely help me.

- That is to say, once money is involved, you have reservations because you think that good relationships between friends are often damaged by money disputes. Well, when you are in low spirits or depressed, with whom will you have a heart-to-heart talk? Will those people listen to you? And, can they console you?

- I think I'll go to one or two of my those seven friends. When all the eight of us sit together, our chats often fall on some general topics. Privately, we all know who are friendlier and communicate more often with each other. So, if I really want to reveal my innermost feelings to somebody, I won't phone all of those seven friends but only one or two of them whom I am more congenial with. Besides, I have an old secondary schoolmate. Yet, she can't be mentioned in the same breath as my other seven friends. I got to know her when we were in secondary school. At that time, we were very young. We grew up together and waited for life to start. Though we experienced quite a lot of things together, after leaving school, she went on her own journey of life and I embarked on mine. The routes we took are different. She doesn't like my seven friends who came from the same field as mine. Sometimes, people might ask how I could have such a long chat with my friend. They wonder what we were talking about and how our talks could last so long. I needn't mind what other people think of us. I can even stay overnight to have a heart-to-heart talk with my friend. I listen to her experience and she listens to mine. She can reveal anything to me such as love romance, happiness, unhappiness, etc. At the same time, I can reveal my bitter or happy experiences to her. We can share our feelings with each other. We feel easy in revealing our innermost feelings to each other.

- You are willing to have heart-to-heart talks with your friend because first, you trust in her and second, she is willing to listen to you.

- Yes, I trust in her but after all, I am just a small potato and what I reveal to her is not newsworthy.   I needn't worry that she'll make my private life known to the general public and cause a scandal.

- Yes, I agree that we are not newsworthy.   Nevertheless, we wouldn't tell things to a person whom we didn't trust in because this will very often tell what you've told them to a third party inadvertently.

- Yes, I agree.   However, I've known my friends for a very long time and this is not the first time I have revealed my innermost feelings to them.   I've had heart-to-heart talks with them before.   They are tight-lipped about my secrets and will not reveal them to other people.   So, I feel relieved to reveal my innermost feelings to them.

- Do you feel that you are your actual self when you are with those friends?

- Yes.

- Which of your friends do you feel really appreciate and understand you, your actual self?

- I can have this sort of feeling when I am with all my seven friends.   We often sit together to chat.   Normally, we meet two to three times a month.   When we sit together, we'll share our feelings and tell one another what has happened to us recently such as A might say that she was going to marry next month and B might say that she got pregnant.   We feel relieved to chat with one another and will not hide anything.   We have no need to plan the topics beforehand, nor do we need to mince our words before we say anything.   What we need to do is to find a place, usually, it is one of our homes, now we seldom have our gatherings in a public place because most of them have children they have to take care of them, so it will be inconvenient to them if our gathering is held in public.   We'll sit comfortably on a sofa or even on the floor to have a good chat with one another freely.   I know that I am quite welcome among my friends.   Perhaps this is because I am the kind of person who calls a spade a spade.   So, when they come across any problems, they often come to me.   Though we are of more or less the same age, I have accumulated more experience than they have.   I can analyze the situation or solve the problem for them if they need someone's help or advice.

- Do you mean that you are playing the role of an elder sister among your friends and they will come to you if they need advice?

- They say that I am not the kind of person who can easily mix well with others.   I will not treat new friends very warmly, nor will I give my phone number or make appointments with people whom I recently got to know.   I am the kind of person that if my friends want to make friend with, they have to go through the test of time. People who know me well say that I am often willing to help.   If it is within my capacity, I will do my best to help my friends without concern for personal gain or loss.   For example, my colleagues know that I have been in the garment field for more than 10 years, sometimes, when they come across something that they do not

understand about garment work, such as how a shirt is made, they will come to consult me. It's always my pleasure to teach them. However, I understand that some people might not think like that. They fear that if they teach them, the pupil will excel the teacher. Yet, I don't think like that. I think that if you know about something, why don't you teach others? If you fear that the pupil will excel the teacher, this is merely due to your incompetence in work. Hence, I am somewhat like an elder sister in my friends' minds.

- And, you are very helpful, too.

- Yes, provided that it is within my capacity. If the people who seek help from me are my colleagues, especially the inexperienced ones, it's my pleasure to give a helping hand to them.

- Perhaps our talk on friends is a little bit confused and there are some overlaps. It's time for me to review it. In fact, you have quite a lot of good friends such as your old secondary schoolmates and your seven friends and they are very congenial to you. And, you are very eager to make new friends. Earlier on, I asked you how you could so easily make friends with other, didn't I? The answer is that you are a woman of wide experience and you can start a talk with a friend easily.

- Yes, this might due to the reason [why it is easier to have friends] that I am interested in all kinds of books. Another reason is that, no matter how busy I am, I read the newspaper every day. If I have time, I will read through the supplements, too. If I am busy, I will at least glance at the main features no matter whether they are of local news, world news or movie stars. Besides, there are always gossip-type TV magazines at my home and I occasionally take a look at them. I can use those materials to start a talk with my friends in social gatherings. In fact, the topics of talks in social gatherings are very limited. They either fall on TV stars or TV programs or the people around us. Since I am not the kind of person who likes to speak about others behind their back, I would rather our talks fell on some common topics than other things. In fact, TV programs are a good topic for social gatherings because it is part of our living. When we sit with our friends or colleagues for dinner, which at least lasts for an hour, if we don't talk about TV stars or TV programs, what else can we talk about? We can't keep speaking ill of our boss throughout the dinner. Another point is that I am not the kind of person who speaks with reservations. Of course, I have to weigh up with whom I am speaking. If the people I speak with are my business friends or my colleagues, I'll talk with them on matters, which we all have a common interest in. Of course, I won't reveal my private matters to them. However, if the people I talk with are my good friends, I can talk about everything with them, even my sentimental affairs.

- In fact, you are a person with strong initiative and an open character, but you only open yourself to others selectively?

- Yes, indeed I am. Perhaps, I should attribute this to my work. In the past, I had to go to China at least one day a week for work. Sometimes, I had to spend a night there and didn't come back to Hong Kong until the following day. Since it was a business trip, there were no companions and I had to go alone. I'd spend the time reading during the journey. When others see you choose a window seat, board the plane alone or they simply judge from the luggage you carry along, they

can easily guess that you are on a business trip and not sightseeing or visiting relatives. In fact, the world is very small, it is especially true if the destination you are heading for is not a big country. I remembered that on one occasion, I flew to Liaoning, which was rarely visited by Hongkongers, for work. When I boarded the plane, I could learn about some passengers by their face. I nodded to them and started to chat with them. From the chat, we learnt that we were in fact heading for the same destination for work. What was different was that he/she was of Company A and I was of Company B. Then, we had a good talk with each other over work. After we had got to know each other, we exchanged the addresses of our hotels and invited the opposite party out for dinner. If you are a person with introverted character, under such circumstances, you'll feel very lonely. I am not that kind of person and I don't care much about trifles. I opine that if I could find someone to dine with, we could have a good chat with one another on trifles. Some of them might have been away from Hong Kong for a number of days and during the dinner, they would ask you about the recent news and the weather in Hong Kong. By doing so, we could while away a night easily. When the following day came, we would say good-bye to one another and head to our own destination country. That's the way I conduct myself in society. I've seen some lone wolves before. They can completely turn a blind eye to others. Well, we can't deny that is a good way to protect oneself but I am not that kind of person.

- I think that's all for our topic on friends.

- Well, what are your opinions on being married and unmarried? What's in your mind when you hear the term 'marriage'?

- Marriage is a destination of one's life voyage. Being single is being free and unrestrained.

- Why aren't you married?

- I think it's due to my lacking a lucky coincidence.

- A lucky coincidence is a chance by which people are brought together. Have you ever had such a chance?

- Yes, there have always been chasers around me. Yet, I don't know why my love romance often falls short of success at the last stage. I had a very agonizing experience in the past in that my boyfriend died in a traffic accident. Perhaps I was greatly affected by that incident. From then on, the boys whom I got to know could only be my friends but never my lovers. I also very much want to know why my love affairs are often just one step short of success.

- It seems that you have quite a lot of experience. Have you ever thought of being single throughout your life?

- I hope I won't be. Yet, I have prepared for the worst in that I might remain unmarried all my life. However, if one day, the luck of bringing lovers together falls on me and I were fortunate enough to grasp that luck, I would choose marriage.

- Will you resist marriage?

- No.

- Even in old age?

- No.   Perhaps that luck won't come to me until I am 50, then, let me start my love romance at 50.

- Have any people put pressure on you to marry?

- Yes, the pressure comes from my family.   When I was in my 20s, my family did give me a lot of pressure.   All along, my family knew that there were chasers around me.   I had phone talks late at night and my family could easily guess that the callers were my chasers because my tune and my manner of speaking were completely different from my chats with those who were just my ordinary friends. My family could easily observe the difference.   My family knew that I had never stopped dating boys.   Yet, I never brought them home to introduce them to my family because I thought that if success was not in sight, I shouldn't give any false hope to my family.   My parents are old-timers.   They think that marriage is a route that a woman must take and there is no alternative.   Yet, I have constantly instilled the idea that nowadays, marriage is not the only way for women to secure true happiness.   I gave an example to my parents, 'One day, if I got married but if my marriage were not a happy one and I were return home to pour my grievances to you, it would surely be a great bother to you!   Or, if I quarrel with my husband day and night over the matter of divorce, this would surely make you lose face.' My parents are very concerned about face-saving.   They press me a lot on the matter of marriage but I just try to escape reality.   My mother used to go to Wong Tai Sin Temple to pray and draw divination sticks for me on the first day of the Lunar New Year.   The divination sticks she drew for me were often the auspicious ones.   She felt very strange and asked me, 'In spite of the fact that the divination sticks I drew for you are auspicious, you fate on marriage is still gloomy.   Why is this so?'   I said, 'The message that the auspicious divination sticks bring to us is that I have no need to suffer the bondage of marriage.'   After I was over 30, I often asked my parents if I was not good enough.   I asked them if I was a burden to them if I was not married.   Or, if they really wanted me to leave the parental home. My mother said that she didn't mean that.   Yet, she said that marriage was a destination of one's life voyage and this was especially true for women.   As the time passed, I told her that I had my own plan.   I asked her not to worry about the matter too much.   At the same time, I tried to divert her attention from me to my younger brothers.   I told her it would better for her to ask my brothers to marry. My mother is a very traditional woman who is characterized by having a strong preference for boys.   It is fortunate enough that she has four sons.   She began to shift her target.   My family once arranged a blind date for me.   I was completely unaware of it beforehand.   After I came to know about it, I just dismissed it with a laugh.   To be frank, she really wants me to take that route.   In my parents' mind, I am a very independent girl.   From school to work, they have not had to worry about me.   I studied hard when I was little.   After leaving school, I decided on my own occupation.   I have always been a good child.   What I mean by 'a good child' is that I made rapid success in both my studies and career.   Every month, I give ample domestic money to my family on time; I have never failed in doing so. They needn't worry about me.   I have given them the impression that I often act independently without seeking company.   Women nowadays are different from those of my mother's generation.   My parents are more than 60 years old and I

can't communicate with them very easily. I can only have a good gossip with them on trivial matters but never my innermost feelings. They can't understand that point. In their mind, I am a very arrogant person in front of my friends and my mother says that this is my vital weakness as that will frighten the boys away. Yet, I have no need to make any explanation to them. After I turned 30, I analyzed a number of factors. On the one hand, I diverted her attention from me to my brothers. On the other hand, I showed to them that I am all right, so there is no ground for her to force me to make that choice. In fact, gradually my mother learns from her friends, her relatives, her neighbors, the TV and the newspaper that marriage is no longer a 'permanent free meal ticket' for women. There is no life guarantee for marriage. She gradually accepts the idea and says to me, 'All right, if you choose to remain single, I'll respect your choice!' She can't do anything with me.

