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# An exploration of self-concept and life satisfaction of single women

Stacey Lynn Piatkowski

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An Exploration of Self-Concept and Life Satisfaction of Single Women

by

Stacey L. Piatkowski

Thesis

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Thesis Committee:

Tsai-Shan Shen, Ph.D, Chair

Raymond Quiel, Ph.D

Judy Sturgis-Hill

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## Abstract

This communication study explores the relationship between self-concept and life satisfaction of single women and examines, through the use of interviews, how these two factors are connected. This study aims to gain perspective of why women remain single, what pressures single women face, and how a woman's life satisfaction and self-concept are affected by being single. Results showed that women remain single for a variety of reasons and while women feel pressure from family, friends, and media about their singlehood, the majority of the pressure is internal and indicated that women need a romantic relationship that will eventually lead to marriage to be satisfied with their life. It was found that the lower the self-concept a woman has, the more dissatisfied she will be if she remains single, and the higher the self-concept a woman has, the more satisfied she will be if she remains single.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Defining “Single”.....	2
Pressures.....	4
Loneliness.....	5
Life Satisfaction.....	7
Self-Concept.....	9
Chapter 2: Method.....	12
Participants.....	12
Procedure and Instrumentation.....	12
Chapter 3: Discussion.....	13
Single Women - The Bright Side.....	14
Independence.....	14
Choices.....	14
Protection.....	15
No Partner, No Problem.....	16
Single Women - The Dark Side.....	16
Loneliness.....	17

Blind Optimism.....	17
Pressures.....	18
“The Plan” .....	19
“(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” .....	20
Regrets.....	21
Self-Concept.....	21
Limitations and Future Research.....	22
Conclusions.....	23

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Engaging in a romantic, committed relationship is viewed by most of society as a central role of life, and the thought of not achieving it can be unsettling for many. Women, in particular, have been traditionally raised to view singlehood as a failure of this achievement. Many believe single women are lonely, unsatisfied, and endure a low self-concept. Society tends to believe a woman would never *choose* to remain single: “She just hasn’t met the one”; “She is just really career focused right now”; or “She’ll settle down later.” These are just a sampling of the lines, or excuses, made for single women being single.

But is this true? Is society’s view that single women constantly long for a romantic relationship, feel lonely and unsatisfied, and have a low self-concept because they are single an accurate assumption? Or do women generally *choose* to remain single? In order to find out how single women truly feel because of the messages they receive, an understanding of a single woman’s mind should be developed.

This communication study explores the relationship between one’s self-concept and life satisfaction of single women. Through the use of interviews, this study examines how these two components—self-concept and life satisfaction—are connected. The study aims to gain a better perspective into the self-concept and life satisfaction of single women through the examination of why women stay single, the pressures women feel with regard to being single, and whether women are satisfied being single. To fully examine how a single woman feels, the definition of “single” must be established in addition to reviewing stereotypes swirling around singles. After a literature review details how a single women’s level of loneliness, life satisfaction, and self-

concept are affected by remaining single, then the methodology will be discussed, followed by the observed results.

## **Literature Review**

**Defining “Single.”** The first task of defining the term “single” can be quite daunting. Many have different definitions of what being single means. Past research seems to find singles are defined in terms of what they do not have and who they fail to be. DePaulo and Morris (2005) found the designation of “single” to be questionable itself. If a woman is unmarried, the designation is odd in that it is singlehood that comes first and is then undone (if it is undone) by marriage. DePaulo and Morris questioned why married people are not called “unsingle.” Glendon (1989) found that, legally, singles are adults who are not officially married by state laws, and socially, singles are people who are not seriously coupled, or in other words, people who are not in a monogamous, exclusive relationship. First, the legality behind the definition of “single” must be discussed, and then the designation of the term “single” based upon social and personal structures can be explored.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports, “Different taxonomies of civil status are used, but the standard reporting format includes four categories: divorced, widowed, never married, and married.” This question prompts even more questions at the same time: “Are you currently married?”; “If not, were you ever married?”; or “If so, are you unmarried because your spouse died or because you divorced?” While filling out census or tax information does not happen on a daily basis, it is just one more thing reminding singles that they are, in fact, still single.

