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Single Women in Ireland

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The mid twentieth century in Ireland marked a paradigmatic shift from a traditional, family-based, rural, mono-cultural society with circumscribed roles for women, unequal gender relations, and authoritative male privilege, to a rapidly urbanising society embracing individualisation, equality, diversity, and choice. The accounts of thirty single women, born in the 1950s and 1960s, reveal the identity effects of the ideology of marriage and family that continues to resonate in contemporary Irish society despite the economic and social forces of modernity. Familistic ideologies positively support constructions of womanhood as married and mother, a context in which singlehood and the opposition between woman identity and single identity are problematic. In the absence of positive and powerful counter narratives, singlehood is disparaged and stigmatized constraining the identity possibilities for all women.

This essay examines accounts of how women make sense of their single identity in an Irish sociological study of singles women's lives. Utilizing a framework from a similar British study (from a psychosocial perspective) the concept of interpretative repertoires and their constraining effects is explored.¹ Some women speak of own singleness as failing to realise womanhood as traditionally endorsed. Others focus on the freedom that singleness brings, extolling the advantages of being alone and the autonomy of single independence. Accounts from both studies show that a negative construction of

singleness disarms the capacity for innovatory action. A positive construction likewise constrains, so that possibilities for expanding the meaning of singleness to include intimacy and independence are not realised. Arguably, the identity of single women, of who and what one can be, is constrained at the ideological level by opposing societal accounts of womanhood and singleness and constrained at the personal level in internal dialogues constructing singleness as either negative or positive.

Despite these constraints, evidence from the Irish study suggests that awareness of the contradictions combined with self-reflection enables women's capacity for transformatory action and change. Four possible responses to opposing constructions of womanhood and singlehood are noted, compliance, acceptance, resistance, and transformation. Though a few are "less successful" as single women, most women work the available constructions, refusing to be constrained by them and talk with awareness about the experiences, difficulties and contradictions of being "on the outside." In recognising the internal contradictions in own narratives and working with the polarities of woman identity and single identity, many women devise alternative ways of being single arguing that singleness will become an acceptable social identity for women in Ireland.

Effects of Ideology of Marriage and Family

While the ideology of marriage and family has a long history and special significance in traditional, rural, familistic societies, familism, the "propagation of politically pro-family ideas," has come under much pressure from the individualistic tendencies of modern industrial societies.ⁱⁱ Historically, there is diversity in family forms and research evidence supports the view that kin as well as non-kin relationships can

promote well-being. Nonetheless, the family unit of the heterosexual couple with dependent children only, based on love, marriage and reproduction is the ideal and highly rewarded social form. “The family” has prime responsibility for maintaining emotional, nurturing relationships, for reproduction, socialisation and care of children, for promoting individual well-being and for encouraging normative behaviours such as sexual exclusivity with marital partners only. The regulatory aspect of family life posits singles as outside the control of the family system and as being less invested in family matters. Bella DePaulo and Wendy Morris note that the idea of a happy single person challenges the security of the “meaning and hope” offered by an American cultural worldview that is pro-family. The “happy single” is also a challenge to the intensive, exclusive coupling demanded by this system.ⁱⁱⁱ

Accounting for the privileged, and idealised, status of family in private and public life, Bourdieu observes that this ideal model of human relations provides the “principles for the construction and evaluation of every social relationship.”^{iv} Relationships forged beyond the family model are ignored, deprecated, or rendered invisible. The perception of family as a naturally occurring universal social category arises, according to Bourdieu, because the external, objective category “family” is the basis for an internal subjective category “which is the matrix of countless representations and actions (e.g. marriages) which help to reproduce the objective social category.”^v In Bourdieu’s account, single women are specifically mentioned as a group marked by “social suffering,” a consequence of their non-conformity to the cultural hegemony of marriage and family. Interviewing single women in France, he notes that women suffer harassment, are not taken seriously, and regarded as inadequate or incomplete persons because they fail to

“fall into line, to settle down and start a family.” Despite the perceived “naturalness” of family as a social institution, social grouping, and mental structure in an age of individualism, it requires extensive maintenance, “the forces of fusion (especially the affective one) must endlessly counteract the forces of fission.”^{vi} Single women are a “threat” to family; perhaps because they are perceived to be forces of fission.

Neither is the state insignificant in supporting and perpetuating familism, performing “countless constituting acts which constitute family identity as one of the most powerful principles of perception of the social world and one of the most real social units.”^{vii} Eileen Connolly’s work on state gender systems characterizes the gender regime in Ireland up to the late 1950s as marked by gender difference, hierarchical ranking of male and female, separation of public and private spheres, and subjugation of individual rights within the family.^{viii} The gender system endorsed male privilege and authority in political, social, economic, legal, and family life, deeply circumscribing women’s roles and life options. Profound struggles to reform the gendered state took place up to the 1990s, but as Connolly notes, once a gender contract is established it proves difficult to alter. The Irish State continues to privilege the marital family, discriminating against non-marital families and single people. As a woman remarked in the Irish study:

I think everybody would much prefer if everybody else got married and it all worked all the time... there is this feeling that the whole society revolves around marriage. . . the assumption is, that this is the norm and everybody else is abnormal because we [single people] are not married and we don’t have children. Interview with Anna, age 42, Ireland.^{ix}

“Singlism,” a term coined by DePaulo and Morris to characterise the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination to which, they argue, single people are subject, is a consequence of the uncontested set of beliefs associated with the ideology of marriage and family. The ideology of marriage and family is uncontested, they argue, as it offers “a simple and satisfying worldview” for both citizen and scientist.^x Singlism is based on the assumption “that the sexual partnership is the one truly important peer relationship and that people who have such partnerships are happier and more fulfilled than those who do not.”^{xi} Permeated by the ideology of marriage and family, scientific and popular discourse supports the view that married people are happier than those who are not married, but asks DePaulo and Morris why then are singles not miserable? Disputing the significance of the relationship between civil status and happiness, DePaulo and Morris present a robust counter argument to show that single people do have significant, lasting interpersonal relationships and live, happy, content, joyful and fulfilled lives.

Puzzled about the persistence of single stigma, Anne Byrne and Deborah Carr propose that singles are caught in a normative and cultural lag, “although demographic patterns and other major social changes are creating an historical and social context where singles may lead lives that are as rich and fulfilling as married persons, cultural values and attitudes still blithely endorse and perpetuate the ideology of marriage and family.”^{xii} Byrne and Carr argue that pro-marriage ideology will persist until the privileged social status and institution of marriage is recognized and interrogated; until the embedded inequalities and flaws in the institution of marriage are recognised as “public issues” rather than “private troubles,” and that the adaptive and creative ways that unmarried persons construct and maintain “family” and other significant relationships are

investigated. They propose that “singleness studies” as a field of academic inquiry may sensitise science and society to even unintentional singlism.