- This is all because she can't do anything with you. But after all, she wants you to have your own family. That's what she wants, isn't it?

- Yes.

- Other than your family, did you feel pressure from any other people?

- I really don't feel pressure from any other people.

- How about yourself? Have you given any pressure to yourself?

- It's very strange. I am in fact not young. However, perhaps I have a baby face, I never feel that I am so old! It in fact depends on how you see the matter. I can mix very well with my colleagues who are only in their 20s. I have no generation gap with them. I can work and spend my leisure time very happily with them. Unless I reveal my age, no one can guess it correctly. I often say to myself, 'I am no fact not so old.' Hence, I don't feel much pressure from myself.

- When you see that most of your friends are married, will you feel some pressure?

- Yes, most of my friends are married and have their own children. Yet, from my chats with them and from observing their daily living, I dare to say that it is just 'the pot calls the kettle black'. I agree that they have their own happiness but I have my own freedom. I feel that they had the same kind of worries as my mother. They said, 'Now, though you have six siblings and you are on very good terms with them, one day, when you get old, you will feel very lonely. No matter how kind your brothers, your sisters-in-law, your nephews and your niece treat you, they will never be as good as your own children.' However, when I think deeply on the matter, even if I have my own children, will they treat me the same way I treat my parents? Nowadays, the new generation and their parents are often far apart from each other and they have their own way of living. When I look back at my friends who are married, I, on the one hand, will admire their happiness, but on the other hand, I can see that their family burden is very heavy. Then, I am satisfied with my present condition. You might say that I am in fact evading responsibility. Anyhow, I can now do whatever I want and go wherever I wish. At least, when I work overtime, I do not need to rush home to take care of my family. Sometimes, when I see my colleagues work overtime for only one hour, they will be burnt with anxiety. They'll worry that they can't go to the market in time to buy ingredients

for dinner and that will result in their family having canned food for dinner. Or, they'll worry that their husbands will blame them for failing to prepare a pot of good soup for the family. I do sympathize with them in their family burden.

- Yes, I agree. You said that your mother gave you a lot of pressure on the matter of marriage when you were in your 20s and you have told us how you dealt with the pressure. Well, do you still feel this pressure now, or has the pressure diminished or dissipated?

- The pressure still exists but it is getting smaller and smaller.

- When you come across the pressure intermittently, how do you deal with it?

- My mother has stopped arranging blind dates for me. When we sit together for dinner, our talk will not habitually focus on that matter anymore. However, on some occasions, such as Lunar New Year, when our relatives visit us and when they notice that you were still in your parent's home, this means that you are still unmarried. Then, they say to my mother, 'Well, haven't you let your precious daughter marry? Are you loath to part with her?' We all understand that those are beautified words. They of course would not say directly that I couldn't find a husband. When my mother hears those words, she feels that they were satirizing her and she is very unhappy. Then she pours her grievances to me saying, 'I really don't understand your thinking, the thinking of a modern woman. In my opinion, nothing is better than a happy marriage. When you get married, you will have someone to depend on. When you feel sick, at least someone will go with you to see a doctor and you needn't be alone.' She would say things like that. On some other occasions such as my parents' birthday dinner, we would invite our relatives in Hong Kong to come to take part in the dinner. When the relatives meet, they ask the same question again. Or, when booking tables for dinner, my mother asks, 'Will you come in a pair?' I reply, 'Of course not. However, if you reserve two seats for me even if I come alone and I only need to present one gift, I won't mind.' I could only answer her in such a humorous way. I can only jokes in response to these kinds of questions from my parents. I can never reveal my innermost feelings to them. My siblings and I can make jokes about my parents. Sometimes, my brothers call my mother 'fat pig'. My mother doesn't mind that. Yet, we can hardly reveal our innermost feelings to them. I can only hastily wind up the matter in a humorous way.

- If you have a face-to-face with her about the matter seriously, it might take you a long time. She might not understand what you say?

- Yes, I agree. I did try to explain it to her. I said that I didn't mean that I didn't want to marry but all along... I have been trying to find my life companion ever since I went out to work. Now, it has been more than 10 years since I started working, how can I explain it to her. My mother is a very nervous person. I remembered that neither my elder brother nor my younger brother brought their girlfriend's home to introduce them to my family until they decided to marry. After they had planned everything, they said to us, 'I will invite a girlfriend home for dinner this Saturday.' Then, we all understood that the girlfriend he invited would be our future sister-in-law. It came as we expected that they began to organize their marriage after the dinner. Since the family pressure was so great, I would not easily bring a friend home for dinner. I feared that they would

326

misunderstand that the one I brought home for dinner was the one I was going to marry. That would make both my friend and me feel embarrassed. I dare not do it.

- So, you gradually learnt to deal with the matter in a humorous way or hastily wind it up. You don't even mind their words?

- No, I don't mind. At the beginning, when I heard the words like no one wanted me, I'd feel a little unhappy. But now, I am completely insensitive to it. Perhaps the following is another reason. I have a sister who is four years younger than me. When she was in Form 5, she got a hydatoncus on her leg. She was going to sit for HKCEE in May and when she discovered she had the disease, it was already January. The doctor said that it was just a hydatoncus and was nothing serious. He asked my younger sister to go to the hospital for an operation after the HKCEE was over. The operation was conducted in Queen Elizabeth Hospital. It was not until my younger sister had the operation that it was found that the tumor was not just a hydatoncus but a hybrid tumor, which would relapse often, and there was no radical cure for it. In the following few years, she had a total of six operations on her leg. She suffered a great deal of pain in every operation because the wound was so big. After the sixth operation, she was admitted into Kowloon Hospital for recuperation where she spent six months. She received physiotherapy and practiced walking in the hospital. Every time when she practiced, I saw her suffering a lot because the wound was so big and the operation was of such large scale. When my sister was about to undergo her sixth operation, she got to know an orthopedist at the Po Leung Kuk organization, which she worked for. The orthopedist told my sister that the tumor was sticking to her bone and there was no radical cure for it. He suggested my sister have the bone affected amputated as that could reduce the chance of relapse. Yet, even though she was willing to have her bone amputated, the doctor still could not guarantee that the disease would not relapse. It has been more than 10 years since my younger sister underwent her first operation. As a result of numerous operations, some tendons had been removed from the instep of her foot. There is a long scar on her leg and she is a little bit lame in that leg. However, if a person does not know the ins and outs of the matter, he can hardly observe my sister's defect. Since the doctor told my sister that her disease would relapse at any time, she resisted making friends of the opposite sex. She once had a boyfriend who got along very well with her. My sister frankly told him that she had contracted this disease. She said that she would not marry him because if one day, her life was taken away by the disease, he would be left alone in the world and that's not what she wanted to see. Furthermore, the doctor couldn't guarantee that the disease would not be inherited to her offspring. My sister has undergone so many operations and I once quit my job to keep her company.

- Do you mean the reason why you choose to remain single is to look after you sister?

- No, I don't. There is no promise between my sister and me. Even if I got married, I would not treat my sister as a stranger and turn a blind eye to her. I remembered that I once fell head over heels in love with my boyfriend. Then, one day, my mother said to me worriedly, 'I don't know when you will marry, nor do I know what your future plans are about, I hope you will look after your sister. No matter how strong her character is, she is merely a girl. Besides, even if her brothers treat her well, we can't guarantee that her sisters-in-law will treat her well,

too.   After all, you two are sisters, I hope you will look after her.'   I replied my mother in a playful way; 'She does not need anyone to take care of her.'   At that time, I was just in my 20s and my mother had not yet urged me to marry.   My younger sister is quite an introverted girl.   Perhaps because of her disease, she is more reticent than I am.   Yet, she is very clever and has learnt all the strong points from my mother such as cookery, knitting, etc.   In fact, I have to rely on my sister to cook food for me.   I have borne my mother's words in mind.   That's another reason why I am not in a haste to find a husband because I tell myself that even if I can't find a husband, my younger sister will be a companion to me.   That's why I exert no pressure on myself to marry.

- I see.   I think this is one of the reasons.

- Yes, I agree.

- Well, let's go back to the topic of remaining single.   What do you feel are other people's views on unmarried women?

- Well, they become more open-minded on this issue than they were.   In the past, if you were over 30 and not yet married, they would say that you are a spinster. Luckily, I have never experienced that from others before despite the fact that I have gone out to work for so many years.   Sometimes, I asked my friends who mixed well with me if I had given them an impression of being a spinster.   They said, 'If you don't tell, how can others know?   Furthermore, nowadays, the world has changed.   Our working ability has gained recognition from others.   Our circle of living has been widened.   Our behavior is not peculiar.   The reason why people called unmarried women spinsters in the past is that they did not open themselves up to others.   Eventually, they drove themselves to the tip of a horn, coupled with the fact that they lacked marriage to enliven their lives, so they became peculiar.'   I have no such feelings.   I have some friends who are more or less the same age as me and are still unmarried.   When we get along with each other, we feel perfectly all right.   Hence, I really don't feel much pressure now.

- Do you feel other people take a distorted view of you?

- No, I don't.

- They won't classify you as a spinster, will they?

- No, they won't.   I really don't get this feeling from them.

- Well, being an unmarried woman, what is your feeling about being single?

- The advantage is that I can enjoy freedom and need not shoulder any burden.   Yet, in the dead of night or when you are in a weak position, you want a companion, no matter whether he is any good or not.   A friend ultimately is a friend.   Sometimes when you phone friends up, they are either too busy to answer your call or not in. Once when I rang up a friend, she said that she was feeding her baby and she asked me to phone her again half an hour later.   When I phoned her later, she said that she was lulling her baby to sleep and she asked me to phone her again thirty minutes later.   But after a whole hour, I was not in the same mood to chat with her. However, if you have a companion, whenever you want to pour out your feelings,

at least he will be beside you.   Of course, it's up to him whether he really listens to you or not, but at least you can instantly find someone to pour out your feelings to.

- Yes, I agree very much with you.   Well, let's go back to your job.   What is your occupation?

- I am in the garment trade.   I hold a post of merchandiser, others might call it a purchaser, nevertheless, and it's just a title.   We are the front-line people who contact and deal with a customer.   When a customer has an idea of a garment he wants, he will tell us.   Then, we'll follow up the matter with him.   He can simply give a design to us and leave the rest for us to do such a decision as what kind of clothe is suitable for the manufacture of the garment, what accessories are required, etc.   Then, we will prepare a sample for him.   If he thinks that the garment has great potential in the market, he will place an order with us.   On receipt of the order, we will purchase dress material and make arrangements for factories to manufacture the garment.   Our work is very diversified.   They call us the engine of a train.   We are the people who deal with the customer directly.   On receipt of the order, the work will be split into different working procedures which are taken up by different departments such as the design department, the material department, the manufacture department, etc.   When the goods are ready and due for delivery to customers, we need help from some other departments to go through the documentation.   Our responsibility is to follow the whole business from the beginning to the end, i.e. from the time we receive the order until we collect the money from the customer when the goods are ready.   Though some working procedures are not dealt by us, if anything goes wrong, it's our responsibility to contact the customer and discuss the matter with him to seek a solution.