DePaulo and Morris (2005) also suggested that in everyday life one distinction typically matters: Are you in a sexual partnership or not? Most people believe when two people are

engaging in a sexual relationship, they are a couple. The individuals may not view themselves as a couple, but the mere existence of sexual engagement gives weight to the notion of coupledness. DePaulo and Morris reflected at the same time that sex alone is not definitional. For purposes of this study, “single” will be defined as “not being involved in a partnership, relationship, or marriage,” regardless of whether these are socially or personally defined.

The demographic face of the nation has changed dramatically over the past several decades. There are now more than 87 million Americans who are divorced, widowed, or have always been single. That is more than 40% of the 18-and-older population (U.S. Census Bureau). Traditionally, singlehood has been considered a transitional period. This transitional period marks the time in an individual’s life before marriage. This suggests society’s expectations of everyone going through this transitional period will eventually “complete” it. But what happens when individuals never leave the transitional period? Is it their choice to stay? How do they feel about going against the grain of what society expects? To answer these questions, discovering why women remain single must be explored.

RQ1: Why do women remain single?

In 1970, 40% of American households consisted of married parents and their children, while only 17% consisted of single people living alone. In contrast, early during the 21st century, there are more one-person households (26%) than households composed of nuclear families or couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With the shift in demographics, singles are becoming a huge aspect of potential research, one that many researchers are simply ignoring.

**Pressures.** Hall (1975) found the biggest pressures facing single women come from family, friends, and media messages. The pressure to get married and have a family was found to

be the greatest a single woman faces in her lifetime (Hall, 1975). This study is concentrated in exploring if getting married and having a family is still causing single women anxiety. This study also focuses on what messages single women receive from family, friends, and the media and if these messages increase or decrease the feeling of pressure.

Other aspects of the pressures facing single women are stereotypes and discrimination. The term “singlism” was coined by Dr. Bella DePaulo. Singlism encompasses the negative stereotyping and discrimination against singles. While singlism has been published in scholarly journals, textbooks, magazines, and newspapers, the whole of the population is not familiar with the idea of singles being discriminated against and stereotyped.

DePaulo and Morris (2005) found that married workers can add a spouse to a health care plan but at the same time a single worker is not allowed to add an adult to his or her plan. Unless you are married, you are not shown the same advantages—you are singled out (no pun intended). DePaulo and Morris also discussed how single men get paid less than married men even when they do the same work and the same level of seniority and competence. Much of the discrimination seems to stem from the workplace, and most of it cannot be traced back to legalities. This happens mainly because individuals in the workplace assume a lot about singles. There are assumptions made that single men or women can stay late and finish the report because they do not have family responsibilities waiting for them at home. This type of assumption leads to discrimination against singles.

The stereotypes of single women begin with the more notable labels like “cat lady.” It seems that a single woman is either lonely and has to have pets to bide her time, or she is a

business professional who drowns herself in work. DePaulo and Morris (2005) found that no matter how happy or successful a single person may be, the singles treatment is still happening.

Why does all this matter? DePaulo and Morris (2005) concluded their work with discussing how singlism affects society: Politicians who practice it lose votes and businesses lose sales. The coworkers, neighbors, friends, and relatives who practice singlism in their everyday lives create less congenial and less fair workplaces, neighborhoods, social networks, and families. Singlism matters because its practice can affect the mentality of a single person. This study aims to find the relationship between the pressures a single woman faces and the woman's self-concept and life satisfaction.

RQ2: What pressures do women feel related to being single?