In terms of social identities, single women have to negotiate between two strong conceptions of womanhood: 1) a patriarchal conception as heterosexual, married and reproductive, and 2) a conception of single womanhood as lack, as deviant and a threat to the patriarchal order. Sociological, (and to a lesser extent historical and psychoanalytical,) studies of single women provide us with a variety of categories and labels which either purport to explain women’s choices to remain unmarried or reveal the effects of prejudice suffered by those who do not conform. A single woman is variously constructed as an old maid, a spinster, an androgyne, a rebel, a marriage resister, sad, mad or bad, embittered, sexless, surplus, celibate, virtuous, a menace, homosexual, a bachelor woman, or an independent woman. The stigmatizing of single women’s reluctance or failure to construct their womanhood on the basis of a recognised, enduring socially approved sexual connection with a man, demonstrates the extent to which heterosexuality matters in dominant modes of constructing womanhood. On the flip side, the valuing of independence and equality as a basis for composing the self is fundamentally challenging to concepts of dependence and inequality, implicit to male/female heterosexual relations. Single women are faced with the challenge of composing coherent self identities, acceptable social identities, negotiating the space between woman perceived as wife/mother/carer and connected to others and woman perceived as independent, a chooser and separate from others. Above all else, singleness is an identity issue.

Single Women in Irish Society

Research on single women's identities in Irish society is scant and focuses on the indigenous population.^{xiii} Byrne and Breeda Duggan maintain that approved social identities for women continue to be based on marriage and motherhood, despite Ireland's membership of the European Community, the influence of the Women's Movement and economic and educational expansion in women's choices in contemporary Irish society.^{xiv} Marriage is perceived as a more desirable option for women with little cultural validation for singleness. Duggan signals the difficulties involved in devising alternative identities. "It is difficult to resist the cultural and ideological pressures and to maintain a positive sense of choice and independence in the face of negative attitudes. Despite the greater sense of independence in the single or lesbian identity, the effects of the social prejudices continue to place constraints on the capacity for greater self determination."^{xv} Constrained by the conception of singleness as a failed identity it is impossible to conceive of singleness as a self-conscious choice. Duggan considers those who "choose" a different lifestyle as change agents engaged in transformatory action and advises further research to investigate how women resist cultural and ideological pressures and "maintain a positive sense of choice and independence in the face of negative attitudes."^{xvi}

Mairead Flynn concludes that being married and older contributes to self-actualization in her comparison of single women and married women in Ireland. Measuring fulfilment of love/belonging needs and self-esteem, older married women score highest, followed by older single women, then younger single women and younger married women.^{xvii} More young, single women (about two-thirds) perceive themselves

as less self-fulfilled compared to the other categories and none of the single women regard themselves as “very self-fulfilled.”

Despite extensive changes in Irish culture wrought by rapid modernization, the ideology of marriage and family continues to spread “ideological effects” evident at the social, structural and individual level.^{xviii} Ideology is implicated in knowledge production; those in control can prioritize their own truth claims “thus limiting the formulation, availability, credibility of alternative accounts which may more fully reflect the interests of subordinated groups.”^{xix} Interested in the effects of ideology on individual identities I spoke with thirty “always single” women on singleness and identity issues. Women’s narrative accounts reveal not only extensive stigma, but also the difficulties in making sense of being a single woman in contemporary Ireland.^{xx} Ambivalence, contradictions, and confusion surrounds single identity. I was interested in women’s descriptions of themselves, reflections on their own and others’ perceptions of singleness and the consequences of dominant conceptions of womanhood for single identity. Other themes explored in the Irish study are the benefits and challenges of independence, perceptions and significance of marital, sexual, mother-child, family and friend relationships, prioritising caring work, career work and partner-seeking work and singleness as an acceptable social identity.

Interpretative Repertoires: British Study of Singles

As in Ireland, Reynolds and Wetherall show that singleness in Britain is a “troubled category (difficult to align oneself with).”^{xxi} Part of the difficulty they observe, is that it is a social category, delimiting the single from the married for example, and a socially constructed, social category that has varied meanings, culturally and historically.

Singleness is also a discourse, regulating conduct and is a set of narratives through which subject positions and identity can be managed. Reynolds and Wetherall call for a feminist politics of singleness to enable women to position themselves “in more enabling ways.”^{xxii} From a social psychological and discourse perspective, their study on the meaning of singleness and identity management provides a valuable comparative framework for the study of singles in Ireland. The thirty participants in the Reynolds and Wetherall study are mainly heterosexual, middle-class, white, single women aged between thirty and sixty, living in Britain, eight of whom are mothers. Unlike the Irish study, which focuses on the “always single,” Reynolds and Wetherall include “single again” women. They acknowledge that the sample is diverse in terms of marital and motherhood status but stress that they are looking for the main patterns in how women speak about singleness and identity issues.

Reynolds and Wetherall identify the concept of interpretative repertoires as “the recognisable routines of arguments, descriptions, and evaluations found in people’s talk. . . the building blocks through which people develop accounts and versions of significant events and through which they perform social life.”^{xxiii} Accounts are variable and inconsistent allowing ideological dilemmas to develop as discrepancies in and between accounts are talked about or reflected upon. Reynolds and Wetherall identify four repertoires single women use to talk about singleness, polarised as two negative and denigrating and two positive and idealised conceptions of singleness. The repertoires used in combination are singleness as personal deficit, as social exclusion, as independence and choice, as self-actualization, and achievement forming an “uncomfortable discursive climate” for single women. The opposing repertoires represent

“a discursive package creating a powerful set of ideological dilemmas without easy resolution” and which have consequences for single women’s identity work.^{xxiv} If one represents singleness as a positive and desirable state, how does one talk about stepping outside the category? Women who denigrate singleness reveal themselves as personally deficient and failing to leave the category. How do women manage the discursive space marked by the four repertoires? One positive strategy identified by Reynolds and Wetherall is that women are aware of, and talked about, the dilemmas. In interview data the tendency among some women to “develop a reflexive account and talk about the dilemmas per se rather than alternating between each side of them as experiential truths” is discerned.^{xxv}

Utilizing this framework, I ask how is singleness spoken about in Ireland, to what extent is an “uncomfortable discursive climate” evident in narrative accounts of single women and how do women position themselves in relation to dominant constructions of womanhood and singlehood?

Interpretative Repertoires: Irish Study

Women are discouraged from talking about the experiences and meaning of singleness. Silenced by the taken-for-granted backdrop of familism, women do not speak about their singleness with friends, family, or in the public domain. It is acceptable for people with partners and families to talk freely about the ups and downs of family life, sexual relationships, childbearing, and rearing in both private and public settings. In contrast, for single women, the discursive context is primarily evoked by others who call on women to account for their single status, who tease, insult or make hurtful remarks

about or to single women or who completely ignore any reference to women's singleness."^{xxvi} Neither do women speak with close friends about being single.

I would want to be at a really low ebb, just to really bare my soul to them. . . I would have to be at a very low ebb to actually speak, to let people know even the way I am. I am inclined to keep to myself and to keep it inside. . . people wouldn't know how I felt, the real me. . .

Interview with Caít, age 39, Ireland.

