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**It is not good to be alone; singleness and the Black
Seventh-day Adventist Woman**

By

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Signed declaration

I, Valerie Bernard-Allan confirm that the work presented is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Date *February 2016*

Abstract

It is not good to be alone; singleness and the Black Seventh-day Adventist Woman

Over the last decade the literature on adult singleness has highlighted the pervasiveness of constructions of singleness as an undesirable status. The great majority of the literature has focused on White women's accounts of being single and few studies have examined Christian women's views about their single identities. A notable exception is Aune's (2004) study of British evangelical Christianity and gender which looked at the state of gender within the New Frontiers International movement (an evangelical house church movement). Yet while the literature on single women is burgeoning, little is known about Black single women. The literature that is available suggests that Black single women are typically portrayed in essentialist and often demeaning discourses that depict them for instance, as hypersexual. There is even less known about single Black women who are committed members of a religious organisation.

This thesis contributes to an understanding of singleness by analysing the accounts of one group of Black British Christian women; Seventh-day Adventist women, mainly of Caribbean descent. I use thematic analysis to focus on the recurring themes produced by the women and to explore the ways in which singleness for these women is a complicated identity. Seventy-nine women were recruited: nine took part in a focus group discussion, fifty-three filled out a questionnaire, seven contributed written narratives and ten participated in in-depth interviews.

The findings illustrate that participants construct singleness as marginal and deficient, despite this, however, these Black single Seventh-day Adventist women draw on a range of cultural, religious and non-coupling narratives to construct more positive accounts of their selves. Intersectionality provided a theoretical framework to illuminate what the key themes highlight about the complexity of participants' racialised, religious and gendered identities.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Background to the Study

Research on the views of single women, has highlighted the fact that many have uncomfortable feelings and experiences related to their ‘failure’ to marry (Aune, 2004; Byrne, 2008; DePaulo, 2006). Much of this scholarship centres on secular women who are White and little is known of the way other women such as British women from other ethnic groups experience being single. This thesis addresses this lacuna by investigating singleness for Black British women of Caribbean descent, who are Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Wider society provides a context within which single women who are not married can be sexually active in relationships that reflect society’s emphasis on coupling rather than marriage per se. Aune (2004) suggests that this is less likely to be the case for Christian women who tend to be influenced by more traditional gender scripts requiring celibacy outside marriage. At the same time marriage is central to Christian identities. The Genesis narrative (Genesis, chapter 1) opens with a description of the beginning of the world. According to this account, the first created being was a heterosexual man who felt dissatisfied in his perfect world because he was alone. God created Eve, a heterosexual woman, who as Adam’s companion, would dispel his loneliness. The edict ‘*It is not good for man to be alone*’ (Genesis 2:18) an instruction in the creation story of the Bible, continues to centralise heterosexual marriage (Amour and St Ville, 2006; Stone cited in Amour and St Ville, 2006).

Black British women’s singleness is also under-reported. Popular media has paid some attention to the issue of Black British men and White partners (See Paul Barker’s April 28, 1996 article; *How many black men have white partners* in The Independent, 1996), which is often connected to the idea that Black women are increasingly single. Emma Dabiri (2013) argues that positive attitudes towards Britain’s ‘melting pot identity’, a result of increasing

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interracial marriages, has tended to discount the exclusions that Black British women are likely to experience because, she suggests, they are less able to couple. From an analysis of the *Labour Force Survey* (2004-8), Platt (2010) found that 65 percent of Black British women from African Caribbean backgrounds are without a partner as compared to 23 percent of Indian and Pakistani British women. Additionally, analysis of the *Millennium Cohort study* indicates that the largest ethnic group of never married women are Black Caribbean women; 57 percent as compared with other groups such as Asian women who have a never married rate of approximately 10 percent (Jayaweera et al., 2007). Despite a discourse around the comparatively high proportions of un-partnered Black women living in Britain, there has been no study to date that focuses specifically on how single identities are produced and maintained for Black women in general and African Caribbean British women more specifically. This study contributes to making visible, the experiences of British single women who are religious and who are also Black British women of Caribbean descent. In doing so it both pioneers research on this group of women and contributes to the burgeoning, but still sparse, literature on single women in general.

This chapter will briefly set out important concepts that have informed this investigation. It will outline the methods adopted and the key questions that have been used in conducting the research. This chapter will also introduce the participants and situating my personal reasons for conducting this research. This introductory chapter presents a discussion of the Seventh-day Adventist view on marriage as a divinely appointed institution and therefore the most appropriate space for heterosexual adults. This view constitutes the context in which single Seventh-day Adventist women live. The chapter introduces key theoretical concepts; feminism, intersectional identity and Bourdieu's (1986) social capital.

This investigation is based primarily on feedback from a focus group of twelve participants (3 men and 9 women), written narratives from seven women, questionnaire

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responses from fifty three women and in-depth interviews with ten women. The data were gathered from the above four interconnected investigative sites in an iterative process.

Accordingly, the information from the focus group narrowed the research focus and guided the content of research questions. Thematic analysis was used initially to analyse the data and intersectional principles informed the conclusion.

Since the group; Black, single, Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) women, have not previously been researched, this research is exploratory, designed to map the women's experiences and accounts. The research questions were:

- 1) What do Black, single Seventh-day Adventist women identify as the key issues surrounding their singleness?
- 2) How do Black, single Seventh-day Adventist women experience their singleness as a racialised, religious and gendered identity?

Researching the Problem

My personal account below is one way that I choose to situate the research enquiry as 'something close to my heart'. It is therefore important that I 'out' myself as a process of reflexivity. I make reference here to Finlay's (2002) 'outing the researcher', in her discussion of the reflexive researcher. In general reflexivity is defined, according to Finlay (2002), as the ability to notice our responses to others around us as well as to events that have impacted on us and then to use that knowledge to inform what we do next. Research findings should be understood as joint products of the participants, the researcher and their relationship (ibid, p. 531). Despite the difficulties entailed in incorporating the researcher as central to data production, reflexivity is acknowledged as a process for providing important opportunities for the field of research (Finlay, 2002). Etherington (2004) challenges researchers to ask a series of questions to help them evaluate how transparent they are in the research process:

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How has my personal story led to interest in this topic? What are my presuppositions about knowledge in this field? How am I positioned in relation to this knowledge? How does my gender, class, ethnicity, culture influence my relation to this topic /my participants?
(Etherington 2004, p. 11)

Such questions guide the work of critical race and feminist scholars as well as those within the field of intersectional analysis who want to make visible previously invisible minorities and to recognise the simultaneous identities that we all hold. The reflexive researcher therefore acknowledges that the research identity is intimately interwoven, in differing and shifting ways, into the canvass of the thesis. I accept such premises and therefore introduce my own personal presence in the research problem and process.

I remember being married, pregnant and with a small child on my knee. I was surrounded by a small group of other Seventh-day Adventist mothers. It was a regular lunchtime meeting for young mothers who were friends. I enjoyed these gatherings for we could share advice and laugh at our changing bodies and life. We gained support and I felt that it was a solid place of belonging. There were times though when my sense of safety was disturbed, when I cast my mind upon some other friends struggling to get to where we were; married with child and ‘completely woman’. Sometimes I would punctuate the informative exchanges with the question; what about the single women in our church girlfriends? What about them? What would have been incredible for me to grasp at that time is the fact that some years later, I would have to live out some of the answers to my very own question. As a single (divorced) Seventh-day Adventist adult, I felt that there was very little understanding of single people’s singleness within a community where marriage is idealised. I often wondered and sometimes asked how other singles managed this status. I found that the culture in the church was sympathetic yet patronising towards singles. I found that singleness was a very difficult identity to occupy. I also felt bombarded continually, by the different ways that marriage was idealised even though on good days I also felt free from the constraints of marriage.

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On many occasions I would hear women speak of disaffection for Black men (because Black men seemed unavailable for marriage and traumatised by the evils and legacies of slavery¹). In such discussions Black men are presented as incapable of relationships due to slavery's systemic regulation of the sexual and coupling intentions of enslaved people. Slavery has been blamed for dislocating enslaved men and women's opportunities for committed relationships. Such discussions led me to begin considering the specific factors that have impacted on, and continue to inform, singleness for Black² Christian women. I also began to reflect on how the different identities such as religious, ethnic and gendered, intersect with the experience of being single. It became clear that my encounter with singleness was more than personal.

There is no scholarship about singleness as experienced within the Seventh-day Adventist community. Hence, there is no scholarly information as to how single people actually deal with an increasing inability to achieve or sustain a key aspect of Christian identity: marriage. This study attempts to give a general picture of what it is like to be single as a Seventh-day Adventist adult, by focusing specifically on the perceptions of self-selected participants, most of whom are Black British women of Caribbean origin.

I was able to secure a voluntary position as the Singles Co-ordinator for the Seventh-day Adventist church in the South of England known as the South England Conference (SEC). I saw this role as one that would help me to access singles for this study, as well as to be able to access resources to co-ordinate social events to meet some of the 'social needs' of singles. I also wanted to use this position to promote discussion on singleness within the Seventh-day Adventist community. The 'Methods' chapter discusses this role in more depth and includes my considerations of the impact that my dual position as both 'insider and outsider' had on the research process.

¹ The assumption and/or expectation underpinning many of these conversations are that Black women should be in relationships with Black men.

² Unless otherwise specified, I use the term 'Black' to refer to men or women of African Caribbean heritage.

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Background to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Seventh-day Adventism is a Protestant denomination. It has, as one of its most distinguishing features, the observance of Friday sunset until Saturday sunset; known as Sabbath observance. Seventh-day Adventism is a conservative faith with origins in the early Millerite movement of America (Bull and Lockhart, 2007). This denomination was formally established in 1863 and has among its founders, a White³ woman, Ellen Gould White, whose ‘revelations’ continue to guide the church’s views on a holistic approach to personhood, conservative principles and lifestyle (Vance, 1999).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Britain runs various primary, secondary and higher educational centres (Davidson cited in Marshall, 2000). It also runs a range of health facilities and services throughout the world (Vance, 1999). It is also a world church that is governed by a General Conference with satellite governance of Divisions, Unions, Conferences and local churches. Its ethnically diverse membership amounts to sixteen million and is growing. It has been estimated that by 2020 the world church of Seventh-day Adventism will have a membership of up to 40 million (Osborn, 2014).

The Seventh-day Adventist Presence in Britain

When the American Seventh-day Adventist evangelist; Judson S. Washburn, arrived in Britain in December 1891, Seventh-day Adventism was relatively unknown, despite the evangelistic efforts of previous American missionaries to England. Washburn’s campaigns in Southampton took the fledgling church’s membership, in just a short time, from twenty to one hundred and twenty. Between the years 1902 and 1914 the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist church more than tripled from 844 to 2,671 (Davidson cited in Marshall,

³ Dudley (1999) claims that Ellen G. White was of African American ancestry

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2000). Macfarlane (cited in Marshall, 2000) records that membership to the Seventh-day Adventist church has grown around 17 percent in the last decade of the twentieth century. There is evidence that Black Caribbean Seventh-day Adventists held membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church in Battersea as early as 1920, and Black Caribbean people began to join the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in significant numbers in the 1950s. The membership of the Church in 1950 was approximately 7,000, a mostly White membership (Davidson cited in Marshall, 2000). There was a growing Black presence in the cities of Birmingham, London and Manchester during the 1960s and 1970s. It has been estimated that at the turn of this century, UK membership stood at 20,000 with a mostly Black African and African Caribbean membership of around 15,000 (Macfarlane cited in Marshall, 2000). Today, however, the Seventh-day Adventist church in Britain has a multi-cultural following including African, Asian, Spanish, and Eastern European people. In spite of this, media profiling of some Seventh-day Adventist institutions and talent since the 1980s has meant that wider society, in general, perceives that Seventh-day Adventism in Britain is predominantly Black Caribbean (Davidson cited in Marshall, 2000).

The Adventist Family

Despite clearly prescribed expectations, Seventh-day Adventists, like any other social group, experience their beliefs within a shifting social context (Bull and Lockhart, 2007). For instance, Patrick's (2010) investigation into Seventh-day Adventist identity depicts this identity as moving simultaneously between conservative and liberal radical stances (ibid). Therefore, their teachings, practices and lifestyles must be understood as a struggle between continuity and change. He stresses that the demands in Western culture, for faith to be established by evidence, now informs Western Seventh-day Adventist thinking, creating tensions with those schools of thought that aim to secure those Seventh-day Adventist beliefs

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and practices that centralise their traditional sources; the prophetic authority of the Bible and the teachings of one of their main founders; Ellen G. White.

One of the ways that Seventh-day Adventists articulate the shifting terrain within which their faith takes shape is within a discourse of controversy. The book *'The Great Controversy'* was written By Ellen G. White (1858) and cautions Seventh day-Adventists to recognise a war between God and Satan for souls (Vance, 1999). Controversy signals an important backdrop to understanding some of the narratives that inform idealised accounts of the Seventh-day Adventist family.

Studies that were undertaken in the 1990s indicate that traditional Adventist accounts see the SDA family as the unit through which its members are able to secure a coherent religious identity amidst degenerative changes in the secular world (Vance, 1999; Brantley, 1996). Bull and Lockhart (1989, p. 133) indicate that nineteenth century Adventist ideas about the family remained unchanged throughout the denomination's history. The Seventh-day Adventist family is still therefore, viewed as critical for forging a 'balanced' Christian identity (Godina, 2013). The socialisation of children within Seventh-day Adventist Christian principles is paramount where children will secure characteristics that will fit them for heaven (ibid). Marriage for the Adventist is no different from any other Christian denomination in that they believe that marriage is blessed by God. All members are therefore discouraged from pursuing divorce, unless adultery has taken place, and the church community is encouraged continually to support estranged spouses to reconcile (Vance, 1999). However, the recognition of issues such as abuse or homosexuality as an aspect of family life presents the Church's attempts to centralise marriage, with many difficulties (Hernandez and Wilson, 2007). More specifically some of the challenges that Black American families reportedly face; poverty, lone parenting, unemployment, are also faced by Black American Seventh-day Adventist families (Brantley, 1996; Henry, 2009) and quite

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possibly Black British Seventh-day Adventist families. Henry (ibid) suggests that the sense of belonging attributed to being married is experienced differently between African American and White American members. Notwithstanding, the Seventh-day Adventist community as is expressed by its central tenets on marriage (see *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: Doctrine 23*) continues to draw from fundamentalist beliefs about marriage as the ideal place for the Seventh-day Adventist adult.

The ideal Seventh-day Adventist woman is found within marriage as an active, efficient and spiritual individual whose aim is to take care of her home and marriage, despite the opportunity to work outside the home (Vance, 1999). The ideal man on the other hand, eventually marries and protects his family by taking up the responsibility of ‘priest’ in the home:

Spiritual leadership in the family seems, at times, not to be clearly distinguished, by informants, from the other primary component of the masculine ideal – provision of monetary income: “both in the family and in the world...men should be open to God’s work. Not just ministries in the church, but ministries in the home. Overseeing things, making sure that their families are provided for, making sure that they are honorable in their business dealings. They should lead family worship. They are spiritual leaders in the family.” [Page 142]... ideal masculinity was defined by the notion of benevolent patriarchy. Adventist husbands were to lead, but that leadership, particularly with reference to one spouse, was to exemplify benevolence.

(Vance 1999, p. 143)

The husband’s role is distinctly traditional. Vance (1999) suggests that Seventh-day Adventist women construct an account of masculinities that is benevolent and godly. Vance (ibid) also highlights the practice of religious endogamy as critical to achieving gendered harmony:

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in a loving companionship. For the Christian, a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith... God blesses the family and intends that its members should assist each other towards complete maturity

(Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1988, p. 294)

Additionally, the Seventh-day Adventist Church actively promotes religious endogamy through the following injunction:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

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(II Corinthians 6:14)

In the main this scripture is promoted as a warning to discourage intimate associations with non-Christians and even other non-Seventh-day Adventist Christians in other denominations. In this light the idea of marriage as a protective nurturing space is emphasised. The idea of yoking '*do not be yoked together with unbelievers*' comes from the practice of two animals being harnessed together as an effective and efficient procedure for pulling loads. Adventist notions of coupling incorporate a 'pulling together' of Seventh-day Adventist wives and husbands to navigate their lives through earthly controversies brought about by sin. Pearson (1990) notes that the importance of the nuclear family unit with heterosexual Seventh-day Adventist couples was constantly affirmed in Seventh-day Adventist thinking:

Given the crucial importance of the stable family unit to Adventism, it is not surprising that there is a heavy emphasis on group endogamy. Warnings of the dangers of being 'unequally yoked with unbelievers' are commonplace in Adventist literature

(Pearson 1990, p. 38)

Seventh-day Adventist teachings suggest that the ideal gendered roles within marriage and the family intersect with beliefs that anticipate an unleashing of evil forces before the end of the world. They claim that such is the ferocity of the presence of evil in the world that many Christians will find that their commitment to God will be severely tested. A marriage and family unit where Seventh-day Adventist husbands and wives are equally yoked in matters of spirituality and faith will be, because they are equipped to withstand the intensification of the controversy between good and evil, better able to remain in close connection with God, despite the challenges. These interrelationships give some clues to the distinctive status given to marriage within Seventh-day Adventist thinking.

Singleness and Seventh-day Adventism

Seventh-day Adventists view singleness as a transitory identity leading to marriage. This view is reflected in the way the church is set up to meet the needs of its members. The

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various departments have, until relatively recently addressed the needs of singles under the Family Ministries departments. My observations are that in Britain this continues to be the case, with the presence of a ministry for single Seventh-day Adventists that is being managed by a group of unpaid volunteers, mostly Black Seventh-day Adventist women. This work generally receives limited financial support from the church administration. In spite of the increasing presence of single women in this denomination, attempts at creating a department (with a paid leader) with specific responsibility for working with single Seventh-day Adventists, have been unsuccessful. The presence of online dating sites for Seventh-day Adventists such as Adventist Match is one approach to tackling the marginalisation and loneliness of single people. It also serves to reinforce religious endogamy. These dating sites are manned predominantly by volunteers, who are sometimes supported through funding provided by people who have a personal interest in supporting single Seventh-day Adventists to marry.

Theoretical underpinning: Intersectionality

This study uses insights from an analytical perspective that has its roots in feminist theory. It is known as intersectionality and was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Simply put, intersectional analysis supports a multi-focal perspective on identities because it foregrounds the fact that everyone is simultaneously positioned in multiple social categories. Drawing primarily from an intersectional approach, the study reported here, aims to analyse the ways in which participants' complex identities interweave. The analysis also draws on three other theoretical insights. Firstly, by utilising insights from feminist scholarship on unmarried and also religious women, the invisibilities/hyper-visibilitys of Black British women are brought into focus. Secondly, some of the discussion is underpinned by Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital since the concept of capital has proved highly

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productive in work that employs the concept of ‘spiritual capital’ (Verter 2003, Guest 2007). The third theoretical insight is particularly drawn on in the final empirical chapter (Chapter 7), which analyses how these Black single Seventh-day Adventist women’s accounts of their personal faith cut across their religious identities.

This section will first briefly map the scope of feminist discussions on religious women. In doing so, it will make the case that Black British women’s religious lives are mostly not captured within these publications. The chapter will then introduce Crenshaw’s (1989; 2011) concept of intersectionality since it is an approach that can help to theorise complex identities from a Black feminist perspective. The section closes with a consideration of how Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital can provide useful theoretical tools that, in conjunction with intersectional analysis, offer new insights into single, black Seventh-day Adventist women’s religious and spiritual identities.

Traditional ideals about what it is to be gendered are contested and scholarship on women’s lives now provide a scope for acknowledging the multi-various ways in which identities are theorised. A Conceptualising of the family as an unstable unit interrelate with conceptions about changing social expectations in society (Giddens, 1992; Stacey, 1998; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; McRobbie, 2004; Taylor, 2012). These social changes also impact gendered experiences within Christian homes (Aune, 2004; Aune et al., 2008).

Despite the advances in seeing women’s lives as complexly situated, not much known about how gendered lives are constructed within religious spaces (Aune, 2004; Sharma, 2008; Trzebiatowska, 2013). Trzebiatowska (2013) and Aune (2014) note that despite the historical significance of religion, in progressing equalities for women, to date, religious women have had limited impact on the development of feminist thinking. Aune (2011) describes herself as a religious feminist and found from her survey of the religious and spiritual views of third wave feminists, that for the majority, religion is not relevant. She concludes that religious

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/spiritual feminists and non-religious feminists will, should current trends continue, raise their concerns from different platforms. Trzebiatowska (2013) agrees that there are disconnections between religious and secular feminists. She argues that ultimately, feminists have inherited the malestream assumption that secularisation would eventually lead to the demise of religion. Aune (2011) contends that such views have and also failed to acknowledge the enduring and international presence of religion in social life. Aune's (2004; 2014) discussions have included the postfeminist lens to interpret religious women's lives, illustrate the value of combining secular and religious feminist interpretations in looking at women's lived realities. Although postfeminism has varied meanings (Gill, 2007) and these differences continue to be debated (Aronson, 2003), it is a concept that has emerged post second wave feminism and is generally viewed as being at odds with the third wave feminist agenda. Postfeminism is defined by McRobbie (2004) as:

[A] double entanglement. This comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life ...with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations

(McRobbie 2004, pp. 255-256)

McRobbie (2004) argues that the gains of feminism have been devalued in the twenty-first century. This is because first and second wave feminists have been successful. Women no longer need equality: they are equal. McRobbie (ibid) points out that young women take for granted the freedoms that feminists have fought for. Feminists have achieved freedoms that enable them to consume technologies and practices that can assist them to achieve both traditional and non-traditional gender ideals. These discussions have tended to situate postfeminism as one feature of a Western secular society. Despite controversy about what exactly is meant by postfeminist, Aune (2004) employed the term postfeminist to capture the working of traditional and non-traditional gender narratives within this religious sphere. Aune was able to determine the procedures these women applied to construct their gendered identities within the Church's traditions, whilst also drawing on ideals of gender equality. The women

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in her study at times expressed both patriarchal and feminist narratives in their gendered identities in contributions that focused on power as well as disadvantages. According to Aune (ibid), this is evidence of post-feminist practices and concerns. There is research evidence that religious women are able to construct autonomous religious identities regardless of the patriarchal pressures they face (Brusco, 1995; Ozorak, 1996; Brasher, 1998; Trzebiatowska, 2013). Furthermore it is ironic that these studies found that religious women use traditional resources to produce agentic lives. Some of the relevant studies are presented below.