**Loneliness.** An important aspect to consider through exploring self-concept, specifically in single women, is loneliness. When a woman is single, many people first think, "This woman must be lonely." Loneliness is a key term in defining the essence of a single woman. Are single women truly lonely? Perlman and Peplau (1981) referred to loneliness as an unpleasant feeling or experience that happens when an individual is not satisfied with their social relations, or their social relations are inadequate to what they want. Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1979) found lonely people to be unhappy, to feel less attractive, to feel depressed, and to be less satisfied with their relationships. Society's stereotypes of single women tell stories of single women being lonely; so does this mean they are also unhappy, feel less attractive, feel depressed, and are less satisfied because they are lonely? This study aims to find the connection between loneliness and life satisfaction within single women.

Lopata (1969) discussed the characteristics of loneliness in which he implies there are three dimensions to loneliness: the past, present, and future. Lopata noted that many people often feel lonely for a person, object, event, interaction scene, or mood they had previously experienced. On the other hand, in the present a person may feel lonely if there is no one actually there. Lopata discussed how loneliness could simply mean the feeling of being unsatisfied with one's self.

This could explain why a single woman may have a lower self-concept than a person in a relationship, because their internal dialogue is unsatisfactory and this is a result of loneliness. To finish out the three dimensions of loneliness, Lopata (1969) noted loneliness experienced in connection with the future can be called "loneliness anxiety." This can be used to describe how a single woman feels unsatisfied with her singlehood because she is "powerless to build a new relation," and again, this directly relates to the idea that single women are lonely.

Lopata (1969) took notice of single women in particular within his research. He found that within society it seems single people, women in particular, are out of place. Lopata also discussed that single women are not the "loneliest" of our kind, but quite the opposite in fact. It was found that individuals who never get married fill that void by building *other* patterns of companionship within their lives. This suggests single women may not be as lonely as society seems to believe; however, there are still many researchers who believe single women suffer from loneliness.

Researchers have consistently shown that married women are less lonely than unmarried women, especially the unmarried women who live alone (DeJon-Gierveld & Raadschelders, 1982; Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). This research seems to prove that women who are single are

completely lonely and miserable. What about something besides romantic relationships? The argument can be made that having relationships with family and friends would make someone less lonely and that engaging in healthy, committed relationships with platonic friends and family can fill the void of having a romantic partner. However, the research begs to differ. The impact of relationships that are built between single women and family or friends is not clear. Most research details how the quantity of women's contact with family and friends does not greatly affect experiences of loneliness; however, there are some researchers who believe looking at the quality behind certain familial relationships or friendships could show correlation to loneliness. In sum, a single woman could come from a huge family and have friends around her constantly but still consider herself lonely. Other avenues of loneliness research found that a single woman could have only one family member or friend in their life who makes them feel less lonely. It seems that when it comes to loneliness, quality over quantity reigns supreme.

Loneliness may occur more often even if a single woman is surrounded by her family because she may believe that these relationships are in place because they *have* to be, while friendships form and grow based on choice. This may also serve as a reason why single women are lonely in that they do not have someone choosing to be with them romantically.

**Life Satisfaction.** A number of studies have focused on the life satisfaction of single adults (Jacoby, 1975; Libby, 1977; Melvill, 1977; Pearlin & Johnson, 1981; Stein, 1981). A college education, high occupational prestige, and a good income are mentioned as factors that make singlehood a more satisfying lifestyle (Jacoby, 1974; Pearlin & Johnson, 1981). Individuals who possess higher levels of these personal resources were better able to translate the ideological freedoms and pleasures of singlehood into reality (Jacoby, 1974; Stein, 1976).

Single women have been vulnerable to different types of negative evaluations that may influence self-concept. Single women have often been viewed as less feminine, less loving and nurturing, less sexually attractive, and more selfish, than women who have strong independent personalities and other qualities that cause them to be less likely to marry (Knupfer, Clark, & Ram, 1966; Nadelson & Notman, 1981). Recently, it seems that it is more acceptable within society for a woman to remain single. In a study looking at attitudes toward marriage between 1957 and 1976, Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka (1981) found that failure to marry in 1957 was not acceptable, but by the mid-1970s marriage was seen only as a potential mechanism for increasing one's happiness. Therefore, it appears singlehood is more likely to be seen today as one's choice of status or at least a status with some potentially positive outcomes, such as pursuing one's career and increasing mobility.

