

Single and Ready To Mingle? A Feminist Exploration of Singlehood, Dating, and Leisure

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Stemming from my own experiences (and tensions and paradoxes) negotiating the complexity involved in dating as a single, adult woman, this study explores the gendered complexity of singlehood for adult women. To unpack this complexity, I argue dating – a social practice commonly associated with leisure – is a useful conduit to achieve this end. Aligning a third wave feminist theoretical orientation with narrative, I conducted one-to-one interviews and group interviews with 12 single, adult women. From the interview data, I created five composite characters to reflect five different phases of singlehood and dating women experienced. To represent the findings, I then engaged the five composite characters in conversation using dialogue-based vignettes to represent the complexity and diversity of their experiences through three larger thematic areas: Gendered Pressures to Connect, Gendered Modes of Connecting, and Gendered Connections. Taken together, the findings highlight the ways single, adult women can face marginalization and stigmatization because of their single status. More specifically, the findings illustrate the ways gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles can discipline and constrain women's experiences with singlehood, dating, and leisure, but also the ways women can resist gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles through their experiences with singlehood, dating, and leisure. Given that the experiences of single, adult women negotiating the gendered world of dating have been largely ignored in the literature across many disciplines, and most noticeably by leisure scholars, this research provides an important contribution to the literature, bringing attention to the topic of singlehood and dating and its ties to leisure for adult women.

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#AlwaysWaitForMargarita #Don'tBeAfraidToTwirl

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#ITriedToKeepItShort #Caffeine

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Dedication

In the words of Beyoncé, to “all the single ladies.”

Table of Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1.0 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 2.0 Literature Review..... | 7 |
| 2.1 Singlehood, Couplehood, and Dating..... | 7 |
| 2.1.1 Are More Single People Living Alone?..... | 8 |
| 2.1.2 Ideology of Couplehood: Stigmatizing Single People, Glorifying People in Couples..... | 10 |
| 2.1.3 Which Single People are Most Susceptible to Stigmatization?..... | 11 |
| 2.1.4 Compounding Ideological Influences on Single People: Familism, and Pronatalism | 12 |
| 2.2 Dating Culture: An Evolution..... | 14 |
| 2.2.1 The Calling System..... | 15 |
| 2.2.2 The Dating System..... | 16 |
| 2.2.3 The Sexual Revolution and the Women’s Movement..... | 18 |
| 2.3 Present Day Dating Culture..... | 20 |
| 2.3.1 Group Dates and Hookups..... | 20 |
| 2.3.1.1 The Sexual Double Standard..... | 21 |
| 2.3.2 A Return to Formal Dating in Adulthood..... | 23 |
| 2.3.2.1 Challenges of Dating in Adulthood..... | 24 |
| 2.3.2.2 Current Dating Trends and Developments..... | 26 |
| 2.4 Singlehood, Dating, Gender, and Leisure | 30 |
| 2.4.1 Leisure as Resistance..... | 33 |
| 2.5 Summary of the Literature Review..... | 35 |
| 3.0 Theory and Methodology..... | 38 |
| 3.1 A Third Wave Feminist Theoretical Orientation..... | 38 |
| 3.2 Aligning Narrative with Third Wave Feminism..... | 42 |
| 4.0 Methods..... | 45 |
| 4.1 Participant Recruitment..... | 45 |
| 4.1.1 Profile of the Participants..... | 47 |
| 4.2 Types of Interviews..... | 48 |
| 4.2.1 Reflexive, Dyadic Interviews..... | 49 |
| 4.2.2 Interactive, Small Group Interviews..... | 50 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 4.3 Data Collection..... | 52 |
| 4.3.1 Interview Order..... | 52 |
| 4.3.2 Interview Location, Setup, and Dynamics..... | 53 |
| 4.3.3 Interview Process..... | 54 |
| 4.3.4 Interview Ethical Considerations..... | 56 |
| 4.4 Researcher Reflections..... | 58 |
| 4.5 Process for Analysis and Interpretation..... | 61 |
| 4.5.1 Phase One..... | 62 |
| 4.5.2 Phase Two..... | 63 |
| 4.5.3 Phase Three..... | 64 |
| 4.6 Messy Texts, Writing, and Representation..... | 67 |
| 4.6.1 Creative Analytic Practice..... | 67 |
| 4.6.2 Shaping Composite Characters..... | 69 |
| 4.6.3 Creating Dialogue-Based Vignettes..... | 76 |
| 4.6.3.1 Phase Four..... | 79 |
| 5.0 Findings..... | 84 |
| 5.1 Gendered Pressures to Connect..... | 86 |
| 5.1.1 It’s not like we are having an Orgy– We’re Eating Dinner..... | 86 |
| 5.1.2 Why don’t you have a Boyfriend? | 88 |
| 5.1.3 Thank God People don’t do Single Tables Anymore..... | 89 |
| 5.1.4 Being so Brave..... | 90 |
| 5.1.5 My Mom Calls my Cat her Granddaughter..... | 92 |
| 5.1.6 No one has Snatched me Up..... | 93 |
| 5.1.7 You’re in your Thirties? | 94 |
| 5.1.8 You’re (Spelled Intentionally) Biological Clock is Ticking..... | 96 |
| 5.1.9 The Transitional Birthday..... | 98 |
| 5.1.10 Needing and Wanting Sexy Times..... | 99 |
| 5.1.11 Before Women Became People..... | 101 |
| 5.1.12 Always Wait for Margarita..... | 104 |
| 5.1.13 “Why Men Love Bitches”..... | 107 |
| 5.1.14 Couplehood is Better..... | 110 |
| 5.2 Gendered Modes of Connecting..... | 111 |
| 5.2.1 Being a Kid in a Candy Store..... | 112 |
| 5.2.2 A Whole Different World..... | 113 |
| 5.2.3 Being a Bit More of Not an Idiot..... | 115 |
| 5.2.4 Do you want to Dance? | 117 |
| 5.2.5 Online Dating – A Last Ditch Effort? | 119 |
| 5.2.6 Being an Online Dating Sociologist..... | 120 |
| 5.2.7 It’s like Selling Yourself on eBay..... | 124 |
| 5.2.8 The Tale of the Unsolicited Dick Pic..... | 127 |

| | | |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 5.2.9 | The Power of Google..... | 129 |
| 5.2.10 | Convenience and Control in Texting..... | 130 |
| 5.2.11 | Twitter – The New Age Love Letter..... | 133 |
| 5.2.12 | An Organic Approach..... | 134 |
| 5.2.13 | You would be Great with So and So..... | 135 |
| 5.3 | Gendered Connections..... | 137 |
| 5.3.1 | There has to be a Spark..... | 137 |
| 5.3.2 | Belly Laughs Everyday..... | 139 |
| 5.3.3 | The V-Strap..... | 140 |
| 5.3.4 | Knowing Right Away..... | 142 |
| 5.3.5 | Standing in my Enough-ness..... | 142 |
| 5.3.6 | Dating in your Thirties is Kind of Fun? | 144 |
| 5.3.7 | Momma Wants a Husband..... | 145 |
| 5.3.8 | It’s like Getting Nervous Before an Exam..... | 147 |
| 5.3.9 | Have Game, but Don’t Play Games | 148 |
| 5.3.10 | Sitting all Stoically | 150 |
| 5.3.11 | Going Splitsies..... | 152 |
| 5.3.12 | This is Not an Advice Forum..... | 153 |
| 5.3.13 | Analyzing Every Stupid Move..... | 156 |
| 5.3.14 | The Lemon Law..... | 157 |
| 5.3.15 | It Involves Chemistry and Anatomy..... | 159 |
| 6.0 | Discussion..... | 162 |
| 6.1 | Gendered Ideologies..... | 162 |
| 6.1.1 | Ideology of Couplehood..... | 163 |
| 6.1.1.1 | Resisting the Ideology of Couplehood..... | 168 |
| 6.1.2 | Ideologies of Pronatalism and Familism..... | 171 |
| 6.1.3 | Implications – Gendered Ideologies..... | 174 |
| 6.2 | Gendered Technologies..... | 175 |
| 6.2.1 | Using Leisure Technologies to Overcome Challenges of Dating in Adulthood..... | 175 |
| 6.2.2 | Online Dating to Establish Romantic Connections..... | 177 |
| 6.2.3 | Disliking Inorganic Ways of Connecting..... | 179 |
| 6.2.4 | Using Technology to Negotiate Power Dynamics..... | 181 |
| 6.2.5 | Implications - Gendered Technologies..... | 183 |
| 6.3 | Gendered Performances..... | 184 |
| 6.3.1 | Goffman’s Presentation of Self..... | 185 |
| 6.3.2 | Performing in the Frontstage..... | 186 |
| 6.3.3 | Performing in Different Front Regions..... | 190 |
| 6.3.4 | Performing in the Backstage..... | 192 |
| 6.3.5 | Implications – Gendered Performances..... | 193 |

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 6.4 Gendered Emotion Work..... | 195 |
| 6.4.1 Experiencing a Wide Range of Emotions..... | 195 |
| 6.4.2 What is Emotion Work? | 197 |
| 6.4.3 Women doing Emotion Work when Dating..... | 198 |
| 6.4.4 Implications – Gendered Emotion Work..... | 202 |
| 6.5 Gendered Friendships..... | 203 |
| 6.5.1 Friendships as Sources of Support..... | 203 |
| 6.5.2 Finding Support in the “Singlehood” | 206 |
| 6.5.3 Feeling Excluded from the “Couplehood” | 209 |
| 6.5.4 Implications – Gendered Friendships..... | 212 |
| 6.6 Gendered Talk..... | 213 |
| 6.6.1 Women’s Talking Strategies..... | 214 |
| 6.6.2 Women Sharing Dating Stories..... | 216 |
| 6.6.3 Women Using Humor to tell their Dating Stories..... | 220 |
| 6.6.4 Implications – Gendered Talk..... | 225 |
| 7.0 Conclusion..... | 227 |
| References..... | 237 |
| Appendices..... | 257 |
| Appendix A – Participant Information / Recruitment Letter..... | 257 |
| Appendix B – Participant Informed Consent..... | 259 |
| Appendix C – Participant Interview Guide..... | 261 |

1.0 Introduction

Books, highlighters, articles, and Tupperware containers are strewn across the top of my metal framed desk. I am working in my cramped, communal office space on campus. Glancing at my cell phone, I realize the time has gotten away from me. It is already late in the afternoon. I begin packing up my belongings to head home. I work hurriedly to stuff them in my bag, recognizing I am cutting it close. I have a date tonight. He is picking me up at 7pm.

Closing my office door, I set off down the narrow hallway towards the stairwell. I am almost to the end when my friend pokes her head out of her office and says jokingly, “Freeze...not so fast!” She motions for me to come back to her office. I inch reluctantly back down the hall and hover in the doorway.

“So, you’re going on a date this eve. How fun! I just love first dates. Are you excited?” she says with a mischievous grin on her face, sitting cross legged, pivoting back and forth noticeably on her swivel chair.

“Ahhh, I guess,” I mumble doubtfully. Thinking to myself, fun? This is not my idea of fun. In fact, it is the exact opposite. It might even be bordering on torturous.

Before I can elaborate, she asks, “Have you decided on what you are going to wear? You should probably wear heels. What time is he picking you up for dinner? Do you think he will pay for dinner? You should think about maybe covering the tip anyway. What if you go for drinks afterwards? Does he have anything else planned?”

“I haven’t given the details much thought,” I lie, trying to seem nonchalant, even though anxiety begins to swell in my chest, pushing against my ribcage. I breathe deeply, trying to keep it subdued. Glancing at my phone, I catch a glimpse of the time, 5:30 PM.

“I’ve got to head home,” I tell her quickly, as I turn towards the exit. But before leaving her sight, add, “Oh, and I will definitely not be wearing heels tonight!”

“What? Well, have fun!” She says, “And don’t forget to....”

Her voice trails off, and I make a break towards the red, glowing exit sign at the end of the hall.

Arriving back at my apartment, the door slides closed and I sigh as I drop the heavy bags from my fatigued forearm. I become aware of the gnawing angst that sits patiently in the pit of my chest. I don’t want to go. I mean yes, I do want to go. But no, no, I don’t want to go.

My mind begins to contemplate how to back out. There is still time. What excuse would be best? There has been a family emergency? I am coming down with something? My mind continues to swirl with wild possibilities as I plot my escape plan, when one of the bags I set down in the hall falls onto its side. Thump! I’m pulled back to reality. I tell myself, no! It’s too late. You have to go. At this point blowing him off would be rude.

Walking over to the fridge and opening the door, I grab the half full bottle of pinot grigio and fill a wine glass nearly to the brim. Liquid courage should help ease my nerves. I promptly take a big gulp, and then a second, practically finishing the glass, before setting it down on the counter beside the fridge. A warm ease washes over my body, flowing downwards to the tips of my fingers and toes, then back up, bringing with it a comforting light headedness. My mind calms and I proceed to self-talk again. Get your shit together! You can do this! Heading down the hallway towards the bathroom, I leave a trail of clothes on my way. Jumping into the shower, I turn the shower radio on.

“Get your umbrellas out. This weekend is going to be a wet one!” I groan, as the warm water from the shower hits my face and runs down my neck.

Tapping the scan button again, I land on a station where the radio jockey is dishing on current celebrity gossip.

“Wedding bells might finally be ringing this weekend for the thirty-nine year old starlet. Several celebrity news sources are also reporting she was seen leaving a baby boutique in West Hollywood yesterday. Looks like the wedding and baby she has always wanted might finally become a reality.”

I push the scan button again.

“And I would do anything for love,” Meatloaf belts out.

Next.

A Katy Perry song is on. I turn it up, and begin singing, without abandon, loudly and likely out of tune, “Baby you’re a firework...”

Still humming the same song, I clear the fog from the steam covered bathroom mirror. I lean close, to examine my makeup-free face. A slight laugh line has begun to surface; the barely visible indent tracing a line from the right hand corner of my nose down to the outer edge of my mouth. Grey bags cast a shadow below my eyes, making me look tired and somehow older than I remember. For a moment, I picture the smooth, unmarked, youthful face of my early twenties being reflected in the mirror. I can feel the envy beginning to stir in the pit of my stomach, as I long to return to those days.

I label the lines and bags imperfections and I swiftly begin covering them with porcelain concealer. I then spend time carefully gliding chocolate brown liner along the top of each crest that runs the length of my small almond shaped eyes, before circling bubble gum color blush gently on the apples of my cheeks. I am sweeping black mascara up and outwards through my sparse, thin lashes, when the mascara wand slips, and I accidentally blink hard.

“Shit!” I curse, as I realize black mascara now covers the top and bottom of my eyelid. I carefully remove the excess mascara, before beginning to straighten my sandy brown hair down my back. This continuous primping does not stop until I am satisfied with the painted version of me that stares back.

While I am walking back to my bedroom, the phone rings. I glance at the caller I.D. It’s him. Why is he calling me? We’ve only communicated through text message. Does this mean I have to actually pick up the phone and talk to him in real time? A glaze of sweat coats my palm, as I draw the phone to my ear and push the button that illustrates a tiny green phone symbol.

“Hello!” I answer too loudly, in a high pitch, screechy voice. Where the hell did that voice come from? I question.

“Oh hi, how are you?” He answers, in a seemingly calm, but quick voice that hints he might also be a little nervous.

We make uncomfortable small talk.

He then asks, “Will you be ready in 10 minutes for me to pick you up?”

I respond, “That works for me. But don’t keep me waiting!” My inner voice immediately judges my choice of wording. You idiot, why did you say that? Why?

This is followed by an awkward pause.

He then replies, “I won’t. See you soon.”

In sharing this personal narrative, I reveal the tensions and paradoxes I experienced dating as a single, adult woman, tensions and paradoxes that as a feminist I continue to question and reflect on. Why was I dating when I found it stressful and overwhelming? What influenced my choices *to* date? What influenced my choices *when* dating? Why did I not want to appear too forward when dating? Why did my decisions adhere to, but also contradict traditional gendered

expectations and roles of dating, sometimes simultaneously? Why did my adherence to different gendered expectations and roles of dating, at times, feel more comfortable?

With these questions in mind, I used my own experiences negotiating singlehood and dating as an adult woman as a starting point for this research. As Baumgardner and Richards (2010) noted, we need to consider the power of everyday feminism that is “right in front of our very noses. We must see its reality if we are to corral that energy into attacking the inequalities that still exist” (p. 49). Although I recognize experiences of singlehood and dating are also gendered for adult men (albeit in different ways), because this research study extends from my own experiences as a single, adult woman, I have chosen to consider how other adult women experience singlehood and dating, more specifically.

Utilizing a third wave feminist theoretical orientation, the purpose of this study is to explore experiences of singlehood and dating for adult women. I argue dating is a useful conduit for understanding the complex ways stigmatization and pressures work with gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles to impact experiences of single life and leisure for women. The research questions explored through this dissertation include:

- How do single, adult women experience singlehood?
- How do single, adult women experience dating?
- How do gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles influence adult women’s experiences with singlehood and dating?
- How do adult women reproduce and resist gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles through dating?
- How do leisure practices and spaces influence adult women’s experiences with singlehood and dating?

To address these research questions, I structured my dissertation as follows: in Chapter 2, I review relevant literature on singlehood, dating, and leisure. In particular, I outline the ways couplehood has become cemented as the normative relationship status in North America, contributing to the stigmatization and marginalization of single people. Then, focusing my attention on dating culture in North America, I review the ways dating has evolved over time, before providing a snapshot of current dating culture, including the gendered power disparities that shape dating practices today. Next, I outline relevant research from the feminist leisure literature that sheds light on the structuring of women's leisure, paying particular attention to the concept of leisure as resistance to illustrate the value of applying a leisure lens to this feminist research study. Subsequently, in Chapter 3, I detail my choice to use a third wave feminist theoretical orientation and outline my use of narrative as my research methodology. In Chapter 4, I describe my research methods including my process for recruiting participants, the profile of the participants, my process for data collection, and my reflexive practice. In the latter half of the fourth chapter I detail my process for analyzing, interpreting, and representing the research data, including my choice to use composite characters in combination with dialogue-based vignettes. In Chapter 5, I share my findings through three larger thematic areas (Gendered Pressures to Connect, Gendered Modes of Connecting, and Gendered Connections). In Chapter 6, I critically examine my findings, offering six main points of discussion: gendered ideologies, gendered technologies, gendered performances, gendered emotion work, gendered friendships, and gendered talk. Finally, in Chapter 7, I summarize the theoretical and methodological implications of this research study. In the final chapter, I also suggest several areas for future research, note the limitations of the study, and highlight several social justice outcomes.

2.0 Literature Review

In this chapter, I set the context for my research study exploring the complex ties between singlehood, dating, and leisure for adult women. I begin by discussing social perceptions of singlehood for adults. I then unpack the complex relationship between singlehood and dating, by providing a definition of dating along with a brief historical overview of the ways dating practices and spaces in North America have evolved over time. Following this discussion, I consider different trends influencing present day dating culture and the associated gendered complexities of dating in adulthood. I then shift my attention towards considering how the leisure literature can be harnessed to build deeper understandings of dating and singlehood for adult women.

2.1 Singlehood, Couplehood, and Dating

In recent years, there has been a strengthened focus in the leisure literature towards exploring issues of prejudice, oppression, and marginalization (cf. Mowatt & Schmalz, 2014; Stewart, 2014). In particular, many leisure researchers exploring issues of oppression stress the importance of considering the diverse ways leisure is lived as a way to enact social justice as an outcome of their research (Parry, Johnson, & Stewart, 2013; Parry, 2014). Social justice research, as described by Parry et al. (2013) works to identify “the specific end state of social change that accounts for power differentials” (p. 82). The growing body of leisure literature focused on doing social justice work has illuminated issues related to sexism (cf. Johnson & Samdahl, 2005; Parry, 2005), homophobia (cf. Freysinger, Shaw, Henderson, & Bialeschki, 2013a; Johnson, 2013), classism (cf. Samdahl, 2011), racism (cf. Arai & Kivel, 2009; Glover, 2007; Johnson, Kivel, & Scraton, 2009), and ageism (c.f. Dupuis, Whyte, Carson, Genoe, Meschino, & Sadler, 2012) in leisure experiences and spaces (to name a few). However, this important body of work has yet to consider the ways leisure practices and spaces are experienced

for people who identify as romantically single. That is, people who are not involved in a romantic relationship and although perhaps not actively looking for a romantic relationship at the moment, desire to be in a romantic relationship at some point in their lives. Accordingly, in this section of the literature review I look at the ways singlehood is positioned in relation to couplehood to illuminate how single people can be marginalized and stigmatized for their single status. I also review several ideological influences that are likely to impact experiences of singlehood for women, including couplehood, familism, and pronatalism.

2.1.1 Are More Single People Living Alone?

The number of people who are living alone in Canada is on the rise (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2005). Canadian census figures released in 2011 show 27.6% of Canadian homes are single person dwellings (Statistics Canada, 2011a). That number is up significantly from 13.4% in 1971. The trend of living alone does not appear to be exclusive to the Canadian population. The United States revealed similar numbers with 26.7% of Americans living in single person households in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). On a global scale, the number of people living alone rose to 202 million in 2006, which represents a 33% increase from 1996 (Euromonitor International, 2008). The statistics are clear: more people are living alone and this is a global phenomenon.

An article in the Globe and Mail by Bielski (2013, January 12) called, “Living Alone: A Testament to Freedom or an Erosion of Society?” highlighted the complexities of the new trend of living alone. The article reviewed living alone as an attractive lifestyle choice for young professionals living in downtown metropolitan areas that offers independence and freedom. The article then juxtaposed the freedom and independence argument with the traditional view of living alone as a necessity during transition periods between relationships. With more Canadians

choosing to live alone, the Globe and Mail article used the main arguments for living alone (freedom and independence versus necessity or transition) to question the implications of the trend for romantic relationships, families, and communities. In part, the discussion focused on the possible negative implications for society of this trend, such as a decreased sense of community and value placed on the family as an institution. A key question identified in the article is whether people living alone identify as romantically single?

It appears the answer to this question is predominantly yes. A research study by Brym and Lenton (2001) found single people are representing a growing proportion of the Canadian population. Statistics Canada (2011b) lent further support to this finding, noting that the number of people living outside of census families (that is people who are not married, and/or not in a common law partnership and/or not a single parent) is increasing. More specifically, from 1961 to 2011 the number of people living outside of census families increased from 8.6% to 17.1%. Throughout this timeframe, most of the people living outside of a census family were living alone. As such, the increasing number of people living alone correlates with the growing number of people who are identifying as romantically single in Canada.

Despite this correlation, much of the previous research on singlehood has focused on experiences of singlehood in adolescence (Strong et al., 2005), referring to when individuals are in their teenage years or early twenties (Arnett, 2010). There remains scant research exploring experiences of singlehood in adulthood, despite the increased number of single adults. As such, there is a need to expand the literature to encompass broader representations and understandings of single life, including experiences of singlehood in adulthood.

2.1.2 Ideology of Couplehood: Stigmatizing Single People, Glorifying People in Couples

Although there are a growing number of people who identify as romantically single in North America, single people face stigmatization for not being in a couple (DePaulo, 2006; Klinenberg, 2012). *Singlism* is a term coined by DePaulo (2006) representing the “stigmatizing of people who are single – whether divorced, widowed, or ever single” (p. 2). DePaulo contended singlism represents a twenty-first century problem that has not been previously labeled or considered. Singlehood is often referred to as a troubled identity category (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) or deviant status (Strong et al., 2005), and the emotions most often attributed to single people are loneliness and sadness (Cobb, 2011). In addition, people who are single are often perceived as immature, unfulfilled, unable to commit, (Budgeon, 2008), selfish, shallow, too picky (Bielski, 2013, January 12), narcissistic (Klinenberg, 2012), and envious of those who are coupled (DePaulo, 2006). Such stigmatization, argued DePaulo, manifests in the everyday lives of single people that also includes their leisure. She explained further, “That’s one of the secrets to the persistence of singlism. It often manifests itself in the minutiae of everyday life” (p. 9), which is why it often goes unnoticed.

The stigma associated with singlehood stems from the social privileging of couple status (Cobb, 2011) rooted in the ideology of couplehood. More specifically, this ideology emphasizes the social value placed on being in a couple and ties a person’s social and cultural worth to her or his relationship status. It centers couplehood as the normative relationship status /category, wherein every person should want to be, and strive to be, in a couple. The ideology of couplehood also reflects the belief that being part of a couple represents happiness and fulfillment, thereby establishing it as the most important type of personal relationship (DePaulo

& Morris, 2005). In short, the ideology of couplehood works to reaffirm couplehood as the ideal relationship status within North America.

2.1.3 Which Single People are Most Susceptible to Stigmatization?

While all single people face stigmatization in a couple-dominated society, some groups are more susceptible to judgment than others. For instance, there are gender differences that influence perceptions of singlehood. That is, women who are single and post-college/university are more stigmatized than single men of the same age (DePaulo, 2006). This gender difference is exposed in derogatory names for single women, including husband hunter and spinster, and these names imply single women are desperate to find love, but ultimately unsuccessful (Douglas, 2010; Pozner, 2010). The expectation that all women are seeking to find a romantic relationship stems from the *relational imperative* that views “normal” women as wanting and needing love, romance, and relationships (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009). In contrast, single men who are post-college/university are often described as bachelors (Pozner, 2010), which has a positive connotation and in some cases may even elevate a man’s social status. In turn, adult men’s experiences of singlehood, although gendered, differ from women’s experiences with singlehood because they often face less judgment or stigmatization for being single in adulthood.

In addition to gender, age also influences experiences of being single. For example, single adults who have newly transitioned out of college/university undergraduate years face increasingly mounting pressures about the necessity of being part of a couple (Cobb, 2011; DePaulo, 2006; Klinenberg, 2011), as they are more likely to live independently (Bielski, 2013, January 12), are often working towards establishing a career, and have less time for leisure and socializing (Bogle, 2008; Kravertz, 2005). The changes and adjustments single adults experience demarcate adult experiences of singlehood from experiences of singlehood in the teenage and

college/university years. Moreover, research has shown single adults who actively put effort towards achieving the ideal “couple” status are less scrutinized than people who are single who do not (DePaulo, 2006). In other words, single people who are actively trying to get out of singlehood and into couplehood are less stigmatized. Yet, the scrutiny single adults face, particularly single, adult women, cannot be entirely explained by the ideology of couplehood. Rather, establishing oneself in a couple is considered merely a first step towards marriage and children, gendered expectations reinforced by the ideologies of familism and pronatalism.

2.1.4. Compounding Ideological Influences on Single People: Familism and Pronatalism

Familism or pro-family ideology works to emphasize the value and importance of family life within society (Gordon, 1994). Familism reinforces key ideals of how families should be constructed and how families should operate in terms of specific gendered roles and expectations. As Shaw (1992) identified, these ideals are based on traditional notions of the nuclear family that include a heterosexual, married couple with children. Any divergence from this traditional structure is perceived as a threat (Shaw, 1992) that works to subordinate and degrade other lifestyle choices, engagements, arrangements, as well as other family structures not centered on the family (e.g., singlehood) (Gordon, 1994). Familism masks the negative elements of the family, such as the unequal allocation of family responsibilities and work (Shaw, 1992). Moreover, as DePaulo and Morris (2005) explained, given that familism works to build the perception of the family as a prime source of happiness and meaningfulness, people invest time, attention, and energy into the family and family relationships. In turn, it is likely familism is influential in shaping women’s experiences with singlehood and their interest in shifting out of single life towards couplehood.

Working in close connection with familism is pronatalist ideology that reflects the belief that men's and women's social roles are inextricably linked to biological parenthood. Put another way, pronatalism works to reaffirm the importance of partnering for reproductive purposes (Valenti, 2007). Although, pronatalist ideology impacts men and women, Parry (2005) noted it impacts more strongly upon women. More specifically, pronatalism promotes the idea that a woman's social worth and social status as a "real woman" is tied directly to her ability to biologically bear children (Parry, 2005; Valenti, 2007). In part, the influence of pronatalist ideology on women is linked to biological timelines. Bogle (2008) explained, that in relationships "the idea that a woman's 'clock is ticking' while a man has 'all the time in the world' fundamentally affects who holds the power" (p. 175). For adults, the window of opportunity to have biological children becomes a more immediate reality as they get older. Thus, pronatalism likely impacts the choices single adults make about dating, relationship initiation, and development, as it reinforces the importance of partnering quickly before it is too late to biologically reproduce. Given that women have a smaller window of time to be able to conceive and bear biological children, it is likely pronatalist ideology plays a stronger role in shaping single, adult women's choices about relationships and parenthood (Baumgardner & Richards, 2010).

When considering the collective influence of these gendered ideologies on single people's lives, it is not surprising many people are eager to move out of singlehood (aware of the benefits of couplehood) and seek to establish themselves as part of a couple by engaging in different dating practices. Indeed, dating is an important conduit for understanding the ways marginalization, stigmatization, pressures, and broader ideological influences work to impact

experiences of singlehood and leisure. I turn next to elaborating on how dating practices and spaces have evolved over time.

2.2 Dating Culture: An Evolution

Most broadly speaking, dating has been considered a public practice (Eaton & Rose, 2011) that is based upon the intention of two people getting to know each other that might possibly lead to a romantic and/or sexual partnership with one another (Bailey, 1988; Eshleman & Wilson, 1995; Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007). Dating is often considered a mechanism for socialization, as well as a marker of status and accomplishment, wherein individuals learn about intimacy, close relationships, and expectations for coupling (Payne & Barnett, 2006). Conceptualizations of dating are also closely tied to leisure. More specifically, dating has always maintained a close association with leisure and recreation insofar as it has been described as a leisure experience (Eshleman & Wilson, 1995), a means of engaging in leisure and recreational contexts, and a source of entertainment (Turner, 2003). Moreover, dating is often assumed to be a fun and enjoyable activity that people engage in freely to meet others (Eshleman & Wilson, 1995) and it also can involve the consumption of personal resources, such as time, as well as financial resources (Samp & Cohen, 2010). Interestingly, this conceptualization of dating aligns closely with a definition of leisure by Stebbins (2008), who described leisure as an “uncoerced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both), use their abilities and resources to succeed at” (p. 4). Although conceptions of dating are often closely tied to leisure, I am aware of no research to date in the leisure and recreation field that has explored the ways in which dating is connected to leisure practices and spaces. To bring greater understanding to the complex ties between singlehood, dating, and leisure for single, adult women, it is first necessary to consider

how dating practices and contexts have developed and changed over time (Mongeau et al., 2007; Turner, 2003). To do so, I provide a brief history of how dating culture in North America has evolved over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

2.2.1 *The Calling System*

Prior to the twentieth century, a formal dating system had yet to be established in North America. Although love and romance still influenced partnerships during this time, individuals primarily partnered for economic, social, and political reasons (Coontz, 2005). Partnerships were driven by the need for establishing stability, acquiring property and resources, as well as securing connections in society to make social gains (Coontz, 2004). At this time, partnerships were also controlled and established by families, rather than by individuals who would be paired together to form the partnership.

At the turn of the century, industrialization influenced many aspects of North American culture, including dating. That is, industrialization established new gender roles within families where urban women were no longer needed to be involved in family farm operations. Instead, women's role within families became rooted strongly within the home or the private sphere (Turner, 2003). In contrast, men took on the role of the family breadwinner through their paid work outside of the home in the public sphere. This strong segregation of gender roles made interactions and meetings between men and women scarce. Subsequently, the calling system that took place in the home emerged as a way for single people to connect amongst the middle and upper class (Coltrane & Adams, 2008).

The calling system involved a formal process where a woman's mother would extend an invitation to a potential suitor to come over to the family house when the mother believed her daughter was of an appropriate age to marry (Bredow, Cate, & Huston, 2008). The calling

system established familial control over the dating process, particularly matriarchal control. For instance, men and women were able to meet, spend time together, and assess potential marriage partners, but all interactions were initiated by and under the supervision of the woman's parents, namely the woman's mother (Bailey, 1988). Not only were mothers responsible for the invitation and the location of the date, they were also responsible for the entertainment decisions (e.g., topics of conversation, chaperonage, refreshments) during dates (Bailey, 1988).

2.2.2 The Dating System

In the early decades of the 1900s, additional changes were shaping North American society dating practices and spaces, including urbanization, the establishment of the U.S. as an international power house, the development of consumer culture, and the automobile (Bredow et al., 2008; Turner, 2003). These changes enabled courtship between men and women to move outside the family home and into the public sphere. Dating became unsupervised, ultimately decreasing the amount of control families had over courtship and partnering processes (Bailey, 1988; Bredow et al., 2008; Turner, 2003). In this way, men and women had more autonomy over dating practices and who they chose to date (Bredow et al., 2008). Yet, with the shift to dating in the public sphere came a simultaneous transfer of power over dating practices. The power and control women (i.e., mothers) had experienced in the calling system was undercut with the shift of dating practices into the public sphere. Bailey (1988) referred to this as the man's "world of the economy" (p. 21) that resulted in men taking control of dating decisions because of their financial power gained from their position in the public sphere.

The dating system, most popular from 1920-1960, was more recreational than the previous calling system (Eaton & Rose, 2011), but it was still guided by traditional gender roles that influenced the sequence of dates and dictated appropriate sexual behaviors on dates (Bailey,

1988). During this time, print media outlets (i.e., advice columns in newspapers and manuals) began reinforcing proper dating etiquette and rules (Bredow et al., 2008; Coltrane & Adams, 2008) that helped to establish a cultural script to guide first dates (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). More specifically, these rules outlined “men, rather than women, were to initiate dates” (Bredow et al., 2008, p. 5) and men were also responsible for planning, paying, and determining transportation for the date. In contrast, women were encouraged to play a passive and reactive role, allowing men to take the lead when making dating decisions. These roles reinforced the gendered expectations of dating, including cultural scripts and roles for both men and women to follow when dating.

During this time, dates also frequently involved recreational activities, such as going out for dinner or to a neighborhood social (Turner, 2003). The introduction of recreational activities into the dating system established new financial considerations for dating. Ultimately, these new expenses tied to dating helped to further reaffirm men’s control over the dating process (Bredow et al., 2008), given that the dating script dictated men were responsible for paying for the date. Moreover, money became a measure of a man’s ability to be a successful breadwinner, influencing his suitability as a marriage partner (Bailey, 1988). This approach worked to strengthen the link between socio-economic status and marriageability.

Similar to the partnering practices of the earlier calling system, the dating system was strongly tied to marriage as the outcome. During this time, marriage was used as a marker to indicate an individual’s transition into adulthood (Coontz, 2005). Yet, unlike the partnering practices of the late nineteenth century, the dating system propelled North American society to embrace the idea of marrying for love, attraction, affection, and romance (Bredow et al., 2008; Turner, 2003), a relatively new concept at the time.

During the era of the dating system, there was a unique period of time that took place in the 1940s and 1950s that was even more noticeably conservative. Historically, the 1940s represented the start of the baby boom generation in North America. During this time, romantically single people would often pair up in a couple referred to as “going steady,” rather than go on dates with multiple people. Going steady with someone suggested a stronger commitment to a relationship, often marked by a symbolic exchange where the man would give the woman a pin or ring. Going steady often included going to dances (referred to as sock hops) and drive-in movie theaters, both of which were considered primary dating venues at the time (Turner, 2003).

2.2.3 The Sexual Revolution and the Women’s Movement

The 1960s and 1970s marked a significant shift away from the conservative dating scene demonstrated in the 1940s and 1950s. Influenced by the sexual revolution, a counterculture surfaced in North American society during this time that defied the conservatism evident in the previous dating system. This time period reflected more relaxed attitudes around sexual activity for men and women, including broader access to birth control (Turner, 2003).

In addition to the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, the women’s movement of the 1970s and 1980s also worked to redefine roles available for men and women within many facets of life, including family, relationships, and work (Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007). This re-examination of gender roles extended to women’s sexuality and garnered support for women’s rights for greater freedom and choice regarding their sexuality (hooks, 1984; Snyder-Hall, 2010). In response to the momentum gained from the sexual revolution and the women’s movement, the dating structure loosened (Turner, 2003) and formal dating practices decreased in popularity

(Reidmann, Lamania, & Nelson, 2003). This shift opened up space for new norms and motives for relationships to be established (Bredow et al., 2008).

First, sex was no longer inextricably linked to marriage, encouraging less strict social attitudes towards premarital sex (Coontz, 2004). Subsequently, dating became less stringently tied to finding a marital partner (Bailey, 1988). Second, the notion that marriage was the sole distinguishing marker between youth and adulthood began to disintegrate. The average age of marriage began to rise for both men and women (Bredow et al., 2008). Not only were people choosing to get married later, but the number of Canadians choosing to get married began to steadily decline, a trend that has continued into the twenty-first century (Statistics Canada, 2006). With fewer men and women choosing to get married, other forms of relationships and partnerships, such as casual dating and cohabitation, began to emerge as popular options (Bredow et al., 2008).

During the 1980s, 1990s and moving into the twenty-first century, motives for dating continued to shift and evolve, particularly for young adults in their twenties and thirties. Single people continued to challenge the need for marriage, given that previously deemed motivations for marriage, such as personal satisfaction, intimacy, companionship, sexual gratification, and attraction, could be achieved in relationships outside of marriage. Consequently, the number of adults choosing to get married continued to decrease (Coontz, 2005). Moreover, dating culture continued to change and evolve as new options for meeting and connecting with other single people were becoming increasingly available, such as online dating. Collectively, these changes and developments to dating practices and contexts helped to inform processes and features associated with present day dating culture in North America, a topic I turn to next.

2.3 Present Day Dating Culture

The present day dating culture in North America has been influenced by many historical and contextual changes. As dating has evolved over time, it has carried forward many traditional elements and expectations, while also integrating contemporary influences and trends. In this section of the literature review, I highlight a number of the prominent features that make up present day dating culture. In particular, I describe the emergence of group dates and hookup culture prominent on college/university campuses. I then discuss the implications and challenges of dating once individuals have transitioned out of the college/university environment into adulthood. Following this discussion, I consider how rapidly evolving modes of dating (namely online dating) have impacted the ways single adults engage in dating practices and spaces. Throughout this section of the literature review, I also pay special attention to identifying the gendered power disparities that continue to influence present day dating culture.

2.3.1 *Group Dates and Hookups*

One of the most popular ways to date in the twenty-first century for adolescents is in groups (Bredow et al., 2008). Eshleman and Wilson (1995) indicated, “dating is more tied to group interaction; young people may congregate in groups, evolve into pairs while retaining allegiance to the group, share food or entertainment expenses, and engage in less structured activities than formal dates of the 1960s” (p. 232). These larger group interactions frequently take place at either parties or bars and in these settings it is common for two people to pair off to hookup at the end of the night. Thus, group dates are inextricably linked to hookups.

But what is a hookup? A hookup is a short term, sexual interaction that can include anything from kissing to sexual intercourse happening outside of a committed relationship (Bogle, 2008; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). More specifically, given that hookups often

stem from group interactions at parties or bars; alcohol or alcohol centered events tend to play a more predominant role in hookups (Bogle, 2008). There are usually no expenses to be shared in a hookup, because both parties take responsibility for their own expenses throughout the night. A hookup is also focused on sexual interaction that renders getting to know someone or forming a relationship secondary or obsolete to the sexual activity (Bogle, 2008). In comparison to hookups, traditional dating practices between two people (as discussed previously) are often more formal and focused on getting to know another person closely, usually by participating in a recreational activity, such as going out for dinner or to the movies. Dates often include expenses and the pair has to negotiate who pays for what aspects of the date. Moreover, the intention of traditional dating is usually more focused on establishing a relationship that can then lead to the potential for regular sexual interaction between the two people in the relationship (Bogle, 2008).

2.3.1.1 The Sexual Double Standard

Men or women can initiate hookups and this allowance in initiation helps redistribute power for men and women (Bogle, 2008). This phenomenon is important to consider, given that power and control over dating practices and spaces has shifted over time between men and women, as noted before (e.g., with women having more power in the calling system and men having more power in the dating system). Despite this allowance in who can initiate a hookup, hookups remain strongly connected to gendered power relations (Bogle, 2008). In part, the gendered nature of hooking up is linked to the sexual double standard. More specifically, when men hookup they do so virtually worry free. In comparison, when women hookup they risk facing judgment regarding their choice to hookup. For example, women are often judged for having “too many partners” (Bogle, 2008, p. 106) and then can be labeled a “slut” (Bogle, 2008). The sexual double standard reflects the gendered nature of hookup culture and can constrain

women's sexual choices, with some women choosing not to take part in hookups to avoid gendered judgments and to protect their reputation (Bogle, 2008). Conversely, men are able to hookup without risking the same repercussions to their reputation (Bogle, 2008).

The sexual double standard that permeates hookup culture is illustrated in a study by Bradshaw, Kahn, and Saville (2010) that examined the difference between hooking up and dating on college campuses for men and women. The study found men favored hooking up, whereas women favored dating with the possibility of initiating a more committed relationship. Their study indicated that hooking up was perceived as more beneficial to men, because it was based on independence and sexual gratification, whereas, dating was perceived to be more beneficial for women, because it involved more commitment between two people prior to initiating physical and sexual intimacy.

In comparison, in a study looking at the implications of the sexual double standard on hooking up versus dating, Reid, Elliott, and Webber (2011) highlighted how hooking up allowed women more sexual freedom. Yet, when women perceived a shift from hooking up to dating, adhering to traditional gender norms and expectations became more important to them. A similar study by Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) found heterosexual women from middle class backgrounds often took time during college to embrace independence, personal development, and to explore their sexuality, rather than focusing on solidifying a romantic relationship. However, they also found women continued to be held to a distinct sexual double standard that influenced their sexual choices.

These research studies, when taken together, make it clear the sexual double standard influences women's hookup decisions and their dating decisions (albeit in different ways), as they move into adulthood. Although there has been a significant body of literature that has

explored group dating and hookup culture (as noted earlier), Bredow et al. (2008) shared that much of the dating literature, “is built on studies of young college students” (p. 23). Less is known about the dating scene for adults and the gendered implications of the sexual double standard on dating practices in adulthood. As such, exploring single, adult women’s dating experiences and choices, including their sexual experiences and choices, is an important gap in the literature that needs to be addressed.

2.3.2 A Return to Formal Dating in Adulthood

Dating today occurs across different ages and life stages. Whereas dating historically took place amongst adolescents, today’s dating scene includes adolescents up to and including older adults. This change in dating reflects a shift in the tasks associated with specific ages along the life course. For example, young adults now place a greater emphasis on education and establishing careers, particularly those from white, middle class families (Armstrong, Hamilton, & England, 2010). In addition, more women are pursuing higher education and establishing professional careers. Hence, women are experiencing less pressure to marry immediately after finishing their education, whether high school, college, or university (Coltrane & Adams, 2008). Taken together, these changes reflect delayed entry into adulthood that indicates women and men are spending more time exposed to group dates and hookup culture, that is (as noted before), less focused on monogamy and establishing a committed romantic relationship.

Not surprisingly, this delay then influences how men and women experience dating once they have transitioned into adulthood. In the past, the transition into adulthood was clearly marked by marriage. Today’s transition is more ambiguous and includes tasks, such as completing education, establishing a career, and living alone (Klinenberg, 2012). Once the transition to adulthood is complete and people self-identify as adults, the literature has suggested

there is a subsequent return to more formal dating practices. In other words, the group dates and hookups popular during adolescence are no longer considered normative dating practices in adulthood (Bogle, 2008; Zimmer-Genbeck, 2002). Bogle (2008) described, “After college, the men and women I interviewed became increasingly focused on finding a boyfriend/girlfriend, and in order to do so, most virtually abandoned hooking up in favor of traditional dating” (p. 164). Thus, the motivations to date change between adolescence and young adulthood, wherein, dates begin to serve as filtering processes, helping adults to narrow the field of potential long-term partners. Indeed, many adults are keenly aware of the benefits of couplehood and are eager to move into that social category, yet, this move is not without its challenges.

2.3.2.1 Challenges of Dating in Adulthood

While dating is a useful way for single adults to move into couplehood, there are a number of challenges adults must negotiate when dating. To start, given the return to more formal dating practices in adulthood, there is a subsequent focus on economic resources (Bogle, 2008). The economic considerations that influenced the traditional dating system are introduced to the present day dating scene in adulthood. The focus on resources when dating in adulthood has resulted in the present day dating culture in North America being labeled a romantic marketplace (Coltrane & Adams, 2008), wherein relationships are initiated and established (Strong et al., 2005) and goods and resources are consumed (Samp & Cohen, 2010). The focus on economic resources impacts how dates are initiated and unfold in adulthood. For example, many young adults are still establishing themselves financially in their careers and in turn do not have a large amount of discretionary income to spend on dating (Bogle, 2008).

Another challenge of dating in adulthood is the amount of time adults have to devote to dating. Free time for social outings and leisure pursuits is often more limited than it was in

university/college. Therefore, finding time to devote to dating is more difficult. This time constraint can be problematic for single adults and can limit the frequency to which adults date (Kravertz, 2005). This time constraint was articulated by Samp and Cohen (2010) who explained how dating also “comes with what economists call ‘opportunity costs’” (p. 41). By deciding to go on a date, single adults are making the choice to spend time with one person as opposed to spending time with friends and/or spending time engaging in leisure pursuits or work commitments. When dating in adulthood, people have to weigh dating decisions against what they are willing to sacrifice in other aspects of their life, such as leisure and work.

Outside of economic and time constraints, dating in adulthood can be challenging because of propinquity. More specifically, propinquity plays a large role in the opportunities available for relationship initiation. Research has shown individuals tend to choose partners or initiate relationships with people who are closest to them geographically (Strong et al., 2005). Once college/university students make the transition away from campus, their immediate environment for meeting other single people becomes limited, as they are no longer on a college/university campus where there is a high concentration of potential partners in close proximity (Bogle, 2008). This lack of contact limits whom one comes in contact with and can pose a challenge for adults who are dating (Bogle, 2008).

Moreover, one of the biggest challenges with respect to dating in adulthood is the influence of dating scripts and experiences learned in the adolescent years. That is, most young adults today are familiar with dating practices based upon group dates and hookups and tend to carry forward what they have learned about the hookup script into their dating experiences in adulthood. Yet, this learned script can be problematic, given that (as discussed before), the hookup script and the dating script are quite different, as are the goals and intentions of both

(Bogle, 2008). Hence, transitioning from the learned hookup script to the more formal dating script can be daunting, especially given that young adults may not have previously experienced a more formal dating script. In addition, transitioning to a more formal dating script also comes with a new set of gendered roles and expectations to learn and follow. Research has suggested traditional gendered dating scripts and roles continue to be reproduced through current dating practices and spaces (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Laner & Ventrone, 1998), despite attempts by feminists to redistribute power in dating practices through the intentional use of alternative scripts (e.g., women initiating dates or women insisting on paying their own way on dates also known as “going dutch”) (cf. Eaton & Rose, 2011; Korman, 1983). In this way (as noted in the discussion of the dating system earlier), a traditional dating script works to reaffirm different gendered roles and expectations related to dating for men and women, while simultaneously working to structure the way dating practices unfold (Coltrane & Adams, 2008). Learning gendered roles and expectations of dating in adulthood can present a challenge for both men and women. And these roles and expectations are likely to be particularly challenging for women to learn and negotiate given the gendered power disparities women have had to historically deal with when dating. Yet, more research is needed to understand the gendered implications of women’s adherence or resistance to these gendered scripts, roles, and expectations when dating. Indeed, single adults must negotiate a number of challenges to dating in adulthood; however, to negotiate these challenges, many single people are turning to different modes of dating to meet romantic others. I discuss these modes next, paying particular attention to online dating.

2.3.2.2 Current Dating Trends and Developments

Given the challenges of dating in adulthood, it is not surprising many adults are looking for different ways to meet and connect with others that are not only accessible and convenient,

but that also help to mitigate these challenges (Bogle, 2008; Coltrane & Adams, 2008). Research has suggested adults pursue a number of different avenues to dating, including online personal ads, speed dating, personal social networks, and online dating (Bogle, 2008; Bredow et al., 2008). Online dating, in particular, appears to have solidified its presence in the dating marketplace in North America as a way for single adults to establish themselves in a couple. In 2004, Americans spent close to \$470 million dollars on online dating services, representing the largest category of online content consumers chose to spend money on (Online Publishers Association, 2004, March 10). Canadians appear to also be actively involved in online dating. On average, 7 million Canadians, in comparison to 40 million Americans, accessed online dating websites per month in 2004 (CBC Marketplace, 2004, March 16).

Barraket and Henry-Waring (2008) defined online dating as “a purposeful form of meeting new people through specifically designed internet sites” (p. 149). Put another way, it is focused on bringing single people together to find relationships. If a single person is interested in getting involved in online dating they must first decide on a specific website. Nowadays, there are hundreds of online dating websites that range from broader based websites, such as *Match.com*, to more niche focused websites, such as *Christian Mingle.com* (Arisse, 2010). Most websites range from \$10-\$50 dollars to subscribe a month (although there are websites that are free, such as *Plenty of Fish*). Once a single person has chosen a website, they set up their profile. Doing so often involves uploading a picture and answering a slew of demographic questions, including age, geographic location, education level, etc. Some websites also allow subscribers to add a brief descriptive paragraph about themselves; however, this description is often limited in length and requires subscribers to skillfully negotiate what information to disclose. Depending on the website, subscribers can browse profiles or the website provides automated matches. Once

a match has been made, both parties can email back in forth to decide whether they want to move forward and initiate further contact, such as a phone call and/or arrange to meet in person (Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, & Felt, 2008).

