

Women Living Single

Your participation is invited in this study of women living single in Western Australia. I am interested in hearing:

1. single women's experiences of aspects of life that seem related to your marital status and how these compare to living coupled. These may be social, recreational, professional, vocational, perhaps in the provision of goods and services or any other sphere where being single has been a factor;
2. coupled women's perceptions and experiences of women living single and how these compare to living coupled.

Background to the Study

Casual observation and experience, as a single woman, of the advantages and disadvantages of living single have generated some interesting discussion with single and coupled colleagues at Curtin and with friends. Because my academic discipline is psychology, I turned to that literature to see what impact living single might have and was surprised to find that living single is either absent from theory or included as an adjunct, secondary – or in some cases, negative – human condition. This finding reflects what is reported to be the dominant societal view of adults, and in particular women, living single. I also found a separate body of work, undertaken in the main by women living single and spanning nearly 40 years, that calls for recognition of living single as a valid lifestyle and its incorporation into mainstream theory. I want to contribute to that incorporation.

Purpose of the Study

Demographically, more adults are living alone and this trend is expected to continue. As well, the rate of marriage dissolution is increasing and the duration of marriages (and less formal relationships) decreasing. It is likely that these demographic shifts may change perceptions and experiences of living single. Psychological theory will have to adapt or risk becoming less relevant to the reality of people's lives and its practice less effective, if not potentially damaging.

The aim of this study is to learn from women whether living single has an impact on any part of your lives and, if it does, what type of impact that might be. This includes learning whether you have noticed any differences in your life between being single and being coupled. It also includes hearing from coupled women how you perceive the lives of single women to be and how this compares to living in a partnered relationship.

Findings from the study will be submitted for publication in psychological and other professional journals. They may also be used elsewhere to advocate change, if any need for change is indicated.

Study Description

Your participation will be a one-off discussion with me held at a time and place most convenient for you. You will be asked to complete a brief demographic data collection sheet and a consent form prior to the discussion, during which you will be able to elaborate on any answer you feel needs it. I will be very happy to answer any questions about the study or my own views afterwards. The discussion will be audio-taped for later transcription which, if you want to, will be sent to you for your review and the opportunity to correct. It will then be entered into a qualitative coding computer program. This means that each

transcription will be broken up as it touches on different themes. Each extract will be stored in a relevant thematic file, comprising all comment on a theme from all discussions, for analysis. The outcomes of the analyses will be discrete discourses about various aspects of the lives of women living single. These discourses will be further analysed for potential integration into psychological theory and to inform practice.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. You will be kept informed of progress and a summary of findings will be sent to you when the study is completed.

Confidentiality

You will be identified only by a code symbol rather than by name. No information that could identify you will be published, or given to any other person and all records, notes and original copies of the audiotapes will be kept in a secure place. The purpose of the attached questionnaire is for me to be able to describe the general characteristics of participants as a group (e.g., aged between x-y, x% in the paid work force, x% were parents) and will not be linked to extracts of discussion. It will be linked to the transcription of our discussion for my information only, so that I could remove extracts from the transcription of our discussion should you later wish to withdraw from the study. Your name and address will allow a copy of the study to be mailed to you.

Consent

If you choose to participate in this study, would you please complete the attached consent and data collection forms and return to me either in person at the time of our discussion or by mailing it to me in the attached reply-paid envelope?

Ethics check

This project was approved by Curtin's Human Research Ethics Committee. Should you wish to, the committee may be contacted on (08) 9266 2784.

Thank you for your assistance.

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