Davidman's (1993) ethnographic exploration of Jewish American women's conversion to conservative Judaism is one example of contemporary women's religious choices. In Davidman's (ibid) study, Jewish converts are viewed as embracers of a faith that espouses traditional gendered norms. Davidman (1993) conveys how traditional expressions of Judaism provide a stable anchor that cushions converts from the challenges and increasing freedoms that are available for women in American society. Her participants emerge as intentional searching agents, seeking identity stability in an unpredictable social world. Ozorak (1996) applies the concept 'cognitive restructuring' to describe how the religious women in her study positively redefine their circumstances as one way of coping with the marginalisations they encountered as religious women in patriarchal religions. Ozorak (ibid) points out that women were able to reframe their oppressions by engaging in selective attentions and downward social comparisons which reinterpreted their circumstances as being much better now than it had been for women in earlier times. Some women emphasised how they gained immense support from being with, as well as serving other women in their religious settings. Other women identified connectedness to God and serving people as central to their experiences. Although Ozorak (1996, p 27) conducted in-depth interviews with sixty-one women, even though these were from different Christian and Jewish communities, she found that all participants highlighted the benefits of feeling a sense of

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belonging to a caring community as well as a sense that God is their friend rather than cosmic ruler or judge. It is from this vantage point that the religious women in Ozorak's (ibid) study, presented their communities as non-hierarchical spaces where adherents were led by a god who treats all people with equal care. Although Ozorak (ibid) questions whether the 'cognitive restructuring' that these women presented were actually their undervaluing of their entitlements as women, she does concede that there are substantial gains to be had as members in their religious communities. This study therefore illustrates how religious women are able to illuminate the multi-level opportunities that help them to navigate their lives.

Yadgar's (2006) discussion extends the above claim in her references to religious women's ability to redefine religious traditional practices in ways that present women as powerful and unique. Noting some complexities in defining the nomenclature 'traditional Israeli women', she claims that the traditional Jewish women that she conducted in-depth interviews with constructed an account of gendered uniqueness through a feminist re-interpretation. This re-interpretation focused less on religious theologies but more on their lived experiences. Yadgar (ibid) further emphasises the daily lived experiences of women as a route for interrogating issues of agency and marginalisations for women. She argues that attention to binary opposites such as feminist and free, and religious and oppressed are not helpful categorisations for understanding religious women's lives (ibid, p. 354). This is because these descriptions are essentialist and therefore a negation of the multi-vocal sites from which identities are produced. Yadgar (2006, p. 354) stresses instead, that it is the lived experiences that provide an important basis for seeing how women construct their lives as meaningful, tactical, negotiating and fluid. At this level of analysis, Yadgar (ibid) portrays women as intentionally resisting the patriarchal oppressions of their religion, whilst also embracing those traditional elements that reinforce their Jewish identities.

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Religious women also are able to produce a collective voice through the social gathering activities that they convene. Spending time with the women in their religious communities emerges as another important gendered practice. Manning (1999) and Brasher (1998) in their respective research, illustrate how women immerse themselves in gendered enclaves for revitalising their lives and renewing their Christian focus. Brasher (ibid) found that the women in her study engaged in the re-interpretation of conservative religious gender scripts despite intensely patriarchal interpretations organised to disempower women. According to Brasher (1998), the mostly White American women, who were members of fundamentalist Christian organisations, achieved a collective voice by participating in female only events which functioned as sacred gender partitioning processes. This resulted in religious communities where men and women occupied parallel religious worlds. Women's togetherness provided countless opportunities to challenge men's power by raising their dissatisfactions with what they saw as the unsatisfactory aspects of congregational life. By challenging congregational life, these women were able to question patriarchal interpretations about how the religious community should be organised. They also claimed that connectedness and submission to God and not to men, served as the main reason for an acceptance of women's roles within the domestic sphere. So these women revealed that they were able to employ the traditional gendered ideals promoted in their communities to provide opportunity for them to enhance their lives as women. Brusco (1995) encountered this type of empowerment in her study of evangelical Christian women. The women in her study reflected on how their husbands' conversion to Christianity introduced them to a different set of rules which undermined the negative aspects of masculine culture. These rules insisted that husbands participate jointly with their wives in the domestic sphere. Brusco (ibid) carried out extensive interviews with urban and rural Columbian Evangelical converts living in Columbia during the nineteen-eighties, and found that the men were exposed to a set of

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religious expectations which required a masculinity that was actively involved with the families' domestic life. This was a far cry from the social expectation that they should spend most of their non-work time and resources outside the home in the company of other men.

The above examples illustrate how studies on women in very conservative religions continue to complicate a reading of their gendered lives. These discussions also show that women's beliefs, practices and manoeuvres do very little to alter the conservative religion's view that the domestic realm is for women. Although much of the evidence has tended to document the ways in which women, most of whom are married, produce empowered identities in conservative religious spheres, both Aune (2002, 2004) and Trzebiatowska (2013) found that unmarried religious women are also agentic.

African Caribbean British women's experiences and perspectives have limited presence in the debates regarding feminism and religion in Britain. The work of Black British feminists (Mirza, 1997; Mirza, 2010) in recognition of Black women's religious identities, have shed some light on Black British women's varied concerns. The wide range of the issues that Black feminism addresses treats local and global issues as central to Black women's lives. It is intersectional analysis that provides an important lens for capturing and illuminating the local, global, personal and social interconnectivities underpinning Black British feminist concerns.

Intersectional analysis as promoted by Crenshaw (*ibid*) facilitates the investigation of the simultaneous operating of multiple discriminations. The theory holds that systems of oppression are interconnected in a way that continually reinforces them. What this means for the marginalised person is that they experience inequality in many different contexts and including, sometimes different but always connecting, discriminations. Intersectionality stands in direct contrast to those perspectives that have a tendency to discuss identities as if they are essentially coherent and stable.

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It was Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who by using the concept intersectionality foregrounded the emerging and burgeoning debates about the multiplicity of identities (Lutz et al., 2011). Crenshaw (ibid) brought such complexities under the rubric of intersectionality. Her work, which was triggered by her attempts to make sense of the complex marginalities of Black women in legal processes, maintains that an intersectional perspective is critical for developing theories capable of simultaneously addressing sexual and racial discriminations. The term intersectionality then came from an attempt to think about a way of capturing the dynamics of discrimination for Black American women (Crenshaw 2011b, p. 230). This was achieved in her ground breaking work; *Demarginalising the intersection of Race and Sex...* (1989). Crenshaw (2011b) contends that seeing Black women only through the lens of race leads to a theoretical tendency to view women as White and all Blacks as men. She states:

Black feminist theory and advocacy sought from its earliest iterations to draw attention to the interface [between race and sex discrimination], not simply as a demand for self-recognition, but as a critique of the limitations of feminism and anti-racism and as demand for accountability. Black women's marginality in the rhetorical discourses that purported to include them was memorialised and made 'sticky' by the phrase 'All the Blacks are Men and All the Women are White', the title of the ground-breaking book that chronicles the voices of Black women speaking into the void.

(Crenshaw 2011b, pp. 227-228)

Intersectional analysis sheds light on the ways that people are simultaneously positioned in multiple categories. It reflects the convolutions of everyday lives and displays how identities have complex commonalities and differences. The analysis rejects the idea of a stable essential identity (Phoenix, 2011).

Crenshaw's (2011b) work contributed to attempts showing that there were social and legal processes and structures at work that rendered Black women invisible as individuals who are as much Black as they are women. Such insights contributed to enabling those processes that marginalise Black women to be tackled.

Intersectionality then was an attempt to create a prism that revealed the confluence of structure and identity and to highlight the vectors in which discrimination was rendered invisible by the prevailing frameworks that were deployed to identify and intervene against it.

(Crenshaw 2011b, p. 230)

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Some critics contend that the extensive breadth of the intersectional prism means that it is too all encompassing and vague to provide a methodology that is able to guide research (Nash 2008). McCall's (2005) useful typification of intersectionality gives some clarity to the way that it has been applied and in doing so, illustrates that various intersectional methodologies are available. McCall (2005) summarises three main intersectional approaches: anticategorical, which captures complexity through deconstructionism by examining categories only if they are made relevant and meaningful by research participants; intercategorical, which uses pre-existing social categories as the focus of its intersectional analysis to compare those in different categories; intracategorical, (which has informed this study), also recognises pre-existing social categories and intersections within or between groups. This last approach is particularly fruitful for the study described below because it uses the pre-existing social categories as a basis to theorise lesser known intersectional identities. As a result intersections that are frequently neglected can be brought to light

Notwithstanding the contribution that intersectionality has made in the field of social sciences in general and Black women's marginalities more specifically, some hold that there is a danger that Black women exclusions can still be side-lined. Jordan-Zachery (2013) suggests that this is the case within the field of political science. She also argues that Black scholars should introduce new methods of study into political science to ensure that their complex political lives are included. In fact Crenshaw's (2011b, p. 224) discussion of the 'uptake and the trajectory' of intersectionality over the past twenty plus years, shares similar concerns:

There is a sense that efforts to repackage intersectionality for universal consumption require a re-marginalising of black women. This instinct reflects a fatal transmission error of 'Demarginalising's' central argument: that representations of gender that are 'race-less' are not by that fact alone more universal than those that are race-specific.

(Crenshaw 2011b, p. 224)

When discussing the different ways that Intersectional analysis is being deployed Crenshaw (2011) centralises the importance of its original intention:

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I gravitate toward thinking about intersectionality in relation to women whose stories appear in ‘Mapping the Margins’ women who, even a minimalist approach to intersectional thinking in shaping the interventions that ultimately failed them might have made a difference in their lives. I think here about the woman who was desperately seeking shelter... I think about immigrant women...I think about hundreds of thousands of women who languish in prison, victims of a racialised public discourse.

(Crenshaw 2011b, pp. 232-233)

Intersectional analysis is central to this study because it takes forward the idea that there is so much more to know about the lives and identities of Black British women than has so far been recognised in most social research. Sojourner Truth provides an iconic consideration to this ‘so much more to know about Black women’.

Sojourner Truth was an abolitionist who was born into enslavement (to a wealthy Dutch slave-owner living in New York). She campaigned for both the abolition of slavery and for equal rights for women (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Smiet, 2015). In 1851 at the women’s rights convention in Ohio, Sojourner spoke out about the invisibilities she encountered as a Black woman. She challenged her audience to see the injustice of constructing notions of womanhood as tied up with Whiteness and wealth. Brah and Phoenix (2004) argue that Sojourner Truth’s question; ‘Ain’t I a woman?’ raises the question of Black women’s multiple identities. More generally Sojourner raises a fundamental issue about exactly what it means to be a woman in different historical circumstances. Brah and Phoenix (ibid) suggest that Sojourner Truth’s speech establishes identities, not as objects, but as processes, inextricably organised through power relations. Her question reverberates through time as a question that is posed for women who, like Sojourner Truth, are Black, have some links with the slave narrative and believe in a Christian God. Her narrative is particularly apposite for a consideration of Black women, intersectionality and Seventh-day Adventism since Sojourner in her later life had close affiliations with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Land, 2005).

By starting from the categories of ethnicity, religion, gender and marital status, but recognising that intersections with other categories may be relevant, this study allows for the

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possibility for analysis of currently unknown emergent categories. As discussed above, it adopts what McCall refers to as an intracategorical intersectional approach.

An intersectional analysis helps to take seriously Crenshaw's (2011b) caution about a remarginalising of Black women, Black feminist concerns that Black women are marginalised and Sojourner's question "Ain't I a woman?" The study's employment of intersectionality serves to make visible how, for one group of British women-namely Black Seventh-day Adventist women, identities are constructed. It addresses singleness as intersecting with their gendered religious and ethnic identities. In so doing, this theoretical lens helps to illuminate the social structures and processes that underpin those identities.

Bourdieu is hailed as one of the most successful sociological thinkers of the twentieth century (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2011). Tatli and Ozbilgin (ibid) claim that by addressing the sociological conundrum of structure and agency, Bourdieu presents a theory of practice which includes the ideas of privilege, capital, different structural arrangements, fields, the active social agent and habitus as some of the building blocks of this theory (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2011). Bourdieu (1986) argued that the social world is simultaneously given and is also reproduced by social actions that reflect people's personal choices and decisions. Social actors are said to operate within a variety of social fields and struggle within these fields to be recognised. Recognition by others within a given field suggests that these 'recognised' social actors, have accrued capital in different forms and have the ability to exchange and purchase capital in the varying social fields that they occupy.

Bourdieu introduces the concept 'field' to discuss how the social actor conforms to certain patterns of behaviour. It is also used to conceptualise how those patterns of behaviour are ingrained and these inform social structures within society. Terdiman (1987) summarises Bourdieu's discussion of field.

If one wanted to understand the "field" metaphorically, its analogue would be a magnet: like a magnet, a social field exerts a force upon all those who come within its range. But those who experience these "pulls" are generally not aware of their source. As is true with magnetism, the power of a social field is

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inherently mysterious. Bourdieu's analysis seeks to explain this invisible but forceful influence of the field upon patterns of behaviour.

(Terdiman 1987, p. 2)

Each field has its own set of requirements and people inhabit the various fields as agents attempting to reflect the competencies required in that field. People are viewed as yielding to the relentless yet subtle social pressure to conform to the demands of the various fields. And so those with the highest level of competency or capital in a field are rewarded. If the field centralises heteronormative coupling for instance, it will, according to Bourdieu's reasoning (1986; 2008) stratify married people in the top stratum of that field and reward them with 'heteronormative capital'. The capital that they gain has transferable value which can be utilised in other fields in the form of prestige and respectability (symbolic capital). This could be in the form of more symbolic capital in a religious community (religious field) that promotes marriage as a key central component of its religious practices.

Bourdieu (1986) argued that there were, in the main, four types of capital; economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. He further claims that at varying levels these four types interconnect and reproduce inequalities between groups of people. So for Bourdieu (1986), wealthy people retain and reproduce their economic status (economic capital), by using the privileges available to them in cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital. It follows then that the more resources, (capital), that a social actor has in one field, the greater is their capacity for exchanging these resources for privileges in another field, particularly economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

There is an increasing tendency to apply Bourdieu's insights into work that recognises the multiple positioning of the social actor, including, in terms of diversity and management (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2011), skin shade, gender and ethnicity (Hunter 2002), sexual fields and sexualities (Green, 2011) and spiritual capital (Verter, 2003; Guest, 2007). Studies such as these illustrate the usefulness of Bourdieusian insights for de-essentialising analyses of social categories and social actors. Bourdieu's (1986) insight into social actors' abilities to draw

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down and produce various resources within pre-given structures and the fact that his theorisation has been argued to fit with intersectional analyses (Hunter, 2002; Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2011) are of particular relevance to this study. The thesis employs notions of intersectionality and capital to participants' intersecting identities in general and religious identities more specifically.

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. It begins with this introductory chapter where a rationale, the method used, the relevance of my personal background as well as the significance of this study and the remaining chapters are introduced. This introductory chapter also further outlines the remaining chapters.

Chapter Two (The literature review) reviews the literature on singleness. It demonstrates that literature on singleness depicts it as a marginalised deficit identity that is usually white, secular and middle class. Taking a view of singleness through the prism of an evangelical Christian tradition, serves to reproduce old gendered narratives. The literature review's investigation of Black single women reveals how essentialist notions of their identities stand out from the limited material available on Black women's lives. By suggesting that research is needed to unveil some of the intricacies informing Black women's identities, the stage is set for analysing the gendered, racial and religious interconnectivities that inform their single identities.

Chapter Three's (*Methodology*) discussion of methodology identifies the iterative nature of the research process. It starts by addressing the epistemological considerations which influenced the study design as a multi-method study using a focus group, questionnaires, written narratives and in-depth interviews. The chapter concludes by identifying and discussing how the analytical procedures adopted unveiled the key features of

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singleness and gave opportunities for an intersectional understanding of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's identities.

Chapter Four (*Key findings; centralising marriage*), is the first of four chapters that report the empirical findings. It draws data from all four research sites. This chapter summarises the key findings of the study and specifically addresses the ways in which participants centralise marriage and narrate their selves as marginal members within their networks. This chapter also illustrates the various strategies that served to maintain marriage at the centre of the women's socio-cultural fields.

The fifth chapter (*Singleness is problematic*) takes a detailed look at how participants' accounts of being single also present their marginal identities. The chapter explores the features of what amounts to a portrayal of a deficit identity that is vulnerable, permeable and subject to the intrusive tactics of others. In their discussion, participants position Black men as struggling to meet the standards required in a married partnership. In spite of this, participants invest unmarried masculinities with traditional gendered authority which actively discriminates against those single women who are constructed as having undesirable forms of blackness.

The sixth chapter (*Troubled Celibacy*) focuses on celibacy as central to the women's sexual lives. By idealising celibacy, women show how they are constrained to choose what is an uncomfortable, but dignified regulated sexual identity. In spite of the challenge that comes with this sexual identity, their commitment to the celibate project offers them alternative opportunities for belonging and power.

The seventh chapter, which is also the final empirical chapter (*Spirituality as a resource*) discusses the place of spirituality in the women's identities. The overriding view is one of spirituality as an opportunity for the women to make sense of their stigmatised identities as single women, whilst also offering a range of development and ultimately

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transcendent opportunities. It is possible to see how the troubles they experience as single women are connected to the opportunities available to them as members of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The eighth and final Chapter (*An intersectional view of singleness: towards conclusions*) details the key findings of the study and discusses these findings in an intersectional perspective. This chapter completes the reading (built up throughout the thesis) of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's singleness as a complex identity. This final chapter summarises the analyses and provides an overall reflection on the research process. It brings the thesis to a close by anticipating the range of contributions that this study can make.

Chapter 2 - Singleness: marginal, complex and White**Introduction**

Current literature on singleness for women establishes that single women hold marginal identities (Reynolds, 2004). Single women appear to be also negotiating their complexities whilst at the same time existing on the margins of a couple-conscious society (Reynolds, 2004; Budgeon, 2008; DePaulo, 2006). The bulk of scholarship on singleness has, however, focused primarily on White women. Very little literature is available on single identities for other groups. This research contributes to addressing the lacuna in the literature by identifying, analysing and evaluating the key issues for single (meaning unmarried) Christian Black women. It centres the perceptions of single participants from one UK Christian community: the Seventh-day Adventist church.

This chapter argues that, despite the advance in scholarship on singleness, where single women's identities are not just viewed as marginal, but also complex, there remain important gaps in the literature. I submit that although the scholarship on singleness increasingly unravels the discursive, multifaceted complexities of the single identity by centralising the voices of single women, the lack of attention to women other than those who are White, middle-class and non-religious, limits understanding of this field. There has, been a tendency to discuss Black women's singleness within publications that tackle the issue of single parenting as well as those that focus on Black women's sexual identities in ways that serve to pathologise them (Reynolds, 1997). None of the accounts centralise the voices of Black British single women who are also religious. This chapter therefore provides the context within which this study has focused on Black British single Seventh-day Adventist women.

Chapter Two – Singleness: marginal, complex and White

Defining Singleness: a complex identity

Definitions of the term ‘single’ have shifted over time (Reynolds, 2006; Roseneil, 2006; Taylor, 2012). Currently, different researchers define singleness in ways that draw upon very different discourses, which makes it difficult to establish what constitutes singleness today. At present there is a proliferation of living arrangements that complicate what we actually mean by the term ‘single’ (Reynolds and Taylor, 2004; Budgeon, 2008; Jamieson et al., 2009; Taylor, 2012).

Attempts to make sense of the relationship between marriage, coupling and singleness are more complicated than might be expected. Those who consider themselves single may actually be in a relationship, as evidenced by increasing living alone together (LAT) rates. In 2001 there were 375,000 couples who described themselves as LAT whereas in 2011 the figures had almost doubled to 640,000 couples (ONS, 2011). Despite changing patterns in coupling (Wilkinson, 2010), intimate heterosexual relationships continue to be expected and desired (Byrne, 2008; Pudrovska et al., 2006; Budgeon, 2008). These complexities are noted in Reynolds’ (2006) discussion of single women’s intimate relationships with men and Roseneil’s (2006) consideration of single men and women who do not live with their partners. Such contributions disrupt simplistic definitions of singleness, so that according to Roseneil (2006) solo living does not necessarily mean not having a partner. In this study, female singleness refers to never- married or divorced women who are not currently in a relationship.

So strong are mores about coupling that even social scientific discussions reflect biases toward ideals of heteronormative coupling (Budgeon, 2008; DePaulo, 2006; Taylor, 2012). Despite legislative changes in 2014 that have extended the rights of gay couples to marry, considerations on relationships and inequalities (Butler, 1990; Rahman, 2010; Green,

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2013; Wilkinson, 2013) draw attention to the implicit advantages of heterosexuality. They contend that the ideological production of heterosexual familialism (Byrne 2003, p. 2) (which includes the idea that women achieve full adulthood only as married women with children) has privileged heterosexuality. Wilkinson (2013) complicates the idealisation of heterosexuality by suggesting that political concerns over the demise of the British family have recently found some new impetus by supporting same sex relationships. This is being done, she points out, in an effort to hold onto traditional family ideals. Wilkinson's (2010) discussion of polyamory highlights the ideal that adult lives be reflected in intimate relationships. She emphasises however, that it is coupling, whether heterosexual or homosexual that is being affirmed.

As ideas about what is natural and expected with regard to marriage, the family and households begin to shift; people encounter a range of dilemmas around their identity work (Radley and Billig, 1996). The literature on single women exemplifies this in different ways. Single women, although represented as marginal throughout the literature, also navigate their single identities and the specific dilemmas that accompany them as intentional subjects.