Online dating has evolved considerably since its inception. More specifically, the development of online dating can be broken into three major phases spanning across the last twenty years (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Engelhart, 2013, February 4). The first phase, pioneered by *Match.com* and *Lavalife.com* in the 1990s, enables single people to place personal ads online. This approach to online dating allows subscribers to control the process by being able to search through personal ads looking for specific criteria to select possible people to date (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Engelhart, 2013, February 4). While convenient, this approach to online dating still involves a significant time commitment, as subscribers have to spend time searching and sorting through profiles.

The second phase of online dating began in 2000 with the emergence of online dating websites that electronically match subscribers through “scientific” formulas and algorithms based on interests and backgrounds. The website most commonly associated with this approach to online dating is *eHarmony.com* (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Engelhart, 2013, February 4). Part of the appeal of this approach to online dating is that it removes the work involved in searching and sorting through profiles by generating matches for subscribers. Although this approach to online dating increases convenience for subscribers, it also simultaneously diminishes the control subscribers have over the process (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008).

The third and most recent phase of online dating encompasses online social networking sites (SNSs), such as *Facebook*. These sites, although not considered dating sites, encourage users to introduce friends and family members to the site and to expand their network by

suggesting people they might know (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). Subsequently, SNSs, such as Facebook, have initiated the use of mobile phone applications, where single people can meet and mingle with other single people by downloading and using applications specifically made for their mobile phones (Engelhart, 2013, February, 4). These phone applications are attuned to different social factors influencing dating in adulthood, such as time and career pressures (Brym & Lenton, 2001). These applications strive to make online dating increasingly accessible and less time consuming, by making it possible to meet and connect romantically and/or sexually with others by simply swiping a cell phone screen right or left, such as with the mobile phone application Tinder.

Despite these advancements to online dating, to date, most of the research on online dating has focused exclusively on online interactions and has not taken into account how online dating is often used by single people in conjunction with other modes of dating, such as meeting and connecting with others through a network of social and personal connections. Interestingly, despite the growing popularity of online dating and the amount of financial investment that single people make towards being involved in online dating, personal introductions remain a popular and common way for many people to initiate a first date (Bredow et al., 2008), including introductions vis-à-vis other single people, family members, and/or friends (Parks, 2007). The importance single people continue to place on meeting others through their social networks highlights the importance of placing online dating into a broader dating context, by considering online dating jointly with additional avenues single adults use to meet and connect with others. Moreover, to better understand how adults are engaging in dating practices and spaces today, it is important to explore the ways single adults are accessing online dating services, using them to connect with others, and choosing to utilize resources within these spaces.

Finally, although recent developments to online dating may help women to play a more active role in the dating process (given the choice they have to sign up, to be matched or find matches, and to initiate contact and interest with potential romantic partners), research has shown online dating sites continue to reinforce traditional gendered roles and expectations associated with dating practices (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). For instance, much emphasis continues to be placed on men to initiate first interactions through online websites (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). As such, there is a need for research that also considers more closely the ways online dating spaces are gendered and how these spaces differ from offline dating spaces. Moreover, given that dating practices have been conceptualized closely with leisure, it is important to consider the ways dating in adulthood, including online dating, is tied to leisure practices and spaces. With these ideas in mind, I next consider what a leisure lens can bring to the topic of dating in adulthood for single, women.

2.4 Singlehood, Dating, Gender, and Leisure

Over the past three decades, there has been a significant and growing body of leisure literature that has examined the role of gender and leisure. Much of this research has been conducted from a feminist perspective and has shed light on “issues such as gender differences in participation, constraints and time use” (Henderson & Shaw, 2006, p. 216). Many early studies in this area did not have strong theoretical roots and often used an “add women and stir” approach (Henderson, 1994; Henderson & Shaw, 2006). Beginning in the late 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholars began exploring women’s experiences of leisure in their everyday lives (cf. Bialeschki & Henderson, 1986; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996), but many of these accounts focused on representing women’s experiences in more universal and totalizing ways (Henderson, 1994).

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, leisure research experienced a shift towards difference (Aitchison, 2005). Henderson and Shaw (2006) explained how the shift towards embracing difference influenced feminist leisure researchers to explore more closely women's unique leisure experiences. More specifically, feminist leisure research has explored the ways gender works with identity markers, such as sexuality, spirituality, and age to influence leisure experiences for men and women (cf. Calley Jones, 2010; Carroll 2001; Johnson & Samdahl, 2005). A number of feminist leisure scholars have also explored the connection between gender, leisure, and women's health experiences (cf. Fullagar, 2008; Parry, 2007). Leisure research in this area has also explored the ways illness can influence women's leisure choices (cf. Shannon & Shaw, 2005) as well as the ways women can use leisure to help in recovery from illness (cf. Axelson, 2009).

In addition to exploring women's diverse leisure experiences, the feminist leisure literature has also paid particular attention to examining the ways family relationships shape leisure experiences and the ways leisure is experienced within the family (cf. Hill, 1988; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Much of the work on relationships and leisure has focused on the married couple and the gendered implications of this relationship (Harrington, 2006). More recent work within the leisure field has explored additional relationships within the family, such as relationships between mothers and daughters (cf. Shannon & Shaw, 2008) as well as relationships between grandparents and grandchildren (cf. Havitz, 2007; Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2011). Accordingly, the feminist leisure literature has also looked at leisure and relationships outside of the family. A study by Herridge, Shaw, and Mannell (2003) explored leisure experiences of women in heterosexual, romantic relationships. The authors found couple leisure was satisfying for women, but it also worked to constrain their non-couple leisure choices

given that traditional ideologies of femininity promote the need for women to put romantic relationships first. In turn, several women talked about putting their partner's leisure time and desires above their own.

Henderson et al. (1996), who also considered women's leisure experiences outside of romantic relationships, discussed the importance of affiliative leisure for women, where leisure interactions are not restricted to solely interactions within the family or within relationships. Rather, they noted, women can experience leisure as affiliation with friends, colleagues, etc. Affiliative leisure interactions often place a greater focus on relationship development within the leisure experience, rather than the leisure experience itself. However, Henderson et al. (1996) explained, "Many women put a considerable amount of effort into ensuring that leisure interactions go well, and that the situation is enjoyable for everyone concerned" (p. 109). In turn, they found affiliative leisure experiences can feel like work for women as well.

Although, this body of the feminist leisure literature provides important insights into the diversity of ways women's leisure can be lived and experienced and the ways familial and non-familial relationships can influence leisure experiences for women, it does not take into consideration how single, adult women experience leisure practices and spaces. Moreover, there remains limited literature considering the ways single, adult women can use leisure to construct, maintain, and resist gendered ideologies and expectations. With that said, one of the main contributions of the feminist leisure literature has been the recognition of leisure as a site of resistance to power relations. In what follows, I detail the concept of leisure as resistance and outline the work of several feminist leisure researchers whose work reflects the concept of leisure as resistance in different ways.

2.4.1 *Leisure as Resistance*

Leisure as resistance is a way to negotiate power relations, whereby leisure can serve to reproduce as well as resist gendered ideologies, expectations, and discourses. In this way, leisure can be a form of political practice that can foster social change and empowerment (Shaw, 2001). Shaw (2001) described, “Leisure as resistance implies that leisure behaviours, settings and interactions can challenge the way in which power is exercised, making leisure a form of political practice” (p. 186). Leisure as resistance moves discussions of leisure past simply the benefits of leisure and opens these discussions to include political processes involved in leisure (Shaw, 2001). Within Shaw’s conceptual framework of leisure as resistance she focused on power relations connected with gender and outlined a framework for analyzing resistance from three different theoretical perspectives: interactionist, structuralist, and postmodernist/poststructuralist. Shaw explained that the theoretical perspective a researcher chooses to take influences the researcher’s understanding of leisure as resistance.

First, researchers using an interactionist approach consider personal experiences of oppression within broader social contexts of power. From this perspective, resistance takes place at a micro and macro level, with women engaging in activities that are individually empowering, but that also challenge social ideologies and expectations. For example, Parry (2005) used an interactionist approach to explore how women dealing with infertility used leisure as a way to resist pronatalist ideology. She found women were aware of the importance of motherhood to women’s worth, a gendered expectation pronatalism perpetuates. She also found women used leisure in several ways to resist this ideology. In particular, women engaged in different leisure pursuits they enjoyed, such as reading and walking, and this helped them feel empowered and to define themselves outside of the patriarchal and pronatalist confines of motherhood and

infertility. In addition, she found women intentionally avoided certain leisure activities where pronatalism was perpetuated, such as baby showers. Parry (2005) noted, “leisure is a site for women, either individually or in groups, to challenge ideologies such as pronatalism” (p. 150). As such, in her interactionist study, Parry was able to illustrate how leisure as resistance can take place on an individual level with women choosing certain leisure activities they enjoy, as well as on a macro level with women challenging larger social ideologies, such as pronatalism.

Second, Shaw outlined a structuralist approach to leisure as resistance. A structuralist approach to leisure as resistance is focused on challenging larger, shared social structures, such as gendered ideologies. Resistance from this perspective is rooted on a macro level. An example of a structuralist perspective is illustrated by Green (1998), who examined how certain leisure contexts for women, such as getting together with friends, provided women with the opportunity to consider and question their lives and identities, a notion Green referred to as “women doing friendship”. Green found women used these contexts to explore ways of resisting traditional gendered ideologies and expectations tied to womanhood. In particular, Green discussed the ways women used humor within these contexts as a way to bridge traditional gendered expectations with feminist ways of thinking and seeing the world (Green, 1998). From a structuralist perspective, Green’s study illustrates how women can collectively use leisure as resistance to challenge larger gendered power structures and ideals of femininity.

Third, within Shaw’s leisure as resistance framework, a poststructuralist or postmodernist perspective emphasizes the importance of embracing diversity and viewing power on a micro level. From this perspective, everyone has access to power and in turn can resist power in different ways. More specifically, an analysis of leisure as resistance through a poststructural or postmodern lens considers the ways resistance can act as a form of personal empowerment at a

micro level, instead of looking at the ways power can be challenged on broader structural levels of society (Shaw, 2001). Berbary (2011) used a poststructuralist perspective to look at the experiences of women living in a U.S. sorority. Findings from her study illustrate the ways gendered expectations were disciplined for sorority women through “girl talk” that sets boundaries guiding appropriate behaviors. Yet, women also used leisure as a site of individual resistance to gendered power relations. For example, women would resist gendered expectations by dressing differently, swearing, or through more bold and visible acts of resistance, such as permanently leaving sorority life.

In addition to these three theoretical perspectives, Shaw (2001) outlined three additional conceptual issues that need to be addressed when considering leisure as resistance, regardless of the theoretical perspective a researcher takes. First, Shaw explained the importance of looking more closely at collective and individual acts of resistance and the types of oppression that are being resisted. What is being resisted and in what ways? Second, researchers need to consider the outcomes as well as the impacts of leisure as resistance. Does leisure as resistance always lead to social change and empowerment? Can leisure as resistance also lead to disempowerment? Finally, Shaw emphasized the need to think about intentionality behind resistance and how it is understood. Can unintentional acts of resistance also lead to empowerment (Shaw, 2001)? Holding these theoretical ideas in mind, I next provide a summary of the research highlighted in this chapter and the associated gaps in the research literature to illustrate how my research works to address these gaps.

2.5 Summary of the Literature Review

Reviewing the literature on singlehood and dating illustrates not only the complexity of the topic, but also a number of gaps in the research literature that need to be addressed. More

specifically, there are a growing number of adults who identify as romantically single in North America. Despite this trend, single adults continue to face marginalization and stigmatization for being single in adulthood (cf. Cobb, 2011; DePaulo, 2006). Yet, much of the previous research looking at experiences of singlehood have explored experiences of singlehood for a younger demographic, that being adolescents. Moreover, given the stigmatization and marginalization single adults can experience, it is not surprising many single adults engage in different dating practices to move from singlehood to couplehood. However, again, the research on dating appears to be strongly oriented towards exploring the dating practices of adolescents, including their use of group dates and hookups to make romantic and sexual connections. Less is known and understood about the ways single adults engage in dating practices. In turn, there is a need to explore more closely the ways adults experience singlehood and dating.

In addition to considering experiences of singlehood and dating in adulthood, this literature review has also made visible the need for research that considers the ways gender complicates dating experiences for single adults. As this literature review highlights, the feminist literature has focused on a number of important topics that influence women's experiences with singlehood and dating, including gendered dating roles and scripts, women's relational imperative, and the sexual double standard (cf. Eaton & Rose, 2011; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Korman, 1983). Moreover, although each of these topics illustrate the ways dating is gendered for both men and women, research has indicated that women continue to have unequal access to power in dating practices (Bradshaw et al., 2010), positioning "women as passive recipients and men as active powerholders" (Eaton & Rose, 2011, p.856). However, to my knowledge, the feminist literature has yet to consider the ways single, adult women experience

dating. As such, there is a need to consider more closely experiences of singlehood and dating for adult women, more specifically.

Finally, when considering the ties between dating, leisure, and gender, it is clear the feminist leisure literature can be harnessed to inform this study. As outlined previously, the feminist leisure literature has explored a large breadth of women's leisure experiences. However, to date, this body of work has yet to consider the ways singlehood and gender influence the ways leisure practices and spaces are experienced by women. Moreover, although dating is often closely tied to leisure practices and spaces, the connections between singlehood, dating, and leisure have yet to be explored in the leisure literature. Thus, it is unknown whether dating is, in fact, tied to leisure for women. To fill these gaps in the leisure literature, I have chosen to add a leisure lens to my research. In particular, I draw on the concept of leisure as resistance (and reproduction) to help illuminate the ways gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles are negotiated by single, adult women when dating. In the next chapter, I outline my choice to frame this study using a third wave feminist theoretical orientation and explain my use of narrative as my research methodology.

3.0 Theory and Methodology

Feminist research is unique as it does not consist of one unified framework (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Rather there are multiple approaches to engaging in feminist research that are diverse, dynamic, and thought provoking. In short, there are many feminisms (Olesen, 2011). Although feminist research can take on many different forms, at the heart of all feminist work is a desire to illuminate gender inequalities and transform culture and society rooted in patriarchy (Snyder-Hall, 2010) to make women's social worlds more just (Hesse-Biber, 2012). In this way, feminist research involves connecting research with activism (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Yet, how feminists decide to tackle gender inequalities and injustices depends on the feminism they adopt and the politics they employ. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to theoretically position this study within third wave feminism. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the waves of the feminist movement to position third wave feminism historically in the discussion. I then outline the broader tendencies that guide my third wave theoretical approach, before highlighting several critiques of third wave feminism and discussing how these critiques influence my use of third wave feminism. Finally, I provide a description of how I aligned my use of third wave feminism with narrative as my research methodology.

3.1 A Third Wave Feminist Theoretical Orientation

The feminist movement is often described using a wave metaphor that attempts to capture social change and transformation that has stemmed from feminist research and action over time (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). The first wave of feminism (generally tied to feminist work that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century) is best known for being associated with the suffragette movement (Gillis et al., 2007). The work of the first wave stemmed from women's segregation and marginalization from multiple domains of everyday life, most

noticeably, the political landscape (Gillis et al., 2007). After gaining political citizenship in the early twentieth century in North America, the women's movement did not make another visible public resurgence again until several decades later, when a second wave of feminism surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s. The feminist work that emerged during this time was considered to have a more clear vision of feminism than that of the first wave, defined by women, for women. As such, the feminist agenda was extended to include a broader range of gender issues impacting women's everyday lives (e.g., reproduction, sexual violence, domestic labor, wage gap, mothering, etc.) (Gillis et al., 2007).

Despite the broader focus of feminist research and activism emerging in the second wave, tensions also began to surface between and among second wave feminists. In particular, tensions arose in the 1980s and 1990s by second wave feminists (cf. Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984) who were concerned with feminist accounts that represented women's experiences in totalizing and essentialized ways (Gillis et al., 2007). Rather, feminists during this time, inspired by postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, were turning their focus towards appreciating and making visible the ways women's experiences are varied, different, and diverse (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Stemming from this strengthened appreciation of difference and diversity in women's lives, a third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1980s into the early 1990s (Hogeland, 2001; Kinser, 2004). Although tracing its precise beginnings are difficult (Kinser, 2004; Parry & Fullagar, 2013), many acknowledge Rebecca Walker for pioneering a third wave agenda when she stated in a 1992 article of Ms. Magazine "I am the Third Wave" (see Heywood, 2006, p. 3) (cf. Gillis et al., 2007; Heywood & Drake, 1997).

Although influenced by postmodern thinking, third wave feminism cannot be characterized exclusively as postmodern (Snyder, 2008). Snyder (2008) explained, it is more

accurate “to describe third-wave feminism as a tactical response to the conditions of postmodernity” (p. 187). Third wave feminism offers feminists the opportunity to take up a theoretical orientation that is dedicated to questioning totalizing and generalizing conceptualizations of women’s experiences and feminist ways of knowing (Dean, 2009). Although feminist researchers can take up third wave feminism in a number of different ways (Dean, 2009), there are several central tendencies involved in a third wave feminist theoretical orientation to research (cf. Dean, 2009; Parry & Fullagar, 2013; Snyder, 2008).

In particular, Parry and Fullagar (2013) identified five tendencies of third wave feminism. First, third wave feminists focus on plurality and inclusivity (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). Other feminists have also noted the third wave emphasis on multiplicity, difference (cf. Gillis et al., 2007; Snyder, 2008), and thinking in plural ways (cf. Kinser, 2004). Third wave feminists also show little interest in attempting to draw clear cut boundaries of what is “feminist” and what is not, and instead celebrate contradictions and paradoxes in feminist work (cf. Fixmer & Wood, 2005; Gillis et al., 2007; Kinser, 2004). In this way, as Snyder (2008) noted, “third-wave feminism emphasizes an including and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political” (p. 175-176). Second, third wavers embrace personal narrative (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). The personal story acts as a form of consciousness-raising for third wavers (Snyder, 2008). Rooted in accessible writing (Heywood, 2006), personal narratives are intended to attune other women to important issues in their own lives and social worlds (Snyder, 2008). Third, self-determination is central to third wave feminist accounts (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). Snyder-Hall (2010) described this third wave tendency, stating: “it is hard to make judgments because a choice that appears anti-feminism at first might look very different when properly contextualized” (p. 259). As such, third wave feminism is messy, complex, and

deeply rooted in personal choice and agency. Fourth, Parry and Fullagar (2013) noted the focus on gender equality and sexual freedom third wavers value in their work. Snyder-Hall (2010) also noted this focus, explaining the strong pro-sex stance of feminists working in the third wave. Finally, third wave feminists value pop culture (Parry & Fullagar, 2013) as an important context for understanding women's lives and social worlds (cf. Jervis & Zeisler, 2006; Kinser, 2004).

These tendencies of third wave feminism shape the theoretical orientation guiding my research. However, there are also a number of critiques of third wave feminism that have surfaced over time that feminist researchers, who position their work within third wave feminism, need to keep in mind. In particular, third wavers have been critiqued for attempting to draw a generational divide between the work of third wave and second wave feminists (cf. Dean, 2009; Gillis et al., 2007). In turn, by attempting to delineate a separate feminist space for their work and activism, third wave feminists have been critiqued for lacking a strong understanding (and appreciation) of the history of the women's movement (cf. Fixmer & Wood, 2005; Hogeland, 2001; Snyder, 2008). With these critiques in mind, although this research is positioned in a third wave theoretical orientation, that orientation is based on a continuous curiosity in, and respect of, feminist work past and present, conducted within, between, and across waves of feminism. More specifically, as Parry and Fullagar (2013) have explained, it is important to consider how "feminist ideas ripple through and interconnect over time" (p. 574).

Third wave feminism has also been critiqued for failing to take collective political action (Dean, 2009; Fixmer & Wood, 2005). Fixmer and Wood (2005) explained, "Third wavers embrace what we term embodied politics, which is personal and often physical, bodily action that aims to provoke change by exercising and resisting power in everyday life" (p. 237). Third wave feminism is focused on women working together in smaller scale coalitions to address

gendered issues, rather than taking a unified and collective stand (Snyder, 2008; Snyder-Hall, 2010). Fixmer and Wood (2005) have advocated for third wave feminists to continue to focus on personal level politics, but also to infuse an awareness of structural level politics into their work to address this critique. In my research, I attempt to keep my political practice attuned to both personal and structural levels of political action and change.

Another critique of third wave feminism is connected to the third wave emphasis on sharing personal narratives in accessible ways. More specifically, third wavers have been criticized for presenting stories as personal confessionals rather than examples that are tied to theory and that challenge dominant ideological structures (Snyder, 2008). As Snyder (2008) explained, drawing on theory can “allow third wave scholars to push popular articulations of women’s experiences in a...critical direction, rendering them more radical and theoretically sophisticated” (p. 191). My third wave feminist theoretical position also demonstrates a commitment to applying a critical lens to the research, including a close examination of discursive, institutional, and cultural practices, as well as gendered expectations and ideologies present in women’s experiences and narratives (Snyder, 2008). With these ideas in mind, I turn next to discussing my choice to align my third wave theoretical orientation with narrative as my research methodology.

3.2 Aligning Narrative with Third Wave Feminism

Keeping my third wave feminist theoretical orientation in mind, I chose to use narrative as my research methodology. Kinser (2004) explained,

One of the important contributions of third-wave feminism is its emphasis on narrative for exploring how it feels to live a feminist life, how feminism informs and complicates

one's sense of identity, and how one stabilizes that identity while being knocked about by postfeminist and backlash forces. (p. 137)

Indeed, the strong focus on narratives and lived experiences within many third wave feminist accounts make narrative a strong methodological fit for conducting research from this theoretical position. As such, for the purpose of this research, I position narrative as “a subtype - of qualitative methodology” (Chase, 2005, p. 651).

Most broadly speaking, narrative is focused on uncovering stories to explain life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002). Josselson (2011) described, the goal of narrative is “to illuminate human experience as it is presented in textual form in order to reveal layered meanings that people assign to aspects of their lives” (240). In this way, narrative seeks to understand how individuals tell and share stories (Daly 2007; DeVault & Gross, 2012) and values individuals' emotions and interpretations embedded in their stories (Chase, 2005). Moreover, researchers using narrative work to set these stories within social, personal, and historical contexts (Creswell, 2007). DeVault and Gross (2012) explained, “how stories are told is not just an individual matter; people's stories are shaped by the formats available to them and reflect the perspectives and values of their communities” (p. 219).

Despite its usefulness for building understanding of the lived experiences of marginalized persons (Chase, 2005), narrative has been critiqued for privileging narrative coherence (cf. Browne, 2014; Hyvärinen, Hydén, Saarenheimo, & Tamboukou, 2010; St. Pierre, 2009). For instance, St. Pierre (2009) explained her suspicion “of what must be excluded to create the equilibrium, totality, unity, and pleasing closure that mark narrative” (p. 226). With my third wave feminist theoretical positioning in mind, my use of narrative embraces the multiplicity of truths in stories and views stories as always partial, situated, provisional (Ellis,

1999; MacLure, 2011). I do not view women's stories and storytelling worlds as linear, whole or cohesive (as dictated by traditional narrative structure), but rather layered, complex, messy, non-linear and in some cases, undone or unfinished.

In addition, to maintain consistency with my theoretical orientation, my use of narrative is also guided by feminist values. Thompson (1992) outlined four tenets relevant to feminist methodological work. These include:

- 1) All inquiry is value-sustaining, and feminist work is politicized inquiry;
- 2) Separation between researcher and researched does not ensure objectivity, and a closer connection between the two may reconcile objectivity and subjectivity;
- 3) Women's experience can be considered a source and justification of knowledge; and
- 4) There may be no such thing as truth and objectivity. (p. 9)

With my theoretical and methodological framework in mind, I turn next discussing my choice of methods for this study.

4.0 Methods

In this chapter, I outline my process for recruiting participants and the profile of the women I interviewed. I then summarize my methods for data collection, including a description of the types of interviews conducted: reflexive, dyadic interviews and interactive group interviews. Finally, I highlight the details of my iterative process for data analysis and interpretation, before sharing my choice of using composite characters and dialogue-based vignettes to represent my findings.

4.1 Participant Recruitment

Recruitment of the participants for this study took place between July and August of 2013. I recruited participants through the use of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used to collect information-rich data to fuel greater insights and deeper understandings of a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2002). I used a hybrid form of purposeful sampling that included a combination of both criterion based sampling and snowball sampling, because I wanted to focus on the experiences of a particular group of single women and needed to ensure all participants met the “predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). More specifically, to participate in the study participants had to be women between the ages of 25 and 40, who at the time of the interviews did not have children, and identified as romantically single. I chose to focus on this particular demographic of women, because they are likely to experience coupling, familism, and pronatalist pressures that a younger demographic of women, women over 40, women with children, and men are likely not exposed to in the same way. As long as the women met the criteria, the study was open to women from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual identities, socio-economic statuses, religions, etc. I describe the profile of the participants in more detail in the subsequent section of this chapter.

To begin recruitment, I contacted seven of my friends (who met the criteria for the study) by email and included an information letter that served as a recruitment letter in the email. The letter described the study in detail, explaining what their participation in the study would involve. The letter also encouraged the women to contact me either by phone or email to express interest in participating in the study (see Appendix A). Contacting each of the women by email, rather than in-person or over the phone, was intended to provide each of the women with a respectful amount of space and time to decide whether to participate in the study. This approach to recruitment was also used to provide all of the women with a less personal avenue (i.e., email) to decline the invitation if they decided not to participate in the study.

Once I confirmed the participation of these seven friends, I used snowball sampling to expand the number of participants meeting the criteria of the study (Patton, 2002). I asked these participants to extend the information about the study to any additional friends meeting the criteria for the study within each of their friendship circles. In response, one participant offered to extend the invite to participate in the study to four of her friends. Once she had confirmed their interest in getting more information about the study, I followed up with each of these women by email to send them the information letter. All four women agreed to participate in the study through email. I also had another friend (not involved in the study) provide me with her friend's contact information who had expressed interest in participating in the study. I followed-up with this woman by email and she also agreed to participate in the study. The same procedure for expressing interest in the study followed as outlined previously. I repeated this process until I secured 12 women to participate in the study.

4.1.1 Profile of the Participants

The 12 women recruited for the study ranged from 26 to 37 years of age. None of the women who participated had children. All of the women had completed (at minimum) undergraduate university degrees at the time of the interviews. Women worked in a range of careers at the time of the study, including: service, finance, law, teaching, therapy, and business administration. Nine women had completed professional degrees (e.g., law, teaching, etc.) or graduate degrees. Three of the women were full-time graduate students. Two women lived in an urban city in Ontario. The other 10 women lived in small to mid-size cities in Ontario. Nine of the women who participated lived alone. All of the women who participated were white. One of the women in the study identified as bisexual (although in her interview spoke predominantly about her recent experiences connecting with men). One woman identified as Christian. Moreover, the women recruited had been romantically single for different amounts of time prior to the interviews. Two women had been single since high school. Seven women had been in serious romantic relationships since high school, but those relationships had ended over a year before their participation in the study. Three women identified that they were recently out of a long-term relationship (within one year) prior to participating in the study.

With regards to the participant profile, several considerations have surfaced since recruiting the participants for this study. First, specific information relating to each participant's income was not collected at the time of the interviews, an oversight I made when conceptualizing this study. This information could have been particularly informative given that financial considerations have been shown to play a stronger role when dating in adulthood versus adolescence (Bogle, 2008). In addition, the findings from this study highlight how financial

considerations influenced women's choices to use certain online dating websites (I unpack this connection in more detail in the Gendered Technology section of the discussion chapter).

Second, I have continued to reflect on the fact that the profile of participants is reflective of heterosexual, white, middle class women's experiences with singlehood and dating. In part, the lack of racial and sexual diversity represented in the profile can be attributed to using my friendship circle as a starting point for recruitment. Since completing recruitment of the participants for this study, I have considered whether I should have used different recruitment methods to secure a more diverse group of participants or whether I should have continued recruitment until I had recruited a greater diversity of women to participate in the study. When these considerations surface, I remind myself that I was never trying to capture or generalize the experiences of all single, adult women in this research study. Rather, my intention was to explore, in-depth, the experiences and stories of the women who agreed to participate in this study. I wanted to value and honor their unique experiences by sharing those experiences in evocative and thought provoking ways with the hope of opening up thinking and dialogue about the many different ways singlehood and dating can be experienced by adult women. Moreover, in looking more closely at the profile of participants, I recognize the participant profile does lack racial and sexual diversity, but the profile maintains diversity in other ways (e.g., religion, age, dating history, and current engagement with dating). With these considerations in mind, I turn next to outlining the types of interviews I used.

4.2 Types of Interviews

For the purpose of this study, I chose to use two types of interviews: 1) reflexive, dyadic interviews, and 2) interactive, small group interviews. I provide a description of both of these types of interviews below.

4.2.1 Reflexive, Dyadic Interviews

In-depth interviews can be useful when data collection is aimed at gaining rich data about specific life experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2007) and stories (Chase, 2011). In particular, an in-depth interview “is the most common way to collect narrative data, largely because stories are so common to most conversations” (Glover, 2003, p. 154). However, some approaches to in-depth interviewing are more structured and formal and have the interviewer playing more of a neutral role within the interview process (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Rather than playing a neutral, researcher role, I wanted to focus on speaking *with* others (Alcoff, 2009) through an engaged and interactive approach to interviewing. I see the potential for interviews to fuel an inviting space, where information is shared and voices meet, blend, and grow. I wanted to take an approach to interviewing that was more conversational to help build rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee and where both the interviewer and interviewee share their experiences in the interview space. Consistent with my use of narrative, I also wanted to use an approach to in-depth interviewing that positions the researcher and participants as co-creators of knowledge, ultimately helping to break down issues of power and authority traditionally imbued in the researcher’s role and redistributing power more evenly amongst all parties involved in the interview process (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

To accomplish this aim, I used a type of in-depth interview referred to as reflexive, dyadic interviews (Ellis, 2004). With this type of interview the focus remains on the participant, yet, reflexive, dyadic interviews are also based on conversations between the researcher and participant, where the researcher plays an active role sharing thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Ellis, 2004). In this way, reflexive, dyadic interviews share similarities with both conversational interviews and active interviews. All three of these types of interviews involve less structure and

are more conversational. Yet, conversational interviews rely on the notion of “going with the flow,” and give the respondent full control to decide where the interview goes (Patton, 2002). In other words, the researcher is not an active participant in the interview process. In comparison, reflexive, dyadic interviews and active interviews require that both the researcher and participant actively share their experiences and stories throughout the interview process and are co-collaborators in meaning making (Ellis, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Yet, reflexive, dyadic interviews add an additional layer to the active interview process. Researchers are encouraged to not only share their own reflections and emotional responses as the participants share their experiences and stories, but also to share their reasons for conducting the research to provide additional context and awareness in the interview space for participants. Although the researcher shares his/her reflections, experiences, and stories in the interview space, with reflexive, dyadic interviews the researcher’s reflections, experiences, and stories do not take center stage (Ellis, 2004). Rather, with reflexive, dyadic interviews the focus remains on the participant’s experiences and knowledge, whereas the researcher’s experiences are used to provide deeper insights and understandings about the topic, fueling conversation and engagement as the interview unfolds, deepening understandings, and bringing out additional layers of the stories being shared by participants (Ellis, 2004).

4.2.2 Interactive, Small Group Interviews

Bringing people together in groups to discuss research topics has also been shown to be helpful in exploratory research, where the focus is to illuminate hidden knowledges. Group interviews have been shown to be particularly beneficial when used in combination with other methods, such as one-to-one interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2007), given that bringing multiple voices together in a group setting can fuel dynamic conversation that can spark new ideas and

perspectives for participants, ideas and perspectives that might not have been thought of or surfaced within a one-to-one interview. Moreover, group contexts devoted exclusively to women have been shown to fuel empowerment as well as resistance towards gendered social norms and behaviors (Green, 1998). As such, I decided to use group interviews in addition to reflexive, dyadic interviews to explore the experiences of the single, adult women in this study.

Taking into consideration my approach to narrative as well as my focus on speaking with women, I was conscious of not wanting to exude control over the group interview process. Rather, I wanted to engage in a more interactive, flexible, and less structured approach to group interviews based on active conversation and ongoing engagement among all members within the group. To accomplish this aim, I used an interactive approach to group interviews (Ellis, 2004). Unlike focus groups, wherein the researcher plays the role of moderator, directing and controlling how the group interaction proceeds, including what questions are asked and the conversation that ensues (Hesse-Biber, 2007), interactive group interviews enable all members of the group to play both researcher and participant roles. An interactive approach to group interviewing helps to remove the researcher-participant hierarchy, one of the feminist tenets guiding my use of narrative. Moreover, interactive interviews focus on building relationships, as each member interacts and shares their own story in a less formal and conversational setting. As the conversation unfolds, the stories that are shared influence the stories that are told. In this way, stories interact and develop together (Ellis, 2004). With this type of group interview, Ellis (2004) stressed the importance of the researcher remaining open and flexible as the process unfolds, because the direction the interview takes cannot be predicted or controlled for in advance.

4.3 Data Collection

The data for this study was collected between August 2013 and November 2013. Once I had recruited 12 participants, I began scheduling dates and times for the interviews with each of the women through email. All 12 of the women recruited participated in a one-to-one reflexive, dyadic interview. Nine of the 12 women recruited also participated in one of two interactive, small group interviews. The three women who did not participate in one of the group interviews were women I had recruited through my own friendship circle. All three of these women were interested in being involved in the study, but were not able to participate in a group interview because of their various geographic locations across Ontario, Canada. As such, it was not feasible based on financial and time limitations to bring these women together to conduct a separate small group interview or to be part of one of the scheduled small group interviews. Yet, each of these women were interested in participating in the study solely in a one-to-one interview, so I agreed to their participation in that capacity.

4.3.1 Interview Order

For the three women who were not able to participate in a group interview, I conducted each of their one-to-one interviews at different times between August and November of 2013. For the nine women who were participating in a group interview along with a one-to-one interview, my initial plan was to conduct the group interviews first as a way to meet and connect with the women recruited for the study who I had not met before or who I knew in a limited capacity. However, due to timing conflicts with two women's schedules, I ended up having to conduct each of their one-to-one interviews prior to their participation in a group interview. Fortunately, both of these women I knew before their one-to-one interviews. The other seven women who were participating in both the group interview and one-to-one interview participated

in the group interview first, followed by a one-to-one interview that I scheduled with them by email after their group interview was completed. I found beginning with the group interviews (for these seven women) was helpful, because it provided them with a chance to hear the questions they would be asked in the one-to-one interview. In this way, women could spend time thinking about which areas of conversation from the group interview they might want to discuss further during their one-to-one interview. As the researcher, conducting the group interviews first was helpful, because if a story or experience was briefly mentioned in the group interview, I was able to follow-up in the one-to-one interview to gain a better understanding of the story or experience. Ultimately, I found starting with the group interviews (for most of the participants), helped to build rapport between the women participating in the study and enhance their overall comfort with the research process, given that many of the women had not participated in a research study before.

4.3.2 Interview Location, Setup, and Dynamics

All interviews were conducted in-person, because face-to-face conversations tend to be more engaging and interactive than interviews conducted through other mediums, such as the phone. All of the one-to-one interviews took place in an agreed upon location between the researcher and the participant (e.g., in the park, at their workplace, my home, or their home). For the group interviews, I decided to host two small group interviews at my home consisting of five and four women respectively. I made this choice, because interactive, small group interviews have been shown to work best with small groups of three to five members (Ellis, 2004). In deciding to host the group interviews at my home, I considered both the research topic in combination with the interactive nature of the interview (Herzog, 2012). Green (1998), in her research on women and friendship, cited the work of both Coates (1996) and Hey (1997) who

found the quality of the conversation between women is best when it is in a private space and where food and drinks are served, because this type of space fuels mutual sharing and comfort. Therefore, I wanted the location of the group interviews to be comfortable and inviting for the women who were participating, hence being in a home rather than a public setting. I also wanted to provide a space that encouraged conversation and helped to foster rapport. As such, I also provided food and drinks for each of the participants involved.

When organizing the group interviews and thinking about how each of the interviews would unfold, I also considered group interview dynamics (Ellis, 2004). I considered how comfortable each of the participants would be interacting together in the interview space (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Interview dynamics is an important consideration, given that this approach to interviewing requires reciprocity and trust and is often better suited for groups where participants know each other (Ellis, 2004). With these ideas in mind, in the first interactive, small group interview all of the women knew at least one other women who participated in the group interview. In the second group interview, all of the women knew at least one other woman who participated, with the exception of one participant who only knew myself prior to the interview. Of the nine women who participated in the small group interviews, I met three women for the first time at the group interview and two women who I knew in a limited capacity prior to the group interview. Overall, considering group dynamics within each of the group interviews promoted a sense of comfort and familiarity in the interview space, particularly for the women I was meeting for the first time and the women I knew in a limited capacity prior to the interview.

4.3.3 Interview Process

I collected written consent from each of the women prior to conducting both the one-to-one and group interviews (see Appendix B). At the beginning of each of the one-to-one

interviews and group interviews, I explained the details of the study and the interview process. I also shared examples of the types of questions that I would be asking from a semi-structured interview guide that I had prepared to use for both the one-to-one interviews as well as the group interviews (see Appendix C). Although I kept the interview guide close by for the one-to-one interviews and group interviews, at the beginning of these interviews, I also explained to the women that I was open to going where the interview would take us (Hesse-Biber, 2007), depending on what experiences and stories relating to singlehood and dating emerged in the interview space. In this way, rather than rely on the interview guide closely and exclusively, given the relational and conversational tone of the interviews, I tried to use the guide in these interview contexts to fuel conversation as necessary. Yet, somehow, many of the topics/questions that were part of the interview guide ended up being addressed through the course of the interview process for almost every interview, even if a question from the guide was not asked specifically. I also found that as I became more comfortable with the interview process, I referred to the guide less and less.

I started each interview by sharing a brief description of my connection to the research topic. I then asked each of the women to describe what singlehood was like for them as an adult woman. I found this question was a good opening question to get the women thinking about their single life more broadly. Moreover, given that there was a time lapse between the group interviews and the one-to-one interviews (at least for seven of the participants), I found myself using the time lapse to get participants to reflect on what had been happening in their lives since the group interview. These small windows of time, in several cases, represented large shifts in some of the women's single and dating lives (e.g., not dating to having met someone they were interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with).

In addition, during the first two one-to-one interviews and the first group interview I tried to take some notes as these interviews progressed, but I realized this process really impacted the flow of the interview. It made the interview space feel less engaged and conversational and ultimately impacted my ability to really listen to the women's experiences and stories. As DeVault and Gross (2012) explained, "Active listening means more than just physically hearing...rather it is a fully engaged process that involves not only taking in information via speech...but also actively processing it. It means allowing that to affect you, baffle you, haunt you" (p. 217). In turn, I decided to put my pen down and focus instead on listening intently, being present, and reacting and engaging with the stories that were shared in the moment.

In addition to sharing my personal connection to the research study at the outset of each interview, I also made a point of sharing and reflecting on my own stories and experiences as a single, adult woman through each interview. I found these stories and experiences were particularly important in the one-to-one interviews and group interviews with women I was meeting for the first time and women I knew in a limited capacity prior to the interviews. I found sharing my own experiences and stories was a helpful way to build rapport with these women. Each of the group interviews lasted between two and two and half hours. Each of the one-to-one interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours.

4.3.4 Interview Ethical Considerations

I attempted to remain sensitive to feminist ethical issues when conducting the interviews, including issues related to consent, anonymity, and participant feelings, questions, and concerns (Devault & Gross, 2012). More specifically, before each of the interviews started, I made sure the women were aware that their participation in the interviews would be anonymous and that they would be assigned a pseudonym. I also made sure participants were aware that they had the

choice to not participate in any and all parts of the interview conversation. In addition, I reminded participants of the fact that our conversation in the interview was part of a research study and to remain conscious of that throughout the interview process. I found this note was a particularly important inclusion for the women who were my friends who were participating in the study, given that the interview conversations, at times, mirrored a conversation we would have together in our everyday lives. At the beginning of each of the group interviews, I also emphasized the importance of keeping the personal information shared in each of these interviews confidential. Once the interviews began, I used a series of check-in questions to ensure the women were comfortable in the interview space (e.g., How are you feeling? Do you need to take a break? Are you okay if we continue?). The interview check-ins were also used to address any questions or concerns that surfaced during the interviews for the participants.

At the time of the one-to-one interviews, I asked participants whether they had a choice of pseudonym. Many women had names in mind. I assigned each participant who did not provide a name a pseudonym. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim into transcripts and the interview data was stored anonymously on my password protected personal computer using the pseudonyms assigned for each participant. Once I completed transcription, I sent completed transcripts via email to each of the participants of both their one-to-one interview and group interview to verify for any inaccuracies in what was said in their interviews. Participants had the opportunity to verify the interview content by adding, changing, and/or deleting any material within the interview transcripts. Several participants expressed concerns over certain stories being recognizable and asked me to change the details of these specific stories. In one case, a participant expressed particular concern regarding the details of one story that she had shared and asked that I change almost all of the details of the story to ensure it was

not recognizable. In this particular case, I decided to remove this story entirely from my analysis to protect the participant's anonymity in the study and to ensure the participant was comfortable with the interview data that had been shared.

4.4 Researcher Reflections

After each of the interviews, I spent time reflecting and recording notes about the interview process in my reflexive journal. I embraced what Dupuis (1999) referred to as a reflexive research methodology, by keeping a reflexive journal to consider both my researcher self and my human/friend self. In particular, I used my reflexive journal to reflect on my personal connection to the research. As timing would have it, once I started work on this research study I became part of a romantic couple. My personal shift from the "singlehood" to the "couplehood" posed a tension for me, a tension that I have continued to reflect on throughout the research project. At first, I struggled with my couple status, because it made me feel like I had taken a step back from the topic. Yet, I found using reflexive, dyadic interviews and interactive group interviews, in particular, helped me to share and reflect on my own experiences and to maintain a strong personal connection to the research topic. In addition, I used my reflexive journal before each of the interviews to pull my experiences as a single, adult women into the present. I also used my reflexive journal after each interview to reflect on the experiences I shared in the interviews with the participants. This part of my reflexive process helped me to build a greater understanding of those moments and experiences and how they met and connected with other women's experiences in the interview space. Despite finding my couple status to be an initial point of contention and worry for this research study, through ongoing reflection, I have been able to see my couple status as also providing a valuable lens into this research topic. More specifically, I witnessed during this study a blatant shift in power and privilege from my

experience as a single, adult woman to my experience as an adult woman in a heterosexual couple. That shift, if anything, has strengthened my resolve to this research study and my dedication to sharing single, adult women's experiences and stories, to bring attention to this social justice issue and the marginalization and stigmatization this population can experience.

I also used my reflexive journal to reflect on methodological considerations. For instance, in the first group interview, my researcher-self experienced some initial trepidation over using an interactive interview approach. The conversations at times veered off in directions that I felt were completely unrelated to the research. Glover (2003) also noted how interviews can, at times, seem to lack immediate connection with the research topic. Yet, he explained, "Though these accounts tend to be cast aside as digressions, they are, in actuality, salient insights into the subjective realities of our research participants" (p. 145). It took some time for me to settle into the interview space and to trust that the interviews would unfold in the way they were supposed to unfold, and that I could not control and dictate that direction using an interactive group interview approach (Ellis, 2004). I had to remind myself to stay open when engaging in the interview process to all experiences, perspectives, and stories brought forward in the interview space, even if those stories seemed, at the time, not relevant to the research (I pick back up on this reflection later in this chapter).

Moreover, as I moved through the interview process, I began to understand more clearly the pros and cons of interviewing friends. As friends, we already have an established rapport, so the comfort, safety, and trust needed in an interview space already exists. We are able to delve into topics and conversations with ease. But in the interview space with friends, I found it was difficult not to fill in the blanks of my friends' stories, many of which I knew in advance. Whereas, with the women I was meeting for the first time at the group interviews, many of these

conversations tended to flow freely as new stories and experiences were being shared and heard. Seidman (2013) explained, researchers need to confront any assumptions that they have of what will be shared in the interview space by friends. To manage this tension, Tillmann-Healy (2003) in her work on friendship as method, noted that when interviewing close friends it is necessary for the researcher “to continually step back from experiences and relationships and examine them analytically and critically” (p. 735). To do so, I found reflecting on the research process with friends before and after each interview was a productive way to confront and build more understanding and awareness of my pre-knowing and assumptions. In particular, through reflection, I identified the urge I felt to probe for additional details relating to certain stories and experiences that I knew in advance so that my friends would share the details in the interview space. I also recognized the need to make sure my friends did not feel as though they had to share stories or details in the interview space that they were not comfortable sharing. As such, I identified the importance of letting the interview process unfold organically and to be open to whatever stories and experiences my friends were choosing to share in that space and time. Yet, there were several times when my friends would bring up a story, but then not provide any explanation of the story, stating that they knew I was already familiar with the story they were going to share. In these particular circumstances, I would ask my friends whether they would be comfortable elaborating on the experience and/or story they brought up, given that Seidman (2013) has suggested researchers need to be comfortable asking for clarification or additional details about experiences and stories from friends.

In addition to using my reflexive journal to consider the ways my methodological process was unfolding, I also used my reflexive journal to record reflections on what was shared in the interview space, adding ideas and questions to consider for future interviews (e.g., the

importance of friends sharing stories with friends about dating came out in the first two one-to-one interviews and both group interviews, and I was able to ask a question related to this topic in the subsequent one-to-one interviews). In this way, I found the interview process overlapped significantly with the early phases of my analysis process. I continued to use my reflexive journal during analysis and interpretation, because as Pinn (2001) described, “Our processes as researchers, our fears and perfectionism as well as our successes, need to be brought consciously into the research process. In this way we can reveal the uncertainty, contradictions, multiplicities and ambiguities of ourselves” (p. 194). During this part of the research process, I used my reflexive journal to continuously reflect on curiosities, discoveries, tensions, and paradoxes that were emerging as well as to note connections and disconnections that were surfacing between the stories shared by each of the participants and the research literature. In addition, I used it to reflect on the ways my understandings of the experiences were shifting and evolving as the research process unfolded. I outline next my process for analysis and interpretation of the interview data.

4.5 Process for Analysis and Interpretation

When considering my process for analysis and interpretation, I started first by reviewing a number of different narrative tools for analyzing and interpreting data (cf. Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2014; Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002; Polkinghorne, 1995). However, many of these narrative tools for conducting data analysis and interpretation did not align strongly with my third wave feminist theoretical orientation and my use of narrative. I then shifted to consider more specifically different feminist approaches to conducting data analysis and interpretation using narrative. Although feminists have devoted attention to sharing narrative accounts (cf. Bell, 2009; Cole & Stewart, 2012; Riessman, 1990; 2008), and examining

more broadly feminist knowledge production, feminist research praxis, and feminist issues in practice (cf. Hesse-Biber, 2012), I was surprised to discover that within these lively and fruitful feminist debates there appears to be limited discussions as to what tools, processes, and procedures feminist researchers can use, develop, or adapt to conduct data analysis and interpretation when using narrative. As such, Maynard (2009) pointed out that there “is a need for feminists to articulate more fully the ways in which their analyses of data proceed” (p. 143).

To address this gap, I decided to develop my own process for conducting data analysis and interpretation, being mindful and reflexive of how my process unfolded. More specifically, I identified three phases of analysis that I moved through during my initial process of analyzing and interpreting the data. Each of the phases are described below, however, because of the iterative nature of this process, these phases were not discrete and at times overlapped. Moreover, given the iterative and ongoing nature of my approach to analysis and interpretation, a fourth (albeit unexpected) analysis phase surfaced when I was writing up my findings. I have chosen to discuss this fourth phase in more detail under the section of this chapter called *Creating Dialogue-Based Vignettes*.

4.5.1 Phase One

Using an iterative process (cf. Hesse-Biber, 2007), I began analysis and interpretation of the data while I was collecting and transcribing the data. This iterative process of analysis is important, because although there is a distinction between gathering data and analyzing data, “these two acts are not really separable...they should be seen as part of the same process” (van Manen, 1997, p. 63) and should work to inform each other. Thus, engaging in ongoing analysis helps in better understanding the experiences shared during the interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2007). After each interview, I would take interview notes. I also spent time reflecting on the process in

my reflexive journal. These notes and reflections served as the precursor to the first phase of my analysis process. In this phase, while continuing to conduct interviews, I began transcribing each of the audio recordings from the interviews and taking brief memos in the margins as I transcribed, noting tone of voice, major ideas and stories, my own reflections on what was shared, and ideas for possible literature connections throughout each of the transcripts.

4.5.2 Phase Two

Once transcription and initial analysis of each of the interviews were complete, I printed the transcripts in hard copy and began working through each transcript one at a time, reading each transcript several times over and highlighting key ideas, dialogue, and larger narrative sections. While I was highlighting these parts of the transcript, I also recorded short descriptions of the key ideas, dialogue, and narrative sections in the margins as memos along with additional memos summarizing my own thoughts and ideas. Even when I was analyzing the first transcript, I remembered moments, ideas, and stories that had been shared by other women in their interviews and I began recognizing significant overlap and/or division between what participants had shared. I noted these ideas in the margins of the transcript in memos. After analyzing each of the transcripts in hard copy, I inputted all of the memos, including the ideas and descriptions I had written in the margins of the hard copy transcripts, into transcribed soft copy Microsoft Word documents for each interview.