This trend toward viewing singlehood as a choice and a move away from stereotypic images of the unmarried creates possibilities for enhancing rather than eroding the self-esteem of never-married individuals (Libby 1977). A study by Loewenstein, Bloch, Campion, Epstein, Gale, and Salvatore (1981) of the satisfactions and stresses of single women in midlife found life satisfaction of single women to be significantly correlated to such factors as good health, not being lonely, living with a female housemate, having many causal friends, and being invested in work. Of the study, only 15% of the entire sample had low life satisfaction.

Research by Austron (1984) compared a large sample of single and married adults on a number of dimensions. One of the most interesting findings was that social support was a better predictor of life satisfaction than marital status. Are women choosing not to marry or are they just not finding "the one"? In an interview from Loewenstein et al.'s (1981) study, a third of the

women interview indicated they were single by choice. This study found that a majority of the women interviewed relied on one or two major friendships or relationships with family members to meet their satisfaction level. This offers the idea that women do not need a romantic partner in their life to be satisfied. While the study from 1981 found that women who relied on family and friends to fill the void of a romantic partner were satisfied with their life, does that idea still resonate with single women today today?

RQ3: Are women satisfied being single?

**Self-Concept.** Self-concept is an individual's personal judgment of their own worth by analyzing the conformity with self-ideal. Self-concept is threatened when a woman remains single and when concepts of self are modified. The self-concept of a single woman is an important component of self-concept that researchers have rarely examined. An assessment of self-concept and prediction of its determinants will be helpful in designing strategies to promote positive self-concept for women who are not in romantic relationships.

How a person feels about himself or herself plays an integral role in explaining human behavior. Self-concept is presumed to possess trait properties of self-evaluation, transcending individual situation (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenback, & Rosenberg, 1995). Negative or diminished self-concept can affect behavior, information strategies, and attitudes. Rosenberg et al. also argue that individuals who engage in low self-concept are not likely to be confident enough to look for outside information or engage in risk taking endeavors.

Loewenstein et al. (1981) asked single women open-ended questions about their single status, and women mentioned a range of advantages. A large advantage found by more than half

of the women interviewed included freedom, independence, pride, and self-respect. Here, these women were noting what attributes of their singlehood enhanced their self-concept.

Considerable research has assumed that the ideal and preferred comparison target for a stable, accurate self-evaluation is a similar other doing slightly better than the self. It has been generally assumed that upward comparisons (to those doing better than the self) produce negative affect and that downward comparisons (to those doing worse than the self) produce positive affect (Aspinwall & Taylor 1993). This can answer why many believe single women feel bad about themselves because many see being in a romantic relationship, partnership, or marriage as something of worth—an attribute a single woman would upward compare herself to. But perhaps many single women are making downward comparisons when looking at marriage, and this can account for the transition of women remaining single by choice.

Single women are becoming a growing demographic in the United States. Many women are forgoing marriage and relationships and remaining single throughout life, and singlehood is no longer a transitional period in the life of a woman. This change in society opens up the door for researchers to investigate the mental models of a single woman. Studying why a woman remains single, what influences a woman to remain single or want a relationship, and measuring the satisfaction and self-concept of a single woman can be beneficial to research and also single women everywhere who may be trapped by stereotypes and discrimination. This study aims to see if the mental models of a single woman are changing, or if marriage and finding partnership is still an ideal of single women.

## **Chapter 2: Method**

### **Participants**

Ten single women were recruited and interviewed. Participants were recruited from a voluntary sample of individuals who self-identified as single (not in a relationship, partnership, or marriage). There was not an age restriction placed on the participants because to restrict the ages of participants would limit the results of the study. Ages ranged from 19-43 years, with a mean age of 25.30. Interviews took place in a quiet location of the participants' choosing.