The idea that singleness can be a positive status is not new. Self-help books have long encouraged singles to enjoy their single life (Reynolds, 2004). More contemporary self-help approaches have continued this view by promoting discussions that re-situate singleness away from a pathological, apologetic, or patronising terrain. DePaulo's (2006) *'Singled Out'* draws on research to demonstrate that singles can and do live well-adjusted lives. DePaulo and Morris (2005) have been influential in arguing that despite this, there is a stigmatisation of singles that is tantamount to a discrimination they term singlism. However, in an edited collection in which both DePaulo and Morris are contributors, there are some indications that discriminatory attitudes and practices against singles are declining (Hertel et al., 2007). Possibilities for living a positive single life are not just the result of contemporary social

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trends. Earlier works such as Adams' (1976) study based on in-depth interviews with 27 single men and women and Gordon's (1994) cross-cultural study of 72 single women, provide early examples of how analysis of single people's narratives about being single can challenge essentialist portrayals of singleness and indicate the complexities that underscore their identity work (Gordon, 1994; Reynolds, 2004).

A complex troubled category; negotiating marginalities

Early scholarship on single women suggested that being single was one way in which women were excluded and made to feel deficient. These earlier accounts tended to produce a view of single women as 'marginal others'. The scholarship on singleness (Adams, 1976; Gordon, 1994) before the turn of the century that aimed to centre women's voices, suggested that there were varying complexities within this representation of singleness. What is clear from this relatively sparse, early literature is the range of strategies that women employed to negotiate their marginalities as unmarried women. Such accounts did provide some insight into women's agency by considering the ways in which single women moved between their private and public spheres as negotiating agents, for whom choice was centrally important. Clements' (1999) investigation of singleness can be placed broadly within a descriptive, historical, feminist and sociological discussion (Macvarish, 2006). Focusing on women in the late 20th century, Clements (1999) conducted interviews with over 100 American women. Drawing heavily on their narratives, she described how, many of the women's reflections outline various psycho-social and practical strategies they employed for adjusting to long-term singleness. The majority of the women in this study did not intentionally embrace singleness but with time, came to experience some aspects of it positively.

Although both Adams (1976) and Gordon (1994) give an account of some of the dialectical features of single women's position in society, it is Clements' (1999) work that

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provides what I see as an important concept for articulating those dialectics; ‘improvisations’.

Improvisations for Clements mean a series of reactions undertaken in an attempt to make sense of, and make something meaningful from the long-term state of singleness. It also conveys a sense of making do with whatever is available in marginal positioning. Clements (ibid) uses the term ‘improvisation’ as the process of resignation, adjustment and embracing that single women in her study engaged in, if they ‘c[a]me to terms’ with being single. Clements’ (1999) use of the term ‘improvisations’ centres time as a critical factor in the process of adjustment to the single identity. In other words improvisations illustrate how, with time, the single women, in her study, eventually reached a point of acceptance of their singleness. Both Trimberger (2005) and Lahad (2012) also incorporate time as a critical element for understanding discursively produced features of singleness. They demonstrate how time is one avenue for investigating single women’s discursively produced identity, particularly for older single women. They show how single women emerge from having to make something out of their difficulty and the longer that takes the more likely they are to succeed in ‘making do’. ‘Making do’ shows how the accumulation of time brings familiarity to the current state of affairs (along with ageing) so that resignation and or acceptance become likely. Lahad (2012) illustrates how interrogating singlehood from a temporal view is useful for shedding light on how societies reproduce and legitimise certain life timetables. People are therefore socialised into achieving life goals and experiencing events and processes such as attending school, getting married, having children etc. These timetables reflect attendant hierarchies and power relations that become highly visible and marginalising for those who have not kept up with them.

Recent investigations that centre the voices of women as exemplified in the work of Reynolds (2004), Reynolds and Wetherell (2007) and Byrne (2003; 2008), represent women’s descriptions of singleness as a complex troubled category. Their work tells of the

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contradictory and varying strategies that single women employ in situating their troubled single identities. The ‘troubles’ identified are about negotiating marginal lives as outsiders while also seeking for credible spaces in which to conduct identity work.

Reynolds’ (2004) study examines the discursive production of women’s singleness through the medium of talk. Her work is a pioneering discursive analysis aimed at identifying the ways in which single women talk about their single status:

“[t]here is widespread agreement that single women are stigmatized, but there had been little of the ways in which women defined as single respond to and work with the typical constructions of their identity available in the public arena. In this study, as I have indicated, I argue that singleness is best viewed as a discursively constructed social category”

(Reynolds 2004, p. 52)

Her use of discourse analysis and recognition of the psychosocial dimensions underpinning identity construction enabled Reynolds to view single women as active in their own identity projects. Drawing on Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (2001) concept of ‘individualisation’, Reynolds argues that singleness should be viewed as: (a) social construction, (b) social category, (c) discourse, (d) personal narrative and (e) political. She draws on the responses to her main questions to investigate how women’s talk about singleness constructs power, agency, choice and culture.

Reynolds’ study confirmed that familialism remains a powerful discourse in that women’s talk reflected how they have to negotiate between two dominant patriarchal conceptions of womanhood; married and reproductive, or single and deviant (Byrne, 2008). She found that singleness for the women in her study was a troubled category in that their talk about being single reflected a range of difficult dilemmas. Additionally, the women in the study presented two contradictory views; that singleness is a troubled category representing a deep desire and need for a relationship, and that it is positive, representing choice and independence. Furthermore, the women made use of a self-improvement discourse when mapping out their life’s journey so as to avoid negative subject positions of

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powerlessness and failure. This self-improvement discourse countered the traditional life-cycle storyline of marriage as an attempt to construct a presentation of an autonomous self:

“[d]ealing with the dilemma of representing oneself as a powerful woman with agency and control in her intimate relationships involved participants in a complicated dance as they drew on different repertoires and took up contrasting positions to help them with the task”

(Reynolds et al. 2007, p. 349)

Reynolds work illustrates how single women’s sense of agency enable them to move towards a more positive, although difficult, single identity.

Byrne (2003) has also contributed to such a portrayal in her study of Irish single women. Byrne interviewed 30 single women and showed how they negotiated their identities between two very strong and different gendered narratives; single woman as deficit and threatening to patriarchy, and married woman in reproductive alliance with patriarchy. These 30 women who were not married, did not have children and did not live with sexual partners were divided into three groups: carers, career minded and partner seekers. Byrne (2003) was interested in looking at how singleness was spoken about in Ireland and the extent to which this talk reflected an uncomfortable discursive climate that informed women’s depictions. Dividing the women’s responses into negative and positive repertoires, Byrne showed that singleness for Irish women was experienced as stigmatised and personally difficult, and yet at the same time allowed greater independence and choice than marriage would. Her findings suggest that, despite evidence that Irish culture has a tendency to give little cultural validation to singleness; the single women in her study were resilient. These women’s narratives revealed self-identities built around connections to the relationships they chose, rather than relationships that have been traditionally prescribed, such as wife and mother. These choices provided participants with a basis for negotiating and mediating a more positive single identity (Byrne, 2003).

Intersectional analysis has made great inroads into feminist literature and has provided an important lens for analysing the multi-dimensional aspects of identities (Lutz et al., 2011).

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Although studies conducted by Clements (1999), Byrne (2003), Reynolds (2004) and others (e.g. Byrne and Carr, 2005; Reynolds, 2008; Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Taylor, 2012) acknowledge the complexities of single women, there is very little discussion of singleness within the intersectional dynamic. In the USA, however, single women's complex identities have been viewed from intersectional perspectives as in the work of Clarke (2011) who looks at the inequalities that African American women face in finding romantic partners. More recently Lahad (2013) analysed singleness within a diverse cultural context that fuses Euro American and Israeli cultural discourses. Using for the most part, the Ynet, Israel's internet portal, Lahad trawled various materials that came specifically from Ynet's subsection on relationships. She examined popular texts such as magazines and blogs and identified internet columns, clichés and songs on single women between 2006 and 2009. Lahad (2012a; 2012b; 2013) claims that in spite of the centrality of narratives that promote free will and independence, single women find that they come up against particular discourses that reinforce their marginal identities. The new opportunities that are now purportedly available have, therefore, also provided new regulations that problematise single women's gendered work. Since idealisation of marriage and childrearing continues to be very important in Israeli middle-class society, middle-aged Israeli women's long-term singleness disrupts social conventions around gendered trajectories. Her insightful qualitative and quantitative work highlighted gendered power relationships that accompany single women's waiting. She concluded that the various texts revealed discursive practices that identified singleness as a liminal temporary state in a community of people waiting and intent on fulfilling and or celebrating the correct rites of passage to marriage. The woman who takes too long to marry therefore causes distress to her family and friends. Lahad (2012, p. 183) suggests that the continuing anxieties that come as a result of viewing late singlehood for women as

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indications of unfulfilled womanhood and motherhood, signal and reflect more general discourses of anxiety and uncertainty currently at large in late modern contexts.

In a later work on choice and single women, Lahad (2013b) profiles Israeli populist narratives that construct single women as failing to manage their choices appropriately. Single women are required to capitalise on ‘post-feminist’ opportunities to choose conservative gendered ideals. Lahad (ibid) contends that the discussion of choice as an aspect of contemporary society is misguided if it fails to capture women’s diversities and the particular social contexts within which their single identities are constituted. Single women are accused of being too choosy, too particular. By addressing the issue of single women’s selectiveness, Lahad (2013a, p. 6) considered important changing elements in society that relate to post-feminist, neo-liberal consumerist norms. She suggests that single women’s selectiveness as a discourse that exists in the popular texts that she interrogated is one route for identifying the complex, difficult and antagonistic responses informing their identity work. Lahad (2013a) recognises that single women’s experiences are mediated through multiple forms of oppression such as ageism, ableism, heterosexism, classism and racism. By recognising the limitations inherent in presenting singleness as a one dimensional identity Lahad (2013a, p. 26) applies what she calls a ‘feminist intersectional methodological approach’ to her analysis of populist narratives on single women. This intersectional perspective is contextualised within a discourse of discrimination against singles (i.e. singlism) (DePaulo, 2006). Lahad (2013a) suggests that Israeli women are currently influenced by both Israeli ideals regarding the family and those Western ideals that centralise independence and choice. Under these circumstances, women are now more able to navigate their single identities within social regulations that expect that ‘she’ should take charge of ‘her’ life (Lahad, 2013a; 2013b). Single women found that they were not stigmatised if they used their new found freedom to choose marriage and children, but stigmatised if they did

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not. She shows how the pressure to reflect autonomy and choice in contemporary Western identities affect the way the mostly non-religious, Western, Israeli society responds to single women. For example, she describes how women who claim to choose singleness are presented as liars, temporary singles, and immature adults needing direction. They are pressurised, she points out, to use their freedoms to express a stable self and choose marriage. She further suggests that discourses around chosen singlehood are taken up and reproduced through cultural mediums that reflect postmodern individualism in ways that do not legitimise women's singleness. Such discourses do not appreciate the complex terrain within which single women do, or do not choose to be single. It is much the same in the discourses surrounding single women's capacity to select partners for marriage. Set within the contemporary account of the increasing ability to choose, the single women in her study reported that they were often castigated for failing to exercise choice to select a partner (Lahad, 2013). This work offers a fruitful introduction to this study's focus on Black Seventh-day Adventist women's singleness because it draws attention to the issue of singleness as an intersectional identity that is imbued with illusory choice.

Taylor (2012) also investigates media scripts as one way of unravelling social discourses on singleness for women. She focuses on how the increasing media attention given to the subject of singleness over the past twenty years, situates the media as one multi-dimensional space for portraying the complex interactions between feminism and popular culture. Despite opportunities for viewing singleness in a more positive light, she shows how popular culture promotes a negative view of what it means to be a single woman. Various texts remind viewers that a positive singleness is a temporary singleness. Taylor (2012) like other feminists (Mc Robbie, 2004; Aune, 2004; Lahad, 2012; 2013a; 2013b) illuminates the post-feminist consumption practices that women are encouraged to entertain in order to enhance the likelihood of meeting a partner. Such consumption sometimes involves taking

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steps to purchase physical and psychological enhancements. In this light, the single identity is set up as resourceful, and also actively and yet independently engaged in preparation for marriage. By contrast there is evidence, according to Taylor (2012) that some women are countering the contradictory portrayals of single women and promoting instead a view of singleness as permanent and positive.

By opening up new ways to interrogate singleness, scholars such as Taylor (2012) and Lahad (2013) offer invaluable insight into how popular culture is employed in the reproduction of the single identity. The ability to blog has created online sites, where single women have begun to contest negative assumptions about being single (Taylor, 2012). Bernard-Allan (2013) Applauds Taylor's (2012) work as groundbreaking within the field of feminist media and cultural studies but argues that when it comes to the issue of Black women it gives limited insights, because Black women remain relatively invisible. Religious Black women who experience singleness in wider society are even more invisible.

All of the studies cited above have made some significant inroads into the study of singleness. The chapter has so far mapped out the different ways that single women's identity representations are increasingly complicated. White middle-class single women appear to be negotiating their single identities with greater autonomy and also increasing complexity than previously. There has been a shift from representing these women as only marginal to some representations that construct them as capable of negotiating their lives. Aune (2004) suggests that the complexities of this group's experience of singleness probably reflect their racialised and class privileges. Until quite recently, none of the above studies considered or paid attention to ethnicity or religion as an aspect of the identity work that some single women undertook. By focusing on Israeli women, Lahad's contribution (2012; 2013a; 2013b) gives some insight into the fusion of Israeli and Euro-American cultural norms in the issue of singleness for Israeli women. She recognises ethnic and religious diversity in her various

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contributions and highlights the importance of extending our understanding of singleness to also include women from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The following section sets the groundwork for looking into singleness from the point of view of Christian women. It then moves into the final section of the chapter which begins to map out those studies that address Black women's identities as single women. Although there is a lack of material in this area there has been some useful in-depth attention on single women in religious spaces. This gives some insights into how White women in general, produce their single identities as Christians.

Single Christian women

Most of the literature investigating singleness has tended to focus on single people within secular society, resulting in what I refer to as the 'secularisation of singleness'. This does not mean that the studies reported in the literature do not include religious people, but that religious identity is not highlighted. For example, although Byrne's (2003) ground-breaking work on singleness has recognised the divergent ways that singleness for women emerges in Ireland, she does not interrogate religion as an aspect of her Irish participants' diversities. Religion continues to play a significant role in Ireland to the extent that 80% of the population of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland identified as religious in 2006 (Statistics Press Notice, 2006). Thus, while formal religion is playing a less significant role in Ireland now than previously (Anderson, 2010), it still remains significant in Ireland and other countries (Aune, 2004; Sharma, 2008). This research interrogates the ways in which for Black, single, Seventh-day Adventist women, religion is an important factor in their complex identities. Perhaps, not surprisingly, given the lack of attention in the literature on singleness for Christian women, very little is known of what distinguishes this complex identity.

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This section will briefly outline three of the key issues that have been reported in the sparse literature on singles and Christianity. These include the under-reporting of celibacy as a significant aspect of Christian singleness; singleness as an expression of post-feminist identity; and singleness as a deficit identity for Seventh-day Adventists.

The twentieth century invested celibacy with contradictory, problematic and redemptive qualities complicating wider society's discourse on the place of celibacy in contemporary Western society (Terry, 2012). The onset of AIDS for instance drew attention to celibacy as the most reliable protection from HIV infection, whereas recent negative revelations about priests involved in paedophilia contributed to perceptions of celibacy as a contemporary problematic concept (Terry, 2012). Although some of the literature on singleness in wider society recognises celibacy as an aspect of the single identity, it has tended to receive very little attention (Terry, 2012). One of the reasons cited for this is because sexual inactivity is perceived to be a relatively rare phenomenon amongst healthy adults (Siegel and Scrimshaw, 2003; Terry, 2012).

Despite changing and complex perceptions regarding gender relations and sex outside of marriage, traditional perceptions that sex outside of marriage is undesirable, persist, as shown in intentional celibacy for Christian singles (Aune, 2002; 2004; Frahm-Arp, 2010). Although some single Christians engage in sexual relations, celibacy has a qualitatively different place in the Christian community than in wider society (Aune and Sharma, 2008; Hobbs, 2005). The centralisation of celibacy in evangelical Christianity reflects the continuity of a traditional script in the face of changing sexual values. The Christian who is single is therefore admonished to include celibacy as an act of commitment to God and subsequently the Christian community (Aune, 2002; 2004). In this way sexual identity becomes subject to the religious group's surveillance of sexual behaviours (Sharma, 2008). By drawing on

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Foucault's (1991) work, Sharma (2008) emphasises the public policing of the sexual self in the religious field where the Protestant single women in her study operated.

There has been some limited, but useful sociological attention to celibacy as an aspect of a single man's identity. Bourdieu's (1991) work on priests within Catholicism briefly acknowledges how they are required to live out their religious lives as celibates. In this work celibacy is normalised as an aspect of religiosity, but when Bourdieu (ibid) considers it within a non-religious sphere, a very different picture emerges. Bourdieu (2004; 2008) portrays the discomfort attributed to involuntary celibacy and singleness by interrogating the emotional and physical awkwardness that celibate men displayed. Gordon's (1994) consideration of '*Partnerships and Sexuality*' notes that of the 72 single women who took part in her study, only six claimed to be always celibate. Cline (1994) illustrates how women's sexual lives illuminated contradictory narratives on gendered ideals where single women were seen as deviant if they were sexually active and deviant if they were celibate. Terry (2012) found that chosen celibacy transgresses the male sex-drive discourse that stipulates that men are sexual aggressors. Christian discourse on celibacy presents contradictory views. Religious literature (See Hsu, 1997; Brown, 2001) establishes that it is difficult to maintain sexual abstinence and purity whilst suggesting strategies to live celibate lives. Yet, at the same time, some Christian scholars such as Moultrie (2011) contend that unmarried Christians who are sexually active are liberated agents. Moultrie (ibid) addresses this issue by looking at 'The Black Pentecostal Church' in America in general and Black televangelism more specifically. Her discussion of the surveillance tactics of African American women's sexual lives, where women are forced to or collude with denying their sexual desires, is for Moultrie (ibid), a denigration of an individual's sexual right.

Since it is generally assumed in Christian circles, that single women will be celibate, it is not surprising that Christian women's discussions of sexuality and celibacy sheds light

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on the tenacity of traditional sexual mores that underpin their sexual identities. Their discussions of shame, sexual desire, temptation and membership of Christian communities illuminate those traditional mores (Sharma, 2008). Yet in spite of prescriptions that celibacy is the correct sexual route for the Christian who is single, there appears to be great difficulty for single Christian women to achieve this. For example, some of the women in Aune's (2002) study of single Christian women struggled with the expectation that they should be celibate and did, at times, engage in sexual relationships. For these women, sexual desire produced dilemmas about whether or not the sexual boundaries in their relationships were appropriate when dating. Others spoke about managing sexual temptation as well as guilt, depression and a sense of failure. These complexly negative feelings were attributed to noncompliance with those religious prescriptions that require celibate lifestyles for unmarried adults.

Sharma's (2008) focus on sex, shame, guilt and church membership suggests that sexual desire is common among young Christian unmarried White British women. Sharma conducted qualitative interviews with 26 heterosexual women and two lesbian women on how their protestant church involvement impacted on their sexuality. Her study illustrates how sexual transgressions and religious membership (Sharma, 2008) are closely interrelated. Sharma's (2008) thesis contends that single, unmarried women's membership of the Protestant church involved accessing a pervasive discourse of sexuality as confined to marriage. This discourse was regulated by the church community to whom the participants felt accountable. By making a link between sexual experiences and membership of the church, Sharma (2008) illustrates the significance of the relationship between private acts and public identity (Verter 2003; Guest 2007; Sharma, 2008). She discusses how the women in her study displayed intensely emotional feelings about their sexual activities. Their sexual episodes affected their sense of belonging to their church communities and resulted in some

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women's decisions to leave the church, as they could no longer reconcile their sexual desires with the expectation that they should be celibate. Alternatively, some women worked through their sexual dilemmas with the support of systems of accountability such as friendship groups and experienced a sense of empowerment and belonging through such regulatory networking.

Frahm-Arp's (2012) work offers a useful cross-cultural comparison into how these young, never married, single, South-African Black Christian women navigate their religious identities. Although her main study (2010) investigates Black and non-Black men and women in general, in recognition of the demographics of the churches where her participants were drawn, Frahm-Arp (2012) does pay particular attention to the challenges that Black South-African, (mostly unmarried) women face. Naming these shifting social arrangements as expressions of South Africa's unpredictability, instability, creativity, individualism and disunity, Frahm-Arp (2012) supports the claim that women's involvement in religion undermines the view that secularisation is an increasing feature of contemporary societies. Conducting her field work with over 80 participants who were predominantly Black women, Frahm-Arp (ibid) shows how economics, religious belief and gender shape women's lived lives. Her discussion on celibacy and single women also identifies sexual regulation as an important feature of these religious women's lives. In discussing young, upwardly mobile, single Christian women and members of one branch of conservative Pentecostalism, she addresses their unmarried identities within the changing socio-economic dynamics that characterise a society undergoing significant adjustments. Frahm-Arp (2012) does this by contextualising South Africa's competing and contradictory narratives about sex and singleness that these women are forced to confront. She discusses how on one hand the religious narrative of the Pentecostal charismatic churches promotes celibacy but on the other hand, popular narratives require that unmarried women engage in sexual activity and motherhood as a means of achieving marriage. She further discusses how the presence of

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these two narratives forges a moral dilemma for single religious women. She found that some women conceded to sexual demands and others, in obedience to the church's views on sexual practices, did not. Those choosing to construct themselves as sexually regulated found that it was difficult to secure a man's attention because they seemed aloof, and because of their ambitions, their class and their efforts to maintain a celibate self. These sets of dilemmas that they faced found resolution when these young women justified their sexual identity projects within the conservative Pentecostal Church's commentaries on how young single women should conduct their lives.

