

Appendices

Appendix A

SINGLE WOMEN IN MIDLIFE

I am looking for single women to interview. If you are a single woman between the ages of 35 and 55, have never had children and are never-married or were married only once and are now currently single, then I would like to talk with you. You're invited to participate in a research project exploring the experience of singlehood in midlife. Would you be willing to share your thoughts and feelings with me ? Please call **Karla Soukup**, Masters Candidate, Department of Family and Child Development, Virginia Tech, **231-9394** or **951-5058**.

- **Interviews will be confidential and scheduled at your convenience.**

Appendix B

TELEPHONE CONTACT

Hello, my name is Karla Soukup. I am a Masters Candidate in the Department of Family and Child Development at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research project on the experience of singlehood for women in midlife. I am interested in talking with women who have never married or had children, as well as women who have been married only once, are now currently single and also have never had a child.

Does this description sound like you ?

Participation in the study will involve this initial telephone contact, as well as one face-to-face meeting in which background information will be gathered and a 60-75 minute audiotaped interview will be conducted.

Would you be willing to participate in this study ?

To determine your eligibility for being included in this study I would like to ask some short questions. May I do that ?

Have you ever been married ?

If yes, has it only been one time ?

Are you between the ages of 35 and 55 ?

Have you received a high school diploma or GED ?

If yes, have you received any training or schooling beyond that ?

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship ?

Have you ever had children ?

Based on your responses, may we arrange a time and a location to meet in person that would be convenient for you ?

Do you have any questions for me ?

If for any reason you are unable to keep our appointment or if you should have questions or concerns before we meet, you may contact me at **231-9394** or **951-5058**.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to participate. I look forward to meeting with you very soon.

Appendix C

BACKGROUND GUIDE

I am doing a study on the experience of singlehood for women in midlife. I would like to begin with a few background questions.

- (1) When were you born ?
- (2) Where ?
- (3) How long have you lived in this area ?
- (4) How far did you go in school ?
- (5) What type of work do you do ?
- (6) Where ?
- (7) Have you ever been married ?
- (8) If so, how long were you married ?
- (9) When did it end ?
- (10) Have you ever had any children ?
- (11) Are you currently involved in a close romantic relationship ?
- (12) What are your present living arrangements ?
- (13) Do you live alone ?

FAMILY HISTORY

Briefly tell me about your family of origin:

Parents:

Siblings:

Appendix D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- (1) Tell me about yourself.
 - What is a typical day like ?
 - How do you spend your time ?
 - How would you describe yourself to someone you don't know ?
 - How would your best friend describe you ?
- (2) What messages did you receive as a child regarding marriage ?
 - From family ?
 - From friends ?
 - From society in general ?
- (3) What are your beliefs about marriage ?
 - Your hopes and dreams ?
 - Wishes or desires ?
 - Fantasies regarding marriage ?
- (4) Can you reflect for me about how your beliefs were formed ?
 - Where do you think these beliefs came from ?
- (5) How have these beliefs changed over time ?
 - From childhood ?
 - From adolescence ?
 - From your 20s ?
 - From your 30s ?
 - From your 40s ?
- (6) Tell me about your close romantic relationships ?
 - How would you define a significant relationship ?
 - Have you ever been married ?
 - Have you ever come close to being married ?
 - Have you ever received any marriage proposals ?
 - Have you ever asked anyone to marry you ?
- (7) What do these relationships mean to you ?
 - How do they make you feel about yourself ?

- How do they make you feel about your life ?
- (8) In what ways has being single changed the way you view yourself ?
- How do you refer to yourself ? Single ? Divorced ?
 - Do you consider yourself to be single by choice ? chance ? or circumstance ?
Please explain.
- (9) In what ways has being single affected other areas of your life ?
- The way you spend your time ?
 - Your work ?
 - Your friendships ?
 - Family ?
- (10) What does midlife mean to you ?
- How do you feel about middle age ?
 - How do you feel about yourself now ?
 - In what ways do you feel different then you did in your 20s ? 30s ?

Appendix E

REFLECTIONS ON PILOT INTERVIEW #2

Conducting the second pilot interview provided a good opportunity for me to examine not only the depth and flow of the revised questions, but also some of the fears I have in connection with the interviewing process. I wanted the interview to flow as smoothly and freely as possible, to make the participant feel at ease, and to feel comfortable myself. As the interview began, the first thing I noticed about both of us was our mutual nervousness. Hers was apparent in her speech (rapid) and in her body language (fumbling with a water glass and repeated shifting in her chair). Mine, while not noticeable in those ways, was apparent to me, in my hypervigilance to the details of the interview process (question sequence, operation of the recorder, “trying” to keep the interview flowing). I realized early on that I was attending so much to the structure of the interview that I was missing out on the process of the exchange. I wanted to be engaged with her, but I found my mind racing along, asking questions while she was speaking, such as, “How closely do I need to follow the order of questions ?” and “Are the questions getting at the kind of information I want ?” and “How can I make her feel more at ease and less self-conscious ?” My initial impression of the participant was that she was somewhat shy and lacked confidence, but I was surprised during the interview, at how articulate and well-spoken she was. There were few hesitations or pauses in her conversation, and she had no prior knowledge of the questions I posed. As for myself, I felt a bit stiff in the beginning of the interview. I think this was due in