After inputting this information into soft copy documents, I began to summarize the broader overarching thematic ideas presented in each of the interviews. To clarify, at this point I was not yet summarizing ideas across interviews. By summarizing these descriptions and memos, I was able to begin to pull out the common topic areas within each of the women's transcripts that had begun to emerge. In total, I ended up with 14 summary tables (12 for the one-

to-one reflexive, dyadic interviews and two for the interactive group interviews). Creating the summary tables made the data more manageable for me to work with, and in making the data more manageable, I was able to begin to see the commonalities and differences of experiences that ran throughout each of the interview transcripts.

4.5.3 Phase Three

Once I completed a summary analysis table for each of the one-to-one interviews and for the group interviews, I started the third phase of my analysis process that consisted of pulling the summarized ideas from each of the individual summary tables into a larger cross summary table to get a sense of the scope of the data I was working with and a better idea of the larger overarching thematic areas presented in the data. In this third phase of analysis, using the data summarized in the larger cross summary table, I identified 13 initial thematic areas: 1) pressures of singlehood, 2) dealing with pressures, 3) meeting men/women (e.g., online dating), 4) gender roles, 5) dating before and now, 6) telling dating stories to friends, 7) dating as both leisure and work, 8) sex and dating, 9) settling, 10) the importance of timing, luck, and fate to dating, 11) feeling it in your body, 12) pop culture and dating, and 13) reading signs. To be clear, by “thematic area”, I do not mean thematic or theme in the sense that all women experienced these thematic areas in the same way. Each of these thematic areas represented complexity and difference. For instance, under the thematic area of “meeting men/women,” some women described enjoying meeting men/women through online dating and were actively online dating. Other women felt they would rather meet someone organically and did not want to online date. Other women described previously trying online dating, but taking a break from it. As such, all women shared their experiences and perspectives around this thematic area – meeting men/women, but their experiences and perspectives were often different.

Once I reached this stage in my analysis process, I debriefed with Diana about these 13 thematic areas. She suggested that these initial thematic areas were more descriptive and that I should revisit the data to see if I could move towards a more analytic framework. With this advice, I went back to my analyzed data and decided to work with the complexity between the 13 themes. I was able to draw some connections between the 13 thematic areas (not all) and I pulled out the connected thematic areas into separate word documents (e.g., pressures of singlehood, dealing with pressures, and settling were three of the initial thematic areas that were drawn together under a larger thematic area entitled Gendered Pressures to Connect). I continued to build and fill out the thematic areas as I went, working with the information summarized in the overarching cross summary table. This part of the process took a lot of time, as I carefully worked with the data to determine links and connections. It is important to note that not all of the initial 13 thematic areas found their way together. Time and reflection did help to create connections between the initial thematic areas, but I did not want to force the data together. In turn, I ended up having to set aside one of these initial thematic areas (e.g., reading signs), that I plan to revisit in more depth after the completion of my dissertation.

When this third phase of analysis was completed, I was left with three larger thematic areas: 1) Gendered Pressures to Connect, 2) Gendered Modes of Connecting, and 3) Gendered Connections. The next step of my data analysis process was to fill out the data in these three thematic areas by copying direct quotes relating to the summarized descriptions and memos from the transcripts back into the analysis summary tables. As I went, I indicated in the analyzed transcripts what data I was copying out of the transcripts to help prevent overlap. I also used different colors for the group interviews versus the one-to-one interviews so that I could see if there were any differences between what the women shared in these different interviews

contexts. I did find some differences, particularly when the one-to-one interviews took place a few weeks after the group interview. Often women described how their engagement with singlehood had changed or shifted (e.g., looking online for a partner at first, and having met someone of interest), which I discuss in more detail below.

In addition, in this phase of the analysis process I identified five phases of singlehood that emerged in the interview data. These phases included: 1) women who are taking a break from dating to work on self, 2) women recently out of a long-term relationship, 3) women who are non-dating, but taking active steps to date, 4) women actively dating, and 5) women who have met someone they are interested in and/or see potential for a relationship with in the future. Many women reflected on their movement between different phases of singlehood at different times in their single lives. For example, one woman described in the one-to-one interview that she had recently (within six months) gotten out of a long-term relationship, but that she had also met someone of interest who she saw relationship potential with and was dating more regularly. In this way, many women identified with multiple phases of singlehood, often simultaneously (e.g., recently out of a long-term relationship, but also dating someone they were interested in). When considering movement between phases, it is also important to note that these phases are not set up in a linear sequence. Women talked about their movement between these phases as being non-sequential and sometimes quite static. For instance, one woman talked about being primarily a non-dater, but recognized that if she wanted a romantic relationship in the future, she would have to begin taking steps towards dating. But at the time of the interview, she was still figuring out what those steps would look like (see the section of this chapter titled Shaping Composite Characters for more information here). These different phases of singlehood

influenced how women perceived their singlehood, how women chose to engage with dating, and, ultimately, how I chose to represent the findings.

4.6 Messy Texts, Writing, and Representation

When considering how to represent my findings, I was and continue to be inspired by Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) who wrote about a messy, engaged process of writing and representing research texts. In line with this idea, Letherby (2003) noted, feminist research accounts often “acknowledge the ‘messiness’ of the research process and consider the detail of doing research and the relationship between this and the knowledge produced” (p. 6). This acknowledgment is important, given that it can free researchers to explore new forms of writing and representation that diverge from traditional structure and confinement (Richardson, 1997). With these ideas in mind, I wanted to represent the findings in a messy way that opens space for new ways of thinking and knowing to emerge and captures the complexity of the women’s stories and lived experiences with singlehood and dating. I also wanted to choose a representational form that is engaging, accessible, and hopefully not a “boring” text for the reader (Caulley, 2008; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). As such, given my third wave feminist theoretical orientation and my use of narrative, I chose to use Creative Analytic Practice (CAP) to represent the data in a way that avoids generalizing understandings or interpretations of the women’s stories and experiences, but that also provides an opportunity to capture the playful, humorous, awkward, tense, emotional, and engaging representations of their stories and lived experiences with singlehood and dating.

4.6.1 *Creative Analytic Practice*

The goals of CAP are to represent complex phenomenon in a way that is not reductionist, disconnected, and limited, but rather that provides an interpretation of experience that is alive,

fluid (Pinn, 2001), and inspired by the cultural contexts and social worlds where that experience was lived (Parry & Johnson, 2007). Moreover, as Parry and Johnson (2007) noted, “CAP is well suited for scholarship that seeks to contextualize lived experiences and address the complexity of life and leisure” (p. 122). Therefore, I wanted to allow the stories and experiences that emerged from the data to guide the representational process and demand the creative edge that was needed in writing these findings. Berbary (2011) explained,

It seems that CAP changes our expectations of research because rather than disconnect and reduce experiences, it instead encourages involvement, inspires curiosity, creates inclusivity, and constructs depictions that remain in the thoughts of readers in ways that traditional representations sometimes do not. (p. 195)

With these ideas in mind, Richardson (2003) outlined five criterion that should be used to judge CAP and questions to consider for each criterion:

1. Substantive contribution. To be successful, how does the text contribute to understandings of social life?
2. Aesthetic merit. Has the author successfully invited the reader to imagine different interpretations of the text? In addition, did the author of the text write the text in an artistically engaging way that captivated the reader’s attention throughout in a way that is not boring?
3. Reflexivity. Is the author transparent about how her/his own subjectivities influenced the interpretation of the data and the creation of the text? How does the researcher choose to share her/his own reflexive voice in the text process? Does the author provide justification for this choice and address ethical issues connected with the creation of the text?

4. Impact. What is the emotional and physical impact of the text on the reader? Does the text encourage the reader to ask new questions about the topic presented? Does the text inspire the reader to write and try out new research approaches?
5. Expression of reality. In addition to contributing to our understandings of social life, Richardson noted the reader must question whether the text is presenting those understandings in a way that captures a credible and embodied sense of lived experience.

With this criteria in mind, I used CAP to create five composite characters to represent the findings.

4.6.2 Shaping Composite Characters

My main motivation for using composite characters was to protect the anonymity of my participants. I recognized during my analysis process that even though I had assigned each participant a pseudonym and changed identifiers in the stories the participants shared to protect their anonymity, using this approach did not ensure anonymity for those participants who were my friends. I was concerned that even with these safeguards in place, there was still the potential for their specific stories to be identified. As such, I decided to create composite characters as a way to further safeguard their anonymity (cf. Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2012). To avoid reducing women's experiences, when I was creating the composite characters I embraced the complexity of their experiences by using their stories and experiences to shape multiple characters in messy ways. In turn, by creating messy characters, I felt confident it would not be possible to trace specific experiences and/or stories to one participant or composite character.

In addition to protecting anonymity, I also found the composite characters helpful to make the large amount of data that I was working to represent more manageable. Choosing to represent the women's experiences through composite characters gave me the flexibility to

engage women's voices and experiences through the different characters in dynamic and interactive ways through the use of dialogue-based vignettes (which I discuss next), an approach that would have been considerably more complex had I tried to engage all 12 voices.

To shape the composite characters, I drew on my analysis of the interview data, as I had previously noted that the women I interviewed identified with five different phases of singlehood. The five composite characters were created to reflect these five phases of singlehood and included: 1) Dawn (Taking a break from dating to work on self), 2) Olive (Recently out of a long-term relationship), 3) Ruth (Non-dater taking steps towards dating), 4) Sam (Active dater), and 5) Winnie (Dating someone I'm interested in). I decided to represent the characters in a way that also aligned with the substantive focus of my research. As such, I opted to use dating profiles to represent each composite character. After I made this decision, I signed myself up for online dating so that I could spend time browsing online dating websites/profiles to see how these sites structure dating profiles. In particular, I liked the format presented on *Match.com* (a popular online dating website used by a number of women in the study). I decided to pull ideas for structuring the dating profiles for the composite characters from this site. In this way, the profiles are loosely based on a dating profile you might find on an online dating website. Although most online dating websites strongly encourage single people to include photos as part of their online dating profile (as noted in the findings section), ethically, it was not possible to use photos for the character profiles. Also, I wanted the stories and experiences that the women shared to be what was emphasized in the dating profiles I created.

As I began shaping the dating profiles, I worked to make each of the profiles messy, weaving together stories and experiences shared by the women in the one-to-one interviews and the small group interviews. To create the dating profiles for Dawn and Olive, I used the data

from seven different women’s interviews for each. To create the dating profiles for Ruth, Sam, and Winnie I used data from six different women’s interviews for each. Each of the dating profiles created for each of the composite characters includes words directly from the interviews (identified in italics) and the words I inserted to enhance flow between the different ideas (identified in regular font).

As Berbary (2011) noted, composite characters are fictional, because they do not represent a single individual within a study, yet their makeup is grounded in the data and as such, are representative of the participants. More specifically, each of the five characters is intended to reflect diversity in age, background, dating history, religion, and engagement with dating. In this way, using composite characters provides the opportunity to illustrate the complexity and diversity amongst participants’ stories and experiences (Berbary, 2011), rather than reduce those stories and experiences. Yet, it is important to note the construction of these characters emerged from the data and my interpretation of it and are not intended to be an all-inclusive representation of singlehood and dating for women. Rather, these composite characters are used to provide a glimpse into the everyday lives and experiences of the women I interviewed. Each dating profile provides details about the character’s demographic information, what they are looking for in a romantic relationship, including age specifications, whether they are interested in having children, their previous dating experiences, and how they are choosing to engage in dating at the current time.

| |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Dawn - “Taking a break from dating to work on self”</i> |
| Relationship: Never married |
| Has kids: No |
| Wants kids: Maybe |
| Ethnicity: white/Caucasian |
| Faith: Not religious |
| Occupation: Lawyer |
| Looking for: Woman seeking man |

Age range: *Twenty-six to thirty-seven, but my ranges are written in pencil and not in permanent marker.*

Description – Write about you

I am a couple months shy of my thirtieth year. It has been almost two years that I have been single now, and not in a serious relationship. Although I haven't for the majority of my life been single. I've realized I keep starting relationships with the same person over and over again. I have gone from relationship to relationship to relationship and with every new relationship I became part of that new relationship. So that sort of started to make me think, I need to just step back and decide who it is that I am and what it is that I really want.

I have decided I am going to work through some things that I need to work through and not get involved in a relationship right now. It's all very cliché laden, and seems a little like "Eat, Pray, Love" stereotypical bullshit in a way, but part of why I am single is because I believe you can never be happy with someone if you are not happy alone and you can't love somebody until you love yourself.

I look at being single as an opportunity to work on myself, the relationships that I have with my friends, and having a good time. I look at singlehood in a positive way and as a time to make myself a better person. Right now, my personal finances aren't in great shape and I would like to focus more attention on my fitness and diet. I don't want to get into a relationship again at this point and have all of this stuff take a back seat for another couple of years, and then not really get anything done about it. I have been pretty static in other areas and I feel for some reason relationships seem to take up an enormous amount of my time. So I want to get my life on a better track, and be very sure I have a very strong relationship with myself before I get into another serious relationship.

Down the road it would be nice to have a connection and to have someone else and to have that intimacy. I hope whenever the next relationship comes around it will be a completely different kind of relationship, because I will have taken this time, and I won't be expecting the other person to do anything or fill any of my needs. I will be self-sufficient.

Olive - "Recently out of a long term relationship"

Relationship: Never married

Has kids: No

Wants kids: No

Ethnicity: white/Caucasian

Faith: Spiritual

Occupation: Therapist

Looking for: Woman seeking man or woman. *I am open to dating all people.*

Age range: *Thirty-five to forty-three.*

Description – Write about you

I am thirty-seven, and I am recently single. Well, going on eight months of being single. But it still feels pretty close to the wake of the breakup, because I was with a partner for three and a half years and I guess, I just kind of thought that I was going to be with him forever.

Seven months ago, it felt really hard because I lived with my partner for a really long time. It was almost like going through a divorce. We had a house together, we had routines and things like that, even though I wasn't happy in the end, it was still my life for a period of time, so for that to be gone all of a sudden. It was a major adjustment.

I'm working on being okay with being alone, because being alone doesn't mean you have to be lonely. I have my moments, like all people do, but I am finding less and less and less I am having lonely times and as much as there are the lows, it still doesn't make me want to not be single in this moment. Honestly, it's the most liberating thing to say, wow this relationship isn't what I need. What is it that I need? And who is it that I am? And what is it that I really want?

Single life is for me, at this point, a really important place to be. It has been nice to be honest. My life is quiet and I have space to do what I want and live how I want. When I am alone in my own space I find that I am always just doing what I need to do for me and what I want to do. My time is only my time. I don't have to apologize to anyone. I don't have to make excuses. I don't have to do things I don't want to do. I don't have to go places I don't want to go out of obligation to a partner.

To be single now is extraordinarily freeing. I am experiencing a freedom that I have never had in my adult life, for any sustained amount of time anyway and so I am relishing that freedom. I don't feel like I have responsibility for anyone else's feelings and I think that is a very big part of the feeling of freedom. I only have myself to take care of and I don't feel selfish about it at all.

Sometimes I think about relationships in the future. I think about what a relationship has to look like. I think sometimes about what if I did get into a relationship with a man, but I still wanted to be exploring this other part of myself who is open to having an intimate relationship with women. But I still think that I will need a space of my own for quite a while because I know I am not quite there, whatever there is, or whatever that means. I am not quite ready to dive back into the dating or making connections world full-force. I think that when I am ready, it will just happen. But I do feel like I am starting to move into readiness.

Ruth - "Non-dater taking steps towards dating"

Relationship: Never married

Has kids: No

Wants kids: Yes

Ethnicity: white/Caucasian

Faith: Christian

Occupation: I work in the finance industry

Looking for: Woman seeking man

Age range: *I am looking for someone twenty-two to thirty-three.*

Description – Write about you

I am a twenty-seven year old single woman. My perspective on dating is a little bit different because I am Christian, and most Christian's date to get married. So I'm a big believer of

dating in the long-term so whether it is marriage minded, or just to have a serious relationship with someone.

With that said, I have non-dating experience primarily. My last actual relationship was in high school so I am pretty perpetually single. Some single friends have said they get really bummed out about being single. And I am so chronically single, that I am just like, oh, this is my life. It is pretty normal. And in being single for as long as I have been, I am very independent. So I think that takes a lot of the kind of rush out of it. It is not conscious. I am not frantic about finding someone because I am okay by myself. I don't go home at night and worry that I am single. I have liked being single for a long time. But I have also gotten so comfortable being single, that I haven't been looking for years and years. So I recognize that if I want a relationship, I need to start being more open to the possibility of dating.

The problem is that I am not super adventurous and I don't want to have to take chances. I have said many times, because I am just a homebody, why can't there just be a really awesome guy in my apartment while I am in sweatpants watching TV? But no one is just going to come to my house and hangout with me. If I sit around and do nothing, then I am just going to be single my whole life and if I want that element in my life, then I need to do something about it. I am at that point where I could be single still in ten years. So dating is something I think I need to move towards, because I want to share my life with somebody and I really, really want kids. So I should probably be thinking about dating a whole lot more and maybe I should take a more forward approach and seek people out, and not be so laissez faire.

Sam – “Active dater”

Relationship: Never married

Has kids: No

Wants kids: Yes

Ethnicity: white/Caucasian

Faith: Not religious

Occupation: Teacher

Looking for: Woman seeking man

Age range: *My brother is four years younger than me and my brother is an idiot. So I would struggle to date a guy who is my brother's age or younger. I would also go ten years older.*

Description – Write about you

I am a thirty-one year old single woman. I love single life. I have been single for two and a half years and I have been in short term relationships since then. I have my own place and I have accomplished a lot in my life already, and I am happy with all of those things. Now I am at the point where I am ready to bring someone into my life. Whereas I don't think I was ready before. I had a lot I wanted to accomplish still.

I go on a date every month, or every couple of months. Dating over the last year I have probably been on maybe around ten dates. I started by asking people out that I thought were attractive. To me, it's about enjoying the process. It is just nice to enjoy meeting people and who knows, because it is important that you get out there often. You can't never date and then expect the one time you go on a date, that is going to be the one. You need to date a bunch of

dummies or weirdoes first, to find one who's not a dummy or a weirdo. Or who is a dummy and a weirdo, but is the right dummy and weirdo for you

I would say a good first date is pretty casual. Grab a dinner and drink and see if there is any sort of connection there. I am a person who can make conversation with a blank piece of paper, so I find that first dates are generally quite good as long as the conversation is good.

I don't feel there is something wrong with me or that there is some kind of void. But I do think that there is another part that could really enrich my life. So, I would like to have that. I guess the thing is too nowadays, I'd be happy being in a committed relationship. I don't think I need to be married. I mean, maybe someday I will come to that, but I will cross that road when I get there. I don't feel a passion to be married to someone.

Winnie- "Dating someone I'm interested in"

Relationship: Never married

Has kids: No

Wants kids: Yes

Ethnicity: white/Caucasian

Faith: I'll tell you later

Occupation: Student

Looking for: Woman seeking man

Age Range: *I'm not too caught up in age. I prefer to think it is about stage not age. If they are where I am at, then they are where I am at.*

Description - Write about you

I am a thirty year old single woman. I've spent the vast majority of my life in relationships. Since I was seventeen I have probably been single for less than a year or two. So in terms of "dating" in a traditional sense, I haven't dated casually a lot to be honest, because I'm a big believer of dating for the long-term. I don't want to date just to date anymore. Now, I'll date if there is that potential.

In part, I don't know if I am super comfortable being by myself and when I am single I have all of this extra time, so I can devote it to expanding my social circles, exploring new people, and making an effort to put myself out there. It doesn't feel like a time drainer to me. It actually feels like I have way more time so when I'm single and I can fill it with being in new situations.

I met someone that I have been dating for the last month. We met on eHarmony and then we started chatting on Facebook and he asked me out on a date. For our first date, we just met up on the beach and we had typical first date conversation: what do you do for a living? What do you like? That sort of basic stuff. He was funny. We had a lot in common, like superficial pop culture stuff. "I love this movie." "Me too!" "I like this show." "Me too." He is super easy, like super open, non-judgmental. And I could just tell right off the bat that he was my type of person.

We have seen each other once or twice a week since then and we are now at the stage of seeing each other every couple of days. We've had some sleepovers. I have met a couple of his friends and he has met a couple of my friends. But we haven't met each other's families. More than anyone I have dated before I find we are on the same kind of level with things. And he's now fairly often saying –I can see some potential of this growing into something. So it is those types of pieces where you are like, okay, we are pretty much on the same page. And although we haven't had a conversation yet, we are kind of evolving into those relationship roles. So I think it is progressing really naturally. It's a good pace, because it can get screwed up if it goes in too steep of a gradient. We are at a plateau right now, and I am okay with this really slow thing that is already going on. We could ride this out for a couple of weeks or months and it would be good and normal. But I think we need to have that conversation eventually.

4.6.3 Creating Dialogue-Based Vignettes

When I was considering how to best represent the three thematic areas using the composite characters I had created, I initially felt stumped with what creative approach to take. I did quite a bit of reading relating to arts-based research (cf. Caulley, 2008; Leavy, 2012; Barone & Eisner, 2012), in particular, exploring the fiction-non-fiction divide inspired by feminist writers such as Leavy (2012). I considered weaving the experiences and stories of the women in this study together, using a novel format, and creating different chapters to represent each of the different thematic areas. I held onto this idea for a number of months, turning it over in my head, brainstorming how I might make all the pieces of my analysis fit together. I spent a great amount of time trying to find a creative breakthrough for using a novel format, before abandoning the idea, realizing that it did not align with my theoretical and methodological orientation. Instead, I began reflecting on my experiences interviewing each of the women in the different interview contexts and I recognized that the women I interviewed talked about the importance of connecting with other women about their experiences with singlehood and dating. In particular, women shared how they talked with other women (often single women) as a way to negotiate and navigate their own experiences with singlehood and dating. Moreover, drawing on my own experiences as a single woman and how I would talk with my single girlfriends about dating, I

recognized that we often embedded stories and discussions of singlehood and dating within our larger conversations, often bouncing from topic to topic in no linear or cohesive way. These types of unstructured conversations amongst women were also evident in each of the interview contexts. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, at times, the unstructured nature of the interviews, particularly the interactive, small group interviews, meant that the conversation would move away from the research topic. This initial point of trepidation in the interactive group interviews (that I noted before), ended up being an important point of inspiration for representing my findings using CAP.

I decided to draw inspiration from the interview texts themselves and I began thinking about how I could represent the women's experiences and stories in a way that was representative and expressive of their lived experiences (one of the criterion Richardson outlined as an important consideration when researchers are using CAP to depict their findings). I also wanted to represent the women's experiences in a way that was guided by my use of narrative and its focus on embracing the multiplicity of truths in stories and that views women's stories as non-linear, layered, complex, messy, and undone. Also in line with CAP, I wanted to engage in an approach to representing the findings that was performative. As Schwandt (2007) explained,

In the case of *performance texts* (experimental texts that are dialogical, multivoiced, etc.) or *performance art*, the term signals a different genre or form of telling, reporting, or portraying. As an event or act, a performance belies the notion of a 'real' experience or performance; performance texts or art are often ironic in that they undercut the meanings of a performance as complete, certain, perfect. Presence and reproduction, hallmarks of a 'real' performance, are replaced by experience and representation in a performance text. (p. 223)

With these ideas in mind, I opted to rely entirely on dialogue to shape my representation of the findings. I remembered Diana telling me one of the best ways to show, rather than tell, is to use dialogue in your creative representations. Moreover, including conversations into representations has been described as a great way to capture the reader's attention and to get them engaged in the writing (another key criterion of CAP) (Caulley, 2008). Qualitative writing, as Caulley (2008) described, without human interaction can be boring to read.

I decided to use *dialogue-based vignettes* to represent the women's experiences and stories as a performative, conversational, and engaged form of representation. Dialogue-based vignettes is my own terminology for this form of representation. It is inspired by the data, but also by the work of other researchers who have infused dialogue into their creative representations in ways that meaningfully impacted how I, as the reader, read, engaged with, and learned from their research texts (cf. Berbary, 2011; Bochner, 2012; Parry & Glover, 2011). In addition, it was a conscious choice to call these representations dialogue-based vignettes. The vignettes weave together and layer women's stories, but they do not promise cohesive and complete stories in and of themselves. Rather vignettes provide an evocative description of a situation, experience, or story. In this way, there is no affirmative end or beginning to the vignettes. Rather, the reader is invited into the dialogue in mid-conversation, to eavesdrop in a sense, and then must exit the conversation prior to its completion. I like the idea of representing the data in this way, with messy, un-kept ends, rather than attempting to create cohesion or to tie up all of the ends of the conversation, as is often the case with more traditional approaches to narrative. Women's conversations, including their use of storytelling in those conversations, is very rarely cohesive and linear and cannot be packaged neatly into a linear structure (with a beginning, middle, and end) that so often characterizes narrative representations. There are

always tangents and stories that carry women's conversations in multiple directions. Stories are started, but in some cases never finished. In this way, I find this form of representation appreciates and honors the messiness and complexity of the data and is in line with my methodological use of narrative. In addition, the choice to represent the data through dialogue-based vignettes was also a practical one – I think this approach will be easier to separate for future publications. I started creating the dialogue-based vignettes looking first at the Gendered Pressures to Connect thematic area summary table with quotes, followed by the Gendered Modes of Connecting and Gendered Connections thematic area summary tables. This is where the fourth phase of my analysis process began.

4.6.3. 1 Phase Four

Beginning with the Gendered Pressures to Connect thematic area, I first removed all of the short form descriptions from this summary table. I was left with just the quotes from this thematic area and a number of different sub-thematic ideas under this larger thematic area. For instance, dealing with pressures and settling (two of the original 13 thematic areas identified in Phase 3 of my analysis process) became two subthemes under this larger thematic area. I began reviewing the data under this larger thematic area looking for subthemes. When I was done, I had 14 different subthemes for the Gendered Pressures to Connect thematic area. I then repeated this process for the other two thematic areas: Gendered Modes of Connecting and Gendered Connections and I ended up with 13 and 15 subthemes for each of these thematic areas respectively.

I then went back to the group interviews to pull out portions of those conversations that related to the different subthemes for each of the thematic areas. For many of the subthemes, I pulled out portions of the conversation from the group interview to create a loose structure that

would begin to shape each of the dialogue-based vignettes under the larger thematic area. This approach is similar to a technique Berbary (2011) described using to shape dialogue for her poststructural feminist, ethnographic screenplay, where she pulled developed narrative sections directly from her research notes. After I had pulled out these sections of dialogue from the group interviews, I cross-referenced these quotes with the quotes I had already pulled out from the group interviews as part of the third phase of my analysis process to ensure I did not have overlap. I then began to weave in the different quotes from each of the individual and group interviews summarized in the summary table for this thematic area to fill out the conversation for each of the dialogue-based vignettes. For each of these vignettes, I also included specific actions that I had remembered happening in the interviews and that I had noted in the transcripts. These actions are represented in the dialogue-based vignettes in square brackets.

I did include my voice in the creation of the vignettes to help improve transitions between the stories and experiences that the women shared and to help improve the overall flow of the vignettes. My voice and my words are represented in the dialogue-based vignettes as regular font, whereas the parts of the dialogue that were pulled directly from the transcripts are italicized, to maintain consistency in the textual representation from the representation of the composite characters. Given that I shared my own reflections and experiences in the interview space, my voice is also included as part of several composite characters, but the pieces of my story that I pulled from the interview transcripts are also italicized. I did not want to enter the story as an “I”, given that it can be distracting and annoying for the reader (Gerard, 2001). Moreover, I wanted the women’s stories who participated in the study to take center stage.

In addition, I also cleaned up the transcripts when creating the dialogue-based vignettes, removing excessive use of words and fillers, such as “like” and “um.” I made this decision based

on the feedback I was given from several women who felt uncomfortable with how frequently they had used these words and fillers in their interviews. But I also wanted to keep many of these words and fillers in the vignettes, because they represent the women's authentic speech and they were helpful when constructing transitions between different ideas and experiences within different vignettes.

Once I finished creating each of the dialogue-based vignettes, I began assigning composite characters to each section of the dialogue. When I was going through the process of making these assignments, I was very careful to ensure that I kept the description I had made of each of the composite characters in mind. After I had assigned the characters to the dialogue, I brought up each of their dialogue sections separately by using the "find" tool in Microsoft Word. Reading through each of the composite character's dialogue sections separately allowed me to verify the data assigned to each composite character was consistent throughout each of the larger thematic areas and connected with the composite character created.

After creating the composite characters and dialogue-based vignettes, I shared the representations of the data with each of the women who participated in the study to get their feedback and opinions. Including participants in the process of data analysis and interpretation, as DeVault and Gross (2012) explained, is not about making sure the researcher got it right. Asking participants for feedback about analysis and representation is rooted in a politics of representation (DeVault & Gross, 2012) that helps to mitigate the power imbalances between researcher and research participants (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Moreover, as Chase (2011) explained, because researchers using narrative, "do not know in advance exactly how they will use the narratives they collect, they should return to narrators to inform them – and ask again for

permission to use their stories” (p. 424). I received the following feedback from the women who participated in the interviews after reading the findings chapter:

“Thanks for this - looks awesome! Everything looks really great, and I have no concerns about anonymity or anything.”

“This is honestly brilliant. I love how you were able to interweave the various interviews into a dialogue that sounded like a real conversation between close friends. I have no comments, or concerns. Congrats Jan! This was really a good read.”

“Oh man I had a good laugh. And I would also like to say well done Janet! Seriously, it's fun to read the title of the vignettes and really see the themes come through. Can't wait to read the discussion.”

“I've read through everything...and I am amazed at the way you weave! Wow! So cool. So creative. I love the composite characters and the dating profile format you've used to represent them...so appropriate! They're complex, purposefully inconsistent and paradoxical...and alive and engaging...Your ability to blend is spectacular.”

“The final findings chapter is amazing, Janet. You've done so much to ensure your participants were represented in a genuine way. I feel the way you've honoured all of us as a collective and I feel closer to the others because of it. We are so fierce! I see our diversity and love the way you've celebrated that through the composite characters and the unfolding of the dialogue. And it's fun, it's bright, it's easy and fluid...I just loved it Janet. Thank you for sharing it with me and thank you for the opportunity to have been a part of it.”

“Thanks for sending, Janet. I have read through part of it and am having a good laugh - definitely interesting! I don't think I will have any comments, but thank you again for asking.”

It is important to note, although I made a concerted effort to include the women in this process and to use their stories, perspectives, and words in shaping these dialogue-based vignettes, I acknowledge that my choice for representing the findings is based on my interpretation of the data and that interpretation represents one interpretation of many. In addition, my interpretation is based on the lives of 12 women, not all women, and as such, is not intended to provide a generalizable depiction of women's lived experience with singlehood and dating. Rather, this interpretation is intended to represent a complex and messy depiction of the experiences the women I interviewed so graciously and openly agreed to share with me, a depiction that hopefully inspires for readers of this text, new insights, understandings, and ways of knowing.

5.0 Findings

As noted in Chapter 4, the women I interviewed talked about the importance of connecting with friends about their experiences and stories with singlehood and dating. Many women talked about the importance of connecting with their single girlfriends, more specifically. I share the following vignette as an introduction to this chapter, to illustrate why I have chosen to represent the findings through the use of dialogue-based vignettes. This dialogue based vignette is titled: *It's like that Sisterhood*.

SAM: At the end of the date, *we just made out, but he was like biting me and then I was talking to my friend, and she was like, no this is what guy's do now. And I thought - this is what guys do now - they bite?*

OLIVE: *I think that was the first online dating story you ever told me. And I was like...*

DAWN: *Tell me more, tell me more, tell me more!*

OLIVE: *Ya, tell me more, tell me more, slash I am never doing this.*

DAWN: *That is a wild story.*

RUTH: *Ya, I find hearing Sam's experiences internet dating both terrifying and hilarious, but mostly terrifying.*

(laughter)

SAM: *It was unpleasant, but I laughed about it and then told everyone. It is a great party story.*

DAWN: *A good opportunity for chuckles for sure.*

WINNIE: *And I'd say even when a date goes badly, at least I come out of it with an experience or a story.*

SAM: *I agree. I think that the stories are really important.*

WINNIE: *And you end up laughing about them for months and years with your girlfriends.*

DAWN: *Agreed. I think too part of having these horror stories that are hilarious, is that they are stories other single women can relate to.*

WINNIE: *And especially with dating or connecting, it can be a real stress reliever to get someone else's perspective. Or to hear your friend say, that is not so bad or that is not a big deal or you didn't screw up or that is hilarious.*

RUTH: Totally. *Validation and affirmation* and that reminder that most of the time things we do are really human things and that it's okay.

OLIVE: *I think it's also a way to bond. And um, you know, particularly the funny ones, or the crazy ones or the disappointing ones are the best way to bond, because it gives you this sense that we're all just in this together and crazy things happen in navigating this single world, and it's okay. It happens to all of us.*

DAWN: *Ya, I think you can really delve into that stuff with your single friends and swap stories.*

RUTH: *It's like that sisterhood.*

Keeping the ideas presented in this vignette in mind, specifically the importance women placed on sharing their stories together with other women, often single women, in this chapter I present three larger thematic areas: Gendered Pressures to Connect, Gendered Modes of Connecting, and Gendered Connections through the use of 13-15 dialogue-based vignettes that I have written for each. Each of the vignettes is presented in the same dialogue based format as the vignette above and includes the five composite characters engaged in conversation. The dialogue-based vignettes that comprise each thematic area, although related, are not intended to be taken as a whole and as such do not have to be read in succession. Yet, given that there is some overlap between each thematic area, I encourage the reader to read all of the vignettes for each thematic area together (regardless of order). In addition, each vignette has been given a different title that is based on the content provided in that specific vignette. In many cases, the titles are posed as questions or snippets of the subsequent conversation between the composite characters and are intended to hint at what each of the vignettes is about to provoke interest and curiosity in the text (Caulley, 2008).

By using dialogue-based vignettes, I aim to *show* the women's stories and experiences, by bringing the reader into the vignettes. Rather than *tell* the reader how to interpret the vignettes, I have decided to wait and *share* my feminist interpretation of the vignettes in Chapter 6, the discussion chapter. With that said, I urge readers to be willing to take up the vignettes in

their own way as they read through each. Perhaps the vignettes will strongly resonate with the reader's past or current experiences. Perhaps the reader will only see themselves in parts or moments of the vignettes. Perhaps the vignettes will not resonate with the reader's experiences at all. All of these reverberations of the vignettes in the reader's mind and body are okay. I offer them as a way to start a conversation about commonalities, complexities, tensions, and diversities of experiences of singlehood and dating. It is through the reader's engagement with the dialogue-based vignettes that it becomes possible to begin to carve out different or alternative interpretations of experiences wherein complexity and diversity can be revealed.

5.1 Gendered Pressures to Connect

The following series of dialogue-based vignettes highlight the breadth of pressures women who are single can experience in their everyday lives. Although there was much overlap between these pressures and many women's experiences, not all of the women experienced the same pressures, in the same ways. Women in the study talked about feeling pressures from various social channels (e.g., family, friends, work, media, etc.) related to the importance of being coupled. Many women also talked about how the pressures they experienced to be coupled were tied to pressures about family and having biological children. Several women in the study also talked about the personal pressures they placed on themselves because of their single status. These pressures impacted how women experienced singlehood and in turn how they chose to engage in dating.

5.1.1 It's not like we are having an Orgy– We're Eating Dinner

OLIVE: I find the biggest pressure is married friends. Many of my coupled friends kind of feel uncomfortable that I'm single. Like they feel badly or that I'm not happy.

WINNIE: Mine too. For me it happened totally when my friends started having kids. My single status became something that needed to be fixed.

RUTH: *Ya, I find a lot of my friends are at the newly married stage or something. So it is still like they are glorifying that is the goal. So it definitely feels like, why haven't you done this?*

DAWN: *And if you haven't, they ask - do you want to meet my friend?*

WINNIE: *Or insist they have the perfect person for you!*

SAM: *Ya, absolutely.*

WINNIE: *And you're like, no I don't.*

DAWN: *People either want to set you up with somebody so that you have a pair or when you are dating someone, invite you out way more than when you are not dating someone, which I am noticing with my coupled friends. Because I feel people in couples are more comfortable hanging out with other couples. So it is like they think I am going to be uncomfortable. But I'm fine being the third wheel.*

OLIVE: *Ya, it is not like you are having an orgy. You are just eating dinner together.*

(laughter)

SAM: *Most of the people that I know who are in relationships are pretty cool and know who they are within their relationship and outside. So ya, I haven't had that experience with my coupled friends. I think I am pretty lucky to be surrounded by a number of friends that don't care. It is never an issue. They love me for just who I am and think that I am awesome. Some of my friends are single. I have friends who have kids. I have friends that are married, and they don't place their own personal value on their relationship or status. Um, I think too because I have gone through a lot of school, I have a lot of professional friends who are still single at thirty.*

DAWN: *You're lucky! I find a lot of friends that are in relationships just feel like, they kind of don't necessarily pity you, but maybe just don't even remember what it is like to be single. Because once you are in a relationship it is so easy to just get back into that mode and forget about why you didn't even like dating in the first place.*

WINNIE: *Ya, it's really unfortunate. I have a friend, and she has never really dated, and she is totally comfortable being a single female. She didn't have a good experience with her dad. She grew up with her mom and her sister, who are also both single, and she is super happy. And all of my other friends are so critical about that – and talk about it all the time – I wonder if she'll find someone? And it is like - she doesn't want someone, so she is probably not going to find someone. And if she does, and that makes her happy, but if she doesn't, are you really going to judge her? So you hear that from them, and it is like, what are they saying about me? And they are some of the most non-judgmental people and even they are getting pulled into that kind of belief system, which I think is so wrong.*

OLIVE: *I don't think there is much support for the single female.*

WINNIE: *Ya, I have a big issue with that. And I freaked out on someone because I was like if you feel sorry for me because I am single, or you look down on me at all because of that, we can't be friends.*

DAWN: *I think ya, if you are with people that only want to talk about babies and marriage and white picket fences then I can't engage. I have nothing to contribute. So ya, like, if they are only focusing on that, and asking me why I don't have it, or judging me for not having it, I am not going to feel good about it. So I also just tend to not keep those people in my life.*

SAM: *I think as you get older, the friends you have are the ones who truly care about you, the ones that really support you, whether you are single, married or divorced, or whatever. Why do they care?*

OLIVE: *Exactly. It is important to have really strong circles of women who are your close friends that are amazing and supportive.*

5.1.2 Why don't you have a Boyfriend?

DAWN: *The thing that I find exhausting about singlehood is dealing with other people's perceptions of being single. It drives me crazy.*

WINNIE: *Ya, eighty percent of it, well in my mind as to why I'm dating is because I like being in a couple and I get stuff out of that. But there is probably twenty percent that I would feel more comfortable, and I think my friends would be more accepting, if I was with someone else. You know what I mean? And I think that is unfortunate and it pulls at every feminist tendency I have, but still.*

DAWN: *And just the little comments and questions.*

SAM: *That increase like exponentially as you get older as to why you are single.*

RUTH: *Why don't you have a boyfriend?*

WINNIE: *Ya, every time you see someone, oh are you dating anyone?*

SAM: *That question I find irritating from people who are not my friends, which I mean, maybe they are hopeful or whatever for you, but I find that question I get asked it daily, not daily, but maybe multiple times a week. So when the same person keeps asking you, it is kind of annoying.*

RUTH: *Ya, like it is not like you ask someone who is married – are you still married?*

WINNIE: *And maybe that is not the first conversation we need to have because there is so much more to my life than my dating status. I can't help the feeling of defensiveness I get when I hear those same questions over and over. Like you somehow have to defend the fact that there is nothing wrong with you, right?*

DAWN: *Right! People ask me lots of questions of why not or tell me, you know what your problem is, or ask - have you been doing this? Like I am a problem to solve. So they make me feel like there is something wrong with me or that I am not trying hard enough, or that me alone is not enough or the way I have chosen to live my life is wrong. That I should be actively participating in my future happiness, finding my future partner and this is something that I should be doing and be focused on and it can resonate for a little while.*

SAM: *Ya, because even if you are dating someone, you don't necessarily want to share that with someone you don't know very well. Um, I mean I think people do it out of interest in your life, and not out of bad motives, but it is kind of like people ask – do you want kids? And are you getting married soon? All those questions, there is no bad intent, but they come across badly.*

RUTH: *I get that often. So oftentimes people will be like, oh Ruth, why don't you have a boyfriend? I can't believe you don't have a boyfriend. It is like – ugh, stop asking me!! It is a personal question, so personal.*

WINNIE: *And often times it's one of those first five questions that someone asks about. How long have you been working here? Where do you live? Oh, are you seeing somebody? So it's probably the third question that people would ask you.*

DAWN: *I think most people mean the things they say with positivity and they say it because they really like you and stuff, but when they ask you - how are you single? What am I supposed to say to that? I don't really know what my answer to that is supposed to be. I don't know, you tell me. Let's have that as an exercise.*

OLIVE: *I know! I think someone needs a good response to that question, to all of these annoying questions. But I haven't thought of a good response yet.*

RUTH: *I find it's different in different spheres of your life. So in business it is often an ice breaker. You get asked it more frequently I would say than in normal social life. I am totally guilty of doing it. Like if you meet someone and you don't really know them, you are like so what do you do? Where do you work? Blah, blah, blah, oh are you married? Do you have kids? Um, you are often in a group kind of situation, so it's often just um, nope, no, I'm single I don't have any kids and I am not married. How about you? And then it just moves on. I don't find in a business setting anyone tends to dwell on it.*

WINNIE: *What I notice is that when I am single, people are always saying - oh you have no problem meeting men. It is like - oh don't worry. And it is like I am imminently looking for that when I break up with someone and I am not. I am really happy to be single since I have been in relationships this much. Like it is actually really awesome, and I love it. And I am not in a rush in any case. And then to hear that, it is like, ya, why are you trying to reassure me?*

5.1.3 Thank God People don't do Single Tables Anymore

RUTH: *I think another thing is sometimes in social situations, you know you are going to something at work or you are invited to something and it is all couples and you are the only single one. It's like well, you know, I don't really feel like going to this party at this person's house because it's a bunch of couples. It's awkward to be the one going by yourself sometimes.*

DAWN: *But I hate those work events, where you're like, well, should I bring a date? Because in the professional world being in a couple is expected and you go to a lot of events with people who have spouses.*

SAM: *And I think a lot of the older generation don't quite understand why someone wouldn't be married. Why haven't you followed traditional steps?*

DAWN: *Ya, it's kind of Mad Men-esque almost.*

SAM: *And so if you don't bring someone they are like – "oh and you couldn't find a date." No, I could just find someone to bring here, but what if I just want to come on my own? I am going to have more fun that way. I don't think there is much support for that.*

RUTH: *And I think that there are pressures I put on myself as well. There are often times where I am invited to something social, like not with my close friends, but maybe for a work party or whatever, and it is always - barbeque at so and so's house, spouses and children welcome. And everybody goes to those things with their boyfriend or with their spouse. And it is just, I don't think it would be awkward, but in my mind I have just made it into this thing where like, ugh, I don't want to go by myself, my own kind of anxiety around that. If I had someone to go with, it would be better. And maybe I would bring a girlfriend, but people don't bring their girlfriends, they bring their spouses or significant others, right?*

DAWN: *It's true.*

RUTH: *So I just sometimes don't go to things because I am like, ugh it would be awkward if I just showed up by myself.*

DAWN: *Weddings are hard too, because you are in a vulnerable position surrounded by love, which is lovely, because presumably you are at the wedding because they are people you know and love. But I feel like there is more of a focus or more conversational pieces around things like weddings that make you feel more single.*

RUTH: *I had one friend, and like I totally don't fault him for this at all, um, he got married this summer and so he called me and said, "Hey we are doing invitations." Side note: They are just starting out their lives and they don't have a lot of money. "We are really trying to keep low numbers and stuff, so I didn't give you a plus one and if there is anyone you want to bring, like let me know." Which I thought was really sweet, where he did acknowledge that maybe I didn't want to go alone. So I said, "No, don't worry." But I was just like wow! I don't even get plus a one anymore.*

(laughter)

RUTH: *Thank goodness I don't think people do single tables anymore.*

SAM: *No kidding, and it is not only at wedding season. I found last Christmas I was like okay, I am single. I feel like it has more of an impact on me during specific times, I guess, that are related to family or being together with people or things like that.*

RUTH: *I do think it can compound, like, oh, I am not going to have this anytime soon. [Sad face].*

(laughter)

5.1.4 Being so Brave

DAWN: *I feel a lot more pressured then definitely I did when I was young and free.*

WINNIE: *It seems like there is a critical age where it goes from dating and having fun, meeting people and you shouldn't commit yourself, to okay you need to settle down. You need to figure it out. You know what I mean? And that expectation in society, with your friends, it is crazy how it happens all of a sudden.*

DAWN: *Ya, I am just reflecting on it and when you are in school and you are kind of in your early twenties and everyone is like, how is school? That is the first question. And now it is literally - how is your partner? And are you seeing anyone? It is this shift of what defines you and what is important to other people changes.*

OLIVE: *Ya, like you shouldn't get in a relationship, it is too soon. But then within a year's time, or something, now you need to be in a relationship. It is like what happened to that? Why did it change? Why is there this new expectation as you get older?*

RUTH: *And I think now that I am older, there is that pressure of like you know, you are twenty-seven, like people your age get married. So like, when you are dating now, it is not just about hanging out with someone.*

WINNIE: *It is kind of, there is an ultimate end. Ya, so it's definitely a lot more serious. There is kind of more expectations about where things lead so.*

DAWN: *I don't know, it's crazy the pressure.*

WINNIE: *Definitely. As you get older those external voices become stronger and have more of a pull on you. Everyone has more to say. It's like, okay, so you haven't figured it out yet, so you need to really hear me. Do you know what I mean?*

RUTH: *And clearly you are doing something wrong, right? Because you should have had this all figured out by now and everybody else is married. So clearly this is my fault and something is wrong with me and what have I done.*

SAM: *Or I am so old, I am willing to just jump into anything because I am desperate now. Fuck that!*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *As we all know, my ex, he's really nice, and sweet, and nothing went horribly wrong in the relationship except that it wasn't working anymore. And it just wasn't right. And, not with any of my close friends, but I had conversations with people after who were just like, I don't get it.*

RUTH: *Why would you leave it?*

OLIVE: *Why would you leave? He's nice. He has a job.*

SAM: *It doesn't matter.*

OLIVE: *Ya, it's insane for some people that I would choose being single. Feeling like the relationship wasn't enough just isn't a legit enough reason. And sort of, I don't know how I feel*

about this, I don't know if anyone has said this to you, but I get told a lot that I am really brave for ending the relationship.

SAM: *I've also gotten emails that say that too.*

OLIVE: *And part of me is like I appreciate that you appreciate it was hard to do and that you recognize, you know, that it was a big move and it was difficult, but at the same time I'm not beating type one diabetes (pronounced di-a-bee-tis) and like raising my kids as a single parent.*

(laughter)

RUTH: *I hate when you say diabetes like that.*

OLIVE: *Hahaha, diabetes (pronounced di-a-bee-tis).*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *I mean I would say to someone, you're brave and not mean it as in you're brave to be single. Just mean it like ending a relationship is hard to do, because a lot of people don't do that.*

OLIVE: *So that's the thing, I don't know. I have just noticed that it is something people say to me a lot about the situation and I am just kind of like, is it brave? Or is it sad that it is brave?*

RUTH: *To leave is the brave part. To be on your own is a choice you make.*

OLIVE: *Right, and maybe that is what it means.*

5.1.5 My Mom Calls my Cat her Granddaughter

SAM: *I think family also puts a lot more pressure on you as you get older.*

WINNIE: *I don't feel that familial pressure. My parents are married and stuff, but my family as a whole is not super traditional. So I don't think there is that pressure there for me. My brother is married, but my sister is not. So they don't really care either way.*

RUTH: *Mine too. Not since I was a teenager have I brought anyone around my family. I think it is just status quo.*

WINNIE: *Ya, it is something that they are used to and don't really ask me about and I don't really offer. It is nice. It is not an issue. It's not like - are you seeing anybody? You should get out there. Which maybe it should be, but I don't have to deal with it on a familial level, which is nice.*

SAM: *Really? I have an aunt who is always asking me what is wrong with me. She even came up to me at my grandmother's funeral and was like, "I can't help but notice that you are the only one that came here alone."*

DAWN: *Oh my god!*

SAM: *Um, ya, it is terrible. And my cousin is also the worst. She is very much that person who has to be the center of attention for everything and now that she is pregnant, everything is about*

her pregnancy and she can't have a conversation. And I'm not meaning to hate on pregnant women, because my other cousin is pregnant as well, and she is like I am still a person. She can still have conversations about others things than being pregnant.