The Pentecostal communities in Frahm-Arp's (2012) investigation capitalised on wider society's narratives of progress and self-actualisation. They did this by linking both the practice of celibacy and social mobility as important vocations for young unmarried women. By advancing the belief that young Christian women should be hard working, socially mobile and also celibate, the church centralised secular and religious narratives. This combined promotion had the effect of offering young, socially mobile, Black South African women new impetus for making sense of their singleness. Furthermore, it provided new impetus for women to break from the oppressive past. Black single women could leave old legacies about their black bodies as Apartheid bodies that were once available for work and sex and instead take the new opportunities that were being presented through their churches. Frahm-Arp (ibid) found that such post-apartheid religious narratives helped some women to reposition their black gendered bodies as sexually unavailable, self-regulated, self-actualised and hard working. Women, who engaged in this way, expressed that this was indeed the route for securing a good husband in the future. Frahm-Arp (2012) found that because the Pentecostal churches in her study promoted a Christian identity which was economically independent and progressive, unmarried women, who are members, could navigate their celibate lives and their prolonged singleness with some levels of dignity. The post-apartheid South African

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Pentecostal churches emerge in this portrayal as possible catalysts for women's gendered power. This study illustrates how it is conceivable for a conservative Christian belief to accommodate contemporary discourses and maintain its traditional ethos (La Poorta, 2012). Frahm-Arp's (2012) findings further reveal that conservative religions' adjustments might also offer important justifications for empowering women in changing times. Her study also demonstrates how conservative Christian communities are able to do this along with retaining traditional ideals about heteronormative coupling.

The evidence available suggests that the hallmarks of traditional religious regulations persist (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000; 2005; Wilford, 2009) and so churches continue to be a space where traditional and clearly defined gender roles are generally promoted (Aune et al., 2008). The scholarship on gender and religion confirms that women both subscribe to and resist these traditions (Aune et al., 2008; 2011; Hunt, 2005). There is some indication that post-feminist tendencies feature in the identities of Christian women (Aune et al., 2011). Aune (2004) suggests that taking a post-feminist Christian perspective can be a way to deal with wider society's accounts of freedom, choice, individuality and traditionalism that women reportedly consume. Trzebiatowska (2013) illustrates this point in her study of Polish single women who make the decision to be nuns, which profiles the extent to which nuns give an account of their lives as mediated through agency and choice. By conducting interviews with 35 Polish nuns from five different areas in Poland, Trzebiatowska provided insights into how this particular category of religious single women situates their feminine identities. She uses the term 'consecrated femininity' to summarise the type of gender work that the women undertook. She found that the nuns in her study actively transformed Polish gender ideology on femininity by utilising a mixture of spiritually driven work and gender ideology. They utilised a range of Polish-idealised feminine scripts to construct expressions of spiritual femininities in alignment with Polish-gendered ideals. This undertaking enabled

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them to retain key features of Polish hegemonic femininity within cloistered realms so that they saw themselves as mothers and as sexually feminine beings, intensely committed to enabling the people in their care to live out their lives as fully as possible. Making the decision to be single allowed them to produce a relatively coherent gendered identity.

Aune's (2004) ground breaking work on single women has provided an important foundation for understanding singleness as an aspect of a complex gendered religious identity. Between 1998 and 2001 Aune (2002) collected data from 94 British, unmarried, evangelical, Christian women. She wanted to discover how they and the wider church perceived the women's single status. Her findings indicated that a third of the single women felt that the church did not view single women positively. Aune claims that the identity struggles for the single women in this study reflected their search for a sense of belonging within a family-focused environment. The women also identified loneliness and the need for a social life that included opportunities to lead in Church functions and services. Adopting what she calls a 'Christian single feminist' standpoint (i.e. a position that highlights the oppressions and marginalities of Christian single women), Aune (2004) in a later ethnographic study of gender relations explored the ways in which a Christian house church movement called the New Frontier International (NFI) constructed their gendered ideologies and experiences. Aune's (2004) findings suggest that single women embrace both traditional and less traditional gendered expectations. She focused on men and women, both married and single, who made up a regular prayer and worship group⁴. Aune found that on the whole, the single women in her study bought into a compulsory marriage narrative and viewed their singleness unfavourably, despite some ambivalence about this status. She discussed that although some women did not see themselves as feminist, they actually lived out feminist

⁴ At the start of Aune's investigation she became a member of a small house church community she called Westside. This community had twelve adult members (five single women, three married women, three married men and one single man) and by the end of her research Westside had doubled in size (fourteen single women, four married women, four married men and two single men).

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ideals by leading in prayer meetings and through involvement in women's support groups (which are expressions of their autonomy and productivity in the face of patriarchy).

Postfeminist is the term used by Aune to emphasise how women in this community expressed their gendered identities, drawing from traditional and non-traditional contemporary narratives about what it is to be a woman. In this vein Aune (2004) illustrated how some of the single women claimed some of the spaces that men tended to occupy, whilst at the same time desiring to inhabit the space in which traditional femininity is venerated. While Aune's work exemplifies the value in using secular templates for interrogating religion and gender, her discussion of post-feminism reproduces some of the colour blindness of much Western feminism. Thus, she centres White femininity by drawing specifically on media portrayals of White non-religious young women like Bridget Jones and Ally Mcbeal. Aune (ibid) acknowledges that her research focuses on single women, who like her, are White and mostly middle-class. Aune's (2008) more recent publications reveal the extent to which Evangelical Christianity retains importance for women who occupy more traditional social positions as wives. Despite claims that strict churches are strong (Iannaccone, 1994), as indicated by high church attendance and intense commitment from members, there are counter indications that in light of changing gendered mores in wider society and some religious communities, inflexible traditional churches will have fewer single women attending their congregations (Aune, 2008). The insistence on demarcating and centralising a traditional femininity that marginalises single women is a contributory factor to the decline in numbers in congregations. Aune (2004; 2008) therefore contends that greater flexibility on the part of such church organisations is needed if they are to retain unmarried women in their communities.

One of the few studies interrogating Seventh-day Adventism and gender relations was conducted in 1999 by Laura Vance. This study was conducted at the height of the ongoing

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and unresolved debate about women's ordination for ministry within the Seventh-day Adventist church. Her investigation is relevant for contextualising the position of single Seventh-day Adventist women. Vance (1999) investigated Seventh-day Adventist women's changing status starting from Weber's (1963) view that new religious formations initially include women, but begin to exclude them as these formations/organisations become routinized and established. This investigation demonstrates that the Adventist theology about evil in the world informs Adventist ideals about women. The Seventh-day Adventist family is promoted as the place for protecting members from the controversy waging in the world and so Seventh-day Adventist women are expected to perform their gendered lives closer to home, as guardians responsible for protecting their children and husbands in the fight against evil. This very conservative interpretation of women's role within Seventh-day Adventism was not always the case (Vance, 1999).

Vance (ibid) utilised multiple research methods to show how Adventism's gendered relations were informed in its initial stages by the central presence of Seventh-day Adventism's prophetess Ellen G White (her maiden name being Ellen Gould Harmon). Vance (ibid) described how the burgeoning faith espoused radical beliefs about the central place of women, yet as the faith developed, traditional arguments surrounding women's roles surfaced. Vance (1999) demonstrates how Seventh-day Adventist ideals about the family, its eschatology and resistance to secularisation, resulted in a complex gendered context where Seventh-day Adventist views on gender roles shifted to maintain their distance from secular gender discourses. The interplay between Christian familialism and Seventh-day Adventist eschatology negatively informs the positionality of those adult members who are unmarried (Pearson, 1990).

Vance (1999) pays some limited attention to the issue of singleness, not in her discussion on the family, but in the chapter addressing appropriate sexual behaviour within

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the Seventh-day Adventist church. By implication this religious organisation considers singleness a potential threat to its sexual ideals. Furthermore, Vance's 'treatment' of single Seventh-day Adventists suggests that there is no credible 'space' for singles within Seventh-day Adventist thinking. More specifically, Vance (1999) works with the concept of singleness in a way that highlights its marginality in light of Seventh-day Adventists' emphasis on sex as critical for full personal development. This treatment, although very brief, does suggest that the issue of singleness is important. This is evident in Vance's (ibid) attempt to cover a great deal in the three short paragraphs that address singleness. First, she discusses the Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on the importance of sex for personal growth. Second, she examines endogamy and its relationship with sex ratios and prolonged singleness. Third, she addresses singleness and gendered inequalities as well as singleness and Sabbath-keeping. Fourth, she discusses how church officials attempted to integrate singles into the church community which included the provision of Seventh-day Adventist online dating sites for singles. This limited interrogation of singleness serves to show that the unmarried Seventh-day Adventist identity is a marginal one. In the same chapter Vance (1999) introduces a comparatively comprehensive discussion of gay and lesbian relationships to delineate another group who operate outside the confines of marriage. The challenges that this group poses to the Church community at large relate to their attempts to justify, and also engage in 'unbiblical' sexual relationships (Vance 1999, p. 161). Vance's coverage of singles, gays and lesbians serves to highlight the boundaries that Seventh-day Adventist authorities establish among those within its heteronormative borders and those who live outside it. Vance's (ibid) focus on North American Seventh-day Adventism provides a framework for interrogating Seventh-day Adventist thinking world-wide.

This chapter has so far outlined singleness for women as a fluid identity that has adapted to the changing gendered terrain which makes singleness in contemporary Britain

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somewhat less stigmatised than previously. Aspects of traditional gendered expectations endure however, illustrating how continuities and change inform what it now means to be a single woman living within Western society (including British society). The employment of the term post-feminist offers opportunities to make sense of the contradictory effect that changing and enduring narratives have on the identity work that single women do. Working with the broad definition adopted in the Introduction chapter (See pages 12 & 13), contemporary women are represented as both autonomous consumers and as women who desire traditional femininity. Heterosexual coupling is still the main factor for confirming productive adulthood (Budgeon, 2008; Lahad, 2012). The women that occupy and navigate the contradictions of changing and enduring ideals in the literature are White and often middle-class, women capable of procuring and consuming opportunities in anticipation of settling down. Aune (2004) illustrates how post-feminist tendencies also appear to have an effect on the lives of the UK single women in her study of Christian women within one religious community. Aune's (2004) study suggests that these women, as White middle-class women, have race and class privileges that are under-theorised, although noted. The ways in which Black women in general and Black British women more specifically occupy their single identities is relatively unknown. The rest of the chapter considers the little that is known about this issue.

Marginalised Black women; hyper-visible and matriarchal

Scholarship on singleness has made important strides in bringing to view the differing ways that single women negotiate their single identities. This scholarship shows that many people have traditional perceptions that, to be recognised as an adult woman, requires women to be married. Despite this, single women have been found to be both agentic and complex in various ways. One shortcoming of the literature, however, is that it has focused primarily on

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British women who are mostly White and middle-class. When attention is paid to singleness as a social category for Black women, a very different picture is painted: they are generally essentialised. This section will present these depictions as well as the reasons for the essentialist and often negative treatment of Black single women. The review of the literature shows that the complex identities of Black single women are mostly undocumented. It will introduce intersectional analysis as one way in which to identify and engage with those complexities.

Some scholars argue that there has been a history of a White feminist tendency to exclude women of colour from various areas of research and this omission parallels Black women's experiences of exclusion in many other areas in wider society (Crenshaw, 2011b; Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Mirza (1997), writing about Black British feminism, views this invisibility of Black British women as a process of whiteness that has failed to see the very different experiences and concerns of Black women. According to Mirza (*ibid*), whiteness makes invisible or re-appropriates things, people and places it does not want to acknowledge. Frankenberg's (1993) work on the social construction of whiteness is one attempt to address such concerns. Frankenberg (1993, p. 1), a White Feminist, argues that race shapes White women's lives and part of that shaping involves consuming the privileges that are available along with a failure to acknowledge those said privileges. It is because of this non-acknowledgement that Frankenberg's discussion on race involves making White privileges visible. She recognises that although whiteness changes over time and place, the power dynamics between White and other people remain similar. So for her, whiteness is '*delimited by the relations of racism at that moment and in that place*' (Frankenberg 1993, p. 236). The literature on singleness for White women has increasingly centred the voices of unmarried women. The literature on Black women is by and large the product of external observers who have not generally taken singleness as their main focus of study. Whenever

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Black women come into view, they have been frequently found to be presented as hyper-visible and pathological (Reynolds, 1997; Phoenix, 1988). There is, in addition, a growing body of scholarship that foregrounds Black women's lives in all its complexity (Sekayi, 2003; Battle and Coates, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2007; Phoenix, 2010; Mirza, 2010; Smiet, 2015). Centralising the voices of Black women has become an important step towards countering the pathologisation of Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Gilchrist, 2011). There are important examples of Black women scholars' contributions to this de-essentialising; Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) on 'strong Black women' for instance as well as Clarke's (2011) and Gilchrist's (2011) consideration of Black women's gendered identities as mostly un-partnered women.

The introduction of theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality, post-colonial feminism and Diaspora studies, opens up Black feminist discussions of Black women's exclusion, invisibility, complexity, multiple oppressions and subjectivities (Mirza et al., 2010). This study takes the impetus from the insights made available in the literature on singleness for women as well as the insights from Black feminist literature, to contextualise singleness for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women.

The rest of this chapter will discuss the literature on Black women's singleness by examining them as simultaneously hyper-visible and marginal. The literature suggests that those Black women on the margins are also negatively visible. Many discussions of Black women, fail to acknowledge Black women's lives as normal, complex and productive. Instead popular discourses promote essentialist portrayals of Black single women as mothers, hyper-/a-sexual, strong and overly religious Black women. As suggested previously, these portrayals serve to neutralise other accounts of Black women's intricate identities and so reproduce pathological essentialist constructions that depict Black single women on the margins.

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Hyper-visible and marginal

Black British scholars (such as the work of Rhamie, 2004; 2007; Arbouin, 2009; Mirza, 1993; 2008) have used the more ample African American scholarship as a basis for discussing the unequal experiences of Black people in education more generally and Black women in education more specifically. In spite of the fact that the educational focus has tended to centre on issues that pertain to younger Black women, they illustrate that those debates that centre Black women's hyper-visible, marginal identities endure (Reynolds, 1997). There is however very little that is available on how marginalisation is experienced by Black British women who are single. Nonetheless, Gordon's (1994) work, *Single women on the margins*, attempts to paint a picture of what that marginality looks like for the 72 women, some of whom self-identified as Black British, who took part in her study.

She found that most of the women, and this included a small number of African American and Black British women, did not subscribe to the marginal status accorded to them by society. In addition, Gordon argued that there were structural constraints which imposed various difficulties for single women. More specifically, she argued that single Black women's marginal identities had to be recognised as being informed by different challenges when compared to that of White single women. Acknowledging the marginal single status as one that intersects with race, Gordon (1994) identifies some key aspects of Black single women's marginalities. One aspect of those marginalities is that Black women are polar opposites of White masculine rationality. Although her work has been criticised by Reynolds (2004) for working with women's narratives of singleness as given rather than interrogating them, she can be credited for having included single Black women's voices in her study of singleness for women.

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Black Feminist writers illuminate whiteness as a key reason for Black women's marginalisations. African American feminist writer Hill Collins (2000) contends that stereotypical images of Black women express their marginal identities because they are the result of power relationships within Western societies, where White domination is perpetuated:

The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group interest in maintaining Black women's subordination

(Hill Collins 2000, p. 72)

For Collins (ibid), slavery as a system of domination has led to an objectification of Black women, where they are positioned as objects within a White racist system. By means of an intersectional framework Collins (ibid) suggests that the perpetuation of 'controlling images' positions Black women as inferior in comparison with 'superior' White women. Collins (ibid) goes on to expand this claim by illustrating how the stereotyping of Black women (the mammy, strong Black woman and, excessively sexual for instance) and amplification of such stereotypes through the media, serve to objectify, denigrate and ultimately control Black women. Monat (2010), discussing the relevance of Hill Collins' (2000) Black feminist interpretation utilises the longstanding stereotypic categorisation of 'Mammy', 'Jezebel', 'Hoocha Mammy' and 'Welfare Queen' in her discussion of Black women in the welfare system. She suggests that very little has changed in the representations of African American women. In keeping with this, Wyatt (2008) writing about Black women states:

'It is not easy to see the processes of interpellation that call us into particular roles. It is, for example, difficult to penetrate the glamour of media representation of seductive women to perceive the derogatory race and class messages that they embody'

(Wyatt 2008, p. 64-65)

Wyatt (ibid) suggests that the media's denigration of Black women is nuanced, hidden and difficult to decipher. This study argues that both marginality and hyper-visibility inform the denigrating portrayals of Black women. The following section addresses these denigrated portrayals as they relate specifically to Black women who are unmarried. It will discuss how

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the literature's analysis of Black single women as mother, asexual, hypersexual and strong fuel old narratives that are contested by intersectional analysis.

Matriarchal and marginal

The question of how Black women are essentialised through discourses that both marginalise and present 'her' as hyper-visible is of central relevance to this thesis. An examination of those representations shows that there is a predisposition for the literature on Black single women to focus on their singleness predominantly as mothers and not as single women per se. This is the case with African American, African Caribbean and African Caribbean British delineations. This section will show how the nomenclatures matriarch, mammy and welfare queen as used in the literature have generated essentialist portrayals of Black single mothering. These portrayals in different and interconnected ways incorporate several accounts of the black mother on the margins of society.

Gordon's (1994) useful discussion on the issue of Black women and female headed households set Black mothers apart from other unmarried mothers in her study. When Gordon conducted her (ibid) study, she found that of the seven Black women who participated, five had children. In Gordon's view, the high proportion of single Black women that are mothers, both in Britain and America can be explained through structural constraints, economic deprivations and demographic imbalances resulting in Black men being less available for marriage.

Reynolds (1997) argues that the media has consistently promoted the idea of Black British womanhood as synonymous with single mothering. Recounting media portrayals of the Black British family as a family in crisis, Reynolds (ibid) centres the 1980s and 1990s political and social concerns over female headed households. She contends that such discussions by focussing on Black women's capabilities managed to also castigate and

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marginalise Black Caribbean British motherhood. Phoenix (1996) on the other hand points out that the marginalisation of Black motherhood is directly related to a lack of interest in understanding how the Black British family actually functions.

Attempts to make sense of the depiction of unmarried Black women as matriarchal heads connect African Caribbean and African American heritages with both pre- and post-slavery values (Hill Collins, 1986). It is claimed (Hill Collins, 1986; Johnson and Staples, 2004) that the transportation of slaves from West Africa to the Americas did not disrupt the independence that represented Black African womanhood. In addition, slavery is credited with entrenching the centrality of the Black Slave mother because during African slavery, Black women tended to stay on one plantation to produce children for labour. James and Busia (1993) claim that the important contribution of slave mothers was translated in contemporary African American communities by those African American women, who took on the responsibility to protect children who did not have parents. These women were referred to as, 'other mothers'. Such figures became a symbol of stability and permanence in traumatic oppressive circumstances (ibid). On the other hand Black women who were required to be sexually available for their slave masters were presented as sexually insatiable women who had their role to play in the slave economy. Their function was not only to work but to also produce human labour power by having children. These as well as other social processes resulted in unhelpful and discriminatory stereotypes of Black mothering such as Mammy, Matriarch and Welfare queen (Woodard and Mastin, 2005). Although these stereotypes continuingly apply to Black married women, the discussion that follows focuses specifically on how they inform the constructions of unmarried Black women.

The 'mammy' is viewed as the asexual, docile, contented, overweight, and dark-skinned slave woman who knew her lowly position in White-dominated society. They are the Black women who looked after White children and families in order to survive. The mammy

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figure is marginalised because she has little physical, economic and social credibility. Her primary function is that of meeting the needs of White society. Omalade's (1994) discussion of 'mammification' describes post-slavery interracial dynamics that position Black women in deference to White authority in much the same way that she was positioned as a slave mother; 'mammy'. Omalade (ibid) suggests that these dynamics are played out today in the workplace, where Black women still have to submit to White authority in order to survive. This is particularly evident when Black women take up those low paid employment positions which expect employees to 'serve' others, positions that have traditionally been feminised and require 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983). Woodward and Mastin (2005) note Hill Collins' (2000) claim that the image of the 'mammy' functions to normalise Black women's positions in the service industries. The 'mammy' is also a 'safe' woman permitted to participate in White spaces as she is incapable of threatening the economic, moral and social stabilities of White society because she is deemed unattractive, a-sexual and servile.

It has been argued that the 'mammy' is produced through the gendered dynamics of religious communities and serves to exhibit the moral standards of Black religious communities (Moultrie, 2011). A contemporary figure of Mammy begins to emerge in Moultrie's discussion of mostly single Black Pentecostal women's sexual identities. Moultrie (ibid) centres the production of overly spiritual and asexual Black women within a religious terrain. These women, she claims produce religious identities that are both sensitive and resistant to discourses that over sexualise Black women. One of the ways that they resist such pathological portrayals is by agreeing with and contributing to the processes that encourage sexual inactivity for unmarried church members. Like the single women in Sharma's (2008) study, these African American single women submit to public scrutiny and regulation by joining women's support groups and participating in spiritually-inclined social activities for singles (Moultrie, 2011). The figure of the mammy is resurrected in Moultrie's (2011)

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interpretations, for she emerges as a single black woman required to surrender her sexual self and to produce instead a hyper-visible and credible spiritual identity.

