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An Examination of Changing Perceptions of Singlehood.

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An Examination of Changing Perceptions of Singlehood

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of Changing Perceptions of Singlehood

by

Julie Tweed

In a patriarchal society where women are viewed as a weaker sex and are compelled by ideology and social norms to attach themselves to men through romantic relationships and the institution of marriage, how do never-married women fare? In particular, how do never-married women over the age of 30 navigate a social world where there is constant pressure to marry? This study explores the social experiences of never-married women over 30 residing in Eastern Tennessee. Thirty never-married women completed a structured personal interview and an online survey was completed by 14 never-married women (ages 30-45) currently residing in Eastern Tennessee. The structured interview and survey focused on key variables associated with the interpersonal relationships, identities, social perceptions, and internet-based social networking (MySpace, Facebook, etc.) of never-married women.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary American society, there are entire industries centered around weddings, millions of dollars spent on advertising campaigns rooted in the desirability of romantic love, and raging debates over the sanctity of marriage and the family (Zajicek and Koski 2003). All of these, along with a vast body of academic literature on marriage and the family, lead to the conclusion that the married lifestyle is overwhelmingly regarded as a hegemonical social norm (Stolk 1981; Stolk and Brotherton 1981; Watkins 1984; Cargan 1986; Tanfer 1987; Simon 1987; Rindfuss and Parnell 1989 ; Rice 1989; Lichter, Anderson, and Hayward 1995; Frazier et al. 1996; Pinquart 2003; Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007).

Historically, the importance of the institution of marriage has shifted over time in the minds of American citizens. The Industrial Revolution allowed men to move out of agriculture and into manufacturing jobs as wage earners, while women were relegated to a separate sphere at home. This shift toward an industrial economy increased the importance of marriage for women, as the statuses of women became increasingly connected to the statuses of their male spouses (Baumbusch 2004; Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007). World War II brought about a transformation within the familial structure that encouraged women to obtain employment outside of the home. This wave of labor-force change promoted financial and emotional individualism for women (Mustard 2000). Further, Kaufman and Goldscheider (2007) argue that the rise of individualism focused more on women's assertion of independence from traditional

gender expectations, creating something of a reversal of gender roles. This rise of individualism influenced further eras of gender emancipation for women's rights.

Though shifts in the structure of American society and the rise of feminism have relaxed marital standards for women, unmarried women, especially those over the age of 30, are still stigmatized and marginalized (Peterson 1981; Watkins 1984; Simon 1987; Ahuvia and Adelman 1992; Frazer et al. 1996; Barich and Bielby 1996; Mustard 2000; Berg-Cross et al. 2004). The social stigma associated with being an unmarried woman over 30 is evident in the language used to describe such women (Cargan 1986; Simon 1987; Mustard 2000). Words such as "spinster" and "old maid" have long perpetuated the idea that never-married women are personally or socially undesirable. Such words, and the stigmatization that they maintain and perpetuate, are consequences of the violation of timing norms that our society places on individuals who deviate from traditional expectations. Although stigmatization of never-married females has decreased considerably since the rise of individualism, terms such as "spinster" and "old maid" still filtrate contemporary labels of singlehood (Lewis and Moon 1997; Mustard 2000).

Previous studies (notably Burnley 1979; Peterson 1981; Anderson and Stewart 1994; Schwartzberg, Berliner, and Jacob 1995; Lewis and Moon 1997) have explored the interpersonal relationships held by single women who are over the socially prescribed age for marriage (specifically 30 years in Burnley 1979, Peterson 1981, and Lewis and Moon 1997). Watkins (1984) and Simon (1987) contend that it is important to study spinsters for several reasons: (1) the study of spinsters reveals pertinent information about the history of marriage, family, and women; (2) spinsters offer a different perspective on traditional meanings of family; and (3) never-married women offer a view of patriarchal

capitalism, and the privileged statuses of both the institution of marriage and men, from its margins. Simon (1987) further argues that "minority groups in any culture occupy a vantage point that permits them, indeed requires them, to inspect dominant norms and expectations with particular acuity" (ix). This issue remains important; contemporary research asserts that the study of mid-life never-married women is vital in understanding one of the fastest growing life-stage populations in the United States (Anderson and Stewart 1994; Schwartzberg et al. 1995; Barich and Bielby 1996; Lewis and Moon 1997).

The subsequent literature review explores never-married women's interpersonal relationships and views on singlehood, including aspects of never-married lifestyles in relation to the technological age. Therefore, this literature review addresses information about the rise in use of social networking websites in the world of courtship and dating. In addition, this research explored women's personal and social identities as they relate to being never married and over the age of 30.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the personal and social identities of never-married women over 30 in Eastern Tennessee, it is first important to understand some basic characteristics of the single female population. This literature review explores the increase of singlehood lifestyles, social perceptions of singlehood, stereotypes of single women, the marital imperative, singles' perceptions of self, and the impact of social networks' technological advancements.

Growth of the Single Population

The percentage of unmarried adults over 30 in the United States has steadily increased over the past 30 years; this has been termed the "singles boom" by several researchers (Ahuvia and Adelman 1992; Lichter et al. 1995; Manning and Smock 1995; Frazier et al. 1996; US Census Bureau 2006), and as a "retreat from marriage" by others (Manning and Smock 1995). A notable factor connected to the singles boom includes delayed age of first marriage. Several studies attribute the delayed age of first marriage to multiple factors: specific regions of the United States; level of education; economic opportunities for women; the rise in popularity, availability and acceptability of birth control; changing sexual norms; and a strong ideology of individualism (Ahuvia and Adelman 1992 ; Frazier et al. 1996; Hamilton et al. 2006). These factors combine to lessen the pressure on women to marry.

According to Frazier et al. (1996), marital timing tends to be correlated with geographical region. Regions of the southern United States have a tendency to associate with earlier ages of first marriages. In contrast, northern regions of the United States

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experience higher ages of first marriages (Frazier et al 1996; US Census 2006). It is predictable that the trend in early marriages in southern regions will further stigmatize single women in Eastern Tennessee because early marriage is accepted as the cultural norm in this region. This further emphasizes the importance of researching this underrepresented population.

Careers also impact marital timing. Several studies found that women (and men) who highly value their careers are less likely to marry before the age of 25 than those who are not as strongly committed to their profession or occupation (Lichter 1990; Frazier et al. 1996; Hamilton and Gordon 2006). In addition, women are more likely than men to postpone marriage if pursuing a bachelor's degree (Frazier et al. 1996; Hamilton and Gordon 2006).

The rise in the number of singles is also related to the increased participation of women in the workforce (Simon 1987; Lichter et al. 1995). Lichter et al. (1995), in discussing favorable and unfavorable marriage markets, pose that women's work has a positive effect on the likelihood of marrying a high-status man, but that work provides no guarantee of escaping poverty for any unmarried woman. Although entering the workforce may increase the likelihood of marrying a man with high status, it may actually decrease the overall likelihood of marriage, primarily because educated women are finding it more difficult to find mates with equal educational attainment (Lichter et al. 1995; Berg-Cross et al. 2004). According to Simon (1987) and Lichter et al. (1995), women's increased participation in the labor force has also produced a larger number of women who are financially independent resulting in higher socioeconomic statuses for single females. This increase in socioeconomic status has an effect on the number of

single women in the population – the proportion of single women increases with increasing levels of income (Stolk 1981; Manning and Smock 1995; Frazier et al. 1996). Single women with high socioeconomic status have satisfying careers that provide them with a stable sense of identity that may then result in marriage delay. Careers are also important in women's self-identities. Women with high socioeconomic status have satisfying careers which may contribute to a stable identity, but some women with lower socioeconomic status lack this stability and may adopt spinster identity as the only pre-defined role available to them (Stolk 1981). Ninety percent of never-married respondents in Rice's (1989) study had careers, which Rice presents as a source of life satisfaction that may outweigh the disadvantages of not marrying.

Educational and career opportunities for women influenced the decision to marry, leading, in many cases, to a marriage delay. Cultural changes, such as the increasing availability and acceptance of contraception and abortion, as well as acceptance of cohabitation, make heterosexual relations without marriage more likely (Simon 1987:5 Lichter et al. 1995; Manning and Smock 1995; Frazier et al. 1996). With the singles boom has come a rise in levels of cohabitation in the population, and a rise in the number of children born to unmarried and never-married mothers (Manning and Smock 1995). Cohabitation refers to the act of sharing of a household by an unmarried couple (Macionis 2006). Previous studies have reported that young unmarried women are choosing to live with a heterosexual partner in a relationship resembling marriage before they marry (Rindfuss 1990; Manning and Smock 1995). Census studies support this finding with steady increases in cohabitation rates along with increases in the average age at first marriage (US Census Bureau 2006). Currently, 51% of women age 30-34

cohabitate, and 50% of women age 30-34 cohabitate (US Census Bureau 2006). The rise

in cohabitation points to a demographic shift in the social acceptability of marriage and

non-marriage, and a change from viewing cohabitation as a youthful vacation from

commitment to seeing it as a valid life choice (Toulemon 1997). When conceptualized as

a retreat from marriage, the increasing acceptability of cohabitation is the major factor

cited in the rise of never-married women over 30 (Manning and Smock 1995; Toulemon

1997). Manning and Smock (1995) also argue that if cohabitation rates are combined

with current marriage rates, the average age of union formation has remained stable. This

means that couples are choosing to remain in committed relationships without the formal

union of marriage. Tanfer (1987) asserts that cohabitation, which is on the rise in the

United States, may be a viable alternative to marriage for women who choose this

lifestyle. Because marriage creates obligations and expectations that bind brides, grooms,

and their extended families together, women may choose cohabitation over marriage to

simplify their lives and leave their options open (Watkins 1984, Toulemon 1997).

Tanfer (1987) and Toulemon (1997) conclude that cohabitation is not a permanent

replacement for marriage, but has become an integral part of the courtship process among

heterosexual couples in the United States. However, cohabitation may play into the

stereotype of never-married women as sexually available. According to Tanfer (1987),

cohabiting women have started their sexual careers earlier and have sexual intercourse

more frequently. Because they do not tend to be better users of contraceptives than their

married and non-cohabiting counterparts, they may be at a higher risk of pregnancy

without marriage. Stereotypes of "unwed mothers" are harshly negative in the United

States and have been since the country's inception. Though these stereotypes are

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changing, visibly single women with children (or who are visibly pregnant) may be subject to the "swinging" or "slut" stereotype (Tanfer 1987).

<center>Stereotypes of Single Women Over 30</center>

A stereotype can be defined as "grossly exaggerated beliefs which may resist change, blindness to the facts and impede rational judgment" (Allport 1954). Stereotypes typically function to separate minority groups from the majority. Any explanation of the prejudice that creates minority status must be related to the psychological needs of the majority. According to Stolk and Brotherton (1981) and Mustard (2000), one can argue that the stereotype of "spinster" (and other stereotypes of never-married women over 30) are at least partly created because men are expressing prejudice toward never-married women in order to defend their traditionally masculine roles. Nondependent women may be seen as threatening to men's traditionally defined social worlds. Because they experience discrimination, prejudice, and social segregation, never-married women constitute a minority group, which means that they are segregated from the majority of society (who are married) (Stolk 1981; Watkins 1984; Cargan 1986; Mustard 2000).

The 1900s brought a negative change in the connotations placed on never-married women. This was a shift from previous generations; from 1780 to 1840 society experienced a unified social acceptance of never-married women's chosen or unplanned single lifestyle (Crainbakos 1985).

It is theorized that the term "spinster" gained negative exposure due to patriarchal fear of self-sustaining, content women in the 1900s (Chambers-Schiller 1978). The term spinster originated in the 1900s and referred to the menial task of spinning cloth, a duty reserved for never-married women who labored for their keep in their families'

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households (Mustard 2000). The connotation that the term spinster held was one of pity and referred to an unmarried woman as childless, awkward, middle-aged, and ultimately regarded as pathetic (Stolk 1981). The term was collectively used to ostracize and label many diverse women based on their marital status alone (Mustard 2000). The stereotype placed on never-married women was used to control and determine the life course of the never married. During the early 20th century, never-married women were not allowed to own property and were required to relinquish their income to male relatives. Never-married women were also bound to family obligations such as caretakers and housekeepers, thus the term "old maid" originated. Caretakers were required to subserviently work for their family in order to remain in good standing with family members who provided them with housing (Mustard 2000).