- This is to say, if the customer has any dissatisfaction, s/he might contact you.

- Yes, the customer only knows us.   He doesn't know our colleagues in other departments.

- In another word, your responsibility is quite heavy.

- What's more, I have been specially assigned to deal with the orders for outerwear, which are usually loose and big in appearance, cotton or down-lined, and long. We also deal with colorful and fashionable sports wear which requires the combination of different kinds of cloth in the manufacturing process.

- It's not an easy job!   At the very least, you have to be very familiar with the properties of different kinds of cloth.

- Yes, we can learn by eye in what way a garment should be treated when cleaned and ironed.

- How long have you held this position?

- I have held this position for half a year but I have been in the garment trade for 16 years.

- All in all, are you satisfied with your job?

- Generally speaking, I am satisfied with it. Yet, the repayment is small.

- How many marks do you give your present job on a scale from 0-10?

- Seven.

- What are you most satisfied with? Why are you interested in this job?

- Our work is teamwork. Earlier on, I explained how a garment is manufactured and you can understand that our work can hardly be accomplished by the effort of a single man. I am very satisfied with the members of our team. Some of them are very young but some of them are older than me. Yet, we get along well with one another. That's a major factor why I am willing to continue to serve my present company. I have been in this trade for so many years and I dare say that nothing in it can baffle me. To me, the most difficult thing is how to co-operate and get along well with people. Another reason is that the company I work for is a large organization. It [the organization] has confidence in its staff in the execution of their duties. If you are competent in your work and have such a capacity, the company will let you handle the work with full powers and without any constrains [job autonomy].

- What are you least satisfied with?

- What I am dissatisfied with is that in the past two years, the market has been very poor. The company, which I worked for in the past, closed down and I was laid off. My previous job was different from my present one. The company, which I worked for in the past, was a trading company and I had no need to look into each working procedure. However, the company I work for now is a manufacturer and I have to go into details for every minor procedure which is already beyond the scope of my work of ten odd years ago. Now, I have to pick that up again. Besides, since the market is poor, I received higher pay for my previous job. The company which I now work for can't offer me such pay.

- You have had to start from the beginning again, well, will your past experience be counted?

- It won't be uncounted. However, the company which I now work for is rather mean over its employees' salaries. There is not a standard pay scale for our job. Yet, we roughly know what post receives what salary in the market. I held the post of "Senior" in my previous company. When I joined my present company, my boss said that there was no post called "Senior" in his company. He said that even if your qualifications were very good, he would not offer an employment to a new comer to fill a so-called "Senior" post. Instead, you have to accumulate a number of years of service and outstanding performance to gain promotion. Nevertheless, he admitted that my qualifications were good so he could at most offer me a post, which was one rank lower than what we called a "Senior". He also said that he had already offered me the maximum pay for that post and I understand that he has not gone back on his word. However, since I had already reached the post of "Senior" a few years ago, I now have a feeling of somewhat having been demoted.

- Have you encountered any difficulties in your work?

- The company, which I work for now, is very large-scale and I need to deal with more than a hundred people a day. The real difficulty is perhaps interpersonal relationships. Sometimes, even if you are willing to help, willing to work and willing to wear a smile on your face, the outcome is often beyond what you have expected. Since our department has a lot of connections with other departments, you can see different kinds of people and you will more or less meet certain difficulties. I think I am already a very exceptional example because during my six months in the company, I have been able to manage everything very well. Our company business for the current year is very good and the orders we received are far beyond our factory's capacity. As a result, we often fail to complete the production of our goods in time and miss the shipping schedule. Hence, we have apologized and explain the problems to our customers.

- Yet, the customers often do not know the real cause, they only know that the goods are delayed.

- Yes, though we do our best to explain this to them, it is not necessary for them to accept our explanations. For them, the most important thing is that you can deliver the clothes to them on time for selling; for example, if they have placed orders with you for winter clothing but you fail to ship the goods to them until after Christmas, what use will the goods be to them after the seasonal time has passed? We all understand that, but our factory really can't cope with the heavy workload. The productivity rate of our factory is 40,000 pieces of clothing per month, but now the orders we have received is equivalent to a workload of 80,000 pieces per month.

- How did you handle such problems, especially in dealing with the customers?

- We do our best to solve the problem within our factory by increasing the workers' wages and seeking help from some other small factories. If the customer understands that we can't finish the goods on time and is willing to cancel the order with us before anything is started, we will cancel the order. Or, we can deal with the matter in a tricky way by saying that the customer has forgotten to furnish us with some important information resulting in us failing to ship the goods to him in time. But usually, we would speak frankly to the customer and explain we can't finish the goods on time to see if he accepts our excuse or not. Another method is that we would deliver the goods to our customers by plane instead of by ship as that can save at least 19 days' in time in transportation.

- So, you have to deal with the matters very flexibly.

- Yes, we have to play it by ear. Please bear in mind that we don't deal with one customer only. If we meet a customer who is concerned with the quality of the goods, we'll say to him that the goods he ordered require a high technique in manufacture and we'll ask him to give us some more time if he wants to have a good result. However, if we meet a customer who puts sales first, we'll say to him that we'd do our best to finish half of the batch of the goods and send them to him first. As for the remaining batch, we'll send them to him two weeks later. We have to know the different requirements of different customers and keep in touch with them by telegram, distance phone calls, etc. We have to try to suit their tastes and to take up a minor issue to evade a major one.

- Oh, I really need to learn from you.

- You're overpraising me.

- No, I am honest. You have been in this field for so many years and have accumulated so much experience. A greenhorn is no match for you on this.

- That's why our boss is willing to offer us good pay to retain us in the company because he understands that we know the different requirements of different customers and will surely be a help to him. Once the customers are familiar with you, they will not easily leave you to do business with another company and they don't want you to be replaced, either. Our employer also understands that if we are ambitious or if we can find someone to back us up, we can easily draw his customers over to our side.

- Yes, I have heard those stories from others before. By taking such advantage, a great profit can be made. Well, being an unmarried woman, have you ever come across any discrimination in your work?

- No, I haven't. Yet, I have come across some inconveniences, for example, sometimes when I go abroad for business, I have to spend my night in a hotel alone. I tell myself that I need not be afraid. In fact, I really don't worry much about myself. However, the people around me such as my parents and my boss worry very much about me. Sometimes, we have to go to some remote and sparsely populated places for work such as Laos and Burma where our productivity lines are. I remember that a long time ago when I first went on a business trip by plane, there were seldom women like me traveling alone for business. I remember that eight years ago when I flew to Liaoning, which is a big city in China, for work, the staff of the branch company felt very strange when they saw me, a girl, go there alone for business. They asked, 'You come alone? Why do you come here?' I answered, 'Because the goods are manufactured here.' They said that they scarcely saw girls go there and they asked me to take care of myself. That's the sort of inconvenience I encountered. Other than that, I was once deprived of the chance of getting promoted merely because I was unmarried. The story is this: In the company, which I previously worked for, I had to work under a manager who was a boss of the company and was married. If I were promoted, I would have been his assistant to him and would be required to travel from place to place with him to meet customers. For example, there were at least two to three fashion shows in Paris every year and we had to prepare some samples of clothing, bring them there and man an exhibition counter there to promote our products and to quote the prices of our goods so as to tout for business. Those exhibitions would last for at least one week. After that, we might need to fly to another place to take part in another exhibition again. I in fact was competent in that post and was fitted for promotion. However, the manager, i.e. one of the company bosses, said that since I was unmarried while he was married, coupled with the fact that we were more or less of the same age, he was worried that something might go wrong if we went abroad for business together. I was completely unaware of the real reason beforehand. The manager, i.e. one of the bosses of the company, thus objected to my promotion despite the fact that the other boss, who owned a smaller share of the company than the former, recommended my promotion. The reasons he gave were that: First, I was too young; in fact I was not but I just had a babyface; and second he lay suspicions about my working ability. The boss who supported me

rebutted him that I was very helpful and my working ability should be beyond doubt. Anyhow, my promotion was finally rejected merely due to the reason that I was unmarried. I did not know the real reason until one year later after I had left the company. The boss who supported me advised me not to resist marriage because getting married might be an advantage to me since in some social gatherings for business, the participants might chat about sex. Being an unmarried woman, you might feel embarrassed about it. However, if you got married, you would feel that it was all right and would not feel embarrassed and you would feel at ease in taking part in their chat because you would know what they were talking about and had the kind of experience they had. However, if you were unmarried, the others would feel strange if you pretended that you understood what they were talking about. If you behaved in another way by drooping your head, the atmosphere and the mood would be destroyed. At that time, I was only 30 years old, he said to me, 'Don't resist marriage. If you have a chance, grasp it. If you are married, it will be an advantage to your career.' He told me that the reason why I could not climb to a higher rank in the company was that the other boss, i.e. the married manager, had placed obstacles in the way. It was not until that moment that I was told about the real cause.

- Yes, it might be a factor.

- Yes, but I can't say that it is discrimination. At that time, I knew nothing about it. I was not told about it until after the event. Hence, my reaction to it was not very vigorous. Yet, I did remember his words by heart. Is it true that marriage will be an advantage to my career? After that, I continued to work hard. Now, there is no more garment manufacturing in Hong Kong because the wages here are high and no one wants to be a garment worker anymore. Nowadays, parents will not let their daughters work as garment workers in factories anymore. Hence, lots of garment factories have relocated to some East Asian countries. After I left that company, the nature of job, which I took up later, was different from my previous one. I am often required to go to the factories to inspect work and seldom required to deal with the customers. Since I am unmarried, I find that it was more convenient for me to carry out my work. I can work overtime at any time if required while my colleagues do not hold the same attitude. They might say, 'I can't work overtime this week because my son is going to have an examination.'

- I think it all depends on what you are hankering after.

- Hence, married women in our trade are gradually sifted out because no boss can stand his employee going off duty punctually at six while there is still plenty of work waiting for her to do.

- Yes, I agree. If I am the boss and have choices, I will not choose to employ that kind of person.

- Hence, when they offer employment, their first choice is for a man. Yet, they will spare some vacancies for females to strike a balance because men are not so tactful as women in dealing with some matters are. For example, if we urgently need zippers but the supplier says that he can't deliver them to us in time, while we all understand that the supplier is in fact applying a delaying tactic, what a male staff member will do is to bang on the table and scold the supplier in foul language or threaten that we'll not buy zippers from him anymore. However, God knows what

will happen in the future. Perhaps one day, we will ask for help from that supplier, so it's unwise for us to break the harmonious relationship with him. If the situation is handled by a female staff member, the result might be completely different. She can act as a mediator and ease the tense atmosphere, and the matter might be solved easily.

- Yes, I agree with you. Sometimes, we can put our strong points into full display. Women are not necessary inferior to men in both boldness and resolution. In fact, different people have different strong points and we women might be smarter than men in dealing with interpersonal relationships might.