Whereas the ‘mammy’ represents compliance with the church’s moral and sexual codes, another type of mother is presented as expressing autonomy by being dominant and self-reliant. The ‘Matriarch,’ is the woman who has authority in her own home and who because of her overbearing dominant attitude ultimately emasculates Black men. It is this emasculation that sometimes means that her relationships with men are troubled and often results in her being alone (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). According to Hill Collins (2000) ‘mammy’ and ‘the matriarch’ are different sides of the same stereotype with the docile mammy in a White employer’s home transforming into a strong Black matriarch when she gets home. Although much of the literature focuses on African American women there is some application to the Black British context for Reynolds. Reynolds (1997) suggests that the popular portrayals of Black British women in church encompass mothering. In this British context Black women are also constructed in two ways: the Matriarch and the Mammy. Alexander (cited in Jarrett-Macauley, 1996) notes that the images of religious, mostly Pentecostal Black women with rolling eyes who look up to heaven calling out for salvation, deny the very critical and complex positions that they occupy within British Black-led churches. Alexander (ibid) dismantles such stereotypical images of Black women by sharing other narratives based on Black religious women’s interest in social community, church building initiatives etc. She presents them as intentional, proactive and complex Christians. However, whilst engaging in descriptions and discussions that challenge the stereotyping of the asexual overly religious ‘mammy’, Alexander (cited in Jarrett-Macauley, 1996), by showing these women as leaders within the Black Churches, inadvertently evokes another stereotype - that of strong Black matriarch.

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The Seventh-day Adventist Black British single woman has not been researched previously. Whilst the above discussions provide a useful, although limited, route for taking this enquiry forward, the contributions of American Seventh-day Adventist scholarship is also useful. In these contributions Black female headed households are problematised and ‘othered’. Although they acknowledge the resilience and determination of many single parents, mostly mothers, within the Black Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America, they tend to also marginalise the Black single mother as one identity that resides outside the familial ideals of the Seventh-day Adventist church. One view is that the Black American Seventh-day Adventist family is threatened by the weakening of ties between African American Seventh-day Adventist men and women. Brantley (1996) argues that the African American family was a resilient unit that survived the traumas of slavery. According to her, modernity and migration were some of the factors that contributed to the weakening of the Black family. Drawing from the work of Moynihan (which has been criticised for its racist interpretations of Black single mothers, Black men and the Black family more generally) she claims that this weakening resulted in female-headed households and disaffected African American men. Brantley (1996) maintains that the Seventh-day Adventist family is subject to the same weakening processes and recommends a survival strategy: spiritual reformation, more research on Black Seventh-day Adventist families and a rejection of the welfare mentality.

Additionally, Harris (1996) a Black Seventh-day Adventist Associate Professor in Education, surveyed 394 Seventh-day Adventist Black single parents and also identified single parenting as one of the causes of the ‘pathologies’ of Black non-Adventist and Seventh-day Adventist families. Harris (*ibid*) does however acknowledge the strengths of single Seventh-day Adventist families and notes the complexities of the identities and the experiences of single mothers but she also manages to situate them as marginal outsiders in

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her discussion. When concluding her considerations, she writes ‘*We can make a difference in the lives of single parent families*’ (Harris cited in Rock 1996, p. 148). By employing the term ‘we’ Harris (ibid) positions single parents, identified as being mostly women, as needy outsiders who have failed to secure a married identity. These women reside on the fringes of the Seventh-day Adventist church’s gendered arrangements who are in need of support and care. The pathologising of female-headed households within this Seventh-day Adventist publication illustrates common uncontested populist accounts of Black single women within religious gendered discourses.

The portrayal of Black single mothers as deficient and threatening is not just a view promoted in some Seventh-day Adventist circles but is also a view held in wider society’s narratives about responsible adulthood. Populist accounts that depict Black women as irresponsible adults, often relate to the view that they are economically dependent on the state. This portrayal is seen to be caricatured through the idea of the ‘welfare queen’ (Reynolds, 1997). Although the nomenclature ‘welfare queen’ is generally used in America to refer specifically to poor African American single mothers, Reynolds (1997) argues that Black British unmarried mothers have also been overly represented as ‘welfare queens’. This type of woman is therefore more readily described as fraudulent, irresponsible and greedy. She exists on the margins of those experiences and views that celebrate adult responsibilities, economic independence and a commitment to long-term coupling.

Gilliam’s (1999) investigation into media portrayals of the ‘welfare queen’ stereotype concludes that it is a powerful racial stereotype which locates single parenting within a discourse of poverty. The welfare queen is one depiction of single women who are poor, young and stereotyped as promiscuous and profligate breeders (Hill Collins, 2000; Alexander, cited in Jarrett-Macauley, 1996; Douglass, 1999; Hancock, 2004). Echoing Moynihan’s 1965 report on the failure of Black American families, it became an established

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popular belief in Britain that Black single mothers or ‘welfare queens’ were unable to provide the necessary parenting to nurture children, particularly sons (Hancock, 2004).

There is some indication that the pathologising and stereotyping of Black single mothers is not just a feature of contemporary Britain. Some evidence suggests that British post-war idealisations of the family resulted in immigration policies that served to fuel negative ideas about Black single mothers (Powell, 1986; Bhabba and Shutter, 1994). These policies made it very difficult for Black single mothers to bring their children to England so that they could continue their role as mothers (Powell, 1986; Bhabba and Shutter, 1994). Under the guise of protecting the child, the British government enacted the 1965 Sole Responsibility Rule, which required both parents to file for their children so that these children can immigrate to England. This resulted in single mothers facing difficulties in having to prove that they were the sole parents (Powell et al., 1994) in order to be reunited with their children. Many single mothers found, therefore, that their attempts to improve their children’s socio-economic circumstances by bringing them to Britain were often met with long delays in their cases being processed. In the meantime, they were unable to be with their children and consequently had to ‘neglect’ their mothering role. The implications of such policies had far reaching consequences on the wellbeing of parent and child, as well as other important aspects of the Black experience in Britain. Black lone mothers were marginalised through British policies and practices that idealised the British nuclear family.

Phoenix (1996) argues that only when the rates of White unmarried mothers increased within Britain did academics and Conservative politicians begin to try to make sense of the issue of lone mothers. Reynolds (1997) argues that despite the popular belief that most Black Caribbean British women are solo parents, these women are actually in long-term, non-residential relationships. Reynolds suggested that the concept of Living Apart Together (LAT) that has recently been identified for White couples is not a new phenomenon in Black

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relationships. The seeming lack of interest in understanding Black families has been attributed to the ways in which Black people continue to be marginalised within British society (Phoenix, 1996). The portrayals of the mammy, the matriarch and the ‘welfare queen’ have served as populist nomenclatures for Black women in general and also Black mothers who are not partnered. All portrayals are essentialist and negative and therefore inadequate resources for understanding Black women’s singleness. Notwithstanding, these essentialist accounts have been useful prisms for seeing Black single women as marginalised citizens.

The above stereotypes; mammy, matriarch and welfare queen provide limited and problematic scope for interrogating historical as well as contemporary portrayals of Black women. Those discourses that equate Black womanhood to pathological caricatures of mothering continue to take root in wider society. They are further entrenched by another controlling image: ‘Jezebel’ (Hill Collins, 2000; Wyatt, 2008). Although ‘Jezebel’ includes some narratives about mothering, this stereotype is a commentary that over-emphasises Black women’s sexual identities. According to Hill Collins (2000), ‘Jezebel’ eventually became the nomenclature used to vilify a supposedly sexually aggressive Black woman. Hill Collins (2000) further states that Jezebel is also known as ‘Hoochie mamma’. Apart from the identity mother, ‘hoochie mamma’ is noted as representing an excessively sexual Black woman promoted in popular culture. This promotion is described by Hill Collins (2000) as one that takes the denigration of Black women to extremes. Jezebel is the Black woman who cannot be sexually satisfied and is also subject to animalistic caricatures rooted in slavery (Chandler, 2011). Hill Collins (2000) suggests that the idea of Black women’s sexual aggressiveness is embedded in White slave masters’ justification of the rape of African enslaved women. By attributing excessive sexual tendencies to enslaved women, slave masters could deceive themselves that they were not raping these women (Chandler, 2011). Hill Collins (2000) also states that ‘Jezebel’ functioned to link Black women’s childbearing during slavery to the

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promotion of the idea that they were sexually aggressive rather than to the fact that many were systematically raped and abused.

Some (Hill Collins, 2000; Woodward and Mastin, 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009) argue that negative constructions of Black women continue to have resonance and are even embodied by Black women in multifaceted ways. Weekes (2004) for example, investigated Black British culture and music of Black origin; Hip hop and Ragga and used this to analyse young single Black, women's sexuality. She conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 girls aged between twelve and sixteen years. Weekes (2004) discusses how through listening, dancing and conversation, these young women by their close affiliation with Ragga and Hip hop music, contributed to the very images that denigrate them. By casting a critical eye at consumption practices within and around the music industry, Weekes shows how difficult it is to undermine the portrayals of Black women as hyper-sexual in British dance hall culture. Almost a decade earlier, Cooper's (1995) work challenged those who attempted to undermine Black women's sexualities. Cooper did this by rejecting the notion that Black women's sexual displays are denigrating. Focussing on Jamaican dance hall culture, she proposed that those dances that emphasise women's bottoms are really physical expressions of anti-colonial resistance. Her work was taken forward by Lewis (2004) to illustrate how Black women's sexual bodies and identities should be explicitly represented in Black women's religious discourses. Both Lewis (2004) and Cooper (1995) underscore their discussion with a reference to Black women as sexually active agents. One recent Caribbean study by Marshall and Maynard (2009) elucidates how Black Caribbean women express that agency in very different ways. Marshall and Maynard's (2009) survey of 153 women in Barbados and Jamaica, categorises a diverse range of attitudes to female sexuality in the Caribbean. Their findings indicate that women are increasingly open-minded about sex. Some women, however, feel that notions of Black women's hyper-sexualities are still current. Being aware

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of this sexual stereotyping they aim to resist and mitigate it by becoming celibate. Whilst becoming celibate might be viewed as sexual autonomy and intentionality, it can also signal a resignation to accept the lack of long-term relationship in their lives.

When singleness for Black women intersects with socio-economic status it becomes possible to liberate Black single women from the essentialist narrative of marginalisation, poverty and failure. A US study by Marsh et al., (2007) of the emerging Black middle-class indicates that seeing single Black women within narratives of motherhood is insufficient. The findings suggest that there is a decline in marriage and childbearing is changing the perceptions of Black middle-class households. There is a shift away from married couples with children towards singles living alone. Marsh et al., (2007) suggest that popular media programmes about single and childless young men and women may reflect new patterns within African American middle-class society. The statistical results show how there has been a steady increase in singleness and living alone in African American women. The authors comment that the disproportionate attention on singleness within discourses on Black poverty has resulted in this important trend being overlooked. They illustrate the fruitfulness of incorporating class into a consideration of singleness within America's Black community. Additionally acknowledging those adults who are voluntary and involuntary childfree singles, is another opportunity to extend an intersectional lens through which Black single women can be viewed.

Marginalised strong Black women

In keeping with populist accounts, academic literature has a tendency to characterise Black women as strong (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009), a description that constitutes an important background for viewing Black women's singleness. The discussion so far also highlight Black women, particularly through discussions of them as domineering

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(matriarchal), overly-sexed (Jezebels), sexual control (mammy), and sexually aggressive, as strong. The discussions suggest that these amplified identities co-exist alongside narratives that undermine Black women's identity work, exclude them from mainstream society and reinforce their marginalities. It is their marginalisations that seem to provide a context for seeing how being strong becomes an important factor in Black women's identity work.

According to Hill Collins (2000) and Wyatt (2008) these stereotypical depictions, by presenting Black women as 'other', serve to equate womanhood with Whiteness, with White women being portrayed as vulnerable and in need of protection and care and, in contrast, Black women being portrayed as strong, resilient protectors.

Other studies whilst maintaining a reading of 'strength' with regards Black single women (Edge and Rogers, 2005; Pudrovska et al., 2006; Gilchrist 2011, pp. 177-200), do also indicate that Black women are not at the mercy of hyper-visible and negative essentialist portrayals. Exploring singlehood in later life, Pudrovska et al., (2006) demonstrated how race and gender were important variables to consider when investigating the coping strategies of single adults in America. They found that Black women over the age of 65 years (single, divorced, separated or widowed) were better able to manage singleness than were Black men, White men or White women within the same age group. African American women, they suggest, have lower expectations of staying married or being happy in marriage. This, coupled with a higher ratio of African American women to African American men, made it difficult for women to find partners to marry. In addition, these Black, single women were more likely than other groups to report that they gained strength from strong support relationships, friendships and family networks. Although the Black women in this study relied on external support groups, this study does contribute to the literature that more recently address the view that Black women possess physical, emotional and spiritual strength.

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More recent contributions illustrate that strength is an important dynamic. Gilchrist's (2011) important work on African American single women discusses the differing ways that the women in her 'study' present as autonomous. By using the written reflections of PhD professors, Gilchrist (2011) illustrates the relationships between strength as academic success and financial independence, with singleness. By illuminating the specific sex ratio, pathological and other issues, Chandler (2011, pp. 201-220) also emphasises how ideals about coupling and stereotypes about 'Strong Black woman' are at large and make for a difficult involuntary single life for African American Professors with PhDs.

Black British women have also been reported to be resilient in difficult circumstances. Edge and Rogers (2005) investigated Black Caribbean women's responses to adversity and found that personal strength in the form of personal and cultural resilience informed their responses. In the work of Edge and Rogers (2005) being spiritual is defined as participation in the religious community as well as having a personal faith.

Looking specifically at distress associated with pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood, Edge and Rogers (2005) found that, despite higher levels of social risk amongst Caribbean British women, they were less likely than their white British counterparts to report depression. They drew on narratives of spirituality as a way of managing the psycho-social distress they faced as young and in many cases, single mothers. They appeared to have little interest in constructing themselves as 'not coping' and were at pains to show themselves as capable. These participants would even invoke slave narratives as 'evidence' that 'strength' and 'Black woman' were tenaciously embedded in Black Caribbean women's psyches:

'For most Black Caribbean women in this study, their identity afforded them a firm anchor to the past, which spoke powerfully of their capacity for resilience in the present'
(Edge and Rogers 2005, p. 4)

Furthermore, they saw spirituality, such as attending church and praying, as a resource on which to build their strength in legitimate ways. For these women then, spirituality was a means of making sense of their adversities. Such strategies resulted in limiting their

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intentions to access formal support. They tended to manage their difficulties within themselves or amongst their faith communities, rather than drawing on formal agencies for support. Edge and Rogers (2005) suggest that spirituality and strength are interconnecting transgenerational coping resources that Black women are able to utilise. This and similar work situates strength as critical to Black women's identity projects by emphasising its relevance to Black British women's coping strategies. By focussing on Black mothers, the study discussed above, contributes to discourses that suggest that motherhood is central to being a Black unmarried woman.

Summary

The literature illustrates the extent to which single Black women are essentialised as mothers. For the most part, Black mothers emerge through demeaning tropes of sexual excessiveness, unattractiveness, asexuality, excessive religiosity, irresponsibility and poverty. These descriptions situate Black women on the margins of racialised gendered ideals. In this chapter, the consideration of singleness in the literature demonstrates how White middle-class single women are presented as complex active agents capable of negotiating their way around marginalising discourses, while Black women emerge through the limited literature available as essentially incapable and outside gendered idealisations that are attributed to White women. They are also depicted as resilient in spite of their marginalities. In both constructions, they are presented as strong Black women. The attention to single Black women illuminates discussions of them as navigating their lives in a way that centralises specificities around the transgenerational basis of their resilience (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).

As noted in the introductory chapter, the literature available highlights religious women's agency. These studies show how women are able to utilise traditional gendered

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prescriptions as the basis of secure agentic identities. What is novel in the literature on Black women in religious spaces is the way that the image of the strong Black woman is one recognisable underpinning feature of Black religious women's agency. It is within this frame that the literature review has examined spirituality as another identity that intersects with and centralises strength as an important resource for Black women. Black women appear in the literature to procure and extend their religious identities by being strong. However, the complex interrelationships between strength, religiosity and spirituality are unexamined features of single Black British women's religious identities.

This literature review provides a starting point for justifying the use of a theoretical approach that can provide a much needed broadening of the discussions of Black women's identities. The intersectional reading of singleness presented in this thesis brings together some aspects of Black single women's intersectional identities and lays a foundation for analysing and theorising Black British single Seventh-day Adventist women as negotiators of other unknown multifarious identities. In this vein the discussion which informs the empirical chapters provides one affirmative response to Sojourner's question/statement (Ain't I a woman) because it engages in the task of broadening the landscape through which singleness can be interrogated.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

1. Introduction

Given the dearth of literature on Black single Seventh Day Adventist women, this study aims to investigate their views on being single. It covers two broad areas of interest. Firstly, I am interested in what single Seventh-day Adventist women see as the key features of their singleness, and, secondly, I am interested in exploring Black single women's perceptions of their singleness as it intersects with their gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs and identity. This chapter will first detail the research question, outline and discuss the study's methodology and provide a rationale for the methodology and the methods that were employed. The chapter will also discuss some of the ethical challenges that I faced.

The two research questions that this thesis will consider are:

- 1) What do single Seventh-day Adventist women identify as the key issues surrounding their singleness?
- 2) How do Black single Seventh-day Adventist women experience their singleness as a racialised, religious gendered identity?

Altogether seventy-nine women participated in this study. The initial phase; the focus group, included the views of 3 men.

2. Research Design

This investigation employed an iterative research process based on four separate research episodes: focus groups; questionnaires; writing workshop and in-depth interviews.

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In broad terms, this study has adopted an iterative multi-dimensional methodology. Whilst there is ongoing debate about what constitutes a mixed method strategy (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007; Morse and Niehaus, 2009), it is an approach that is generally viewed as a useful alternative to either qualitative or quantitative research since it frequently combines both.

There is a growing interest in mixed methods (Brannen 2005; Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2011; Harrits, 2011; Teddlie and Fen Yu, 2007) as a pragmatic approach to research, sometimes referred to as the third paradigm (Dures et al., 2010). The general view is that this approach helps the researcher to enhance the validity and credibility of their findings by bringing different perspectives to the same issue as well as attempting to capture the complex and often sensitive nature of social realities (Jehn and Jonsen, 2010). Combining methods is, however, complex and challenging (Brannen, 2005; Bryman, 2007; Harrits, 2011).

In general mixed methods advocates define this approach in the strictest sense as a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies but there is acknowledgment that mixed methods research can also mean the inclusion of various research instruments within one paradigm. There can, for example, be a 'qualitative mixed method design' (Morse and Niehaus, 2009). I take my lead from this description by using, in the main, different qualitative methods in this to research. This study employed a qualitative approach across all four elements of the study, producing accounts from the participants themselves and on key issues for single Seventh-day Adventist women. In addition, it did also, to a limited degree, draw on mixed methods in the generally accepted sense of the term by supplementing the qualitative research design ('a focus group' discussion, written narratives, open questions in the questionnaire and in-depth interviews) with a questionnaire in order to identify the key issues for a broader range of single Seventh-day Adventists. The design was sequential in that the analysis of the focus group session influenced the content of

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the questionnaire and the questionnaire analysis influenced the data collecting method in the writing workshop and so on. In other words, each research sequence called for richer and thicker qualitative data.

My original intention was to investigate singleness for Seventh-day Adventists in general. And so I had begun the investigation with the question ‘what do single Seventh-day Adventists identify as the key issues pertaining to their single identities?’ This intention changed due to the fact that most of those who agreed to take part in the initial stages of the research turned out to be Black Seventh-day Adventist women of Caribbean heritage. Because of my own experience and observations as a Seventh-day Adventist member, this was not really surprising to me. This finding eventually led to the decision to focus primarily on singleness for Black British single Seventh-day Adventist women after seeing the numbers of Black women participating. The final stage of this investigation; ten in-depth interviews with Black women gives attention to some of the ways contributors’ gender, race and religious affiliation, intersect with their single identity. Table 3.1 below summarises the four methods used, the number of participants who took part in them and the aim of each method.

METHOD	PARTICIPANTS	AIM
1 - Pilot study Qualitative Data Spring 2004	One focus group Attended by twelve Black adults (3 men and 9 women) They were invited through the church's national newsletter.	Focus group of single Seventh-day Adventist men and women). Open ended discussion of key issues for single Seventh-day Adventists (men and women)
2 - Questionnaire Quantitative Qualitative Data Summer 2004	Fifty-three questionnaires were returned from single Seventh-day Adventist women. Forty identified as Caribbean four as African five did not declare and Four identified as other. They were recruited by open invitation at the welcome and introduction of a conference for single Seventh-day Adventists.	Identification of the key issues for single Seventh-day Adventist women. Women's short descriptive written narratives on the main issues on singleness for them.
3 - Written narratives Qualitative Data Autumn 2004	Seven single Seventh-day Adventist women Recruited by open invitation through a national church circular. All were Black African or Caribbean descent.	Women's personal, reflective and written narratives on the main issues on singleness for single Seventh-day Adventist women
4 - In-depth interviews Qualitative Data Autumn/Winter 2013	Ten Seventh-day Adventist women of African Caribbean descent. They were recruited through snowballing.	Detailed oral, personal narratives about women's views, feelings and experiences on: Key issues on singleness for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women. How their gender, race and religious affiliation intersect with their single identity.

Table 3.1 A summary of the four research methods used

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The employment of an iterative process gave this research an ongoing responsive flexibility which facilitated the improvement and refining of its data collecting methods (Edelson, 2002). The iterative process adopted had both planned and responsive features where the first two research sequences were planned and the last two were developed after initial analysis. I had made an earlier decision to take a flexible approach to data collection if I felt that it was necessary for securing more in-depth understanding. One of the thorny issues that relate to mixed methods surrounds how different ontological positions and epistemologies or differing affiliations around particular research methods can negatively impact on analytical integration (Morse and Niehaus, 2009). Bryman (2007) found that the twenty mixed methods researchers who took part in his investigation were not clear on how best to integrate mixed methods data analytically. His study highlighted that there was a general tendency to keep the qualitative and quantitative research approaches separate and to give greater credence to one approach over the other in the reporting of findings. His study does show that the matter of integrating different approaches continues to be raised. Although the research approach is in the main qualitative, the task of integrating the data from the different research sequences in this study did require careful consideration and implementation. Taking a lead from recent discussions on improving rigour within mixed methods research (Harrits, 2011; Bryman, 2007, Jehn and Jonsen, 2010); I have identified points of integration across the methods. There are two levels of integration: namely, the sequence of research events and the evolving focus of the research. Figure 3.1 below shows how in level 1, integration takes place from one research sequence to another (top down) and in level 2, from one data set to another (top down). The arrows going across show the relationship between the research sequence and the focus of each research sequence. The study was predominantly qualitative and the epistemological and ontological bases of the project were kept consistent.