The only socially acceptable form of female singlehood after 1900 emerged during times of economic crises, such as the Great Depression and the Second World War. Economic hardship provided women (and all citizens) the opportunity to devote their time to work and creating stability for their country. These periods of chaotic instability decreased the amount of pressure placed on single women to marry. In contemporary society, a significant proportion of never-married women are characterized by traits vastly different from those attributed to the "spinster" stereotype (Stolk 1981; Mustard 2000). Never-married women have been stereotyped as lonely, failures, to be pitied, barren, unfulfilled, deficient, sexually available to men, unwanted, and deviant (Stolk 1981; Watkins 1984; Cargan 1986; Mustard 2000). According to Cargan (1986), single women were viewed as either swingers or pathologically lonely. Loneliness may be the most common theme in literature about the lives of unmarried women over 30.

Pinquart (2003) investigated the predictors of loneliness among never-married women. Pinquart (2003) defines *loneliness* as characterized by deficits in human contact, and an absence of satisfying social relationships, which may or may not be accompanied by psychological symptoms. He further posits that the main causes of loneliness are lack of social integration and support, which are most likely due to human contact deficits. He also asserts that spouses are the *most* important source of closeness, intimacy, and sharing and finds that married adults are less lonely than their unmarried and never-married counterparts (2003).

Twenty years ago never-married women over the age of 30 were viewed as unacceptable, failures, and pitiable (Stolk 1981). It was assumed that never-married women over 30 were barren, unfulfilled, and deficient in personal and social adjustment, possibly to the point of pathology (Stolk 1981; Cargan 1986). According to Simon (1987), all 50 women in her study were "deviants," otherwise regarded as outcast (9). In remaining single, they deviated from a powerful cultural norm and an overwhelming demographic pattern, to which 94-95 percent of their age cohort conformed to at that time.

Deviation from social norms can often bring various types of negative stereotypes, one of which for singles is sexual deviant. Cargan (1986) maintains that the stereotype of sexual swinging is upheld if you have a stereotype that implies that single women have more sexual partners than married women. When women are sexually active in ways that society views as negative, they are often referred to as "sluts." The "slut" designation is just as negatively viewed by society as the "spinster" designation, perhaps more so (Cargan 1986).

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Currently, recent research concludes that although never-married women are a rapidly growing portion of the population, they remain deviant because society views marriage as the only appropriate way of being a complete adult (Hamilton et al. 2006). Further, never-married women over a certain age are still seen as broken or having a problem that needs to be fixed (Mustard 2000; Hamilton et al. 2006). Modern day "spinster" stereotypes portray never-married women as somewhat fulfilled in their independent lifestyles but ultimately unfulfilled or lacking in certain areas of their lives, specifically referring to intimacy and motherhood (Mustard 2000).

In addition to the stigma of being unmarried in a married world, never-married women over 30 feel the pressure of heterosexism – the privileging of heterosexual relations over celibacy, bisexual relationships, or lesbian relationships. Because they have not exhibited sufficient proof of their heterosexuality, these women may be subject to the same lesbian baiting as the feminists of the 1970s. The women Simon (1987) interviewed "lived most of their lives under the suspicion of arrested development or perversion, and 'compulsory heterosexuality' has required these never-married women to justify their status, to explain their assumed manlessness, to prove their womanliness, to account for their childlessness, and, in general, to defend their normality" (110).

Although the image of singles has evolved over the past 30 years, their invisibility and stigmatization as lonely, lacking something, and deviating from the norm continue to be pervasive (Zajicek and Koski 2003). The dominant culture constructs singleness as the absence of a healthy relationship and implies that the never-married woman has no agency and is being acted upon, rather than acting in her own interest (Zajicek and Koski 2003). Some evidence suggests that singleness is increasingly viewed as *normal*, though

the never married continue to be marginalized. A new style of singleness represents choice and a status characterized by happiness, career, and social mobility. Even though this new acceptance has arisen over the past three decades, never-married women over 30 are still seen as more deviant than their male counterparts (Keith 2003). Because available discourses provide an image of being in a committed relationship as an easily accessible definition of self, never-married women's lives are characterized by more self-reflection and more choice in identity representations than their married counterparts (Zajicek and Koski 2003).

Discussions of master statuses in sociology often focus on race, gender, and ability – traits that are immediately visible to the public. Because wedding and engagement rings are a status symbol in American society, and because people learn from childhood that rings on the left ring finger are symbolic, the single status becomes publicly visible. Because it is publicly visible, marital status becomes a master status. According to Simon (1987), never-married women over 30 have at least two master statuses: female gender and never married status. When a single woman over 30 is of a racial minority or physically disabled, her master statuses increase in number, and can multiply in their impact on her life (Simon 1987). Because never-married women are often stereotyped as man-hating (and even as lesbians), they are often further marginalized from society by these statuses, which are not claimed by never-married women over 30 but are ascribed to them by mainstream society (Simon 1987).

Never-married women may also be stereotyped because society believes they *need* to be married. Kaufman and Goldscheider (2007) conducted a study of people's conceptions of whether men or women need to be married. Their findings are important

to how stereotypes of never-married women may have changed over the past several decades. They found that both men and women feel that men need to be married more than women do. They also found that women are more likely than men to think that both men and women can have satisfying lives without marriage. Younger, more educated people are less likely to emphasize marriage, which may point to a generational shift in views about women and marriage. However, religious people and those who are married with children are particularly likely to think that neither men nor women can have satisfying lives without marriage (Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007). The differences in views of these groups of people are important to understanding the personal and social identities of never-married women over 30 in Eastern Tennessee.

The Marital Imperative

Several researchers have proposed that 30 is a turning point of sorts for never-married women. A woman's 30th birthday has been conceptualized as a turning point (Burnley 1979), "Doomsday" (Peterson 1981:61), and as the "Age Thirty Crisis" (Peterson 1981:69). According to Peterson (1981),

> "Age thirty is widely understood as the age by which women are supposed to be married.… This view of 30 as Doomsday is further reinforced by literature dealing with women's lives, by various 'official' criteria such as the Census and academic studies on marital status. It is recognized in the popular culture, by parents and friends, and by the media" (61).

The question of whether 30 is a turning point revolves around the idea of a *marital imperative*. Eventually, according to Peterson (1981), women who do not marry are "called to reckoning and come to terms with the paradox of their position" (61). This describes the concept of never-married women becoming self-aware of the socially prescribed age of marriage, thus coming to terms with their deviation of those norms. The

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Age Thirty Crisis is characterized by the conflicting feelings and values held about marriage, which is followed by a process of working through the conflict, and coming to terms with being single (Peterson 1981). According to Peterson (1981), Burnley (1979), Gee (1990), and Davies (2003), around the age of 30, never-married women begin to reflect on their status in relation to earlier expectations held on marriage. According to Davies (2003), individuals measure their life course progress against cultural expectations, so individuals that deviate from socially expected life changes may experience an acceptance or rejection of their single status after the realization that their life patterns are dissimilar from others in their age cohort. According to Peterson (1981), women at 30 have developed lives, have forged ahead in their independence, and have gotten on with development as adults. Then they are "attacked from behind by traditional ideas of women's lives they have learned earlier, and by the roles society still demands of women" (69). Peterson calls this "social lag," and presents it as the central conflict of the turning point women come to at age 30 in regards to marriage and their lives as single women (69). Burnley (1979) also suggest that at the age of 30 causes single women to rethink their lives. This reevaluation eventually leads to an internalization of the single identity. Further, Burnley (1979) concluded that these changes in perception were "related to specific changes in their lives, rather than enduring personal attributes" (184). Following Burnley's conclusions, it is logical to suggest at this point that women may never marry because of social conditions rather than personal characteristics – such as being unattractive or man-hating. Peterson (1981), and Burnley (1979) concluded that single women would reach a crucial realization period of the potential permanency of their single status around the age of thirty.

More recent research, notably Gee (1990) and Davies (2003), suggest that a woman's life can be divided by several social roles, which are attached to life events, and influence major roles such as marriage. Gee (1990) refers to the self-acceptance of singlehood as a transitioning point of social timetables. Gee uses the term "social timetables" to describe the ordering of life events and social roles by age markers that are socially prescribed. These age markers represent the norms that society places on individuals to determine major role transitions such as marriage. Gee further postulates that the transition points in social timetables change as society transforms. Davies (2003) describes the self-realization of singlehood as a self-attributed change in status from provisionally single to single. She describes this as a gradual change from an indeterminate state of singlehood to a final self-acceptance state of singlehood permanency. Even though Davies does not list a specific age of awareness, she speculates that the transitioning point occurs when individuals internalize their singleness and relate more to their status as a single (Davies 2003).

<u>How Singles View Themselves</u>

Self-identity is self-reference, that sense of ourselves as unique individuals. According to Byrne (2003), self-identity is made up of four elements: (1) experiencing the self in interaction with others, (2) developing the capacity for self-knowledge, (3) devising care and practices of the self, and (4) self-reflexivity. In contrast, social identity refers to our recognition of and response to others' categorizations of us in terms of personhood, gender, race, class, and even marital status (Byrne 2003). Social identities can also be formed according to roles, occupations, social positions, or even stereotypes

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which are believed to signify enduring features of a person's life (Byrne 2003). One significant feature of a single's life is relationships.

When women talk about their experiences as never married and over 30, it is often in terms of relationships – of not having met the right person or difficulty establishing relationships (Frazier et al. 1996; Lewis and Moon 1997). Most often, singles attribute being unmarried to not having met the right person – which suggests that being single reflects barriers to marriage rather than the choice to remain unmarried. Frazier et al. (1996) sampled a group of people who adopted the optimistic view that the difficulty lies with meeting potential partners rather than with there being an actual shortage of desirable partners as Lichter et al. (1995) suggest. In fact, Frazier et al. (1996) found that people are more likely to endorse ideas of choosing to be single rather than ideas of barriers to entering the institution of marriage. According to Kaufman and Goldscheider (2007), single women are more likely to identify with the view that they can remain satisfied without entering into marriage. Relationships are also important to perceptions of loneliness in never-married women over 30. In a study conducted by Cargan (1986), single people were more likely to talk about having no one to share happy and sad moments with or not having anyone to discuss their problems with.

A study conducted by Rice (1989) explores the relationship between life satisfaction and measures of support in single, older, childless women in an attempt to ascertain the differences between never married and widowed women. Using the constructs of role theory, Rice examines the lack of major societal roles for her sample as they relate to the subjects' feelings of life satisfaction and connectedness to others. Rice concludes that never-married women report significantly higher satisfaction, and that role

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consistency is one factor associated with life satisfaction because it is related to the ability to communicate and socialize. Rice suggests that the never married have had long-term experience with their role and have become comfortable with it. A more recent study (Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007) compared the relationship views of life satisfaction in an attempt to distinguish differences between never-married women and men. Although a large number of both sexes did not think that marriage was necessary for life satisfaction, men more so than women felt that marriage was necessary to fulfill satisfaction in their lives.

Two themes that emerge in the literature about never-married women over 30 are independence and choice. According to Simon (1987), the concept of independence pervades the self-portraits of women, and their emphatic refusal to marry is paralleled by their resistance to viewing themselves as part of a group of never-married women. The women in Simon's (1987) study believed in the American ideal of individualism (which is required to be independent) and distanced themselves from devalued social categories. Byrne's (2003) study concludes that achieving ambition, financial independence, and gaining control over one's life were key to women's sense of personal and professional success. In addition, their choices and practices in careers are oriented toward independence. Some of the women Byrne (2003) interviewed, however, did not perceive themselves as able to satisfy the obligations of both career and marriage and thus chose careers over marriage. This choice reflects a value on independence over familial responsibility – which these women did not seem to desire as much as independence. Because never-married women over 30 now view the choice to marry in terms of the emotional and intellectual fulfillment they expect from a marriage relationship, they have

become more selective regarding these criteria (Ahuvia and Adelman 1992; Anderson and Stewart 1994; Schwartzberg et al. 1995). This selectivity includes the desire to select a partner based on egalitarian qualities in regards to educational attainment, career ambition, and financial standing (1992). This increased selectivity may be related to the increased choice and autonomy never-married women over 30 seem to value. Although singles may experience increased independence, many often express contradicting life experiences as single women.