- If the customers we are going to deal with are males, no matter whether they are Chinese or foreigners, they prefer it the person they are going to talk business with is a woman rather than a man, not least to say a beautiful woman. This is because a woman's voice is at least much pleasant to listen to than a man's. Besides, women are usually mild and tactful while men are usually blunt and straightforward. Our boss knows that well. So, if he knows that the customer we are going to do business with has a bias towards women, he will assign you to deal with him. Of course, this is confined to work only and not to any other things. Luckily, ever since I started to work, I have never come across any harassment or things like that. I always say that policewomen are worthwhile people. It's not necessary for us to require them to carry pistols to perform high-risk duties. Policewomen can put their use on full display in dealing with cases such as "Lost Children". I believe that a policewoman is more competent than her male counterpart in cajoling a child who has got lost.

- When you feel annoyed or have worries, how will you deal with these?

- I'll put them aside and don't think about them. I never bring my worries over work home. Once I return home from office, perhaps I have already worked overtime in the office till 11:00 p.m., I'll put all my worries away and just watch TV or read magazines. Then, I'll have a good sleep. When I wake up the following morning, I can very often think of a solution to the problem while I am on the way to work on a bus. If I still can't think of a solution to the problem in the forenoon, I'll go out for lunch. Though there is a canteen in my company, which offers cheap lunches to staff, I prefer to go out for lunch because once I leave the office and am exposed to a new environment, my thoughts will be stimulated and I might easily find a solution to the problem!

- Did you contract any disease or feel sick over the past month? Do you suffer from insomnia?

- No, I didn't. I can even fall asleep on a bus.

- What is your age?   • Between 35 and 39.

- Where were you born? • Hong Kong.

- How many siblings do you have?

- Six and I am the second of them.

- What is your educational level?

- Form 6.

- Do you have any religion?   •   No.

- Do you need to make any supplements to the above answers?   •   No.

- Thank you very much.

- You are welcome.

Appendix 4

RESPONSES FROM INTERVIEWEES BY MEANS OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Case 1: Annie

Q1   Please share your social life.
It includes some mass activities such as hiking, barbecue, karaoke, badminton. Recently I'm learning to play tennis. I would also keep in contact with my friends alone as well as in group so that I may understand their experiences and opinions for my reference. Joining social activities is a matter of killing time. Sometimes cleaning households or personal belongings can become a good memory of the past.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
1. My family members usually discuss the solution together when there is a problem and arrange a time to carry out. I usually leave the problem when it is not important. They will understand and accept my explanation.2. I don't have close relationship with my friends because we have different living styles and different personalities.3. Generally I can get along with my colleagues very well. We will only give opinions in relation to our positions in the job.   These 3 types of relationship do not seem to be different. They focus on the problem and its solution.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
There is absolutely freedom in singlehood. It would be a loss if people are to be categorized.   However, there is so much to learn in marriage. A different stage requires a different type of responsibility, acceptance, and patience. It demands not only getting along between 2 persons, but also [new relationships] among friends and relatives. There will be sacrifice and giving of love in living. It's marvelous!

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
I don't have any stress. My satisfaction comes from accomplishment in every task, a regular income and a regular occupation.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
When I am distressed, I will share with my friends. I will take their advice if it is acceptable and do my best to find a solution. If the result is not desirable and no remedy has been identified, I will simply accept the reality and plan for my future.

**Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your
        physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?**
My old wound at my leg has been affecting me since the Chung-Yeung festival.   There's no need to receive physiotherapy now.   I'll be recovering soon.

Case 2: Betty

Q1   Please share your social life.
My social life is basically my church life.

In the leisure time, I usually join the service and take part in ministry. I only make contact with my friends of unbelievers every 3 months to half a year. Furthermore, I rarely meet my Christian friends because they belong to different churches.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
I have intimate relationships with my father and my mother.

I have fair relationships with my friends, who include Christians and non-Christians.

With my colleagues, I only have purely working relationships, never mentioning closer relationships.

I seldom get along with my relatives.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
Marriage, for me, is a gift from God. If God sends me the gift, I will gladly receive. If it is the will of God that singlehood is better than marriage, I will accept singlehood joyfully.

In marriage, both sexes must commit to each other, understand to sacrifice of oneself, learn to appreciate each other and to search each other's potentials. In good times and in bad times throughout life, they must cooperate and support each other, and share joys and pains together.

In singlehood, the person should utilize one's talents, make loving relationships with people around him/her, and share with others all the virtues from God.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
I do not have much job satisfaction. If I can help my clients to have a better price in the stock market, I am already satisfied. In the meantime, as the stock is an exchange of money, it leads to psychological stress. My job also demands speediness and precision.

On the other hand, there are many gossips about people in my present job. I do not have trustworthy colleagues. I communicate with them only for working purpose.

However, I have only made friend with a colleague who is working in another branch. We can share with each other our personal lives.

Fortunately, my supervisor and my boss show their appreciation to me. I do not receive any stress from the top level.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
As my parents become older and my mother has poor health, I have to take up the burden of household chores. I also have to save money for them for their future. However, I do not have much income reserved for that purpose.

Recently I suffer from pains at the back and the knees. I feel arduous at doing household tasks. I worry I am not able to take care of my parents in the future.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
Pains at the back and the knees. They are caused by accidental bending of spine.

Case 3: Connie

Q1   Please share your social life.
1. Dining, chatting or making phone contacts with friends.
2. Sports e.g. badminton, running

3. Church activity e.g. joining group
4. Shopping, reading, listening to hymns
5. Trips

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

Family relationship:

Harmonious, but lacks deep communication. I seldom share with them when I have troubles. Mutual concern is not in an expressive manner, although there is some support.

Peer relationship:

I have different kinds of good friends in different stages. We build our friendship on a certain basis. We don't come together regularly but we do have good sharing when we meet each other. I have some confidants, who are mainly met in schools, in these friendships. We can share a lot from love, family to personal ambitions and difficulties etc.

Relationship with colleagues:

I have fair relationship with my colleagues. Their support are usually from the job.

In a nutshell, as there is so much restriction of help from people, my faith [in God] has become my immediate help.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

Marriage is established by God. It should be respected. It is for mutual sharing in life and for reproduction. However, marriage is not a myth as in the Cinderella. It demands adaptations in different stages, shared enrichment, mutual sacrifice and establishment. Therefore, marriage, which yields joy as well as pain, probably enhances growth too.

Singlehood is made ready for some persons by God. One of the reasons is to let them to devote themselves in serving God. Moreover, I also realize that, to a certain extent, singlehood means freedom, more rooms for actualizing oneself, and meeting one's ambitions. If singlehood is not voluntary, one has to accept reality and to adjust one's attitude. He or she should also maintain a balanced mental health and to learn to enjoy the fun of singlehood. Don't pity oneself. Moreover, singlehood is more acceptable in modern society. I don't have much stress on it.

In sum, I am open to any opportunity of marriage.

(Phyllis' remark: If all conditions remain unchanged, she keenly expects to have a lifetime partner. Nevertheless, she is confident to live happily alone.)

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

I have been serving in this agency for many years. I find it a very meaningful job. The present job offers me many opportunities for actualizing my talents and for exploring the external environment. When I discover that my clients have become mature and have been changed, I have much pleasure. Man is changing but brings a lot of challenges. It is precious that my life view has been broadened when I listen to the stories and life experiences of my clients. Yet the most important thing is to assure the value and the meaning of the present job.

My job stress comes from heavy workload, shortage of manpower, incompetence.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

1. Sharing with friends for ventilation and advice
2. Physical exercise
3. Prayer
4. Cry if the problems are distressing. But it will only last for a short period. I'll then keep myself calm and try seeing the thing in a different way.

Q6 **In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?**
No.

Case 4: Diana

Q1 **Please share your social life.**
I'm too busy and I don't have many social activities.   I usually get along with my relatives, my friends and my church members.   That's my social circle.

Q2 **Please talk about your social network.**
Relationship with family:
Fine and harmonious.   We are able to share with each other.
Peer relationship:
I have many friends who can share deeply.   I still keep in touch with my old colleagues.

Q3 **Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.**
For marriage: If there is true love between the two persons, marriage is the best choice.   It is meaningless to get married just for marriage.   Marriage, in my opinion, is a knowledge of high degree.   There are so much to learn: responsibility to bear, problems to solve, and life to adjust.
For singlehood: It is merely freedom.   Some may believe that a single person has nobody to rely on and no one to get close to.   Yet I disagree.   When I am in need, my relatives and my friends will show their support.   Furthermore, it is not necessary for a single person to take into account the thought and the needs of one's spouse.   For example, going out with others.

Q4 **Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.**
I am working in a beauty shop.
Satisfaction:
1. I can offer help to those whose skins need improvement.
2. I can make a profit.
3. By sharing my knowledge of beauty-making, I can build a rapport with my friends and my church members.
Stress:
1. Being misunderstood of selling cosmetics or making a profit, especially in the church.
2. When my clients do not understand that it takes time to allow the process to go after they receive the treatment.
Besides, I also help my younger brother to take care of his daughter.   It's funny.   I don't have much stress.

Q5 **Please share your coping strategies.**
Be optimistic.   Don't be too rigid.   I'll tell myself to put away all the sadness from my heart.   It is important to see things with a simple mind.   Always maintain a joyful heart even there is not a job for me.   Be a balanced spender.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

Psychologically and physically.   I'm quite well in the past month.   Hyperthyroxine is a chronic illness.   I'm taking medicine now.   I'll   be okay.   A tumor has been identified near my thyroid gland.   Yet my doctor advised me to check regularly in the Notre Dame Hospital.   No operation is needed.

Case 5: Elaine

Q1   Please share your social life.

As I'm very busy with church ministry and I don't have much personal time, I lack my social life. The situation has not been improved since I start my church ministry. I really long for an improvement. Therefore, when I had my new year plan for 1997, one of my goals is to improve the schedule of my ministry. I look forward to some personal time and social activities. However, the plan has not yet been actualized. I expect an improvement soon.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

1. Family: Except with my 2nd sister, I seldom talk with my brother who are 10 years older than me. However, I spend more time with my old parents as well as my married sister and her younger son. We live happily together.
2. Peers: I have fair relationship with my friends. We concern and support one another. A few of them can also have deep sharing of feelings and viewpoints. I give thanks to God for that.
3. Colleagues: I am a support for my co-workers. As we are all busy, we seldom share, read the   Bible and pray together.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

At present, I am single. Yet I've never considered singlehood. I take marriage as good because God said, "Two persons are better than one." Moreover, marriage is established by God. Love in marriage is very important. When a person gets married, he/she will continue to grow and to learn to love deeply in marriage. Therefore, marriage implies giving. Giving oneself for the person you love. Hence, when looking for a companion, I must love him so as to fulfill what I have mentioned.

I feel a sense of fullness, satisfaction, peacefulness and joyfulness in my singlehood. I don't have any burdens and worries. I can devote myself to church ministry and knowledge so as to improve oneself and ministry. Although my life is busy, I feel very joyful. Therefore, I am sufficient in whatever styles of life. Thanks to God!

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

1. Satisfaction: it mainly comes from the Christians who have been under my pastoral care. I am   also glad that I can help them to experience God so that they may show their love to God and to people and be able to serve the ministry.
2. Stress:
A. I don't have sufficient time to prepare and to plan for small groups.
B. I am also stressful in preparing for a sermon because I don't have sufficient time for preparation and I lack the opportunities for practice.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
As I don't have sufficient time to serve the ministry and I lack the ability and the time, it doesn't help to worry. I will cast all my cares upon the Heavenly Father.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
A. Physically: I have been suffering from flu for two weeks because of cold weather and now I have recovered my strength.
B. Psychologically: I will look for the reasons of agitation and then solve it if I don't feel any peace. If the reasons are related to my temperament or to others, I will pray for the strength to solve.