WINNIE: *[Belly rub action].*

SAM: Haha, exactly. *She is always rubbing her belly. She is also one of those people that waits until she gets you alone, so she can belly rub and ask: "Do you hope to have children someday?" In my head, I'm like thanks for asking you smart bitch. Go fuck yourself.*

(laughter) [everyone belly rubs and laughs]

SAM: *Luckily my parents are pretty cool. In particular, my mom has backed off quite a bit. Whenever I was dating my last boyfriend, she would say things like about when we would get married and stuff like that. But she doesn't do the whole – are you seeing anyone? Neither does my dad. They don't do that because they know that I will just snap. But they do inadvertently say things, like I have a couple of other cousins who are my age who are single, and so there are always the questions of - what is wrong with them? And at the dinner table, a while ago, my dad was like, "so like what is the deal with Mark. Why doesn't he have a girlfriend? Is he gay?" No Dad, he is younger than me and he is straight. What are you trying to say? Like, you know, think about it. Just, just think. Cause he wasn't trying to be mean, he just wasn't using his brain.*

DAWN: *I noticed my parents started treating me differently since I've been single. They seem to think I shifted back to this sort of childhood state of needing them to take care of me, much more than my three younger siblings who are married, because they have someone to look after them. I don't. There is no man to take care of me. It drives me mental, if that makes senses?*

SAM: *Complete sense. Even though my mom has backed off, she still calls my cat her granddaughter, if it makes you feel better. It is a bit bizarre, but maybe she is coming to terms with my singlehood on her own.*

OLIVE: *This is getting real sad, real fast.*

RUTH: *We are so alone. (laughter)*

5.1.6 No one has Snatched me up

DAWN: *Every family function, holiday and Christmas, so are you seeing someone now? How about now? But it is couched in a language of concern, which makes it harder to say go fuck yourself.*

SAM: *Because you love me so much.*

OLIVE: *I just want you to be happy!*

WINNIE: *And it is funny, because you almost can't give a straight answer when someone is like, oh are you seeing anyone? It's almost like, no I'm not, thank you very much.*

RUTH: *You have to justify.*

DAWN: *Nope I'm not, still single and loving it, right?*

SAM: *I think you just have to shrug it off. I don't think there is necessarily any good response to it. And I sometimes explain, here is the deal, I'm actually kind of awesome and doing all of this great stuff. So, I'm fine. If I meet someone, sure, if I don't, I am totally comfy with being single. I would rather be single than just being with someone for the sake of being with someone. I don't want to be married that badly that I just pick someone for the sake of having someone in my life. I find people are usually responsive to that.*

RUTH: *I think I use humor in a lot of situations just to take things down a level. With perceptions about relationships it can get to an uncomfortable place. Um, so I would rather just diffuse it and move on, especially with like close friends when they ask, cause it is just what I do. I find that if you make a joke, no one is going to keep at you on something. So it can just be a laugh and moving along. And sometimes it will be a self-deprecating joke. Most of the time it is just like – nope, no one has snatched me up yet. No one is good enough and then hahaha – move on. And in my head, I'm thinking, if you could just shut it, it would be great.*

(laughter)

DAWN: *Or like, why are you single? I have a tail. Then they are like, huh? And they get distracted by my tail.*

RUTH: *Exactly. I think also, and I don't really experience this all that much, but I know other people do feel pity about people being single. Or just people feel badly that you are single. So I think by using humor it shows them that this isn't something that I am hiding in a dark corner about because I am single. I am going to make a joke about it and we can all laugh and move on.*

DAWN: *It is just so weird that people think that they have a right to comment and question these public domains: your body, how you dress, your weight, and who you are dating. People think they are entitled to comment on these really personal things. I think it is inappropriate. And so that is not what I ask people whenever I see people. I ask - what is new and exciting? So it doesn't have to be about men, it can be like, I got a new blender y'all. It is wicked. It is blending kale. So it is like a topic that doesn't invade personal privacy, you know?*

5.1.7 You're in your Thirties?

SAM: *Although my parents have backed off, I remember one time I was on the phone with my dad and he mentioned, "Why don't you have a boyfriend?" And he was like, "You know, you are getting older, you know, don't you want to have kids?" So there is that whole.*

OLIVE: *The kid thing.*

DAWN: *I am twenty-nine, so I should start having kids.*

WINNIE: *That cycles through my head on a constant basis. It is terrible.*

RUTH: *Awful. It puts so many expectations on us.*

WINNIE: *It's like okay, we need to date this long before we can consider engagement, so that would put me at this age before I can have kids and I want to have this amount of kids by the time I am this age, like it is terrible.*

RUTH: *There are these pillars of life that society holds themselves on: dating and being with someone and having babies. And I don't fulfill those things.*

WINNIE: *It is crazy. I am not super traditional and I don't need to follow a timeline, but because society expects it, that is what you use as default or at least I do.*

DAWN: *Ya you try to recognize that it is silly and that it doesn't work for most people, but you still fall back to that, as like default kind of, in your head.*

RUTH: *It is so stupid, and you know it is stupid, but you still do it. You do that whole timeline thing in your head. You are like, okay so I want to have kids by this age and so that means I need to get married, if I want to do it in a traditional sequence, you plan it out that way. And then you are like, so I have to meet someone, cause we have to date for this long, that whole thing. And so that puts an imminent pressure on dating for that purpose. That is why it can't, even though I don't want to have kids for another three years or so, not in the close future by any means, you still have to think about the sequence because you want to date someone you could have kids with.*

DAWN: *But you can get trapped by the timeline within relationships too. The last serious relationship I had, it was a series of things that I felt I had to do. I just felt I was indebted and needed to continue going forward with it. I am in this deep, so this is the next step. We are going to buy a house, we are in this deep. I am at that age, this is you know, what is supposed to happen. He wants to commit, so I should just commit and just go along with it.*

OLIVE: *It happens to a lot of people.*

DAWN: *And now that I have been out of that relationship for a while, as a single woman who has a house and a career, now people are like, well you have a house, you have this career, what are you waiting for? And it is making huge assumptions of what I need to do.*

RUTH: *It's true. But those assumptions encourage women to do the math. Like, okay, I meet a guy, and we've got to date for at least a year or a year and a half before we get engaged and then it's another year until we are married and then another year before we have kids. It could be five years until I can have my first kid. I got to hurry.*

DAWN: *It's not going to happen when you think like that.*

RUTH: *Ya, but I think a lot of people do that math.*

WINNIE: *Just get pregnant, and trap someone in a relationship really fast.*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *I'm joking. Obviously.*

DAWN: *Alternative!*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *This weekend, I went shopping with a friend, and we were talking about how I wanted to buy a dress for a friend's thirtieth birthday. And this girl at the shop said, "Oh, thirty, to me*

that is the perfect age.” She’s like, “I can’t wait to be thirty.” And I said, “How old are you?” And she said, “I am twenty-three.” And I said, “Why do you want to be thirty?” She goes, “You know, at twenty-nine I am going to be married, then by thirty I am going to have a baby and it’s just going to be so perfect.” And my friend and I were like, bitch please! Like she’s thirty, I’m thirty-seven, we both ended long relationships. Ain’t nobody getting married. Ain’t nobody having babies. Thanks for the dress.

(laughter)

OLIVE: *We didn’t actually say that, but were both thinking it. But I just thought it was so funny, I’m like wow. You know, it’s like one end of the spectrum or the other. There are people who are like, you’re in your thirties? That’s terrible. And then there are people who are totally, what’s the word I’m looking for, romanticize what your life is going to look like when you’re in your thirties.*

5.1.8 You’re (Spelled Intentionally) Biological Clock is Ticking

RUTH: *I think wanting to have kids is a big one.*

SAM: *I think there are biological pressures that are present for women that aren’t present for men necessarily in the same way. If kids are on your plan or on your agenda and in the plan, you know you have to pop some babies out before you are forty.*

WINNIE: *It puts more pressure on you, because there is realistically a timeline for women. You can’t be forty-six, forty-seven, I have found the man of my dreams. I am going to have a baby now. It just doesn’t work that way. So if kids are a big factor in your future and what you are expecting of yourself, I think that puts some pressure on. But if you are just looking for your special person, I think that takes the pressure off a little.*

ALL: *Um-hmm.*

WINNIE: *Like if you just are waiting to meet the right guy who you want to travel with, spend time with, and do the cross word with, and grow old with, that’s awesome and great.*

RUTH: *And you’ve got time. But as someone who wants kids, I feel that pressure to imminently have kids. And it is annoying that it is like a running joke with females. Oh you are getting older, you only have so many eggs, like you better make sure you have babies before this age. And I think it can evolve into a fear of I better get married before I am thirty-five, so I can have healthy babies, right? So there is definitely that kind of biological pressure I would say. Um, that, you know, maybe I put it on myself, but I guess it is also a fact of nature.*

OLIVE: *It’s science.*

(laughter)

SAM: *I’m very aware of the biological imperative too and I find I’m often reminded of it by others. I just got a message from someone online who said my biological clock is ticking.*

WINNIE: *That’s hurtful.*

SAM: *He literally wrote to me, one line, you're, you-are it was spelled, you're biological clock is ticking.*

(laughter)

DAWN: Smart.

RUTH: *A random on the dating site?*

SAM: *Ya. You're biological clock is ticking. I sent it to Olive and I was like, thank you for the reminder.*

OLIVE: *He's bullying her into going on a date.*

DAWN: Sounds like it.

SAM: *Don't worry. I didn't respond. But sometimes I think, I am single and I am thirty-one. How long do I need to be with someone before a baby can become a reality? And where does that fit in my career plan? And then how old am I? And it is weird because I don't quite feel old enough to have kids, but I am definitely old enough.*

WINNIE: *I thought that I'd be married with kids, whatever, by now. So I think coming into this age range, because my biological clock is technically ticking, and do I want kids? Yes. So I started to think about the fact of having a baby on my own and that being okay. Do I want a child to be mine? Yes. And I think it is something that I never thought of seven or eight years ago. I never would have thought it, if you asked me when I was twenty - would you ever have a baby on your own?*

SAM: *You'd be like fuck that.*

WINNIE: *No, I am going to be married, why would I have a baby on my own?*

DAWN: *Ya.*

WINNIE: *But now, it's like, you know realistically if I don't meet someone in the next ten years, and I want a baby, I'm probably going to do it.*

SAM: *We are one of the first generations where that is a perfectly acceptable option.*

OLIVE: *Is it though?*

DAWN: *People have a hard time with it.*

OLIVE: *People have a really hard time.*

DAWN: *I think I would have a hard time.*

WINNIE: *I think there are some people who would, but it is certainly more acceptable than it was ten or fifteen years ago.*

SAM: *Who gives a shit even?*

OLIVE: *My singlehood is, I would suggest, even more free because I don't have a time limit. I don't have that mother instinct to have a baby. I don't want to be pregnant. I don't feel that. I don't see a pregnant belly and think like, oh, my uterus is kicking. I think, stretch marks, bad sleeps, indigestion, ripped ass holes from birth. And I know that some women really feel in their bones that they want to be pregnant and they want to carry their child and have that baby. And I do get the appeal of having a baby, a biological baby, be the combination of you and your partner, this person who you love so much. And they are the mishmash of the two of you in a physical sense. I do see that appeal. But it doesn't trump my other values around it. So it's not enough to make me hit the streets looking for a partner for that reason. And so, I think that reshapes my singlehood and I have a different kind of single life because of that I think. And an easier one I think in a way. But for those people who want to have babies in their body and out of their body, I think that is how it works.*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *But for those people, there is a very real time constraint on some of those things. But I'm really not too worried about it. And part of the reason is also, I was a real serial monogamist. Part of why I needed the breakup was to be alone. And so I am okay with that, because I don't feel like, okay better hurry, I got to get married or the window's closing on babies. Because at my age, if I decide one day that I want to have kids, I am really open to adopting, fostering, having a surrogate. There are all sorts of options. Which I think is a really good thing.*

DAWN: *I am not completely attached to the baby thing either. I love babies, don't get me wrong. I love kids. But I can't tell if I am programmed to want kids or if it's really an inner longing. I can't tell the difference. I still wrestle with that in my head a lot. I don't know how authentic that is. But I am not attached to having my own.*

OLIVE: *Ya, so I mean I feel, it's like, I don't feel lucky that I feel those things. I just feel those things. But it is more freeing. I don't have that same pressure.*

5.1.9 The Transitional Birthday

RUTH: *You know what thing freaked me out?*

DAWN/OLIVE: *What?*

RUTH: *My last birthday, I was turning twenty-seven. I never have a problem with the big birthdays. I have a problem with the transitional birthdays.*

DAWN: *So twenty-seven was a tough one?*

RUTH: *Twenty-seven, was like I am in my late twenties and twenty-three, I was like, I am no longer a kid. So, I have a backup with a buddy, if we are both not married, we are going to get married.*

WINNIE: *Right.*

OLIVE: *A pledge.*

RUTH: *We made this backup when we were probably twenty-two.*

DAWN: *That you were going to be twenty-seven and married?*

RUTH: *No. That we were going to be thirty-five.*

WINNIE: *Everyone chooses thirty-five.*

RUTH: *It seemed so far in the future and it seemed outrageous that we both wouldn't be married by then and that we'd be forced to marry each other. And then I turned twenty-seven, and I called him, and I was like, I have eight years to find someone to not marry you. And we made that deal almost six years ago.*

WINNIE: *That's scary.*

SAM: *So you better start saving for our ballin' wedding.*

DAWN: *So fuck!*

(laughter)

RUTH: *But that's like, I was just like whoa! That freaked me out.*

OLIVE: *Ya, that circumstance would freak me out as well.*

SAM: *I don't have a pledge with anyone. Maybe I need to get one.*

OLIVE: *Want to get married in ten years?*

SAM: *Ya, okay let's do it.*

DAWN: *You would be the best couple ever.*

WINNIE: *Get your love on.*

OLIVE: *We could be a sitcom couple.*

DAWN: *Oh my god.*

5.1.10 *Needing and Wanting Sexy Times*

DAWN: *I find there is often an expectation now from men that I am going to sleep with you after I just met you. It is expected after a certain amount of dates or if you go away together for a weekend. And I find that without feelings that I am really not interested in doing that. And it's so weird, because I still want to keep hanging out, you know? So it's like, for sure come back, but you don't want to imply that you are going to have sex.*

WINNIE: *Before I met the guy I am currently dating, I accidentally slept with someone.*

RUTH: *By accident?*

WINNIE: *Yes, by accident! Well sort of by accident. And by sort of, I mean not really. Alcohol was involved. Does that count?*

DAWN: Yes.

SAM: No.

WINNIE: *It was a guy from work, my part-time job. I didn't really expect anything to happen, but then he brought it up. I can't remember the exact phrasing of it or anything, but it was essentially like, "Maybe we should have sex." But then he said, "Nothing can come from this, like you obviously understand that," which was kind of douchey. So ya, we had sex. Woke up in the morning and I was like, shit. It is not the fact that I am single and don't really have any repercussions for having sex, but I don't know who from work knows and I feel like people always blame the woman. So ya, there was a little bit of stress. There is that tension that something could really blow up in your face.*

DAWN: *Totally. Fuck. Men have got it fucking easy. If I am just going to be blunt, they have it so easy. I think society in general, like I am going to make a mass generalization.*

RUTH: Watch out!

DAWN: *You know that they are usually wrong. But just my perception of it is that guys are encouraged to have their fun. In fact, it is encouraged to do whatever the fuck you want. Spread your seed. Spread your attention and guys are not judged or punished like women are in the dating scene. I don't think that all men are like that, but I think society lets men off the hook. For example, if you have a one night stand, if you are a dude it is expected. There is absolutely no negative attention associated with that. For women, there are pressures to do it when you are there. But then if you do it, you are a slut. You are branded these bad things, scarlet A. There is just a lot of pressure for the sexy times. And don't get me wrong, I want, need sexy times. But I just really freakin' hate that pressure around it. It is like it is supposed to be fun. It is supposed to be something I choose to do. It is supposed to be something to enjoy and not do because I feel obligated or someone asked me to.*

OLIVE: *I just want a penis.*

RUTH: *Attached or?*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *I want a penis in my life. Like, you know.*

DAWN: *You can buy that. It's called BOB, a Battery Operated Boyfriend.*

WINNIE: *Oh, like a dildo.*

SAM: *But do they feel the same as a penis?*

OLIVE: *It doesn't feel the same.*

SAM: *I have never tried one, but I can't see it feeling the exact same.*

DAWN: *No, they are not warm.*

OLIVE: *Exactly, and you don't have the warm body on top of you.*

DAWN: *It's not the same, but I think having it I don't have so much pressure to get my jollies through dating the wrong people. I get it through my smut and through BOB. So I can be satisfied.*

SAM: *I need the body. I need the body, the abs.*

WINNIE: *The shoulders.*

OLIVE: *I love shoulders and legs.*

SAM: *I need to kiss. I need all of that intimacy. I want a man to throw me up against a wall.*

DAWN: *It does get the job done admittedly.*

OLIVE: *I have a need for touch I think, which I think is maybe a little emotional, a little physiological. I want to have sex with someone. Anyone? Is anybody listening???*

DAWN: *Attention dicks!*

WINNIE: *I'll have sex with you!*

(laughter)

5.1.11 Before Women Became People

OLIVE: *I think dating is challenging for men, because there are mixed messages about, you know, should you pay? If you offer to pay, are you treating her not as an equal? There is all of this muddled stuff and I think before women became people.*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *It was much clearer of how men were supposed to act on a date.*

WINNIE: *Roles were more defined.*

OLIVE: *And it can be kind of a mine field for men.*

ALL: *Um-hmm*

OLIVE: *So, I think it is probably a lot more challenging for men than it is for women. I could be wrong about that, but in terms of do I pay, do I not pay, do I make a move, do I not make a move? Um, and especially being a little bit older, things have changed for me. But he might not know that. Like you don't know that I am a feminist. He doesn't know which stupid advice books I have been reading, or you know, if you offer to pay then you are insulting my abilities as an independent woman, right? So I think there are a lot more traps and falling points for men. I think there are just a lot more ways they can make fatal errors.*

SAM: *Ya, I didn't think about like the actual dating process. But I think men may have a harder time, or not a harder time, different pressures and stress because I think, you know, I am a pretty progressive, independent woman and I would still likely say, it has got to be the guy's job to ask me out, right? So I think that for the most part, they feel that pressure. Like, oh I have to be the*

initiator. And probably, there's that pressure for paying for dates, or the pressure of choosing where to go, or the pressure of trying to impress. And I think some women look at do they have a good job, do they have a nice car, you know? So I think they still have that kind of traditional gender role placed on them. Whereas, women, we are a little more free to be either way, maybe. So I think it would be more difficult, I think for men, cause they still are kind of forced to be the male role and go out and kind of hunt, which is a weird way to put it.

(laughter)

SAM: I wish I hadn't said hunt, but being the aggressor, to be the initiator, the pursuer.

OLIVE: It would be scary to be a guy. To be the one who has to hunt.

SAM: Hey!

OLIVE: Just kidding. But we are at the stage now where a lot of women are very independent and very strong. I think it's very difficult to be a guy dating at our age, because there are still assumptions that they are going to do a lot of that work.

SAM: That they are going to put themselves out there for you to reciprocate.

OLIVE: Exactly. Well, and there are mixed messages. There are some people who are like let's do this thing. And people who are saying, I can't talk to a guy first. And so I feel like men have to negotiate a lot.

SAM: And I think for women often times, and this is not necessarily always the case, but I think it's often times possible for a woman to just sit back and be like, show me what you got.

OLIVE: Ya.

SAM: See how you manage this, right? And the man has to hop through all the right hoops.

DAWN: It's true.

SAM: And I think that is linked to power too, where women can just kind of coast along and then get to the end and then be like - you did this, and this, and this wrong. That is a deal breaker. Peace. Or not, or you know they did all of these things right. But I think women have the ability to just kind of sit back and see where it goes.

DAWN: Right, so, I think, I totally agree with you, that there are pressures on men and I have actually experienced that on a date, where a guy is like, "Oh I'll pay." And then I am like, "Oh no, I would like to split the bill." And then he is like, "Okay, but I would still like to offer to pay but if that is really important to you." And they are really trying.

RUTH: Awkward.

DAWN: Ya. They are really trying to define this traditional idea of dating.

OLIVE: Because it takes women like us and it takes honest communication. And we have to be talking about this with the men we are dating of what we want/prefer.

SAM: *Totally. And I think a lot of men are receptive to that. They want to make you feel comfortable, but they also want to feel generous.*

OLIVE: *I remember my ex-partner and I having a huge blow-up one time, because he didn't understand what the word feminist meant and I called him one. I said, "You are a good feminist." And he said, "I am not!" And I said, "That is a fucking compliment. Get your head out of your ass." And we just fought and fought over this term feminist. And um, I think that's a huge responsibility for men. It's, how do I walk that line and not be completely emasculated.*

SAM: *There is definitely pressure there that doesn't exist for women necessarily.*

WINNIE: *Well, there are different pressures that influence men and women.*

RUTH: *Ya. I think the external pressures of being in a relationship and stuff, I think are more so on women. I didn't think of the dating kind of pressures. I thought about the long-term kind of pressures. And I think that it's much more acceptable, I think, to be an older bachelor.*

OLIVE: *Totally.*

RUTH: *Then it is to be an older bachelorette.*

WINNIE: *And they don't have the biological imperative.*

RUTH: *Exactly. And even the names that go along.*

OLIVE: *Spinsters versus distinguished bachelor.*

SAM: *Like men are the bachelors, if they are older, sexy. If they are younger, they are just available and ready to mingle.*

DAWN: *George Clooney.*

OLIVE: *As opposed to Jennifer Aniston.*

SAM: *She doesn't have a baby and she is so sad.*

DAWN: *So sad and jealous.*

RUTH: *Exactly, women are spinsters, desperate, and lonely. There are perceptions that women have an expiration date. Like if you are over forty. I just heard a guy at work say "Women who are over forty – good luck getting married. If you are not married at that point, because all the guys want the thirty year olds if they are fifty or forty." Awesome! Like men are kings and women have to settle. So men have all the options and women don't have any.*

DAWN: *That makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside.*

RUTH: *Ya, men aren't pressured to have a girlfriend or to get married. When woman are single, why are you single? Why don't you have a boyfriend? Ya, they don't, like, when we are single females, it is like why don't you have a boyfriend? Guys never get asked the question, why are you still single? Because it is almost like for men, it's their choice, right? Whereas women, it is like, what is wrong with you? Why don't you have a boyfriend? And if a guy is thirty and single,*

who cares. If a woman is thirty and single, it's like, oh my gosh, she's thirty. Like she better get married in the next five years.

WINNIE: My initial gut instinct is that it is harder for women, that there is more pressure, but I know my cousin who is also single, his parents are up his ass about being single all the time. His parents have commented, "What is wrong with him?" And his dad has actually come up to me, "So what is the deal with him. Like what is going on?" So he is getting all this crazy pressure from his family. So I don't, I don't see that as being different necessarily.

OLIVE: It's probably pretty similar I'd imagine. Um, I think people think it is vastly different, but I don't know. I think men go through the exact same things. Maybe they don't vocalize it to their friends or whoever, but I kind of think it is all the same. But I am sure, you know, they have the same questions and wonders.

WINNIE: I think that people put too much emphasis on the differences, when in actuality there are probably way more similarities. Um, I think guys still feel the same amount of pressure. I think they still get nervous. I think they get excited. And you know, society [air quotations], tells us that guys aren't supposed to express those types of things.

5.1.12 Always Wait for Margarita

DAWN: Well I know for me, my mom told me one time that I am too picky. And I didn't like to hear that from my mom. I was like, are you kidding? And later we talked it through. And I have heard that from people before, whether friends or acquaintances, of like, you know - maybe your standards are too high? Like, maybe that is why you haven't found anyone yet.

RUTH: Ahhh!

DAWN: And so it is just, I know, it's just like mind blowing, because obviously I am not just going to settle, right? It might be a lot of work to find that one person.

OLIVE: It will be more work to stay with someone you have to settle with.

DAWN: Ya, exactly. So it's, it's, to me settling is you know, bringing down your standards, because you are saying, okay well I haven't found that person, maybe I just need to be open to more people and just go for something, like ya.

WINNIE: Exactly. Settling is when you're feeling those pressures and you're, maybe desperate is not the right word, but you want to have a boyfriend. You want to make things happen, so you settle on something less than what you want for yourself.

DAWN: Settling to me seems like anything that is going to detract from my life. I think it's like just having a lot of reservations and staying in the relationship just because you are afraid of being alone. I am just not interested in doing that. It has taken some time to get used to being alone, because after being in two serious relationships, it was kind of all I knew, but now it is nice and I don't want to find myself in a situation where I am responsible for someone else's happiness. I won't do that again.

RUTH: I just don't see how you can ever be happy if you are fearful constantly or if you've primarily made your life based on fear. (pause –Ruth contemplates) Which in thinking about it, I

suppose I have done in not really dating up until this point. Um, so take that Ruth! (laughter) It's good. This is good therapy for me. It's great. I am going to pay you each a hundred dollars when you leave and charge it to my benefits.

(laughter)

RUTH: *But, thinking about it, especially once a lot of people in your social circle start doing it, pairing off, and you become of a certain age, you can become that much more desperate to find someone because your whole life you are told you are supposed to find your pair.*

SAM: *Your one true love.*

OLIVE: *Totally! Settling for me is if I am made to feel that I can't be myself in any way shape or form. If people are feeling like they are being backed into a time corner to have babies and it is what relationships are coming down too for women then fear is motivating it. The fear of running out of time is motivating it. And I think a lot of men are fearful of it too, because there is a pressure on them too. This whole familial relationship thing, but these pressures are so prevalent and I think we settle so often.*

DAWN: *Exactly. And ya, you can kind of, because dating is so much effort, you can see how it would be easier to be in a relationship that is kind of shitty, but that has its high points every now and again, because you are used to certain patterns, like a dance almost with each other. You might be very distant, but still a couple. So you don't have to deal with the dating thing. You don't have to be single.*

RUTH: *But if you can't be independent and happy alone, I don't feel like you can be happy in a relationship. And this is from me seeing my friends, who are, I call them chronic serial daters, who are never alone.*

DAWN: *Serial monogamists.*

SAM: *That's a good one. Serial monogamists, they jump from relationship, to relationship, to relationship, and their likes end up becoming the new persons. It's like that movie with Julia Roberts.*

OLIVE: *Runaway Bride - eating her eggs.*

SAM: *Always her eggs, the way she likes her eggs is always.*

RUTH: *How her boyfriends like their eggs.*

WINNIE: *And I have friends who are like that. They change their likes based on who they are with. And my sister is one of those people where she ends up liking the music of the person she's with. And you know, I want to ask her - what do you like? You know, just because you don't like the same music, that's okay.*

DAWN: *There is a difference between expanding your horizons and absorbing their whole being.*

SAM: *I am sure we all have friends or acquaintances, where you go to the wedding and it's like, they are just getting married to get married. And you look at a lot of those friends and you are like, you settled. And I don't like to make that judgment, but you just know. You think - that's love? That is not good enough for me. You don't even get along, or you don't even talk. You are not even buddies.*

WINNIE: *No, I just, I hate it. I have seen girlfriends do it and I think you settle out of a motivation of fear and it makes me so sad to see that someone would rather settle and maybe not be as happy as they could be because they are scared to be alone. But in terms of my perception, I would rather be on my own. Um, and, you know, create a family on my own then be with someone who I wasn't entirely proud to be with and sure of.*

RUTH: *You have to believe that you are with your best possible person.*

SAM: *And it is funny because my grandmother, my Boba, and my Gigi, my grandfather loved each other, and they would have done anything for each other, but they were not in love with each other. And you see the difference. Like when you see some older people that are head over heels in love with each other and some that are not. And it just saddens me that they are not in love. And then I see my parents, and they are in love. And I'm like, no matter how long it takes me to find that person, I'm willing to wait. And so you know, I have friends where they were just in such a rush, and then they are not happy. And they look back on their life with regrets, or like could of, should of, would of, and I don't want those feelings.*

RUTH: *It's true. My grandma, who's like a lovely lady, had written a little note to me and gave it to me, that was like write down what you are looking for in a man and don't settle for anything less. And I wrote it down. I said okay, like you know, somebody who I date has to be this, has to want this, has to have this, right? Like, which was a helpful experience for me to say you know what, I am not going to settle for anything less than what I've written down and decided upon, because I am worth that. I don't think I have always felt that way in my life, but I am at the place now where I am not going to settle.*

OLIVE: *I refuse to settle.*

DAWN: *Settling doesn't sound like something I ever want to do. Marriage or commitment of any type is a big deal. And it is not the type of thing that I take lightly anymore. I'm happy with my life, and who I am. And I am going to find someone that compliments that. I am not just going to settle for anything. So when it comes, it will come. And if it doesn't, in the meantime, I am just working on myself and having a good time.*

WINNIE: *But I kind of wrestle with a thought, because I think the media posits this view that we are supposed to get this perfect gentleman who is super romantic and we connect with on all levels. This totally ideal standard of what love and romance and everything is. And I think that to accept anything less, would be settling. But I think that is also super unrealistic.*

DAWN: *It's true.*

WINNIE: *So I kind of have that conflict, okay, if what I want or what I think I should have, according to the media, is that realistic? You know, so I don't know if it's settling to accept something less, or if it actually just being kind of realistic that everybody has their imperfections.*

I think it is important to *realize, okay what is something that is a make or break? And what is something that I can live with and recognize that not everyone is perfect?*

DAWN: It is important to *recognize what is important to you. But then I think maybe every relationship has a fear of settling, because obviously everyone is going to have some terrible qualities that really piss you off and you have to weigh like, is this is a deal breaker? Is this like going to just get so much worse as it goes on? Which usually that stuff does.*

OLIVE: I think it is important to *recognize human nature is not perfection and if you are really not feeling it in your heart, you have settled, and they are not the one you are supposed to be with.*

SAM: I have a good analogy. Well, *it is not my analogy. It is one of my very good friend's analogy who has also been battling singledom for quite a while.*

RUTH: *I liked how you cited her. That was very nice.*

SAM: *Thank you. So her analogy is, if you come home from work on a hot day, and you are super sweaty and you are tired, and you open up the fridge and there is milk in the fridge, and you are like, ya, I should drink this milk. I am thirty-one, it's probably good for me. It's good for my bones. It is going to go bad. I am thirsty anyways. Fine. Whatever. I'll just drink the milk. But if you come home from work and you are all sweaty and you are tired and you open up the fridge and there is this big, frothy pitcher of margarita in the fridge, you are like, oh my god!!! This is the best day ever! I love margaritas! Who put this in my fridge? I am so happy. But if you have been drinking milk when you find margarita in the fridge, maybe you are full. Maybe you don't have any more room for margarita, because you are so full of milk. So always wait for margarita.*

DAWN: *I love that.*

OLIVE: *Wait for margarita.*

SAM: *Never settle for milk.*

WINNIE: *Cause there is nothing wrong with milk.*

SAM: *No.*

OLIVE: *Milk is refreshing, hits the spot. But it doesn't make me fly.*

SAM: *Not like margarita.*

OLIVE: *It's not a party in my mouth. (laughter)*

DAWN: *Milk is not a party.*

WINNIE: *Unless it's chocolate.*

5.1.13 "Why Men Love Bitches"

RUTH: *Have you read the book "Why Men Love Bitches"?*

SAM: *I've read that one.*

WINNIE: *I read part way through it. It's kind of funny.*

SAM: *I thought it was hilarious, I read it at the cottage one time over drinks with some friends, just like the excerpts. You know, he says all of a sudden he can't come, because his car breaks down, like this is what you should say. And I howled. I thought it was hilarious.*

OLIVE: *And there's another one, by the comedian Steve Harvey, he wrote a book called.*

SAM: *"Think Like a Man, Act Like a Woman."*

WINNIE: *There's a movie too, isn't there?*

OLIVE: *I think so.*

DAWN: *I find books like that offensive. They all focus on how women have to change.*

OLIVE: *I guess it depends how you pick them up, how you read them, and what sorts of messaging you are taking away. If you are in a place where you really want some advice, and you are reading them earnestly, it could be problematic.*

SAM: *But if you are reading them with your friends it could be funny.*

WINNIE: *All of those books are ridiculous, but they have a message, don't be a doormat. Stick up for yourself.*

RUTH: *Have a backbone.*

WINNIE: *I read "He's Just Not That Into You" during a single phase prior to this single phase. All I took from "He's Just Not That Into You" was don't be a doormat.*

RUTH: *Ya.*

SAM: *And that's what the bitches book is - don't be a doormat.*

WINNIE: *And I mean ultimately, especially for me at the time when I was reading it, I was in my very, very early twenties, probably twenty, twenty-one, and for a girl that age, that's an incredibly important message I think to get across.*

OLIVE: *For sure.*

WINNIE: *Don't let this guy who you like dictate how you are going to act, or how you are going to react.*

SAM: *Or how you are going to feel.*

WINNIE: *Or how you are going to feel, or let him validate the feelings that you are feeling. Like feel your feels.*

OLIVE: *Feel your feels!*

DAWN: *Are there books for guys called “Don’t be a dickhead”?*

(laughter)

SAM: *But that’s the thing that, I feel like those books are all the messages that you take from it. So you don’t want to take it for its literal.*

DAWN: *No.*

SAM: *Well, he says he can’t come over because his car broke down, well then you better pay for a taxi, or I am not free until next week or like whatever, right? You don’t take it for that literal like...*

RUTH: *Translation.*

SAM: *Translation. You take it as - okay I am not going to be a doormat.*

OLIVE: *But so many women are reading these books and hanging on to it. You know, oh, this is fact and I should be trying this.*

DAWN: *It is self-esteem.*

RUTH: *I have a girlfriend who is thirty-three, and she is a doormat, and there is no better way to describe her.*

WINNIE: *She should read those books.*

RUTH: *But she won’t even read them. She won’t change her viewpoint, and I respect her for it. She says, this is how I am. I was raised to be a nice person, you know, if someone needs me, I will be there. If someone needs a ride, I will be there. But she does it too much.*

DAWN: *To the point of being taken advantage of?*

RUTH: *To the point of being taken advantage of, but hopefully she will find a man that isn’t like that, or whatever.*

OLIVE: *I just read this article, or something, it was on the line, on the internet.*

RUTH: *Did you just say on the line?*

SAM: *On the line.*

RUTH: *Was it in the inter pipes?*

DAWN: *Hahaha, the inter pipes.*

OLIVE: *Anyway, I read this thing on the web, on the line.*

WINNIE: *The Google machine.*

OLIVE: *The Google machine, and basically it said, and your story of your friend reminded me of this, that you have to do things out of love, not out of fear. So if a friend says to you, come pick*

me up. If you are doing it out of love because you love your friend, and you know their stuck somewhere it's okay. But if you are doing it because you don't want your friend to be mad at you, I better go get her. Then that's not okay. It's not about being a nice person or not. It's about doing things out of love and not fear.

SAM: *Ya.*

OLIVE: *And I think that you have to try to live that way all the time. Like, jump into something because you want to be with someone, not because you are afraid that you are not going to have a baby by thirty-five. You have to do things from a place of love and that is not going to steer you wrong.*

WINNIE: *And that's good advice in general. That can apply to friendships and family relationships.*

OLIVE: *It applies to everything!*

5.1.14 Couplehood is better

OLIVE: *It is almost like, when you are in a relationship, it doesn't matter how good it is, what the status is, if you're extremely unhappy, that's better than being single and happy.*

WINNIE: *And to me that always was like shocking, you know. To me at the end of the day, you are happy you are happy, like regardless of your relationship status. Like, that's terrible that you're defined by your worth as being in a relationship even if you are miserable.*

RUTH: *Yes, I agree.*

DAWN: *That's better in society's eyes, in your family's eyes, in your friend's eyes. Oh, but you are with someone, so you have that.*

RUTH: *It's so bizarre*

WINNIE: *And when you are coupled off there is more of a sense that you can relax about these kind of things and you are not always trying to, you know, figure out what kind of person you want to be with, and then, how to find that person, and like oh, should I online date?*

OLIVE: *But it is important to ask yourself why you need to be in a couple. You know what I mean? Like you can have everything and be single and I think that is a mind shift.*

DAWN: *Or recognizing that having everything doesn't necessarily have to mean being in a couple. There are multiple definitions of happy and um fulfilled.*

SAM: *I made a very conscious decision a couple of years ago at New Years. I don't make New Year's resolutions, because I am super lazy, and they never last. Um, but I felt like I made a very conscious decision that I was going to start owning what was awesome in my life and stop being envious of other people who have things that I don't have. And it still takes a lot of work. But I am really trying to focus on what I do have and what I can do.*

RUTH: *It is so important to be happy with your own identity. What your interests are, what your life goals are, um, those types of things, and not to be searching for that person to complete you and being happy in life regardless of whether you are single or not.*

OLIVE: *You need to know how awesome you are. Definitely, but I think a big piece of that is that you have to have a real sense of humor in this game. We can't take ourselves so damn seriously. Like really? Really? And I think sometimes we just need to laugh at ourselves, and just go, why are we taking this so seriously? Why are we taking ourselves so seriously in a relationship or not in a relationship?*

RUTH: *Ya.*

DAWN: *What makes me laugh the most about it, is that I have three younger siblings who are all married, and my parents are also successfully married, so when we get together for like family dinner, which we are doing this weekend, ughhh, we can sit in the backyard though, so that is okay, but we usually sit around the table in the dining room, and it is pretty mashy. And there are eleven people every thanksgiving, so I am always perched on the edge of the table with a corner in my ribs or something, like I am hanging off the table because I am a single person. But it makes me laugh.*

SAM: *At least you don't have to sit at the kids table.*

(laughter)

DAWN: *Well as soon as I get more nieces and nephews I am going to sit at the kids table, totally.*

RUTH: *They are more entertaining anyways.*

5.2 Gendered Modes of Connecting

The following series of dialogue-based vignettes illuminate the different modes women used to make romantic connections. In particular, women noted that the modes they used to make connections shifted as they entered adulthood and became more focused, for many women, on the use of different technologies to make connections (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Google, online dating websites, cell phones, etc.). Several women talked about feeling uncomfortable using certain types of technologies, such as online dating, to make romantic connections, preferring what multiple women referred to as a more “organic” approach to forming romantic connections. In addition, many women talked about the challenges associated with making connections when using different technologies, including the importance of representing yourself in certain ways

through various technologies. Despite the challenges and discomfort associated with using different technologies to make connections, a number of women also commented on the productive and enjoyable aspects of using technologies to make romantic connections.

5.2.1 *Being a Kid in a Candy Store*

DAWN: *The environment is different. When you are younger, you are surrounded by more people around your same age and your same likeness, so you have more opportunities. It is more of an open period.*

SAM: *Ya, I feel like when I was younger it was like being a kid in a candy store. Like there were just so many options. Um, there was always somebody rolling along.*

RUTH: *Ya, there were a million people around who were also single.*

SAM: *Now I find it is different. Maybe it is because there are less people who are single or you are just doing different activities now.*

DAWN: *It's true. It's like, where the heck are all of the men? Are you doing fantasy sports camp or something?*

(laughter)

DAWN: *There are definitely fewer options. I think it might be because people have started to pair off and have kids and stuff.*

OLIVE: *What I am coming to learn also is that a lot of men who are exactly my age are in relationships. So you are either going to have to go younger or maybe a little bit older, to people who have also just gotten out of a long relationship, are divorced perhaps, or, whatever, it's, it's sort of interesting, because you have to be open.*

DAWN: *And you are busier or you don't feel like going out as often.*

WINNIE: *Definitely. There is this really organic stay at home, kind of mode, where people don't make a lot of effort to go out with people.*

RUTH: *And it makes it hard to meet men in a normal way.*

DAWN: *I find now I go to a lot of work networking events.*

SAM: *I agree. Most of my socializing now is with work people.*

RUTH: *I find my main issue is that I don't really like my work industry type of man. They are capitalists. They have pretty terrible views about women. So that makes it challenging. So then how do you find someone else who has the same kind of goals and values if not at work, the*

place where you spend most of your time?

WINNIE: Exactly. *I don't play sports.* So that's out. *I am a pylon.*

DAWN: *Pylon. (laughter)*

WINNIE: *So, it was like, well, what else can I do? Online dating just kind of seemed like a necessity.*

RUTH: *And that is where people meet each other nowadays.*

SAM: *I got to that point too. When I realized that I was thirty-one working in an almost all-female setting. And people would be like, can't you meet someone at work? And I am like there is one single male here and we are buddies, so no.*

RUTH: *And the other thing right. It's your career. I am not willing to jeopardize it or complicate it for the chance to say I have a boyfriend*

SAM: *And unless you are going to spend your nights at the bar, picking up people at the bar, how exactly do you go about meeting people other than the Internet?*

DAWN: *Try being a professional in a smaller city. Living in a small city is one thing because there are limited people, but being a professional in a small city is even more complicated because I have to be careful. Everyone knows everyone and with the profession that I am in, like I need to, I'm always on.*

5.2.2 A Whole Different World

SAM: *I think when you are younger you will date these wildly ridiculous people who are not remotely suited for you at all, and you are just like yep, okay, great! And then after are like, yep, that was stupid.*

WINNIE: *Exactly. In undergrad you could meet a hot guy at the bar and be like, this guy's smoking hot, there is chemistry, whatever. And then you find out that this guy shops weed to everyone in his residence and you are like, oh that's cool.*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *But you know now if you find a guy who is dealing weed to everyone in his mediocre walk up apartment building, you are probably going to be like, I'll pass. So your standards are different. Your expectations are different.*

SAM: *It's a whole different world now. I am not just dating everyone that I think is sexy and I want to hop into their pants. Not that I want, and before I wasn't in anyway like really promiscuous, because I was pretty uptight. Um, but now it's very much more like.*

DAWN: *Needs to be deeper?*

SAM: *Needs to be deeper. Now I am more specific. And I'm okay with being single if it means not being with someone who isn't right.*

RUTH: *Ya your expectations are definitely higher as you get older. And I think that also narrows the pool. You are not going to date someone who is wildly inappropriate for you. You have a better definition of what you want from someone and what you need from someone.*

WINNIE: *And you are not necessarily going to be impressed by bullshit assholes, like oh I want to date a guy on the football team because he is vaguely interested, okay, this is my new boyfriend. You are not going to date someone who is completely...*

SAM: *Like a crack head?*

WINNIE: *Right, a crack head.*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *But you are not going to kind of go out on a limb maybe for somebody you don't think suits you at all.*

DAWN: *And I think that might make it harder to date at our age because you have a pretty firm grasp on who you are and what you want. You are independent. So I think it takes a lot more effort than it did when you were younger.*

RUTH: *You kind of have to wade through the trenches to find that person who is going to kind of be a better fit.*

WINNIE: *Ya, and I mean like, you will have a few bad dates. And, or you will even have a date or two with a guy who you think is awesome and he isn't into you. And it doesn't work out. So I think that there is a little bit more honesty as you get older.*

DAWN: *But I think part of why you are less particular when you are younger is cause you don't know yourself yet. You are a different person and you are in a different period of your life.*

SAM: *Ya, I remember my mom telling me when I was in high school to date a lot. To just date and date and date and date, um, she probably didn't think that I would still be dating. But her perspective on the whole thing was that it helps you to understand what you want out of a person and out of a relationship if you have more than one. Like she met my dad when she was seventeen or something and they are super happy and awesome together, but I think she missed the opportunity to explore some of these other things.*

WINNIE: *Ya, to explore that.*

SAM: *And dating for me has been a learning process. It teaches you a lot about who you are as well, like independently and in a relationship. Like no, I don't want to be that person so I am not doing that. And I think that comes with a bit of experience, but I think it also comes with, you know, maturity and learning more about myself. Learning about what I want in relationships.*

WINNIE: *It helps you to figure out what you want, right?*

DAWN: *I think that by the time you are thirty you get to this “start being awesome stage.” So it’s kind of like, you are just more true you. You are more confident. You know more about who you are and what you want. Or you hopefully know more.*

OLIVE: *And because you have this better understanding of who you are, better sort of self-confidence, you are more happy with yourself, um, there isn’t that whole insecurity piece attached of - oh my god, what if he doesn’t like me? And what is he going to think? It is kind of like, this is who I am and if we connect we connect, that is fine.*

WINNIE: *I also know that people change. Like, so me now is different than me ten years ago.*

RUTH: *Me too. For me, I don’t think I was meant to date someone when I was younger, like in my early twenties. I think I would have met the wrong person before, because you change so much. I think it is hard. I mean, if you are lucky you meet somebody and you both change and it keeps working.*

SAM: *For me, I think I am looking for different qualities in someone than I ever would have before. And I feel like now I have dated enough that I can be sort of, well I keep saying, all I really want is someone who is crazy about me. So now I know that.*

5.2.3 Being a Bit More of Not an Idiot

SAM: *When I was younger, there wasn’t really any kind of dating. It was more like, you just evolved into relationships with people.*

OLIVE: *In the times when I started relationships.*

RUTH: *Back in my day (Ruth says in a raspy, shrill, mocking voice).*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *I’m a grandma. You know that about me. But before, in undergrad, you were always hanging out with these big groups of people. And I felt often, I dated people in that group who you knew quite well before. So you’d often have known that person for a while, and so you’d kind of just grow into it. All of a sudden you are in a relationship. It is not the same kind of way that it happens now.*

RUTH: *I agree. My last serious relationship/boyfriend was high school. When we first started going out, you know, we were in the same youth group. We would hangout as friends. Um, you know, I found out he liked me and then was like, oh do I like him back? Like, I guess so. Like, it was, it was ya, I did not like him until I found out he liked me. And then after he found out that I liked him back, then he asked me out. Um, but I am not really sure if the word date even came up.*

DAWN: *Dating, if that is the word we are going to use.*

OLIVE: I prefer *deepening connections*.

DAWN: I like it. Well dating or *deepening connections* is totally different as an adult. *It is a lot more traditional than it was before.*

SAM: *And just kind of knowing what is expected or appropriate is kind of weird. There are more traditional dating patterns now than when you were in undergrad or high school.*

DAWN: Ya because it is usually *someone that you don't know. You know a lot less about them and then you have to follow up and go on a date with them. So it really, truly is like a first date.*

SAM: *Ya, when I think about how relationships evolved when I was younger, it happened really progressively.*

WINNIE: By progressive, do you mean *you go from meeting someone, having sex after the bar, and then poof - now they are your boyfriend?*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *Exactly. There was no like, let's go out for movies and dinner and fancy stuff. You'd meet at parties and have sex. Like I wasn't afraid to just hookup and gain sexual pleasure. I was young then and it was fun.*

SAM: *Back then, I didn't know who I was and I was always worried about like, you know, if I have sex with him, is he going to think I'm this? And very much like molding myself to fit whoever that person needed me to be. And what I thought I needed to be. I was also very insecure.*

OLIVE: I get that. *When I was younger, there was a lot of concealing of who I was too. There was a lot of mask wearing. So I think from seventeen, that is when I got kicked out of my house, into my early twenties I was just really learning what it is to take care of myself, and who I was, and making money, and that made me feel really strong. I had my own car and my own apartment. But there has been a switch to what I was then and what I am now. I think because of my history, and my family is a broken family, they were divorced young, young parents, abuse, and all this kind of stuff. I just feel like when I was twenty I was desperate to find my own family. I wanted a person to be like, who would fill that spot at that time. That is what I was looking for. It is not what I am looking for now. But at the time, I was definitely lonely, sad. I had a great support circle of women, don't get me wrong about that, but I wanted someone to have my back. I wanted someone I could call in an emergency. I wanted...*

WINNIE: *Someone to act as your family?*

OLIVE: *Ya. I wanted someone to give a real hoot and shit about me. I wanted someone to call, and they would be right there, because I didn't get those reactions from my family. So I think in my early twenties I was looking to fill the space, and that was probably an unfair thing to ask from a romantic relationship. But that is what I attracted to myself.*

WINNIE: When I was younger *I jumped into relationship after relationship after relationship, trying to fill that void. But now I know it's really about not looking to the other person to fulfill something in self. Or playing into the roles that people need from me, and then later down the road finding out I am not being my whole authentic self.*

OLIVE: *And you definitely learn to let some things go by thirty-seven. And I don't feel like I need to plan, and young people, I don't know. Maybe when I was that age too, I don't know. All these expectations you have for yourself, you know, of what life is supposed to be like.*

SAM: I agree with the expectations piece. *When I was younger, when I was in high school, I thought, okay I will go to school, do my undergrad, I am going to get married right away. I am going to have kids, because I want to be a younger mom. And boom, boom, boom. And it hasn't happened that way for me.*

WINNIE: *And I guess I have evolved from the party days of my early twenties to being a bit more of not an idiot. I am coming into a realization that I have three relationships, and that is, the first one is with myself, the second one is with my calling - my career dreams, and the third one is with an intimate other. And they are all equally important, and I think that is the way it has to be. And so, I'm not willing to put a guy first. And that is a real big change. And that means that I am not willing to run after something.*

5.2.4 Do you want to Dance?

SAM: *I guess I don't ever put my mind to it, like I am going to go here and try to find a boyfriend or try to find a date. But I have met people everywhere. I have met people just out and about.*

WINNIE: *Ya, like I have gone to weddings, met someone. You just never know. It could be anyone, anywhere.*

DAWN: *Once I did speed dating and it was fucking weird.*

RUTH: Are you serious?