According to recent studies of single people (Keith 2003; Zajicek and Koski 2003), ambivalent attitudes characterize single women's views of singleness. On one side, many women often report many positive social and economically fulfilling experiences and identify various advantages of being single. On the other side, single women talk about a sense of being invisible, stigmatized, and marginalized related to the mainstream emphasis on being in a committed relationship (Zajicek and Koski 2003). Some individuals function well alone, though contradictory themes continue to characterize the lives and stories of never-married women over 30 (Keith 2003). Marriage has clearly become less required for adults in the 21st century (Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007), but the unmarried continue to feel alienated from mainstream, married society (Keith 2003). Continuous contradictions between how women view their identities in accordance with societal expectations likely contribute to the challenges many singles face.

Zajicek and Koski (2003) conducted a study of single, divorced, widowed, and never-married men and women. In their sample, 75 percent of respondents stated that being in a committed relationship is the dominant norm and 39 percent emphasized that

being single is often stigmatized. In addition to experiencing the constant messages that being single is deviant, several respondents felt pressured (at some point in their lives) by their family or friends to become romantically involved – which is, of course, supposed to lead to marriage.

As often happens for people in stigmatized positions, there is a drive to resist stereotyping and marginalization by never-married women over 30. Resistance to dominant norms does not have to involve public challenges to mainstream perspectives, according to Zajicek and Koski (2003), but can occur through subtly refusing to accept negative images of stigmatized groups. Resistance requires negative aspects of identities to be replaced with more acceptable aspects. This can be accomplished by renaming a status by focusing on advantages of it – like the advantages never-married women often talk about such as greater freedom and independence. Zajicek and Koski (2003) admit, however, that all the resistance strategies that emerged in their research relied, in some way, on the person having socioeconomic privilege. Women in Byrne's (2003) study were aware that working to increase the acceptability of singleness as a social identity would require change at the level of self. Even if women do not *resist* stigmatization, they must justify remaining single because most women marry (Watkins 1984; Anderson and Stewart 1994; Schwartzberg et al. 1995).

Never-married women over 30 are aware of the stereotypical conception of womanhood, and that the continual interrogation of their marital status is due to the unacceptable social identity that marks their lives (Byrne 2003). In Byrne's (2003) study, women talked about their invisibility to their families and parents' preferences for married daughters and sons. Women were also aware of others' perceptions of single

women as either asexual, sexually available to men, or lesbians. Byrne concludes that a gendered, stigmatized social identity of singleness continues to persist, perpetuating a more valued conception of womanhood tied to heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood.

<div align="center">Technological Advancements</div>

According to Ahuvia and Adelman (1992), the singles boom has been accompanied by a proliferation of social introduction services including singles ads, video dating, and matchmakers. Writing in 1992, Ahuvia and Adelman could not have predicted the rise in social networking websites, such as MySpace and Facebook. Ahuvia and Adelman also assert that these types of introductions are no longer for socially undesirable people in the dating world but are receiving more legitimacy in the mainstream. In their study, many post-college singles reported feeling that they had exhausted their immediate social networks as conduits to new dates and that other demands on their time contributed to a decrease in dating opportunities. This could be related to Lichter et al.'s (1995) discussion of marriage markets and proportions of available men for women to date after age 30. Due to the lack of literature pertaining to singles and their association to online social networking, this research will explore how singles are influenced by social sites.

Social networking sites all require the same basics in order to function well: user profiles, content, and some way of connecting users to each other (Winder 2007). MySpace attracted more than 114 million visitors in June 2007, up 72 percent over the previous year, while Facebook saw 52.2 million visitors – a 270 percent rise (Winder 2007). The rise in popularity of such social networking sites has no doubt had an effect

on the ways people meet and interact with others – specifically romantically available others.

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

Although much research has been dedicated to the experiences and interpersonal relationships held by never-married women, little if no research has focused on how technology, specifically social networks, have influenced the lives of these women. Previous research has explored the interpersonal relationships held by single women; however, previous findings are dated and inapplicable to present day women. Subsequent studies have investigated the deviant labels placed on never-married women, but even more current research is deficient in explaining current labeling trends. Research is especially limited in regards to the work experiences, specifically discrimination, faced by never-married women in the workforce.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study explores never-married women's perceptions of singlehood. The population parameters consisted of females, ages 30 to 45, who reside in Eastern Tennessee. This study examined never-married women's interpersonal relationships and views on singlehood in the age of online social networking. In addition, this research explored single women's reactions to singlehood in regards to social evolvement and trends. It was predicted that the former benchmark age of 30, in categorizing never-married women as "deviant," is less prevalent now than 30 years ago. It was further hypothesized that relatives, rather than non-relatives, were likely to use negative labels in reference to never-married women over the age of 30. Due to the evolution of society over the past 30 years, it is predicted that there is greater social acceptance of singlehood.

The research was conducted using 30 interviews of never-married women residing in Eastern Tennessee along with an online web-based questionnaire. This chapter presents a description and explanation of the population studied, the instrument used, and the methodology of the study.

Description of Population

The population of interest was never-married women, ages 30 to 45, who currently live in Eastern Tennessee. True random sampling was not possible due to the unknown total population of never-married women in this region. Due to this limitation, two methods were used to collect data from women meeting the eligibility criteria: personal interviews and a web-based survey. Thirty never-married women (ages 30-45)

residing in Eastern Tennessee participated in a structured personal interview. The other 14 also participated in the research but with a different kind of participation.

Volunteers for the personal interviews were sought through nominational and snowball sampling. Nominational sampling is a commonly used technique in qualitative research; it relies on parties outside of the research team to nominate or inform the researcher of potential interview subjects. For this study, I invited local community members to nominate women who fit the eligibility criteria. Once an initial group of respondents were gathered, I asked those women to refer additional respondents who met the eligibility criteria (snowball sampling). This combination of sampling methods resulted in 44 individuals who participated in the research.

Volunteers for the online survey were sought through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling was used to entreat participants through technological communication websites such as MySpace, Facebook, dating websites, and additional social networking systems. The resulting sample consisted of 14 volunteer participants who fit the criteria of never-married women between the ages of 30 and 45 who currently reside in Eastern Tennessee.

The median age of respondents in the personal interview sample was 37.5 years old, and the median age of respondents in the online sample was 39 years of age. Eleven women were white and 3 did not answer about their racial classification. In the personal interview sample, 28 women were white and two were African-American. Because these women did not differ significantly in major demographic characteristics, I have chosen to report these findings with the two interview styles as a combined sample.

Of these 44 women, 50 percent resided in Washington County, 13.6 percent

resided in Sullivan County, and 11.4 percent lived in Unicoi County. The rest resided in

Greene, Grainger, Knox, Carter, Sevier, Johnson, and Hawkins counties. See Table 1 for

a full breakdown of county of residence.

Table 1. County of Residence for Respondents

	Online		Personal Interview		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Washington	6	42.9	16	53.3	22	50
Sullivan	1	7.1	5	16.6	6	13.6
Unicoi	1	7.1	4	13.3	5	11.4
Greene	2	14.3	1	3.3	3	6.8
Grainger	1	7.1	0	0	1	2.3
Knox	1	7.1	0	0	1	2.3
Carter	0	0	2	6.6	2	4.5
Sevier	0	0	1	3.3	1	2.3
Johnson	0	0	1	3.3	1	2.3
Hawkins	0	0	1	3.3	1	2.3

Educational level was also similar for respondents in both groups. Most

respondents had achieved no more than a four-year college degree (B.A. or B.S.), and a

few had achieved master's degrees. One had achieved a PhD, and three had not

completed high school. For a full breakdown of educational attainment, see Table 2.

Table 2. Educational Attainment of Respondents

	online		personal interview		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
less than high school	0	0	3	10	3	6.8
high school or GED	3	21.4	11	36.6	14	31.8
4-year degree	7	50	13	43.3	20	45.5
master's degree	2	14.3	0	0	2	4.5
PhD.	0	0	1	3.3	1	2.3

Because much of the literature suggests that women's involvement in the labor

force is connected to changes in the status of never-married women over 30, I gathered

information about employment and income. Ninety-one percent of women sampled were employed (96.6 percent of personal interview participants and 92.9 percent of online questionnaire participants). Their income levels ranged from no annual income to between $50,000 and $79,999 per year. A full breakdown of income levels is available in Table 3.

Table 3. Income Ranges of Respondents.

	online		personal interview		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<10k	0	0	2	6.6	2	4.5
11k-19k	1	7.1	1	3.3	2	4.5
20k-29k	2	14.3	10	33.3	12	27.3
30k-39k	1	7.1	6	20	7	15.9
40k-49k	0	0	4	13.3	4	9.1
50kk-79k	3	21.4	5	16.6	8	18.2
>80k	0	0	0	0	0	0

Respondents reported a range of religious views. Some were not religious (18.2 percent), while others were participants in organized religion (75 percent). Some women did not want to reveal their religious preferences (6.8 percent) for personal reasons which they refused to divulge. Of the religious women, 50 percent were Protestant Christian, 6.8 percent were Evangelical Christian, and 9.1 percent identified as "Other." 34.1% of respondents chose not to answer questions about their religious preference. Women placed in the "Other" category generally reported that they were "spiritual" or that they believed "in a higher power," but did not participate in organized religious activities.

Methods

Personal interviews were conducted in order to obtain qualitative information on the lifestyles of never-married women, using an interview guide (Appendix A). In-depth interviewing of a small sample allowed me to obtain comprehensive information about

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the respondents' lifestyles. This design maximized the likelihood that respondents would bring up lifestyle aspects that could not elaborated on through a survey.

Personal interviews allow researchers to homogenize the environment in which the interview takes place, such as determining a specific time and location for all interviews. This assures the researcher that all interviews were conducted similarly, thus allowing researchers to interpret responses more precisely. Personal interviews also provide the interviewer with control and direction of the interview process. Personal interviews permit the recording of spontaneous reactions from respondents, such as body movements, gestures, and facial expressions (Frankfort-Nachmias 2000). During this research, personal interviews provided me with flexibility during the questioning process of this research. During the personal interviews, I clarified questions and probed for additional information while filtering contingency questions in accordance to respondents' answers. At various points during interviews, I recorded emotional outburst from respondents, which allowed greater precision in analyzing respondents' beliefs about particular themes relating to the interview.

Personal interviews are not without limitations. A possible downside to the flexibility of personal interviews is the potential for interviewer bias. Even though the structured interview should be objective, it can be difficult for an interviewer to conceal nonverbal communication when emotions are evoked. An interviewer's external appearance can also influence the respondents' answers (Frankfort-Nachmias 2000). During the interview process, I was continuously controlling my facial expressions with the hopes of conveying attentiveness while at the same time avoiding disapproving or approving gestures. I also controlled my external appearance for respondents' comfort

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during interviews. Prior knowledge of a potential respondent's occupation or socioeconomic standing enabled me to wear clothes that would match the respondent's assumed appearance. This was initiated to make the respondent feel secure responding to someone she could relate to. While I could not guarantee anonymity to respondents, I did guarantee confidentiality. All participants provided informed consent, and in the subsequent reporting of the data, all names have been changed to protect the identities of respondents and to further guarantee confidentiality.

A web-based survey was used to complement the qualitative data gathered in personal interviews by reaching a geographically diverse sample in a relatively short amount of time. This method was cost-efficient and provided supplemental data used in conjunction with the personal interview method. Due to my limited funds, a web-based survey was the most cost efficient way to contact respondents from several Eastern Tennessee counties. Survey data further enhanced interview data by including respondents from distant counties. These surveys would have otherwise been impossible to gather by interviews due to my limited funding for transportation.