The research interview is one of the few occasions when women speak about being single. Silencing of singleness talk limits the opportunity for women to explore the narratives in public and private use. For example, women struggle with the conflict between woman identity as defined by ideologies and practices of familism and single identity based on experiential knowledge of the individual benefits and challenges of singleness. Kitty, who is unhappy about the lack of an intimate relationship in her life, but yet yearns to "have my own identity," speaks of the tension between autonomous single identity and woman identity as being intimately connected with others.

I would like to be somebody's" wife and somebody's mother, but I would also like to be me. With my own life and my own career . . . to have my own identity. But to have somebody to share it with. . . Interview with Kitty, age 31, Ireland.

Most of the women interviewed think of themselves as single: it is a conscious, present characteristic that not only shapes others' interactions with them, but is part of their knowledge about themselves. Women are attuned to the lack of fit between the rigidity of the social category of singleness and their own personal experience of living as

a single woman. Women's narratives reveal this tension and their struggle around their capacity to alter their subject position so that a positive, coherent identity can be achieved. While many women think of themselves as single, they immediately modify their response, reluctant to foreclose on future possibilities. Women speak about waiting for "the right person" or the desire to have a child that could alter their single identity.

I do now, but I didn't. That is not to say that I don't want to get married, if I met the right person. But I am quite happy to be single if that is what falls to me. Interview with Kelly, age 36, Ireland.

And even if these possibilities fail to transpire, women reveal that they have sufficient "confidence" to be single and are "happy" to be single.

Negative Repertoires: Singleness as an Unacceptable Social Identity

The women interviewed use negative and positive repertoires in different combinations. Nevertheless the negative repertoire is more commonly used by less successful singles and those who reluctantly accept their singleness. For these women, singleness as a deviant social identity, intrudes into their perception of singleness. A negative repertoire is evident in the characterisation of singleness as deficient personal attributes and women themselves are to blame for being single. For example, women speak about the types of single women with whom they did not wish to be associated. Labels they found objectionable and insulting when applied by others to themselves, they uncritically apply to other single women. This in contrast to Cynthia Burnley's findings in which the single women she interviewed are loathe to describe other single women in negative terms, (apart that is from those searching for a partner and who participated in

“single activities”).^{xxvii} Burnley’s women are sensitive about the negative portrayal of single women suggested by terms such as “loser,” “swinger,” “never married,” “unmarried,” “old maid,” “spinster,” and are also aware that strangers and acquaintances would use such labels about single women such as them. In contrast, the women I interviewed had little difficulty in applying negative terms to single women from whom they wish to distance themselves.

You would get one or two spinsters coming in and they were very, very particular, because they were so used to having everything their own way. I would hate to end up like that, maybe I will, but well. . . in time gone by, they would be pernickety, or they would be looking for attention.

Interview with Fiona, age 34, Ireland.

In not wanting to be single, Kitty has difficulty accepting other single women. She describes herself as “a watcher of other women.”

I personally don’t accept myself as being a single woman, so then I wouldn’t really accept other single women. I am tired of people watching me and wondering if I am going to get married and I would be as much a watcher of other women and wondering if they were going to meet someone or going to get married. No I don’t think it (being single) is a viable alternative to being married. I think a few women who choose to be that way, who have absolutely no interest in meeting someone, just being quite happy just being themselves. For them, yes it is viable, but for those who don’t choose it, it is not. Interview with Kitty, age 31, Ireland.

Some women distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable singles. Acceptable singles are those who, like themselves, might marry someday while unacceptable singles are “fussy, selfish, choosy, particular, spinsters, women who are staid, old, not living, single women who hate men, old maids, wallflowers, lonely women who are left on the shelf and women who have something wrong with them.” “Though I am one of them,” Susan distanced herself from other single people who are “oddballs,” had “odd mannerisms” and are “very pernickety.” Single women also distinguish between singles with and without intimate partners. For some women, those with partners are not “true” singles, having the privileges and futures of being coupled. Partnered singles are construed as strong, choosing singleness and intimacy but in “having the best of both worlds” they too are marked as unacceptable and revealingly not authentic single people.

Some people like being single and have. . . a lot of outside interests and they are very strong people and they were determined to be single anyway. Now they may have boyfriends and not live with them. That means they wouldn't be single in the true sense. They wouldn't be single. Interview with Fionnuala, age 44, Ireland.

Those for whom singleness is difficult are unable to recognise the successful movement away from a negative identity or the negotiation between independence and intimacy that partnered singleness achieves. Bounded by singleness as an unacceptable social identity, the potential of alternative identity accounts is not noticed.

Singleness as Lack

For most women, singleness as a social category is defined as “not married,” “not in a relationship,” and “as not chosen.” For some, this meant that to be single is “being alone” and “lonely.”

Spinster, on the shelf, not going to get married. It is a lonely life really. . . .

Being lonely. . . Interview with Edel, age 43, Ireland.

For Mel, womanhood is based on a “natural” imperative to reproduce. She explains her failure to marry as a personal deficiency that she is lacking in some capacity or attribute. Singleness means

I am different. What is wrong with me that I cannot get married? Looked down on. Women should get married. Women should have children. It is so natural to do so. Interview with Mel, age 44, Ireland.

Similarly, Fiona is provoked to think about her gender identity and regards singleness as somewhat “selfish,” particularly for women. She finds it difficult to reconcile her single identity with her identity as a woman. Womanhood is selfless, it means “giving” and “sharing” to family and children: any other conception of womanhood is “selfish.” Perceiving oneself as selfish causes doubt about one’s womanhood.

Being a woman, it was nearly selfish. That I should maybe think of sharing something with somebody else and maybe should be giving time to family and children. Interview with Fiona, age 34, Ireland.

Stereotypical and negative, self deprecating representations of singleness are found in women’s narratives, similar to those in the British study. Even when women

attempt to challenge negative conceptions, there is recognition of their tenacity and the need to find a way of speaking and thinking differently about singleness.

I suppose, what I would love would be if being single was OK. If society would allow people to be single and I suppose that I could argue that must come from in here first and I probably have a conditioning that makes it difficult even for me to allow single to be OK. So I can't accept it myself. . . Interview with Cara, age 39, Ireland.

Singleness as Loss and Exclusion

Singleness is construed as loss and being excluded from society in women's talk of missing being with others, missing intimacy, and missing motherhood and children. Because being single is most commonly thought about as not coupled, absence of a partner is one of the most talked about aspects of singleness among single women themselves. In having to account for being unattached, the single woman has to engage in reflection about whom she is in order to present herself to others.

I don't have much of a social outlet because of the fact that I am single. And I think once you reach a certain age, it is a couples world after that. . . you are fairly isolated because of that. Interview with Fionnuala, age 44, Ireland.