DAWN: *Didn't I tell you about this? And it was just, I very rarely have a hard time speaking with people. I can carry conversations about myself, but it was labor intensive. I think it was five minutes per person.*

OLIVE: *But that was five minutes too long?*

DAWN: *Exactly. One guy had terrible breath. But I think it is something everybody should do once to be honest. It was my worst date experience and also my most interesting.*

WINNIE: *I try really hard, especially as I get older, um, to just always meet new people and join different groups and expand my social network. Because I think it's important to just get out there, whether it's the bar, or whatever.*

SAM: *I got drunk at a bar the other night and met a guy.*

DAWN: *I have met people at bars.*

WINNIE: *Me too.*

SAM: *I was super-duper wasted, and he just happened to be sitting near to me at the bar and I started talking to him. I told him a really inappropriate joke and he thought it was so funny.*

DAWN: *It's so easy when you are drinking at a bar. You are waiting for a drink. There are people around you. It's easier to chat someone up, because you are drunk or you are drinking. It is safe. There is not that same pressure as when you are sober and there is only one person there. You know? Like on to the next one.*

SAM: *It is also convenient. You are all hanging around in the same area. There can be so many excuses to talk to you. Asking - what do you drink? Or do you want to dance?*

RUTH: *There are a thousand different ways you can approach that.*

DAWN: *Or when guys are like I am just going to walk up to you and grind my "you know what" against your "you know what."*

(laughter)

RUTH: *Ya, why do some guys think that is a good move?*

OLIVE: *It's gross.*

SAM: *It's sexual harassment.*

DAWN: *That's very true.*

SAM: *Ya, so the guy I met, he invited myself and a friend back to his apartment to have a glass of wine. So he was like, "you guys should come and have a glass of wine." We went. He was like, "can I get your number and call you sometime?" And I said, "ya sure." And at the time, I was like oh my god, he is so cute. This is so perfect. But then in the sober light of day, when I actually spent some time with him not drunk, I was like – nope, not happening.*

DAWN: *That's happened to me too. I think another good place to meet men, other than the bar, is when you are going away on vacation.*

OLIVE: *I completely agree. And I think the best part with men you meet on vacation is that you might never see them again. So I am very cognizant of that, and the idea of seize the moment. Get to know that person when they are right in front of you. And when you are traveling, you are interested in why other people are doing it too, and so these connections around intentions. Why are you here?*

WINNIE: *Totally.*

OLIVE: *And it is exciting because you come back with this feeling anything is possible, right? And in meeting men, like even if they were flirtations or, a kiss, whatever they were, you feel really good about yourself. And after getting out of a long-term relationship, I honestly didn't know how attractive I was to men anymore.*

SAM: *I think that is why Vegas is just so fun because you get all dolled up into outfits you would not normally wear. You do your hair, you do your makeup, and you are feeling really super good, and you wear a nice little dress, and you walk through a casino, and even if you are having a day where you are like, I look like shit, every man turns to look. So you just feel good. And you get into places for free, so you never know where you might meet someone, whether at a bar, at an outdoor party, on a dance floor.*

RUTH: *The d-floor.*

SAM: *You know it!*

DAWN: *I have a funny story about meeting a guy on a dance floor, but it wasn't in Vegas. It was a while ago. After I met him, we went out on our first date and had dinner and then went out to a club which was just like kind of a little underground bar that had a band. It was super chill. Like have a glass of wine and sit. It was actually really nice and the band started playing this Michael Jackson song, and we had already talked earlier in the evening about how we had liked Michael Jackson, and I said something, it was from Michael Jackson's "Bad" album, and I said something about how, this was like the first tape I ever owned. And he said, "Oh ya – when was that?" And I was like, "I don't know. Like, I got it for my birthday it was like '88 maybe." And he mumbled something about not being around then and then changed the subject and I was like, "Pardon? Bring it back." And he tried to change the subject again, and I was like, "No, seriously, were you not alive in 1988?" And he said, "No." So I said, "Oh! What year were you born in?" And he said, "1989." And I was born in 1983, so that was a bit of a stunner.*

5.2.5 Online Dating – A Last Ditch Effort?

WINNIE: *Ruth, do you online date too?*

RUTH: *I've always been a bit of a skeptic about online dating. Like do you need to do that to find someone? If you need to go online you obviously are desperate or something, you know?*

DAWN: *I get that. And I know it's hypocritical, but I just feel like one of my top things that I would find attractive in a person is not being into online dating. And in a way, I guess, I feel it is a last ditch effort.*

WINNIE: *I'm with you. I still don't feel fantastic about online dating. Its stigma for me has not been completely removed, because I think we were raised in a different time. We were raised when this wasn't commonplace.*

RUTH: *But there are just less opportunities to go out there and meet people, because so much of your social interaction happens on a computer. As crappy as that is, it is kind of the reality. And*

so if you take dating into consideration, you have to realize it is going to follow suit and kind of be more available through that avenue and people are going to be more comfortable with it because that is how they communicate with most people, right?

SAM: True, and even though I do online date, *I am still not one hundred percent sold on it. It's not like I'd want to share the story of how we met online during our wedding speech or anything. I wouldn't feel super excited to make that declaration to the world. But I am open to it.*

RUTH: *I find the online thing a bit scary, but definitely I think it's difficult at our age when you are in a career, school is over, for most of us [looks at Winnie], and there are kind of smaller windows to meet people. So I think more and more online is just, it's the most reasonable way to do things. Um, so it is something that I am working on.*

DAWN: *It is not for me. I refuse to meet someone over the internet. I shouldn't say refuse, because I have tried it before, but I am not out there fishing. My line is not in the water.*

OLIVE: *It is not in my comfort zone either, even if a lot of the taboo has been removed from online dating. I have a friend who is a very avid online dater, and she convinced me pretty early on after my breakup, probably within a few months to make an online profile for Match.com. It has different promotions and stuff, so there was this window where you can go and get your thing and browse men and whatever. And she convinced me to go do it. So I did. I actually made it. And then I quit the next day, because I was like, I can't do it. I went to all this trouble of making um, a new email address and profile. And I was just like, no, I can't friggin' do this. I chickened out and just closed it all down after one day. So um, ya, and so then she encouraged me to try Plenty of Fish and I was just like, forget it.*

WINNIE: *I've gone through spurts with it. Um, where I'll sort of engage with a website for a month or something and then I will just get totally sick of it and not look at it for three months. I've honestly been pretty passive about it. Like, I will send people messages if I think that they seem cool, but I just roll with it.*

SAM: *Me too. I receive lots of messages, and I don't necessarily respond to everyone. And I don't necessarily go online for hours looking for people. I have had times when I have done that, but I don't seek out people a lot. I um, am very passive in a lot of ways. So, I hate online dating, but I also love online dating.*

5.2.6 Being an Online Dating Sociologist

SAM: *I have basically been an online dating sociologist. I have tried almost every site out there.*

WINNIE: *I am on a few right now.*

SAM: *I just joined Match.com last week.*

OLIVE: *So did Jessica. She texted me and was like, fyi – I joined Match.com. Omg.*

SAM: *Ya, I convinced her to. We were out for drinks. I was like just join. What do you have to lose?*

WINNIE: I am also on *Match.com*. Well actually, I am on a few different sites. I'm on *Okay Cupid* and *Match.com*. I have done *Plenty of Fish*. I think I started with *Plenty of Fish*, because it seemed like that was what everyone was doing and it was a really common site, but I found that there were just all these random sketchy dudes, saying like - yo babe, hey babe, you're pretty babe.

SAM: Ya, but as annoying as those messages are more often than not it is just a crazy ego boost because you get so many messages in a day. I think it makes you feel good frankly. Like when these people message and they are like, oh you are so beautiful. You are just like, oh, that makes you feel good. But it can sometimes be too much.

RUTH: But you can't do *Plenty of Fish*. I've heard that one is scary.

SAM: People say it is a hookup site, whatever, but people are actually themselves on that site. There are fake profiles and there are people who are like douchebags on there too, but you can actually sift through profiles. I opened up an account on *Plenty of Fish* and within an hour I had something like three hundred messages. It was ridiculous. Within two weeks, I had over a thousand messages. It just blew up and I went on some amazing dates.

RUTH: That is crazy!

DAWN: I don't know. I think you need to choose one you have to pay for, because *Plenty of Fish* is free and I have heard some really scary stories.

WINNIE: *Okay Cupid* and *Plenty of Fish* are free. *Match.com* and *eHarmony* are not free. They have free periods, but they are brief. Or you sign up and you can't see pictures, or you can't see something. So they are teasers.

SAM: Ohhhhhh*Harmony*. One night last year, I was drinking wine with my girlfriends, and they loaded up *eHarmony* and we wrote my profile together and I decided I will do three months. What do I have to lose, right? And I thought paid site, this is safer. It will probably limit at least some of the characters that I am not interested in and if you pay for it, you really want it, right?

RUTH: I had a friend who went on it and she found that the guys that were on it were a little bit more serious, because it does cost money. So people who were actually looking to be in a relationship.

OLIVE: That is what one of my girlfriends said too.

RUTH: So it filters out those people who just want to hookup, who are just like, let's see what is out there sort of thing.

WINNIE: I am on *eHarmony* as well. I decided, to do a three month trial. Pay 60 dollars and try to meet people that are truly serious.

OLIVE: Per month?

WINNIE: 60 dollars for the three month trial.

OLIVE: *Wow. That's expensive.*

WINNIE: *But ya, I only meant to pay for three months, but they are tricky and it automatically renewed my subscription. I was so mad, because I can't spend \$35 a month on this. But realizing I was still on I was like okay, I am going to make an effort and I was trying to be extremely open. So what if this person is really overweight and we don't sound like we have anything in common. Maybe I am just going to go for it. I talked to people who I wouldn't normally talk to and I was just trying to be open. And it is nice in the fact that it matches you with someone. You fill out this huge, huge, huge questionnaire, and that was difficult to fill out, cause it was just like, ah, question after question. And um, but it would send me matches, like specifically about people who have the same interests.*

OLIVE: *And did you find the questions constrictive at all? Did you feel you were being pigeon holed?*

WINNIE: *Ya, it decides based on how you answered your questions. And just because I answer a question a certain way, like a lot of the people I have dated, are not exactly like me, but we complement each other, and so, I am not sure how their algorithm works, but they are choosing every day the ten people they think are your match. So on eHarmony you can't scroll through profiles or look at all that stuff. No, everyday it gives you, like, here are today's matches and you can accept and reject or whatever. And because the questions are so specific, people can judge you right away. And then it was a three step process, where you ask someone five multiple choice questions, and then they get back to you. And then you send them your must haves and can't stands.*

RUTH: *Oh goodness.*

WINNIE: *And then you email. It was just this process. It is so robotic. And what made it difficult is that you were only sent matches that eHarmony gave to you.*

RUTH: *Right, so you couldn't browse a catalogue.*

WINNIE: *You couldn't browse. So the first few days I got a whole bunch of matches, and I could kind of be selective. But after that I would maybe get one new match a week, or one new match a month, and I was like, really? They were just scrounging for people, like they were running out of resources because you're literally going through the pool of everyone they have on the site by that point.*

SAM: *Ya, I had the same experience, right off the bat. I was like oh, there are so many people. And it was so exciting. And you wish you could rewind back to the beginning, when you were all - oh there was twenty new matches, I could be really picky, because there were a lot of fish in the sea at that point.*

OLIVE: *Right, right. And did you get frustrated?*

SAM: *I got kind of frustrated, because I wasn't getting any matches. And realistically it is sending me people in Toronto and first of all, not interested in long distance.*

WINNIE: *I think it's hard. eHarmony works better in a big city. Toronto has a lot of people to pick from.*

DAWN: *Right, it would filter it better.*

SAM: *But people who live in Toronto are frosty. I feel like Toronto people are less connected. People are even less prone to make eye contact or polite chit-chat, like, on the bus or anything. And so I don't feel like we are on the same page.*

RUTH: *Ya.*

SAM: *I am a country girl. I like small town and you can't even filter that, cause it gives you, like, this person.*

RUTH: *Is fifty kilometers away.*

WINNIE: *Ya. So your selection is limited and you are paying for it too. I met one guy that I am actually dating from there, but um, other than that it has been a bust.*

OLIVE: *And is he local?*

WINNIE: *No, I haven't met anyone locally on that site.*

RUTH: *Ya, so there are the pros and cons, right?*

WINNIE: *Ya, I guess, but my experiences were like, with the exception of the new guy, most of the dates I went on were not great, whatever, and then some of them, I was like you are a douchebag and you are paying for this. So there were douchebags on there.*

RUTH: *There are douchebags everywhere.*

SAM: *I also found the same people who were on eHarmony were also on Plenty of Fish, so why am I paying for it when the same profiles are also on there?*

RUTH: *I have recently started online dating, very recently. The one that I just signed up for where you get ten free days is Christian Café.*

DAWN: *Oooohhh!*

OLIVE: *Oh fun!*

RUTH: *I think it is great because I know for me I would be hopeful every time a change happened in my life. I would be like, oh I got a new job, oh I am going to go to a new church. And every time it was like.*

SAM: *A new opportunity.*

RUTH: *And then nothing every time, right? So it was like you know what, maybe I need to find someone else who has the same kind of goals and values. I know that those people are you know, same stage of life as me, as a Christian, someone who is ready to date.*

OLIVE: *You already have that commonality.*

RUTH: *Exactly. It is nice, because it has four areas of what you are looking for. Whether it is um, serious relationships only, or looking to be friends. I think the first one says pen pals or something, which I laughed at.*

OLIVE: *I love that!*

RUTH: *You get ten free days. But then it is something that you can choose a selection of what you want to browse for, but really anybody can search you. So pros and cons to that obviously is that you could get mail from sixty-six year olds from London, England.*

WINNIE: *Oh geez.*

RUTH: *But then the plus side is there is a whole list of people where you can read their profile and start a conversation, which is so much better than, you know, having that select criteria and that judgment and whatever.*

5.2.7 It's like Selling Yourself on eBay

DAWN: *I feel like someone can't really get to know you over the computer. And if they actually see you in person, it is a different situation.*

RUTH: *At least at a bar you physically see the person.*

DAWN: *For me, I need to meet someone and be talking to someone, because I just don't connect well with people when I am not with them and having that reaction in the moment.*

WINNIE: *It is completely different when you are in real time talking to someone.*

SAM: *Exactly. And online, they judge based on, you know, oh she answered this way or she looks this way.*

WINNIE: *Like on Okay Cupid, which I found offensive, they told me if someone found me attractive and how many stars out of five I was. They are like "You are a four out of a five stars." And I am like, great, thanks for letting me know I am not a five.*

RUTH: *See that terrifies me. I am afraid of getting no hits. So that is why I have been reluctant to set myself up on online dating before.*

WINNIE: *To put yourself out there.*

RUTH: *Ya.*

DAWN: *To get no responses or only to get cheesy, superficial responses. I want authenticity.*

SAM: *I actually had a friend, I have a friend who has an online profile as well, but he is in web marketing. Like that is his profession. And he told me my profile is terrible. And that he would help me make it better. And I was like, no. I don't care.*

WINNIE: *My number one mistake with online dating was that I put a picture up from my sister's wedding. So I had really nice makeup and hair done. So that was kind of a misrepresentation of*

my actual looks. Or it would be an expensive thing to keep up to get professional hair and makeup before dates.

(laughter)

WINNIE: And I just tend to, and this is probably a really narcissistic quality, like I am so overly concerned with how I am representing myself. It is like you are marketing yourself and then ya, you have to up yourself to try to get people to look at you, but then at the same time, you are really setting the bar quite high for when you meet them.

DAWN: It feels like you are selling yourself on eBay. Like look at my picture.

OLIVE: But it is encouraged to put a picture up, cause nobody wants to date you if your picture isn't up there, but I refused to do that the one evening I was signed up for online dating. I wouldn't put a picture up. And actually a couple of people, while I was creeping on other people, messaged me, even though I didn't have a picture, because they liked my profile.

SAM: I don't look at women's profiles, so I don't know what women are doing, but you know, I would just say, leave something to the imagination. So a lot of women, you know, I'll see profiles just randomly and they are revealing too much or you know, just like some men do. It goes both ways, but let a guy respect you for your mind first. In all my profile pictures, nothing is revealed. My body is not shown in any way in my profile. It is my face, but there is no cleavage. I am very much about, if a guy is coming to your profile because your boobs are out, is he really interested in you?

RUTH: I guess it depends what you are looking for.

SAM: I am all about female empowerment, and if you are just interested in casual sex, if you want to put it all out there, and you are okay with that, go right ahead. Do it! Do it! Ya, absolutely, guys do it, why can't girls do it? Why is there a double standard that if a guy does it, it is okay, but if a girl does it, it is not okay? So I am all about, if you are okay with that, you are still respecting yourself, and you feel comfortable, whatever. But if you are on your profile saying that you want marriage, or a long-term commitment and you are throwing it all out there, it might not be the way to go about it. You might be sending the wrong message. And I would never say that on my profile. Like in the end, ya, that is the actual goal that I want someone to spend the rest of my life with, but I would never say that. I would say looking to date, but nothing serious right now.

RUTH: I have also heard women say, I am not going to message anyone. I am going to wait for the man to initiate online.

OLIVE: Ya, because an assertive woman, is not an attractive woman.

DAWN: Oh, I don't agree with that.

SAM: But I have got that message from men that I have dated though, who have been like, oh my god I can't believe you messaged me online, you are so attractive, why would you ever need to message a man?

OLIVE: Pardon?

SAM: *Ya.*

(laughter)

SAM: *Saying, "You must be getting so many messages, why would you message me?"*

OLIVE: *Oh wow!*

SAM: *Ya, it's really infuriating.*

WINNIE: *Ya, if you are messaging me, are you desperate?*

SAM: *There's that underlying.*

OLIVE: *Wow.*

DAWN: *But their understanding of it is that they need to be the instigator.*

WINNIE: *Right.*

DAWN: *Because that's what they're told by society.*

WINNIE: *But see, I also judge people online. Not on their appearance, but based on their pictures. If you are sitting in your basement and all of your pictures are web cam photos.*

RUTH: *Or posing.*

OLIVE: *Or selfies.*

SAM: *Or on your crotch rocket in your driveway, like, meh.*

WINNIE: *We are probably not going to have much to talk about, right?*

RUTH: *Ya, it's true.*

WINNIE: *So I look for pictures that demonstrate your personality. I get a lot of messages from guys who are like, oh my god I love that picture of the mountain. Like where were you? That looks like an awesome spot. Okay, cool. We might have something to talk about, whereas if it is like, I think you're hot.*

RUTH: *Exactly, ya.*

SAM: *To be honest, I do care a little more about their appearance. For example, there was a guy recently that looks really good looking in his pictures online. And I can show you. But then I searched him, and I found him on Facebook, and I don't know if I am attracted to him. But the photos that he posted are attractive. So I am like, do you look like this in real life? And I am not trying to be rude. I am sure he is a great guy, but I don't know.*

DAWN: *But if you were attracted to the person you thought he was in his online profile, not that other person.*

SAM: *I guess it is very bad to admit. Ya, you don't ever admit that to people.*

(laughter)

SAM: *Ya, with online dating people can very much put on the best photos that they have. And so I have met a couple people that I visualized very differently from what they looked like in person. So you know, sometimes you are not really seeing who that person is.*

RUTH: *Photoshop.*

WINNIE: *There are a lot of things that I have learned about online dating, where I feel I can restructure every man's profile to make it so much better.*

OLIVE: *I bet you could make it better. But the one evening I tried online dating, I basically just browsed around for a few hours. Had a couple glasses of wine and just browsed through the guy's profiles. I must have looked at hundreds, no joke, and there was not one profile that I was intrigued by. I was judging their grammar, their writing. I thought the things they chose to write were stupid, or I thought their profiles were lazy and I was like, forget it!*

5.2.8 The Tale of the Unsolicited Dick Pic

OLIVE: *I think one big thing is that I didn't see anybody that I was interested in when I went online. And I thought I can't spend my days flipping through hundreds of profiles to not find anyone that I want to go on a date with. This will just eat up my time. I'm on enough social media and have enough of this kind of online interaction that I don't need to add this to the stack of things.*

SAM: *It's that sheer volume. It does take a long time just to filter through. There are a lot of messages that come through.*

WINNIE: *And I find sometimes it does sort of start to spiral where you open it up and you have twelve messages, or a thousand messages if you are Sam, and wow! Crazy! And I'll engage with it for a couple of months, but then after a while, ah, okay. Now I am done. This is taking so much time.*

SAM: *Ya, you put it on the back burner sometimes.*

OLIVE: *It is a lot to go through.*

WINNIE: *It is like a full-time job. And generally, because I have been on my share of online dates, and most of them are one date only, I usually feel pretty apprehensive going in. Like I'm, generally, I am just like, why did I agree to do this? This is a huge waste of my time. Um, so ya, that's generally what I go in with and then I am pleasantly surprised when it is not horrible.*

DAWN: *You've got to keep your expectations low.*

SAM: *But that's because you have to meet them sooner rather than later.*

WINNIE: *Oh ya, I would one hundred percent agree.*

DAWN: *You should.*

SAM: *Too long and I am like, ugh, I talked to you for a month. And I have Skyped with people, and then I meet them in person, and oh god, why did I waste my time on you?*

WINNIE: *Ya, I think especially with online dating. You could talk to somebody online forever. But if you don't meet them, you are never going to know. So I am sort of more like enough of the talking online. Let's just get this over with and see if there is any point.*

SAM: *Once I talked to a guy for two months online - biggest waste of time, messaging him all the time every day, great guy, probably for over a month. And then I met him and I was like, I can't stand this guy. He couldn't carry on a conversation. It was really awkward in person. So I find some people can talk a mile a minute through texting or some other kind of communication source, but when you get them in person they cannot hold a conversation. They are really awkward. And so I wasted a month and a half of my life.*

RUTH: *People are so different in person*

WINNIE: *You can't read chemistry online. But you find out pretty quickly face to face.*

SAM: *The thing I always say about online dating though is that you can also meet weirdos in life too.*

OLIVE: *Ya, but in life, most people aren't bold enough to send you unsolicited dick pics.*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *You're right. I find a lot of people are bolder online.*

SAM: *I have gotten a lot of propositions for threesomes online. I went on a date once with this guy from online and now he'll occasionally send me nude photos trying to get me to see him.*

WINNIE: *You know what is kind of interesting, is that if that happened to me in real life, I would be like you're fucking sexually harassing me. But if it happened online, I would think it was really funny.*

DAWN: *Because you can get away with it though, right?*

RUTH: *I guess, but it is still a really aggressive, disgusting thing to do.*

OLIVE: *For sure.*

SAM: *And even if it isn't a dick pic, I get messages from guys who say, like, I am in love with you.*

WINNIE: *And you are kind of like, no. Delete.*

SAM: *Exactly, there's one particular guy right now, that's over the top. I know I am going to have a great connection with you. I just know, that I really, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, you are a little over the top right now, so that really pushes you away.*

5.2.9 The Power of Google

SAM: *You get a good idea of like, someone through their Facebook account. You see their wall, and you see pictures of them and their family, find out a little bit about their friend group or what they do or their rec and leisure. If someone has twenty friends I know that they are not a good match. And then you know some things, before you decide to meet them. I know that is bad.*

OLIVE: *She is really good at creeping people.*

SAM: *Some people like to call it investigating.*

(laughter)

SAM: *But it's true. Oh, I am so good. I can find anyone. Give me a challenge. I can do it probably. I am very internet savvy. I can internet stalk with great efficacy and learn amazing things about people using the power of Google.*

OLIVE: *Ya, she is an amazing private investigator. I was actually out with her one night, we went into my friend's bar to have a drink late night and visit her. So we were talking about how a bartender I had met a couple times at the bar was actually really cute. Anyways, after we left my friend who worked with him, texted and said, "Oh, he says your friend is really cute." And I said, "Oh, well, we should hook them up," because I know that she is an avid dater, and would probably be up for it.*

SAM: *And so I agreed and said sure, let's scope this guy out.*

OLIVE: *So I said okay, let's look him up. So we were on the phone together and Sam said let's go look at his Facebook profile. I found his first and last name. I can't believe this happened. I am embarrassed that I made such a stupid mistake. So I am looking him up on Facebook, and Sam is looking him up at her house, she is on her computer too. And he and I have mutual friends on Facebook, so I can see more of his profile. And so I go to click on his cover photos to, to look at his cover photos, and I accidentally click add friend. Now, I don't know, as far as he knows I wouldn't know his name let alone his first and last name to find him on Facebook. He doesn't know my name as far as I know. So now he has this totally random add. So I panic and shut my laptop.*

SAM: *And she is saying to me on the phone, "Oh my God! I just added him as a friend. What can I do? Can I un-add him?" So I say, "You can un-add him, but he is still going to get a notification that you added him, so then he'll see that you added him, and have since un-added him. So it is even weirder. Leave it as it is and see what happens."*

OLIVE: *So I decided okay, I'm going to turn my alerts on my cell phone on, so I know right away if he added me back and I decided I was going to say, "I am so sorry. I have no excuse except that my friend said that you thought my friend was cute and we decided to check you out online to see if she should go on a date with you."*

DAWN: *So straight up confess?*

OLIVE: *Exactly. I was just totally going to tell the truth, because there is nothing else you can do at that point except confess.*

SAM: *And I said, to make her feel better, “You are just being a good friend. You are just scoping this guy out for me as a wing-woman. So it is not as creepy in a way.”*

OLIVE: *So he added me or accepted my friend add. And I wrote to him and said that whole apology and he actually just took it really well and kind of made a joke about it, and said, “Oh, well, I should be thanking you, because now you’ve made my Facebook stalking that much easier. Haha, whatever, don’t be so hard on yourself. It is not a big deal.” So it turned out to be all good.*

5.2.10 Convenience and Control in Texting

DAWN: *People don’t talk on the phone in general anymore, or at least rarely, because it is a big time commitment.*

RUTH: *I think it is kind of sad, um, that no one ever talks by phone anymore. We rely too much on text messages and emails.*

SAM: *I think we are on the cusp of that generation. I think a few years older than us and people aren’t really texting that much, but a few years behind us, and that is all they do, right?*

DAWN: *Ya, cause in high school and in my twenties you always talked on the phone to someone you were dating. That is the way it worked.*

WINNIE: *But I hate talking on the phone frankly. Like texting is much easier.*

DAWN: *Winnie, I don’t want to alarm you, but it sounds like you are maybe becoming one of those teenagers who doesn’t know how to interface with humans and can only do things via text.*

(laughter)

RUTH: *I think it’s just our general philosophy of how we communicate these days. Unfortunately, it is much more removed and on a screen.*

WINNIE: *Exactly. When I was travelling overseas last year, I met a guy and we exchanged phone numbers, but we WhatsApp’d all week. We never talked on the phone. It was just easier.*

SAM: *That’s because when you are just shooting the shit and joking around about stuff, and making wise remarks and things like that, ya, you can do it through text. It is easy and it is fast. And it is you know, convenient. And it doesn’t take time to phone to have a conversation, you know, you can just send a message like – oh, saw this. Or send a picture or something funny, whatever. It is nice that you can just have those types of communications throughout the day.*

DAWN: *Totally. It is just an easy thing to get into especially when you don’t know someone well, because it is really casual and it takes some pressure off. You can, you know, you can sort of take a minute to think about an answer.*

SAM: *Communicating via text is really easy. You have time to think about it. You don't necessarily have to be quick on your feet. You can just kind of do whatever and hope for the best.*

WINNIE: *But texting can also be dangerous.*

RUTH: *I think it can make you feel that you have a connection with someone, but they have time to craft a response rather than just be themselves and just say what they are thinking at that moment. If you are having a conversation, you are not taking a whole minute or five to think about what your response is.*

WINNIE: *How witty and clever your response is.*

OLIVE: *Like erasing it and redo-ing it?*

RUTH: *Ya, and I think you can really craft a persona that is not necessarily, and it might not even be conscious that you are doing that. And you know, phrase things the way you want to convey them.*

DAWN: *Ya, cause you have that time to make it perfect. You can sit on it for three hours and draft something, draft and change, draft and change until it is the most sensational thing that you can say to somebody.*

RUTH: *Right.*

WINNIE: *And especially with dating, you are picking up a lot on body language and tone and inflection, and you know, facial expressions and none of that obviously comes across when you are reading a tiny little box from someone that, like Ruth said, that they may have crafted in the five to ten minutes it took them to reply to your, "Hey what's up? What are you doing?"*

OLIVE: *Ya.*

SAM: *And I have dated guys, where I think they are hilarious on BBM, and you meet them and you are like, you aren't quick enough.*

OLIVE: *People are better in writing.*

DAWN: *Or better in person.*

WINNIE: *Totally. And I always feel with texting, so what next? Do I text him? Do I wait for him to text me? If I send him a text right away, is he going to think that I am desperate? When is he going to text me? I don't know.*

DAWN: *Me too. I just have a really hard time because I am always thinking, oh my god, like what should I say next? I don't know how to respond to a thing. Think of something smart!*

WINNIE: *Me too! The pressure makes me not know how to interact with people.*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *You can over analyze the message and conversation.*

SAM: See I don't *feel that performance stress of saying the right thing. Although, there is a very interesting process where you are trying to reveal things about yourself in a casual and conversational way, because you want them to know about you and you want to know about them. And it is sort of funny to have to type those things as opposed to saying them, because there is this time lag and whatever you are saying sits there. And so more than the performance piece I think for me, it is those gaps. So you write something, and then you don't hear back for an hour and you are checking your phone and you're wondering where they went or whatever.*

WINNIE: *Totally. It's, ya, it's the lack of control. And it is like that with the texting. It is like, write me back!!! You just want to will somebody to write you back.*

RUTH: *I think the instant gratification is almost a problem too.*

ALL: *Um-hmm.*

RUTH: *I think we are too used to it.*

OLIVE: *Totally.*

SAM: *And I hate BBM and WhatsApp in that way, because if I am really busy and I have time, like two seconds to look at my phone, I might read it, but I'm not answering it until later. But then the person is thinking I didn't answer their message. So then, okay fine, the next message I am going to make her wait for hours.*

WINNIE: *You start playing games. But then, there comes a point when you are not trying to hone an image of yourself with this person anymore, peacocking in a way. You really just want to communicate and have more meaningful conversations.*

DAWN: *Deep and meaningful.*

WINNIE: *Exactly. And it is more that it just can't be conveyed fast enough through text. I have had some pretty deep conversations via text with this guy I have been dating recently, and I would say text isn't the best place to be having conversations like that, because you are sitting there trying to talk, you know, and answer and you're working on six hundred characters, right? And hopefully something doesn't get misconstrued. So often times I send someone a text and then comma, does that make sense? As in, I feel I have just been typing for five minutes, you know?*

DAWN: *And at least with phone it is all lost in time, you know what I mean? You can't reference back, so you can't be oh, he said this, so it must mean this.*

WINNIE: *So it's, I think good and bad – right? It is good that you can have that constant conversation, but at the same time you know, it is not quite real life. And even with this guy I just met online, he's great, but I had to send him a text that was like, just as an fyi, I think I am going to take a bit of a technology fast tomorrow. I am going to just not go on my phone or Facebook.*

RUTH: *Why?*

WINNIE: *I think it has just been so much going on. We'll talk until midnight and then you know I am wide awake or I have woken up on Saturday at 6am and I couldn't go back to sleep. I was*

like, it's Saturday! I was so annoyed, because I'm a good sleeper. Sleeping is something that I do really well. And I'd check my phone, and there is a text. And it was a little much. It was constant texting all the time. I was of course really excited when, you know, I checked my phone and there would be a text waiting from him. Um, but it was just every day all the time. Text, text, text, text, text.

DAWN: Too much!

WINNIE: *And ah, and then after we had that conversation, I had a good sleep. And you know, we were constantly talking, and I just didn't really think about it at the time, but that's why I wasn't sleeping.*

5.2.11 Twitter – The New Age Love Letter

OLIVE: *I started writing, sort of, what I want from a future relationship, in terms of not only what I want my partner to be but, what, how I would like to see it nurtured. And I wrote that I would like my next relationship to be slow and that I would like there to be a written aspect to it. The idea of love letters at the time really got me in the heart.*

RUTH: I love *handwritten letters!*

OLIVE: *Actually it is so funny, because I have been communicating with a person through Twitter. It is not serious in any way shape or form and I wouldn't call it dating.*

RUTH: Tell us more!

OLIVE: *So first of all I have to let you know about my intentions, since you know I'm recently out of a long-term relationship. So then this person joined Twitter and we started following each other.*

DAWN: *One hundred and forty characters, what are you going to say?*

WINNIE: *Ya.*

SAM: *You've got to get it out there. No rambling really.*

OLIVE: *Exactly, one hundred and forty characters. You have to be succinct. And there is something about writing about your feelings. I articulate myself through writing really well, and so I feel I say what I need to say more clearly and concisely when I have a little more time to think about it, and put it into the written word. And I feel they do too. And I feel sometimes, saying things face to face and speaking with an intimate other, you trip over your words or it doesn't come out just like you would like. But writing is, I don't know, is an opportunity to get it perfect, or as close to that as possible. So that was my intention. And you know, you can be, I don't know, I just feel like we post things specifically for each other that are safe for the public eye to see, but we will know that they are for one another.*

RUTH: *And you are not having that face-to-face. And you are also not having to read body contact, so that anxiety isn't there.*

OLIVE: *Exactly, I mean there is some anxiety in opening myself through the written word, but I don't have to see the reaction. So I almost feel it garners me a little more courage. I can say what I need to say and there is no pregnant pause in the room. I can give time to respond and not be sitting there going, umm, did I say something really stupid?*

DAWN: *And if you are an over thinker, or over analyzer, it just feeds into that.*

OLIVE: *And, you know, instead, it is just like okay, it's out there. And there is nothing else I can do. I pressed send. It's gone. Not I just have to sit and wait. So if Twitter is the new love letter, I am okay with it.*

5.2.12 An Organic Approach

WINNIE: *One of my theories on the online dating thing is that I have known some people who were online dating, and then met someone organically. So, I don't know if that is a thing or not, but that is kind of how I feel about it. Just get comfortable with the idea of talking.*

SAM: *Talking about yourself.*

WINNIE: *Because I am very shy. So it is just kind of about.*

DAWN: *Breaking the ice.*

WINNIE: *Get the ball rolling.*

DAWN: *I think that's a good theory, because I have actually done online dating twice in my life, and I have only ever gone on three dates. I have probably only been on for about a month in total. But it is just such an awkward thing to online date. I don't know, going through profiles, it kind of feels like online shopping based on how someone presents themselves. It just doesn't feel organic to me. I just want something that is organic. And, I don't know, I think it opens the door to judgment. Well, where person A seems nice, but person B that I spoke to last week was a little more interesting. And then it's, well, let's see what else I can get.*

OLIVE: *I don't date. Um, ya I wouldn't call what I am doing now as dating in any way shape or form. I am not interested in this point in sitting in restaurants and having awkward interactions. That doesn't interest me at all. Um, I would rather do that with women, you know? I just believe in a more organic approach. I really believe in um, if it happens stance and it works for me. Um, I believe that I will meet people and I don't have to put out the effort to actually go. I just sort of walk through life with a very clear perspective of what it is I need from a relationship, and just leave it as general as that, and just hope to attract that to myself.*

DAWN: *I agree. I don't think I am old fashioned in very many ways, but I think maybe I am in that regard about meeting someone. I don't want to SkyMall catalogue a man. I think that I am not attracted to a really prescriptive shopping kind of method of doing it. It does take some of the spontaneity out of it and those really exciting pieces of just seeing a person and making eye contact with them and striking up a conversation or whatever. And I think part of me also thinks that there is an appeal to a whole new world, to quote Aladdin (laughter), but to meet someone who's an unknown entity. Who has his whole story that I don't know. And I am not part of, and nobody I know is part of, and to sort of discover that life with him, I think would also be ideal. So*

that is like a chance encounter to me, is just one of those things where you strike up a conversation somewhere, or you meet somewhere, or I don't know, and I honestly don't know how likely, or how often those things really happen. But I kind of idealize that chance meeting with someone who you end up having a connection with.

WINNIE: *And something interesting, like what you said about chance encounters, I find frequently when I am embarking on like a new change in my life, that's when I will meet someone. And I think it has something to do with your mental state at the time. You are in this exciting moment of change, and you are exuding that energy out into the world, right? And you attract that.*

SAM: *It is always when you don't look, when you are not looking. Yep*

OLIVE: *But there is something to be said about timing.*

DAWN: *You have to surrender to it.*

5.2.13 You would be Great with So and So

SAM: *Just dating, I find now in life, I am getting set up a lot more. I don't know if, I don't know maybe you get to know more people now that are looking to set people up. I am not sure, but, um.*

DAWN: *Ya, and you run into, or people are like, oh you would be great with so and so and set you up.*

OLIVE: *A friend of mine, who is a teacher, tried to set me up with this guy who is a supply teacher at her school, not interested. (laughter) And I mean some of that not interested part came because it actually came very early after my breakup when I just really wasn't interested in anybody. Um, but also, just from what she told me about him, and just pure physical attraction, he was also totally not on the mark for me.*

SAM: *Dawn tried to set me up recently and it was completely blind.*

OLIVE: *I don't like going out blind. I don't like not knowing anything about the person.*

RUTH: *Me neither. I think you prejudge them right?*

SAM: *But it ended up being really great. Well it didn't work out, but he was still a nice guy.*

DAWN: *My bad. He wanted to date her more, she didn't want to.*

SAM: *But it was, you know, great to meet someone.*

DAWN: *I think the thing about a setup is that it's perfect when I know him, but he is not my really good friend.*

RUTH: *Ya, he can't be close.*

DAWN: *And so I was like well if it works out great, if it doesn't, I don't care. No pressure, he is a nice guy. And so they went out, you went out twice or once?*

SAM: *Ya, twice.*

DAWN: *And it didn't work out, but.*

SAM: *I still see him all the time and we're friendly.*

RUTH: *I think people also need to be responsible setter uppers. I feel a lot of people who are in relationships tend to think, he's single, you're single, you guys should date.*

OLIVE: *Totally.*

RUTH: *And that is not really the sole criteria.*

OLIVE: *It's just like that sitcom joke of, oh my god, you're gay, you're gay. And just because they are gay, doesn't mean they are meant to be. It's the same kind of thing with single people.*

RUTH: *Totally.*

OLIVE: *Ya, I happen to be your single female friend and you have a single male friend.*

RUTH: *It doesn't mean we are remotely compatible.*

OLIVE: *That is a very good point. And I don't know, for me, the idea of having a couple of hours of awkward conversation or whatever with someone I don't really want to meet in the first place, just doesn't appeal to me. So I think that a random setup thing probably isn't going to work.*

RUTH: *But at least if your friend of a friend knows somebody, you can find out if they are a creep without having to get to know them. They are coming with this endorsement and with this known past.*

WINNIE: *Totally. There is a little bit more credibility and it doesn't feel like you are going into a date with a complete stranger. With those six degrees of separation you would hope that someone would tell you a bit about their history and then you can choose based on that whether to give them the benefit of the doubt or to not go there.*

SAM: *Ya, for sure. Dawn told me about her friend before the date, and said he is such a nice guy. He is so nice, he is so funny, whatever. I was like, okay, you know, some sort of support like that from friends is always good.*

OLIVE: *I guess in an ideal world I would want to meet someone through a friend. My last partner was my really good friend's friend. And our friend groups integrated and it was really nice and I had this great support network and I knew the goods and bads on him, you know, before we got serious. And I really liked that.*

5.3 Gendered Connections

This series of dialogue-based vignettes reveal what women identified as important aspects of romantic connections that they were looking for and enjoyed. Many women talked about the importance of attraction to connection, including the emotional and physical elements of connection. A number of women also spoke about the emotions that were involved in dating and making connections and the different ways they experienced and negotiated these emotions. In addition, women commented on how their intent towards dating influenced their perception of dating. More specifically, when women focused on the process of dating, rather than the outcome, they often perceived dating to be more leisurely. Finally, the vignettes illustrate the different ways gendered roles and expectations influenced the ways women experienced dating and making connections.

5.3.1 *There has to be a spark*

WINNIE: *So I think it's not just about the situation you are in. It is who you are with and if you have a good connection, any situation will feel better.*

SAM: *That is exactly what I was thinking. Okay best date - did I go to a really good restaurant? Did I see a really good show? And does that matter? No.*

RUTH: *Right.*

SAM: *What makes it a good date is the person you are with.*

OLIVE: *Connection.*

DAWN: *For sure. That je ne sais quoi?*

SAM: *There has to be a spark, that's important. Like you can have great conversation and they can be really interesting and really attractive, but if there isn't that connect, then it doesn't work. It doesn't go any further.*

OLIVE: *That energetic spark of, oooh you are cute and you are kind of checking me out. It's my favorite part about connecting.*

WINNIE: *When you meet someone that you truly connect with and you feel that spark with, there is nothing like that feeling. You can't replace that with anything else. That excitement, that connection, it's an amazing thing.*

SAM: *You smile the entire time.*

DAWN: *You find really dorky excuses to touch each other.*

SAM: *It's true. If I like you, I will touch you. Just a little tap, or you know.*

WINNIE: *Arm touches.*

RUTH: *Or like a leg bump and you don't pull away.*

DAWN: *Skin contact.*

OLIVE: *Where your elbows touch above the table, but then you can't help but be anywhere but in the present with your skin touching. It's like you have got my full attention at the elbow. My elbow is singing. You have my attention at the elbow! And as soon as that connect in the elbow moves, like you are not thinking about anything else that is going on.*

SAM: *Totally! Why did he move his elbow? I still want to be touching him. How can I be touching him? Maybe I can touch his foot under the table? And then all of the attention is in your foot.*

OLIVE: *And my eyes just want to continuously drift back. They are pulled back, because I want to make that eye connection. It's like my eyes have their own brain and they just want to keep looking at this person.*

DAWN: *Even if your brain is going you are staring, look away, stop that!*

OLIVE: *The body can't help but be aware of that flow of energy between two people. I do believe our body has a wisdom that our brains sometimes doesn't connect with.*

DAWN: *Agreed. When I feel the spark, my heart beat picks up a little too.*

OLIVE: *And if my breath catches. That ahh, ooooh! You know?*

(laughter)

ALL: *That ahhhhh!*

OLIVE: *You all know it's true!*

DAWN: *It's true. Those physical reactions come out and I know that I am interested, or on that base level there is that kindling, that reverberation.*

OLIVE: *If I'm sweating it, or if it makes me nervous to think about even going to talk to them, that's a pretty big sign. Because when you like someone, there is automatically that association with happiness and joy, also a fear of rejection on some level.*

SAM: *Ya, if you are on a date with someone who is kind of a spark, but your heartbeat doesn't really pick up, or you don't feel nervous, I don't really give a fuck about what they think about me. If I have a sense I might be rejected by this person, meh. But with someone you really have a strong spark with, if there is a sense of rejection that will hurt. That will suck! Then suddenly this person is special to me and I don't want them to reject me. I want them to really like me. And then you begin gaging the reaction of the other person.*

OLIVE: *There are different degrees of spark. I had this rebound thing, but it was a hot burning fire, and it burned out really quickly after the initial hurra.*

SAM: *That's happened to me too!*

WINNIE: *But it's easy to get caught up in the spark and then get blind to a whole lot of other things. So, it is the best part, but it's also not the only thing. And I think as you get older, you have to sort of think about those other things too, you can't just get caught up in that.*

RUTH: *It's definitely about the connection on many other levels.*

5.3.2 Belly Laughs Everyday

DAWN: *A great personality is a perk to me.*

RUTH: *And I need to laugh a lot. So I need someone who is funny and can be open.*

OLIVE: *I agree. I need belly laughs, every day.*

SAM: *Humor is key.*

WINNIE: *Sharing a similar sense of humor is probably one of the most important things to me. I pride myself on having a really good sense of humor. I personally think I am hilarious and I want other people to think I am hilarious. So if I am cracking little jokes and they are completely non receptive or don't think I am funny, or can't laugh at even something funny that happens entirely outside of us, then it is a deal breaker, because I need to be able to spend the rest of my life laughing with someone.*

RUTH: *Someone who can't laugh at themselves is a really, really big problem.*

OLIVE: *I agree.*

WINNIE: *If someone takes themselves too seriously, it's indicative of bigger root problems.*

DAWN: *Having a stick up their ass.*

(laughter)

RUTH: *And I have met people that I am not necessarily attracted to them at first too, but then when you get to know someone through talking to them you find out they are hilarious, or crazy smart, and you are just like oh - whoa, connection!*

SAM: *Like hello.*

OLIVE: *And then, that gets you going.*

RUTH: *You just find that person so much more attractive.*

WINNIE: *And I love when conversation flows really freely and easily.*

DAWN: *Me too. If I don't look forward to chatting with you it is probably not going to go to the physical level because I am very much a verbal person and that is something that is sexual for me. It is my foreplay,*

OLIVE: *But also silence can be very revealing. Because the pregnant pause can be nerve racking and you want to fill the space. But when it doesn't matter, and there is a comfort in the silence even, that can be really intriguing too.*

5.3.3 The V-Strap

DAWN: *I like to feel an immediate physical connection, for me that is the danger zone. If it is paired with a sparkling wit, that is my Achilles heel.*

SAM: *Physical chemistry is so important.*

WINNIE: *There has been a couple circumstances where I have met someone online, or where I have met someone briefly, and we've continued a texting relationship, and then we met again, and we got along really well communication wise, but there was no...*

OLIVE: *Physical.*

SAM: *Ya, because you need to know that physical connection is there.*

WINNIE: *I think you know immediately when you are physically attracted to someone. That is instant, right off the bat.*

SAM: *When you are online dating you do rely on physical attraction.*

WINNIE: *It is initially just that superficial level. Do I find this person attractive? Am I feeling something like that?*

SAM: *I agree. I met this guy online. This guy was super good looking.*

OLIVE: *Was he Sam?*

SAM: *No, no he was.*

OLIVE: *Until.*

SAM: *He was super good looking. Olive saw the pictures.*

OLIVE: *I did.*

SAM: *He was super good looking and super nice. And I thought he is too good to be true. What is wrong with this guy?*

OLIVE: *I can't wait for you to tell them why.*

SAM: *You know those people where, if he smiled he still looked good looking. If he talked, he still looked good looking, but if he laughed.*

RUTH: *Oh ya.*

SAM: *He had a massive overbite and buck teeth or something.*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *And she couldn't deal with it.*

SAM: *I am a super bitch.*

RUTH: *I think everyone has their things.*

DAWN: *You always have that ideal of what you are looking for physically.*

RUTH: *I feel it's this weird evolutionary thing and I don't understand it, but I think I would have a hard time dating someone who is a lot shorter than me. I am a tall women and I have had male friends say to me that I can be intimidating. So if I am already that, I don't need to add on taller than the guy, because I feel that is just going to lead to too many issues for him. So it is probably best if he at least trumps me in height.*

SAM: *I really like a guy's guy. I like a guy that is very manly and is rough around the edges.*

OLIVE: *I love a sexy man leg.*

WINNIE: *I love the v-strap.*

DAWN: *What is the v-strap?*

WINNIE: *The v-strap is something that I learned from Urban Dictionary.*

OLIVE: *Oh my god!*

WINNIE: *Let me pull up the definition on my phone. "On a guy, the part in between their 'stuff' and belly button, forming a 'V' shape between each hip bone."*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *I am learning about new cultural phenomena every day!*

5.3.4 Knowing Right Away

OLIVE: *Can you just know? Can you walk in and meet this stranger and feel a spark on your first date?*

RUTH: *I don't know if you necessarily feel it right away or if it is something that can grow.*

SAM: *I know right away. My body always knows first. If I feel butterflies or if I feel nauseous, I know if there is potential or whether it is going to be someone that I am going to have a really good connection with or not.*

WINNIE: *I think when you meet people in general I think you know pretty quickly if you would like them as a friend, or if you click with that person or you like that person. You get a grasp pretty quickly and obviously sometimes it is wrong, but I think you know. You can just tell.*

SAM: *People always say you need to give someone a chance. No you don't, because honestly first impressions are important. If you are an intuitive person, a first impression will say it all. You get a good read during an evening spent having conversation and spending time with someone.*

WINNIE: *If I know it's not there on the first date then there are no other chances. I had one date with a guy who had a lot of good qualities but I knew immediately that I wasn't attracted to him physically. And I knew the first night, within the first hour of spending time with him that I was like, nope. He's not interesting. He has no personality. Like he's not a bad guy, I am sure someone will love him someday if he's lucky. But he is also the most boring human on earth.*

(laughter)

DAWN: *Ya, but there are sometimes when I am like, hmm, maybe. If I had an okay time with them, I am willing to go on maybe another one. But usually in the end I am right, that it is just not there. You do once to get a feel for it, and then maybe it was off, maybe it was whatever. You have got to give a second chance. But then that's it.*

SAM: *But the other thing is that you get that read off them too. Obviously, if you sense that they don't feel it, you are kind of not going to feel it either.*

RUTH: *It has to be a two-way street*

SAM: *Ya, you pick up on what someone else is putting out there.*

5.3.5 Standing in my Enough-ness

OLIVE: *I try not to let my ego get too into it. But it does feel really good to be liked and to know someone has interest in me. And I find that since I am a regular person, and I don't attract constant male love and attention, I'm intrigued by the attention.*

WINNIE: *And I don't know if it is what I am used to, or if it is because of what society says, but as a woman you want to be seen as appealing.*

RUTH: *Or like, something about you is really driving a man to pursue you.*

WINNIE: Exactly. *It heightens your self-confidence, right? They are really into me. There is something about me that is awesome.*

RUTH: *It is self-affirming.*

WINNIE: *Why wouldn't you just want someone to be totally into you and make you feel great about yourself?*

RUTH: *But it's also tragic because so many women define themselves by their looks and how they are able to attract people. And do all these things to attract a man because they feel it's their responsibility.*

WINNIE: *That's what I did last Friday. I got ready for my date and I tried to make myself look pretty.*

DAWN: You don't have to try to look pretty!