Web-based surveys are convenient for researchers with limited financial and transportation resources; they provide greater access to geographically dispersed samples, while providing anonymity for respondents. I solicited respondents via email directed toward respondents' screen-names posted on various websites. Specific websites targeted included MySpace.com, Facebook.com, QuieroLatino.com, Meetup.com, Lavaplace.com, etc. These sites were targeted because they allowed me to contact members of the social network without gaining identifiable information. The social networks also represented various causes such as specific religious dating services or

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minority networking sites. Although I could identify and e-mail participants by their screen-names, websites restricted me from actually gaining knowledge of screen-name e-mails. This allowed me to e-mail potential participants without having identifiable knowledge of participants. Having identifiable knowledge of participant could have influenced participants' responses, resulting in biased data. Biasing error is greatly reduced when respondents are not influenced by an interviewer's disposition. Respondents could answer the survey in the privacy of their chosen location without the pressure of an interviewer influencing their decision. Web-based surveys also provide the respondent sufficient time to respond to each question because they are allowed to take the survey in their chosen location and at their own pace. (Nachmias 2000).

Limitations of web-based questionnaires include simplistic questions, inflexibility, bias, and low response rate (Nachmias 2000). One disadvantage found in surveys is lack of elaboration from respondents. This is partially due to the simplistic wording, which often solicits simple responses. Web-based questionnaires are designed with simplistic wording to ensure consensus on respondents' comprehension and do not provide the researcher with opportunities to probe for additional information. An additional disadvantage surfaced due to the location of this study. Eastern Tennessee is a fairly poor, rural community, and not everyone has access to a computer or the internet. Because of this, there may be class bias in the web-questionnaire data because those who have internet access are likely to be different from those who do not.

Questionnaire Construction

Two methods were used for this study: a structured personal interview and a structured online survey. I considered other research methods, including mail surveys and

online surveys only but decided that personal interviews were a more cost efficient use of resources in comparison to mail surveys. The only cost occurred during personal interviews was the price of transporting myself to and from interviews. Participants who lived in distant counties were asked to complete the online survey, further reducing total expense. I also decided that personal interviews would provide a richer, fuller picture of the reality of life for never-married women over 30. Interviews allowed me to guide the questioning process while providing the respondents with opportunities to elaborate on their experiences as never-married women.

The personal interview and survey guide were designed to gather a general overview of the social experiences of never-married women residing in Eastern Tennessee. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to investigate several aspects of never-married women's lives. Questionnaire construction was facilitated by restructuring Burnley's (1979) questionnaire along with creating original questions pertaining to social networking sites. The personal interview and online survey consisted of six sections of questions.

Table 4 contains the first set of questions, which consists of demographical questions that primarily pertain to the personal history of respondents. This section is divided into two parts: Questions (items 1-4) contained essential contingency questions on respondents' prerequisites in relation to the survey, and an inventory of respondents' personal information. Respondents were filtered to the second set of questions if they met the prerequisite in age, gender, location, and lifestyle requirements. The first group of questions related to respondents' personal histories.

Table 4. Questions Relating to Personal History of Respondents

1.	Are you a never-married female between the ages of 30-45, and currently reside in Eastern Tennessee?
2.	In what year were you born?
3.	What is your ethnicity?
4.	What Eastern Tennessee county do you reside in ?
5.	How long have you resided in this county?
6.	What is your highest level of education completed?
7.	Are you currently employed?
8.	What is your job title?
9.	What is your annual income?
10.	Are you religious?
11.	What is your religious affiliation?

The second set of questions in section one (items 5-11) consisted of demographic

questions pertaining to respondents' personal status. Demographic inquiry was primarily

used for information in regards to respondents' employment status, annual income,

religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status.

The second section of questions (items 12-15), found in Table 5, explored the

relationship status of respondents. Respondents were asked to provide information in

regards to sexual identity, living arrangement, and relationship status.

Table 5. Questions Relating to Relationship Status of Respondents

12.	Are you presently involved in what could be called a dating relationship with a man/woman/not in a dating relationship?
13.	How long have you been in this relationship?
14.	Would you characterize your relationship as casual/serious?
15.	Do you have an exclusive commitment to this one person? In other words, both parties agree to only date each other?
16.	Do you currently live with this person?
17.	How long have you lived in this arrangement?
18.	If you could change your living arrangement, what would you like to change about it?

The second section of relationship status questions (items 16-18) specifically explored the current living arrangements of respondent, including the type of living arrangements along with respondents' satisfaction in regards to this living arraignment.

The third set of questions (items 19-24), shown in Table 6, examined the personal identity of never-married women. Questions measured the general life satisfaction levels of respondents.

Table 6. Questions relating to Respondents' Personal Identity

19.	Do you think you will marry this person?
20.	What advantages have you experienced form being a never-married female?
21.	What disadvantages have you experienced from being a never-married female?
22.	In general, are you satisfied with your current life style ?
23.	Has being a never-married female affected your life?
24.	In what way(s) has your life been affected?

Questions revolved around the advantages and disadvantages respondents experienced as never-married women over a particular age.

The fourth set of questions (items 25-31), shown in Table 7, was designed to measure respondents' awareness and response to social views on never-married lifestyles. The fourth segment of questions centered on social views of never-married women (which shape their perceptions and evaluations of self), which I will call *social perceptions*, for the purposes of this study.

Table 7. Questions relating to Social Perceptions of Never-Married Lifestyles

25.	Do you think the people you work with treat you differently because you have never been married?
26.	How do you describe yourself to others when your relationship status is questioned?
27.	What words do you think people generally use to describe single women?
28.	How do you think society in general views never-married women over the age of 30?
29.	Do you feel that society treats never-married women differently than married women?
30.	Have you ever been called a specific word reserved for never-married women?
31.	What type of terms were you called, and did they make you feel positively or

	negatively about yourself?

Respondents were asked to describe how society and specific individuals reacted toward respondents in social settings, such as work and other daily interactions. Questions also focused on respondents' feelings about social views of their lifestyles.

The fifth set of questions (items 32-41), shown in Table 8, was designed to explore never-married women's use of online social networks.

Table 8. Questions relating to Social Networking of Respondents

32.	Do you participate in singles groups in your area?
33.	Do you utilize any online social networks such as MySpace, Facebook, dating sites, or any other online meeting spaces?
34.	How often do you utilize online social networks?
35.	What online social networks do you primarily use and why?
36.	Do you feel that online social networks have had a positive influence on never-married women?
37.	In what way(s) have social networks had a positive influence on never-married women?
38.	Have online social networks influenced your life in any way?
39.	How do you primarily meet female friends?
40.	How do you primarily meet male friends?
41.	Who do you primarily spend time with?

This section was created to explore the influence of online social networking and dating sites on the social and dating interactions of never-married women.

The sixth set of questions (items 42-53), shown in Table 9, focused on potential holding patterns associated with various life changes in regards to marriage status. Questions were designed to gather information on crucial turning points in a woman's life and how never-married women faced these changes.

Table 9. Questions relating to Life Satisfaction of Respondents

42.	In the past, did you desire to marry?
43.	Has your desire to marry/not marry ever affected the way you planned your future?
44.	When you were in your teens, did you have some approximate age by which time

	you thought you would be married?
45.	How did reaching/passing that age affect you?
46.	Do you have children?
47.	Would you like to have children?
48.	How would you prefer to have children?
49.	Sometimes married people tease singles about being single, or ask when they are getting married, or why they have not married. Have you experienced this?
50.	In Do you have a reason for not marrying??
51.	What is your ethnicity?
52.	Do you feel that never-married women are more or less stigmatized today than they were in the past ?
53.	Thank you, would you like to have a copy of the research findings?

The last half of section six questions (49-52) were designed to gather general views on

the satisfaction of never-married lifestyles, along with perceived social views and

typecast of this particular lifestyle. Question 56 concluded the survey with a gratitude

statement with a solicitation for additional research participants. Respondents were also

offered research results at no cost for participating.

Data Collection

Potential interview participants were sought through individuals that knew of or

interacted with never-married women. Once potential interview subjects were located,

they were subsequently contacted by phone, text messaging, or e-mail. This allowed me

the opportunity to explain the purpose and significance of the research, along with the

opportunity to schedule a one-hour interview period with the potential participant. At the

scheduled interview, I requested that the participant sign and date a consent form

(Appendix C), which provided the participant with information regarding the rights of the

participant, responsibilities' of the researcher and the voluntary nature of the study.

Once an interview was scheduled, I provided reminder phone calls, e-mails, and

text messages to the participating individual. When a prospective contact denied written

consent for the personal interview, I destroyed all gathered information and terminated further contact with the individual. Interview participants chose public locations throughout Eastern Tennessee for interview sites, based on where they felt most comfortable. Participants who completed the structured interview were asked to provide the contact information of other women who fit the research criteria.

I assigned a number (1-30) for each participant, instead of actual names on transcriptions and research findings, thus assuring that the participant's confidentiality was intact. In the subsequent reporting of the data, pseudonyms have been provided for each participant to make writing their stories easier and more understandable for readers. I alone possess and maintain all research and supplemental information, further assuring participants' confidentiality. Each participant was offered the study results free of charge for her participation. I only retained contact information in the event that a participant wished to receive follow-up information and notification of further research.

A structured internet survey consisting of the same questions as the interview was included in this study to enhance the personal interview data. This method also provided opportunities to reach a more racially and geographically heterogeneous sample of the population. The survey was designed on software provided by Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey has two features important for my study. First, it permits filter questions that sort subsequent questions based on previous responses. Second, it allows for contingency questions (closed-ended questions that are relevant to only a subgroup of respondents), which ensured relevant responses from respondents. Convenience sampling was used to gather potential survey respondents via social networking sites. The online structured survey was posted on various social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, dating

websites, and other social network systems. General social network systems available to the general-public were solicited, along with various networks dedicated to specific subsets. Subset social networks included various interest groups such as specific ethnic dating services, regionally themed interest groups, and all women chat rooms, which provided member e-mails. Initial survey respondents were solicited through e-mail addresses gathered through online networking sites. Background information on the research, including the consent form, was provided within the survey itself. Participants who fit the research criteria and submitted the consent form were granted access to the research survey. Potential participants who did not fit the research criteria were blocked from accessing the online survey. Participants who completed the survey were asked to forward the survey link to any women who fit the research criteria.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the social experiences of never-married women over the age of 30 currently residing in Eastern Tennessee. Three specific areas of interest were examined: first, it was predicted that the former benchmark age of 30 in categorizing never-married women as "deviant" is less prevalent now than 30 years ago. Second, it was further hypothesized that relatives, rather than non-relatives, were likely to use negative labels in reference to never-married women over the age of 30. Third, due to changing trends in marriage patterns, I expected to find greater social acceptance of the single lifestyle.

This research was conducted using 30 interviews and 14 online surveys of never-married women residing in Eastern Tennessee. The participants in this sample ranged in ages from 30-45 and represented 10 Eastern Tennessee Counties. The average age of respondents was 38.25.

I expected these participants to provide valuable insight into the common experiences of never-married women over the age of 30. I also wanted to explore how singlehood has affected the personal and social identity of never-married women. Lastly, I wanted to examine online social networking in relation to singles social lives.

Experiences of Never-Married Women Over 30

Several types of stereotyping emerged during the interviews with these women. Some had been called lesbians, some had heard the most common stereotypes of "spinster" and "old maid," and many of them experienced some form of stereotyping at work.

Only a few women had been called the two most commonly used stereotypes reserved for never-married women, "old maid" and "spinster." One term that was not mentioned in existing literature, yet was used toward several women was "cat lady." Although literature on this term is lacking, it might be suggested that the term "cat lady" refers to a newly coined stereotype. One respondent, Melissa, wittily defined "cat lady" as a term used to say a single woman was so lonely that she sought the companionship of many cats while also being portrayed as mentally unstable. This might suggest that the term "cat lady" is a modern version of "spinster." Jenny said that she hears "old maid more than anything." Once she said the words, however, she quickly distanced herself from the stereotype and began to talk about women she thought fit the "old maid" stereotype. She said, "Gosh, I always think something's wrong with *them* when *they're* not married" (emphasis added). An interesting theme emerged during my research: the respondents' inability to associate themselves with the negative aspects of never-married females. Jenny's statement above, directed towards *them* and *they're*, shows a distancing of herself from a collective group of singles. It might be suggested that due to the continued negative connotations placed on singles, Jenny along with other respondents chose to distance themselves from social stigmas placed on singles.