The narratives contain many personal experiences of being excluded from coupled occasions and social gatherings by family and friends, by colleagues in work settings precisely because they are women alone.^{xxviii}

Feeling lonely and isolated is mentioned as the main drawback to being alone: most women speak about lonely times, even those who say they lead full and satisfying

lives. Who identify single women and who plan to be alone. For example, the companionship of others cannot be taken for granted by single women. Susan finds that she has to look for companionship all of the time, something she assumes she would not have to do if she had a partner or husband. After her mother died, Fionnuala stopped going out to social occasions or night classes and dreads the winter most. She misses the companionship of her mother, somebody to come home to at the end of a working day and someone with whom to share events, both remarkable and unremarkable. Though she works fulltime and lives in a large urban area she feels lonely and isolated, something she could not have anticipated. No longer a caretaker, she feels she had no personal identity, no sense of who she is.

It is something that I didn't imagine going to feel like this for the rest of my life. As you get older I suppose that you realise that you don't have any family. . . somebody who would think about you and appreciate your worth and needs for the rest of my life. . . . you realize that you are not part of family anymore and that the family who are your siblings have gone on to make families of their own. . . you don't really have an identity. Interview with Fionnuala, age 44, Ireland.

In not having an intimate, sexual partner women say they miss the companionship of another adult with whom they could share and talk about daily, routine, mundane activities. Cara not only misses somebody to socialise with, but also having somebody with whom to talk things through.

[I miss] not having somebody to do things with. . . I wouldn't go to the pictures on my own. . . [I miss] somebody to go on in my everyday life

with. If I am having problems at work, figuring out something or somebody, it is great to talk to somebody. It helps you figure it out in your mind. I miss that. Interview with Cara, age 39, Ireland.

But in women's talk about their feelings of missing the companionship of other adults, feelings of missing one to one intimacy, feelings of regret about not having children, feelings of the loss of attaining woman identity as traditionally defined are also revealed. Physical contact and sexual intimacy are also missed. Many women speak at length and freely about singleness as absence of intimacy, as absence of sexual relationship, reflecting on their sexuality. Apart from therapists, there is no opportunity to explore feelings about sexuality.

I am trying to get the words right for this. I know exactly what I miss most. I think there is something special between a couple, a husband and wife, partners. . . . That there is a bond or a contract, an unwritten contract between two people. You always have somebody, well hopefully anyway, somebody to talk to, somebody to come home to, somebody to share things with, hide things from. That you have somebody constant in your life. . . . At the end of the day you have somebody to climb into bed with and put your arms around... And yes there are nights when I would go to bed feeling so lonely and would love to be held by somebody. And that is something I would miss the most. Having somebody special in my life. Somebody that I am special to and that are special to me. Just having this person to be there with me. Interview with Bridget, age 32, Ireland.

Another woman specifically misses having sex with somebody.

I suppose I would very much like to have a physical relationship. . . I think I will have to take practical steps. . . . It would be a dreadful thought to think that for the rest of my life I wouldn't have a physical relationship with somebody. . . I am sexually frustrated. . . I suppose I miss the actual physical act itself, the actual physical sensations and the closeness. The ability to get close to somebody very quickly. Interview with Cliona, age 37, Ireland.

Though most women are quite definite that they would never consider having a child alone, others are more ambivalent, unwilling to firmly reject the option. Most miss having the opportunity to have children.

I have gone past, I can't have children now. And my child bearing age from thirty onwards, were taken up taking care of my parents that I suppose that I lost out on those years. . . I adore children. It is the only thing that I regret. I wouldn't care if I never had a man as long as I had kids. Interview with Fionnuala, age 44, Ireland.

A number are unwilling to wait for Mr. Right and would consider parenting a child alone.

I would, I would like it actually. It wouldn't be my upbringing and it wouldn't be my family's way at all, but in another couple of years, if I have not got a long term relationship going, I wouldn't hang on. I would have a child. . . I would just say that I would like to have a child. I wouldn't like to go through life without having a child. Interview with Brenda, age 31, Ireland.

Women know how they feel, have thought about their vulnerabilities in independence and have thought about “the practical steps” that they need to take, to live as single women.

Family and Negative Conceptions of Singleness

Often it is attributes of the single woman herself that are the focus of attention. Family and friends often charge that the single woman is “too fussy, too choosy, too particular.”

A lot of them would say that I am too fussy, all the time I have been told that I am fussy, but not only my family, friends and that. . . Interview with Brenda, age 31, Ireland.

Fussiness is regarded as a regrettable personal characteristic closely associated with and used as an explanation for the single status. Interestingly, most women accept the label, not openly challenging the interpretation of themselves as a person who is too choosy, too particular in their search for a partner. The pejorative label of “too fussy” is a judgement, critical of the single status, questioning single women’s apparent failure to support the majority form of female social identity, as the married, childbearing, heterosexual woman. The alternative interpretation of woman as chooser is little heard.

Many women mention that because they are single, family members and mothers in particular regard them as incomplete adults, as “girl like.” The deprivation of full adult status or personhood is a recurrent theme.

My mother gives me an awful hard time and my eldest sister gives me an awful hard time over being single. And I always have a feeling from both

of them and probably from other folk as well that I am not complete when I am not married. Interview with Emer, age 33, Ireland.

Bridget is not only confused about her single identity but also about “who I really am,” about her identity as a woman.

I don't feel like I am a girl anymore. I don't feel I am a girl. But on the other hand, there is this very strong message telling me that I am and that I am not having relevant experiences which would show otherwise.

Interview with Bridget, age 32, Ireland.

The single woman perceives that she is less important than married family members. Katie, caring and living with her elderly mother recounts that her sister has a big family and runs a successful business with her husband. Accordingly their mother treats her sister with more affection.

She is the daughter that is doted on and I am the maid. Again my mother has more respect for the one that is married. . . I definitely feel that it is because my sister is married to a successful man and that. . . . They don't give me much heed at all. I think a lot of that is because I am single and they don't take much notice of you. You are not worth as much, with my family anyway. Interview with Katie, age 45, Ireland.

Despite her caring work, Katie feels she is not “worth as much” because she is not married. Her sisters and brothers pay her very little attention, not inviting her opinion or inquiring after her health and well-being or any other needs that she may have. Narratives reveal that single women are placed in a subordinate relation to families and heterosexual couples: the interests of those who realise familistic, societal norms supercede the

interests of single women. Being treated by families as less than adult, as immature, as not deserving attention, support or care is a consequence of their devalued status.

Positive Repertoires: Independence and Being in Control

While the trials of managing alone form part of the negative repertoire of singleness, this same aspect is valorised in women's narratives when speaking about independence and freedom of choice as the main benefit and privilege of being single. The positive repertoires revolve around being independent and having freedom of choice. Perception of self as strong and self reliant, being mobile, achieving career or educational goals, valuing time to oneself, being engaged in creative and self development activities are given as positive examples of being single. Women's shared commitment to independence emerged as the most significant aspect of their singleness. Components of independence identified in Tuula Gordon's study were financial independence, taking care of yourself, being in control, emotional independence, mental independence and being alone.^{xxix} For her participants, establishing independence was hard work, had to be learned over time and then sustained through developing "symmetrical relationships" with others. Attachment to independence as the most valued characteristic of being single, is marked in the narrative accounts. The word "independent" is most commonly used to describe themselves or other single women they know. Independence, singleness and the desire for autonomy are intertwined in women's view of themselves. Colette points to her single lifestyle which supports her "want for independence."