part to some of the responses the participant gave which surprised me, such as not having any close friends, when I asked her to describe herself. I was not prepared for the insights she shared and that threw me off a bit. I had had the intention of closely following the script of questions, and her responses seemed to be drawing me in another direction, where I wanted to go, but I was uncertain whether I should. Next time I will sacrifice structure for flow and work my way back to where we need to go. About midway through the interview, when the subject of the “right one” came up, I intuitively asked the question, “How do you know if it’s the “right one?” It was with that question that I could visibly see each of us relax - in my mind, that was when the interview **really** began. At that point, it ceased to be a question and answer session and turned, instead, into a reflexive conversation between two women, both of us single, both of us trying to understand what being single means for us. I know I missed opportunities to follow up on comments the participant made, but I feel like it was more a timing issue than anything else. The interview was conducted during our lunch hour and took almost that full block of time. I think this interview demonstrated to me the importance of an initial contact with the participant, whether in person or on the telephone, to help establish rapport prior to the interview, giving each person an opportunity to get comfortable and be familiar with the other.

Appendix F

Application for Approval for Research Involving Human Subjects

Karla S. Soukup

Department of Family and Child Development

540/231-9394 or 540/951-5058

Protocol for Research Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Choice, Chance or Circumstance: A Qualitative Study of Never-Married and Once-Married Women's Marriage Beliefs in Midlife

Justification of this Research

The purpose of this study is to examine the central or core beliefs regarding marriage held by women who identify themselves as single and in midlife. Despite the rise in the proportion of singles in the United States, singleness is still considered a minority phenomenon. Women who do not marry or experience motherhood are often viewed as being out of the mainstream. Given the strong social imperative towards marriage coupled with the negative associations of remaining single, the experience of being single challenges the conventional construct of womanhood. Because marriage and motherhood are essential in shaping women's lives, this study will focus specifically on the unique experiences of single women who had never had children. Information is needed to inform our understanding of these women whose lives have followed an alternate life path, as well as to explore their experience within the context of midlife.

Procedure

Because marriage and motherhood are pivotal in specifying what a woman is, women without children who self-identify as single and in midlife (ages 35-55) will be recruited for participation in the study. Volunteers will be sought through advertisement, personal and professional networking, and also through snowball sampling, a process in which present volunteers recommend future participants for the study.

The sample will consist of 5 never-married women and 5 formerly-married women, for a total of 10 individuals. Volunteers will be contacted by telephone and asked to consent to a face-to-face interview. The initial telephone contact will be used in determining eligibility as well as to brief volunteers on the general scope of the study. The face-to-face interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location and include a background guide followed by an in-depth interview lasting approximately 60-75 minutes.

Risks and Benefits

Volunteers for this study will be assured of their right to terminate participation at any time. Interview questions are not intended to cause risk.

Women who participate in this study will have the opportunity to express and reflect upon their unique experience of singlehood in midlife. By sharing their experiences of singlehood, participants may validate or revalidate their individual life experiences as both viable and positive. Through reflexive exchange between

participant and researcher who is also single, child-free and in midlife, issues of singlehood, mother-free status, and midlife may be explored and discussed in a shared way, a benefit to both respondent and researcher. Participation of individuals in this study will contribute to the knowledge base of singlehood as a alternate life path as well as increase understanding of female midlife development.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

Only the named investigator will conduct the interviews and have access to the list of participants. Responses of individuals who participate in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Participant names, telephone numbers, and audiotaped interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet and destroyed after six months. Information provided will have actual names removed, and be replaced instead with code numbers. If necessary, a professional transcriptionist may be hired to help with the transcription process. This transcriptionist will have access only to coded audiotapes, and in keeping with the rules of professional transcription, will be required to maintain strict confidence about information transcribed. Analyses, future documents, or presentations will use pseudonyms.

Appendix G

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: A Qualitative Study of Never-Married and Once-Married Women's Marriage Beliefs in Midlife

Principal Investigator: Karla S. Soukup

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a study on single women in midlife. The purpose of this study is to increase understanding of the ways women who have never had children experience singlehood throughout midlife. There will be a total of 10 participants in the study, 5 never-married women and 5 once-married women.

II. PROCEDURE

You are being asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. Our initial contact was via telephone and lasted approximately 15 minutes. The in-person interview which is taking place in a mutually agreed upon location, will begin with some brief questions about your personal and family background and be followed by a tape recorded interview lasting approximately 60-75 minutes. You will be asked questions about your beliefs regarding marriage, your experiences with close romantic relationships, and how you think and feel about being single and in midlife.

III. RISKS

No risk is intended. Questions being asked are about everyday life experiences.

IV. BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Participation in this study will give you an opportunity to express and share your thoughts and feelings about what singlehood means to you. Reflecting on life experiences often provides an opportunity to understand how our lives have been shaped as well as what the future might hold. By talking about your experience of singlehood with me, also a single woman in midlife, issues of everyday living may be discussed and explored in a shared way, which could be of benefit to each of us.