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Level 1 - Integrating modes of enquiry

Level 2 - Integrating themes

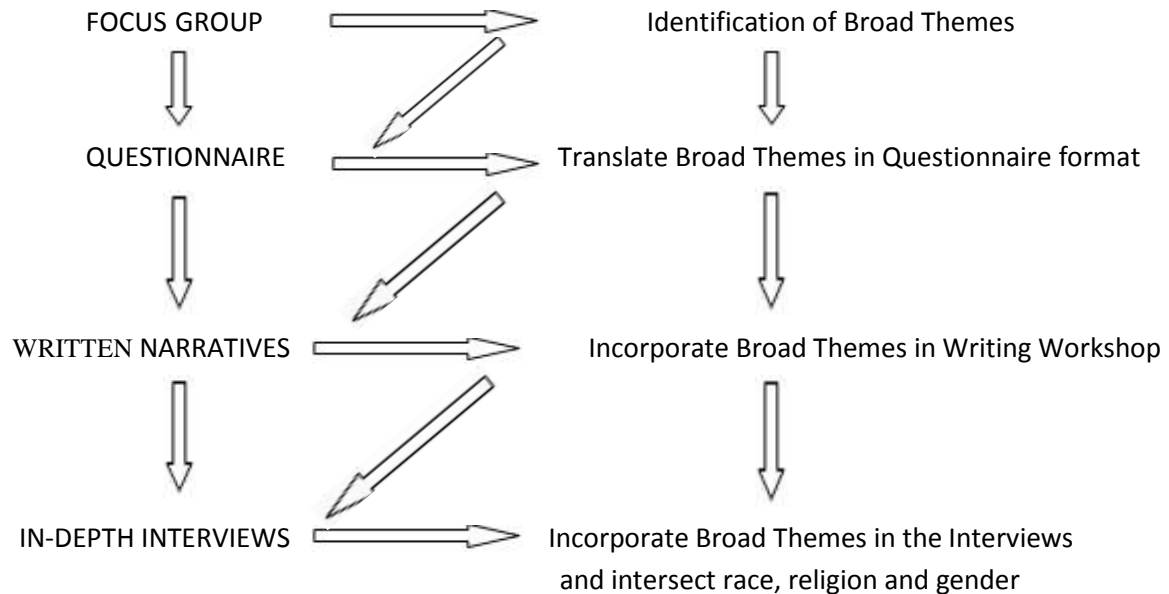


Fig. 3.1 Levels of Integration

2(a) Ontology and Epistemology

Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) succinctly connect the relationships between ontology, epistemology and methodology when they discuss the key concerns that should govern researcher's selection of one approach over another;

Researchers should begin their inquiry process with philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), how they know what is known (epistemology), the inclusion of their values (axiology), the nature in which their research emerges (methodology)[.]

(Tashakkori and Creswell 2007, p. 238)

The ontological assumption underpinning this study on Black single Seventh-day Adventist women recognises the existence of inequities as a central aspect of social realities and employs an intersectional lens in recognition of this. Intersectional analysis extends and complicates ontological assumptions by foregrounding rich and complex ontology (Phoenix

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and Pattynama 2006, p. 187). Walby et al. (2012) acknowledge the epistemological difficulties that arise in an acceptance of a very complex social reality and attempt by an application of both critical realism and complexity theory to extend conceptual and theoretical discussion on intersectionality and to provide new opportunities for working with complex relationships between intersectional identities and complex social realities. By drawing from the principles of Intersectionality in general as a heuristic device, this study has centralised the viewpoints of single Seventh-day Adventist women. This study has also taken note of Crenshaw's (2011b) recent caution that as intersectional discussions take place on the international stage, it is still important to maintain the original intersectional impetus of bringing the complex marginalised lives of Black women into view. Her caution is a reminder that minority voices must not be lost through new applications of intersectional analysis. Solórzano and Yasso (2002) in recognition of the insights provided by intersectional analysis argue in their discussion of critical race theory that the marginalisation of Black peoples' voices relates to those intercentricities; the multiple layering of oppressions, that silence minorities. This study notes the existence of multiple narratives that inform our interpretations and so is aware that research participants are contradictory story tellers, whose accounts are partly true and false (Trzebiatowska, 2013).

Critical race theory and intersectionality, by contrast, place emphasis on the new perspectives that become available when invisible groups become central participators in knowledge production. By making the case for critical race methodology, Solórzano and Yasso (2002) offer counter-storytelling as an important source of alternative theorising. Taking a lead from critical epistemologies (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006), this study argues that the voices of marginalised people can challenge the status quo and so it follows that the alternative insights that they provide are valuable. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) suggest that when the voices of the marginalised are central to the investigation, they offer a

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fuller narrative. Furthermore, using their voice to name their oppression is also the first step on the road to justice (ibid, p. 58).

2(b) Positionality

I took the opportunity to establish myself as the Singles Ministry coordinator for Seventh-day Adventists living in and around the South of England to gain access to samples that would otherwise have been inaccessible. After deciding that I wanted to look into the issue of singleness, I felt I wanted simultaneously to raise its profile. There was very little formal focus on single Seventh-day Adventists at that time despite the fact that the church was organised into different ministries. I set up a meeting with a coordinator of ‘Family Life Ministries’ of the South England Conference to discuss the feasibility of working together to bring Seventh-day Adventist single women and men together in a range of social events to socialise, discuss singleness as well as to provide a route for advancing my research interest. The idea was well received and I was able to access support to facilitate the delivery of different social events with the formal title of ‘Singles Ministry coordinator’ for the South England Conference. I was therefore able to provide a social space for singles and to conduct different phases of the research within my Singles Ministry. This responsibility posed a series of opportunities and complexities pertaining to my ‘insider’ status as a Black Seventh-day Adventist woman who was at that time also unmarried. My insider and outsider status was simultaneously and complexly experienced. Couture et al., (2012) suggest that;

[T]aking an intersectional approach recognizes that we never just have one identity and thus allow us to appreciate how our identities make it possible for us to be an insider and outsider simultaneously.

The following section details the research process undertaken and the rationale for that process.

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3. The stages of data collection

3(a) Focus group

A conversational process based on the focus group or group interview (Bryman, 2001) format was employed at the first stage of the study. It was conducted in this ‘pre-pilot’ phase in order to identify the breadth of issues on singleness which participants collectively felt should drive the content of this research investigation. As there was very little information on single Seventh-day Adventists, I felt the focus group was an efficient and effective starting point for mapping out some important themes. The single Seventh-day Adventists who took part represented ‘expert’ positions for informing the content of the next stage of the investigation.

The focus group is a non-directive group interview where rich collective descriptions capable of advancing understanding of a particular issue, can be achieved (Kroll et al., 2007). This collective view from focus group participants was to be the first crucial stage for refining the focus and content of the study. I sent out an invitation through a national Seventh-day Adventist circular. At this initial exploratory stage, I was interested in making some cross-gender comparisons on singleness so both men and women were invited. The session was held at a church café near London. Twelve people (3 men and 9 women) attended. All participants were Black adults who confirmed that they were members of Seventh-day Adventist churches (I did not request information on specific characteristics such as ethnicity, age, etc.). There were three small groups each comprising one man and three women.

After a general introduction to the participants and some information about my role as the ‘Singles Ministry coordinator’ and its aim to raise the profile of singles’ issues in the church community and provide networking/discussion events for singles, I outlined my

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exploratory interest in the subject of singleness and Adventism. I then asked their permission to use the information that would emerge from the evening's session to direct the focus of this exploratory research. I had to have an alternative strategy in the likelihood that attendees rejected the idea. The plan was to go ahead with the discussion as planned and set up another session which would advertise for participants to attend a focus group discussion as a research activity. I was able to take the session forward by emphasising their right to opt-out at any time. Because achieving informed consent is a process that is continually revisited through the specific dynamics of the research process (Sin, 2005; King and Horrocks, 2010), emphasising participants' ongoing right to opt-out was critical. The opening and only question was introduced: "*What do you think are the key issues for single Seventh-day Adventists?*"⁵ The conversation began with this one question and participants comprising the three groups were invited to discuss this question and then change groups after 25 minutes, guided by the rule that in order to have the groups balanced with respect to gender, there should be one man in each group. I adopted the role of a 'neutral' facilitator in the plenary session. In order to give priority to participants' views, I asked clarifying questions to enhance the co-construction of meaning (Madriz, 2003; Wilkinson, 2004) so as to assist the production of a combined group summary conclusion and not on any initial interpretations that I might have had. I posed questions and prompted them to engage in a plenary discussion. I began for example by stating; "*I am sure that you have talked about many interesting issues in your group but in this plenary session, I am wanting you to come up with the areas that you think I should be tackling in a research project on single Seventh-day Adventists*". I was mindful of some of the complications and contradictions in trying to stand outside the research process (Couture, 2012). My adoption of a 'neutral' stance at this stage

⁵ This question was informed by Kristin Aune's study on *Single Women; A Challenge to the Church* 2002.

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of the session was designed to neutralise one aspect of my intersectional identity; my ‘insider status’.

I recorded the responses in note form. It was important that all were given the opportunity to speak, in order to promote greater coverage of issues across the breadth of the groups’ views and so I constantly invited all members to add, agree or disagree with the group summary. After thirty-five to forty minutes of discussion for the most part amongst themselves, the group finally established the main issues that they felt were critical for further investigation. The atmosphere was positive and some participants attributed this, to the feeling that they had made a significant contribution to the research process.

It is clear that the procedures that were undertaken in the conversation episode did not meet the traditional standards for managing a focus group. Traditionally, a focus group would require the ongoing facilitation of the moderator (Kroll et al., 2007). The moderator often follows a prepared schema to manage the timing and focus of the discussion. Furthermore, the moderator is expected to listen intently to responses and to employ constant prompting to ensure that participants stay on track (Hoyle et al., 2002; Munday, 2006). This was more the pattern of the second part of the discussion, but the first part was not facilitated or recorded.

3(b) Rationale for using the focus group as a research method

Focus groups can provide useful information for situating exploratory research in uncharted areas as well as identifying new research questions. Focus groups have been popular for some time and have a long history in market research. They have gained popularity because they are cost-effective, flexible and offer quick results (Fontana and Frey, 1994; Kroll et al., 2007). The decision to use a variation of a focus group format for the first phase in this study was influenced by literature that argues that collective meaning or ‘co-constructed meaning’ (Wilkinson, 2004) can be accessed through group discussions

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(Munday, 2006). In other words collective meaning is more likely to be voiced through interactions that promote group cohesiveness (Stewart et al., 2007). As people talk and exchange, their views and opinions are sometimes refined and sharpened (Pollack, 2003; Madriz cited in Pollack, 2003). Although traditionally the terrain for market research, the social sciences have for some time viewed focus groups as valuable tools for conducting a range of investigations (Stewart et al., 2007). I decided to use the focus group discussion format with the intention of maximising the identification of key issues by drawing on the views of Seventh-day Adventist participants who identified as single. In addition, in view of the marginalisation that singles experience, it was important that the views of marginalised adults should launch the content of this investigative research. Some feminist researchers argue that methods of enquiry should utilise everyday modes of communication to elicit information and the focus group is one such naturalistic method (Wilkinson, 2004). The benefits for marginalised focus group participants is the increased opportunity for them to shift their understanding of their marginality as an individual experience to a consciousness that their marginality is also collective, thereby enhancing solidarity amongst the group (Madriz, 2001; Wilkinson, 2004). The positive energy that focus group participants shared is probably due to the fact that they had engendered a sense of solidarity through their exchanges.

3(c) Difficulties with using a focus group as an initial investigative tool

There is a high probability that the themes emerging reflect the views of only those singles good at conversing, thus possibly limiting the breadth of opinions expressed (Gibbs, 1997). Focus groups are criticised for eliciting data which does not capture all views because they are sometimes consensual in nature and hides the interplay of dominant voices as well as making dissent invisible (Stokes and Bergin, 2006). The mixed gender groups for the initial

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discussion, therefore raises important questions about power relations and who speaks (Carli and Linda, 1999; Stewart et al., 2007). There were only three men who attended and the rule that each small group discussion should include one man meant that for this stage at least, contributions from men were limited. It is possible that the men may have felt intimidated because they were outnumbered, but men often exercise disproportionate power in groups and get more attention for their views. Since I took no part in the small group discussions, I do not know whether either of these possibilities pertained. I did not follow the advice that focus group participants should be carefully selected (King and Horrocks, 2010) because I wanted to engender a sense of naturalness in order to meet the socialising intentions of the participants and useful 'directions' for this research.

Apart from a final written list of key issues for further consideration, the focus group session was not audio recorded. I reasoned that as the plenary session was the space where key themes were agreed, it was not necessary to use any other data-gathering instrument over and above my skill at discussing and clarifying initial themes. I did not take any of the written notes that they had made because their notes had served the purpose of reminding them of what they had covered in the small group discussion as well as a basis for negotiating key themes in the plenary. The aim of this stage of the exploration had been achieved; important themes had been identified, discussed and agreed.

Participants did not raise sexual issues as something that should be considered as a key issue for singles. It is important to acknowledge how the religious discourse that typifies sex for unmarried people as sin (Sharma, 2008; Moultrie, 2011) and sex for married people as private, would serve to minimise the likelihood of sex being discussed in the open, particularly in a mixed gender group.

The issue of parenting did not surface either. There was no indication in the exchanges that came up in this plenary that it had been addressed in the small group

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discussions either. It is possible that participants may have downplayed any identities, such as single mother (or father) that could have threatened their ability to attract someone they may have been interested in. The promotion of a space where two different interests (bringing singles together to network and conducting a research activity) collide, underpins many of the dilemmas that I encountered.

In addition, unlike the matter with sexual issues, I did not insert a direct question on parenting in any of the subsequent research sequences. Questions on attitude of family members, provided some opportunity for participants to comment on their children and in so doing raise the matter of single parenting. It was eventually agreed by all participants that the following four issues were important to research: personal development; attitudes of family; attitudes of friends; vulnerability and loneliness.

3(d) The Questionnaire

The questionnaire (See Appendix 1) was the second part of the research and was designed to shed light on what participants had to say about the key issues identified by the participants in the focus group. The questions attempted to establish how important were the key issues? What were the perceived experiences and views about these issues? What additional key issues did the respondents feel should be included for further research? As sexual issues had not been included in the focus group, but issues of singleness and celibacy are reported in Christian literature to be significant but relatively unexplored, questionnaire respondents were also asked about the issue of sex. The questionnaire was chosen as the best available, confidential and efficient research instrument in which to elicit data that would give general information about important issues for singles. It began with a quantitative general ranking question, with Likert scales offering participants a five-point choice. Respondents were asked to rank the main themes; loneliness, vulnerability, attitudes of

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family, attitudes of friends and personal development. This ranking question was placed at the start to familiarise respondents with the themes that they would be asked to give more detailed responses to further on in the questionnaire. The questionnaire then moved into some open-ended questions aimed at unpacking the ranking responses as well as more in-depth responses on key sexual issues. All of these open questions reflected the intention to achieve participant-directed responses. A suite of closed questions, aimed at identifying characteristics such as age and gender, were placed at the end of the questionnaire.

3(e) Piloting the questionnaire

The pilot phase of research is a valuable tool for anticipating any difficulties with conducting the proposed investigation. It gives information on the relevance of questions to the overall aim of the study, the appropriateness of methods as well as the logistical issues that emanate from conducting the investigation (Drever, 1995; Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001).

A pilot questionnaire was distributed to investigate respondents' experiences of the questionnaire rather than their answers. I made the decision not to analyse these answers but to focus on feedback relating to their experience of completing it. The pilot questionnaire was distributed to eight volunteers at different times to help me to improve the questions, their sequencing and experience of answering questions. The pilot sample consisted of two men and six women; seven were between the ages of 18-30 and one between the ages of 31-40. Six were White Europeans (five women and one man); one (a woman) of mixed ethnicity (African and European) and one man described himself as Black. They were identified through snowballing. All volunteers were single adults attending the same local church of which I was not a member.

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The pilot questionnaire contained a suite of closed and open questions directly reflecting the key issues that emerged in the focus group. The questionnaires were collected from each volunteer face-to-face and verbal feedback was requested. The feedback confirmed that all participants found the schedule accessible and easy to follow. Feedback from two candidates requested that more clarification be given on the questionnaire's use of 'issue'⁶ (for example; what *do you consider are the key issues that single women face?*). I responded to this feedback by making sure to explain this term to respondents in the actual study prior to them filling out the questionnaire as well as adding an explanation of what is meant by the term 'key issue' to the questionnaire.

The piloting of the questionnaire reflects the study's original intent to focus on single Seventh-day Adventists in general. The participants at the piloting phase were men and women, mostly men and mostly White. It is unlikely that these social characteristics significantly undermined the usefulness of the feedback regarding sequencing or the questionnaire data, as their responses were not included. The revised questionnaire schedule was distributed to volunteers at a conference that I had organised for single Adventist adults.

3(f) The final questionnaire

The questionnaires were distributed in a large room that was set aside as the research space and took place in the afternoon session of the singles conference I had organised. Around 100 people attended and, of the 85 adults (14 men and 71 women), who requested a questionnaire, 53 were returned by women. In order to address the research question's focus on the views of women, the seven questionnaires that were returned by men are not included in the findings. Table 3.2 below shows some social characteristics of the participants.

⁶ 'The use of the term 'issue' was influenced by Aune's usage in her study *'Single women in the church 2002'*. In the questionnaire to SDA adults the term 'issue' was used to denote views and experiences that were negative, positive or neutral.

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Marital Status		Ethnicity		Employment		Age Groups		Disability	
Single	33 (62.3%)	African	4 (7.5%)	Employed	42 (79%)	18-30	4 (7.5%)	YES	2 (4%)
Divorced	12 (22.6%)	Caribbean	40 (75.5%)	Unemployed	3 (6%)	31-50	39 (73.5%)	NO	51 (96%)
Separated	3 (5.7%)	Other	4 (7.5%)	Other	4 (7.5%)	50+	5 (9.5%)	No Resp.	0 (0%)
Widowed	1 (1.9%)	No Response	5 (9.5%)	No Response	4 (7.5%)	No Response	5 (9.5%)		
No Response	4 (7.5%)								

Table 3.2 Social characteristics of questionnaire participants

The sampling process used was non-probability sampling. This type of sampling, allows the researcher to select unique cases that are normally difficult to reach rather than focusing on representativeness (Neuman 2000, p. 198). All respondents self-selected by responding to an advertisement in a Seventh-day Adventist periodical: *'The Messenger'* (See Appendix 2). Their attendance at the conference was secured through booking a place with the conference administration team.

The distribution of the questionnaire took place in the main conference hall during the afternoon at a slot in the day specifically identified as the research space. All attendees were notified at the start of the proceedings that there would be a research activity later that day. Once all volunteers were settled, I invited them to fill out the questionnaires after reiterating the purpose of the research; I asked if there were any questions, and stated that, *"I am available to answer any clarification questions"*. No one asked for clarification. I also

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explained that the questionnaire's use of the term '*issues*' was a neutral term that was not denoting negative or positive features. I encouraged all participants to work silently and independently and to avoid discussing their views and responses. Based on information from the feedback from piloting, 45 minutes were allocated for this. The research activity was completed within 50 minutes.

3(g) Rationale for using questionnaires

Questionnaires are normally viewed as useful and efficient quantitative data collecting instruments (Parker and Dewey, 2000; McDowell et al., 2007). Although viewed as part of the traditional quantitative data collecting procedure, it is seen by some feminists as a valuable tool for identifying oppressive practices. As one example of mixed methods, the questionnaire, when used in conjunction with qualitative methods can help to provide crucial data on some aspects of social life (Tashakkori et al., 2012).

The questionnaire provided me with an opportunity to access confidential and more detailed information on the main issues that had been previously identified by focus group participants. Although the depth of information it provided was limited, respondents were able to give some useful indication as to the strength of their views on some of the main issues that they were being asked to reflect on. These issues were followed up by written narratives and in-depth interviews.

3(h) Difficulties with using questionnaires

Securing a good response rate presented me with challenges. Both Fincham (2008) and Nulty (2008), looking at response rates within educational settings, present them as an aspect of a 'contained' environment and with a 'captured audience'. This provided some context for me to evaluate the level of responses that I received from the singles conference; a

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‘contained space’ with a ‘captured audience’ as it were. Nulty (2008) suggests that a good return rate is generally considered to be between 50 and 75 percent. The need to obtain a ‘good’ return rate meant ‘containing’ volunteers in the pre-allocated space for the distribution, filling out and returning of the questionnaires. There were ushers in attendance responsible for circulating in the hall and collecting ‘completed’ questionnaires. As there were 71 women who filled out questionnaires and 53 were returned, there was a response rate of about 75%. Furthermore when mapping the responses to the questionnaire I faced the difficulty of participants responding to some and not all questions. Closer scrutiny revealed that the completion rate is approximately 80% for both open and closed questions. It is well documented that low completion rates result in unfavorable bias in the data. I included all questionnaires, particularly as the ‘incomplete rate’ was reasonably low.

Researchers have a responsibility to consider both ‘order’ and ‘sequencing effects’ (Hoyle et al., 2002, pp. 140-142) particularly as this can lead to incomplete questionnaires. The piloting of the questionnaire indicated that the sequencing of questions was reasonable and the meanings comprehensible. The patterns of responses suggest that the ranking question provided a context in which respondents felt less inclined to respond to the following suite of qualitative questions which asked for more in-depth considerations. It is reasonable to assume that for some respondents the ranking question with responses to one or two open questions provided sufficient scope to express their perception of singleness. Careful consideration of participants’ responses indicated that it is also reasonable to infer that respondents preferred to maintain ‘silence’ over what they perceived to be some of the sensitive aspects of the questionnaire (Neuman 2000, p. 266). There was no suggestion that any questions were mandatory but all participants were encouraged to complete all questions in the questionnaire.