### **Procedure and Instrumentation**

Participants recruited for this study were given the general nature of the study and were then asked to take part in an interview. Participants were asked how old they were at the time of the interview, and this served as the only demographic-centered question of the interview. The entirety of the interviews were structured with open-ended questions that allowed for spontaneous responses regarding the state of their singlehood and self-concept. Interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. After reviewing the interview transcriptions, analysis of interview data began with coding into broad categories dictated by the interview questions. Graduate research assistants were trained to code the transcripts and find reoccurring themes. The graduate research assistants coded the interviews independently and different researchers reviewed their coding to resolve any disagreements in the findings (See Appendix).

### Chapter 3: Discussion

To explore the association between self-concept and life satisfaction of single women, participants were asked open-ended questions, aimed at finding a correlation. It was found that women remain single for a variety of reasons, with the main reason being that they have not found anyone worth committing to. The study also explored the pressures women feel related to being single, and indicated that while single women feel pressure from family, friends, and the media, the greatest sense of pressure was internal.

The study also suggested that women admired other women who could remain single and satisfied through their lifetime but would call themselves a failure if they themselves were to remain single. It was found that women need a romantic relationship that will eventually lead to marriage and a family to be satisfied with their life. The relationship between self-concept and life satisfaction was developed by looking at how women viewed themselves as incomplete, a failure, and unsatisfied without a romantic partner. It was found that the lower the self-concept a woman has, the more unsatisfied she will be if she remains single. On the other hand, the higher the self-concept a woman has, the more satisfied she will be if she remains single.

Age also played a significant role in the results of all three research questions. The older women in the study exemplified high self-concept and high life satisfaction. In contrast, the younger women in the study showed signs of low self-concept and low life satisfaction in relation to their single status. Overall, the study found that there is clearly a bright side and also a dark side to the life of a single woman. Early in the study, it was thought that there would be more positive attributes to being single, but nearing the end, it was found that the negatives of being single were abundant.

## **Single Women - The Bright Side**

In the beginning of the interviews, it was clear that there were advantages to being single. The women discussed the positive attributes of being single as independence, having free choice in choosing whether to remain single, having protection from potentially getting hurt again, and feeling complete without a romantic partner. These advantages served as a positive reminder to the women of why being single was not the only thing that defined them.

**Independence.** The women noted independence as an advantage and told stories of feeling empowered to be able to focus on school, focus on finding a better job, and just being able to focus on themselves. The idea of not having anyone to answer to was also an advantage found. For example, Lindsey said, “I don’t have to worry about my decisions affecting another person.” Not needing to rely on someone else for support was important to a majority of the women. For example, Natalie said, “I have freedom to do what I want, when I want, and how I want.” Natalie also noted that she remembered fearing that if she were to get married, she would have to give up herself and her freedom. Time was another advantage found in relation to being single. Sue said, “I have a lot of time to focus on me.” Sue also noted that being single allowed her to grow and reflect personally, “When I am single it is a time in my life when I am able to make things better emotionally, physically, and mentally.” This indicated that being single is a good opportunity to take time for themselves and figure out who they were before getting involved with someone.

**Choices.** The women noted that being able to choose between remaining single or not was important to them. The women found that they were single because they were not able to find someone worth committing to. While this may seem like a negative because they were not

able to find someone, this is not the case. The women felt empowered because they were not finding anyone because they were raising their standards. The study indicated that the women were indecisive or picky about the men they had met. These women refused to settle with the men they were meeting. For example, Sue said, "I'm pretty indecisive so I just haven't met anyone who has driven me to want to commit."

Settling versus not settling came up many times throughout the interviews. All of the participants stated not settling as a reason they were single. Michelle had a particular view of marriage, "I look at marriage as the biggest commitment I'll ever make and if I'm not 100% sure, I'm not going to get into it, I'm just really not willing to settle. Settling is ridiculous." Many of the participants watched their friends and family members settle and realized that they did not want to follow suit. Mary even discussed how people have commented to her about her single status: "You're smart. You're very smart for not settling." The participants viewed settling as a mistake that ends in an unsatisfied life, with a break-up or divorce to follow.