Melissa said she had been called "cat lady" by men and had developed a strategy for resisting that label for herself in the future. "I profess to hate cats just because of this stereotype. I mean, I have nothing against cats, cats are fine, but I won't own a cat, there will never be a cat in the house as long as I'm single, because then I would be an old cat lady." Though Melissa has "nothing against cats," this stereotype has led her to avoid having a cat as a pet. Melissa chose to deprive herself in order to deflect the potential

stereotype from being connected to her social identity. Melissa and Jenny show us that social stigmas placed on singles still influence the way singles perceive themselves as deviant. According to Stolk and Brotherton (1981) and Mustard (2000), singles' stereotypes are created partly because men (who are insecure with women fulfilling traditionally masculine roles) are expressing prejudice toward never-married women. Melissa's experience with men calling her "cat lady" illustrates the notion that modern sexism is directed toward independent single women through stereotypical terminology.

Nine of the women I interviewed said they had experienced discrimination at work based on stereotypes of never-married women over 30. Employers assumed that they had nothing to do at night and on weekends, and that they had nowhere to go for the holidays. Employers often scheduled them for extra time or longer hours around holidays, without asking them if it was okay, or if they wanted the hours of work. Melanie (43, white) is a nurse. She said that at a previous job, "they would change my schedule without asking because they knew I was single, there was no negotiating, really." Linda (36, white) is also a nurse. She experiences similar things as Melanie, but says that she understands "that there is people who like to be home with their husband and kids and I try not to worry about it too much." Frances, who is also a nurse, said she does not experience these things at her current job, but in the past she was "expected to take on longer hours on the weekends because they assume you don't have anything to do. Usually they would not ask me if I wanted the hours."

Nursing is not the only place women experience this kind of discrimination. Joan (40, white) works part-time at a hair salon shampooing hair. She said "Yes, they make me work holidays. In the beginning, the boss asked 'oh, no kids? Very good.' I like it, but

sometimes you feel used by it." Though she has a part-time job, Joan is currently living in a homeless shelter. Martha (44, white) works as a server in a restaurant. She said, "I am the first person they call when someone can't show," with an obvious look of disgust. Betsy (31, white) works at Sam's Club and says she is usually asked to work around holidays over married co-workers because "they assume that I don't have anywhere to go for the holidays."

Many respondents shared similar experiences of work-place discrimination. Whether supervisors openly praise single women for their useful status as a working commodity or automatically scheduled overtime and holidays, the single women were viewed as having no life. This discrimination also suggests that employers disregarded single women's personal agendas, further illustrating the notion that singles are not valued as socially competent individuals, and therefore they would subserviently work their shifts.

Although only a few women expressed having been called lesbians, those who had experienced lesbian baiting expressed the most disgust at being labeled this way. Lesbian baiting refers to the notion that a woman must exhibit sufficient proof of her heterosexuality to others in order to justify her lifestyle (Simon 1987). Lesbian baiting tactics were used against the feminists of the 1970s as a means to diminish their standing as strong and powerful women (Simon 1987). The continued use of lesbian baiting tactics illustrate that the stigma of being a lesbian is greater in contemporary American society than is the stigma of being never married and over 30. Men were the most common perpetuators of heterosexual questioning. This further illustrates the notion that a

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dominant group is marginalizing single women in order to diminish the potential threat against traditional male roles of provider and protector.

During her interview, one woman twice mentioned having been called a lesbian, in response to two separate questions. Jenny (37, white) is a hairstylist and has felt some pressure about not being married from her clients. She says people ask her questions like "What's wrong with you?" and "Are you gay?" Though she gets questions about not being married often, she says, "It [being stereotyped as a never-married women over 30] only made me mad when a male customer asked me if I was gay and didn't like men."

While Jenny got upset about suggestions that she might be a lesbian, Linda (36, white), who is a nurse, simply mentioned that being over 30 and unmarried raised questions about a woman's sexual orientation. She said that stereotypes depended on the age of a woman, and that being over 30 "raises more questions such as sexual orientation as far as what kind of lifestyle they are living and what life choices they have made."

Another respondent said that questions about her sexual orientation were simply annoying but not really bothersome. "Other than making family gatherings kind of annoying, you kind of get grilled about, you know, 'so are you seeing anyone? What are you doing?' and they start to assume you are a lesbian. It makes gatherings fun," said Frances (36, African American), who is a nurse and a student worker.

Is 30 a Turning Point?

Previous studies suggest that 30 is a turning point, or age of awakening for unmarried women – that 30 brings with it a crucial point when women question their unmarried status and feel some marital imperative. The women I interviewed were mixed on this. Some felt some internal pressure to get married while others stressed the

disadvantages of being married. Others stressed the advantages of being married when talking about their own marital imperatives.

Several respondents were engaged. Melanie (43, white) is engaged, and said she "can't wait to move in with my boyfriend when we get married." Others, like Agatha (38, white) and Sue (41, African American) said they would like to get married and live with their boyfriends. Of the 15 women who were in relationships, six said they would marry the person they were dating, while nine were adamant that they would *not* marry the person they were dating.

Still others said they did not want to get married. Linda (36, white) said, "There was a time I thought the person I am with was going to be my husband, and when I realized he was not the person I was going to marry I decided to move and work for a while. I definitely made some different decisions. I wasn't concerned about going to school when I thought I was going to get married." Though Linda was not going to marry the person she was with, she did not have a realization that she would never get married, only that he "was not the person I was gong to marry," which suggests that she believes, as other women expressed, that they would get married when the right man came along.

Others said they wanted to live on their own before getting married, but that marriage was still important to them. For example, Sue (41, African American) said "I've always wanted to put my life first before marriage because I knew I wanted to get married after I lived on my own. I mean, it's good to depend on that other person, but you don't want to fully depend on that other person because I knew I love him and he loves me but you know there's like, you know, you have to be independent." One

respondent, Melissa (42, white) said that she "realized that a piece of paper is not that important when it comes to your relationship."

Some women talked about the tax benefits of being married and how they would like to benefit from marriage in that way. Others expressed a desire to have two incomes in their household – to make life a little easier. Most, however, focused on the relationship aspects of being married – having someone to talk to and having someone to support them (emotionally and financially).

Linda (36, white) expressed her desire to be married as partly a desire to have someone help with the basic physical tasks of everyday life. She said, "It can be more work [being single], there is not someone helping out like taking out trash. You know, when you have had a stressful day, the last thing you want to do is have to come home and wash dishes, it would be nice to have someone to help out with household things." Others expressed a desire to benefit from the status ascribed to married women. For example, Melissa (42, white) said, "It's almost like married women are real women because they are doing their purpose and we are just labeled as the others." While she did not verbally express her desire to be a part of this group, her facial expressions and gestures during this part of our conversation led me to believe that she desired the higher social status gained by becoming married.

Only a few of the respondents in this study said that they had an age at which they thought they would be married. Two women said they thought they would be married by 21, while another said she had hoped to be married by 19. Only 6 women felt there was an age by which they should be married, and one of these said that only her parents held on to that requirement for her. I asked the women how they felt once they had reached

that point in their lives, and most expressed having laughed at themselves or just moving on with their lives. While only a few women expressed having had an age at which they thought they would be married, I think it is important to include their responses in this report because the turning point is such a prominent part of the literature about women's lives.

Melanie (43, white) and Lindsay (40, white) thought they would be married by their early 20s. Both said that they felt slight disappointment that the right man had not come along, but that they just moved on. Lindsay went on to say, "I knew that it was not the right time in my life to be with someone, I knew that I needed to further my future first."

Still others laughed at their own expectations. Frances (31, African American) said, "I thought it was funny that I had that notion that, like, 25 was so old when I was a teenager. Now, if I get married in my thirties I'll be happy." Margaret (44, white) said, "When I turned 21, I realized that it was ridiculous to think I would be ready to marry at that time, so I just focused on work and my life."

<p align="center">Personal Identity</p>

As evident in previous research, the themes of independence and freedom emerge from most conversations with never-married women over 30. The same is true for my sample. Specifically, women discussed financial issues in regards to independence and choice in their lives. Many women discussed their reasons for never marrying, especially the feeling that they had just not met the right man. I also asked women about their satisfaction with their lifestyles, and from this, several contradictions emerged.

My conversations with these women were overwhelmingly focused on their sense of independence and freedom. Many expressed a feeling of being "okay" by themselves, or alone. Those who lived alone preferred things that way because they did not feel constrained by the presence of other people in their lives – people they felt would make demands on their time and energy.

Jenny (37, white) is a hairstylist and is currently engaged. While she said in her interview that she "can't wait to move in with her boyfriend," she also said that she felt some sense of independence because of the experience of living alone. "I don't really have anybody to answer to. I mean, I do my own thing and I don't have to worry about being home when it's later 'cause I'm not married and I don't have children." She doesn't have to worry about being home at a certain time because there is no husband or child at home to demand her time and energy.

Most of the respondents said they felt like they have freedom, or that they have more freedom now than they did when they were in relationships in the past. For example, Mary (38, white) owns her own business, and said "I have the freedom to live as I please, I don't have to answer to anyone." This feeling may be amplified for Mary because of her status as a business owner, but she was not the only respondent who expressed a feeling of freedom, and many respondents related their sense of freedom to financial independence.

A sense of financial independence accompanied these feelings of independence and freedom. Melanie (43, white) said, "You're just responsible for your own finances, you don't have to wonder about how the other person is spending money." Mary (38, white) said, "You don't have to worry so much about bills. If something doesn't work

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out, you don't have to worry about splitting everything up." Both of these women expressed some sense of financial independence but also a reservation about having combined finances, which they both felt was an undeniable part of being married. For them, and others, not getting married was somehow related to protecting themselves from becoming part of a financial bind with someone else.

Still others, like Jenny (37, white), saw some financial benefit to being married, but weighed the advantages of greater income with the disadvantages of losing her independence. "I mean, money wise, it would be nice to have another income, but I think sometimes it's [being single] better because I look at all these people having all these problems and I don't have all these problems, 'cause I don't have no one to answer to." Because Jenny is currently engaged, it is only speculation, but seems quite obvious after spending time with her, that she is conflicted about giving up her independent identity to become a married woman. Though she desperately wants to be married, she has some reservations about what it might mean to be married.

Only one woman expressed being unsatisfied with her life as a never-married woman over 30. All others said they were completely satisfied with their lives the way they were, though they may have wanted to change their living situations because they were not happy with roommates. Joan (40, white) said, "After 40 it looks like you don't have a place if you don't have a family and it kind of deeply, deeply hurt inside after 40. Before 40, I never felt like this." Joan is the only woman who felt unsatisfied with her life, and she felt a very deep pain from social pressure. Joan's comment on self-realization after 40 could potentially suggest that singles are approaching a turning point at a later age. Although this particular comment cannot be generalized to the sample, it

does suggest that further research should explore the later age of single's self-actualization.

<div align="center">Social Identity</div>

Women's personal identities are shaped by their social identities. Most identity theories suggest that these cannot be separated (Byrne 2003). However, Byrne (2003) suggests that the two can be artificially separated when studying the lives of women. I have separated them for the purposes of this paper to be able to examine the social causes of women's feelings about being never married and over 30. I do not believe that they are separate in the lived experiences of women.

I asked these women several questions about their social identities. They provided incredible insight into the social view of single life, the family pressures they endure as never-married women, and the feeling of loss as their friends married. They also expressed their own perspectives about the social stigma of being never married over 30, and told me about how they think that stigma has changed from their mother's generation to now.

When women talked about how society sees never-married women over 30, they expressed some positive views and many negative views that they believe society has of them. Most expressed that these days, women are seen as strong or career-oriented, and are respected as individuals. Others said they felt like being unmarried over 30 was seen as normal now, compared to their mothers' generations. This further illustrates that 30 as a self-actualization point is now experienced at a later age.