I don't have a problem with being single. I think I have an awful lot of advantages with being single. It supports my want for independence.

Interview with Colette, age 37, Ireland.

For Katie, singleness, independence and individuality are equated. Katie's view of herself is as a single person, who is "very independent." Despite the positive accent on independence, Katie continues to construe singleness as not coupled.

Oh yes, I am conscious of it [being single]. Being single or being an individual and not part of a couple, I would see myself that way. I would see myself very much as an individual and not part of a couple and I like to be very independent, but it is not always possible. Interview with Katie, age 45, Ireland.

A number of women either describe themselves as "strong" people or that one has to be "strong" to be independent:

I think you would need to be strong because I mean, I feel that in lots of women there is a huge sense of dependency on a man, or on a partner. . . . You know I think oftentimes it is a sense of vulnerability in women and they just need to latch onto somebody. . . Interview with Collete, age 37, Ireland.

I suppose I am a strong person. . . I only rely on myself. I am very independent and I don't make a decision based on what someone else may do for me. . . I do it myself. Interview with Eleanor, age 32, Ireland.

Having the confidence to be independent and having the confidence to stay single is a recurrent theme. Some women recognise that they have gained the confidence to go on living the single life, even in times of adversity. Bridget described being single as having to deal with "the opposite all the time:" she has to constantly deal with her own and others conceptions of woman as coupled and mother. It is an effort to construct a

positive single identity in this context, but an effort that is important to make. Attachment to independence partially explains the viability of a single identity and the single lifestyle.

In the context of independence, being without relationship ties is construed as a benefit of the single life. Being in charge of oneself, having developed the capacity for self reliance, having time to oneself, being a self governing individual are aspects of independence which are valued and to which women are attached. Much emphasis is placed on being able to support oneself financially. Women gain confidence from their success at providing for themselves, content that they could buy their own home, car or holiday abroad, for example. Being independent clarifies a way of being in the world, imbuing a strong positive hue to single identity. Siobhan describes independence as being “complete,” a very different conception of singleness as lack, as incomplete.

To be independent. . . . it means being able to stand on your own, not feeling that you are lacking in anything. That you are complete and able to stand on your own, even through strengths and weaknesses and ups and downs. . . I attach some kind of...importance to being on my own and able to stand up and able to manage and get things done, on my own. Interview with Siobhan, age 37, Ireland.

Satisfaction with Living Alone

Living alone is perceived as an important aspect of independence. Almost half of the women live alone. Living alone also means that one has to be financially independent, self-reliant and emotionally self-sufficient. For some living alone is an “unexpected pleasure.” Cara, anxious about people breaking in and strange noises at night found that her worries gradually ceased:

After a while, then it just stopped and I don't know how or why, but it did . . . and I just thought, I love it and I just love living on my own and it was one of the joys that I hadn't anticipated and it is something that has given me more pleasure than anything that I can remember for a long time.

Interview with Cara, age 39, Ireland.

Many of the women talk about how important it is to live by one self, taking pleasure in one's own space, to be as one chooses to be. In a study of a "family oriented" society in the Netherlands, Jenny De Jong-Gierveld and Monique Alberts conclude that the unmarried, divorced and widowed are lonelier than married people.^{xxx} However, a sub-group of unmarried and divorced people living alone, identified as "creative singles," report fewer feelings of loneliness. Of these, women compared to men, tend to value living alone in positive terms. De Jong-Gierveld and Alberts conjecture that women's capacity for self-sufficiency is greater, perhaps because they possess more internal resources. An orientation to values and practices based on independence is perhaps part of that explanation. Though those who enjoy living alone in the Irish research feel lonely "at times," but few would consider giving up living by themselves. Even when financial benefits of sharing would ease the burden of debt, the pleasure of living alone won out. Deciding to live alone is also a statement to oneself, recognizing a conception of self as "preferring" to be live alone, as "needing" to live by oneself. Recognizing one's preferences and acting upon them, in this instance, living alone, is part of the process of composing an autonomous, single identity.

Being in Control: Refusing Sexual Relationships

Accounts of women's involvement in career and educational development reveal their commitment to nurturing independence and self-development as a priority in their lives. Being in control is crucial to these women. Women defer marital or reproductive decisions, being more interested in creating options for themselves that ensured a degree of personal independence not available to their mothers. A concern with personal growth, challenging oneself and having confidence in one's own judgements permeates women's accounts of their working lives, business activities and educational plans. Brenda describes how she "discovered herself" through being ambitious and testing herself in her career. In her view, she is no longer "shy and reserved" but "confident and ambitious." Fiona, who started her own business on leaving school, and owned her own house and car by the time she was twenty-one, found it difficult to reconcile her enthusiasm for and success in entrepreneurial activity with her sense of herself as a woman. For her, women had a social obligation to unselfishly "give time to family and children" but she wanted to make a commitment to developing and expanding her own business. Doubts about her femininity and capability assailed her. Her account of the resolution is interesting.

It dawned on me. Deal with yourself and your person and what you are happy with and you go with it. . . Interview with Fiona, age 34, Ireland.

Fiona realized that she was feeling constrained by social expectations of what it is to be a woman and "once that was out of the way" she proceeded to become fully engaged in her business development plans. She had to reflect on herself as a person, on what kind of person she thought herself to be so that she could set aside conventional expectations and fulfil her career ambition.

Most of the older, single women in this study are no longer sexually active with another person, some for ten years or more, while a few have never been sexually active with another person. Cliona observes that she is less dependent, less needy when not sexually involved with another.

You are free of wanting another person. Of being a little bit, how would you say it, dependent. Dependency isn't there because there is no need for a person and there is a certain dependency when you need the person. . . there is a freedom, a little bit of freedom. . . Interview with Cliona, age 37, Ireland.

Wanting to be a person in "my own right" was another important aspect of independence. If intimate relationships did not allow women to be themselves, women "withdrew," avoiding relationships which would constrain or confine their sense of themselves. Fiona regards relationships with men as inhibiting her self-development.

I suppose in relationships with men, I felt that he'd be keeping you back in some shape or form. . . I don't like any form of coercion. Interview with Fiona, age 34, Ireland.

Others talk about previous relationships they severed because they were not recognised as persons in their own right. Unhappy being perceived as somebody's girlfriend, "I was. . . a non-identity. . . . I want to be a person in my own right, not somebody else's appendage." Her boyfriend paid little attention to her career ambitions and made decisions about their life together without consulting her.

I actually ended the relationship and I remember at the time that friends of ours were absolutely stunned. . . . But I just realised that he really didn't

love me and the other thing was that he actually didn't take my studies very seriously. . . Interview with Anna, age 42, Ireland.