<u>Case 6: Fanny</u>

Q1   Please share your social life.
I don't have a large social circle.   Although I don't have many new friends, it is enjoyable to meet new friends and new things.   I like outdoor activities, but many of my friends would prefer meal and chat to those activities.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
My attitude towards them is peacefulness.   We seldom have conflicts.   I treat my family members as if they are my friends.   I'm happy with my family members, my friends and my colleagues in a harmonious manner and in a friendly atmosphere.   And I feel comfortable about that.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
Singlehood is free and boundless.   There is less responsibility to bear.   yet it results in aloneless and loneliness.   Life without marriage and family seems to bring regret.   If a wrong choice has been made, one would be more regretful.
A normal and happy marriage should be more complete than singlehood.   Yet the responsibility in marriage is more important than in singlehood.   Nevertheless, it depends either on the characteristics of the spouse or the circumstances one experiences.   Life is complicated.   Every experience may change other's perceptions.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
My satisfaction usually comes from a solved problem in job and the recognition from my colleagues.   When I can accomplish a task completely, I can easily feel satisfied.   When I have to face difficulties in my job, stress will come. If I cannot solve the problem immediately, stress may increase. If I cannot work out the solution in an efficient way, psychological stress may increase too.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies. Patience and perseverance are my common attitudes toward difficulties and worries. I will also make my very effort to find the most desirable solution. I always share with my family and my colleagues so as to gain some insights.

Q6 **In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health? If yes, what are they?**
Basically, I feel very well with my body and my soul. I have been suffering from allergy in my skins. I have to avoid my skins being exposed to airflow as well as to cold weather.

Case 7: Gladys

Q1 **Please share your social life.**
My social life includes seeing my friends in holidays, shopping and Friday night meeting in church. I also have gatherings with my alumni twice or thrice a year. Therefore, I have a plain social life. I join the Sunday service too. I used to join a prayer group on Tuesday but now I have been joining an evangelical training class in the QE hospital. I expect I can learn something to help the patients as well as my church members.

Q2 **Please talk about your social network.**
I don't have good relationship with my family. I seldom communicate with them since I was a child. Yet I have more communication with my friends. I will also take their advices on phone when I face a great difficulty. Only one or two colleagues may share my burden. Others may only have a chat because everybody is in a hurry.

Q3 **Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.**
I've been looking for a companion since I was 20. I really expect to know the boy I like and to get married as soon as possible. My aim is to leave my family. Yet I have never met one. Although some friends have been introduced to me, I dated for only a few times and then rejected them all. I would never get married just for marriage. Now, I am converted into a Christian and my need has been restrained. Before I was a Christian, I was scared of singlehood and even celibacy. I need not worry even I have reached an age for marriage. I'll cast all my cares upon God and enjoy singlehood to the full extent. Many things are not under my control. I've been longing for a divorced husband. However, I'll lift it to God.

Q4 **Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.**
I have been an insurance salesman for 6 years. I just want to change myself in the present job. I'd only try irrespective of its nature. I have been facing many difficulties in the beginning. I had to make a 'cold call' to a divorced husband. When he bought an insurance in the May of 1991 he went to Canada. From his letter I found that he was a Christian. Therefore when I realize that somebody whom I am not familiar joins an insurance, I'd be satisfied. My stress comes when there is an uncertainty of finding a customer. However, there should be stress in every job. It's important to be diligent and persevere. Stress can be reduced if I can make more appointment with people.

Q5 **Please share your coping strategies.**
I will share with my friends who may listen to me when I am distressed. When they are not available, I will pray to God and have a good sleep. Sometimes I'll also listen to music.

Q6 **In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health? If yes, what are they?**
No. There were only some pimples on my lower jaw a few months before. They were ugly to see. They were caused by an imbalance of hormones.

Case 8: Helen

Q1   Please share your social life.
I'm very busy. I've joined the church and some small groups (pastoral care group, Christian fellowship for social workers, fellowship in church, Satir Model training and prayer group). Besides, sometimes I'll go shopping and swimming.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
1. In the past I visited my sister and her family once a month. Recently I visit her every week because of my illness and my home removal. When I was sick, I had even been living with them for 3 days. My relationship with them is very harmonious. However, I don't have much time to visit my elder brother. There are only 2 or 3 times a year. Besides, my father and my younger brother are living in Australia.
2. After work, I sometimes dine with my colleagues.
3. I spend most of my time (about 80%) with my church members e.g. family gathering, shopping and swimming.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
Both marriage and singlehood are good. They have different challenge. There is freedom as well as aloneness in singlehood. However, one has to grow with oneself. The couple can grow in marriage, yet they also face many struggles. They will become more mature if both of them are in the same beat.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
Stress:
1. Submission of case recording
2. Crisis in clients or irrationality of clients
3. Tiredness, a sense of powerlessness

Satisfaction:
Certainly. For example, in conducting groups for couples, in which I can see their growth, or in publications, or in counselling, in which changes in clients are pursued.
Moreover, I have the highest satisfaction in counselling children.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
Idling, shopping, prayer, sharing with God, buying my favourite food, eating a lot, sharing with friends.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
Physically: Bronchiolitis (10 days long), flu, cold and fever, cold sweat
Psychologically: home removal

Case 9: Iris

Q1   Please share your social life.
1. Colleagues: We seldom have social activities. We usually have dinner gathering twice or thrice a year.

2. Students (graduated from seminary and the school I taught): tea gathering and chatting
3. Church: Regular meetings with church members.
4. Friends: Mainly the elderly. Others are several young people. I mainly listen to them.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
1. Family: I usually have gathering with the family of my married brother once or twice a week. We'll contact by phone if necessary.
2. Friends: Some are local. Some are overseas. The quantity is great. Most of them have common belief. We share our faith and pray together.
3. Colleagues: We are quite isolated. We talk less about our lives (except health problems) but more about our job.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
Marriage is an utmost holy event. It's a blessing to get married, and it's also a blessing to be single.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
1. I pay less attention to my job. I only take my responsibility to finish my task. My job satisfaction comes from the appraisal of my supervisor (usually by distributing more tasks) and the feedback from my students.
2. In my church life, satisfaction always comes from the group experience that God listens to our prayers, personal growth, mutual love and mutual concern.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
1. Sleep
2. Leave the problem for some time. Light will probably be shed on the problem.
3. Share with some confidants
4. Prayer

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
1. Asthmatic bronchitis, 1-2 times/year, it collapses when the weather changes.
2. The level of intestinal acid has been too high in the evenings. It remains normal in daytime.

Case 10: Janice

Q1   Please share your social life.
I'm a Christian. I like reading, swimming and hiking. I usually evangelize with my male church members. It is important that through evangelization people may get to know a true life.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
My occupation is service-oriented. I have long working hours. Every day I have to serve different targets, including individuals and families. My job has become part of my life. I will meet my family members once or twice a week. I don't have regular contact with my friends. There are only two staff members including me in the shop.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
I haven't got any opinions on this question.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
My satisfaction in the job comes from 2 sources. First, I can feel the presence of God and through Him I receive power. Second, there is an opportunity for learning and renewal. This is done by making contacts with different persons. It is also important to pay attention to my stress level and to keep an eye on it.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
Through prayers, I can face my busy life, my work and my daily problems.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
I thank God that He keeps me healthy and perfect in my body, my soul, and my spirit.

<u>Case 11: Kitty</u>

Q1   Please share your social life.
I'm too busy to have social activities. I would prefer taking rest instead. Sometimes I will gather and dine with my schoolmates or join some mass functions, such as Christian group activities for less than a few times a year.
I spend much more time with my family. We go walking, shopping, and tea gathering.
I take less initiative in calling upon others in joining activities. It's always others' initiative that I am invited to join the functions. I'll make my effort to do so.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
Family: We are very close. We meet one another daily in one house. We have good emotional bondage and we respect one another. We sometimes express grievances and opinions. Yet less conflicts are known.
Peers: Though we seldom see one another, we are in good bondage. We sometimes keep in touch or gather together. I'll also support each other and share opinions with my best friends.
Colleagues: Not bad. We can accept one another in spite of different opinions.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
There are both advantages and disadvantages in marriage and in singlehood.
In marriage, there will be a companion and a learning opportunity for communication. However, there will be less freedom and more considerations in everything.
In singlehood, there will be more freedom and more time to use, especially in church ministry, in which one doesn't have to consider another's view and needs. However, there will be aloneness and social pressure (assuming marriage).
It's merely a personal choice because both are equally important.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
Satisfaction:
1. Gaining confidence. My confidence is enhanced through working. I find my job suitable for me and I'm competent to do so. I also gain acceptance and appreciation from others. I can also get along with many people of different ages.

2. Understanding my weaknesses. When I realize my strengths and my weaknesses, I can fully utilize my talents and improve my weaknesses.

Stress:
It is stressful to communicate with colleagues of different personalities. It would be very difficult if I cannot get along with my colleagues especially when there are other relationship problems. For example, when I fail to handle a problem in my church members, I would become emotionally distressed.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
1. Prayer is the major strategy because I'm a Christian.
2. Sharing with my friends and seeking for advice and solutions.
3. Sharing with my family and asking for opinions.
4. Wandering around so as to reduce distress. As it is time-consuming, I seldom take this strategy.
5. Be patient and let it pass away.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
Troubles:
I am depressed as the muscles of my waist have been painful for a week.

Causes:
1. Perhaps I've been too nervous and too busy. And I have less time to sleep.
2. Emotion. I probably have difficulties in communicating with my colleagues. He always has difficulties in understanding what I intend to say. There is little support from my colleagues. I feel isolated. In fact, I am scared of relationship problems. I would be unhappy when conflicts arise in communication.

Case 12: Lily

Q1   Please share your social life.
My social circle is small.   I am getting fewer friends.   Some of them has immigrated to other countries.   I am studying an evening class 3 times a week.   I play badminton with my best friend every week.   Sometimes, I go hiking with my friends.   I enjoy staying at home for reading, listening to music and I feel relaxed.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
For my family life, we have close relationship and we love each other.   We have regular gatherings.
I get along well with my friends and some of them quite care for me.
For the colleagues, our relationship is fair.   I hate those colleagues who get into my business.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
For the point of views in marriage, I think a couple can take care of each other.   You can feel the warmth of being together and this make you psychological and physical health more balance.   You can share your happiness and unhappiness with him.   The feeling is

different from other friends. However, marriage also restricts your freedom and also increase your burden like you need to social with relatives. All in all, I believe that marriage is in the relationship of "give and take".

While for singlehood, single life can have more freedom and only need to take up little responsibility from the family. You can do whatever you want (i.e. no need to get permission from him). However, you will feel lonely sometimes and you cannot get a good listener when you are sad.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
My job duty is quite simple. I deal with parents and do clerical work. I can handle them smoothly. That is why my job cannot offer me any satisfaction. Actually, I feel bored sometimes.

I do not feel stressful about my task but I feel stressful about human relationship in my office. I do not mind to have heavy workload because I can finally finish it some day. However, human relationship is a great problem in my life.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
I am a nervous and sensitive person. A trivial thing can make me panic and worry. I usually read, eat or walk along rivers to make myself relax. Sometimes, I talk to a friend who is a good listener although she may not give me solutions to the problems.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health? If yes, what are they?
I only felt painful on my breast last month.