Only Melissa, after she realized how desperately she wanted to be married, said that she felt society had a negative view of never-married women over 30. In fact, she

admitted that she, personally, harbors negative stereotypes and views of never-married women over 30. She said, "I think there must be something wrong with them. I really feel sorry for them. Like, I think they won't get married because I just found them weird." Melissa's professed self-hatred towards singles suggest that she has internalized negative social stereotypes of singles. If this is the case, Melissa is harboring these feelings to distance herself from the label of single. This type of "I" am not "them" ideology was a reoccurring theme throughout the interview process. All respondents would refer to single women as "they" and "them" instead of collectively identifying with the lifestyle.

While all of the women said they felt pressure to get married, few said they felt that pressure from anyone but their immediate or extended family members. This supports my second hypothesis that family members pressure singles to marry more than nonrelatives do. Melissa said, "My parents don't call me anything specifically, but they are constantly pressuring me to get married. It's so bad that last Christmas, my dad bought me a huge screen TV just so men would want to come over to my place." Melissa's case is extreme, but many women felt that their families were pressuring them to meet someone and settle down.

Margaret (44, white) felt inadequate because of pressure from her immediate family. She said, "It would irritate me that they were trying to pressure or push me into a lifestyle. It made me feel that my present life was inadequate." Mary (38, white) said, "My mom is constantly asking me when I'm going to get married and what's wrong?" Dara (38, white) expressed dread of family gatherings because of pressure from her family. She said, "Holiday gatherings with my family are the worst. That's when the

'when are you getting married' questions are brought up. Thank God holidays are scarce."

Others said their extended families made jokes about their single status, but it was evident from the way they said things and their facial expressions, that they felt the jokes as real pressure. Agatha (38, white) said, "My family will just jokingly tell me that I'm not getting any younger. As if I hadn't noticed." Frances (31, African American) also hears jokes from her family. She said, "My family will just kind of, you know, make jokes that I better get on that because my biological clock is, you know, thank you for reminding me." Their responses to what appear as "jokes" from their families are not completely received as jokes by these women. It may be that these jokes are their parents' way of subtly approaching the topic of marriage. Some women commented that immediate family members were accepting of their lifestyle; however, at extended family events they would feel pressure from family members to justify their singleness. Many respondents experienced joking phrases directed toward their singlehood. It is interesting that the type of "jokes" singles experience was actually a subtle commentary on the deviant nature of their lifestyles. It would be interesting to further explore how jokes are directed toward marginalized groups in order to cleverly mask social condemnation.

Several women that I interviewed expressed some feeling of loneliness in their lives. Most of their loneliness centered around not having someone with whom to share their problems and their life's journey. Once the word *lonely* left their lips, though, most of them turned the conversation around to a positive aspect of being alone – having time to be selfish and think about themselves first.

Margaret (44, white) said that when she was younger, she was lonely. She went on to say, "I think that's because I was used to living with someone (parents), but after living on my own for a while, I learned to appreciate myself." Several women I interviewed expressed a similar way of dealing with loneliness – they either refused to be seen as lonely, or they took their time alone as a time to grow and learn to love and "appreciate" themselves.

Others experienced loneliness when their female friends got married, and they felt as if they were "pulled away" from them. Melissa (42, white) said, "My friends can't come over as much because they get into the day to day routine of being with this other person and they have to be home to make dinner, and it's just impossible to have the freedom to just go off like me." Not only did Melissa (and others) miss their friends, but they also found something positive in being lonely. Melissa continued by saying,

> *I just don't want to be that woman in the back of the room with children all around her, and you don't really... you never really talk to her. She's his wife and those are his kids and she's not her own person anymore, she's just his wife. I get real lonely and it's real hard to make decisions when you don't have anyone to bounce ideas off of. I feel like I'm flying by the seat of my pants and I don't have the safety net of anyone else. I mean if I lost my job, I would just be on my own.*

Though Melissa felt as if she was "flying by the seat of her pants," she justified and romanticized her loneliness by seeing marriage as having its own stigma. Women who are married are no longer themselves – they have lost their identities – and she would rather be lonely than to not be herself.

Several themes emerged as singles elaborated on their experiences with loneliness. A few women experienced loneliness from lack of intimacy, although they quickly asserted that having independence and learning to appreciate themselves

alleviated the loneliness. One study by Baumbusch (2004) suggested that single women often experience loneliness due to lack of companionship. Melissa not only related loneliness to her personal life, but also as a married women's experience. Melissa viewed marriage with motherhood as a loss of a woman's personal identity. One study found similar patterns of single women choosing to view marriage as a loss of women's personal identities (Zajicek and Koski 2003). This theme suggests that Melissa views marriage as a subordinate position held by women that requires them to relinquish their personal identity in order to serve their social role as mother and wife.

As I was talking to these women, several contradictions emerged. Most of them involved internal conflict about their own desires to be married. Sue (41, African American) said, "You learn to rely on yourself and be very independent, but having a relationship gives you someone to talk to and get you through things." Though she felt independent, she also felt as if a relationship could provide something she is lacking.

Similarly, Linda (36, white) said, "I really like my freedom of choice, it allows me to be selfish and accomplish my goals, then again it would be nice to have someone help out and to talk to, you know, it has its ups and downs like everything else." Linda liked being independent, wished for something else, but also realized the contradiction of her position. She learned to accept that everything has "its ups and downs," no matter which side of the wedding you are on.

Perhaps the biggest contradiction I observed was in Melissa (42, white). At the beginning of her interview, she was adamant about never getting married. As we were talking, she began to cry, and said, "I know I said before that I was satisfied, but now that I think about it, I'm not sure about it, I'm not. I want to be married. I make marriage a

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bigger deal than it should be. Maybe I should just marry someone who is convenient."
Not only did Melissa's attitude about her life and her desire for marriage shift, but she
realized that she wants to be married so badly that marrying "someone who is
convenient" – marrying for the sake of being married – has become desirable to her.

Several women felt that being single gave them the opportunity to enrich
themselves and develop a strong sense of independence. However, many women often
expressed that the disadvantage of having independence and freedom was that they had
no one to spend time with. A recurring theme of singles viewing marriage as a
relinquishment of independence could relate to society's gender expectations placed on
marriage. This is illustrated by the pressure single women felt about the role of wife; they
felt that they would have to relinquish their independence in order to become a wife.

Several women felt that marriage would result in a loss of personal friendships.
Three specifically spoke at length about their feelings of loss. Melissa (42, white) said
that her friends had "joined married people land." Melissa said, "It feels like once they
get married, they joined married people land, and they only ever talk about being
married. … We are still friends and we can still talk about other things, but it's like, I
can't help with their problems because I don't understand where they're coming from
anymore." At this point, Melissa started crying and said, "My best friend and I used to go
to the beach together, but now she can't because she's married and she needs to go home
and can't stay over." Melissa's feeling of loss is very deep, as evidenced by her tearful
story about losing her best friend to marriage. Melissa's feelings further illustrate that
single women feel that part of their identity must be relinquished in order to become a
married person.

Jenny (37, white) said, "Most of my high school friends have got married, I talk to some of them, but after some got married they had kids and it's different. You get married and it's harder to talk. I'm sure it's the same for them, it's hard for them to talk to me 'cause I've never been married." Jenny also expressed some irritation about always having to hear about other people's children. Jenny admitted earlier in her interview that she wanted to have children as a married person, and it could be that she feels some desire to be able to talk about her own children with her married friends.

Frances (31, African American) said, "Friends don't really tease but when they start pairing off and getting married, you would go out with five couples and, you know, I tend to drift apart from my friends when they get married, not all, but for the most part, they want to do things with other couples, you don't want to be the fifth wheel. I feel comfortable around other singles." For Frances, being around married couples made her feel uncomfortable, so she chooses to spend time mainly with other single people, where she does feel comfortable.

Frances, Jenny, and Melissa illustrate the disappointment many singles experience when their friends transfer from a single to a married status. The single women often feel that they no longer share similar interests with newly married friends. These feelings can also be associated with loss of identity. Single women feel that their friends relinquish their former identities in order to fulfill the socially prescribed roles of marriage. Further research should explore traditional marriage roles in order to explore the "lost identity" theme.

I asked all of the women I talked to about how their lives have been affected by other people's perceptions of them as never-married women. I also asked them about

how they think they are perceived as never-married women. Most of them disconnected from others who are never married and over 30 by talking about other women who are like them, as a way of distancing themselves from the stigma of being a never-married woman over 30.

Margaret (44, white) said, "I don't think I have been affected in any particular way… I mean, of course I have to deal with people questioning my choosing to never marry." Margaret also said, "I think a stigma still exists to some extent, but not like it was in my mother's time. I think it is more acceptable for women to choose their lifestyles." These quotations were part of Margaret's answer to "How has your life been affected by other people's perceptions of never-married women over 30?" Less important than her answer to the question is how she answered it. She turned the personal part of the question around and answered as if she had been asked about other women, and not about herself. This happened with 90 percent of the women I interviewed. This incident further illustrates that single women are choosing not to relate to the collective identity of being single. It can be hypothesized that this occurs due to single women's perceptions of social stereotypes of singles; therefore, singles choose to disassociate from identifying themselves as single women.

I asked all of these women if they thought that the stigma attached to being never married and over 30 had changed from the past, and the majority of respondents felt that the stigma was less prevalent today. Melanie (43, white) said, "I think it's more acceptable today and not so much as (there's something wrong with you?) as it was in the past." Linda (36, white) said, "I think that society is more accepting of women pursuing higher education and careers… There are more opportunities to travel and explore.

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Society has broadened its horizons and it is more acceptable for women to experience things."

Others thought that rather than society having "broadened its horizons," the shift happened in people's views about the necessity of marriage. Frances (31, African American) said, "There's less of an assumption that you have to get married, you know, people are a little more free to pursue careers so they are more comfortable." Jodie (41, white) thought people's ideas had changed because people's ideas about divorce had changed. She said, "It is just more acceptable mainly because my older friends that have been married and divorced think that not marrying is a viable option."

Whatever they believed caused the shift in social acceptability of being never married and over 30, all of the women I interviewed believed there was less stigma attached to their identities than there would have been in the past. This ideology can further support the notion that the age of 30 is no longer the turning point in a single women's self-acceptance of singlehood. Although the majority of women did not suggest a specific new timeline for self-reflection, one respondent proposed that 40 was her reflection period.

<u>Social Networking</u>

I had originally hypothesized that the rise in use of social networking sites would have an impact on the dating lives of women. I found, however, that most women used these sites solely for keeping in touch with old friends and had reservations about meeting new people online, especially men. When asked about how they met friends, most said they met both male and female friends through work or church, and a few said they met friends online. The interesting difference is that women never mentioned

meeting other female friends through their current friends. Almost half, however, said they met male friends through their current friends.

Of the women I interviewed, 75 percent used a social networking site, such as MySpace or Facebook. Only two of the women I interviewed had used or were currently using a networking site focused on dating (Match.com or eHarmony.com). Half of the women had a MySpace account, and one-third of them had a Facebook account. One-third had no account with any social networking website. I asked women how they used these sites, and how they thought these sites had changed dating for women.

Linda (36, white) said, "I usually talk to people I met back in school or people that have crazy schedules and it's hard to contact them. It makes me uncomfortable talking to new people online. I prefer to stick with people I can trust." Melanie (43, white) also expressed some fear of what is unknown when meeting people online. She said, "I think a lot of times those can, well, people can write whatever and say whatever, so you can pretty much write whatever you want and it almost always turns out bad. It might be more comfortable for some women to meet people online if they are shy, but a lot of it is trash." Ten percent of respondents shared that they had reservations about meeting new people online, especially men, through such sites, and expressed some fear of doing so.

Jodie (41, white) left open the option of meeting potential dating partners online. She said, "I mean, I have ran into some high school friends but as far as dating, it has not helped. Well, I met one of the guys I am dating on couchsurfing.com, it's a website you use to find places to stay for free if you're crashing in another town." While Jodie had not

planned on meeting a potential dating partner on this website, she had, and it seemed to be working out well for her.