WINNIE: *But I think that is where work comes into dating, like just in struggling so hard to look a certain way with your appearance.*

OLIVE: *But it's usually for other people. And I don't have a relationship with my body for other people. I have a relationship with my body for myself. I have been without a TV now since I was about eighteen years old. And thank god for that. I think it has made a huge difference in the way I perceive myself and my body. I am not feeding myself those messages, and I don't allow those messages into my space. I have been seeing through the Cover Girl bullshit for a long time.*

DAWN: "Maybe it's Cover Girl."

RUTH: That's the Maybelline jingle.

DAWN: Whoops!

RUTH: Haha, Cover Girl is "Easy, breezy, beautiful, Cover Girl."

(laughter)

OLIVE: *Seeing through the Cover Girl bullshit, I was able to shift my perception at seventeen from body looks, to heart health and it has only deepened and deepened and deepened over the years and I really feel that I am in the really fortunate space of being heart guided. I am not saying that I have let the ego, or that I am enlightened. Lord knows, Jesus, you know, I still like to throw on some high heels and a party dress, dangly earrings, some lipstick, and I love to rock the dance floor. But I honor my femininity now in a whole new way. I am comfortable in my body, and I think people see I am comfortable in it and that is attractive, because it is confident.*

SAM: *Ya, and if you are happy and a good person and you kind of own it, what you need will come.*

OLIVE: *You will attract that which you are. And I don't want to attract someone who is needy, and or lonely and just looking to date because they are needy and lonely. I want to be standing in*

my enough-ness, knowing I am attracting someone who is also standing in theirs and we see that in each other.

5.3.6 *Dating in your Thirties is Kind of Fun?*

SAM: So now that I am older and I am actively dating, it is kind of interesting. And I talk about it with my sister, every now and then, who hasn't been single since she was in her early twenties, um, dating in your thirties is kind of fun. I think it is better as you get older. It gets you out of your comfort zone a bit. Whereas I think it might have been a stress inducing thing maybe a little bit earlier.

RUTH: Really?

SAM: Ya. I would absolutely say that dating is leisure, because now, at the end of the day, if I have had a long stressful day, I like at the end of the day lying in my bed with my computer and searching people's profiles. I find it very leisurely, to just be creeping people. Like on the Internet.

RUTH: Where else would you be creeping them?

DAWN: I just pictured you with binoculars spying on someone from behind a bush at night.

(laughter)

DAWN: In all honesty, the creeping part is actually probably why I haven't done online seriously in a while, because it is too much. I find it to be too much filtering of people that you really don't have the connection with or you don't think you have a connection with.

WINNIE: I'd say it flip flops for me. My initial experiences of online dating were leisure. It was new, fun, and exciting, but then when it became, oh I have to go on and check this today. Like you know, I have a month, I am trying to make connections. It was time consuming. And when I had those barriers up, time restraints or whatever else, it was, it was not leisure.

DAWN: And especially online, you might be starting to make a connection with someone and then finding out oh bam, that doesn't work, or bam, I'm not interested, they are not interested. It just gets tedious sometimes. It is a lot of work, when that is kind of constantly on your mind. Did they email me today? Oh, they didn't, hopefully tomorrow. It's a lot of work.

RUTH: Ya, oh my, my perception of it is not leisurely. For sure work. But so I definitely see that it can be leisure for people and I hope to one day experience where it is not having a lot of pretense or pressure or stress and going to do fun things with people.

SAM: I think because you do go and do those fun things when you are dating, you go to the movies, you go bowling, you go out to eat. And so, you are doing a lot of leisurely activities I would say.

WINNIE: *You'd spend an afternoon playing, well not me, playing soccer or going blading. Going to the park, you might spend an afternoon or a period of time, you'd block off in a day, spending this time, and usually doing something fairly enjoyable with a person you are interested in. There is a potential to maybe have sex, actual intercourse, or coitus, if you can manage it, another form of leisure.*

(laughter)

DAWN: *Coitus.*

RUTH: *But when I am meeting people that I don't really know, or I am going to, you know, a restaurant to have dinner with someone on a really formal date, um, that to me doesn't feel like leisure. I imagine. I haven't done it. But I imagine that is what I will feel.*

WINNIE: *I would say it becomes more stressful when you kind of pick someone and you emotionally invest in them, but you are working out those kind of details. For like a month or so, and you are kind of really casually dating, but you don't know if it is gonna go anywhere. So there is no commitment or reassurance that it is going to work out because it is way too early. But there is the excitement and the hope.*

OLIVE: *I agree. Once you are beyond that initial phase of dating or connecting, ya, I think it is totally leisure. You are with a person you want to be with, doing whatever, and I think it is one of those contexts where whatever you are doing becomes leisure. Laying on the couch, grocery shopping, you know, all of these things can take on leisurely qualities, because of the ways you are interpreting the experience. You are with someone you want to be with. You are doing something that you want to do because you are with them and you're discovering things about each other, and you are having fun. And I think that once you get over that really uncomfortable piece, and you find that you can be at ease with a person or you are choosing to spend time with a person, then, that's when I do think it's really leisure. So I guess it's maybe going from dating or connecting to being in a relationship.*

DAWN: *It is easier when that kind of stuff goes away. And instead of dreading every date, and wishing you could be at home watching television, you are at home hanging out in your sweatpants together.*

WINNIE: *And the whole process is exhausting sometimes when you just want to get laid, or whatever. And you just want to get to a point where, you know what I mean?*

DAWN: *When you can actually sleepover and not have sex?*

WINNIE: *Yes! Not that I love doing that, but, if you fall asleep, you fall asleep.*

5.3.7 Momma Wants a Husband

DAWN: *Sometimes I think – do I actually enjoy it? Is it fun? Is it actually leisure, or sometimes does it seem like work? Because a lot of women act like they enjoy dating, and that they love it, but do they? Or are they expected to? And sometimes I feel badly, like there is something wrong with me, because I am not, I don't feel that way.*

RUTH: *I think of it more as a career almost in terms of you have to put time into it. You have to put effort into it. And I think of the stage of our life that we are in we know how to get things done that way. If you approach it the same way, it's maybe more comfortable, and it is maybe how you know how to run your life, so that is how you do it. Um, but it can be really scary.*

DAWN: *There is so much stress. Money wasted, Time wasted. It is a crapshoot. It is a gamble. And because it only takes that one, the large majority of that process is going to end up ending. Taking its course and ending. And I don't like that. I don't like wasting my time. I don't like, getting hurt. I don't like necessarily being vulnerable. I don't like anxiety. I don't like bad breath. I don't like a lot of things. So long story short, I don't like dating. To me it is a necessary evil. It is a means to an end.*

WINNIE: *Frankly to me, having kids is kind of more important than having a partner. My first question, I know this is ridiculously forward, to the guy I am seeing is that I don't want to continue this conversation if it's not on the table – are you interested in having more children? Like throwing it out there.*

RUTH: *I definitely kind of have that in mind too, like oh I want to meet someone so that I can have some babies.*

OLIVE: *I find it interesting, and no judgment, that to meet people, you are thinking why am I dating if it is not going to lead anywhere? For me, I'm looking to make connections and I am not attached to the outcome. I am totally open to making friends. I am so open to having hundreds of friends, like the more friends the better. And if I can really connect with someone, even if we don't become anything, then I still feel that person in some way, shape or form is helping me explore myself.*

SAM: *I have had some brutally painful dates, but for the most part, it's just kind of like you are meeting someone who is interesting and you have kind of a nice conversation and whether or not there is a connect, you still kind of just had this nice exchange with someone you wouldn't have spoken to otherwise. And as you get older, you're more comfortable with it I guess. And more kind of, it is, what it is. Whatever happens happens, you know? And have fun with it. Try to go into any situation optimistically, that even if I don't like the person, I am still going to have a good coffee and you know nice conversation and meet someone new. Expand your horizon. And I mean worst case scenario, this is someone that I have a fun, nice meal with. If there is no chemistry, there is no chemistry. And at least I got out of the house for the night and I didn't spend the night knitting cat sweaters, like I normally do.*

(laughter)

RUTH: *So I guess it depends on what you're looking for.*

SAM: *It is indicative of your intention. To me it is leisure when you don't have an objective in mind. When you are not husband hunting, it's leisure. It is being social, it is a different style of social, but it is really just, how is it any different than going out for drinks with girlfriends? You just happen to be going out with a man or woman. And it's fun. But if you are going about it, not unlike a hooker, with you know, momma's got to get paid, or momma's got to find herself a husband, then...*

(laughter)

SAM: *Can I carry on? Get it together. Momma wants a husband. If you are looking at dating as a means to an end, it's not leisure. You are not having fun. You are working. You've got to find someone. You've got to meet all of these expectations that you've set for yourself. But if you are doing it, because well it is Friday night, a handsome man wants to take me out, alright. Then it's fun. So I really do think the differentiator is your objective. Why are you doing this? And it is different for every single person. I like having a boyfriend, but every date I go on I don't have the expectation that this is going to be a relationship.*

RUTH: *Ya, I guess it's the same as shopping. Like if you are dress shopping, and you have got to find this dress and it has got to be the perfect dress - that is not fun. If you are in the mall hanging out and you have an extra two hundred bucks to blow - that is fun.*

5.3.8 It's like Getting Nervous Before an Exam

DAWN: *I once had a really nervous reaction in the car ride on the way to a date with a guy I met online. I was really excited about it, until about half way to driving there, I was like - oh my gosh. I am so nervous. I got this huge pit in my stomach, and I was like, I don't know anything about this person. What if he is a serial killer? What if we don't connect? What if this is the most awkward time of my life? Why did I agree to go on a date? I hate online dating!*

WINNIE: *It's exhilarating, but at the same time it is like rollercoaster exhilarating. It's that kind of anticipation when you are about to go on a date, which is exciting, but at the same time can be nauseating. And then the thrill of the ride afterwards, which is great, but it's getting to that point.*

SAM: *I actually enjoy the anxiety, as much as I hate it.*

DAWN: *And try to back out.*

SAM: *And I feel like I'm going to barf or vomit or have to poo my pants, or something.*

(laughter)

RUTH: *Poo your pants.*

SAM: *You know when you get nervous for an exam? It's kind of like that.*

RUTH: *No, I feel it is stressful.*

SAM: *As soon as you sit down and say hi, it's fine.*

WINNIE: *But the face-to-face across the table. I find that part of dating is really intense.*

DAWN: *The uncomfortable awkwardness.*

SAM: *Staring into each other's eyes.*

WINNIE: *The interview, right? It's really intense.*

RUTH: *I find it very stressful and nerve racking. Not even the act of dating, because I don't really do it. But thinking about dating, or thinking about going online dating, terrifies me. Even just signing up for the online site recently was stressful.*

DAWN: *I think it does take a lot of courage.*

SAM: *I remember the first time that I online dated, went on the first date, I was so nervous. I had high anxiety. I thought I was going to vomit, and my phone died, so my friends were worried because I said I was going to text and my phone completely died. And I just remember being so anxious, and it ends up the guy was really nice and it was fine, and you know. But that's why you have to have a drink before any first date.*

DAWN: *I think a lot of people have social anxieties when it comes to dating, um, the vulnerability component, and the inhibitions. But you can let those go when you drink, so you don't have those same worries about vulnerability and you can also excuse your behaviour. People use it as an excuse to say what they really feel and do what they really want to do.*

WINNIE: *When I am drinking, I am at base level needs –cute boy – talk – go – do.*

SAM: *Me too. And I still get nervous. I still get anxious. I don't think that ever goes away, but it is kind of a fun nervousness, a fun anxiety now.*

WINNIE: *I think you have to embrace that. I think you are a little more nervous going on a date because there is more on the line, or more potential because that person would hold a bigger spot in your life, right? If it worked out.*

DAWN: *I think it can be pretty emotionally draining sometimes, especially if you are not seeing results or having fun, to constantly put yourself out there and be open. The last guy I dated it was really hard when that didn't go anywhere. I got a taste of intimacy again and I started to ache a little for it. I was like, holy, this is what I was missing and this is wonderful. Like you know?*

OLIVE: *Ya.*

DAWN: *But when I didn't have the taste of it, I didn't miss it.*

5.3.9 Have Game, but Don't Play Games

WINNIE: *I think no matter what people say people still play games to some degree. They are inevitable.*

RUTH: *Ya.*

WINNIE: *As much as we don't like games, if a guy gives all his cards at me and is like, oh my gosh, you are wonderful, you are amazing, blah, blah, blah, I am going to pull back because I am going to be like this is too much.*

RUTH: *I think that would freak most people out.*

OLIVE: *That is not playing games. That is bad games.*

WINNIE: *Because it's the chase.*

RUTH: *No one likes a desperate person.*

WINNIE: *No it's unattractive, like a stinky cologne.*

DAWN: *I think I am aware of it. You know, I think especially early on, you don't want to come off as too eager beaver, constantly messaging them and vice versa. I think games are from the get go.*

WINNIE: *Even if you think somebody is fantastic you have to play it cool.*

DAWN: *I always have those automatic thoughts. Oh, somebody sent me a message. Maybe I should wait a day or two so I don't seem desperate. And then it takes a few minutes to be like okay that is stupid. Just do what you feel like doing.*

RUTH: *It is also a game with yourself and you can outplay yourself.*

DAWN: *You are trying to figure out where people are coming from and if what they are saying is actually what they mean, and you know? You are just being a bit protective.*

OLIVE: *It is fear, fear, fear. Instead of, oh, hey, I got a message. My heart says respond. I am going to do what my heart says, we go ego, ego, ego.*

DAWN: *Ya, it is all a power struggle. I want to play like I don't care. They want to play like they don't care.*

WINNIE: *For sure. This guy I have recently been talking to told me the other week he was going camping with a friend and put a smiley face. And I didn't know what that meant, and immediately my ego, is there someone else? He would tell me right? I feel like I am putting my heart out there. I have been very honest with him a couple of times now, he would tell me right? So then I wrote, ya, I'm going to spend the weekend with a friend. And I didn't put whether it was male or female either because I was just ahhhh! And afterwards, I went Winnie that is so petty, but let him wonder anyway.*

OLIVE: *There are so many things that are not being said that you wonder and you are not asking.*

WINNIE: *Absolutely. In fact, it was that reply, me replying that I went, oh, this sucks! You know what, I don't like this game. I am left wondering myself and I am really not in a better position than I started out in. This is so silly. I am just trying to gain power, because I am fearing rejection. And so I decided that in order to find out if I can trust him, I just trust him. And if he fucks up, then I just get over it. So why don't I just ask. And then just make space to listen. And if I don't get an answer, then that is my answer. And if I do get an answer, it could be awesome or maybe not, but then at least I'll know.*

OLIVE: *I think my problem is that I really don't like games or playing games.*

SAM: *I don't either. I am a terrible game player.*

OLIVE: *But I'm so not about the game ever. I don't do the wait twenty minutes to send a text game. If I want to text someone, I am going to text someone. I just want to lay it on the table.*

RUTH: *I am just going to be really open and honest.*

OLIVE: *Ya, I just really wear my heart on my sleeve. People just know how I feel about them. I say what I mean, and I mean what I say. But the problem is I also don't have game.*

RUTH: *No you don't.*

OLIVE: *To the point where everyone's always like, you got to play it a little better. And I'm like, no! I just don't want to do it. I don't see the point of being manipulative or dishonest. I just, I can't be bothered. It just seems like such a waste of time and really immature.*

SAM: *I really have very limited tolerance for games too. People who have tried to play games, I just lose patience really quickly. It's like, what are you trying to do here? What is your objective? Is this an ego thing? Are you just trying to fuck with me? Either way it looks bad on you, and I am losing interest fast and furiously - Van Diesel style.*

(laughter)

RUTH: *Maybe you have to have game, but not play games?*

ALL: *Yes!!!!*

DAWN: *Good one.*

5.3.10 *Sitting all Stoically*

SAM: *When you go into a situation and you are very serious, and like, well he's going to approach me or whatever. If you don't appear open and fun, and having a good time, where you would maybe approach someone, they are not going to approach, because you look...*

RUTH: *You look intimidating.*

[Sam makes a stoic face]

SAM: *That's me being stoic.*

OLIVE: *I don't know about stoic.*

DAWN: *It looks like you have a sore throat.*

(laughter)

SAM: *But it's true. No one is going to approach you.*

WINNIE: *You're setting yourself up for failure by not being open.*

SAM: And no one wants to be overly vulnerable. So if you just put a little bit out there. If you say hi, and he comes over, that's sometimes all it takes. But if you just sit there all stoically.

[Sam makes the "stoic" face again]

OLIVE: Not the sore throat face again.

(laughter)

WINNIE: *You have to put yourself out there in order to find what you are looking for, which is a challenging thing to do. It is tough sometimes to open yourself up. I am not the most outgoing person ever so I think that's something you have to really push yourself to do it.*

DAWN: *And it is always easier to stay at home.*

SAM: *But at least you can say you were out there, and meeting people, not sitting at home by yourself.*

RUTH: *I think dating is incredibly brave because you really have to put yourself out there and be completely open to somebody being like - I don't like you, which I am not very good at in life in general. I am a bit of a people pleaser. I basically operate under the assumption – you are going to like me. I don't do well if I know somebody doesn't like me.*

OLIVE: *It is a fear. Fear of rejection.*

RUTH: *And I feel that fear. So then I also struggle with the flip side of it - oh okay, if you are not even remotely trying to date, then, you're likely not going to not be single ever. So, how are you going to sort that out?*

DAWN: *I have to quiet the voices too.*

RUTH: *So a few weeks ago I sent this guy, who I had met a couple of times, an email saying you know, it was really great seeing you. I would love to grab a drink or something. And I was panicked, but I was just kind of like, well, basically, you're going to be single forever. Send the email! Send! And then he never wrote me back.*

DAWN: *Boo! My therapist said that the one thing about dating is if you don't take breaks you can build up a tolerance to it and that you can be more desensitized so you are not as hurt by the process. So if I did put myself out there more, that I would not feel so strongly about the outcome.*

RUTH: *That's why I decided to give online dating a shot.*

SAM: *I think it's the mindset you take too. It can be kind of liberating. If you think about it like you are just meeting people. That you have nothing to lose in the end and you're not thinking I am going to meet my husband or boyfriend. And even if someone rejects me, it's not a shot to my ego. It is just not a connection.*

5.3.11 *Going Splitsies*

WINNIE: *I am a neo-traditionalist in the sack, but that's it. On dates I am a bit traditional. I like a man to take control.*

SAM: *I'll go dutch for dinner.*

WINNIE: *I won't. I feel it means you're cheap I think, if some guy wants to go splitsies.*

RUTH: *Like on the first few dates? I agree.*

SAM: *If he offered to pay I'd be happy, and be like no, let's just split it.*

OLIVE: *I would always say let me leave the tip.*

WINNIE: *Ya, let me leave the tip or let me give you an OPHJ.*

SAM: *OPHJ. That is amazing.*

WINNIE: *Do you know what I mean?*

SAM: *Over the pants hand job?*

DAWN: *Love acronyms. Love them!*

(laughter)

OLIVE: *Fun with acronyms. Why are we single?*

RUTH: *I don't know.*

DAWN: *Are there any men out there that love acronyms?*

RUTH: *Come on. No?*

OLIVE: *I don't mind initiating anything. I am so tired of having to feel it is more gentile to wait for the man to make the first move.*

RUTH: *Right. It is a man's job. I am going to wait for the man to initiate, that stereotypical thing.*

SAM: *Like sending the first text to me isn't really that big of a deal. But I think it is nice if they ask you out. And even online sometimes I am waiting for them to initiate, but I will often ask. There have been times where I've initiated just so it speeds things along. They are not initiating so I might be like, oh we should get together sometime. We should go for coffee.*

OLIVE: *I think as I have gotten older, I've just sort of stop caring about the rules and if I like them, I would ask them out. Um, not too forward though, but you know.*

RUTH: *While I theoretically would like to be totally fine with initiating dating, I think it is something that is hard to do.*

WINNIE: Me too. *I make a point of not putting myself in that situation, of being the chaser. I am Type A. I like to be in control and I like them to put in the work, cause I am more comfortable with that.*

DAWN: *If you feel like you have control, you feel less vulnerable when you are dating.*

RUTH: *It's true and then, looking deeper into that, I don't want to be rejected, right? Like if I ask him and he says no. Then that is me getting rejected.*

SAM: *Ya, someone that I am seriously interested in, I would probably be more nervous and reluctant to initiate with because I'd have to get up the guts to do it. But someone that it is just going to be a casual thing, that would be easier to do.*

DAWN: *Ya, I think that you can be bolder if you are not totally attracted to the situation, because your commitment to the idea effects how you approach these things.*

WINNIE: *I think it's true, because even though it is modern times, and we are modern, independent women with a Y, who each have our individual her-story.*

OLIVE: *Telling a her-story, I was just going to say, I fucking hate that word. So stupid.*

DAWN: *History, her-story.*

SAM: *Ew.*

DAWN: *It's a bit much.*

WINNIE: *But there is always a bit of jockeying in the early stages until you figure out what is going to happen and whether it's worth it to invest.*

5.3.12 This is Not an Advice Forum

RUTH: *So I have a buddy, who I've known since high school.*

SAM: *This is not an advice forum.*

OLIVE: *Is this a story about you?*

(laughter)

SAM: *I have a friend... I am just kidding, keep going.*

RUTH: *So I have a buddy from high school, he is one of my best friends.*

DAWN: *I said date him.*

RUTH: *I have known this guy for fourteen years. Half of my life and there is no world that he would want to date me. There is no world that I would want to date him.*

SAM: *Are you attracted to him?*

RUTH: *No, he's a good looking guy.*

SAM: *So where's this story going?*

RUTH: *He and I have always been friends through our mutual friend and recently he's been texting me to hangout more. Which is fine, but we will go golfing or go to the driving range.*

DAWN: *He lives here too.*

OLIVE: *Oh okay.*

RUTH: *And I feel I am a hundred percent positive that he does not want to date me, but I feel we go on pseudo dates. Like I feel I am his pseudo girlfriend.*

WINNIE: *So you've hungout with him?*

OLIVE: *What makes you sure that he doesn't want to date you?*

RUTH: *Just knowing him. Like knowing him, trust me, I know he does not want to date me.*

SAM: *So you have been hanging out?*

RUTH: *We've been hanging out.*

WINNIE: *Do they get flirtatious? Do they get touchy?*

RUTH: *No.*

SAM: *Maybe you like him.*

RUTH: *I don't think I like him.*

OLIVE: *Things have already changed from you never wanting to date him, to now you don't think you like him.*

DAWN: *Now you are questioning it though.*

RUTH: *Because you are laying it on me!*

DAWN: *If I have a boyfriend, I can talk to anyone. If I am single, I question everything I do.*

OLIVE: *Ya.*

DAWN: *Like am I hitting on that person?*

RUTH: *Right. I feel if I didn't know him, I would think we were on dates. But I know him.*

OLIVE: *To me its sounds like you are convincing yourself that you are not going on dates, but you might be.*

DAWN: *He tries to pay, so it's not going dutch. That's almost a date.*

RUTH: *I never let him pay.*

SAM: *But he wants to.*

RUTH: *Or he'll pay, and then I'll pay.*

SAM: *That's a date. That's a date!*

DAWN: *No, I don't know.*

WINNIE: *How many times have you gone out in this context?*

RUTH: *Two or three times.*

DAWN: *You bailed last time.*

RUTH: *I just bailed last time because it was weird.*

DAWN: *She was doing laundry on a Saturday.*

RUTH: *Our other buddy was supposed to be there, and I was just like no, I am going to pull the chute. I feel weird.*

DAWN: *And you are both single and there is nothing stopping you two from dating.*

WINNIE: *Except your own decisions of you shouldn't do this.*

OLIVE: *And you might not want to, but then it's awkward.*

SAM: *You should be able to be friends. I promote that.*

WINNIE: *I have this conversation a lot with people about whether men and women can ever be friends.*

DAWN: *Someone always likes someone.*

WINNIE: *I think they can.*

SAM: *Ya, I think women and men can be friends.*

OLIVE: *I think they can too.*

WINNIE: *But most people don't.*

DAWN: *I don't think they can be friends. I think someone always has more feelings for someone.*

WINNIE: *It is not just pure friendship, like you and I being friends.*

DAWN: *I don't think they would ever act on it, but I think there is always something there.*

WINNIE: *Ya, the feelings are there.*

SAM: *But that is like saying every lesbian likes all women or every gay person likes all men. And that's not true.*

WINNIE: *But if you are friends, then you have a base.*

DAWN: *If you like spending a lot of time with me, you like everything about me, chances are.*

WINNIE: *It has crossed your mind at least once.*

DAWN: *Ya, and not that you'd ever act on it, but if they were single. I don't know.*

WINNIE: *I guess then the question is, whether that negates friendship?*

DAWN: *No, I don't think so.*

WINNIE: *But another factor with that too, is time. If you've only been friends with a guy for a year or two it's different then if you've been friends with them since you were fourteen.*

5.3.13 Analyzing Every Stupid Thing

DAWN: *When you first start dating someone, it's just a lot of pretending and trying to see where the other person is coming from and reading these bizarre signs, analyzing every little stupid thing. So I would say it is kind of work at the beginning. Like it is for me anyways and maybe that is my personality, because I do over analyze everything. And sometimes I get so frustrated I just want to walk away.*

WINNIE: *So the guy I am seeing made such a small comment, which it was so reassuring. He was like I am totally into this. I think this, this, this about you, I think, you know this could really develop, but I really just want to take things a bit slow. It was so tame. It wasn't like, whoa, back down Sally. But to me it felt like rejection. And then I found I was over analyzing everything I was saying, because I didn't want it to sound like I was too into him, or whatever. I started being even more cautious and more careful in what I kind of presented. I felt crazy.*

DAWN: *It's interesting how one comment can make you do an analytical spiral.*

WINNIE: *And I hated it, because I am already so over-analytical. But my friend is always good at saying you are way over-analyzing, which of course I was. She was like just play it out. Just back off a little bit so you get a little bit of reassurance. Everybody has their off days and everybody has their weird things that come up, especially if you are talking over text. Don't even worry about it. Just don't take this to be the be all and end all.*

RUTH: *Right.*

SAM: *It can so easily happen. Not anymore, but when I first started online dating, I would be like, hey I messaged this guy, why isn't he getting back to me? What is wrong with my profile? Oh maybe I should go back and change some answers. Or maybe I should, you know, and I brought it all on myself. It kind of threw me for a loop.*

RUTH: *It is interesting that we put that on ourselves, and don't put it on the other person.*

SAM: *I know! And I would say that most of the time it is just myself, putting that on myself. My own kind of anxiety around that. But then I started to think, you know what, I am not going to go*

down that road. I have no clue what is going on in this other person's life, right? And it's not my fault. And the person who likes my profile will message me and I can't, you know, have that negative thought about myself every time someone rejects me online.

OLIVE: *And not just online, but in general, it is about being okay enough with myself that I am not sitting back and going why isn't he writing? Did I do something wrong?*

WINNIE: *I think it comes back to just being used to being in control. And I think that when you are not, when you are not the one controlling things and you are more vulnerable it is an uncomfortable feeling. Especially with someone you don't know very well, and you are trying to figure out.*

5.3.14 The Lemon Law

SAM: *I say let's do this again sometime.*

RUTH: *You are Chandler Bing.*

DAWN: *Excellent friend's reference.*

SAM: *I say it to everyone, but I don't mean it to everyone.*

WINNIE: *I don't want to go on any dates with you! You are going to hurt my feelings. (laughter)*

OLIVE: *But then what do you say to them if they ask you again?*

SAM: *I ignore them if I am not interested.*

DAWN: *I am also a taper-off-er. Is that a word? Anyways, I just stop answering calls and stop replying to things until they finally get the point, which is totally mean. It is so bad because I have been on the opposite side of that and just being ignored by someone is really not that nice of a thing to do. But at the same time, it is really hard to tell someone you don't like them.*

RUTH: *You don't want to be rude about it.*

DAWN: *I also use words of disinterest. Like I am really busy and I am probably busy next weekend and the weekend after that and for eternity I am washing my hair.*

WINNIE: *My thing is I say I am kind of dating someone else now and it is further along.*

OLIVE: *That is pretty smart.*

DAWN: *Ya, that is smart.*

WINNIE: *Someone said it to me once, and I was like okay.*

DAWN: *And then you were like, damn, I have got to use that.*

WINNIE: *Ya, so I have used it a couple of times.*

OLIVE: *I don't even care if that is true, because that is a good line.*

WINNIE: *It's not about them then.*

OLIVE: *Ya, that is a good point. Because I feel like I would just keep dating someone forever.*

RUTH: *One of my best friends online dated and she was just like you have to be really open to meeting someone for coffee, knowing within thirty minutes that they are not someone for you, and you being like, it was really great to meet you, I just don't think it is going to work. Take care. Good luck. You have to be okay with doing that if you are seriously online dating.*

SAM: *I one hundred percent agree. With online dating, you need to get comfortable with the concept of talking to strangers and talking about yourself.*

RUTH: *Meeting a lot of people.*

SAM: *And being okay sitting through a terrible conversation.*

RUTH: *And you have to be okay with that being done to you.*

SAM: *You could just say, oh, I have to meet someone.*

DAWN: *You have a doctor's appointment.*

SAM: *Oh ya.*

OLIVE: *I have my herpes test. I got to go.*

DAWN: *I have to go to my gynecologist.*

(laughter)

WINNIE: *I don't want to lie.*

OLIVE: *I just, I'm too nice. I'd get caught up and suffer through.*

DAWN: *I am kind of like that too.*

OLIVE: *It is one night, right? And I think you have to respect the people who are also going out on a limb, coming to meet you, looking for love, or whatever they are looking for. And I would just feel bad that I was, you know, not the right avenue for them on that journey. It would make me feel sort of sad that I let them down or that we didn't connect or whatever, because I'm sure there are lots of creeps and weirdos, but I am sure there are also a lot of nice men just trying to find someone.*

RUTH: *See I am not in any way courageous. I would feel too uncomfortable rejecting people I think like that. I don't think that I could just do that random kind of meet, and then run the chance of having to say no thanks. Sorry. I would feel bad or guilty or worry about their feelings. I would feel obligated to talk to these men even if it was in the cyber world. It's so bad, that I could imagine myself starting a relationship with someone, because I didn't know how to extricate myself from it.*

DAWN: *I think that is how I ended up dating the last person I dated for three years. Cause I felt badly. So, it's really not a good thing. Don't use that as your guide.*

OLIVE: *But it is this tendency, and I think it is very gendered, where women feel badly that men are paying attention to them, and then feel badly ignoring them or not talking to them.*

SAM: *There needs to be a fifteen minute rule. Like after fifteen minutes when you meet someone, you can both tap out.*

RUTH: *Have you ever seen that "How I Met Your Mother" episode?*

SAM: *No.*

RUTH: *The Lemon law.*

OLIVE: *What is it?*

RUTH: *It is in the first five minutes, you can lemon law someone, and be like, nope, lemon law. And leave. No harm done.*

5.3.15 *It Involves Chemistry and Anatomy*

SAM: *I have never had a one night stand.*

DAWN: *Ya, you are not in it for the hookup. I am like that too. It gives me a lot of anxiety to do it too soon and knowing when to go that far. As a woman, what does me doing this look like? What are people going to think of me if I have a one night stand? And also, for me personally the hardest part of dating is, you know, it hurts your heart if you are rejected and you have done that. You have done it, and there is that vulnerability for me that just makes it more hurtful. I know it is a sexual thing, but my heart is involved too.*

RUTH: *Of course.*

DAWN: *And in the moment it feels good to get laid. But the repercussions are not worth it if you haven't built a trusting, loving relationship.*

OLIVE: *They are not.*

DAWN: *I am very sexual but I think for sex to be good it needs that emotional component. I need to have some kind of connection and intention to commit. It doesn't necessarily have to be this fully monogamous, let's exchange promise rings, kind of thing. But it does change the tone of it from it just being dating, to that deeper connection. I am not saying that that is a steadfast rule, but that emotional and that trust and safe place is when it can be really fantastic and passionate.*

OLIVE: *And then there is also that element of tease. The build-up, of something to look forward to and then that waiting game gives you something to like, it just makes it that much better.*

WINNIE: *Ya, it takes a long time to build up an intimacy level where sex is actually really good, but I am able to separate the sexual part. Which is, you know, the sex is not going to be as good*

or as intimate. It is more mechanical and there is not a lot of trust. But I have made a conscious decision before, at different times, that I just want a fuck buddy and I don't want to be boyfriend-girlfriend. I just want to have sex with this person.

SAM: *I recently propositioned a guy for sex, which I've never done before in my life.*

OLIVE: *I was there, pressuring her.*

WINNIE: *You should just do it always.*

SAM: *I have never propositioned a guy for a casual relationship or for sex. I have never propositioned a guy period. Any guy I have ever really had sex with I have been in some sort of relationship with in some way.*

WINNIE: *Dating or something.*

SAM: *Ya, this guy I dated before and physically I could just melt into him. Kissing was great. I wanted to rip his clothes off. But emotionally this guy just couldn't hold a conversation. So I thought, a casual relationship would be ideal with this guy. So this one night I was drinking wine and I propositioned him. And this was actually really funny. So I just put it right out there. I said, "Hey, are you dating someone right now?" And he said, "No, why?" And I said, "Okay, I have a proposition for you, interested?" And he was like, "lol, possibly." So I said, "Even though the distance gets in the way of us being a couple, I'd be interested in seeing you in a non-committal capacity (wink)." And then he said, "That sounds very scientific and very tempting." And I said, "It does involve chemistry and anatomy."*

OLIVE: *My line!*

(laughter)

SAM: *Anyways, then I didn't hear from him. This was almost a week ago. So I said, "Nervous? You know we aren't jumping in the sack right away." I said, "We can go on a date to start and see how we feel – wink." And he's like, "lol, I have no problem jumping in the sack." I said, "haha, well hadn't heard from you after my proposition." And then I haven't heard from him since.*

WINNIE: *I don't know how to interpret that.*

OLIVE: *I know, right?*

DAWN: *He's dating someone.*

WINNIE: *Maybe.*

OLIVE: *Um, she asked that first, straight up though.*

RUTH: *But if he still likes her, he's not going to say.*

SAM: *He does still like me. Ya, you're right. Maybe that is what it is. Cause he was very much into me, and wanted to date me before. Maybe he's still into me, but doesn't want to say that he is dating someone.*

WINNIE: *That's what I was thinking. That's a possibility. That would probably be my number one thing of what is holding him back right now.*

RUTH: *But then if he does like you and wants a relationship.*

DAWN: *That's another reason for him not to do it. If he knows you are only looking for sex.*

SAM: *But that could be his way in, kind of thing.*

OLIVE: *And then he can trick you into a relationship.*

RUTH: *She won't know what's coming.*

DAWN: *Coming.*

SAM: *Play on words.*

(laughter)

The themes for each of the three larger thematic areas (Gendered Pressures to Connect, Gendered Mode of Connecting, and Gendered Connections) reveal the complex ways adult women experienced singlehood, dating, and leisure. In particular, the findings from this study provide insight into the ways gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles can shape single, adult women's experiences with singlehood, dating, and leisure. In the following section, I critically explore the findings presented in these three larger thematic areas through six points of discussion: gendered ideologies, gendered technologies, gendered performances, gendered emotion work, gendered friendships, and gendered talk.

6.0 Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, I present six points of discussion. The first two points of discussion, gendered ideologies and gendered technologies, tie strongly with the research described in the literature review, while also offering new angles of consideration and questions for reflection. The subsequent four points of discussion: gendered performances, gendered emotion work, gendered friendships, and gendered talk offer new insights not reflected in the literature review, thus opening new space for discussion, questions, and perspectives to emerge. To support the subsequent discussion points, I include excerpts from my findings chapter throughout. To maintain consistency, the excerpts from my findings chapter that I have chosen to include are presented in a similar format to how they are represented in the findings chapter, including the use of italicized and regular font.

6.1 Gendered Ideologies

Regardless of how women or men choose to organize their lives, whether single or coupled, their choices are shaped by gendered ideologies. Gendered ideologies pervade men's and women's lives in unique ways (Freysinger, Shaw, Henderson, & Bialeschki, 2013b) and emphasize the importance of heterosexual couplehood, family relationships, and the necessity to biologically bear and raise children. However, Freysinger et al. (2013b) suggested the impact of these ideologies may be even more pronounced for women who do not fit into traditional notions of womanhood (e.g., wife, mother), such as single, adult women. Moreover, as Freysinger et al. (2013b) explained, "Although these discourses can be challenged, systemic inequity persists in subtle and overt ways, influencing time use, leisure involvement, and leisure experiences" (p. 542).

Previous research has demonstrated the ways gendered ideologies, including pronatalism and familism (cf. Parry, 2005; Shaw, 1992), can influence women's leisure lives. However, as of yet, limited literature has focused on how these gendered ideologies influence leisure experiences for single, adult women. In addition, there is limited research looking at the ways the ideology of couplehood, more specifically, influences experiences of singlehood for adult women. In this section of the discussion, I unpack the ways gendered expectations stemming from gendered ideologies, including couplehood, pronatalism, and familism, influenced the lives of the single, adult women in my study. I also outline the ways women chose to reproduce and resist gendered expectations tied to these ideologies as part of their leisure and professional lives. I turn first to discussing several of the ways the women in this study experienced gendered expectations tied to the ideology of couplehood.

6.1.1 Ideology of Couplehood

My findings support previous work by both Cobb (2011) and DePaulo (2006) that has suggested the ideology of couplehood influences experiences of singlehood for adult women. A number of women expressed a strong awareness of the expectation to couple that was perpetuated within a number of different leisure contexts. For instance, several women mentioned how they had been invited to leisure-based and couple-centered events, such as weddings, without the option of bringing a date. One woman shared a story about how her friend had called her to talk about wedding invitations, "*We are really trying to keep low numbers and stuff, so I didn't give you a plus one.*" In addition, a number of women explained how they had become more aware of their single status at different times throughout the year, such as during Christmas or Thanksgiving, as these holiday occasions are rooted in notions of couplehood and family. Moreover, several women noted their coupled friends often excluded them from certain

leisure outings. These findings, when taken together, illustrate the ways leisure contexts can marginalize single, adult women.

A few women also talked about feeling pressures when attending events hosted by their workplace, given that they felt these events required they bring a date or romantic other. As one woman shared, “*where you’re like, well, should I bring a date? Because in the professional world being in a couple is expected and you go to a lot of events with people who have spouses.*” Moreover, several women talked about feeling judgment at workplace events when they decided to go alone (e.g., “if you don’t *bring someone they are like – ‘oh and you couldn’t find a date’*”). Yet, the expectation to attend workplace events in a couple is also heteronormative. For example, several women noted how there had been certain workplace events where they had been invited with a date, but even though they did not have a romantic other to bring, they did not feel as though it would have been viewed as acceptable to bring a woman friend instead. These findings reinforce the importance placed on couplehood as the most important type of personal relationship (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) and undermines the value and importance of other relationships, including women’s friendships with other women.

In response to this marginalization, a few women revealed how they avoided certain couple-centered and family-focused social situations (including work social situations) where they knew they would have to attend alone. This finding is reflected in a study by Parry (2005) exploring how women dealt with infertility. She found women used leisure as resistance to pronatalist ideology. In particular, the women in her study intentionally avoided certain leisure activities where pronatalism was perpetuated, such as baby showers. Building off of Parry’s work, the findings from this study illustrate the ways women can resist other gendered ideologies, such as the ideology of couplehood, by avoiding certain leisure and professional

contexts where this ideology is perpetuated. In addition to avoiding certain leisure and work functions, several women resisted the ideology of couplehood by choosing not to keep friends in their lives who focused on the importance of couplehood and having children (see the Gendered Friendships section for a more detailed discussion of the links between marginalization, friendship, leisure, and resistance).

In addition to experiencing marginalization in certain leisure and professional contexts, my findings speak to the ways singlehood is pathologized as a relationship status that needs *fixing* for single, adult women (Cobb, 2011; DePaulo, 2006). As Cobb (2011) explained, “Part of the reason being single is terrible is that it’s been made into a mystifying condition, marked by failure, characterized by an almost unassimilable oddity despite its always threatening ubiquity” (p. 4). Many women described finding it challenging to deal with the perceptions other people (e.g., friends, family, coworkers) had regarding their single status in both their professional and personal lives. In many cases, they could sense other people in their lives were uncomfortable with their single status and were often judging them for being single. For instance, a number of women noted how people’s attempts at being supportive of their single status often reinforced the expectation that couple status is the ideal relationship status. More specifically, women mentioned how people in their lives often tried to troubleshoot the reasons why they were still single (e.g., *maybe your standards are too high?*). Several women also shared how friends and family tried to reassure them that they would eventually find someone with whom to couple. In particular, one woman noted how she was told that it was brave of her to leave her couple relationship to be single. Several women also talked about how these comments were, at times, delivered in harsh ways. For example, one woman revealed how her aunt told her at her grandmother’s funeral, “*I can’t help but notice that you are the only one that came here alone.*”

Related to the unsolicited and offensive comments diagnosing their singlehood, almost all of the women in the study talked about having to navigate routine questions about their single status from friends, family members, and co-workers, such as: “*Why are you single?*” “*Do you have a boyfriend?*” Most women found these types of questions intensified in adulthood and several women felt as though single, adult men did not get asked the same types of questions about their single status with the same frequency and judgment. Rather, women talked about how the perception is often that single men are single by choice (although one woman did note her male cousin who was single was also questioned at times by family members), whereas women are single because there is something wrong with them.

In addition, many women felt comments and questions related to their single status crossed a personal line, and as such, were questions they did not want to have to answer or respond to, let alone negotiate on a regular basis. DePaulo (2006) explained single people often perceive the marginalization and stigmatization of being single to be personally invasive. The pressure women felt to respond to these questions in the workplace is particularly problematic, given that women should not have to explain and/or justify their single status anywhere, but most especially at work. Although several women in this study admitted they did not feel the people in their lives asked these questions with any type of mal intent (for the most part), they did note the ignorance many people in their lives had to the oppressive nature of these questions.

Interestingly, several women noted how questions about their single status represented a double standard, in that these types of questions were seen as appropriate and sanctioned in social settings, whereas questions related to a person’s couple status or marriage were considered inappropriate and unsanctioned in social settings. Put another way, questioning “the couplehood” is considered off limits. These findings speak to the persistent and frequent questioning single,

adult women face because of their relationship status and how these questions have been normalized in leisure and professional contexts over time and continue to be reinforced through different social channels. Ultimately, these questions reinforce the value placed on couple status.

Although friends, family, and coworkers have been shown to reproduce gendered expectations tied to the ideology of couplehood through comments and questions (Strong et al., 2005), my findings highlight how women themselves can also contribute to this reproduction. For example, one of the women I interviewed admitted she was guilty of asking similar questions in professional contexts, because questions relating to a person's relationship status in these contexts are commonly asked as icebreakers. This finding indicates there may be a difference between the ways gendered expectations tied to the ideology of couplehood can be experienced for women in professional contexts in comparison to leisure contexts. Even more importantly, this finding illustrates the role single women can play in perpetuating the ideology of couplehood.

When asked how they responded to these questions, many women admitted to not knowing how to respond to questions relating to their single status, although they often felt obligated to provide an answer. A number of women shared how they found it difficult to challenge comments and questions related to their single status, because these questions were often couched and delivered in a language of concern. In this way, women often felt constrained by these comments and questions and in turn felt obligated to provide some type of response. As a means of diverting these questions about their singlehood, several women talked about using humor in self-deprecating ways. Not surprisingly, Coates (2013) found humor is used by women and men as a form of self-protection in certain situations that might be uncomfortable or stressful. Despite the ways humor can be used to divert questions and comments as a form of

self-protection, using self-deprecating humor to respond to questions about one's single status can also reinforce gendered expectations, given that self-deprecating humor is based on belittling oneself as a way to divert the direction of a conversation. In turn, using humor in self-deprecating ways can actually reinforce gendered power disparities tied to the ideology of couplehood (a discussion point I expand on in the Gendered Talk section of this discussion).

6.1.1.1 *Resisting the Ideology of Couplehood*

Despite not wanting to engage with questions related to their single status, many women found ways to resist the gendered expectations tied to the ideology of couplehood by responding to these questions in more subversive ways. For example, one woman explained her overt approach to answering these types of questions: *“here is the deal, I’m actually kind of awesome and doing all of this great stuff. So, I’m fine.”* In addition to more overt forms of resistance to these questions, a few women shared how they often responded to questions and comments using inner monologues to voice what they wanted to say out loud, but did not feel as though they could say out loud (e.g., *“if you could just shut it that would be great”*). Another woman revealed how she made a point to ask friends in social situations, *“what is new and exciting?”* as opposed to focusing the conversation on their single status. In this way, the findings also demonstrate the ways women can actively refuse to further perpetuate the ideology of couplehood in their own lives, and thus, set an example for others to follow.

In line with this finding, Pozner (2010) highlighted how women can use deconstructing questions to address gendered messages and expectations. Similarly, women in my study were able to resist gendered expectations tied to the ideology of couplehood, by asking their own questions in their own ways. Several women subverted the ideology of couplehood by choosing to ask their own questions related to their single status. For instance, women asked questions,

such as: “*What is it that I need? And who is it that I am? And what is it that I really want?*”

Asking these types of deconstructing questions about their own needs and wants was liberating for a number of women and personally empowering. Other women were able to use these types of questions to shift their mindset: “*Like you can have everything and be single and I think that is a mind shift*” and “*recognizing that having everything doesn’t necessarily have to mean being in a couple. There are multiple definitions of happy and um fulfilled.*”

After reflecting on these types of questions, a few women talked about choosing to take a break from pursuing a romantic relationship. Instead, choosing to use their single time to work on and learn about themselves. By taking a break from dating, women were also able to legitimize a life without a partner as fulfilling unto itself. In this way, women began the work of “breaking down and questioning the ideology that ‘it must always take two’” (Cobb, 2011, p. 35), by considering their own needs and wants first and foremost. These findings reflect a study by Schäfer (2008) that looked at how the relational imperative influenced heterosexual women’s understandings of romantic love and relationships. She found several women in her study experienced empowerment through forms of resistance to expectations of romantic love and couplehood. For example, several participants felt they did not need a man in their life to feel complete and had decided not to be in a romantic relationship because they enjoyed the freedom of being single (Schäfer, 2008).

Moreover, in my study, resistance was also evident through women’s discussions of settling that surfaced in both group interviews and nearly every one-to-one interview. Women described settling as “*bringing down your standards*” and “*when you’re feeling those pressures and...you want to make things happen, so you settle on something less than what you want for yourself.*” Almost every woman talked about not wanting to settle in a romantic relationship

simply for the sake of being in a couple. Several women referenced other people in their lives who they knew had settled and were not happy in their couple relationship. As an example, one woman explained, *“I am sure we all have friends or acquaintances where you go to the wedding and it’s like, they are just getting married to get married. And you look at a lot of those friends, and you are like, you settled.”* Many women commented they would rather find happiness alone than be in an unsatisfying romantic relationship. Another woman shared a saying *“always wait for margarita”* to verbalize her own resistance to settling in a romantic relationship. The women also collectively used talk together, subverting certain gendered expectations set forth by these ideologies, resistance that I outline in more detail in the Gendered Talk section of the discussion.

Women’s resistance to the ideology of couplehood was also apparent through their sexual choices. Given that couplehood and marriage have traditionally been perceived as the most appropriate avenues for establishing sexual relationships (Bailey, 1988; Coontz, 2005), a notion reinforced by the sexual double standard (Reid et al., 2011), it is not surprising a number of women talked openly about not feeling comfortable pursuing sexual relationships outside of a committed relationship or marriage. However, several women in this study noted their choices to date were primarily driven by a desire and interest in pursuing a sexual relationship. In this way, women were finding ways to meet their sexual needs and explore their sexual desires outside of couplehood. For example, one woman explained how she deliberately established relationships with men for the sole intent of sexual activity: *“But I have made a conscious decision...I just want a fuck buddy and I don’t want to be boyfriend-girlfriend. I just want to have sex with this person.”* Another woman explained how she had recently propositioned a man for a purely sexual relationship.

In addition to pursuing relationships for sexual purposes, a few women also talked about pursuing other options for gaining sexual pleasure, such as through erotic novels and sex toys. As one woman mentioned, *“It’s not the same, but...having it I don’t have so much pressure to get my jollies through dating the wrong people. I get it through my smut and through BOB (battery operated boyfriend). So I can be satisfied.”* This example illustrates the ways women can pursue sexual activity in self-satisfying ways independent from men. This act, in and of itself, subverts traditional expectations tied to women’s sexuality that position women as passive when it comes to fulfilling their own sexual desires. These findings support the work of Parry and Penny Light (2013) who discussed women’s consumption of sexually explicit material (e.g., pornography and erotica) as part of their leisure and the ways such consumption can be used by women to subvert gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles. Indeed, the findings from my study illustrate the ways women resisted the ideology of couplehood. Yet, a number of women also talked about a fear of running out of time to partner and have biological children, fears tied to the ideologies of pronatalism and familism, where I turn next.