Case 13: Mandy

Q1   Please share your social life.
I usually invite my friends to join some cultural and amusement activities after work. For example, watching drama and ballet, walking street and dining in restaurants. I usually visit my family members on weekends. Recently, I go hiking or biking with my friends every Sunday.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
Although I've moved out from my family to live alone, I will make a phone call to them every day. I also visit them frequently.
After work, I always like to walk and dine with my friends.
Moreover, I seldom have leisure activities with my colleagues because we don't have common hobbies and interests.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
In recent decade, more women choose to marry in older age or plan not to marry. It is probably because they have devoted themselves to work and have made an excellent performance. Some of them choose cohabitation instead. In fact, discrimination against singlehood has already been removed! If the purpose of marriage is to find a partner, there

would not be such a need. Marriage should only be considered if the two persons have a common need or if there is an agreement that the children should grow in an intact family.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
Stress: being a 'sandwich' between supervisor and colleagues. On the one hand, my supervisor does not encourage a close relationship between colleagues. On the other hand, I find it difficult to mobilize other colleagues to accomplish a task effectively in the appointed period.
Satisfaction: 1. Appraisal from supervisor
               2. Increase in salary
               3. Maintaining a good relationship with colleagues.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
Share more with my family members. If it is too personal, I will share with my friends so as to reduce the anxiety facing them. Sometimes I will ponder, analyze, or even solve the problem.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your
       physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
As I have to finish the account of the office and to take care of my father, who had been admitted to the hospital and is in an unstable condition, I have been very nervous and concerned in the past month. Moreover, I am so weak that I suffer from flu and diseases in gut. There is weight loss too.

Case 14: Nancy

Q1   Please share your social life.
Meeting friends for movies, dinners and church gatherings.   I like to play tennis, go hiking, swimming in the summer and skiing in the winter.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
I will go to see my mother every week.   Most of friends are church members.   I do not really socialize with my colleagues.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
I think marriage is a good thing.   It is great to meet with someone whom you can share your life with.   However, not everyone is so lucky, so one needs to prepare oneself for singlehood.   Some people choose to remain single for various reasons, which it is difficult to explain.   I think we should respect people's decision.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
I always feel that every job has its good points and bad points, no one job is perfect.   I am one of those lucky people that I do not let my job to interfere with my personal life.   I do not think about the job when I leave the office.   Generally, I am satisfied with my job performance.   I have a good salary rise in 1997.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

I will talk with friends when something is troubling me. My strategy is to face the problem right on. Do not run away from it, deal with it and forget about it. I do not think one can rely on anybody for everything. We must depend on our own strength at the end of the day.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

Physically, I think I am very fit, far better now than 2 years ago because I exercise more. Psychologically, I would think I have my "up" days and my "down" days. For the last few months, the thought of growing old "alone" comes into my mind a lot.   I was a bit scared at first, then I realize that whether I like it or not, life goes one, and I must go on.

Case 15: Ophelia

Q1   Please share your social life.

I have been a team member of the St John's Ambulance Brigade for 20 years. I have my social life mainly with the Brigade and other team members.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

I usually dine with my family members in special days and in festivals.

I usually join funny activities with my friends.

I can get along with my colleagues in a harmonious manner.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

One is free from bondage and stress from the family in singlehood. He/she feels free to do whatever he/she likes.

One is family-centred in marriage. There may be mental stress. Everything is done on purpose for one's family.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

When I am stressful, I usually go swimming, watching TV, doing relaxation exercise.

I would be very happy when I have a satisfying experience.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

I will share with my friends when I worry.

Or leave the trouble for a moment so that I can relax. I'd look for solutions after it passes.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

Sore throat.

Case 16: Pauline

Q1   Please share your social life.

My social circle is very small. My social life includes my family, my church and my job. I usually share with my colleagues or schoolmates after work. It's also a coping strategy for

stress. Besides, I also join church activities and ministry. I will share the burden of housework and everything with my sister. I also enjoy family life with my parents at least once a week. I prefer such activities as home visit, phone conversation, tea gathering, dining and hiking.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
I have long been under the nourishment of my family as I am the youngest member. As I grow older, I make less contact with them. It is difficult to identify the love among family members as the Chinese are not expressive. It is only when there is crisis the members of the family may show their love to one another. All my best friends are my best listeners. They always share my tears and my joy. I can get along with some peers and some of my subordinates in a harmonious way. We are so close that we always share our work experiences. However, my relationship with my supervisor and other paramedical staff (especially the doctors) is just average. The content of communication has been confined to our works.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
I believe God makes marriage for people. Marriage is perfect if there is respect, love, acceptance and unity in God.
It would be fine for singlehood if one has not yet found a companion who loves. There is less concern about the family and more freedom in singlehood. Life is short. We are only pilgrims. If one can live fully and joyfully, there would be no difference between singlehood and marriage. It's only a choice of living style.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
My satisfaction comes from the co-operation of people, the fruit of collective efforts, a solved problem, or someone's benefit from our help.
My stress comes either from my boss, who offers less support and help, or from an unsolved problem.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
When I calm down, I'll analyze the problem in detail so as to seek a solution. Sometimes I will share my problem with my friends and take their advices. However, the most important strategy is to let it to God. He will show me a new way or give me a new perspective.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
No.
N.B. Operation for tumor in fat tissues.

Case 17: Queenie

Q1   Please share your social life.
My greatest joy is to be with people, schoolmates, colleagues, and students. Activities include hiking, watching movies, dining, shopping, camping, picnics and telephone contacts.
I can also enjoy being with myself. I will go alone for movies, shopping for bookstores, and food. Or I will stay at home for TV, books and music.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

I maintain good relationship with my siblings. There are about 2 gatherings (tea gathering and family gathering) per month. I would share my difficulties or my joy to them. And they would be glad to offer their help.

I don't have many best friends. Yet I always gather with 2 girls in my university. They are my confidants. Both of them are teachers. They understand me deeply. Besides, there are some boys in my university and some best friends in my secondary school. Although we don't see each other regularly, we maintain very good friendship.

I maintain a fair relationship with my colleagues. We will go hiking and camping. Yet we are still acquaintances.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

I'm not a person who support singlehood. However, it is very difficult to look for a person who can understand me, accept me and be sensitive to me. I will not push myself. I'll wait for an opportunity!

I'm free, comfortable and having less worry in singlehood now. But I don't feel easy to ask for help when there's a need.

To prepare for the future, I have to make plannings, make savings and apply for insurance so as to reduce the burden of my family.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

My greatest satisfaction comes from a good relationship with my students. I'm glad to see that they have grown up and be mature enough to offer some help to others. My next satisfaction comes from a sense of security in the co-operation of my enthusiastic colleagues. However, it is inevitable to have conflicts in the office. The new post of Student Guidance Officer is a tough one. As I don't have sufficient time, I am afraid I cannot provide adequate support and teaching to them. There will probably be a shift of work from student guidance to academic in the next year. It'll be a challenge for me. However, I trust that it's a good job for me. If all come true, I'll further my study in the 2nd semester so that I can relax myself! Best wishes for tomorrow.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

Here's my weakest point. When I am distressed, I will not be able to manage my emotion and I cry easily. When I cry, I probably cannot express myself clearly to others. I also have difficulties in handling conflicts. I'll never strike back. As a result, I feel dejected. After passing through a period of time, I'll be able to share with my best friends and gain their support. When I am sad, I'll go to see movies and read books. After I calm down, I 'll share with my best friends and seek their advice.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

Probably I'm too busy. I have been suffering from a mild flu since the first day of my holiday. I'm recovering my strength now.

There's some tension in my interpersonal relationship a few months ago. But now the tension is released. Although the problem has not been solved, I have learnt the causes and I feel much easy now. Moreover, the situation will be much better when there's a change in my job next year. I'm   much relaxed. Yet I still concern for some developments in my school.

Case 18: Rose

Q1 Please share your social life.

My daily life mainly refers to my job. There is no need to work on Saturday. Sometimes I do the housework, listen to music, receive facial treatment or go hiking with my friends. I join the morning service on Sunday and dine with female members of the church in the afternoon. We share everything. I don't have much social life. I usually watch TV at home in the evenings.

Q2 Please talk about your social network.

1. I don't have much time with my family members. It's not more than 3 hours a week. It's mainly because I have moved out from my parents a few years ago. In fact, I do not enjoy staying with my parents. My relationship with siblings is adverse too. We don't have much to talk. I don't feel any warmth in my family.

2. I only have 2 or 3 friends, who know one another deeply. We are confidants. They are Christians too. They understand my introvert personality, therefore, they always take initiative to make contact with me and to show their concern. I am scared when talking with the opposite sex. And so I don't have any boyfriends.

3. I have good relationship with my colleagues, especially with the same sex. They are young. I am very active in the office and always kid with my colleagues. Sometimes I feel quite happy (when there is less stress at work).

Q3 Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

Marriage should be sustained by love, but not by one party. It demands mutual acceptance, patience and responsibility. It also includes loving the relatives and the friends of the other party. The two persons should be able to withstand sufferings, to support each other, to share tears, worries and joy and so on.

Life in singlehood is totally free. There is no boundary in action and it is free from emotional bondage. I may feel a sense of self-pity in special days such as the Valentine's Day, Christmas, Mid-Autumn festival, birthday. It is difficult to express my loneliness. Perhaps I have given myself too much pressure. Who would like to know how I live the days? When I grow older, I am afraid I would not be able to face reality.

Q4 Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

I am not satisfied with my present job simply because I cannot do my job perfectly. I feel stressful because I do not have much confidence. I am afraid to make mistakes and I don't think I can do my job very well.

Q5 Please share your coping strategies.

I will seek help from my friends, my colleagues, or even my boss when I face difficulties. I will simply omit them if there are no solutions. Acceptance and prayers help.

Q6 In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health? If yes, what are they?

I don't feel any trouble psychologically. However, some physical problems have been identified in my fingers in the past few months. They have been swelling. Besides, I suffer from influenza and do not feel well. Furthermore, I also suffer from German Measles.

Q1   Please share your social life.

I am leading a very simple life. Most of my friends were my schoolmates. Our relationship started at the very young age and there was no any problem on conflicts of interest. It is more enjoyable in getting along with ex-schoolmates without any reservation in communicating with each other.

Since I have a very busy life and most of the gatherings are arranged during weekend and mainly for gossiping. Of course, I will go out with colleagues after office hours mainly for birthday celebration or having dinner after overtime work. In short, my social life is plain without any excitement.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

My social network combines 70% of ex-schoolmates; 10% of friends whom I got acquainted when traveling abroad; 20% of colleagues. Relationship with my family is not very close because of age difference and different exposure to life but it does not mean that I don't care about them. The extent of relationship is not judged by time but mutual communication. Colleagues to me are regarded as a kind of collaboration and working relationship only.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

Marriage is regarded as burden and responsibility. Understanding and forgiveness contribute to successful marriage but they are difficult to be achieved. It takes ages and pains to understand the real meaning of marriage.