**Protection.** One may think that a woman needs a man for protection, but the women of this study discussed how remaining single served as a substantial way to protect themselves. While discussing why the women remained single, some of the women ascribed their single status to being in a previous bad relationship, making them hesitant to start a new relationship. Sophia said, "When I was in a relationship there were a lot of things I couldn't do or like I stopped myself from doing because of him." Women who worried about future relationships attributed their worry to being hurt in the past and not wanting to put themselves into a vulnerable position again, and overall, they believed staying single was protecting themselves. Sophia added, "I seem to keep getting hurt."

**No Partner, No Problem.** At times in the interviews, the women did not even talk about needing a partner in their life. Rather, the women discussed that the greatest reason they would want (not need) a partner was because they *needed* to have a family to feel complete. Michelle said, “I want to have a husband and I want to start a family, I hope to find someone I truly love and start a family. But if I don’t meet Mr. Right, I still want to have a family because starting a family is what I am most looking for.” The women discussed wanting a family but not all necessarily wanted a relationship. Michelle added, “My biggest goal in my entire life is to have a family, not a job or even the ‘dream’ wedding. I want to raise children.” Instead of career, education, or other goals, the goals of the women interviewed centered on having or gaining a family. This suggested that the women who feel lonely being single may alleviate this by having children with or without a partner.

### **Single Women - The Dark Side**

As previously stated, at the beginning of the interviews the women were upbeat and excited to share stories of their singlehood. This was the case only for the beginning of the interviews. As the questions became more personal and the women were asked to reflect upon their life satisfaction in relation to their singlehood, things became darker. The disadvantages of being single were found to be loneliness, blind optimism, internal pressure and expectations. These disadvantages lead to low self-concept and an unsatisfied life.

**Loneliness.** While discussing why a woman is single, the question inevitably arose of why they would want to be in a relationship. It was found that the women felt incomplete without companionship. Emma said, “Just having someone there, someone physically there is what I want.” While family and friends sufficed for the aspect of companionship in some events,

the women discussed why having a romantic partner companionship was different. Emma added, “I would like to know that there is someone there for me, who loves me, and has chosen to spend their life with me.” Stability, safety, support, and comfort are all attributes a woman wants and believes a romantic relationship can bring.

The women noted fear as a big reason they wanted to be in a relationship. For example, Kate said, “The fear factor sets in, like good God, am I going to be by myself when everyone dies?” Women attributed being afraid of dying alone to why they didn’t like being single and wanted a relationship.

**Blind Optimism.** The women seemed to be cast under a spell of blind optimism that made them believe no matter what, they would get married because it is just what you do. The women were ignorant of the fact that they might not meet someone, they might not get married, and they might *not* have a family. This goes back to expectations, both those that individuals set for themselves and those that individuals set for others.

The women are confident that they will get married and have a family because they themselves expect to and they believe it is what they are *expected* to. Through the interviews, the women continually said they admired other women who never married, but if they themselves were to remain single for their lifetime, they would see themselves as a failure and would be unsatisfied with their life. As the interviews progressed, the women became more dark and dismal. The women clearly noted not being fulfilled until they would marry, not wanting to let down their family, feeling rushed, and questioning themselves. For example, Sue said she often asked herself, “What is wrong with me, aren’t I good enough?”

When asked why they were so confident that they would marry, the majority believed they were following society's golden path. For example, Emma stated, "Because that's what you do. You grow up and get married and have a family." The blind optimism of the women was cast in shadow when asked how they would feel if they never married. Many noted they were scared to think of a life without getting married. The women even discussed that if they were to not marry, they should "give up." Not marrying even seemed like a joke to some, almost off-putting. Emma added, "If I'm never getting married, I might as well get some cats."

**Pressures.** When asked about pressures related to their singlehood, the answers ranged from family and friends to colleagues and the media. It was expected that family and friends played a big role in whether a woman felt pressure about being single. Previous research showed similar results with single women feeling pressure from family, friends, and the media; however, the research was late to mention the impact the personal pressure women place on themselves.