6.1.2 Ideologies of Pronatalism and Familism

Bogle (2008) found many women felt pressure to follow timelines for coupling and marriage to have biological children. The findings from this study support the idea that women experience social timelines related to the ideology of couplehood, as well as familism and pronatalism. In particular, several women noted the social value placed on coupling as a step to achieving biological parenthood became more salient in adulthood, given that their family began asking questions as to whether they wanted to have children someday and many of their friends were beginning to have children. These pronatal pressures influenced women’s experiences with singlehood in different ways.

Several of the women who wanted to have biological children talked about doing “the math” of how long each successive step on the timeline would take to achieve couplehood before they would no longer have the option to have children biologically. One woman explained, “*It is so stupid, and you know it is stupid, but...you still have to think about the sequence because you want to date someone you could have kids with.*” For many of these women, the timeline was a constant reminder they were running out of time to accomplish this goal. As one woman shared, “*I think it can evolve into a fear of I better get married before I am thirty-five, so I can have healthy babies.*” Moreover, the women in this study did not believe the gendered expectations tied to pronatalism were experienced by men in the same way, as men do not have the same pressures related to biological timeframes. These findings support the work of Notkin (2014) who found women are socially made to feel as though they have made the wrong choices if marriage and biological motherhood do not become a reality by a certain age, especially as women get close to reaching the end of their window to have biological children.

Although women who wanted to have biological children in this study experienced pressures related to their single status, a number of women resisted the gendered expectations tied to pronatalism by considering alternative ways to have biological children. For instance, several women considered the option of having biological children by themselves. Hertz (2006) also found a growing number of single women (albeit often professional, middle class women) pursued biological children on their own. She (2006) explained single women who want children biologically are electing “to bypass the storied progression from love to marriage to motherhood. They have taken matters into their own hands, as it were, to fulfill a familiar dream in an unfamiliar way” (Hertz, 2006, p. xv). However, it is important to note several women in my study who wanted biological children did not feel as though this was a feasible route to achieving

biological parenthood, as they did not believe having children outside of the couplehood has been fully accepted and normalized in society.

In addition to having children on their own, one woman, in particular, spoke about how she questioned her desires to have children and the authenticity of those desires. She explained, *“I can’t tell if I am programmed to want kids or if it’s really an inner longing. I can’t tell the difference. I still wrestle with that in my head a lot. I don’t know how authentic that is.”*

Questioning these desires, in and of itself, is a form of resistance to pronatalist ideology, given that pronatalist ideology works to promote the idea that a “real” woman must biologically bear and rear children (Valenti, 2007).

Several women in this study who desired children also talked about being open to alternative ways of having children that were not solely biological, including adoption, surrogacy, and/or fostering. Connected to this finding, Notkin (2014) demonstrated how single, adult women are finding alternative ways to be mothers or bring children into their lives outside of biological motherhood, including placing a stronger emphasis and importance on roles they consider to be maternal, such as being an aunt. Although Notkin’s work opens space for thinking about different ways women can be mothers, the underlying message of her work remains centered on the need for women who are not biological mothers, to still find ways to fulfill their “naturalized” maternal instinct. But this message fails to consider that single, adult women may not be interested in pursuing motherhood, biologically or otherwise.

A few women in this study made it explicitly clear they did not want to have children. The women who did not desire children considered their experiences with singlehood to be freer than experiences of singlehood for women who did, as they were not dealing with the same pronatal pressures and associated timelines. The findings from this study suggest personal leisure

experiences for women who do not want children can be potentially more free, or freer, from gendered expectations set forth by these ideologies. Yet, it is important to consider how their choice to not have children is taken up by family, friends, co-workers, and self. Can women face marginalization in leisure contexts (such as holidays focused on family, couplehood, and children) for not wanting to be mothers? And when women speak up about not wanting children, can they establish new expectations about what womanhood can look like?

6.1.3 Implications - Gendered Ideologies

The findings from this study illustrate the complex and messy relationship between singlehood, gendered ideologies, and leisure for women. More specifically, the findings from this study support the suggestion made by Freysinger et al. (2013b) that gendered ideologies *may* impact more strongly on women who do not align with traditional ideas of womanhood (e.g., wife, mother). Gendered ideologies *do* impact more strongly upon single, adult women in several ways. For example, it appears single, adult women can face marginalization and stigmatization in certain leisure and professional contexts through comments and questions about their single status. Moreover, the findings from this study illustrate how the ideology of couplehood can reinforce expectations related to familism as well as the biological imperative that emphasizes the need for women to couple to have biological children.

Although gendered expectations tied to the ideology of couplehood, familism, and pronatalism can be reproduced through leisure and professional contexts, the findings illustrate the ways women can resist these expectations (e.g., not attending couple-centered events and occasions, asking their own questions about their single status, considering different ways to achieve parenthood that are not solely biologically confined, etc.). The findings from this study also challenge the expectation that all single, adult women want to have biological children. As

such, there is a need for future research that pays closer attention to the ways gendered ideologies influence experiences of singlehood, dating, and leisure for these women.

6.2 Gendered Technologies

Although technology continues to play an increasingly bigger role in women's leisure lives, there still remains limited literature from leisure studies exploring this relationship (for exceptions see Green, 2001; Parry & Penny Light, 2013). As such, Parry and Penny Light (2013) stressed the need for leisure researchers, particularly feminist leisure researchers, to consider the different ways women use technologies as part of their leisure lives and the meanings and impacts that are tied to women's use of different technologies. In this section of the discussion, I draw on the notion of *mediated leisure*, proposed by Parry and Penny Light (2013) and defined as, "the many ways that leisure behavior is both facilitated and influenced by various technologies" (p. 51), to consider the ways leisure technologies influence single, adult women's experiences with dating. In particular, I discuss the ways women used different leisure technologies to make romantic connections in adulthood and I consider the different influences shaping women's choices to use (or not use) different technologies to make romantic connections. Finally, I consider how women used technologies in ways that reproduced and resisted gendered expectations tied to dating.

6.2.1 Using Leisure Technologies to Overcome Challenges of Dating in Adulthood

Many women commented on how the development and expansion of leisure technologies influenced how they connect and communicate. Although technologies have made communicating and connecting with others faster, easier, and more convenient than ever before, these technologies have also made connecting and communicating more removed and on screen, rather than face-to-face. As such, it is not surprising that the ways people make romantic

connections has also been impacted by the widespread development and adoption of technologies (cf. Engelhart, 2013, February 4). In particular, online dating websites have been shown to play an increasingly larger role in mediating how single adults establish romantic relationships (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). The findings from this study support this notion. Almost all of the women I interviewed talked about the importance of technologies, particularly online technologies, to making romantic connections in adulthood. The most common form of technology used (or at least explored at some point) by many of the women, was online dating using specific websites, including *Plenty of Fish*, *Match.com*, *Okay Cupid*, *eHarmony*, and *Christian Café*. Interestingly, many of the women described feeling as though using technologies was required to negotiate or overcome many of the challenges of dating in adulthood.

For instance, a number of women in this study found they had fewer opportunities to meet romantic partners in adulthood, whether this was tied to work responsibilities and/or they found themselves engaging in fewer leisure activities or going out less often as part of their social lives. This finding echoes work by Kravertz (2005) who noted limited time in adulthood can impact how often adults are able to date. Not only did many of the women I interview find time was an issue, women also shared how dating in adulthood meant fewer opportunities to meet people to date and a more narrow pool of single people to choose from, as more and more people were pairing off in adulthood. In addition to limited time, opportunities, and options to date, a number of the women I interviewed also commented on how they struggled in knowing what to expect and what was expected of them (role wise) when on dates. This finding was previously captured in a study by Bogle (2008) that highlighted how learning a new dating script (and associated roles) in adulthood, one that is different from the previously learned hookup script (common in adolescence), can present a challenge for adults. The findings from my study

strongly support the notion that there is a transition to a more formal and traditional approach to dating in adulthood and this approach to dating is different in a number of ways from the group dates and/or hookups many women talked about engaging in during the teenage and college/university years (cf. Bogle, 2008; Zimmer-Genbeck, 2002). Finally, when considering challenges of dating in adulthood, several women noted propinquity as a challenge. Strong et al. (2005) also mentioned this challenge, explaining how people tend to prefer establishing romantic relationships with people who are in close geographic proximity to them. The findings from my study show how living in smaller city, in particular, can limit one's opportunities for meeting a romantic partner. In turn, to negotiate these challenges many women accessed and used online dating websites.

6.2.2 *Online Dating to Establish Romantic Connections*

The women in my study used online dating websites to make romantic and/or sexual connections easily and efficiently. Women talked about how online dating websites provided them with a larger pool of potential romantic partners to choose from. Online dating websites were also used by the women in this study as a way to make initial romantic connections and a number of women stressed the importance of meeting someone through an online dating website sooner rather than later to avoid wasting time if it was not going to work out in-person (e.g., *You could talk to somebody online forever. But if you don't meet them, you are never going to know. So...enough of the talking online. Let's just get this over with and see if there is any point*). Similarly, participants in a study by Whitty (2008) found men and women using an online dating website were not interested in getting to know someone through the website. Rather, they preferred to meet a date through an online dating website with the intention of getting to know the person in more depth in-person. Parry, Glover, and Mulcahy (2013) also found mothers used

a SNS to connect with other mothers and their engagement with the SNS was helpful to establish face-to-face interactions with other mothers. However, one key difference between Parry et al.'s study and the current study is that mothers using the SNS continued their relationships with other mothers through the SNS. The continued use of the SNS to maintain the relationship highlights what Parry et al. referred to as "the complementary nature of online and offline interactions in the development of friendship" (p. 41). In contrast, online dating was used by a number of the women in this study as a way to meet potential romantic partners. But once a romantic connection had been established offline, these connections were not maintained through the use of online dating websites. These findings, when considered in relation to Parry et al.'s study indicate the type of relationship a person is seeking through online technologies (e.g., romantic relationship or friendship) impacts the ways relationships are established, developed, and maintained over time and the ways online technologies are used in that relationship. The findings from my study also illustrate the need for additional research that considers the ways women negotiate the transition between online and in-person interactions when dating and making romantic connections.

In addition, although the findings from my study show that women used online dating websites to make initial contact with potential romantic others, the findings also illustrate the ways women shifted to using other technologies to continue and maintain those romantic connections over time. In particular, women noted using SNSs, such as Facebook and Twitter, along with cell phones and different cell phone applications, such as Blackberry Messenger and WhatsApp, as a means of furthering connections with potential romantic partners. In this way, women used technologies in complementary ways to develop romantic relationships, but those technologies shifted throughout the dating process. The findings from my study highlight the

need for future research to consider the ways online dating websites may be used in combination with other leisure technologies to establish and maintain romantic connections over time.

6.2.3 *Disliking Inorganic Ways of Connecting*

Despite leisure technologies (here I am referring primarily to online dating websites), playing an increasingly important role in many women's lives, the women in my study expressed several reasons why they were not interested in or thrilled about using online dating websites as a way to make romantic connections. One of the most common reasons cited in this study as to why women were not open to online dating and did not feel good about their choices to online date as a way to make romantic connections was the perceived stigma associated with accessing online dating. More specifically, all of the women in my study, whether they chose to engage in online dating (and were actively doing so) or not, expressed some trepidation about accessing and using online dating websites. One women perceived online dating to be a "*last ditch effort*" and another women talked about not wanting to "share the story of how *we met online during our wedding speech.*" Online dating was also seen as unfavorable, because this approach to making romantic connections was considered, by many women, as being prescriptive and shopping-based (e.g., *I don't know, going through profiles, it kind of feels like online shopping based on how someone presents themselves. It just doesn't feel organic to me.*) Many women in my study commented instead on preferring a more organic or traditional approach to making romantic connections (e.g., *a chance encounter; in an ideal world I would want to meet someone through a friend*). In this way, connections made through online dating websites were seen as less valued and authentic than connections made in more "organic" ways, such as in-person or through friends. These findings align with research by Barraket and Henry-Waring (2008) who found men and women who participated in online dating websites considered themselves (and

others) “products for consumption” (p. 161). Similarly, a study by Heino, Ellison, and Gibbs (2010) found the market metaphor was commonly used by online dating participants, referring to it as a “supermarket” and “catalogue.” However, the findings from their study illustrated the ways online dating participants used the market metaphor to shape the strategies they used when online dating (e.g., being selective, filtering for specific characteristics, increasing the supply of available partners, etc.). In comparison, in my study although women referenced the market metaphor to describe online dating, the metaphor had a negative connotation for women and in several cases, worked to discourage women from accessing online dating websites.

In addition to the trepidation women felt using online dating websites, women’s choices to consume online dating websites were also influenced by financial constraints. For a few women, the cost involved in joining and accessing different online dating websites discouraged them from signing up. This finding is reflected in a research study by Bogle (2008) that showed adults can experience economic constraints to dating when they are first establishing themselves in careers. Although Bogle’s (2008) study looked at financial constraints considered more broadly in relation to dating, the findings from my study suggest the ways women access and use online dating websites can be influenced by their access to economic resources.

Women also did not like the time commitment involved in online dating. Several women found online dating demanded too much of their time, given that they needed to spend time setting up their profile and then browsing profiles and initiating communications with men. One woman described this process as a “*full-time job*.” Finally, a number of women found it challenging to get to know someone online and ascertain whether they would have chemistry and frustrating that most online dates did not extend past the first date. Given that most dates never resulted in a romantic relationship, a number of women found online dating to be a waste of

time. These findings, when taken together, highlight issues of access preventing women from using these leisure technologies to make romantic connections.

6.2.4 Using Technology to Negotiate Power Dynamics

Parry and Penny Light (2013) discussed that although technologies influence how we share information and connect with one another, gendered norms and expectations continue to influence the ways technologies are used by women. In this way, gendered power relations continue to influence how women use and engage with technologies and how technologies work to maintain and constrain women's lives (Throsby & Hodges, 2009). My findings illustrate the ways women used technologies to resist gendered power relations tied to dating in adulthood. More specifically, women often gained control and power over their dating experiences by using multiple technologies simultaneously. For example, several women described using Google and Facebook to find out more information about the men they had met through online dating websites so they could screen the dates they went on. By using multiple technologies together, women were able to take a more active role when dating, thus giving themselves greater control over the process. By using this approach, if women chose not to go on a date, they were also then saving themselves time and money they would have spent on the date. Several women also talked about using a number of online dating websites simultaneously to date, hence increasing their chances of meeting a romantic partner and taking a more active role in their dating choices. A number of women who were online dating also commented on choosing certain sites where they had the power and freedom to browse profiles and determine who they were connected with, rather than having matches of profiles selected and sent to them by the website. This example was particularly evidenced by one woman in this study, who was looking to meet a romantic partner who shared her religious values. She decided to pursue online dating through a

niche site as a way to narrow the field of potential partners to those men who held the same religious values. Interestingly, these findings illustrate the ways women can pursue websites where they have more control of who they connect with romantically and/or sexually. This finding is reflected in a study by Barraket and Henry-Waring (2008) who found participants associated a sense of personal control and freedom with online dating. Moreover, in my study a few women (not all) explained that they were more interested in pursuing online dating through websites you had to pay for to increase their chances of meeting someone who was more serious and interested in a committed relationship. Finally, several women chose to take breaks or to not use certain technologies to meet men, sometimes months at a time. In this way, their choices to avoid using these types of technologies can also be perceived as resistance to gendered ideologies, as they decided to remove themselves entirely from this situation, ultimately granting themselves more control over their dating life.

Although women shared a number of ways they gained control over dating through their use of online dating websites, at times, accessing and using online dating websites also worked to limit women's power and control over dating. For instance, several women talked about being propositioned through different online dating technologies, particularly online dating websites. Several women commented on having received unsolicited sexually explicit photos and messages through online technologies. Even more disturbing, is that women noted receiving this type of explicit content was not uncommon. Women explained that they felt one of the major reasons as to why men (in these cases) may act this way, is because online technologies, such as online dating websites, act as a buffer so men (again, in this case) may feel as though they can be more bold and get away with certain inappropriate actions. This finding is reflected in a study by Barraket and Henry-Waring (2008) who found participants felt uncomfortable with how the

transparency of utilizing an online dating website also opened users up to becoming vulnerable as the subject of another online dater's control. These findings highlight the need for leisure researchers to look more closely at issues of safety for women when accessing certain leisure technologies to make romantic connections. There is a need to consider more closely what measures developers and gatekeepers of these websites take to protect women when they are accessing and using these technologies. There is also a need for more research that considers how women can protect themselves online. One woman I interviewed talked about not being willing to put a picture of herself up online. I now wonder whether she made this choice, at least in part, because she did not feel safe and comfortable in these online dating spaces.

6.2.5 Implications - Gendered Technologies

The findings from this study illustrate the importance single women place on different technologies to make romantic and sexual connections in adulthood. In particular, in line with previous research, the findings highlight how women utilized technologies as a way to negotiate many of the challenges of dating in adulthood, (e.g., having less time to date, having less opportunities and options to date, dealing with a new dating script, economic constraints, and negotiating issues tied to propinquity). Online dating was the most common type of technology used by the women in this study. Almost all of the women perceived online dating to be a necessity of dating in adulthood, despite also feeling some trepidation about online dating as a mode of meeting romantic others. My findings demonstrate women used multiple technologies in combination with online dating to make romantic connections in adulthood and these technologies, when considered together, play a supportive and successive function in moving romantic and/or sexual connections forward.

Despite the importance women placed on using technologies to make connections, future research should consider more closely how gendered expectations and roles tied to dating influence women's use of these technologies to date. For example, women often resisted gendered roles of dating by taking a more active role in their dating experiences online to gain control (e.g., using different technologies simultaneously, choosing niche sites or sites that are paid, taking breaks from using technologies as a way to date). Although women used technologies in ways that resisted gendered roles and expectations tied to dating, the findings from this study also illustrate the ways certain technologies can limit women's power and control when dating. An important topic that is connected to women's use of different technologies is how women perform dating and how technologies impact their choices to perform. I shift next to looking at single, adult women's gendered performances of dating, both online and offline.

6.3 Gendered Performances

A number of the women commented on the ways they perceived dating to be tied to notions of performance. More specifically, women referred to their experiences dating, especially initially, as a time when you are *“trying to hone an image of yourself,” “it’s just a lot of pretending”* and *“there is always a bit of jockeying in the early stages until you figure out what is going to happen.”* In this section of the discussion, I unpack the ways women performed different gendered expectations through their performances of dating, drawing on Goffman's (1959) work on performance and presentation of self in everyday life. In particular, I consider Goffman's distinction between frontstage and backstage performances, along with the ways performances of dating for single, adult women were impacted offline and online.

6.3.1 Goffman's Presentation of Self

Goffman (1959) explained when people are performing in front of an audience they are constructing a presentation of their self. Frontstage performances, also known as social fronts, are formal performances taking place in a specific front region (e.g., in relation to dating this could be at a restaurant, at the movies, or through online dating). Social fronts are used by performers to influence the audience or observers in a certain way. To do so, performers will use different forms of personal expressive equipment in their frontstage performances (Goffman, 1959). Personal expressive equipment is considered to be the equipment that identifies the performer in the performance. It is also the expressive equipment that moves with the performer through their performance in the frontstage. Goffman distinguished two primary forms of personal expressive equipment performer's use in the frontstage: appearance and manner. Appearance is the expressive equipment used by the performer to not only give the audience an understanding of the performer's unique identity factors (e.g., social status; gender, etc.), but also to share with the audience the type of activity a performer is engaged in (e.g., dating). In addition to appearance, performers also use manner as a form of expressive equipment. Manner is used by the performer to show the audience what role the performer intends to take in a particular situation or context. For instance, a passive or meek performance can foreshadow the performer is preparing to take a more passive role throughout the performance. Goffman explained most frontstage performances have a specific set of social expectations that help to guide the audience in knowing how they should respond to the performance. As such, when a performer embarks on a performance in the frontstage, they often find a social front or script already exists for that performance the performer can follow, including specific forms of appearance and manner expected for that performance. Although a person might employ a certain appearance and

manner in one situation, often aspects of their appearance and manner will carry over to other situations.

6.3.2 Performing in the Frontstage

Goffman's work on performance can be used to understand women's experiences dating in adulthood. That is, several women talked about the importance of their appearance as part of their frontstage performance when meeting men in-person. For instance, a few women noted the effort they would put into their appearance when going on a date: "*I got ready for my date and I tried to make myself look pretty*" and "*I think that is where work comes into dating, like just in struggling so hard to look a certain way with your appearance.*" Several women also commented on the importance of appearing "*fun*" and "*open*" when they were in public settings, because men would be more likely to approach them. In addition to physical appearance, one woman noted how her concern with appearing a certain way posed a challenge when performing in the frontstage on dates. She shared, "*I just have a really hard time because I am always thinking, oh my god, like what should I say next? I don't know how to respond to a thing. Think of something smart!*" These findings support Goffman's work relating to how appearance can be used as a form of expressive equipment in the frontstage.

Although Goffman's work on frontstage performances is based on face-to-face interactions, researchers have used his theory to explore contemporary social interactions, including the ways people choose to represent themselves in online contexts (cf. Miller & Arnold, 2001; Whitty, 2008). As such, it comes as no surprise that a number of women also considered appearance as part of their performances when online dating. As one woman mentioned, "*it is encouraged to put a picture up, cause nobody wants to date you if your picture isn't up.*" This finding echoes previous research that has shown people are often strategic in

choosing how to present themselves online or in cyberspace (cf. Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001; Whitty, 2008). Online dating websites often require the user to create an online profile as a way of representing themselves online (Whitty, 2008). The findings from the current study reflect a number of the ways physical appearance was involved in women's frontstage performances of online dating.

For some women, representing their appearance through an online dating website was a lot of work. One woman shared, *"I am so overly concerned with how I am representing myself (online). It is like you are marketing yourself and then ya, you have to up yourself to try to get people to look at you."* Another woman explained, *"It feels like you are selling yourself on eBay. Like look at my picture."* In addition to the work involved in creating online profiles, one woman talked about how she misrepresented her appearance on her online profile by using photos from her sister's wedding. She elaborated, *"My number one mistake with online dating was that I put a picture up from my sister's wedding. So I had really nice makeup and hair done. So that was kind of a misrepresentation of my actual looks."* In line with this idea, Whitty (2008) found men and women who were online dating believed creating an attractive physical image was the most important factor to consider when creating their online profiles and that men and women chose photos with these ideas in mind. In addition, Whitty found more women than men put photos up on their profiles and more women than men used "glamour" photos (referring to photos where there is particular attention paid to styling one's hair and applying makeup for the photo). She also found participants commonly misrepresented their appearance on their online dating profile to appear more physically attractive to others (e.g., using out-of date photos) and women, more often than men, misrepresented their looks on their online profile.

Physical appearance was not the only aspect of self-presentation women misrepresented on their online profiles. In particular, one woman talked about misrepresenting the content of her online dating profile by not disclosing the type of romantic relationship she was actually seeking through online dating. She explained, *“in the end ya, that is the actual goal, that I want someone to spend the rest of my life with, but I would never say that. I would say looking to date, but nothing serious right now.”* Similarly, Whitty (2008) found participants misrepresented their profiles in other ways separate from physical appearance, including their interests, socio-economic status, etc. Taken together, these findings illustrate a number of the gendered expectations that influence the ways women choose to shape their online dating profiles and the importance placed on women to represent and perform their appearance in certain gendered ways, both offline and online. However, several women in this study suggested women’s appearances were judged more severely by others online. For instance, one woman revealed,

Okay Cupid...told me if someone found me attractive and how many stars out of five I was. They are like ‘You are a four out of a five stars.’ And I am like, great – thanks for letting me know I am not a five.

This finding demonstrates how women can be made to feel they need to spend more attention to their appearance when dating in online spaces, given the gendered emphasis placed on the importance of women adhering to narrow ideals of female beauty (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Mulvey, 1975).

Although many women reproduced gendered expectations through their frontstage performances of dating, a number of women also resisted gendered expectations through their performances in the frontstage and their use of appearance as a form of expressive equipment. More specifically, one woman talked about (as I previously mentioned in the Gendered

Technology section of this discussion) how she refused to post a picture of herself on her online dating profile. Another woman mentioned her lack of interest in changing her profile picture and content when her friend told her that her profile was terrible (e.g., *he told me my profile is terrible. And that he would help me make it better. And I was like - no. I don't care*). These small acts of resistance provide opportunities for women to gain power and control over their dating experiences, by choosing to perform online dating in ways that subvert gendered expectations governing these online dating spaces. These findings raise two important questions: How can women's frontstage performances shift between online and offline dating spaces? Can women perform in more resistant ways online?

When considering women's frontstage performances of dating, in addition to appearance, women also employed manner as a form of expressive equipment. Several women talked about how they preferred to adhere to certain traditional gendered dating roles when dating offline and online. Many women noted they were not traditional in other aspects of their life, but they did prefer to adhere to certain gendered roles when dating offline (e.g., *I am a neo-traditionalist in the sack, but that's it. On dates I am a bit traditional. I like a man to take control*). When dating online, a number of women also commented on their preference to take a more passive approach in these frontstage performances, noting *"I always have those automatic thoughts. Oh, somebody sent me a message. Maybe I should wait a day or two so I don't seem desperate."* As with appearance, it appears as though women used manner in their performances of dating in ways that were also constrained by gendered expectations and roles of dating.

Despite the ways several women reproduced gendered expectations through their use of a more passive manner in their performances of dating offline and online, several women talked about not wanting to adhere to a more passive role when dating in either of these contexts. As

one woman shared, “*I don’t mind initiating anything. I am so tired of having to feel it is more gentele to wait for the man to make the first move.*” Although several women did note they were willing to initiate dates and to take a more active approach to dating, their initiation at times maintained a passive undertone. For example, one woman explained, “*as I have gotten older, I’ve just sort of stop caring about the rules and if I like them, I would ask them out. Um, not too forward though, but you know.*” Although this was an act of resistance to traditional gendered expectations tied to dating, this act of resistance was hedged by also stating that she did not want to appear too forward.

These findings suggest women are more likely to break from traditional gendered roles in their performances of dating when using different technologies, such as online dating websites. However, their performances remain constrained by gendered expectations and roles. For example, several women talked about how when they took a more active role online and initiated dates, they were sometimes questioned by men as to why they would *need to* initiate. This finding illustrates the ways appearance and manner, as two forms of expressive equipment women can use in their frontstage performances of dating, continue to be inextricably linked. Moreover, this finding, in particular, illustrates the ways online technologies, such as online dating websites, continue to be spaces where men have power to discipline women into reproducing certain gendered expectations tied to dating.

6.3.3 Performing in Different Front Regions

In addition to social fronts, women in this study noted the different ways front regions influenced their frontstage performances of dating. Several women talked about being on vacation and seizing that time to meet and connect with men. As one woman shared, “*Vegas is just so fun...you get all dolled up into outfits you would not normally wear. You do your hair,*

you do your makeup, and you are feeling really super good, and you wear a nice little dress.”

For a few women, performing dating in the front region when on vacation gave them confidence to be in the moment. Women also talked about the bar being a more familiar front region used to meet and connect with men. Although women talked about finding this front region an easy place to meet potential romantic partners, they did admit this front region was becoming a less common avenue to meet and connect with romantic partners as they were getting older, primarily because they were spending less time at bars than they did when they were younger.

Nonetheless, this front region and its focus on consuming alcohol (which I discuss in the more detail in the Gendered Emotion Work section of the discussion) highlights the ways different social fronts influence women’s performances of dating.

Moreover, expanding on Goffman’s work, the findings from this study illustrate the ways online front regions, such as different online dating websites, influenced women’s performances of dating in the frontstage. One woman described the process involved in online dating through the website *eHarmony*:

You fill out this huge, huge, huge questionnaire, and that was difficult to fill out, cause it was just like, ah, question after question. And um, but it was good because then it would send me matches, like specifically about people who have the same interests...it decides based on how you answered your questions...I am not sure how their algorithm works, but they are choosing every day the ten people they think are your match. So on eHarmony you can’t scroll through profiles or look at all that stuff. No, everyday it gives you, like - here are today’s matches and you can accept and reject or whatever. And because the questions are so specific, people can judge you right away. And then it was a three step process, where you ask someone five multiple choice questions, and then they

get back to you. And then you send them your must haves and can't stands. And then you email. It was just this process. It is so robotic.

Many of the women who online dated talked about finding *eHarmony* too restrictive and that they found it to be frustrating, because they could not browse other profiles and instead received daily matches. As such, they had less control over their choices to perform in the frontstage through this specific front region (a lack of control associated with the websites that designate matches for you is also noted in the Gendered Technology section of this discussion). These findings suggest different front regions, whether offline or online, influence women's choices to perform dating.

6.3.4 *Performing in the Backstage*

In contrast to the frontstage, Goffman (1959) explained when performers are in the backstage they can relax and step out of the character they employed in the frontstage, because they are no longer in front of an audience. Goffman (1959) noted, the backstage is often a place where performers can critique the expressive equipment they employed in the frontstage and that includes their appearance. In the backstage, several women did critique their performances in the front stage. One woman who was online dating assumed there was something wrong with her online profile when a man did not reply to her online message. Several women also critiqued other women's profiles in the backstage. As one woman shared, *"but you know, I would just say, leave something to the imagination. So a lot of women, you know, I'll see profiles just randomly and they are revealing too much or you know...let a guy respect you for your mind first."* These findings illustrate the ways women can discipline other women through their backstage performances of dating. I expand on this finding in more depth, by drawing on Butler's work on performativity and language in the Gendered Talk section of this discussion.

The findings from this study also illustrate the ways certain technologies are used to negotiate frontstage and backstage performances. As one woman revealed, *“I was drinking wine with my girlfriends, and they loaded up eHarmony and we wrote my profile together.”* In this way, she created her profile with her friends in the backstage, but that profile was then used for her dating performances in the frontstage. Women also used technologies (e.g., cell phones, Twitter) as mediums to negotiate their performances in the backstage. For some women, using text messaging or Twitter to communicate with someone they were interested in provided time and space to consider their choices to perform in the backstage, before actually delivering their performance in the frontstage. Moreover, several women noted using these technologies gave them a chance to make their performance as perfect as possible: *“You have that time to make it perfect. You can sit on it for three hours and draft something, draft and change, draft and change until it is the most sensational thing that you can say to somebody.”* This finding supports work by Walther et al. (2001) who noted computer mediated communication (CMC) users tend to experience more control, flexibility, and fluidity over their performances. Indeed, using different technologies blurred the lines between women’s performances of dating in the backstage and frontstage.

6.3.5 Implications – Gendered Performance

The findings from this study illustrate a number of the gendered expectations and roles that influenced the ways women choose to perform dating. For instance, women disclosed how appearance and manner played a central role in their performances of dating in the frontstage, both when dating offline and online. For a number of women the effort involved in looking a certain way as part of their performances of dating in the frontstage, particularly in their online performances, involved a lot of work to reproduce gendered expectations tied to appearance.

This finding indicates gendered expectations of women's appearance may be heightened in online dating contexts. Although women reproduced expectations tied to their appearance in online dating contexts, women also resisted gendered expectations tied to their appearance in these spaces (e.g., choosing not to put a profile picture up online, choosing not to spend time tweaking or working on their profiles).

These findings also suggest there may be differences between the ways women perform dating in offline versus online front regions. In turn, these findings raise a number of important questions: do online technologies enable new expectations and roles to emerge for women to take up when performing dating? If yes, do they present a challenge for single, adult women to learn (given that learning new scripts and roles have been shown to be a challenge of dating in adulthood)? Finally, the findings from this study illustrate the ways dating technologies create overlap between frontstage and backstage performances (e.g., creating profiles in the backstage that can be used in the frontstage). In this way, technologies (e.g., cell phone, Twitter) can be used by women to gain control over their frontstage performances, by giving them time and space to negotiate these performances while in the backstage (e.g., deciding what to write via text message). In particular, this finding troubles Goffman's frontstage/backstage dichotomy that positions frontstage and backstage performances as distinct and discrete. Rather, women's performances of dating are more fluid and dynamic and cannot be clearly categorized as part of the frontstage or backstage, especially when considering the ways dating performances shift between online and offline contexts for adult women. There is a need for future research to examine more closely the ways gendered expectations, roles, and scripts translate both offline and online to influence women's gendered performances of dating.

6.4 Gendered Emotion Work

One of the limitations of Goffman's work, as noted by Hochschild (1979), is that his work on the performance of self and the ways people engage in impression management focuses on how actors manage their impressions outwardly. Yet, his work does not sufficiently consider how actors manage their impressions inwardly (i.e., how they manage their emotions). In short, Goffman's actors are not represented as feeling anything and responding to those feelings in their performances (Hochschild, 1979). Hochschild explained, to extend Goffman's notions of performance, we must also consider inward performances of impression management. More specifically, how do we use emotions to appear competent in different social situations (Rojek, 2010)? With that said, before considering the ways women engaged in emotion work as part of their performances of dating, I first elaborate on the different emotions women experienced when dating.

6.4.1 *Experiencing a Wide Range of Emotions*

Women commented on experiencing a wide range of emotions tied to their dating experiences. Fear was an emotion that was noted by a number of women in this study. However, feelings of fear were not always triggered and experienced by women in the same ways. For example, women experienced fear related to being rejected by a romantic other: "*when you like someone, there is automatically that association with happiness and joy...a fear of rejection on some level.*" Several women also commented on the fear they experienced engaging in dating practices, including "*dreading every date*" and "*I find the online thing a bit scary.*" And for some women, even the thought of dating brought out fear: "*But thinking about dating, or thinking about going online dating, terrifies me.*"

In addition to fear, women also commented on the ways dating could be, at times, exhausting and frustrating. For these women, dating was exhausting, because they felt they had to constantly put themselves out there and try to be open to dating, which took a lot of emotional effort and was often frustrating when their efforts did not result in any type of relational outcome. A few women also commented on how they experienced emotions of guilt and discomfort involved in telling someone they were dating that they were not interested in them. In particular, several women noted they often felt a sense of obligation to continue talking to or dating men, because they felt too guilty rejecting them. And for some women, online dating heightened these feelings, as online dating technologies increased the amount of people women came in contact with whom they might not be interested in pursuing a romantic or sexual relationship with and in turn might need to reject.

Moreover, women also talked about feeling stress, anxiety, nerves, and discomfort associated with going on dates. One woman explained how she thought her feelings of stress and anxiousness were tied to the fact that if the date turned into a relationship that person would then hold a big spot in her life. Another woman shared that although she did not enjoy dating, she felt badly because she thought she should. Several women also talked about how negotiating choices around dating and sex, in particular, caused them anxiety. In many cases, women described their visceral reactions to their performances of dating. For instance, one woman mentioned, *“And I feel like I’m going to barf or vomit or have to poo my pants.”*

Although women experienced a number of uncomfortable emotions associated with dating, several women also talked about experiencing these emotions in positive ways. As one woman explained, *“It’s that kind of anticipation when you are about to go on a date, which is, exciting, but at the same time can be nauseating.”* Women also talked about experiencing a

number of positive emotions about dating independent of other emotions, such as nervousness and stress. For example, one woman commented on the enjoyment she experienced when making a romantic connection with someone: “*When you meet someone that you truly connect with and you feel that spark with, there is nothing like that feeling. You can’t replace that with anything else. That excitement, that connection, it’s an amazing thing.*” Several women also talked about how they felt it was self-affirming and felt good when men showed romantic interest in them. Indeed, the women in this study experienced a range of emotions tied to dating, and to negotiate these emotions, many women engaged in emotion work.

6.4.2 What is Emotion Work?

Emotion work refers to “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561). Based on Hochschild’s (1979) conceptualization, emotion work is not focused solely on the work of suppressing or stifling emotions as a way of controlling those emotions, but rather emotion work can also involve how a person invokes emotion in certain situations to achieve impression management. For instance, emotion work is often used by individuals when they have an awareness that they feel a certain way in a given situation, but their feelings do not align with social expectations or norms of how they are supposed to feel in the given situation. The expectations associated with what a person should feel in a given situation are what Hochschild referred to as *feeling rules*. She explained, “The social guidelines that direct how we want to try to feel may be describable as a set of socially shared, albeit often latent (not thought about unless probed at), rules” (p. 563). In this way, feeling rules tell you what you are supposed to feel in a given social situation, whereas emotion work is the work you do to manipulate your feelings to adhere to the appropriate feeling rules for a given situation. In addition, Hochschild made a distinction between emotion work and

emotional labor in her writings. More specifically, she explained emotional labor is the emotional management a person engages in at work, whereas emotion work is the emotional management a person engages in during their personal and day-to-day interactions, such as during leisure (Hochschild, 1983). In this discussion, I use the term emotion work to refer to the work women in this study engaged in to manage their emotions when dating. I turn next to exploring the ways women engaged in emotion work as part of their dating performances.

6.4.3 Women doing Emotion Work when Dating

Fullagar (2008) noted research from leisure scholars looking at the ways people control and manage their emotions as part of their leisure has been limited (for exceptions see Rojek, 2010; Wearing, 1998). However, as Rojek (2010) has pointed out, emotional labor (he is using this term more broadly to encompass what Hochschild refers to as emotion work) is central to leisure. Leisure contexts happen to be one of the primary ways people learn emotional intelligence and competence needed to know what emotions are required/appropriate under what circumstances and in what situations (Rojek, 2010). Moreover, having emotional intelligence and the ability to engage in emotion work is becoming increasingly important and necessary to successfully establish and maintain social relationships in our social worlds (Rojek, 2010). With regards to my study, women engaged in emotion work when dating to make romantic connections using a number of different strategies. These strategies included: 1) consuming alcoholic drinks when dating or in contexts where they might be with potential romantic others, 2) playing dating games (e.g., playing it cool, letting men chase them, etc.) that adhere to traditional gendered roles when dating, and 3) increasing the frequency to which they dated.

First, to deal with feelings of apprehension, fear, stress, and anxiety associating with dating, women talked about using alcohol to help suppress these feelings. For example, several

women talked about how they would have an alcoholic drink when meeting men and going on dates to manage their nerves. Drinking alcohol has been shown to help lower inhibitions (Montemurro & McClure, 2005). Thus, it is not surprising that it helped women feel less vulnerable and uncomfortable when dating. In addition, a few women talked about the ways alcohol enabled connections within leisure contexts, such as bars. For instance, one woman shared, “It’s so easy *when you are drinking at a bar. You are waiting for a drink. There are people around you.* It’s easier to *chat* someone up, *because you are drunk or you are drinking. It is safe.*” In line with this idea, previous research has shown alcohol can act as a catalyst for women to take up “new and temporary subject positions” (Eldridge & Roberts, 2008, p. 327), that do not always adhere to gendered expectations of femininity (Pilcher, 2011). As such, women can use alcohol to help control their emotional responses within different dating contexts, but they can also use alcohol to do emotion work, and thus, be more willing to take an active role when making romantic connections.

Second, although not all women engaged in dating games to make connections (with many women expressing their frustration and disinterest over these games), a number of women did talk about the importance of playing games when dating and making connections. As one woman mentioned, “*I think especially early on, you don’t want to come off as too eager beaver, constantly messaging them and vice versa. I think games are from the get go.*” In this way, women often used games as a way to suppress their interest or excitement in potential romantic partners. However, the games women chose to play were often reflective of gendered roles associated with dating (described previously in the Gendered Performances section of this discussion). In particular, women often adhered to a more passive role when playing games. For instance, several women noted they preferred to let men initiate dates (e.g., *when you are not the*

one controlling things and you are more vulnerable it is an uncomfortable feeling). Interestingly, women talked about how adhering to a more passive role when dating made them feel more in control of their dating experiences. This passivity/control dynamic when dating is reflected in an autoethnographic study I completed exploring my own experiences dating as a single, adult woman (cf. Mckeown, in press). More specifically, I noted how, at times, I adhered to a more passive role when dating. Although adhering to a more passive role when dating has been shown to limit women's power and control when dating (Laner & Ventrone, 2000), I explained how I actually gained a sense of power and control over the dating process by adhering to a more passive role when dating. More specifically, by adhering to a more passive role, I did not have to put myself in a vulnerable position of having to be rejected by the men I dated, which I found to be a source of empowerment.

Third, women also talked about how they felt it was important to frequently date as a way to manage their emotional responses when dating. For example, one woman shared, "*you need to get comfortable with the concept of talking to strangers and talking about yourself.*" Another women explained,

My therapist said that the one thing about dating is...you can build up a tolerance to it and that you can be more desensitized, so you are not as hurt by the process. So if I did put myself out there more, that I would not feel so strongly about the outcome.

In support of this finding, Barraket and Henry-Waring (2008) found women who were online dating were able to reflect on their experiences online dating and use those experiences in transformative ways. Although, in Barraket and Henry-Waring's study they are referring to online dating specifically, the findings from my study suggest women can also reflect on the

emotional impact they experience dating (both online and offline) in ways that can help them appear more emotionally competent when dating.

These examples illustrate the ways women engaged in emotion work to control their emotions when dating with the intention of finding comfort and control in their dating experiences. However, the findings from this study also highlight the ways women engaged in emotion work, reproducing the gendered ideology of an ethic of care. As described earlier, women often felt obligated to the men they dated and felt guilty or badly rejecting them. In this way, women reproduced gendered expectations that are reinforced by an ethic of care, encouraging women to be selfless, putting the needs and wants of others in front of their own (Parry, 2013). This selflessness can place a demand on women to care that can compromise women's autonomy (Clement, 1996) and discipline women into performing certain gendered identities (Parry, 2013). One woman's insight was particularly revealing related to this experience. She noted, "*But it is this tendency, and I think it is very gendered, where women feel badly that men are paying attention to them, and then feel badly ignoring them or not talking to them.*" In turn, by doing emotion work, women were reproducing women's "caring" role when dating, not only putting men's feelings and experiences above their own, but also limiting their own power and control over dating practices.

However, women did not always engage in emotion work entirely by themselves. A number of women noted the importance of talking about dating with friends and analyzing certain dating situations helped them to do emotion work. As one woman shared, "*But my friend is always good at saying you are way over-analyzing (which of course I was). She was like just play it out. Just back off a little bit so you get a little bit of reassurance.*" Hochschild (1979) found, at times, people may use emotion work systems, accessing members of their social

network to help them do emotion work. In this way, emotion work can be done “by the self upon the self, by the self upon others, and by others upon the self” (p. 562). I expand on the connections between women’s friendships, talk, and dating in the section of this discussion titled Gendered Friendships.

6.4.4 Implications – Gendered Emotion Work

The findings from this study strongly illustrate the emotional involvement that is part of dating and the process of making romantic and sexual connections for single, adult women. In particular, women engaged in different forms of emotion work as part of their dating performances to control their emotional reactions. These findings, when taken together, reveal the ways women resisted gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles through their use of emotion work (e.g., drinking alcohol to be able to assume a more active role when dating and making connections). Yet, women did not only use emotion work in their performances of dating in resistant ways. Women also reproduced gendered expectations tied to dating by playing games and by adhering to a more passive role on dates (as also mentioned in the Gendered Technology section). In many cases, women were able to reproduce these gendered roles in ways that helped them to gain control over the situation (e.g., not having to be vulnerable by allowing men to take a more active role when dating). However, women also reproduced gendered ideologies through their performances of dating in ways that limited their control and power in dating contexts, such as when women reproduced an ethic of care when dating, placing men’s feelings and needs above their own. Although my findings begin to reveal motivations as to why women perform emotion work, more research is needed to explore this connection and the ways women use emotion work to reproduce and resist gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles associated with dating.

6.5 Gendered Friendships

All of the women in the study shared how they perceived dating to be a way to establish a romantic and/or sexual relationship (whether women chose to actively date or not). However, through their experiences with dating and singlehood many women emphasized the importance of women's friendships to experiences of singlehood. Although several women also talked about their friendships with coupled friends and several women talked about their friendships with single men, the friendships that appear to be most commonly deepened through their experiences with singlehood and dating were with other single women. In this section of the discussion, I outline the ways women's friendships acted as important sources of support, including the ways women supported each other as members of the "singlehood" and the ways women felt supported by other single women in exploring different modes of making romantic connections. I also discuss how a number of women shared how they did not always feel supported by other friends in their life, including their coupled friends. I turn first to considering the ways women experienced their friendships with other single women as an important source of support.

6.5.1 Friendships as Sources of Support

Women's friendships have been shown to be important contexts for leisure (Green, 1998). Despite the importance of friendships to women's lives and leisure experiences, until recently, the topic of women's friendships in the leisure literature has received scant attention. Perhaps this is because friendships have often been conceptualized as an alternative bond or relationship, whereas, familial and couple bonds have traditionally been considered to be the central and most important type of personal relationship in a woman's life (Burnley, 1987; Taylor, 2012). Regardless of the reasons as to why women's friendships have been given limited

attention in the leisure literature, more recent research from the field has paid attention to this important dimension of women's leisure lives.

In particular, leisure research on women's friendships has considered the importance of women's friendships over the life course (cf. Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012; Hutchinson, Yarnal, Staffordson, & Kerstetter, 2008), along with the ways women's friendships can be used to cope with negative or stressful life events (cf. Hutchinson et al., 2008; Hutchinson, 2013; Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002). The leisure literature has also paid attention to considering the ways women's friendships are an important determinant of women's health and well-being (cf. Glover & Parry, 2008; Hutchinson et al., 2008). In addition, leisure contexts have been shown to bring women together who share a social identity as a source of social support and friendship (cf. Glover & Parry, 2008; Green, 1998; Mulcahy, Parry & Glover, 2011; Parry, Glover, & Mulcahy, 2013; Piercy, K. W., & Cheek, C., 2004). This latter group of studies support the notion of homophily, wherein friendship connections between people are strengthened when people share similar aspects of their identities (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Focusing on this body of work on leisure and women's friendships, more specifically, the findings from my study affirm the ways leisure based friendships can act as sources of support for single, adult women.

The women in my study noted the importance of their friendships with other single women as sources of support, as many women did not feel as though they could always access support from other people within their social network (e.g., coupled friends, family members, co-workers). Many of the women noted the importance of surrounding themselves with strong circles of women friends, often single girlfriends, who were accepting and supportive of their singlehood. In this way, friendships between single women provided a sense of connection and

provided a safe space where women could talk openly about their experiences with singlehood and dating together and gain support. These findings reflect a study by Hutchinson (2013) that considered women's experiences participating in a book club as a source of leisure based friendship. She found women's participation in a book club acted as a source of shared support. In particular, Hutchinson found leisure environments work to deepen women's friendships and are spaces where women can access social support. She outlined four factors that need to be in place for women to access social support in their friendships. These factors include: 1) women must engage in frequent and ongoing contact, 2) women must have a safe and comfortable space to talk within, 3) women must foster acceptance and flexibility so all women feel comfortable participating and can do so in different ways, and 4) women must be able to have fun with each other.

In line with these ideas, Glover and Parry (2008) considered friendships as sources of support for women dealing with infertility. They found women used friendships with other women dealing with infertility as sources of emotional support. Women felt cared for, listened to, and empathized with through their friendships with other women experiencing infertility. Through their shared identity of dealing with infertility, women felt as though they could be themselves and would be accepted within their friendships with other women dealing with infertility. When considering Glover and Parry's (2008) study in relation to the current study, a distinction emerges between how women gained and accessed support in their study. Glover and Parry (2008) found women experiencing infertility often pursued new friendships with other women experiencing infertility. Although the women in my study talked about connecting with other single women as important sources of friendship, these friendships were not newly formed friendships (in most cases), but rather friendships that had been previously established and

deepened, because of the women's shared social identity of being single in adulthood. The findings from my study illustrate the ways women can develop stronger friendship bonds with women in their existing social circles who are also single. To this end, many women in this study focused on deepening rather than establishing friendships with other single women (as was the case in Glover and Parry's study). I next look at the specific ways many of the women expressed feeling supported by their single girlfriends.

6.5.2 Finding Support in the "Singlehood"

Women talked about the importance of spending leisure time and having fun with their single girlfriends as an important source of support (e.g., shopping with a friend, drinks with friends, etc.). This finding is reflected in a study by Walker (1995) who found middle-class men and women's friendships were characterized by engaging in different leisure activities, such as going on vacations, out for dinner, to different sporting events, etc. In addition, Glover and Parry (2008) found friendships based on a shared social identity can deepen over time if both friends are dedicated to spending consistent time together in leisure contexts. Thus, it comes as no surprise many of the women in my study felt closely connected with their single girlfriends given the amount of time they spent together engaging in leisure activities.

A few women in this study also talked about feeling like it was easier to be vulnerable and to open up to their single girlfriends. Relating to this idea, one woman described the connections between single women as a "*sisterhood*," where it is possible to delve into specific topics related to singlehood and dating with other single women. Another woman noted she felt supported in her friendships with other single women, because these friendships represented "*pure friendships*" not complicated by romantic or sexual desires. These findings support previous research by Berdychevsky, Gibson, and Bell (2013) who found girlfriend getaways

offered women comfort to say what they needed to say to each other free of judgment. In addition, they found an important aspect of girlfriend getaways was that women were free from experiencing romantic or sexual tensions from romantic others and, as such, could be themselves and say what they needed to say with other women friends.