Singlehood means freedom and less hesitation when making decision on any moves. Singlehood does not necessarily mean loneliness but independent character will be developed and capability in dealing with problems intrepidity.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

I am now working in a completely different field as compared with my last job. It takes time for me to understand my present job; being construction which is highly technical. Since it is my Boss's family business which she is forced to get involved. She is not interested in it as well as not enthusiastic. Therefore, she leaves it tome without any definite directives and that makes me feel helpless. Pressure comes from all directions but it gives me chances to deal with problems independently. This helps me to develop a tough and strong character. Whenever there is any problem sorted out or case closed, I feel relieved and proud of having problematic issue moved out.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

Whenever I encounter any problem, I will approach friends and business associates for assistance. They are all very helpful and they all know my flight and render to me their heat assistance. Luckily, all my colleagues are very co-operative and are working very closely with me like a team. Therefore, whenever there is any unrehearsed assignment, all my colleagues are ready to work hard with the same goal in accomplishing the assignments.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

In these two years, I have been suffering from dry eyes and I cannot put on contact lens This makes me very uncomfortable in wearing spectacles.   I am now receiving treatment constantly to improve this problem.   This problem might be derived from heavy workload and tons of documents need to be gone through everyday.   Recently, I try to release myself from heavy workload by not staying at the office late.

Case 20: Tirana

Q1   Please share your social life.

Reading is mainly my leisure activity. I enjoy reading my favorite books or the reference texts which I am studying in a fast food restaurant. Besides, I also enjoy seeing dramas or dances with my old colleagues.

I like playing badminton and swimming. However, I usually go swimming alone. I seldom invite my friends because I am scared of wearing the swimsuit in front of them. My neighbourhood have been playing badminton in early morning for 10 years. I joined them 2 or 3 years ago. Now I will play with them when I am free. It gives me much pleasure.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

Although I am living alone, I still visit my parents every weekend.   I will stay with them until Sunday.   As my parents are growing old, I will make every opportunity to respect them.   Besides, we will join the Sunday school together.   And it is a family function since my mother is converted into a Christian.

I seldom join functions with my siblings.   Except my elder brother who always has to travel aboard, others are too busy to gather together.

I always keep in touch with some of my good friends, I will have lunch or dinner with my one or two friends who are my schoolmates in the primary school.   In the meantime, my old colleagues are my best support.

Church life has become a part of my life.

I am glad to have some "angels" who always take care of me in church. It's the gift from God that two pairs of couples have always been praying for me, encouraging me and guiding me with the Scriptures and their life experiences. I'm joyful about that. I'll also let them know immediately when I'm in need. They' ll pray for me. I give thanks to God that He has given me these trustworthy friends.

My relationship with colleagues is alright. I'm busy wherever I am. Although I don't have close communication with my colleagues, I can receive their respect and concern. Irrespective of their positions, I would be willing to be the friend of my colleagues.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

I have always considered singlehood as a transition. Some may take longer time. Others may take shorter. Singlehood does not necessarily mean celibacy. I've never thought of celibacy. However, I won't be in a hurry to get married. Both singlehood and marriage are a gift from God. In marriage, the couple should be willing to be agreeable with each other. I would expect mutual enhancement and growth between the couple.

At present, I'm still single. I am happy about that. I won't be in a hurry because I trust that God will make a way. If it's the will of God that I shall be single, He will comfort me and

strengthen me. Being single at the present does not necessarily mean that I should be single forever. It's worthy that I can enjoy singlehood and develop my own interests.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

I have spent most of the time in my job. Yet I gain great satisfaction in it. I'm glad that I have a very good supervisor, who shows respect and trust to me. She also provides me the opportunity for actualizing my potentials.

When I first got to know about the issue of child sexual abuse in the States nine years ago, I wondered if it would happen in Hong Kong. After I returned, I began to study the issue with great effort. I hope I can contribute something to the society. With the support of my supervisor and the effort of my colleagues, the attention of the public has been aroused and some improvements in the law have been made. This task has given me a great satisfaction in these few years.

Certainly, I am experiencing stress! The most distressful thing is that I always lack sufficient time to finish my work. It's also distressful that I always have to meet deadline. Being a FLE supervisor, I always have to deal with many small things as well as the mass media. I have to respond to invitations. These emergencies have caused much inconvenience to my daily work. I really need the wisdom and the time to deal with it.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

When I am distressed, I will pray to God. I thank God for He is always my fortress.

Besides, I will organize my thoughts and my distress through writing so that the roots of problem and its solution can be sought.

Of course, it would also be helpful to share with my friends. I would take the advices of my trustworthy friends (However, it has already been an ordering process when I ventilate my emotions.).

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your
physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

I was taking a sick leave when I am completing this questionnaire. I was told by the doctor that 2 tumors had been identified in my uterus and a small operation was needed. Yet there's no need to deal with the tumors unless a rapid growth was identified.

Besides, I was also identified anaemia. It was a surprise to me as I had never thought of such a thing happen to me.

Anyway, it has been a very good experience to me:

1. I experienced the role of a patient. I now become more sensitive to the care of patient. Moreover, the quality service of public hospital has changed my impression of nursing care.

2. I received a complete relief and care during my leave.

3. I learned much about life. "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money......If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." James 4:13-14. It is also the grace of God that I am given a good health and a sound life. I would live my days thankfully and I would take good care of my health. That's what I've learnt from my illness.

Case 21: Yolande

Q1   Please share your social life.
I cannot separate most of my social life from my church life. My services in church and fellowship with church members are my social life. Some of my social life have to meet the demands of my job, such as farewell party, new year celebration, ball etc.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
Since I am living away from home, I don't have a close relationship with my parents or brothers or sisters or indeed other members of the extended family.
I enjoy a harmonious working relationship with my colleagues. Nevertheless I'll cultivate a better understanding among my Christian brothers and sisters at my work place i.e. Yuen Long Police Station.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
A marriage partner is   a gift from God. Marriage is for witnessing the love, the faithfulness and the guidance of God. There are many practical problems in marriage, such as financial management, family planning, attitudes towards career and ministry.
Singlehood offers freedom, yet many practical problems are to be dealt. For example, no electricity supply, out of order in computer, leakage of tap or car tyres.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
I would be satisfied if:
1. I have finished a big project.
2. my recommendation and advice have led to the promotion of my subordinates.

I would be stressful if:
1. I have to finish some tasks alone in a very short period of time.
2. [something] comes from uncertainty.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
I will talk about it and I will pray. I will read my Bible and ask God to solve the problem for me.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
I was sick last week that's way it had taken me so long to finish the assignment for you. I got a flu on 3.3.97 or 4.3.97. My voicebox had been affected. I could not speak for a few days.

Case 22: Vera

Q1   Please share your social life.
I may have gatherings and tea with my colleagues or my friends. I will also go with my friends when I discover a good activity such as a concert in the newspaper. Recently I joined a training course and I have met some new friends who are the trainees of health assistant. After 3 weeks, we will go to different wards to assist the nurses. We'll then have less time together. We have also planned to see one another regularly. When we come together, we usually share happily and we miss everybody.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
I'm responsible for making decisions and managing finances in my family. Although my mother is old, we are willing to serve her for any purpose. I am glad that my sister and I can understand each other well. My relationship with my sister-in-law and her children is harmonious too.

I have two kinds of friends. One kind is for fun. Another one is for deep sharing. My confidants may give me advice and share my joy.

I'm also glad that I can cooperate happily with my colleagues. We seldom have conflicts at work. However, I'll always keep an eye on my own action so as to protect myself.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
I would not be in a hurry to find a boyfriend. I am kind and talkative, therefore it is easy for me to get along with the opposite sex. I don't expect singlehood until death. Easy come, easy go.   I trust that God will take of me.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
As I am working in a hospital, I have to be careful about everything. I'm responsible for checking the ECG, cleaning the breathing apparatus and tidying. I have much satisfaction and a sense of excellence when the patients give thanks and appreciation to my patience and kindness. However, I can be very stressful when failure is found in the apparatus and nobody can help.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
Recently I joined an evangelical class. I expect insights in self-discovery and in life skills. I was taught to analyze different kinds of things in the last three months. I benefit so much from the class. There is every solution in every problem. It depends on my attitude.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your
       physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
I have been coughing and suffering from bronchitis for two months. These have caused me much trouble in my work and in my social life. My strength had not yet been recovered though I had consulted the doctor for a number of times. Sometimes I may attribute my illness to my age or the hospital environment. However, I feel better recently.

Case 23: Winnie

Q1   Please share your social life.
On holidays, I will have morning tea with friends, go hiking, have dinners and picnics. Sometimes, I will visit my friends.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
I have very good relationship with my family members.   However, for those words in my heart, I will not tell them.   On the other hand, I will tell my friends.   Sometimes, sharing happiness with them will make me even happier.   For the relationship with colleagues, I find that some people will have conflicts of interests.   If the friendship is ruined because of it, I feel that it is not worthwhile.   As I think that working happy is valuable, I will try

to avoid having conflicts with others. I will cry more and let the unhappiness be blown away by wind. So, the relationship is very good.

Q3 Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

No feelings. In Hong Kong's society nowadays, most marriage has created victims. I feel insecure, so I do not have much expectation on it. But if there is a chance, I will try. However, I am single now and I feel quite happy. I have no need to worry about my children to become delinquents. Sometimes, I can see that my married friends worry about their children's studies and they are too anxious about the examination results. Being single, people sometimes will ask you why not marry, I will just smile. Some of my married friends will say that not to marry is better than getting married. So, I feel that my present status is already very good. For future, I do not know.

Q4 Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

My job has no satisfaction and pressure. I work in service sector. Sometimes, I cannot communicate with the customers. But if the body language can enable our communication, I feel satisfied. While for the pressure, when I do not know what they want, I can feel the pressure. On the whole, the customers and I are just like friends.

(I am a cleansing worker of in a changing room of a club house. Majority of the customers are foreigners and some are Chinese. The foreigners know that my English level is low, so they will not mind.)

Q5 Please share your coping strategies.

I feel that I have nothing to worry. When I wake up in the morning, I will do whatever comes to my mind. What I worry is my parents' health.

Q6 In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health? If yes, what are they?

I have ever had intestinal inflammation, cold and influenza. But I am all right now.

Case 24: Winsome

Q1 Please share your social life.

I don't feel bored about my social life because I will make every opportunity to take part in every activity, such as the Charity meeting in the church. I have to attend its meetings and join its gatherings every month. I am also responsible for preparing the sacraments in Easter, Christmas and retreats. I would go for trips when I have long holidays. Watching TV, reading books, knitting, hiking, shopping, playing mahjong with my family members and so on are my pastimes.

Q2 Please talk about your social network.

I have a family with 30 members. 10 and more of them will visit us on roster every Sunday because my handicapped mother needs their caring. Therefore, our siblings can gather together. My relationship with peers is alright. It is the grace of God that I can still share deeply with my friends who knew each other 20 years ago. I am a regular volunteer in the church and I always bring the news about the church from the minister to the church members, the elderly and the sick.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
I've never thought to be single. I would not choose to be single because of my age. I understand that I have to wait for a second chance after I failed last time. I would meet the opposite sex introduced by my friends and relatives. I would be punctual for every dating. I expect a second chance. As I understand that people should not be pushed for marriage, I would not go for courtship unthoughtfully just because I am envy about my friends who have already got their happy families.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
I have changed a new job since last time I was interviewed. I am happier in the new job because it offers a different nature and a different management style. I have already forgot all the things in the past. I have not experienced any satisfaction and stress yet. I hope a new opportunity would be open to me in the new job.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
I am a Catholic. I will arrange a time to talk to the Lord and to share all my worries to Him when I am distressed. I believe that He will show me the way and guide me in every trouble. Sometimes I will share my sadness with my friends and my family members. For every problem in my family, I will discuss and find out a solution with my family members.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
I have failed the blood test a month ago, which indicates a deficit of 'qi'. Frequent headache and dizziness are observed too. Anxiety is shown because of an irregular discharge of the menses caused by age. However, I understand that it is a natural process of human life. I am receiving treatment now.