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Some researchers agree that, with the exception of making questionnaires mandatory in some ways, a way to increase response rates is by providing incentives (Yu and Cooper, 1983). In one sense the fact that respondents were also attendees to the conference for singles that culminated in an evening concert provided an indirect incentive for them to stay and participate in the research. I am unable to ascertain the extent to which this incentive actually impacted on the response rate.

My assumption that respondents had the ability to write legibly and clearly in limited spaces may have affected the completion rates in that those who struggled to write may have written little. However, the limited space available for responding to the open questions signalled to participants that brief summaries were sufficient and this indication should have hopefully reduced any anxiety about producing lengthy responses. The limited space allotted to each open question resulted in some respondents writing outside the space to complete what they wanted to say. This observation along with the range of contributions suggested that another session would enable singles to write more freely and for me to gather more in-depth material for analysis. The writing workshop was set up to produce more detailed data on the issues of singleness.

3(i) Written narratives

The writing workshop was the third in the sequence of research activities and aimed to provide more in-depth data on what participants chose to present as key issues for them as single people. It was also set up to find out whether the themes identified in the questionnaire were repeated in this other context. Finally, it provided a space where more in-depth written accounts of singleness could be included.

The respondents were men and women who looked to me to be between 25 and 60 years old. All were of Black African or African Caribbean descent. They were a non-

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probability, purposive sample, as participants self-selected by responding to an advertisement which was circulated through London and London's surrounding Seventh-day Adventist churches (See Appendix 3).

The day's event began with general introductions and outline of activities for the day. This was to include a general seminar in the morning followed by writing space that would also double up as a research activity in the afternoon. The seminar considered the fact that vulnerability, loneliness, attitudes of family/friends, personal development and sexual issues were identified as important issues. The attendees (14 women and 5 men) were invited to discuss any of the above as well as any other issues that they felt were important in random small groups.

The instruction for the research space in the afternoon was stated clearly and simply; "*Write about any aspect of singleness that you think is important*". Participants were invited to leave their written pieces at the front of the room if they so wished. Women were asked to leave their scripts on one side and men on the other. Of the 19 people who attended, eight submitted written scripts; six of them were women.

I received a poem by email from a single woman who was not able to attend the '*writing workshop*', not long after this event. She indicated that we had met previously; I remembered her as a Black woman in her early to mid-thirties. I did ask her to confirm during our one and only follow up conversation, whether or not she objected to me using her piece as part of the research and she gave her verbal consent and promised to secure this consent by email which she did not. I am, however, using this piece because in sending me the poem she strongly indicated that she wanted her views to go public and did not mind the poem being used as a part of the research. Although this account did not arise under the same conditions as the other six, it is a rich piece of data. The six women who contributed pieces in the

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workshop and the ‘poet’s’ contribution brings the total to seven women who provided 11 written pieces.

3(j) Rationale for using written narratives

The limits of the focus group and the questionnaire were partly addressed in the production of written narratives for the research investigation. The questionnaire had limited space for responses and the writing activity created an opportunity for respondents to have an extended time to write about any aspect of singleness that they chose, thus achieving deeper insight into the issue of singleness. The use of written scripts for research is normally employed to furnish the research with in-depth rich data about the internal world of the writer. It sheds some light on how writers interpret and reconstruct their inner and outer worlds. Individual written pieces can also provide invaluable and sometimes uninterrupted accounts of experiences (Cortazzi, 2002). The study of personal narratives is of interdisciplinary interest (Keats, 2009) as a process for illuminating the complex inner and outer world of the individual (ibid). Although some argue that narratives that are in written form are frozen texts and as such lose their value (Allen, 2007), critical epistemologies suggest that the narratives of marginal groups take on significant importance as a resource for providing alternative and useful accounts of their marginalities (Delgado, 1989; Harding, 1986).

3(k) Difficulties with using written narratives

The fact that the poem was unsolicited and submitted after the writing exercise/event and was not subject to the same processes of co-construction to which the other writers were subjected, makes the poem a different kind of account from the other written texts. It is

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included in the thesis, however, because it reflects the unpredictable and differentiated nature of real-life social processes and it is therefore a valuable contribution because of this.

I also faced the dilemma that the rest of the written pieces, as is the case with the questionnaires administered at the '*Making it Real*' conference, were constructed after some morning discussions and that these discussions were fueled by the introduction of the key themes that emerged from an analysis of the questionnaire data. The individual written submissions therefore have to be understood to have been produced in the context of the prior group discussions and as influenced by my simultaneous positioning as researcher and Singles ministry coordinator.

The participants expressed themselves differently, with some writing in poetic style around one theme and other producing eclectic accounts briefly covering a variety of themes. I was able to maintain levels of consistency in the analysis by having a flexible measurement for unit of analysis (see pages 32 & 33). With the exception of the poem, written narratives were very short pieces that provided invaluable data for this research. The depth of information made available suggested that there was so much more to discover.

3(1) In-depth interviews

In keeping with the iterative design of this investigation, I conducted semi-structured interviews with single women to address issues raised in the written accounts. It became clear that interviews had to be conducted in order to stimulate richer data. The data elicited from the focus group, questionnaires and written narratives assisted in the identification of key issues and the analysis of the data elicited from the above research activities gave direction to the semi-structured questions for the interviews. So as loneliness emerged as a key difficulty for participants and was strongly represented in the data from questionnaires and written narratives, this was introduced into the interview by using the following question to probe its

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racialised, gendered and religious components: *What do you think are the loneliness issues for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women?* The in-depth interviews facilitated an intersectional understanding of singleness, as a racialised religious and gendered identity (see Interview schedule – Appendix 4).

The interviewees were identified primarily through the process of snowballing. I approached one Black British Caribbean Seventh-day Adventist woman whom I knew and asked if I could interview her. She was willing to notify others, and these then notified others. I also requested through an email (that I followed up with a phone call) to one popular singles network that my request for interviewees be circulated. All ten interviewees were Black British Seventh-day Adventist women aged between 35 and 60. Participants identified as Black British (all were born in England, except one who was born in the Caribbean). Two of the ten are divorced women and the other eight have never been married. One ‘never married’ interviewee indicated that she had just started dating. Two never married women and two divorced women had children. Six never married did not have any children (See Appendix 5). I made the decision to work with the first ten unmarried women who were willing to be interviewed. With the exception of one woman who had sent word after I had met my quota of ten, that she wanted to be involved, no volunteers were ‘rejected’. One of these ten contributed to the pilot interview. All interviews, apart from one, were conducted face-to-face. Interviewees were women that I had seen and had differing levels of contact with as a result of my presence at various church events over the years. Reynolds (2004, p. 89) notes in her study on women alone, that she was acquainted at different levels with the women she interviewed and that in some traditions this would be seen to be hampering objectivity in interviewing procedures and reporting the findings. She agrees with those feminists such as Oakley (1981 cited in Reynolds, 2004), who contends that such arguments reflect malestream approaches that do not reflect the complexities of interviews.

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All interviewees were from the London area and its environs. I did not focus on differences in social characteristics. As in the research by Reynolds (2004), my aim was not to emphasise such differences, but to focus instead on similarities between the women in terms of gender, religion, ethnicity and marital status. My insider experience and assumptions were a reference point for me and it was my personal understanding of some of the stigma and taboo issues associated with single Seventh-day Adventist women that led me to use a snowballing technique in order to access women who met the selection criteria and who really wanted to contribute to this research.

The semi-structured questions that directed the interview reflected an intention to find out how Black single Seventh-day Adventist women experience their singleness as a racialised, religious and gendered identity. Although Glassner and Loughlin (1987) would argue that a pilot interview was not necessary as an aspect of qualitative interviews, I did conduct one with the interviewee who I had initially approached. Her feedback was invaluable and helped me to consider how best I should pace the interview given the sensitivity of some of the issues. I realised after the pilot that there was potential for the experience to be quite distressing and introduced this possibility at the beginning of all subsequent interviews. I did decide to review the first question; *“what do you think about the issue of singleness for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women?”* I replaced this question with *“how would you describe yourself”*. This change gave participants the option to present a positive self-evaluation. It was a very important shift in questioning, particularly in light of the intensely painful and difficult contributions most of them went on to give. As there was no other significant shift in the sequencing and content of questions, I decided, with this pilot interviewee’s permission, to include this pilot interview as one of the ten interviews. It was important that the interviews be conducted in a space which interviewees felt comfortable to be interviewed, and so interviews took place in their homes, in church counselling spaces and

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for one woman, on the phone. Having a safe space to talk increased the probability of gaining authentic and ‘thick’ material for analysis.

All interviews were preceded by a telephone discussion where I talked through with participants the thrust of the research and the confidential way that it would be conducted. I kept the whole process as uncomplicated as I could, so there were no documents distributed to participants before interviews. I take the view that the level of responsiveness, exchange and dynamism was enhanced because of this.

As stated previously, the interview began with two interconnected self-description introductory questions which then eased participants into questions that prompted responses on the general circumstances of their singleness, and then more specifically about their racialised religious understanding of their singleness. The semi-structured questions gave me sufficient room to maneuver around the questions in a way that maintained an appropriate flow and clear focus to the exchange. As a way of emphasising their central place in the research process, the final question invited interviewees to ask any question they wanted to add, to clarify, to retract or to develop. All interviews were transcribed and transcripts were sent to participants for their authorisation and comment (See Appendix 6). Participants expressed appreciation of seeing their contributions in print. Two women specifically requested the removal of personal and sensitive content that they felt would undermine their position within their local church communities. The interview data were analysed separately from the questionnaire and written narrative data. Thematic analysis was applied in order to identify main themes.

3(m) Rationale for conducting in-depth interviews

Interviews are generally recognised as a reliable and valid data collecting procedure (Van den Berg et al. 2003, p. 5). Although they can adopt either or a combination of

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positivistic and interpretivist traditions, interviews constitute an interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (Silverman, 2006; Van den Berg et al., 2003) in ways that allow the researcher the flexibility to adjust the social interaction so as to elicit useful in-depth data. Interviews are also a useful tool for centering the interviewee's perspectives and can allow the repositioning of the marginalised person as knower. Giddens (1984) argues that it is not possible really to describe social reality without knowledge of what social actors know. To ignore their perceptions would be to relegate all social actors as subject to structural forces beyond their control. Arbouin (2009) in her study of Black people in education found that semi-structured interviews provided an appropriate process for centering their voices. The interview then is one route for hearing and centralising the voices of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women.

Qualitative interviews are seen to encourage a rapport between the individuals involved: interviewees and interviewer. Knowledge emerges from that context as a result of that relationship. Some interpretivists, like Denzin (1975) argue that an inter-subjective depth becomes possible when formalised rules of engagement are abandoned and so interviewer and interviewee are able to exchange freely. Conscious of the fact that I wanted to avoid any promotion of myself as an expert and, therefore, particularly powerful in relation to the participants, I presented myself as an appreciative interviewer incapable of knowledge production without the interviewees' help. Additionally, I used a semi-structured interview to entrench the positioning of the interviewees' identities as 'specialist' and to also create another identity; that of myself as non-specialist. My intention was to demonstrate that they were the experts on their singleness and the fact that I was seeking knowledge from them through questioning, reiterated that stance. Furthermore, when it came to looking at my position as an ex-single woman (as I had met someone and married over the course of the research), it felt to me that I had lost an important insider identity. Nevertheless, I had other

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insider identities to draw on (a Black Seventh-day Adventist woman who had experienced long-term singleness). All interviewees were informed that I had long-term experience of singleness and for a couple; I outlined the reasons for this. The interviewees had a lot to share with me and I felt welcomed and appreciated by all. It is possible that too much in-depth data could be produced with participants who have a lot to say about their lives (King and Horrocks, 2010). I was aware that this could be a challenge for me as there was a strong likelihood that given my multi-level 'insiderness' with participants, there would be a lot of rapport. I anticipated that a schedule of pre-planned and piloted semi-structured questions would help us both to navigate the process. At times I drew on my skills as a counsellor and allowed my intuition and experience to guide us through the more emotionally charged aspects of the interview.

Given the premise that the interview is a social interaction as well as informed by intersecting identities (Couture, 2012), the question of achieving validity through interviews is a complex issue. Ideals about achieving authenticity in research become redundant in light of the view that authenticity is a culturally defined way of seeing the world (Silverman, 2015). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the data elicited through this 'natural' exchange is not useful.

3(n) Difficulties with conducting in-depth interviews

Given the messiness inherent in all interactions and the emotionally charged content of the interviews, the single women in the study were sometimes triggered into new, powerful insights as conversations progressed. The process of giving 'voice' to their experiences may have triggered an unleashing of unknown insights and distractions that were being produced as conversations progressed. It is not unusual for conversational interview data to produce ambivalence and contradiction. Potter (2011) suggests that researchers should not get too

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anxious about this, but place the ambivalences of human communication within the context of ‘naturally occurring’ talk. According to Potter (ibid) naturally occurring talk does not lose its validity because of its ambivalence.

Another difficulty that I encountered relates to the lack of face to face communication through the use of the telephone. One interviewee had chosen the telephone as the most efficient way for her to participate as she was a busy person. Rhamie (2003) indicated that she found the telephone a very useful tool for conducting interviews with Black participants and that her telephone interviews seem to produce comparable accounts to face-to-face interviews. I was not able to see the body language of the participant and could not see her expressions to gauge how to move into the next question. However, I found that the skills that I had developed through years of telephone counselling came into play. Furthermore, the ubiquity of mobile technology has normalised the telephone for contemporary communication. It is likely that this contributed to the fact that the telephone interview was similar in length and content to the face-to-face interviews.

Telephone interviews are now common in quantitative research but, as Novoic (2008) points out, there has been very little research on the contributions that telephone interviews can make in qualitative research, but there has been increasing interest in online qualitative interviews and such developments. Although these recent developments have not incorporated telephones, Novoic (2008) argues that the principle is the same; telephones can be included in such discussions as an earlier example of an effective telecommunication procedure for qualitative research.

A further difficulty relates to the emotional aspects of the interview. I had not anticipated the emotional energy that each interview would take and found that at times I was physically exhausted and also very sad. I had to work very hard to ensure that interviewees did not think that they needed to look after me, so I presented myself as positive and yet

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sensitive. A couple of interviewees became tearful and the naturalness of our exchange meant that the tears had a native place in the interview. Although, I did not weep openly, as I sat quietly listening to their sobs, I cried inside. Rager (2005) suggests that strategies such as counselling, peer debriefing, and journal writing are important ways in which researchers should be able to deal with the potential for what she refers to as “compassion stress”. She also suggests that the preparation of social science researchers should include information on appropriate self-care strategies. As I realised early on in the interview phase of this study that the sessions had the potential to be emotionally charged I was prepared and able to draw on my counselling skills and experiences to support myself and the interviewee through the interview.

It is important to acknowledge that my insider status as a Seventh-day Adventist woman was also a problematic identity to have. Although I had emphasised confidentiality in all interviews, I still have to acknowledge that participants may have chosen to recount their lives in a way to protect themselves as participants who were also members of a religious community where I also held membership. The interview addressed some sensitive issues, such as sexual behaviours and some women may have ‘re-scripted’ such experiences because of my insider identity.

4. Analysing data

Below is a description of the process of data analysis which relates to the three research sequences that followed the focus group session. The data that were elicited were mostly qualitative with some quantitative. The quantitative data in the questionnaire focused on characteristics of participants; one ranking question based on a Likert scale and one pre-coded question requiring respondents to indicate yes or no. Quantitative data were grouped by the simple procedure of organising responses into relative frequencies. The unit of

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analysis for the questionnaire data was the total response to each question. The unit of analysis for written narrative data was a sentence (usually delineated because it began with a capital letter and ended with a full stop). In the absence of a sentence, the unit of analysis was identified as a group of words which comprised the beginning and ending of a theme. This principle was also applied to chunks of writing that were made up of a few sentences that covered one theme. This was evident when the rules of paragraphing were applied. In general the unit of analysis for the transcribed interviews was a group of words that comprised the beginning and end of a theme. I used a very basic transcription procedure (See appendix 7). Additionally, standalone words such as '*frightened*', '*lost*', etc. were included as a separate unit of analysis. In fact all differing levels of responses were included as units of analyses because they represented participants' contribution to the issue of singleness. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) point out the importance of addressing such thorny issues such as multiple responses, if the research is to stand as credible. Scrutiny of the data revealed that a small number of women's questionnaire responses contained multiple themes. In this instance I opted to include the contribution that reflected what was emerging as a frequently occurring theme. This did not detract from the analysis as they were so few.

Thematic analysis was employed to elicit recurring themes across all three data sets. This is a widely used approach that has not always been recognised as a separate analytical approach and so it has received little methodological attention (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is generally described as a method that can be used to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data. However, in practice, it is often presented without explicit information on how a particular study actually conducted its thematic analysis. Scholars have noted that this reduces claims to validity in research and so clarity is vital (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In light of this criticism (and as evident below), it is therefore important for this study to be explicit in recording how analysis was done. Thematic analysis

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involves the use of either an inductive (Boyatzis, 1998) or a deductive approach (Crabtree and Miller, 1999 cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It is flexible enough to accommodate both approaches within one study (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

In this study, a thematic analysis procedure was employed (following Braun and Clarke, 2006) by applying both deductive and inductive approaches. The phase of the analysis represented as 1-4 below describes the inductive approach which moves the data from the specific contributions from participants to general classifications. Stage 5 below refers to a deductive approach which focused on translating and refining these general codes as a step towards producing abstract categories. 1) The qualitative data were transcribed; 2) Open coding involved identifying and organising chunks of similar data established through multiple readings of the transcribed data. This was carried out so as to enhance familiarisation with the text which would facilitate the identification of broad themes; 3) The chunks were then interrogated and identified as broader ‘chunks’ or segments; 4) These broader chunks were encapsulated into first level ‘codes’ or concepts; and 5) These ‘first level codes’ (concepts) became the content for more abstract or refined categories. This was achieved by grouping similar first level codes (or concepts) in the first instance and re-applying the process of encapsulation to these first level codes. This process resulted in the identification of final ‘categories’ for analysis.

The written responses from the questionnaires and the written narratives from the writing workshop as well as the data elicited from in-depth interviews went through an analytical procedure as separate data sets that were eventually merged. I was interested in analysing the regularity of key themes. In other words, I used the ‘frequency’ with which a theme occurred between, as well as across participants’ accounts, to orient me to its possible significance. So ‘frequency’ was established by counting the number of participants covering an issue/theme with respect to the questionnaire and written narratives as well as the number

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of times an issue/theme arose in the written narratives across both these data sets. Taking the abstract category 'marginality' which came from the code 'feeling marginal' to illustrate the point; 'feeling marginal' was identified as a relevant category for describing a range of codes identified to reflect participants' descriptions of loneliness (wanting to be married, not wanting to be alone, their interest in networking, enhancing their participation in their religious/ social circles and their need for support) in about a third of the data from both questionnaire and written narratives. At least 40 out of the 53 questionnaire participants commented explicitly on loneliness or feelings of isolation (as a direct response to the question on loneliness but also in response to other questions) in addition 9 out of the 11 written narratives covered the issue of loneliness. The data elicited from the interviews, were eventually matched with the recurring themes from the other data sets and provided an intersectional depth to those recurring themes such as 'feelings of marginality'. In other words, the interview data made it possible to see how their intersecting racialised religious and gendered identities were located within recurring themes. Additionally, the in-depth interview data showed how their intersectional identities were also reflected through the final more abstract categories, such as marginality. Furthermore, as most participants considered their marginal identities as reflecting the fact that they were unmarried and therefore unhappy about being single, the thesis situates a consideration of their marginal identities within two discussions; a problematic singleness and a centralising of marriage.

The coding process was an incremental one; therefore, the first set of codes that were produced from the questionnaires influenced the classification and production of the second level codes. In practice this meant that the analysis of each successive data set i.e. the written narratives and the in-depth interviews were partially shaped by the codes that were previously established. The questionnaire data which was the first data set to be analysed had five different processes which included an initial analysis as well as four levels of coding,

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whereas the written narratives (the second data set to be analysed) had only three levels of coding because it entered the coding process at the second level codes which emerged from the questionnaire. The interview data also underwent three levels of coding. Figure 3.2 below details the incremental feature of the data analysis as well as the entry points at which the written narratives and interview data were incorporated.