The evidence from this study is that women significantly value their independence: that it is meaningful to the daily practice of single living. Women who value independence are emphasising autonomy as a key goal around which they are organising their lives. This fundamentally structures their relationships with others and consequently their personal identities. Church emphasises reflection, planning and self-control as constitutive of self-identity. Valuing independence has also implications for female gender-identity, setting up a “new specification” of what it is to be a woman.^{xxxii} If one accepts Gilligan's proposition that women have a different moral orientation than men, (towards caring and relationship) and that this “sets its own distinctive developmental path,” then achieving woman identity based on single values will be problematic for single women.^{xxxiii} For women, autonomy, rather than attachment, is portrayed by Gilligan as “the illusory and dangerous quest.” In living independently, in saying “I am an independent woman,” single women are claiming an autonomous selfhood in the context of their relational, gendered identities as women. Autonomy and relationality are clearly identity issues with which single women have to struggle and resolve.

Impossible Utterances and Actions

Reynolds and Wetherall, “suspect that it may be unusual to have to draw on a discursive and ideological space that is so polarised, where the ideological dilemmas raised by the contradictions between the repertoires are so closely linked to the possibilities for who one can be as a person.” While other marginalized or excluded

groups in society generally have the support of a social movement and lobby groups to counteract any stigma, single women “lack a social movement or identity politics around singleness.” This is indeed problematic and a phenomenon recognised by a number of scholars of singleness studies who advocate a politics of change around singleness, a project perhaps of interest to feminism.^{xxxiii} Reynolds and Wetherall noted discursive strategies open to women negotiating their membership of the “troubled category” of singleness. They included distancing oneself from the category or defining the category through positive conceptions of singleness. Very few women in the British study chose the latter option, the denigrating conceptions of singleness being in command. However, women made it clear in their accounts that they are not personally deficient, and resisted this construction of singleness. Women demonstrated distancing, explaining why they are not true members of the category – they either had a boyfriend, lots of friends, a good social life, would like to have married, are financially independent, and are really different from women who are “spinsters.” Distancing is the most common strategy utilized; the primary task is to disavow membership of the troubled category, in the effort to communicate “a more positive sense of self” to others.^{xxxiv}

In the Irish study, distancing is utilized but to lesser extent. Usually women accept their single designation and are likely to blame themselves for being single due to some inherent personal deficiency or inability to maintain long-term relationships. For example, some women say they do not know how to be sexually close to another person. Others cite adverse family background, such as parental alcoholism or having witnessed or having been the victims of violence in the home. Illness, being separated from parents at an early age or having to assume caring responsibilities early on in life are also part of

biographical history presented to explain personal inability to form long term couple like relationships with another. Others speak about having no control over their lives, fate rather than self-controlling destiny. For these, singleness then is “something that just happens.”^{xxxv} A consequence of polarised repertoires on singleness, is a difficulty in saying, “I choose to be single.” Choosing to be single is an impossible utterance in the context of denigrating or idealised repertoires of singleness. More commonly, women clarify at length that they did not choose to be single. Singleness is regarded as a challenge that can be embraced by some but is beyond the ability of others. A passive, fatalistic account of singleness stands in marked contrast to actively choosing to be single.

Combining independence and intimacy is also a challenge for women. Bridget feels confused by her single identity in that she wants to be “independent” and “I can direct my own life but I would like to have somebody else in there as well.” Bridget wants to be in control over her own life, but also wants human connection in an intimate, sexual relationship. The polarized repertoires of singleness make it very difficult for women to be positively single and yet admit to a desire for an intimate relationship. Some women resolve the “intimacy problem” in creative and individual ways, some of which challenge conventional expectations of female behaviour. Alternatives to marriage for post-thirty single women include non-resident, intimate relationships.

I think a lot of women. . . choose to live singly. . . I know [two] women having relationships with men for maybe six years. . . they each have their own apartment and their male partners have their apartment and they just go back and forward. . . and if you ask them are they single, they say

"Yes." And that is the way they choose to live their life. I think a lot more women are choosing to do that. Interview with Nancy, age 36, Ireland.

For the six women with partners the presence of an intimate relationship did not change their view of themselves as single women. Being in an intimate relationship brings many personal benefits, but does not compromise independent single lifestyle or self-identity.

Marriage isn't an option because he already has been married and has a family and it is just not an option. Even if it were from his point of view, I don't think it is something I would fancy. We go out together socially, we get on very well, we have quite a bit in common, but there is a lot of him I couldn't live with. . . I am quite happy the way I am. It would be a huge, huge commitment for me to make now, because there are a lot of things I would have to give up. I have based my life around what I am, what I do and I have tremendous flexibility and I think that would be very hard for a man to take on board. Interview with Collete, age 37, Ireland.

Marriage would interfere with Colette's career plans and the mobility and flexibility that she enjoys. For her there is neither an economic, social or sexual reason to marry. Social and economic changes in Irish society mean that "it is very easy to establish your own base and live quite comfortably without a partner." Colette had recently built her own home described herself as "single through choice" and would not give up her single way of life. Being single supports her "want for independence" and gives her "a sense of freedom" while the non-marital committed sexual relationship fulfils her need for intimacy.

Talking About the Dilemmas of Being Single

A number of women use therapy to talk through and resolve some of the dilemmas of singleness. In therapy women's concerns focus first on transforming their own attitude to singleness, then to "making singleness OK" in society. In psychotherapy, Kitty is learning to deal with her anger and other people's view of her as "written off" because she is not married.

In doing the work that I do in psychotherapy, I am dealing with those issues quite a lot. So I would hope that in working with those issues that I would be more able to accept it (being single) and live with it and enjoy it even. To try and turn it round for myself. Interview with Kitty, age 31, Ireland.

Bridget is angry at others' lack of respect for women who are not coupled, a situation she finds both undermining of women's choices and single women's claims for recognition. Bridget is concerned not only with her own struggles and dilemmas, but also those of all women whose identity claims and alternative "ways of life" are denied.

So I suppose I am actually angry with that. I feel it is a very ignorant stance to take, very disrespectful and I feel that it is very undermining as well. . . I see a lot more women who have chosen not to be or maybe not so much as chosen, but are not in relationships and it is very much a way of life and it is a way of life that is undermined. . . many women, including myself, may always live in it. So it is a kind of denial, I suppose, of who we are and how we are living our lives and the value of our lives as seen by others. Interview with Bridget, age 32, Ireland.

Singleness as an Acceptable Social Identity

Part of the feminist theoretical debate on conceptions of womanhood has moved between essentialist/universalist definitions of woman and post-structuralist arguments that find analysis of discursive practices on identity is more useful.^{xxxvi} Much of this theorising is an effort to deal with women's agency. What set of factors or conditions motivate one person to embrace change and resist constraints while another continues to participate in her own oppression, so to speak?