Your participation in this project will provide information that will be helpful to the understanding of single women and midlife. Little is known about the life experience of women who remain single or who return to singlehood following marriage. Providing insights and perspectives on singlehood may be of benefit to other women who share a similar experience.

No guarantee of benefits is being made to encourage you to participate.

V. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Your interview will be tape recorded for later transcription. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. All identifying information will be removed and code numbers or code names will be assigned to all information and written reports. The list of names and telephone numbers as well as the audiotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet. This list and the audiotapes will be destroyed in 6 months.

The tapes will be reviewed and transcribed by the interviewer. If necessary, a professional typist may be hired to assist with the transcription process. The typist will

have access to only coded audiotapes and in keeping with the rules of professional transcription conduct, will be required to maintain strict confidence about any information that is transcribed. Future documents or presentations will use code names.

VI. COMPENSATION

Other than my sincere appreciation, there is no compensation for participating in this study.

VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Family and Child Development.

IX. SUBJECTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

I know of no reason why I cannot participate in this study.

Signature

Date

IX. SUBJECT'S PERMISSION

I have read and understand the informed consent and conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered. I agree to the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. Two copies of this agreement will be signed. One copy will remain with me and the other copy will be kept by the interviewer.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct I may contact:

Karla S. Soukup Investigator	540/231-9394 Phone
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Katherine R. Allen Faculty Advisor	540/231-6526 Phone
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H. T. Hurd Chair, IRB Director Sponsored Programs	540/231-5281 Phone
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Karla Soukup is a Masters Candidate in the Department of Family and Child Development. Ms. Soukup received her training in the field of Social Work with an emphasis in individual counseling. She has studied research methods at the graduate level including qualitative methodology. She has also assisted Dr. Katherine Allen in a program evaluation project involving qualitative focus group interviews.

Dr. Katherine R. Allen is Professor of Family Studies in the Department of Family and Child Development. She teaches the required graduate course in qualitative methodology, FCD 6514, Advanced Research Methods. She regularly teaches two additional courses at the graduate level, Theories of Marriage and the Family, and Perspectives on Human Sexuality, as well as the undergraduate course, Gender and Family Diversity (FCD 4364). Dr. Allen received her training in qualitative research methods, life course theory, and family studies and gerontology at Syracuse University. She is a faculty affiliate of the Center for Gerontology, housed in the College of Human Resources and Education. She is also a faculty affiliate of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, and regularly teaches for the Women's Studies Program. She has taught undergraduate Women's Studies courses such as Feminist Research Methods, Women's Studies Senior Seminar, and Introduction to Women's Studies (honors), and at the graduate level, Advanced Issues in Women's Studies. Dr. Allen has conducted many investigations using qualitative research methods and supervised the thesis and dissertation research of 26 students at two universities. Dr. Allen's investigation, *Single Women/Family Ties: Life Histories of Older Women*, was published in 1989 by Sage. In 1992, she co-authored the text, *Women and Families: Feminist Reconstructions*, published by Guilford. Currently, she is co-editing the *Handbook of Family Diversity* (in press) with Oxford University Press. At present, Dr. Allen is involved in a life course analysis of older adults' (55 and over) experiences of family diversity. She has served as a proposal reviewer for the National Institute on Aging's Human Development Study Section II, she is the Deputy Editor of the premier journal in Family Studies, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, and she is a member of the editorial board of two additional journals, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Family Science Review*.

Appendix H

CODING SCHEME

100 Mystique of Marriage

101 the expectation

102 a mixed message - marriage solves everything/marriage is hard work

103 anybody can get married but good marriages are rare

200 Realities for Single Women at Midlife

204 how I define myself

205 work - what I do, not my identity

206 creating family roles beyond wife and mother (e.g. family historian, aunt, paternal grandmother, godmother)

207 altering the script to fit the story - the creative use of language, humor and self-reflection in dealing with aloneness

300 Childhood Memories

308 child's play

309 fairy tales and fantasies

310 I always thought I'd get married versus I never wanted to get married

400 Family Messages

411 messages from parents

412 messages from extended family

413 lessons I learned within my family

500 Perspectives from the Never-Married and Once-Married

514 not everyone's meant to be married

515 marriage was a mistake

516 I never would have left the marriage

600 Growing Up but not Necessarily Growing Older

617 physical changes but increasing wisdom

618 as old as you feel and act or not ready for the cemetery yet

700 Surviving Stigmas, Living with Loss, Coping with Loneliness

719 assumptions about singlehood

720 not wanting children versus not being married

721 imaginary lives or “what if”

722 dealing with affection needs (e.g. pets, friendships, surrogate children)

723 coping with singlehood or “getting to okay” - mental health and self-esteem issues

800 Letting Go of the Fantasy of Marriage, but Hanging onto the Dream

824 single by default but still hoping for a miracle

825 between marriage and singlehood

900 The Research Experience

926 observations and reflections

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