It was found that while pressures came from various sources, the internal voice within the women was the most powerful. For example, Mary said, "It makes me question myself, like, what is wrong with me? Aren't I good enough?" This is also where expectations came into play. The participants all mentioned expectations of some sort throughout the interviews. Mary added, "The expectations I set for myself create this sense of pressure because I'm not meeting them." The expectations were generally centered on meeting "Mr. Right" and establishing a family. These expectations were formulated in the minds of the women as part of their "plan."

**"The Plan."** After the first few women interviewed brought up their "plan," explanation of the plan was sought by the researcher. The "plan" was a mind-map set up by the women of what they believed they should achieve in relation to getting married and starting a family,

including the times and ages that these goals should be met. Sophia said, “Now, I guess the plan is changing and I’m sad about that because I feel like I’m off track or behind.” This is an example of how one participant’s plan of her expectations to get married and start a family are not panning out, and she is questioning herself and her life satisfaction.

The “plans” of the women seemed to create a sense of false reality. It is almost like these plans are setting women up for failure or, at least, an unsatisfied life if they are not to obtain what their plan indicates that success is. When asked about when and why the plans form, it was found that the plans are formed and altered all through the life of a single woman. Emma said, “I am definitely the girl who has the plan. As a child, I loved all the Disney movies and I honestly thought and still think that I am going to find my Prince Charming. I even have my list of all the qualities I want in a guy.” Similar to this participant, the other women noted their plans beginning in childhood.

When discussing the plans, it quickly became clear that each woman who had a plan had not been successful in her plan thus far. Because all of the women in the study are single, and the main goal of all the plans was to find a romantic partner, none of the women were satisfied. The discovery of the “plan” and the expectations created from the “plans” helps explain and find correlation between the life satisfaction and self-concept of a single woman. For example, Kate stated, “When expectations don’t match up to what you get, you’re not satisfied.” It was found that women who acknowledged practicing “the plan” and had not accomplished the goal of “the plan” were unsatisfied with their status of singlehood.

***“(I can’t get no) Satisfaction.”*** The Rolling Stones may have been onto the mindset of single women when they coined their hit song, “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction.” After the “plans”

were revealed within the study, it seemed easier to find out how the women felt about their life satisfaction. The women were filled with anxiety about the notion of never getting married. For example, Michelle said, “I would be miserable if I was single forever.” While this was a blatant expression of how this woman would feel about her life satisfaction if she remained single, other women’s feelings were not as obvious.

The women would also consider themselves unsatisfied if they were to never have a family. For example, Natalie said, “I wouldn’t be satisfied because I do want children and a husband.” Looking back at the literature review, a study looking at attitudes toward marriage between 1957 and 1976 by Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka (1981) found that failure to marry in 1957 was not acceptable, but by the mid-1970s marriage was seen as only a potential mechanism for increasing one’s happiness. Therefore, the researchers proposed that singlehood would be more likely to be seen today as one’s choice of status or at least a status with some potentially positive outcomes, such as pursuing one’s career and increasing mobility.

This study argues against what Veroff et al. (1981) found. The women interviewed would consider themselves a failure and not acceptable if they were not to get married and start a family. For example, Lindsey noted, “I agree that times have changed, but I would still consider myself a failure.” The women believed that not achieving the “plan” was a failure on their part. The expectations set for themselves dictated how they would feel if they did not achieve their goal. Lindsey added, “If I didn’t marry, I’d see myself as a failure.”

**Regrets.** It was also found that women would be more regretful if they never had children than if they never got married. For example, Sue said, “At the end of the day, I would be much more upset if I didn’t have children than if I never met the man of my dreams.” This

finding could explain why settling sometimes occurs in relationships. When a single woman's want for children exceeds her want for a romantic partner within the "plan," it seems that women will relent what they truly want for what they believe they need. This could also serve as a reason women get married in the first place: to have children. If the overall goal is to have children, perhaps women are settling in relationships to get what they really want.