Case 25: Anna

Q1   Please share your social life.
Q2   Please talk about your social network.
I tend to think the two questions are the same, i.e. I share by talking and social network is subsumed under social life.

With my immediate family (mother and younger brother), I try to keep at least one ,meal together a week.   The three of us live different orbits of life.   My brother works "graveyard" shift, I do not see him at all during Mondays to Saturdays.   I have to "date" him to have one meal with him a week.   I am with my mother everyday about 2-3 hours a day from normally 10 p.m. to 12 midnight.   Saturday night I am with her longer hours.   On Sundays, I sometimes do food shopping together with her and we dine together sometimes with or without my younger brother.   I do not help in the household chores at all.   She does it all, not without grudges and grumbling.   After all she is 74 already.

My brother works long hours as well.   Sunday is the only time he gets to see his friends. So I do not blame him if he chooses friends over us.   We do not share similar hobbies, so we never "play"   together except for one or two tennis games (very rare indeed.)   He loves heavy metal and underground music.   I like classical.   I love outdoor sports, he does not.

We basically give a lot of space to one another. WE have good bonding, although we seldom talk.

With my church friends, I try as much as possible, to meet up with them in the not-so-young youth fellowship once a week. I normally cannot manage because I normally study Saturday afternoons, or I have to work over-time on Saturdays. I meet with them (about 5-6 regulars) about 2-3 times a month, each time about 23 hours. I do not describe myself as a bubbling, chatty person. I cannot keep up a long conversation. I get bored easily. I'd rather do things together, e.g. trek together, discuss some issues together, watch a movie together, pray or song together. I am an impatient listener. But I will definitely count my church friends as good friends with whom I can tell almost everything and get support for my frailties and wounds. I can count on them for emotional support. I do not give enough, make effort enough.

With my biking friends, I normally just bike with them and enjoy their company, support and casual friendship. They are not my intimate pals. I have just been a biker for 2 years to be countered into any inner circles. I warm up to people VERY slowly.

With my colleagues, over the long span of my career (more than 20 years), I have only kept one or two colleagues as friends, due to laziness. I do not make effort to keep friends. I treat my colleagues as colleagues, that is all. I have no plans of making them my friends unless it happens naturally.

In general, I think I have not enough energy to keep friends. If I have any spare time at all, I'd rather clear my messy desk documents, read long awaited books, articles, or just laze about doing nothing.

Q3 Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

for want of companionship:
I prefer to celibacy. Not that the former is without pains and troubles but I , not having lived alone ever, (although I have rented out for 12 years, I have had flat mates all along), may find living alone, quite unbearable.

for want of care:
I imagine commitment in marriage to be the most. For example, only a spouse can "demand" consortium. Friends living together is not the same level of commitment. They have no obligation through sickness, old age, poverty and lingering death. Am I selfish or what, demanding so much from one person. Probably. But I shall try to reciprocate.

for growth:
But I do not think one is "complete" or "fulfilled" only in marriage. As much as possible, I shall try to be fulfilled on my own. There are so many aspects to being human. But sharing and giving, I think, has to be one of the keys.

to prepare for celibacy:
I must remain as healthy as possible. I should improve in keeping my friends. I should enlarge my interests.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

I am overworked and grossly underpaid.

The satisfaction comes from having cases done well, having cracked hard nuts and solved someone else's' problems. '

The work is high pressured, demanding in time and energy.   The pace is fast, the tension is high.   So are the stakes.   Mistakes are very costly.

I wish I get better paid.   Perhaps it is time to change.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

To cope with the stress of work: I swim, I take long bike trips.   I listen to good music.

To cope with financial insecurity: I have no tactics but to improve my investment portfolio. I have no money to hire portfolio managers.   I merely ask around, get 2nd handed information.   I ask my mother, who follows the stock market, to invest for me.

To cope with political insecurity: I have no tactics at all, complete powerless.   I sometimes support democratic minded political groups financially.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

My back pain is on the increase.   My left knee pain also.

Sense if insecurity (money, health, loss of my mother) on the increase.

Case 26: Betsy

Q1   Please share your social life.

My social circle is very simple. It includes my family, my colleagues, 2 or 3 old schoolmates and 10 or more old colleagues of different generations. We normally keep in touch by phone at a regular period. We will prepare simple snacks and gather together at someone's home when there are celebrations, such as birthday and new born babies. Children will be playing and adults will never stop chatting. Sometimes on a Friday night I will dine with my colleagues. We will talk everything about our job so as to make our friendships.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

I am a big sister in my family. I am free to speak and brave to stand. Therefore I always play the role of an idea-maker or an advisor. I'm also a good helper among my colleagues. I can do everything for them. I can talk with everybody freely, sometimes I can even make an insight in such a way that others become amazed to my expression. I am a perfect listener among my friends and I can keep secret for them. All are willing to disclose themselves before me.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

I'll never resist marriage. I am still single just because the time has not come yet. I'll not hesitate to choose marriage, but I'm prepared to be single. If that should happen, I'd never regret. Although my family members have been putting much pressure on me, I have never thought of easy matching. Different roads lead to different happiness. A full understanding of other's feelings should involve putting one's foot in other's shoe. I'm content with being single at the present moment.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

I've been working in a private agency and it is inevitable that everyone is pursuing for excellent performance at the expense of interpersonal relationship. I do not belong to them probably because I am not competent to do so. Therefore, I have been playing the role of an excellent farmer. I neither strive for power and money, nor cause any trouble to my boss. No rivalry is found between others and I. Stress is certainly reduced. Furthermore, although I have to make a lot of contacts with people, I am sophisticated to handle different relationships. Let's illustrate with a concrete example. I am working in a productivity setting. Making a garment requires many stepwise procedures. A piece of cloth, a zipper, a button, a piece of thread, and even a bag may affect the outcome and the quality of a product. Moreover, it also requires co-operation. Conflicts may arise as many people are working together. However, the most difficult task is dealing with people from different levels. In addition, mistakes will be easily made in such a large division of labour. Anyway, both challenges and satisfaction come to me every day. Since the company I work for has its production lines allocated outside Hong Kong, we always have to go to Southeast Asia for business. Although it would be inconvenient for many of my colleagues, especially those who have been married, to go there, I am glad to take it only when it is infrequent. I can make use of the time in vehicles or in my hotel room to read and to think. It is also stress-reducing when I can leave behind my heavy workload for a shorter period.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

I don't think I have any worry in living as I am single and am living with my parents and my siblings. Most of the problems come from my job. I will leave them aside for some time and then enjoy a full lunch (I usually have quick and simple lunch!). I will walk along the street. Perhaps I will chat with a friend at night. My sharing may not necessarily involve the problem I am facing. However, insights will usually come just by chatting around. Although not every problem has been solved, it was fortunate that throughout years somehow insights had come and problems were solved. I believe that there is always a hope in the end.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

No.

Case 27: Clara

Q1   Please share your social life.

My social life comprises of the following activities:
1 to 2 visits to fitness club with friends every week
Tennis or badminton once a week
Christian fellowship gathering every Friday night
Church gatherings every Sunday
1 to 2 family gatherings every month
Dinner with friends once every 2 weeks
1 to 2 holiday trips with friends once a year

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

I'm fine with my family. We have regular gatherings and dinners. I'll meet my friends more than 2 to 3 times a week. We'll play ball games, keep fit, enjoy fellowship and have dinners.

My relationship with colleagues is alright. Yet I don't have much personal sharings with them. We contact only for business.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
I'm happy and satisfied with my present situation. But sometimes I may feel lonely. It's good if I could find a partner. I don't resist marriage.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
I'm glad that I can communicate with people. I always get along with people from different backgrounds in my present job. I have great satisfaction when I discover that after they have received the treatment they wear a big smile on their faces. Although I don't have much pressure, it does exist when sometimes a good treatment does not yield the best result. Furthermore, it comes from expenses. I have big expenditure every month. When the workload is light, I will be tense too.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
Sharing and praying with friends. Playing piano or playing ball games, sport activities, watching TV, listening to music.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
Bronchitis, coughing. Insomnia, more frequently in Summer, less in Winter.

Case 28: Daisy

Q1   Please share your social life.
It's quite simple. Going to work and leaving from work. Having lunch with friends if I'm available. I don't have many appointments. I usually make phone contacts, watching TV and reading books such as magazine and those requiring much thinking ability.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
I usually stay with my family members and we work together. I will share my inner feelings only with my sister-in-law and one or two friends. I don't believe I need many friends. One or two confidants shall be enough.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
Marriage implies responsibilities and love, whereas singlehood refers to freedom and boring.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
I feel quite bored with my family members because we usually share about the family business   whenever we come together. I don't have much pressure. All I want is to finish my work.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
If I feel tedious, I'll leave myself alone (watching a movie, walking down the street or listening to radio or watching TV at my bedroom.). If I want to have a chat, I'll look for somebody to do so.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

No. Nothing wrong with any physical/psychological health. But I need to be on diet. That's all.

Case 29: Elsa

Q1   Please share your social life.

It mainly comprises dining, watching film and attending seminars with my church members and my old schoolmates.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.

My 4 elder sisters and 1 younger sister have been married. I have the best relationship with my 4th sister. I love her son very much, who is now 16 years old. I will chat and laugh with some family members. And my relationship with others remains fair.

I have fair peer relationships. I have about 4 or 5 friends who can share deeply with me. They include a bank manager, a secretary, a clerk, a teacher, and a nurse.

I'm the only person under my boss. She trusts me so much. My colleagues are part-time instructors. We seldom have time to meet each other because we need to attend classes.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.

Singlehood is more easier than marriage because only the problems of an individual are being dealt. There are much more time, space and freedom in singlehood. It also allows me to equip myself, to heal myself psychologically, and to grow fully.

However, marriage is a gift from God. Deprivation of it should not be seen as the problems of maturity or spirituality. It is only the timing matters. Marriage belongs to 2 persons. It is a continuity of life. A true family should be characterized by reproduction. Making a family implies facing complicated and multidimensional problems. It demands self-denial, patience, talents, continual growth, and daily renewal.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.

I'm happy when I see the active and kind responses of children. I'm amazed when I discover their unexpected creativity. I am also pleased when I am told by their parents that they always draw pictures at home and talk about me. I am satisfied with my job when I can design a creative, vivid and exciting curriculum. Besides, popularity in my course and progressive performance in my students are also important to satisfaction in my job.

I felt quite tense when I took all the burdens from a full-time teacher. I was exhausted. I could not bear with my troublesome boss.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.

Stop and be still. Have a cold drink. Keep my mouth shut.
Pray continuously.
Share with my friends.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?

Bronchitis, nose allergy, periodontal disease, tiredness.

<u>Case 30: Fiona</u>

Q1   Please share your social life.
Dining, chatting and going to trips with friends.

Q2   Please talk about your social network.
My relationships with family members, friends and colleagues are not bad. We can talk to one another.

Q3   Please express your perception to marriage and singlehood.
Responsibility is necessary in maintaining a family after marriage, whereas freedom and autonomy are maintained in singlehood.

Q4   Pleas share your satisfying and stressful experience in the present job.
Making more money for my boss and good performance in my job can make me satisfy.

Q5   Please share your coping strategies.
I'll do my best to solve any problems.

Q6   In the past month, did you have any troubles and complaints with your physical/psychological health?   If yes, what are they?
Nil.