How do we account for the fact that even when confronted with alternative perspectives, some women choose to become liberated or at least to resist patriarchy while others do not? How do we explain why, even when shown the face of their oppression, some women still justify their oppressors?^{xxxvii}

The development of skills and competencies assist identity transformation.^{xxxviii} Meyers identifies socialisation for autonomy competency as key to releasing agency and achieving full personhood for women. Certainly socialisation, consciousness-raising, the development of competencies as well as contact with ideas and alternative ideologies go some distance in theorising individual identity transformation. Structural elements such as the availability of material resources and the enhancement of legal rights for example, are without doubt crucial pre-requisites to realising individual autonomy and self-determination. This is most evident when a bar or impediment exists, such as in the case of the Irish marriage bar of 1932 to 1973 which formally and legally excluded married women from public service and financial services. The marriage bar limited women's employment opportunities and depressed women's bid for economic independence. Inequalities imposed by class, race, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability as well

as gender, for example, all impact on the person we claim to be and on individual identity. I am not arguing here that such structural constraints or opportunities are ignored, but rather that these are combined with a focus on individual capacity for change and the consequences for social transformation. Huntingdon advises that feminists need to theorize “the activity whereby we assume responsibility for who we become and for cultivating critical consciousness, even as our desires and intentions remain socially influenced and even though we liberate ourselves via the range of critical discourses already available.”^{xxxix}

For Huntingdon, the concept of self-determination combines the freedom of self-constitution with the constraint of social construction, that is “the subject whose identity . . . is rooted in the self-critical choices she makes.” Self-reflection and self-awareness develops one’s capacity to make self-critical choices. These choices inform one’s activities and one’s relationships which “produce new habits and capacities” and engender autonomy.^{xl} Thus the capacity for being oneself, for composing oneself comes into being.

The response to singleness among single women in this study is varied. Yet all reflect on their own identity, a concern motivated by single women’s deviant social identity in a heterosexual, familistic society. The effects of stigmatising interactions with others precipitates intense awareness that one’s own identity claims as an acceptable single women are not validated, a pattern which women commonly observe in their interactions with others. This awareness, this self-reflection in interactions while they are going on, compels women to reinterpret the significance of dominant social identities and find “acceptable” ways of being single women for themselves. In the face of others”

view of them as not-women, as not-adult, women compose their own definitions of self which do not rely on their conceptions of woman as wife, as mother, as coupled in sexual intimacy or as economically dependent within a familial setting; the result is a developing conception of woman as an autonomous, self-defined person. In actively transforming their own identity, in deferring to one's own values, in making distinctive relationship choices, in contesting and resisting patriarchal constructions of womanhood, single women demonstrate their impressive capacity for innovatory action.

What did women have to say about the future viability of singleness as an acceptable social identity? Four responses to the dominant constructions of womanhood and singlehood are noted; compliance, acceptance, resistance and transformation. For five of the thirty women, the lack of sexual intimacy in their lives defined their single identity as failure, despite impressive personal achievements in other spheres and awareness of the advantages of the single lifestyle. Significantly influenced by heterosexual familistic ideology, their perception of singleness as different and marginalized leads to a sense of personal failure in achieving womanhood. Caught in the repertoire of single woman as failure limits their capacity for innovative or transformatory action. None are interested in promoting singleness as a basis for continuing self-identity or indeed for social identity. They seek to exchange the stigmatised social identity of singleness for the more valued social identity of marriage. In complying with the dominant conceptions of womanhood, they seek change only for themselves.

In contrast, though there are differences of degree among them, twenty-five women agree that singleness "ought" be an alternative social identity for women. Of

these, some single women are characterised by their pragmatic or realistic view of the world. While very attached to the single lifestyle, accept own single self-identity, they agree that dominant social identities for women continue to prevail and they also agree with and accept this conception of womanhood. Single stigma continues to have resonance and resolving tensions concerning woman identity and single identity is not easy. Though Eleanor finds being single difficult and lonely, she is keenly aware of the benefits of independence, accepts the fact of her singlehood and would be very reluctant to exchange her singleness now for a relationship or marriage. Singleness is an alternative identity location for women in her view, as it is a reality, representing her life and the lives of all her friends.

Oh Yes. It has to be because it is there. There is no what will I do? Will I get married? There is none of that. Myself and my peers, we are all too intelligent to go for the "I want to get married and he'll do." None of us are going to go for that. I think if I waited this long and things haven't worked out, so what? I would definitely be on my own than lonely in a marriage. Interview with Eleanor, age 32, Ireland.

For Kelly the single identity is "absolutely" a viable alternative to a married identity, one of a range of alternatives that are being considered by women in contemporary Ireland.

I feel myself luckier than a lot, I see myself as a lot luckier than a lot of women I know and even a lot of women that I don't know. . . Yes, I think there are all sorts of alternatives to marriage. Interview with Kelly, age 36, Ireland.

Women are aware of the difficulties of claiming singleness as an acceptable social identity. In order for changes in social identities to be accepted, it is not enough to claim that the identity ought to be acceptable but the larger community of others must also agree to the changes. Brenda believes that “things are changing in a lot of ways in Ireland” citing the introduction of divorce and the growing economic independence of women. She has learned much from observing her mother’s life, a life spent at home looking after twelve children, not able to drive a car, not involved in activities outside the home and crucially having no money of her own. It was a life that Brenda was determined not to live.

She had twelve children and I have felt that she shouldn’t have had twelve children. She should have been a career lady. And I can see the mistakes now. . . I could see her having had a better life. Interview with Brenda, age 31, Ireland.

Brenda, despite the changing cultural and economic environment, believes that marriage and motherhood cannot be combined with achieving economic independence for women or with the risks, resources and time required for entrepreneurial activity. While this situation continues to prevail, the single identity “is an alternative in a way but [also] it is not.” Brenda is happy to live her life as an independent single woman with an established career, who can take financial risks and experiment with her life plans. However the problematic issue of composing an acceptable female identity as a single woman remains to be resolved in the future. Katie believes that single women have the opportunity now to make independent personal and lifestyle choices but it is also evident

from her account that the legitimacy of singleness as a social identity has not yet been secured.

They used to be viewed as kinds of losers. I think that has probably changed now. It is easier to be single now and people can choose to be single and still to be financially afloat. But I think that they also see single women that remain single, especially women, they see them as very hard-nosed and very well off and very self-centred. A lot of people would think that single professional women are too selfish and too self-centred to get married. And I would say that a lot of people would not like this view that women can choose to get married or not. Women can choose to live with somebody and get married or not. Women can choose to have a family or not. They can make all these decisions now and still keep going. Interview with Katie, age 45, Ireland.

Bridget believes that it is easier to be a single woman now than it was twenty years ago and that perceptions of single women have changed from being viewed as “spinsters” and “minders,” to also include gay women, career women and women who postpone motherhood. She is aware that the acceptability of singleness is dependent on one’s class position. Her class position has conferred benefits and opportunities which allow her to be economically independent, self sufficient and to remain single if she so chooses.

I suppose I am quite privileged. . . I did get to college and that I have a job that allows me access to clothes, to holidays, to therapy. So I am privileged to have access to a way of life that is maybe more free and I am

not sure that it is like that for all women. . . Interview with Bridget, age 32, Ireland.