The women I talked to had mixed feelings about the benefits of online dating and networking sites, but all agreed that dating had changed because of them. Most women thought that while they might provide an outlet for shy women to meet people, they also expressed reservations about whether or not this was beneficial. Most of their reservations related to the fear they expressed about using the sites to find dates for themselves.

Melissa (42, white) said she had never met someone online, but "I think they are great for women who want to get married but I think they are for desperate women." Melissa expressed agreeing with stereotypes of women who use these sites. Others, like Frances (31, African American), said they felt like dating sites perpetuated a stereotype of never-married women. She said, "It's devoted to resolving a 'problem' and that irritates me because it treats us like we have a problem. Sites developed for friends could potentially be useful or meaningful, but the dating sites are worthless."

Although social networking sites did not prove to be beneficial in providing singles with new personal relationships, they did however prove to be useful in connecting singles with existing friends and relatives. This chapter provided a summary of the major research findings. Chapter five provides a discussion of the significance of these findings as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Significance of Findings

Examining the lives of never-married women led to five central discussions, which include 30 as a turning point, stereotypes, personal identity, social networking, and discrimination. These discussions not only show significant differences in the lives of never-married women, but also suggest the potential for future research.

The research findings suggest that the former benchmark age of 30 as a crucial self-awareness point in a never-married woman's life is actually experienced at a later age. All but one research respondent were content and satisfied with their current lifestyle as a never-married woman over the age of 30. The one respondent who insisted she was dissatisfied specifically mentioned the age of 40 as a turning point in her life. Joan (40, white) said, "after 40 it looks like you don't have a place if you don't have a family and it kind of deeply, deeply hurt inside after 40. Before 40, I never felt like this." Joan's statement suggest that at the age of 40 she came to a self-realization of her single status and decided that she was not accepting of her potential permanent status as a single woman. The majority of respondents suggested that they came to a self-realization that they were content and at ease with their current lifestyle. Although a specific age of this self-realization was not specifically mentioned, it was suggested that respondents felt greater freedom to place education and careers at the forefront of their lives. With the increasing number of women pursuing higher education and careers, it can be further recommended that never-married women are experiencing a turning point later on in life because life stages are being delayed due to educational and career pursuits. Although

respondents still felt the pressure to marry from others, never-married women are experiencing this pressure at a later age due to changing life stages. The freedom for women to pursue higher education and career pursuits could correlate with greater social acceptance of delayed marriage. In that case, it is suggested that delaying the age of first marriage is more acceptable at a later age. This further suggests that the former turning point of 30 is obsolete. Future research should expand on the notion that never-married women are experiencing life-stages at a later age, which may coincide with a delayed age of self-reflection of one's lifestyle choices. It is recommended that future research examine the various life-stages that never-married women experience in their lives.

Throughout this research, stereotypes were a common experience for several respondents. Stereotypes such as "spinster" and "old maid," which originated over 100 years ago are still very much a stigma placed on never-married women (Stolk and Brotherton 1981; Mustard 2000). A few respondents had experienced being labeled "spinster" and "old maid," while some mentioned the term "cat lady." Respondents all experienced the labeling of these terms in a joking manner by others. This suggests that even though people were labeling never-married women in a comical manner, their true intentions were to subtly reinforce the cultural norms and expectations of the majority. The use of derogatory terminology directed toward never-married women is still used to reinforce the dominance of a marriage-centered culture. Although the origins of the term "cat lady" are unknown, it is clear that this term contains the same stigma that the terms "spinster" and "old maid" suggest about never-married women. Respondents who experienced this term shared a collective definition that a "cat lady" was a never-married woman who is to be pitied because she is extremely lonely, eccentric, and seeks

companionship with cats. It is suggested that future research examine the origin of the term "cat lady" along with how and when the term is used in reference to never-married women.

Although many women experienced traditional terminology used to stereotype their lifestyle, only a few women experienced the stereotype of lesbian baiting. Those who experienced lesbian baiting were forced to defend their singlehood as if they were required to justify their reasoning for being single. The women Simon (1987) interviewed "lived most of their lives under the suspicion of arrested development or perversion, and 'compulsory heterosexuality' has required these never-married women to justify their status, to explain their assumed manlessness, to prove their womanliness, to account for their childlessness, and, in general, to defend their normality" (110). Although several women experienced the common stereotypes for never-married women, it is interesting to note that while never-married women are labeled with specific negative terminology, never-married males are often stereotyped according to traits such as commitment shy and reluctant to marry (Frazier et al. 1996). This brings up important variations between stereotypes of never-married women and never-married men. The stereotypic terms placed on never-married women and never-married men tend to lean toward never-married women as having habitual loneliness or undesirable traits, while never-married men are viewed as choosing to remain single. This contradicts research which shows that never-married women are generally more satisfied and in control of their single status while never-married men tend to be dissatisfied and reluctant to remain single (Pinquart 2003 ;Goldscheider 2007). These research findings suggest that in spite of satisfaction levels, never-married women are still viewed as more socially deviant than never-married

men are. Future research should examine the contradictions between stereotypes of never-married women and never-married men in comparison with overall satisfaction levels.

An additional theme that emerged during this research was the strong personal identity of respondents. The majority of respondents expressed the satisfaction of personal freedom and independence in their lives. Respondents felt that they experienced autonomy in living their lifestyles and owning sovereignty over every aspect of their lives. Although some respondents were aspiring for a marital relationship, they felt that marriage would require them to compromise their independence and freedom. Melissa (42, white) referred to this compromise as becoming lost in married land. She felt that if a woman became married she would no longer belong to herself but rather become an extension of her husband's identity and role as a mother. Melissa stated,

> *"I just don't want to be that woman in the back of the room with the children all around her, and you don't really…you never really talk to her. She's his wife and those are his kids and she's not her own person anymore, she's just his wife".*

Although Melissa was a respondent who wished for marriage, she felt that she would need to relinquish her self-identity in order to become a married person. This viewpoint was reflected throughout many responses and suggests that women feel that they need to relinquish themselves to their husbands in order to fulfill the socially prescribed role as wife. This further suggests that marriage norms still perpetuate patriarchal customs of males as the dominant figure in marriage and women as second class helpers. Many women praised their ability to have the freedom and independence to achieve lifestyle changes such as education and career choices, yet many women saw marriage as a non-negotiable compromise of their freedom and independence. Future research should

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examine marriage roles between females and males in regards to role strain and equal distribution of responsibilities.

It was hypothesized that online social networking would be an influential aspect in the lives of never-married women. Although the majority of never-married women frowned upon using social networking technology for dating functions, many used social networking sites for maintaining previously formed relationships with friends and acquaintances. Future research would benefit from exploring why singles are hesitant towards using online social networks for pursuing potential dating relationships.

One emerging theme was the discrimination that never-married women faced by family and friends. Often family members would ask respondents why they haven't married and remark that time was running out. This blatant discrimination faced by never-married women shows that they are devalued because of their lifestyle status. Family and friends would often make comments regarding single's lifestyles as unimportant because singles have fewer commitments to others.

An additional, unexpected finding was discrimination never-married women face in the workplace. Several respondents remarked that their employers would schedule them for extra shifts and holiday work due to their status as a single. Employers assumed that the women would accept the extra shifts and never asked the women for their permission. Although these actions frustrated the women, the women continued to take on these shifts without challenging employers. This could suggest that never-married women are devalued by society and have consequently accepted their minority position in the workplace. Even though the self-realization period of accepting the single status is occurring at a later age, singles are still blatantly devalued and discriminated against. It

is suggested that future research explore discrimination in the workplace for never-married women. Further research should also explore if never-married men face the same discrimination never-married women face. There is little, if no current research exploring workplace discrimination in regards to singlehood.

Because this sample was not representative of the national population of single women over 30, I cannot make general conclusions about single women as a population. I can, however, make some conclusions about this sample of women. These women are still affected by stereotypes that mainstream society holds about never-married women over 30. They still experience pressure from family to get married, which may reflect a societal pressure felt by their parents' generation.

Society's views about women have changed over the past 30 years, at least that is what these women feel have happened. They still feel pressure from their parents, especially, because their parents' generation felt pressure to marry before reaching age 30. The rise of feminism may have played an important part in singles' resistance towards early marriage, especially for these women, as many of them expressed feminist ideas, such as "women have more freedom," "women are more respected," and "women have more opportunities" and that they *should* have freedom, respect, and opportunity.

Respondents generally agreed that the single lifestyle is less stigmatized than it was in the past. It can be further suggested that the turning point of a singles self-reflection occurs at a later age. Although many women referred to experiencing singlehood acceptance at a later age, one respondent suggested that 40 was her turning point.

Many respondents noted experiencing discrimination at the workplace, whether openly or subtly. A reoccurring experience was employers' tactics of scheduling singles for overtime and holiday hours without their permission. This suggests that employers are viewing singles as absent of social lives while pretentiously exploiting their labor. Discrimination in the workplace further illustrates that singles still experience marginalization.

An emerging theme throughout this research was the connection singles established between marriage and loss of identity. Many respondents felt that in order to transition from singlehood to marriage a woman must relinquish who she is in order to fulfill her new role as wife. This illustrates the notion that our societal prescriptions of marriage roles still contain patriarchal expectations for women.

Although I hypothesized that social networking websites would be an integral part of these women's dating lives, they appear not to be. These women use sites like MySpace and Facebook primarily to connect with old friends and have some reservation about using dating sites and what it means to be "desperate" enough to resort to using them. This may reflect a larger national trend, or it may be related to the mentality of the region of Eastern Tennessee.

<u>Suggestions for Further Research</u>

My findings suggest several possible points of research – including the reasons parents pressure their daughters to marry before a particular age and the contradictions women express when talking about the possibility of marriage. Particularly interesting is the theme of discrimination in the workplace. Women have long faced discrimination in the workplace. Historically this occurred because women were expected to be at home

raising families. It appears that some shift has happened in workplace discrimination so that now single women are discriminated against – by having to work long hours, weekends, extra shifts, and holidays. Investigating this particular problem could reveal powerful evidence that sexism and patriarchy are still very strong forces at work in the American workplace. Future research should examine the notion of 40 as a new self-acceptance turning point in a single's life. Many women suggested that society is more accepting of singlehood, which may suggest that the previous turning point of 30 is now experienced at a later age. A recurring theme throughout this research was the notion that single women must relinquish their identity in order to pursue marriage. Further research should explore how married people feel about the security of their self-identities and social expectations of gender roles in reference to marriage.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

<u>Interview Guide</u>

1. Are you a never married female between the ages of 30-45, and currently reside in Eastern Tennessee?
2. In what year were you born?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What Eastern Tennessee County do you reside in?
5. How long have you resided in this county?
6. What is your highest level of education completed?
7. Are you currently employed?
8. What is your job title?
9. What is your annual income?
10. Are you religious?
11. What is your religious affiliation?
12. Are you presently involved in what could be called a dating relationship with a man/woman/not in a dating relationship?
13. How long have you been involved in this relationship?
14. Would you characterize your relationship as casual/serious?
15. Do you have an exclusive commitment to this one person? In other words, both parties agree   to only date each other?
16. Do you currently live with this person?
17. How long have you lived in this arrangement?
18. If you could change your living arrangement, what would you like to change about it?
19. Do you think you will marry this person?
20. What advantages have you experienced from being a never married female?
21. What disadvantages have you experienced from being a never married female?
22. In general, are you satisfied with your current life style?
23. Has being a never married female affected your life?
24. In what way has your life been affected?
25. Do you think the people you work with treat you differently because you have never been married?
26. How do you describe yourself to others when your relationship status is questioned?
27. What words do you think people generally use to describe single women?
28. How do you think society in general views never-married women over the age of 30?
29. Do you feel that society treats never-married women differently than married women?
30. Have you ever been called a specific word reserved for never-married women?
31. What type of terms were you called, and did they make you feel positively or negatively about yourself?
32. Do you participate in singles groups in your area?
33. Do you utilize any online social networks such as Myspace, Facebook, dating sites, or any other online meeting spaces?
34. How often do you utilize online social networks?