**Self-Concept.** When looking at the self-concept of a single woman, the goal was to find out whether a single woman was satisfied with herself in regard to her singlehood status. The study found that self-concept seemed to go hand-in-hand with life-satisfaction. Similar to the findings regarding life satisfaction, it was found that self-concept was also greatly affected by the "plan." The expectations set by the women affected their self-concept. This finding emulates the concept of using upward and downward comparisons. When an individual engages in upward comparisons it produces a negative affect, and that is what is happening when a single woman's life is not going according to "plan." When the women went astray from their plan, they found themselves to be unsatisfied with their life, and this made them feel bad about themselves. For example, Kathryn noted, "If I woke up and I was 50 years old and still single I would be depressed and unsatisfied."

## **Limitations and Future Research**

Similar to other studies, there are certain limitations to the current study. As with in-depth interviews, generalizations about the results are usually not able to be made because of the small sample chosen. That is the case here with the sample being ten participants. To get a better understanding of the population of single women, a larger sample would need to be taken. A survey with scales developed specifically for finding a correlation between self-concept and life satisfaction would be beneficial for future research.

The age range for this study was 19-43, with a mean age of 25.30. To gain a greater scope of how single women feel, the age range should increase, with a focus put on certain age groups. It may be interesting to research more deeply into the differences shown between the younger and older women and how they feel about their singlehood. Choosing a population, either younger or older, would be interesting to study and then to compare the results.

Future research studying how the “plans” women make for themselves would be beneficial because it is obvious the “plans” directly affect the expectations, self-concept, and life satisfaction of single women. It would be interesting to see if the “plans” change according to generations or what characteristics certain generations have set within their “plans.” Future research centered around single men and life satisfaction should also be looked at because comparing what women need to attain for life satisfaction and what men need would help with gender communication and be beneficial for individuals as well as couples.

## Conclusions

While this study was based upon the assumption that single women are satisfied with their life related to their singlehood, the study concluded with affirming that single women are unsatisfied. It was found that most women, no matter their age, want to be in a committed, romantic relationship. It was also found that while women enjoy feeling independent and empowered, at the end of the day, single women want to be in a relationship to feel completely satisfied.

The self-concept of a single woman is an important component of self-concept that researchers have rarely examined. An assessment of self-concept and prediction of its determinants is helpful to design strategies to promote positive self-concept for women who are not in romantic relationships. This study found that a woman believes she will be more satisfied and have higher self-concept if she were in a relationship. With that said, this study shows that workshops and other self-esteem-boosting activities can help women and should focus on helping women work towards the idea of not needing a relationship to feel satisfied with their life.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is the nature of why women feel the need to have a relationship to be satisfied. Throughout the interviews, it was found that women would be more regretful of not having children than of never getting married. This suggests that some, or most, women get married and engage in romantic relationships primarily because they want to have a family.

Overall, through examining previous research, this study discovered a link between self-concept and life satisfaction of single women and how this is directly affected by internal

expectations set by the woman. It is important to examine this because single women are a growing demographic, and having an understanding of the mental model behind the single woman can help bridge the gap in realizing what truly defines a satisfied life.

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Table 1  
*Structured Interview Questions*

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- 1 Age:
  - 2 How long have you been single?
  - 3 How do you define single?
  - 4 What does it mean to you to be a single person?
  - 5 What pressures do you feel specifically related to being single?
  - 6 How do you feel about society labeling 'being single' as a 'transitional period in a woman's life'?
  - 7 One critique of western society is that it seems to be structured for the life of couples, how do you feel about this?
  - 8 How has being single affected your career or educational decisions?
  - 9 How does your family feel about your singlehood?
  - 10 What factors drive you to remain single?
  - 11 What factors drive you to want a relationship?
  - 12 What advantages do you find related to your single status?
  - 13 When evaluating your life satisfaction, how does your singlehood affect it?
  - 14 In a study looking at attitudes toward marriage between 1957 and 1976 by Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka (1981) it was found that failure to marry in 1957 was not acceptable. How do you think the times have changed or is remaining single still labeled a failure?
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*\*Note:* The questions above we administered to all participants. Additional questions (not listed) were asked during the interview if the researcher saw an opportunity to expand the participant's response.