In addition to spending time together and experiencing friendships with other single women as a sisterhood, the women in my study talked about how their single girlfriends supported them in making romantic connections. For example, several women noted how they learned about online dating and different online dating websites from their friends. As one woman shared, *“I had a friend who went on it (eHarmony)...and she found that the guys that were on it were a little bit more serious, because it does cost money. So people who were actually looking to be in a relationship.”* Several women in the study also talked about being convinced by their single friends to try online dating (e.g., *I have a friend who is a very avid online dater, and she convinced me pretty early on after my breakup, probably within a few months to make an online profile for Match.com*). A few women also noted how they had convinced their single friends to try online dating (e.g., *Ya, I convinced her to. We were out for drinks. I was like just join. What do you have to lose?*). These findings demonstrate single women influence the ways other single women engage in dating and the technologies women choose to adopt to date and make romantic connections. However, women’s friendships with other single women can also shape the ways women choose to take up gendered messages around dating. For instance, women talked about consuming dating advice books together. Although a few women did express some concern the messages presented in these books might be problematic if women read these books earnestly, a number of women talked about reading these books with their friends in shared leisure spaces where they were able to laugh and mock

the gendered messages presented in these books. The findings from this study illustrate the ways women's friendships with other single women can provide women with the space to read these books in more critical ways, ultimately, opening space for new discourses around dating and women's experiences with dating to emerge.

Moreover, several women commented they had received support from their single friends when writing their online dating profiles, often writing profiles together. For example, one woman explained, "*I was drinking wine with my girlfriends, and they loaded up eHarmony and we wrote my profile together.*" Women in the study also spoke about seeking out additional details about potential romantic others online with the help of their single girlfriends. In particular, two women talked about using other online technologies, such as Facebook and Google, in collaboration with their single girlfriends to find out additional information about men they were interested in. In this way, women often acted as "wing-women" for their single friends. Moreover, several women talked about how their single girlfriends had set them up on dates with different men. A number of women noted they preferred to be setup by their single friends rather than their coupled friends, explaining their single friends often had a better understanding of who they might be interested in and compatible with to date. Regardless of who was setting them up, women found being setup was often a good way to meet men, because their friends would be able to give them details about the person they were being setup with before meeting them in-person.

Not only did women express feeling supported by other single girlfriends in making romantic connections, women also talked about how their single girlfriends played a supportive role when they were on dates. One woman talked about checking in with her friends prior to going to meet a man in-person she had met initially online. The check-in process was used by

women as a safety measure to ensure someone knew where they would be going when they went on dates with strangers. In addition, for the women who were dating, but found dating to be stressful and/or anxiety inducing, their single friends often provided support and helped them deal and manage their emotions around dating through their talk together (see the Gendered Emotion Work and the Gendered Talk sections of the discussion for more information on this point). This finding supports work by Hutchinson (2013) who shared women who participated in a book club together felt “‘true friendship’ meant ‘being there’ when needed both emotionally and practically” (p. 204)

Although the women in my study talked predominantly about feeling connected and supported by their single girlfriends, a few women also spoke about receiving support from their friendships with single men. One woman talked about receiving feedback about her online dating profile from her single friend who was a man (even though she did not accept it). Another woman explained how she had made a commitment with her friend who was a single man that they would get married at thirty-five if they had not met anyone else to marry. These findings suggest sharing an identity (i.e., being single) with friends, regardless of gender, can create a connection between friends that acts as an important source of support for single women. Most notably, the findings from my study illustrate the important role friends can play in initiating and establishing romantic and sexual connections for women.

6.5.3 Feeling Excluded from the “Couplehood”

A few women talked about feeling lucky their close friends (whether coupled or single) did not care about their single status. However, the majority of women expressed some frustration over the lack of support and understanding of their single status that stemmed from their coupled friends. This finding is in line with the leisure literature on women’s friendships,

wherein friendships have been shown to not always be supportive (cf. Glover & Parry, 2008; Green, 1998; Fullagar, 2008; Hutchinson, 2013) and women often experience gains and losses in friendships (Glover & Parry, 2008). The women shared a number of ways they did not feel supported by their coupled friends. More specifically, several women spoke about it being difficult to relate to their coupled friends, because in many instances, their coupled friends had forgotten what it was like to be single. A few women also commented they had friends who had recently established themselves in a couple or had gotten married and these friends were often glorifying couplehood as the ultimate goal. Several women also shared how they felt excluded from couple-centred outings and leisure activities, because of their single status (a finding I discussed in more depth in the Gendered Ideologies section of this discussion). These women found their coupled friends were becoming increasingly focused on doing couple-centered activities, as more and more people were pairing off in adulthood. The shift towards couplehood made them feel left out and excluded from certain leisure activities because of their single status. In turn, a number of women felt as though they were being pushed to the margins within their broader friendship groups, because these friendship groups, in many cases, were dominated by friends who were in couples.

The findings from my study support the work of Cobb (2011) and DePaulo (2006) who demonstrated the stigma and marginalization of singlehood can lead to feelings of isolation for people who are single. Moreover, these findings also echo research by Mulcahy et al. (2010). In their study on women's experiences in mothers groups, they found mothers in the group would often "get left out" and "get judged" (p. 3). One notable difference in my study is the judgment and exclusion single women faced was caused by not sharing a social status (e.g., being coupled). Whereas, in the study by Mulcahy et al. (2010) the women who were excluded and

judged shared a common social status (i.e., mother) with the other members of the mother's group and it had been this status that had brought them together in the first place for leisure purposes. With Mulcahy et al.'s study in mind, I question whether the women in this study experienced any type of marginalization and stigmatization in their friendships with other single women? If yes, what did that marginalization and stigmatization look like? And how was it perpetuated?

Moreover, a few women felt their coupled friends felt badly and pitied them for being single. Many women talked about feeling as though their coupled friends saw their singlehood as something that needed to be fixed (see the Gendered Ideologies section of the discussion for more details here) and would often want to set them up with other single men (sometimes with little regard to their actual interest or compatibility with that person as noted previously). As one woman explained, "*I feel a lot of people who are in relationships tend to think, he's single, you're single, you guys should date.*" Several women mentioned how they found it surprising their coupled friends responded to their singlehood in a judgmental way, as they perceived their friends to be progressive in many other dimensions of social life. In particular, this finding reaffirms the ways singlism, as defined by DePaulo (2006), continues to be a form of marginalization that goes unnoticed within our social worlds, particularly by people who are part of the privileged "couplehood."

In response to this lack of support, several women talked about getting rid of non-supportive or judgmental friends. As one woman noted, "*if you feel sorry for me because I am single, or you look down on me at all because of that, we can't be friends.*" Another woman also shared,

[if] you are with people that only want to talk about babies and marriage and white picket fences then I can't engage. I have nothing to contribute. So ya, like, if they are only focusing on that, and asking me why I don't have it...I am not going to feel good about it. So I also just tend to not keep those people in my life.

Although a few women noted the importance of surrounding themselves with truly supportive friends and that letting go of friends who did not meet this criterion was part of making the transition to adulthood, these choices can also be considered resistance to different gendered ideologies (e.g., couplehood, pronatalism, and familism). This finding is reflected in a study by Glover and Parry (2008) who found women dealing with infertility found friends not dealing with infertility were not always empathetic of their situation. When the women in their study did not feel supported by certain friends, they would often choose to remove these friends from their life.

6.5.4 Implications - Gendered Friendships

Given that many women (not all) commented that they had faced judgment and exclusion from their social circles because of their single status, the findings from this study highlight the ways women's friendships, particularly with other single women, can act as important sources of support for single women (e.g., spending leisure time together, feeling comfortable being open and vulnerable in these friendship spaces, learning about different dating technologies and how to access and use them, and acting as wing-women). In particular, the findings illustrate the ways women's friendship with other single women can be used to resist gendered expectations tied to dating (e.g., reading dating books together and mocking the gendered messages in these books). However, it is likely women can also reproduce gendered expectations in these spaces together.

Further research is needed to determine in more depth the ways single, adult women can resist and reproduce gendered expectations in their friendship spaces together.

In addition, previous research has shown friendships, when used as sources of support by women, can improve women's well-being (cf. Glover & Parry, 2008). The findings from my study do not demonstrate whether engaging in friendships with other single women improved single women's well-being. However, it is likely the support and acceptance women experienced connecting with their single friends about their experiences with singlehood and dating helped improve their wellbeing. One woman did express how these friendships helped her "cope". In turn, future research could explore the ways single women's friendships, as sources of support, may improve women's well-being.

6.6 Gendered Talk

In addition to the ways women used friendships as sources of support, the women in this study noted the importance of talking with other women as an important aspect of their experiences with singlehood and dating. The leisure literature has considered the ways women use talk within their friendships with other women to consider and review their lives (Green, 1998). Women engage in becoming and being friends through talk by building connections and strong interpersonal relationships (Coates, 1997; Green, 1998). Coates (1997) discussed friendships provide women "with a safe enough space to talk in ways we might not be able to elsewhere: I mean, to talk in ways that are exploratory and contingent" (p. 255). In this way, women's talk is both experimental and exploratory, wherein, women can explore different versions of womanhood (Coates, 1997; Green, 1998). In this section of the discussion, I consider the ways women used talk with other women to maintain and build relationships. Drawing on the work of Coates (1997), I outline different talking strategies women used in their talk together in

the interview spaces. I then consider in more depth the ways women used storytelling and humor in their talk together in the interviews, but also the ways women noted using storytelling and humor outside of the interviews with friends to reproduce and resist gendered ideologies and expectations of singlehood and dating.

6.6.1 Women's Talking Strategies

Coates (1997, 2013) highlighted how women deploy different strategies in their talk together to accomplish different goals. The first strategy Coates outlined is how women tend to develop a collaborative floor through their talk as a way of sharing an intimate space. In this way, the collaborative floor acts as a way for women to join together in conversation and build connections through what is shared in the space. The second strategy Coates (1997, 2013) noted, is the ways women incorporate the use of hedging in their talk, by including specific words or short phrases (e.g., maybe, sort of, right). Hedging can be used by women as a pause when deciding what to say and also as a way to express agreement or disagreement with what is being said in the conversation in a way that continues the conversation forward. Coates noted the third strategy women use in their conversations is probing or asking inquisitive questions. Women use both of these means to remain connected to the conversation and to fuel conversations forward, by encouraging inclusion and full participation by all women involved. The fourth strategy Coates (1997, 2013) shared, is the ways women use repetition of other women's ideas to promote solidarity.

When considering the findings from my study, women used a number of these talking strategies when sharing their experiences of singlehood and dating to create a collaborative and connected space in the interviews. For example, a number of women used hedging (e.g., *I don't know, at least I do, you know*), asked inquisitive questions (e.g., *Did you find the questions*

constrictive at all? Did you feel you were being pigeon holed? Same sort of complaints? Did you get frustrated?), and repeated other women's ideas as a way to build connections in the interview space.

In addition to the strategies outlined by Coates (1997, 2013), I noted women used a number of additional talking strategies in the interview space. For example, the women used affirmative questions when sharing their experiences (e.g., *Do you know what I mean? If that makes sense?*). The women also worked to reaffirm what had been shared by other women, by using different words and fillers (e.g., *it's true; exactly; totally; ahh; um-hmm*). I also realized the women at times finished each other's sentences as a way for women to build connections together within the interview space (e.g., SAM: *You don't take it for that literal like. RUTH: Translation*). As such, asking affirmative questions, reaffirming other women's experiences through the use of fillers and phrases, and finishing each other's sentences, offers several possibilities to expand on Coates' original outline of women's talking strategies.

In addition, to the talking strategies outlined before, women also used talk in the interview space in transformative ways. For instance, one woman talked about how she found the process of sharing her stories and experiences in the one-to-one interview provided her with the space to think about her experience in new ways. She explained,

I just don't see how you can ever be happy if you are fearful constantly or if you've primarily made your life based on fear. Which in thinking about it, I suppose I have done in not really dating up until this point. Um, so take that Ruth! (laughter) It's good. This is good therapy for me. It's great. I am going to pay you...a hundred dollars when you leave, and charge it to my benefits.

The idea of transformation through talking in the interview space is reflected in a paper by Parry (2014) who explained that through the process of talking with women dealing with infertility in the interview space, many women were able to reflect on and critically evaluate their experiences. In some cases, through the process of talking together, women were able to reflect on their desires to be biological mothers and were then able to reconsider their feelings and perspectives and come up with new ways of thinking about their experiences with infertility. With these ideas in mind, many women in my study also used the interview space in transformative ways, helping them to reflect and think about their experiences in different ways, a practical implication of this study that I elaborate on in the conclusion chapter.

6.6.2 Women Sharing Dating Stories

A fifth talking strategy Coates (1997, 2013) outlined is the ways women use storytelling in their talk together. As Coates (1997, 2013) noted, through storytelling women are able to learn about other women's lives while also sharing details about their own lives. The back and forth sharing involved in storytelling acts as a sounding board for women to contextual their experiences. The findings from my study reveal how, for many women, having a story to tell was an important and positive outcome of dating. Stories provided women with the opportunity to connect and relate to other single women (even for women who were not actively dating). Several women noted the value of swapping stories with other single women. In sharing stories together, women could receive validation and affirmation of their own experiences and choices relating to dating and singlehood and receive and offer advice to others. As one woman shared, *"it can be a real stress reliever to get someone else's perspective. Or to hear your friend say, that is not so bad or that is not a big deal or you didn't screw up."* Women also talked about

how sharing stories with other women provided them with a sense of connection and helped to create deeper friendship bonds. As one woman explained, in sharing stories together,

[p]articularly the funny ones, or the crazy ones or the disappointing ones are the best way to bond, because, it gives you this sense that we're all just in this together, and crazy things happen in navigating this single world, and it's okay. It happens to all of us.

These findings illustrate the strong sense of connection and understanding women fostered through their use of storytelling together. The connection between the ways people use talk to establish friendships has been previously highlighted by Glover, Parry, and Shinenew (2005) who looked at community gardeners and the ways leisure contexts were used to build relationships through talk. They found gardeners used leisure contexts as a social lubricant (enabler) to talk with other gardeners about gardening. Through talk in the leisure context of a community garden, gardeners became open to establishing and building connections necessary to produce social capital. This aligns with what Coates (1996) noted as the primary goal of women's talk within leisure spaces, which is not simply the exchange of information, but rather how the information shared through talk builds and maintains friendships. For many women in this study, sharing stories about their experiences with singlehood and dating acted as a social lubricant to begin conversations about their lives and to deepen connections with other single women

Women also used pop culture references to help tell their stories. For example, women referenced an example from the movie *Runaway Bride* when sharing stories about what settling in romantic relationships means to them. They explained,

DAWN: Serial monogamists, they jump from relationship, to relationship, to relationships, and their likes end up becoming the new persons. It's like that movie with Julia Roberts.

OLIVE: *Runaway Bride - eating her eggs.*

SAM: *Always her eggs, the way she likes her eggs is always.*

RUTH: *How her boyfriends like their eggs.*

As this example illustrates, women used pop culture references as a way to bridge connections within their stories with other women, but also as a way to resist traditional notions of women as passive and compliant in heterosexual romantic relationships.

Furthermore, many women also used curse words and phrases when sharing their stories about singlehood and dating with one another (*e.g., fuck that; that is a fucking compliment*). Not only does the use of these words resist traditional notions of what is considered “appropriate” women’s talk, traditionally perceived as women being discrete in their conversations (Leach, 2000), but women often used this language in ways that resisted gendered ideologies and expectations. For instance, one woman revealed, *“Or I am so old, I am willing to just jump into anything because I am desperate now. Fuck that!”*

Although women found ways to resist gendered expectations talking and sharing stories together (including their use of language in their stories), women also reproduced certain gendered expectations through their storytelling together. For example, several women shared their thoughts on how women should shape their online dating profiles and the appearance they present on their profiles. For instance, one woman noted, *“if you are on your profile saying that you want marriage, or a long-term commitment and you are throwing it all out there, it might not be the way to go about it. You might be sending the wrong message.”* Women also used gossip to share stories about singlehood and dating. For example, one woman explained, *“I have a girlfriend who is thirty-three, and she is a doormat, and there is no better way to describe her.”* These findings relate to a duoethnographic study by Spencer and Paisley (2013). They

noted how through their performances of watching the television show *The Bachelor* together they labelled women on the show “sluts” or “crazy.” Yet in the process of labeling the women on the television show, they were also simultaneously constructing their own gendered subjectivities, disciplining one another into performing and adhering to more normative or “acceptable” gendered subjectivities. Similarly, in a study by Berbary (2012) examining how discourses of femininity are disseminated and disciplined within women’s sororities, she found covert forms of discipline to be present in the ways women used “girl talk” in their day-to-day experiences of sorority life, including their involvement in social events. Girl talk, Berbary (2012) described, is “the rumors, discussions, and confrontations that occurred among the women that reinforced the boundaries of appropriateness through joking, name calling, opinion gathering, trash talking, and complaining” (p. 618). Sorority women used girl talk to respond to other women’s behaviors and appearances, by deciding whether to mimic those behaviors and appearances or instead mock or belittle those behaviors and appearances. In this way, girl talk was used by women in creating their gendered subjectivities.

When looking more closely at the ways single women share stories together, it is evident this type of performative speech act is also discursively constrained and disciplined (Butler, 2006; Chambers & Carver, 2008). Women, through their storytelling performances can discipline each other based on what is deemed normative or “natural.” In this way, women’s storytelling can actually work to constitute their own gendered subjectivities over time and discipline women into adhering to that which is considered a more acceptable gendered subjectivity. For instance, women can use storytelling with other single women to reproduce the objectifying gaze, also referred to as the male gaze, on women, by women. The objectifying gaze, more specifically, reinforces male privilege, making men active viewers, privy to

inspecting and scrutinizing women's bodies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Mulvey, 1975). This privilege gives men power to determine narrowly what defines women's beauty. The objectifying gaze positions women as passive objects to be critiqued and objectified by men (Mulvey, 1975). However, women can also see women as objects through the gaze (Puvia & Vaes, 2013). Research shows women can internalize messages of objectification reinforced through the objectifying gaze and use these messages to self-objectify. Moreover, women can also reproduce the objectifying gaze on other women, disciplining narrow ideals of women's beauty, weight, appearance, and sexuality (Puvia & Vaes, 2013). As such, storytelling can be used by women as part of their talk with other women in ways that can reduce or limit women's power (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990; Hutchinson, 2013), disciplining women to perform womanhood in certain ways when dating. I turn next to considering the ways women also used humor to resist and reproduce gendered expectations in their talk together when sharing stories.

6.6.3 Women Using Humor to tell their Dating Stories

Humor was also an important part of women's talk when sharing stories. This is not surprising, given that Barreca (2013) noted, "Women's humor...isn't all about punch lines; it is about telling stories" (p. xxxvi). To set a context for these findings and the connections between women's use of storytelling and humor, I first consider research by Coates (2013) that focused on the connections between women's humor and their talk with one another. She found women are more comfortable using humor in their private conversations together (e.g., over a glass of wine at home), rather than in public settings (e.g., out for dinner). Thus, suggesting that in public spaces women's talk is likely more constrained by gendered expectations associated with appropriate women's talk. Moreover, Coates (2013) found women's use of humor is most commonly based on relationships and stories from women's own lives. Coates noted this was

one common difference between the ways men and women use humor in their talk together as men are more likely to use humor in their friendships, by drawing on examples of people who are not present. In addition, men tend to use humor in their conversations in ways that are more competitive and boisterous than women (Coates, 2013).

Coates noted a number of functions humor plays in women's conversations together. For instance, women can use humor in their conversations in ways that promote solidarity within the group and a feeling that there is a collective understanding of what is shared. In particular, Coates (2013) illustrated how women can co-construct humor together in their talk with one another by continuing a joke and by responding to what is said rather than what is implied in their use of humor. In this way, "Humour often lies in the gap between what is said and what is meant" (Coates, 2013, p. 229). In addition to promoting solidarity among women, humor can also be used by women together to reproduce and resist gendered ideologies, expectations, and identities (Coates, 2013) and for women to find ways to explore aspects of their lives that might be considered taboo or challenging topics to explore otherwise. The ways women can use humor in their talk together as a source of resistance and reproduction to gendered notions of womanhood and as a way to broach taboo topics (e.g., marital satisfaction) was also noted by Green (1998) as part of her work on women's friendships. Green explained, "humour can pinpoint incongruities in the way 'things are supposed to be and the way things are'; it can also be used to enforce the rules of the culturally dominant group, or to subvert them" (1998, p. 181).

When considering the findings from my study, women used humor in their talk with one another in a number of ways. In particular, women talked about the importance of using humor to share their stories about dating and singlehood, because using humor provided the women with an opportunity to bond, relate to one another, and build solidarity (e.g., *I laughed about it*

and then *told everyone. It is a great party story*). Not surprisingly, Barreca (2013) explained, “Humor continues to serve a crucial function in women’s lives: it helps them realize they’re...not alone” (p. xxxvii). Using humor can also help rid feelings of isolation and can help to remove fear from certain contexts (Barreca, 2013). In this way, by sharing funny and humorous stories about dating, women can gain a sense of connection with one another and also discuss aspects of singlehood and dating that might not be comfortable or accepted topics of conversation in other contexts.

In addition to using humor to share stories together as a way to build solidarity, women used humor in their talk with one another in ways that resisted gendered ideologies, expectations, and stereotypes. For example, women used humor to share gendered stereotypes of single, adult women in ways that mocked these stereotypes in a subversive manner. For instance, the stereotype of single, adult women as sad and alone (e.g., *This is getting real sad, real fast*), as cat ladies (e.g., *I didn’t spend the night knitting cat sweaters, like I normally do*), as desperate (e.g., *just get pregnant and trap someone in a relationship really fast*), as ignorant (e.g., *But for those people who want to have babies in their body and out of their body, I think that is how it works?*), and as flawed (e.g., OLIVE: *Fun with acronyms. Why are we single?* RUTH: *I don’t know.* DAWN: *Are there any men out there that love acronyms?* RUTH: *Come on. No?*). These findings illustrate that when women reproduce gendered stereotypes through their talk, they can actually challenge them through their use of humor.

Women also used humor in their talk with one another in more overtly subversive ways. For instance, several women talked about the importance of having a sense of humor when single and dating (e.g., *I think a big piece of that is that you have to have a real sense of humor in this game*). A study by Korobov and Thorne (2009) examining how young women talk with one

another about their experiences with romantic love, relationships, and heterosexuality lends support to this finding. More specifically, findings from their study revealed how women negotiated hearing and talking about their own experiences with heterosexual relationships, by making light of or joking about romantic expectations collectively with other women as a way to alleviate the focus on finding a romantic relationship.

In addition to using humor verbally as resistance, women also used actions to infuse humor into their conversations and stories together. In particular, one woman shared a story of how her cousin who was pregnant asked her whether she hoped to have kids one day while rubbing her stomach. When telling this story, the woman in my study pretended to rub her belly in a mocking way as resistance to pronatal ideology (e.g., *She can still have conversations about other things than being pregnant. [Belly rub action.]*) A few other women used facial expressions to resist gendered stereotypes of single women as lonely and sad (e.g., *oh, I am not going to have this anytime soon. [Sad face]*).

Moreover, several women used humor in overtly sexual ways as resistance to gendered expectations (e.g., OLIVE: *I just want a penis.* RUTH: *Attached or?* DAWN: *Attention dicks*). Finally, a few women used humor as sexual innuendos (e.g., RUTH: *She won't know what's coming.* DAWN: *Coming.* SAM: *Play on words. (laughter)*). Coates (2013) noted women will often use sexual innuendos as humor in their talk with one another, but Coates never provided a function as to why women do this as part of their talk. The findings from my study suggest women used humor in their talk with one another in sexual ways, as a way to resist traditional gendered expectations of women's sexuality (e.g., as passive). Instead, affirming the ways woman can engage in sex for pleasure as active agents of their own bodies (Parry & Penny Light, 2013).

Although women found ways to resist gendered expectations and stereotypes through their use of humor, women also used humor in ways that reproduced gendered expectations and stereotypes. This is an important consideration to highlight, because as Zwagerman (2010) noted, much of the research that has focused on women's use of humor has overstated its subversive possibilities. Rather, it is critical to also consider how women use humor in their talk and storytelling together in ways that may in fact limit women's power. For instance, women reproduced certain gendered expectations of womanhood through their use of humor. For example, that single, adult women are desperate to find a man (*e.g., But if you are going about it, not unlike a hooker, with you know, momma's got to get paid, or momma's got to find herself a husband*). In addition, women used humor in their talk together that reproduced the importance of "successfully" coupling. As one woman shared,

What makes me laugh the most about it, is that I have three younger siblings who are all married, and my parents are also successfully married, so when we get together for like family dinner, which we are doing this weekend (groan)...and we sit around the table in the dining room, and it is pretty masy. And there are eleven people every thanksgiving, so I am always perched on the edge of the table with a corner in my ribs or something, like I am hanging off the table because I am a single person. But it makes me laugh."

Moreover, as I noted within the Gendered Ideologies section of this discussion, a few women also used humor in self-deprecating ways to negotiate gendered ideologies and pressures about their single status. Barreca (2013) explained, women have more freedom "to discuss our bodies, our emotions, our desires, and our ambitions with less shame than we've had in previous generations, but self-deprecating humor is still at the heart of much girls' humor" (p. xxxvii). As such, although self-deprecating humor can be used to manage pressures tied to the ideology of

couplehood and as a way to diffuse certain social contexts that may be uncomfortable, it can also be used to belittle women's lived experiences and reinforce gendered power disparities.

6.6.4 Implications – Gendered Talk

The findings from this study illustrate the important ways single, adult women use talk within their friendships with other single women. Single, adult women used a number of talking strategies in the interview space when talking with other single women (e.g., using affirmative questions and comments, finishing each other's sentences). The findings from this study also illustrate how the interview space can provide women with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of singlehood and dating and to think about their experiences in new, and in some cases, transformative ways.

In addition, the women in this study identified sharing stories together was an important talking strategy as well as an important outcome of dating. Women used stories to receive and provide validation, affirmation, and support regarding women's experiences with singlehood and dating. The findings also illustrate the important ways women used humor in their talk with one another. Both storytelling and humor were used by women to resist gendered ideologies, expectation, and roles tied to dating along with gendered expectations associated with women's talk more broadly (e.g., pop culture references, curse words, mocking gendered stereotypes of single women, sexual innuendos and comments). However, the findings also illustrate the ways women can reproduce gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles through their use of storytelling and humor, ultimately, limiting women's control and power (e.g., reproducing the objectifying gaze on other women and reproducing the notion that single women are desperate to find love/a man). Indeed, these findings illustrate the need for future research that looks more

closely at the ways women use different strategies and dimensions of their talk in ways that can subvert and reproduce gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles as part of their leisure.

Taken together, these six points of discussion offer insight into the complexity of factors influencing and shaping women's experiences with singlehood and dating, including their negotiation of gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles. This discussion has also drawn attention to the ways women can engage with different technologies, both online and offline, as a way to make romantic and sexual connections in adulthood. Women's engagement with different technologies is not solely based on their consumption of technologies, but also their performances of self when using these technologies. The points of discussion also provide insight into the ways women can manage their emotions when dating through the use of emotion work. Lastly, the discussion chapter helps to build stronger understanding and awareness of not only the importance of single, adult women's friendships with other women, often other single women, but the role that their talk together has in shaping their own understandings and engagement with singlehood and dating as part of their leisure lives. In the final chapter, presented next, I provide my concluding thoughts on this study, including the theoretical and methodological implications, possible areas for future research, and the research limitations of this study. I also detail several of the social justice outcomes this study makes.

7.0 Conclusion

Starting from my own questions (and tensions and paradoxes) of singlehood and dating in adulthood, the purpose of this research was to extend from my experiences, utilizing a third wave feminist theoretical orientation, to explore experiences of singlehood for adult women negotiating the gendered world of dating. After 12 one-to-one reflexive, dyadic interviews, two interactive, small group interviews, approximately 500 pages of transcription, and eight months of analysis and interpretation, I created five messy composite characters to reflect different phases of singlehood and dating women experienced. To represent the findings, I engaged the five composite characters in conversation using dialogue-based vignettes to represent the complexity of their experiences through three larger thematic areas: Gendered Pressures to Connect, Gendered Modes of Connecting, and Gendered Connections. I decided to share my feminist interpretation of these thematic areas through six points of discussion: gendered ideologies, gendered technologies, gendered performances, gendered emotion work, gendered friendships, and gendered talk. In this final chapter, I outline the key theoretical and methodological implications that stem from my research. I also share a number of the possibilities for future research extending from this work, along with several of the limitations of this research study. I conclude this chapter by highlighting the social justice outcomes of this work, including the outcomes for participants, the broader community, and myself.

Theoretically, the experiences of single, adult women negotiating the gendered world of dating have been largely ignored in the literature across disciplines, but most noticeably by leisure scholars. This study provides important insights into the marginalization and stigmatization single, adult women can face as part of their everyday lives, including their leisure. In particular, this study sheds light on the ways adult women's experiences are

influenced by gendered ideologies, such as the ideology of couplehood, familism, and pronatalism. The findings from this study also provide support for Freysinger et al.'s (2013b) proposition that women who do not adhere to traditional familial roles of wife and mother are likely to be more strongly impacted by these ideologies. Women who are single in adulthood *are* more strongly impacted by these ideologies.

From a theoretical stance, this study also highlights the many ways women can reproduce, but also challenge gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles that constrain and discipline their experiences with singlehood and dating. The reproduction and resistance dynamic was evident in this study through women's use of technologies to date, their performances of dating, both online and offline, their use of emotion work when dating, and within their friendships with other single women through their talk together. The different ways women reproduced and resisted gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles illustrates the dynamic and often intricate interplay between reproduction and resistance in women's leisure lives. Rather than considering reproduction and resistance in polarised ways, wherein, reproduction is positioned as reinforcing gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles, and resistance is positioned as liberating from gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles (Raisborough & Bhatti, 2007), the findings from this study reposition these ideas to consider the ways women can use both reproduction and resistance, at times, simultaneously (Parry, Glover, & Shinew, 2005), and as sources of empowerment in their experiences (Spencer & Paisley, 2013).

Methodologically, this research also offers an important feminist/narrative analytical contribution. As noted in the methods chapter, although feminist researchers have played an instrumental role in sharing narratives, and more broadly in bringing elements of research praxis

to the forefront in their research projects (cf. Hesse-Biber, 2012), detailed accounts of how feminist researchers engage in data analysis and interpretation using narrative remain limited. With these ideas in mind, I attempted to be as detailed as possible when writing the analytical and interpretive steps that guided my research process. I believe this research provides important insights into what data analysis and interpretation can look like when guided by a feminist approach to narrative and hopefully provides a framework that other researchers can look to for guidance when negotiating this process.

Furthermore, from a methodological stance, this work illustrates the possibilities for using dialogue-based vignettes as a way of representing research findings. I chose to represent the findings for this study through dialogue-based vignettes, as this representational form reflects the ways women actually talk and share stories together, often in sporadic, engaged, but not necessarily cohesive ways. I encourage other researchers interested in using CAP to seek inspiration for representing their research findings from the data itself, as this approach can help promote the representation of the findings in becoming an expression of reality, which as Richardson (2003) noted, is one of the key criterion for judging CAP.

Building off of the theoretical and methodological contributions of this research study, I believe there are many opportunities for future research that stem from this work (many of which I outline in the discussion chapter). Yet, in this final chapter, I summarize the areas of research that I believe are most pressing for leisure scholars, and particularly feminist leisure scholars, to consider. More specifically, although this research study brings attention to the importance of looking at the ideology of couplehood in shaping single women's experiences with single life and dating, more research is needed to consider more broadly the ways this ideology influences women's leisure lives. For instance, if women are in a romantic relationship they are not happy

with and/or want to leave, how does the ideology of couplehood influence their choices to stay or go? How does their decision to stay or go influence their leisure lives?

Moreover, although this research begins to highlight the ways gendered ideologies including the ideology of couplehood, pronatalism, and familism can compound to influence women's leisure experiences, more research is needed to examine the ways gendered ideologies (and not solely the ones outlined in this study), work together to discipline and constrain women's leisure lives in different ways. To better understand the complex ways gendered ideologies influence women's leisure lives, I suggest looking to Watson and Scraton's (2013) work on intersectionality and their central argument that "thinking intersectionally is a useful means of analysing leisure as a dynamic interplay of individual expression and the social relations within which leisure occurs (p. 36). With their argument in mind, I contend it is important for leisure scholars to think about gendered ideologies in intersectional (and compounding) ways.

In addition, although this research highlights the ways gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles shape women's use (both their performance and consumption) of digital technologies (e.g., online dating websites, SNSs, cell phones, etc.), future research could explore more closely how women use different digital technologies, both online and offline, to initiate and establish romantic and sexual relationships. More specifically, future research could consider more closely how women use these technologies in complementary, but also successive ways throughout relationship initiation and development. What influences women's choices to use or not use certain technologies? How do gendered ideologies and expectations influence women's use of these technologies to make romantic and sexual connections? What factors may be preventing women from accessing certain technologies to make romantic connections? How do women

negotiate issues related to the digital divide? What measures can be put in place to ensure women have better access to these technologies?

This study also illustrates the important role language and talk plays in single women's leisure lives, including their friendships with other women. Indeed, the findings from this study highlight there is richness and complexity to the ways women talk together, richness and complexity that needs to be further considered, questioned, and critiqued by leisure scholars, and again, I emphasize particularly by feminist leisure scholars. Future research could consider in more depth the ways women use different talking strategies (verbal and non-verbal) and dimensions of talk (e.g., storytelling, humor, and gossip) to discipline, maintain, but also subvert gendered ideologies, expectations, and stereotypes as part of their leisure lives.

In addition, the findings from this study indicate single, adult men may also experience pressures related to gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles tied to dating, albeit in different ways from single, adult women. Indeed, future studies could explore the connections between singlehood, dating, and leisure for single, adult men. Previous leisure research has shown men are also influenced by gendered ideologies, expectations, and roles tied to heteronormative masculinity (cf. Berbarry & Richmond, 2011; Dunlap & Johnson, 2013) and men can reproduce and resist these ideologies, expectations, and roles through their leisure (cf. Johnson, 2013). Future research could consider the ways single men reproduce and resist gendered expectations and roles through dating.

Although there are a number of possibilities for future research stemming from this study, there are also several limitations. One limitation of this study, is that it focuses primarily on experiences of singlehood and dating for white, middle class, heterosexual women, a limitation that I describe in detail in the methods chapter. It can be argued that if women who participated

in this study experience marginalization and stigmatization for their single status, it is likely this marginalization and stigmatization may be heightened or at least further complicated for women whose singlehood also intersects with other identity factors, such as race, disability, sexuality, socio-economic status, etc. As such, an area of future research could extend this work to explore broader intersectional experiences of singlehood and dating for adult women. Applying a multitude of feminist lenses to this topic could help “wake us up to layers of sexist, racist, homophobic...points of view” (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 5) on this topic.

In addition to the diversity of the participant profile, another limitation of this study is that not all of the women participated in both a reflexive, dyadic interview and an interactive, small group interview, and for the women who did, not all women participated in the interviews in the same order. In retrospect, given the important insights that were gleaned from this study in terms of the ways single, adult women talk together, I believe the research study would have been strengthened had all women participated in both interviews in the same order (i.e., interactive, small group interview followed by reflexive, dyadic interview). This approach would have provided additional insight into the different ways single women talk together in group contexts versus one-to-one contexts about their experiences with singlehood and dating. For instance, how does a group context shape the stories and experiences women share and in what ways? Future research could explore this question in more depth.

Despite the research limitations, this study also fostered social justice and social change in several ways. First, research has shown contexts devoted exclusively to women may fuel empowerment as women talk together and find ways to resist gendered expectations and norms (Green, 1998). Many women who participated in this study found ways to resist gendered expectations tied to singlehood and dating in the interview space. This resistance was most

visibly evidenced through women's talk together and their use of storytelling and humor. Indeed, through their talk together, women can help to turn "the political wheel" (Baumgardner & Richards, 2010, p. 28), by unearthing common ground, along with new ways of knowing and looking at their experiences of singlehood and dating. In addition, involving participants in the analysis and interpretation process and asking for feedback on the findings also helped to build connections between women and to engage new ways of thinking about their experiences of singlehood and dating. For example, after reading the findings (as I noted in the methods chapter) one woman shared, "*I feel closer to the others because of it. We are so fierce! I see our diversity and love the way you've celebrated that.*" In turn, for women who participated in the research study social change happened at a more micro level, through what Parry (2014) has referred to as "transformative encounters." More specifically, transformative encounters foster social change in "the private spheres of women's lives including recognition of a problem, a small shift in priorities, a value of self or a sense of empowerment that may be less visible and more difficult to assess, but no less valuable" (p. 354).

This study also works to foster broader-based social justice and change by bringing awareness and attention to the marginalization and stigmatization single, adult women face in the greater community. As DePaulo (2006) noted, singlism frequently slips under the radar and remains unnoticed. The findings from my study illustrate not only the lack of awareness of the marginalization and stigmatization single people face, but also the ways single, adult women's experiences with singlehood and dating are often discounted, judged, and scrutinized. I was reminded of this perception most vividly when I submitted my ethics application for this study and received the following feedback relating to the potential risks associated with participating in this study: "Will most women who participate consider the questions asked as a personal or

sensitive topic? This risks statement may be a little overstated.” This response highlights the ways experiences of singlehood are commonly not taken seriously or validated.

In response to this issue, by sharing the findings from the study with others, I hope to bring greater understanding and awareness to experiences of singlehood in both leisure and professional contexts, helping to reduce the stigma and marginalization this population experiences. In particular, using CAP to represent my findings, given its focus on accessibility (Berbary, 2011), will help to open the research text to a broader audience. As Parry (2014) explained, “In its process and representation, CAP facilitates a high propensity for social justice as it facilitates women’s stories entering the public domain to influence change” (p. 360). In particular, I plan to seek out multiple avenues for sharing this work, including, but not limited to, academic journals and conferences, feminist blogs, newspapers, and undergraduate classrooms. As Snyder (2008) suggested, undergraduate women’s and gender studies programs offer important contexts for sharing third wave feminist accounts.

Finally, this research has had significant personal implications. In particular, this process has been a tremendous learning opportunity. I have been able to learn from established and talented scholars, to ask questions, to get advice, feedback and, at times, much needed direction. This study has also given me the invaluable chance to learn from and with the women who so graciously agreed to be part of this study and who were willing and open to sharing their stories and experiences in the interview space. Their stories and experiences helped me to think about singlehood and dating in many new, layered, multi-dimensional ways, as highlighted in the findings and discussion chapters. Their stories and experiences also fueled this work forward. When I was struggling creatively or conceptually, I often would go back to their stories for inspiration and guidance. I would hear their voices, laugh at their humor, and try to channel their

spirit. Returning to the data for inspiration is an important lesson that I will carry forward with me when conducting and moving through future research studies.

Through this process I have also learned about myself. This study has helped me to better understand my inner ways of knowing and seeing the world. In particular, finding “my feminist footing” has been one of the greatest gifts/lessons this process has given/taught me. I have been able to identify, give meaning to, and honor the gendered questions, tensions, and paradoxes that present themselves in my everyday life. As one woman in my study wisely shared, “*Paradox in any situation should be honored.*” Being able to see my own experiences in this way has been a personal source of empowerment and it has also been transformative, in that it has given me permission to look at my own life as an important source of knowing and understanding (Ellis, 2004). It has also provided me the opportunity to embrace, learn from, and own my experiences of singlehood and dating, rather than scrutinize and judge those experiences for not being “feminist” enough.

This research study has also helped me to recognize the strength of my own voice. As feminists inspired by third wave feminism have shown (cf. Lyons, 2013; Pavlidis, 2013), personal stories, when shared with commitment, honesty, and vulnerability, can not only help to illustrate the tensions and complex power relations that exist between dominant gendered ideologies and the reality of women’s leisure lives (Snyder, 2008), but they can also be a fruitful way to introduce new and important topics into the research conversation (Baumgardner & Richards, 2010). I hope this research study encourages other leisure scholars to draw research inspiration from their own lives and emboldens other women to tell their story, to take action, to speak up, and to have their voices heard around issues that present themselves as most pressing in their leisure worlds. With these ideas in mind, it seems only fitting to invite the reader back to

my own experiences negotiating singlehood and dating that I presented in the introductory chapter. I conclude this research study by sharing one final excerpt from my story.

He pulls up to the entrance of my apartment building and stops the car. I already know I'm not inviting him in. I don't want to seem too forward. Instead, I decide to wait passively, but intentionally for several minutes. We continue to talk and laugh. Finally, I move my right hand towards the car door and I slowly pull the handle towards me. Part of me wants to make a break for it, but another interested part of me insists on staying.

“Okay, thanks. I had a nice time!” I say, as I glance briefly at him, then at the door. I look back at him again, take a deep breath, and spontaneously lean in. Our lips find each other's, stumbling at first, but then relaxing into a comfortable and familiar rhythm. I should be lost in the moment, but instead my stream of consciousness plays distractingly in my head: “Oh right, this is what it's like to kiss someone. This is nice. I'm kissing someone!! When was the last time I kissed someone? I hope he doesn't ask to come up. Would it be bad if he did? STOP!”

I pull away. “I should probably go,” I note.

“Okay. I had a great time tonight. I will talk to you soon!” he replies.

“Me too. And yes – let's talk soon,” I reply, attempting to play it cool. I move out of the car and give him a sheepish wave, before bolting towards the entrance of my apartment building.

Standing in front of the elevator door, the door opens and I step inside. My feet press firmly against the tiled floor of the elevator, grounding me, as the door dings, closes and the elevator begins to move up, up, up. My body relaxes into this solid stance, knees soft, feet rooted. As I move through this space and time, I reiterate his last words “I will talk to you soon.” I wonder whether we will talk soon. Ding. The elevator door opens and I walk off.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Information / Recruitment Letter

Dear (*insert name of Participant*),

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study exploring experiences of dating, for single, adult women. The title of the study is “Single and Ready to Mingle? Exploring Single Women’s Experiences Dating”. This research is being completed for my dissertation, as part of the degree requirements for my PhD in Recreation and Leisure Studies. I am currently a third year doctoral student in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, working under the supervision of Dr. Diana Parry. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with more information about the research study and to outline the details of your involvement if you decide to take part in the study.

There is limited research exploring the experiences of singlehood for adult women. More specifically, the ways adult women engage in dating practices and the ties between these practices and women’s leisure experiences. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature, by examining adult women’s experiences of singlehood and dating. In particular, I hope this research illuminates the social, relational, and personal influences shaping single, adult women’s experiences of dating. In addition, I hope this study will build understanding and awareness of these experiences for the women who participate, but also within the broader community. In turn, insights from this study may help to shape practices in leisure studies as well as other fields and act as a catalyst towards establishing better community support systems and programs for this population.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in two interviews: 1) a one-to-one, in person interview, and 2) a small group interview, with 3-4 other women. Both interviews will last approximately one to two hours and the interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon location between the participants and the researcher. You will also be asked to bring one story to both interviews that you feel speaks to you about your experiences dating.

During the interviews, you may decline to answer any of the interview questions asked. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, which I will later transcribe into verbatim transcripts for analysis. The information you share in the one-to-one, in person interview will be kept confidential. Although, I cannot guarantee confidentiality within the small group interviews because of the context, I will be stressing the importance of keeping what is shared within the group interviews confidential with all participants, prior to beginning the interview. When writing up the findings from this study, I may use direct quotes from the interviews, but I will ensure confidentiality by assigning each participant a pseudonym.

By participating in this study, there are minimal emotional risks anticipated, because the study deals with a personal and sensitive topic. However, I will be implementing specific safeguards throughout the interviews. I will engage in a series of check-ins throughout both

interview processes to address any questions or concerns that you may have. In addition, you will have the option to stop the interviews at any point.

Data collected during this study will be retained for three years. Only I and my supervisor, Dr. Diana Parry, will have access to this data. Moreover, I would like to share my initial analysis and interpretation of the data with you. In addition, upon completion of the study, I will also make available a copy of the study. You may indicate your preference for receiving these documents relating to the study, on the *Participant Informed Consent*, which I will distribute and collect at the interview.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information, feel free to contact me, Janet McKeown by email at j2mckeow@uwaterloo.ca. You can also reach my supervisor, Dr. Diana Parry, by phone at (519)-888-4567 ext. 33468 or by email at dcparry@uwaterloo.ca. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the Director of the Office of Research ethics, at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca. I look forward to speaking with you and I would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this study.

Yours sincerely,

Janet McKeown
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Diana, Parry, PhD
Associate Professor
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Appendix B – Participant Informed Consent

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I agree to participate in the study “Single and Ready to Mingle? Exploring Single Women’s Experiences Dating” being conducted by Janet McKeown, a Doctoral student in the University of Waterloo’s Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, who is working under the supervision of Dr. Diana Parry.

I have made the decision to participate based on the information I have received in the information letter. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and request any additional details I wanted about this study. As a participant in this study, I realize I will be asked to participate in a small group interview and a one-on-one interview. As a participant in this study, I am aware that I may decline to answer any question that I prefer not to answer.

I am also aware that the interviews will be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am aware that excerpts from the interview along with direct quotations may be used by the researcher in any publications to come from this research. The researcher will use pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and to ensure my name is not identified in any way. In addition, I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time by asking that the interview be stopped.

I am aware that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (file #___). I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the researcher, Janet McKeown, by email at j2mckeow@uwaterloo.ca or her advisor Dr. Diana Parry at (519) 888-4567 ext. 33468 or by email at dcparry@uwaterloo.ca. I am also aware that I may contact the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, Dr. Maureen Nummelin at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or Maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca if I have any concerns or comments resulting from my participation in this study.

I agree to participate in the small group interview (60-120 minutes).

YES NO (Please circle your choice)

I also agree to participate in the one-to-one interview (60-120 minutes).

YES NO (Please circle your choice)

Participant Name (please print):

Participant Signature:

Witness Name (please print):

Witness Signature:

Date: _____

Would you like to receive a copy of the initial analysis and interpretation from the study?

YES NO

When the study is completed, would you like to receive a copy of the study?

YES NO

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, please leave your contact information below.

Participant Contact Information:

Appendix C – Participant Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Janet McKeown. I am a graduate student at the University of Waterloo in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study “Single and Ready to Mingle? Exploring Single Women’s Experiences Dating”.

Before we begin, I would like to go over a few important items. The interview is meant to be conversational in style, but there are several questions that I would like to ask you about your experiences with singlehood and dating. If there are any questions you are not comfortable answering, please let me know and we can skip them. You may also choose to stop the interview at any point. In addition, the information you share in the interview will be kept confidential and your name will not be identified in any way. However, please be mindful throughout the interview that this is a research project. *(For the small group interview I will also remind participants of the importance of keeping the personal information shared during the interviews confidential).*

To make sure I have a clear description of your experiences, I would like to audio record our conversation. Are you comfortable with me audio recording the interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

- 1) Take me through a typical date.
 - a. Have you been on different kinds of dates?
 - b. How would you characterize these dates?
 - c. Can you tell me a personal story about a date that represents the different kinds of dates you mentioned?
- 2) How would you describe dating?
 - a. What words/terminology do people use to describe dating?
- 3) How does dating work?
 - a. In what ways do you engage in dating? (e.g., online dating, etc.)
 - b. What role does technology play in your dating experiences?
 - c. Where do you go on dates?
 - d. How would you describe the dating market at this point in time?
- 4) How do your experiences of dating in adulthood, differ from the experiences of dating you had in your teenage or early adult years (e.g., at College or University)?
- 5) How did you learn these dating practices?
 - a. Are your dating practices the same as your peers?
- 6) What influences your dating decisions?
 - a. Do you feel pressure to date?
 - b. What sort of pressures do you feel when it comes to dating? (e.g., from whom, where, how?)
 - c. Do you ever have periods of time when you choose not to date? If yes, why?
- 7) What roles do you feel comfortable playing on a date? (e.g., initiating the date, paying for the date, etc.)
- 8) What do you like/dislike about dating?

- a. What is your ideal date from start to finish?
 - b. How would you describe yourself in relation to dating??
 - i. A good dater? An anxious dater?
 - c. How do you know when a date has gone badly?
- 9) What keeps you dating?
- 10) In what ways do you think dating differs for men?
 - a. In your view, would men answer these questions any differently?
- 11) Do you consider dating to be an enjoyable experience?
 - a. Do you consider dating to be a leisurely experience?
- 12) When does someone enter the dating phase and then move beyond it?
- 13) Is there anything else you think is important about dating that we have not touched upon yet?

Thank you for providing feedback about your experiences. Your insights will be helpful in understanding the complexity involved in dating experiences for single, adult women. Your feedback will also be helpful to build awareness in the community and will hopefully help to inform community programs and services and reduce any stigmatization and marginalization this population experiences.

I will be providing all participants with a copy of the interviews transcripts, the initial analysis and interpretation of the findings as well as a copy of the final research report if you indicated interest on the *Participant Informed Consent* form. If you have any questions or comments about your participation, please feel free to contact me, Janet McKeown, by email at j2mckeow@uwaterloo.ca or my Advisor, Dr. Diana Parry at (519) 888-4567 ext. 33468 or by email at dcparry@uwaterloo.ca.