She believes that her life is quite different from the life of many economically poorer women, who believe that financial and social security is found in marriage.

Being in a relationship was your means of security and still is for a lot of women and is sought after. And you get dolled up to the nines and you go out and you go out there to “catch.” That is the way it is and. . . while I say it is a lot easier (to be single), I think that maybe those women feel that they should be in a relationship in order to complete themselves is quite prevalent. I don’t think that is gone. Interview with Bridget, age 32, Ireland.

The “new” single identity is womanhood as independent and self-reliant, as exercising the capacity to choose and to determine one’s own life path. Single women make unconventional choices and “still keep going.” Siobhan believes that she alone is responsible for her own life and her own happiness, believes that she is in charge of her own future, to be organized according to what she values most. Her involvement in community and voluntary activities is connected to the sense that she alone is accountable for her own self-development, happiness and security.

I like to get involved in things for itself and I think I often feel excluded if I don’t involve myself in things. Secondly I think it is something of taking on responsibility for furthering the things in your life or your environment that you think are important. Just on its own as something you should do and is worthwhile doing. Interview with Siobhan, age 37, Ireland.

While, singleness means that “you haven’t the voice in political terms and being represented and. . . being single is less than best” Mari advocates collective based change. Committed to making singleness a more acceptable social identity one has to remain “on the outside” she argues, a place requiring strength and support from others. She and other single women are “at the beginning of a frontier in a way and that we are trying to stand up and be counted as being single.” She is concerned that singleness be made visible and embraced as a legitimate alternative to marriage for women.

A focus on the narratives of single women reveals critical resistance to the effects of stigmatising categorisations underpinned by familist ideologies. Transformative identities are achieved through self-understanding and awareness of the contradictions imposed by narrow conceptions of womanhood and singlehood. The capacity for making autonomous choices in relationships with others, in chosen activities based on one’s own values and in devising a number of innovatory and nonconformist resolutions to combining intimacy with independence are also significant. Taking one’s own responsibility for transformatory action and living as a single woman brings the possibility of singleness as an acceptable identity ever closer.

Notes

ⁱ Jill Reynolds and Margaret Wetherell, “The Discursive Climate of Singleness: The Consequences for Women’s Negotiation of A Single Identity,” Feminism and Psychology 13 no. 4, (2003): 489-510.

ⁱⁱ Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, The Anti-Social Family (London: Verso Books, 1982), 26.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bella DePaulo and Wendy Morris, “Singles in Society and Science,” Psychological Inquiry 16, nos. 2/3 (2005): 57-83.

^{iv} Pierre Bourdieu, “On the Family As A Realized Category,” Theory, Culture and Society 13 (1996): 20.

^v *Ibid.*, 21.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 26, 22.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 25.

^{viii} Eileen Connolly, “Durability and Change in State Sender Systems: Ireland in the 1950s,” The European Journal of Women’s Studies 10, no. 1 (2003): 80.

^{ix} Interview with Anna, age 42. This interview, along with 29 others was conducted as part of a larger study of single women in Ireland. Interviews were conducted by the author from January 1995 to September 1998; Connolly, “Durability and Change,” 1.

^xDePaulo and Morris, Psychological Inquiry 16 (2005): 58.

^{xi} Ibid., 57.

^{xii} Anne Byrne and Deborah Carr, “Caught in the Cultural Lag: The Stigma of Singlehood,” Psychological Inquiry 16, nos. 2/3 (2005): 87.

^{xiii} Anne Byrne, “The Socio-Economic Situation of Single Women in Ireland, 1989,” report (National Report, Ireland, 1989); Anne Byrne, “Single Women in Irish Sociological Writing” in Anne Byrne and Madeleine Leonard, eds., Women in Irish Society: A Sociological Reader (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997); Anne Byrne, “Researching One An-Other” in Anne Byrne and Ronit Lentin, eds., Researching Women: Feminist Research Methodologies in the Social Sciences in Ireland (Dublin: Institute for Public Administration, 2000); Anne Byrne, “Single Women's Identities in Contemporary Irish Society” (PhD diss., University of Limerick, Ireland, 2000); Anne Byrne, “Developing a Sociological Model for Researching Women’s Self and Social Identities,” European Journal of Women’s Studies 10, no. 4 (2003): 443-64; Byrne and Carr, “Caught in the Cultural Lag;” Breeda Duggan, “Single Women” (master’s thesis, University College Cork, Ireland, 1993); Jane Millar, The Socio-Economic Situation of Solo Women in Europe (Commission of the European Communities: Brussels, 1991); Mairead Flynn, “Self-Actualization: A Study of Married and Single Women in the Dublin Area” (master’s thesis., University of Dublin, Trinity College, Ireland, 1992).

^{xiv} Byrne, “The Socio-Economic Situation;” Duggan, “Single Women.”

^{xv} Ibid., 66.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Flynn, “Self-Actualization.”

^{xviii} Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, "Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology," British Journal of Sociology 44 (1993): 473-499.

^{xix} Gillian Dunne, Lesbian Lifestyles: Women's Work and the Politics of Sexuality (London: Macmillan, 1997), 13.

^{xx} Anne Byrne, "Singular Identities: Managing Stigma, Resisting Voices," Women's Studies Review 7 (2000): 13-24. (<http://www.medusanet.ca/singlewomen/>)

^{xxi} Reynolds and Wetherell, Feminism and Psychology.

^{xxii} *Ibid.*, 493.

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, 496.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*, 501.

^{xxv} *Ibid.*, 507.

^{xxvi} Byrne, Women's Studies Review.

^{xxvii} Cynthia Brunley (1979), Selves, Careers, and Relationships of Never Married Women (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 1979).

^{xxviii} Byrne, Women's Studies Review.

^{xxix} Tuula Gordon, Single Women: On the Margins? (New York: New York University Press, 1994)

^{xxx} Jenny De Jong-Gierveld and Monique Alberts, "Singlehood: A Creative or Lonely Experience?," Alternative Lifestyles 3, no. 3 (1980): 350-368.

^{xxxi} Jennifer Church, "Ownership and the Body" in Diana Tietjens Meyers, ed., Feminists Rethink the Self (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).

^{xxxii} Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 48; Marilyn Friedman,

“Autonomy and Social Relationships: Rethinking the Feminist Critique” in Diana Tietjens Meyers, ed., Feminists Rethink the Self (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997): 43.

^{xxxiii} Byrne and Carr, “Caught in the Cultural Lag,” 84-91.

^{xxxiv} Reynolds and Wetherell, Feminism and Psychology, 502, 505.

^{xxxv} Byrne, Women’s Studies Review.

^{xxxvi} Patricia Huntingdon, “Towards a Dialectical Concept of Autonomy: Revisiting the Feminist Alliance with Poststructuralism,” Philosophy and Social Criticism 21, no. 1 (1995): 37-55.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*, 43.

^{xxxviii} Diana Tietjens Meyers, Self, Society and Personal Choice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

^{xxxix} Huntingdon (1995), 43.

^{xl} *Ibid.*, 50.