35. What online social networks do you primarily use and why?
36. Do you feel that online social networks have had a positive influence on never-married women?
37. In what ways have social networks had a positive influence on never-married women?
38. Have online social networks influenced your life in any way?
39. How do you primarily meet female friends?
40. How do you primarily meet male friends?
41. Who do you primarily spend time with?
42. In the past, did you desire to marry?
43. Has your desire to marry/not marry ever affected the way you planned your future?
44. When you were in your teens, did you have some approximate age by which time you thought you would be married?
45. How did reaching/passing that age affect you?
46. Do you have children?
47. Would you like to have children?
48. How would you prefer to have children?
49. Sometimes married people tease singles about being single, or ask when they are getting married, or why they have not married. Have you experienced this?
50. Do you have a reason for not marrying?
51. Do you feel that never-married women are more or less stigmatized today than they were in the past?
52. Thank you, would like to have a copy of the research findings?

APPENDIX B

Survey Guide

Principal Investigator: Julie M. Tweed
Title of project: An Examination of Changing Perceptions of Singlehood

Informed Consent Form: Online Survey Group

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Julie Tweed, a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. Through this study, I hope to gather the life history and experiences of never-married women residing in Eastern Tennessee. I hope to learn about the life experiences of single women and understand how technology has influenced their relationships and self-concepts. Your personal experience as a never married woman will be a valuable asset to this project.

Your participation involves completing a structured online survey. This survey will take approximately twenty minutes. There is no potential risk involved with this study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any question at any time. There are no alternative procedures for the study other than to not participate. Your participation in this study will be confidential. In any publications or presentations that result from this research, your name/screen-name/email will never be used. In addition, your information will be anonymous. In other word, there will be no way for me to connect your name or screen-name with your responses. Survey responses will be analyzed in aggregate, or group form. Survey data will be stored on a secure computer file to which only I have access. It is my hope that this process will benefit you by giving you the opportunity to share aspects of your life and experiences. In addition, you will also contribute to a greater understanding of never-married women's identity and history.

All aspects of your participation in this study are voluntary. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), DHHS, and I have access to the study records. You may refuse to participate and/or withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about the research, you may contact **Julie Tweed** at (828) 273-8176. You may also contact Dr. Leslie McCallister, Thesis Chair at ETSU at (423) 439-4998. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you cannot reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423) 439-6002. You may call the Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at (423) 439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

By checking the acceptance box below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You freely and voluntarily are choosing to be in this research project.

__ I accept
__ I do not accept

2. Are you a never married female between the ages of 30-45, and currently reside in Eastern Tennessee?

___Yes

___No- Thank you for showing interest in my survey, however I am only looking for females that fit the requirements listed above. Please forward this survey to anyone you know that fit the above criteria. Thank you!

3. In what year were you born? _____

4. What is your ethnicity?

_____ Native American

_____ Hispanic

_____ African American

_____ White, Non-Hispanic

_____ Asian-Pacific Islander

_____ Other (please specify) _____

5. What Eastern Tennessee County do you reside in?

___Anderson

___Bledsoe

___Blount

___Bradley

___Campbell

___Carter

___Claiborne

___Cocke

___Cumberland

___Grainger

___Greene

___Hamblen

___Hamilton

___Hancock

___Hawkins

___Jefferson

___Johnson

___Knox

___Loudon

___Marion

___McMinn

___Meigs

___Monroe

___Morgan

___Polk

___Rhea

___Roane

___Scott

___Sequatchie

___Sevier
___Sullivan
___Unicoi
___Union
___Washington
___Other (please specify) _____

6. How long have you resided in this county? _____
7. What is your highest level of education completed?
___Less Than High School
___High School/GED
___Some College
___2-Year College Degree (Associates)
___4-Year College Degree (BA, BS)
___Master's Degree
___Doctoral Degree
___Professional Degree (MD, JD)

8. Are you currently employed?
___Yes
___No
9. What is your job title? _____
10. What is your annual income?
Below $4,999
___$5,000-$10,999
___$11,000-$19,999
___$20,000-$29,999
___$30,000-$39,999
___$40,000-$49,999
___$50,000-$79,999
___$80,000-$99,999
___Above $100,000

11. Are you financially independent (can you support yourself)?
_____
_____

12. Are you religious?
___Yes
___No
13. What is your religious affiliation?
___Muslim
___Roman Catholic
___Buddhist
___Evangelical Christian
___Hindu

___Jewish
___Other
___Protestant Christian

14. Whom do you prefer to date?
___Men
___Women
___Neither
15. Are you presently involved in what could be called a dating relationship with a…
___Man
___Women
___Not involved in a dating relationship
16. How long have you been involved in this relationship? _____
17. Would you characterize your relationship as casual/serious?
___Casual
___Serious
18. Do you have an exclusive commitment to this one person? In other words, both parties agree   to only date each other?
___Yes
___No
19. Do you currently live with this person?
___Yes
___No
20. Do you think you will marry this person?
___Yes
___No
___Not Sure
21. What are you current living arrangement? In other words, who do you live with?
_____
_____
22. How long have you lived in this arrangement?
_____
23. If you could change your living arrangement, what would you like to change about it?
_____
____
24. What advantages have you experienced from being a never married female?_____
_____
25. What disadvantages have you experienced from being a never married female?_____
_____
26. In general, are you satisfied with your current life style?
___Yes
___No
27. Has being a never married female affected your life in any way?
___Yes

___No

28. In what way has your life been affected?_____
_____

29. Do you think the people you work with treat you differently because you have never been married?_____
_____

30. How do you describe yourself to others when your relationship status is questioned?

	Family	Friends	Unfamiliar Persons	Co-Workers	Employer
Bachelorette					
Career Woman					
Never Married					
Old Maid					
Single					
Spinster					
Unmarried					
Independent					
None of these words					
It is never brought up					

31. What words do you think people generally use to describe single women?

	Family	Friends	Unfamiliar Persons	Co-Workers	Employer
Bachelorette					
Career Woman					
Never Married					
Old Maid					
Single					
Spinster					
Unmarried					
Independent					
None of these words					
It is never brought up					

32. How do you think society in general views never-married women over the age of 30?_____

33. Do you feel that society treats never-married women differently than married women? If so, in what way?
_____

34. Have you ever been called a specific word reserved for never-married women?
___Yes
___No
35. What type of terms were you called, and did they make you feel positively or negatively about yourself?_____
_
36. Do you participate in singles groups in your area?
___Yes
___No
37. Do you utilize any online social networks such as Myspace, Facebook, dating sites, or any other online meeting spaces?
___Yes
___No
___I do not have access to the Internet
38. How often do you utilize online social networks?
___Once ever two weeks
___Once a week
___A few times a week
___Everyday
___Other (please specify)_____
39. What online social networks do you primarily use and why?_____

40. Do you feel that online social networks have had a positive influence on never-married women?
___Yes
___No
41. In what way(s) have social networks had a positive influence on never-married women?_____

42. Have online social networks influenced your life in any way? If so, in what ways?
_____

43. How do you primarily meet female friends?_____

44. How do you primarily meet male friends?_____
_____

45. Who do you primarily spend time with?
___Married women
___Never-married women
___Married men
___Never married men
___Married women and men
___Never-married women and men
___All kinds of people
___Other (please specify)_____

46. In the past, did you desire to marry?
___Yes
___No
___Did not think of it
___Other (please specify)_____

47. Has your desire to marry/not marry ever affected the way you planned your future? If so, how?_____
_____

48. When you were in your teens, did you have some approximate age by which time you thought you would be married?
___Yes (please specify age)_____
___No
___Not sure

49. How did reaching/passing that age affect you?
_____
_____

50. Do you have children?
___Yes
___No

51. Would you like to have children?
___Yes
___No
___Maybe
___Other (please specify)_____

52. How would you prefer to have children? (mark all that apply)

	As a never married person	As a married person
Would you like to bear your own children?		
Would you be interested in adopting a child?		

53. Sometimes, married people tease singles about being single, or ask when they are getting married, or why they have not married. Think about the people who might have asked you, "Why aren't you married." If this has happened to you, would you tell me what types of people have asked you this question since you have turned 30?_____

54. Do you have a reason for not marrying?_____

55. Do you feel that never-married women are more or less stigmatized today than they were in the past?_____

56. Thank you so much for completing my thesis survey! If you have any questing please feel free to contact me with any questing or comments you have. If you would like to receive a copy of my thesis results, please leave your e-mail and I will send you a copy. I will have the results in approximately two months from now after I gather all survey data and personal interviews. Your participation is greatly appreciated! Please forward the survey link to as many women you know of that fit the criteria. Thank you!
-Julie_____

APPENDIX C

Interview Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Julie M. Tweed
Title of project: An Examination of Changing Perceptions of Singlehood

Informed Consent Form: Personal Interview Group

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Julie Tweed, a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. Through this study, I hope to gather the life history and experiences of never-married women residing in Eastern Tennessee. I also hope to learn about the life experiences of single women and understand how technology has influenced their relationships and self-concepts. Your personal experience as a never married woman will be a valuable asset to this project.

Your participation involves completing a structured personal interview with the researcher. This interview will take approximately one hour. There is no potential risk involved with this study. There are no alternative procedures for the study other than to not participate. It is my hope that this process will benefit you by giving you the opportunity to share aspects of your life and experiences. In addition, you will also contribute to a greater understanding of never-married women's identity and history.

With your permission, I will tape record the interview. The interview will be transcribed by the principal investigator into a secure computer file to which only I have access. Your participation in this study will be confidential. In any publications or presentations that result from this research, your name will never be used. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), DHHS, and I have access to the study records.

All aspects of your participation in this study are voluntary. You may refuse to participate and/or withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have any research-related injury or problems or have questions about the research, you may contact **Julie Tweed** at (828) 273-8176. You may also contact Dr. Leslie McCallister, Thesis Chair at ETSU at (423) 439-4998. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you cannot reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423) 439-6002. You may call the Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at (423) 439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily are choosing to be in this research project.

_____
Signature of participant   date

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APPENDIX D

Survey Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Julie M. Tweed
Title of project: An Examination of Changing Perceptions of Singlehood

Informed Consent Form: Online Survey Group

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Julie Tweed, a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. Through this study, I hope to gather the life history and experiences of never-married women residing in Eastern Tennessee. I hope to learn about the life experiences of single women and understand how technology has influenced their relationships and self-concepts. Your personal experience as a never married woman will be a valuable asset to this project.

Your participation involves completing a structured online survey. This survey will take approximately twenty minutes. There is no potential risk involved with this study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any question at any time. There are no alternative procedures for the study other than to not participate. Your participation in this study will be confidential. In any publications or presentations that result from this research, your name/screen-name/email will never be used. In addition, your information will be anonymous. In other word, there will be no way for me to connect your name or screen-name with your responses. Survey responses will be analyzed in aggregate, or group form. Survey data will be stored on a secure computer file to which only I have access. It is my hope that this process will benefit you by giving you the opportunity to share aspects of your life and experiences. In addition, you will also contribute to a greater understanding of never-married women's identity and history.

All aspects of your participation in this study are voluntary. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), DHHS, and I have access to the study records. You may refuse to participate and/or withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about the research, you may contact **Julie Tweed** at (828) 273-8176. You may also contact Dr. Leslie McCallister, Thesis Chair at ETSU at (423) 439-4998. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you cannot reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423) 439-6002. You may call the Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at (423) 439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

By checking the acceptance box below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You freely and voluntarily are choosing to be in this research project.

☐   I accept

☐   I do not accept

VITA

JULIE TWEED

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: June 1, 1983
	Place of Birth: Asheville, North Carolina

Education: North Buncombe High School, Weaverville, North
                  Carolina 2001
                  B.A. Sociology, The University of North Carolina at
                  Pembroke, Pembroke, North Carolina 2005
                  M.A. Sociology, East Tennessee State University, Johnson
                  City, Tennessee 2008

Professional Experience: Adult High School/GED Instructor, Isothermal Community
                          College, Continuing Education 2005-2006
                          Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University
                          Department of Sociology and Anthropology 2007-
                          2008

Honors and Awards: National Dean's List
                     Tuition Scholar, East Tennessee State University
                     Department of Sociology and Anthropology 2006
                     Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University
                     Department of Sociology and Anthropology 2007