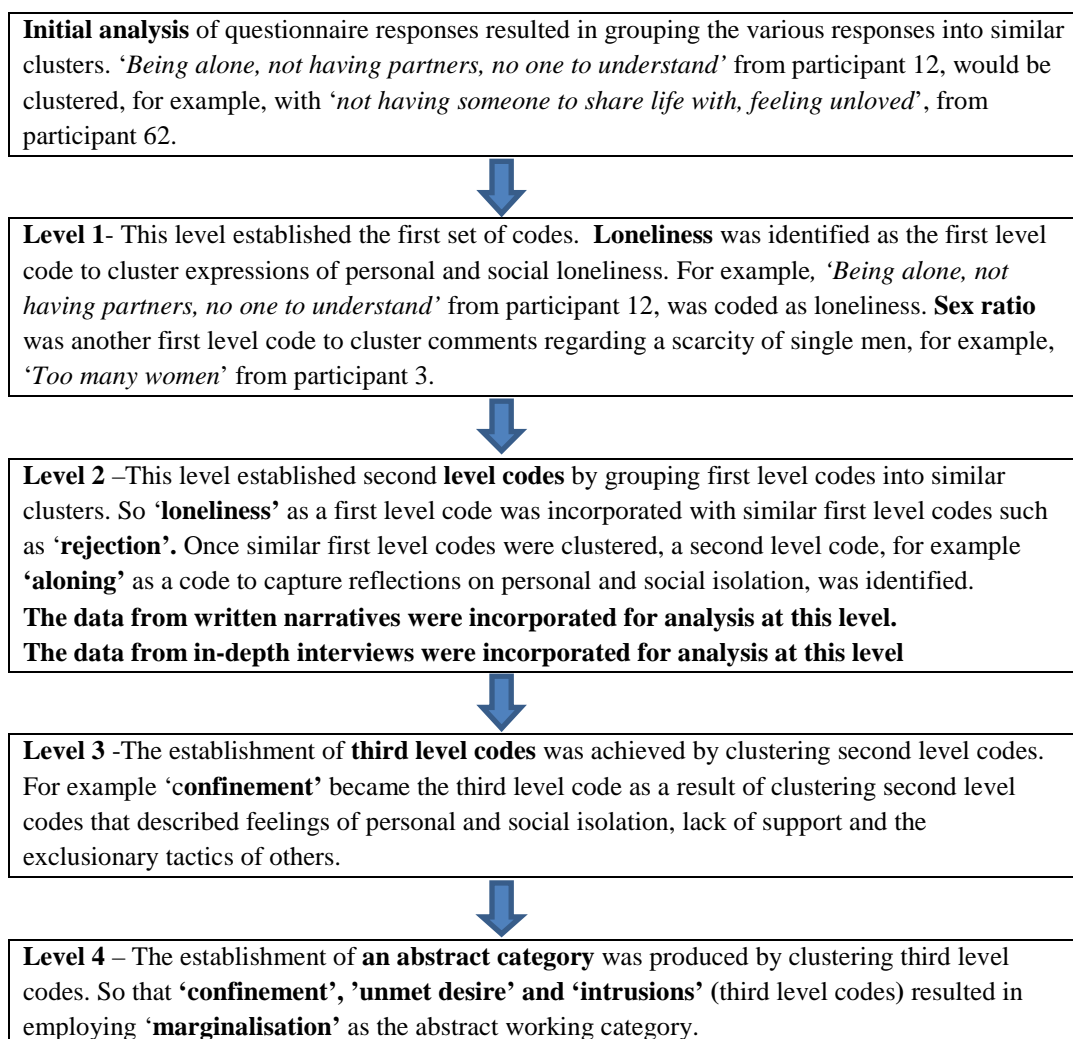


Fig. 3.2 Incremental levels of coding

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Although the analysis gives equal weight to each dataset there were some ‘tensions’ regarding my interpretation of participants’ meanings. How can I know for sure that the word ‘loneliness’, for instance, when used in an intense semi-structured interview, where clarification is possible, has the same meaning as a participant’s brief record of it in the questionnaire or in a more in-depth written narrative? In addition, what weight do I give to the use of the word ‘loneliness’ when used by the poet who may have expressed her sentiment by using poetic license rather than the ‘truthfulness’ of her feelings? To what extent are the themes that have been identified as recurring, really themes in my own head (Braun and Clarke, 2006)? Have the themes that have ‘emerged’, done so only because I have looked for them in an effort to iron out any anomalies? These and similar concerns relate to the mixed method approach that inform this work.

The analytical tensions that are pertinent to mixed method approaches have to be recognised (Jehn and Jonsen, 2010; Bryman, 2007; Harrits, 2011). This recognition does not, however, undermine the advantages in conducting mixed methods research (ibid). Furthermore, there is room in thematic analysis for recognising some of the messiness involved in conducting qualitative research. Although, I have not resolved this tension, I took the decision to analyse the data that were elicited from the different research sequences based upon the acknowledgement in qualitative research that the social world is complex. My detailing of the analytical procedure adopted, demonstrates an effort to maintain as much analytical consistency as possible.

5. Ethical Considerations

This research recognises and adheres to the British Sociological Association’s (BSA) *Statement of Ethical Practice* (2004) which sets the context for identifying which responsibilities and rights, enshrined in professional sociological practice, should be adhered

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to. The rights and protection of respondents are an important aspect of this professional practice.

5(a) Informed consent

An important question for this research is: “To what extent is the project successful in managing informed consent?” Attempts to identify the place of consent in research investigation increasingly attest to its fluidity and unpredictability. Hoon Sin (2008) challenges researchers to unravel the complexities underpinning informed consent as negotiated and situated. My particular consent processes reflected such dynamics and relied heavily on what I see as the normative assumptions in Christian-gathering events, where the coming together signals an intention to participate. In other words, I drew on my insider experience that informed me that single women would want to take part in a process aimed at identifying the marginalising of Christian singles. There are, however, some important ethical issues that arose in the conduct of the study. One of these was that I had not promoted the focus group and writing and questionnaire events as research activities. Although the BSA has documents very clear guidelines on the issue of informed consent, studies such as the work of Wiles et al (2005), admit that achieving it can be problematic (particularly for the vulnerable). In one way it may appear that I had breached informed consent because the publication of events tended to reflect my coordinating rather than research role. So I am left with some ethical tensions that relate to a consideration of the degree to which my conduct of these activities can be described as covert research. First, I have to question, that had I advertised the research component of both events, how many of the individuals who attended the events would still have attended and secondly, whether this omission meant that some participants were implicitly pressured into participation. It is possible that participants needed more than a morning session to consider whether they wanted to participate. Wiles et al.

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(2005) note that some researchers feel uncomfortable with employing methods that may have pressurised people to participate and suggest that giving people sufficient time to think about whether they really want to participate is important. These questions serve to situate my ethical dilemma as an issue of informed consent.

Calvey (2008) in his discussion of covert research proposes that good research will always have to contend with the blurring of ethical practice. He argues that there are various covert research spaces even in investigations that claim to have established informed consent. Such ‘failing’ on the part of the researcher is deliberately obscured in the production of findings and so does not come under the scrutiny of regulatory panels. He also points out that ground-breaking social scientific knowledge is sometimes the product of research that chose not to adopt overt research practice. For example, he cites club studies and research into recreational drug cultures as being driven by the search for insider knowledge, which often have covert dimensions. Although Calvey’s (2008) discussion are helpful in creating a more balanced interpretation of what actually took place in this study, it is important to recognise the way in which my role as the Singles Ministry Coordinator undermined this aspect of the research process.

This problem regarding informed consent is less problematic when I focus more specifically on the processes set up to invite those who attended the social functions into the research space. Firstly, the filling out of the questionnaires and production of written narratives took place, on both occasions after an open invitation to participate in some general discussion and networking activities. This gave participants some time to think about whether or not they wanted to be involved. Secondly, participants were informed that they all had the right to opt out should they want to. The response rates on the questionnaire indicate that a small number of participants who were invited to participate chose not to do so. It is

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important to highlight the point that, whereas participation amounted to informed consent, non-participation may well amount to informed opting out.

Matters of informed consent were much clearer when it came to the individual in-depth interviews. I found, like Reynolds (2004), that the voluntary nature of interviews, having them taped and transcribed were acts of informed consent. Interviewees were also told they could opt out of questions that they did not feel comfortable to answer. This did not happen but there were varying levels of opting out as participants were making decisions about how much they really wanted to share. The opportunity for each interviewee to give feedback on the transcribed interview provided another possible point for opting out by deleting aspects of their contribution. Additionally, in-depth interviewees were given consent forms to sign (see Appendix 6).

5(b) Multiplicity: insider outsider status

Over the course of this research journey I occupied multiple spaces that resulted in a complex positionality that I had constantly to manage and critique. At one stage in the research, I was a single Seventh-day Adventist Black woman, coordinator and researcher all at the same time and at another phase I was an ex-single Black Seventh-day Adventist woman. This meant that I was intensely connected to the study in ways which impacted on the ethical principles and practices employed. Like Reynolds (2004) and Aune (2004) in their study on single women I was both insider and outsider and had to negotiate the challenges that accompanied my multiple relationships with the project.

This proved to be a challenging road to travel, as I had to keep internal checks and balances to ensure that both research and my Singles Ministry responsibilities were upheld but kept separate. Although more traditional approaches to research would question the conflict of interest with these positions, more critical accounts attest to its beneficial

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characteristics. African-centered epistemology, for example, supports multiple positioning on the grounds that the individual is also a member of a community and the research space does not change that (Asante, 1980). The debate on 'insider-outsider status' in qualitative research tries to make sense of the researcher's relationship with respondents with the view to establishing the merits of the investigations. Broadly speaking, there are two main schools of thought: if the researcher is closely connected to the study i.e. 'insider status', then the research is undermined or if the researcher is distant i.e. has an 'outsider status', then the research is compromised. In spite of this dilemma researchers have identified different ways to justify their 'insiderness' or 'outsiderness' and have got on with conducting their investigations. Reynolds (2004, p. 99) points out that she managed her level of 'insiderness' with the friends she interviewed by turning the tape recording off when interviewees wanted to disclose information that they did not want to be recorded. I felt that I had different intersecting levels of 'insiderness' and that it was important to have this positioning. My status as a Black Seventh-day Adventist woman (who had experienced long term singleness) conducting research on singleness, more than likely contributed to a sense of identification with women respondents which meant that I felt that it was easier for me to make sense of what they were saying. Participants would punctuate their accounts with Creole, pause, sigh, moan and laugh etc. in a way that replicated conversations I and other Black women often entertained. Proponents of the efficacy of 'insider status' often argue that it is familiarity that give researchers a good ability to process and analyse data (Armstrong, 2006). Feminist theorists have argued this case strongly, on the grounds, for example, that as language is a key vehicle to communication and is complex, only those who do understand the 'language' of the respondents are able really to make sense of the data that they have (Hesse-Biber, 2004).

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My membership in the Seventh-day Adventist community meant that there was a level of accountability already in place. My attendance at various church activities led me into frequent contact with people who participated in the research or knew participants who did so. The responsibility that I had as the then Singles Coordinator meant that I attended and sometimes facilitated some ‘singles’ events where people would ask me about this study. Whilst these contacts deepened my sensitivity to the issue of singleness, they functioned as ‘systems of public accountability’ and continue to be a constant reminder of the responsibility that I have to participants in this study and to myself.

Despite the fact that at the time of the interviews I was actually married, I take the position that my insider status was still credible as a researcher woman who continues to share other points of identification with participants. This served to deepen my understanding and my competence to effectively analyse the data. Naples (1996) suggests that feminist standpoints, by highlighting processes through which ‘outsiderness’ was constructed and reconstituted, reveal how investigators are never fully outside or inside the community they investigate. It is, however, the case that my change of marital status may have placed me as an ‘outsider’ from interviewees’ perspective. It seemed to me that I had moved into a liminal space. In full recognition of the fluid positioning of the social researcher, I felt that the long-term nature of my singleness and the short-term nature of my identity as a married woman, positioned me as an ex-single woman with insights into singleness.

6. Summary

This chapter has focused on the multiple methods employed to elicit data for analysis of single Seventh-day Adventist women and the ethical issues raised by my insider/outsider positioning. It has detailed some of the tensions inherent in some aspects of this work and perspectives and strategies in working with those tensions, some of which still remain. It has

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argued that the identified methods and analysis are relevant for the aims of this study. The methodological route taken underscores the general and specific interests that are reflected in this study's aims. The remaining chapters discuss the various ways in which Black single Seventh-day Adventist women give an account of singleness as a racialised, religious and gendered identity.

Chapter 4 - The Centrality of Marriage

Introduction

Academic literature on families draws attention to shifting ideas and social behaviours regarding heteronormative coupling (Reynolds, 2006). On the whole, the status of marriage is rendered somewhat less central by these shifts (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In spite of this as illustrated in the literature, coupling narratives still drive and define the statuses of adults. The burgeoning literature on singleness for women portrays singleness as a very difficult identity for single women to navigate (Aune, 2004; DePaulo, 2006; Budgeon, 2008; Taylor, 2012). Increasingly, scholarly focus on White women addresses the differing ways in which these single women give an account of their single identities. At the same time, Black single women remain on the margins of that scholarship or situated mainly in debates about single mothers. Therefore, little is known about how Black British women experience their single identities. The sex ratio imbalances within Christian communities would suggest that unmarried women should expect singleness as a permanent or long term factor in their lives. Yet, very little is known about Christian women's experiences of singleness. This study's focus on singleness for Black British women who are Christians makes an important contribution by providing Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's in-depth perspectives on how that singleness is lived. By drawing on the insights provided through intersectional theory, social capital and feminist theory, this chapter explores how Black single Seventh-day Adventist women use idealised narratives that make central their desire to marry.

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Centralising marriage

Given the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist church and the findings of the previous studies, it is not surprising that the accounts of the participants in this study overwhelmingly venerate marriage. They make explicit how achieving marriage as a goal, infuse Seventh-day Adventist community life (Vance, 1999). Their accounts centralise marriage, describing it as a relationship in which adults achieve both social and psychological stability and divine recognition. The insights made available through the in-depth interviews idealise women's identity work in ways that fitted with the conventions of the church. Moreover, participants described marriage in language that illuminated their commitment to religious and racial endogamy. An analysis of their accounts, illustrate how such endogamies serve to regulate and restrict them but also acts as a buffer against pathologically essentialist constructions of Black women and Black men.

This chapter first discusses the centrality of marriage and then it looks at the benefits of marriage from the viewpoints of participants. Overall they viewed marriage as an ordained opportunity. Marriage was therefore expressed as a relationship that was approved by God and would enable them to be nurtured by men who meet idealised expectations. These expectations are reinforced and challenged through a discussion of inflexible eligibility criteria which rule out most men. The fact that they do not have relationships with men who are unfit for marriage provides a basis for some women to narrate how they uphold traditional Christian ideals about gender and marriage. Additionally, participants illustrate their agency as women making choices within religious gendered narratives. Susan, a never married woman in her mid-forties, demonstrates a clear intention to situate herself first and foremost as a woman who not only centralises marriage, but as one who is naturally destined to marry:

Susan: Well I think that marriage is a good thing, I see marriage as a good thing and I think that choosing to marry should be seen as people being in love and if you love someone enough to want to spend the rest of your life with that person, it's a good thing, go ahead,

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you have my blessing...I don't know how, but some women don't think that marriage is for them...but marriage is for me, I was made to be married.

Her insistence that she was made for marriage evokes Christian Edenic ideals about women's position in society. Susan takes a somewhat romantic view of marriage as a 'good thing' that she desires as natural, with the inference that God created her that way: *'I was made to be married.'*

Other respondents also indicated that marriage was important for them. Asked about the circumstances surrounding her singleness, Chantelle, a divorced single parent with two children, in her mid-fifties expressed how she felt devalued when she became single:

'[B]ecause being married gives you status'. Chantelle extends the significance of losing her status as a married woman by describing her divorce as an experience that was imposed;

'divorce was something that was done to me, I was not a willing partner.' By indicating that she had no choice in the matter, she drew attention to the lack of agency in her current identity as an unmarried woman. Pauline, a never married single parent, with two children and a woman in her late-forties, highlighted her singleness as difficult and stigmatised.

Pauline associates her difficulties with her identity as a single mother:

Pauline: *Well to begin with, I must admit that it was difficult being single because of the stigma that I should be married and because I was a single parent.*

Angela, a never married woman in her mid-thirties tentatively responded to the question

'what is singleness like for you as a Seventh-day Adventist woman?'

Angela: *Although I hate to say it, in a certain way and I also think so myself, there is a perceived validation that comes with being a married woman. You are out of bounds and so you can have a certain amount of respect. If you are still single and some of the men begin to look at you and leer and they think that it is an opportunity..... If someone has decided to marry you, I always think about it as a measure of success.*

She is tentative because she is reluctant to present her unmarried identity as deficient. Angela concedes that it is easier to be respected, protected and appreciated as a married rather than a single adult. Her concession introduces an ideological dilemma between her openness about

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her desire to marry and her dislike of the fact that she has to admit that for her, being single is problematic. By describing marriage thus, she makes clear that being unmarried is perceived, as well as experienced as, exposed, disrespected and denigrated. Reynolds (2004) identified ideological dilemmas as a feature of singleness for the single women in her study. By drawing on the work of Billig (1991), Reynolds (2004) discusses how dilemmas, such as those exhibited by Angela, inform the single identities of the women in her study. The women in her study showed how they had conflicting feelings between expectations that they should be in a relationship and expectations that they should be independent. By showing that they wanted to couple, they were also showing that they were failing as progressive women. Their dilemmas were the result of refuting denigrating repertoires of singleness whilst also producing accounts of emotional and sexual needs (ibid, p. 158).

Although, in general, Christianity has a tendency to be more conservative than wider society, (Aune, 2004; Sharma, 2008) there is some indication that when it comes to matters of gender, Christians do challenge traditional gender scripts (Aune, 2004; Aune et al., 2011). Christian single women specific dilemmas are informed by wider contemporary discourses and relatively traditional Christian narratives. Aune (2004) found for instance, that in spite of the centrality of marriage in the evangelical community she studied, some single Christian women adopted aspects of secular post-feminism expressed as wanting to marry, desiring to be leaders and leaving the Christian community if they felt dissatisfied. The dissatisfaction would sometimes include disagreement with how they were being treated as women or the lack of available men to marry. Angela, on the other hand, illustrates how her dilemma reinforces the centralisation of marriage within the Seventh-day Adventist church. The other single women by providing their reasons for wanting to be married show those heteronormative ideals about marriage remain intact for them. As will become apparent throughout this thesis, the conservatism of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women in this

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study is related to the specific ideological, socio-historical and cultural dogmatism that underpins Black women's identities. Moreover, interviewees' accounts present marriage as an opportunity for achieving protection from the marginalisation that accompanies singleness and also from those that relate to being religious and Black.

Marriage as an ordained space

One of the ways that marriage has been centralised by the single Seventh-day Adventist women in this study is within a discourse of divine planning. This functions to anchor participants' lives firmly within the scope of God's guidance. Marriage is invested with divine properties because it is instituted by God. Having acknowledged marriage as pre-ordained and necessary, participants faced intense trouble when making sense of their current single statuses.

Above, Angela demonstrates her dilemma of living as a single whilst also desiring to be married. She also shows how her difficulties as a single woman are further complicated when viewed through a theodicy of divine planning. In response to the question;

'What is singleness like for you as a Seventh-day Adventist woman?' she states:

Angela: Because you are in the church and you know what God's ideals are, and you read about Genesis on how He has made man and women to be together, and you do see men and women together, then it is something that you expect and when it does not happen to you it can be frustrating and difficult. Emotionally it's a challenge and you look around and you can be happy with those who are happily married, but it is like watching somebody eating a nice pie and you think 'Wow! They are really enjoying that'. And I would like my slice of pie as well, I can eat and enjoy and we can both talk about pie.

Angela's response makes reference to marriage as something God wants for her, but yet, has not given her. Her use of the words *'and when it does not happen to you'* shifts her presentation of getting married from the discourse of divine planning to an event that is a natural organic life event. This subtle shift of emphasis might be an attempt to bolster her faith, by countering any assertion that God has not fulfilled His ideals in her life. Whilst her

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account appears to undermine her agency, because getting married is something that ‘*happens to you*’, it also questions God’s benevolence. Furthermore, her celebration of those who are married set the tone for presenting her singleness as deficient. She articulates her unhappiness at not achieving marriage, particularly as she, by her reference to ‘*my pie*’, implies that it is *hers* to be had. Set against the assumption that God wants adults to marry as one outcome of His divine plan for Christians and her acceptance of that plan, Angela is left with the difficult task of managing the fact that she is still single and her uncertain feelings about God’s effectiveness. When Angela’s dilemmas are taken together, they exemplify her negotiation of the pervasiveness of traditional gendered and theological ideals in her identity work.

In the extract below Tracey, one of the younger never married interviewees makes emphasis on how much she accepts marriage as God intended. Yet she too, like Angela has to make sense of the fact that God has not yet fulfilled His will for her to marry:

Tracey: Adam and Eve, there were two of them, it is not good for man to be alone, it is not good, it is really, really horrible and so you know that you are missing something. I don’t want to be alone, it is really uncomfortable for me... it is like something is missing and I want somebody to be with....

She generates a narrative of lack and deficiency; *it is like something is missing ... it is not good, it is really, really horrible...*

In the above account, Tracey interprets her singleness through the theology that centralises coupling and she uses biblical narratives to interpret her singleness as abnormal and not good.

The central place that marriage has for these Black single Seventh-day Adventist women illustrates their acceptance of Adventist familial ideology. This reflects traditional Christianity’s idealisation of marriage (Aune, 2008; Byrne, 2008). This idealisation surfaces in participants’ general considerations on many levels, but particularly in their assertions that marriage is the only comfortable status and that they want to marry.

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Being married is discussed as the respectable space for exhibiting and experiencing effective Christian adulthood. Marriage then confirms the individual's social capital within the religious and wider social fields. It is a social relationship that raises the personal and social standing of its membership whilst also conferring particular interconnected benefits to them.

Participants explained how they desire to achieve the social standing made available through marriage so that they are secure and display their gendered religious and spiritual worthiness. In their accounts singleness is a devalued identity that has little autonomy. Yet, however much marriage is desired they have to wait to be chosen for marriage. It is men not women, who do the choosing and so the participants' commitment to marriage within the church entails allegiance to traditional gendered scripts. Their commitment also involves negotiating their prolonged singleness with the belief that marriage is what God desires for them and He could provide. Regardless of dilemmas and disappointments, the above accounts illustrate that Black single Seventh-day Adventist women, in this study, hold the institution of marriage in high regard.

Both Clarke (2011) and Chandler (2011, pp. 201-220) in their studies of African American women, show how being coupled is important for their participants. They highlight the value of interrogating the perceptions and experiences of Black women with regard to matters of coupling, romance and love etc. By focussing specifically on college educated and PhD professors some of whom are religious, Clarke (ibid) and Chandler (ibid) contribute new insights into the gendered identities of middle-class single Black women. One of those insights relates to these African American women's commitment to racial endogamy which is the context within which they remain single. The women in this study also consider this as an important issue.

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Maintaining endogamies: Religious and racial

Participants suggest that ‘appropriate’ masculinity is important within the coveted status of wife. They constructed an intensely romanticised heterosexual account, in such contributions with stereotypical eligibility criteria that in some cases contested and affirmed others’ stereotypical accounts of Black men. Whilst some participants directly accredit marriage with divine properties, others construct an account of marriage as an important protective shield. Marriage is therefore viewed as protecting them against the destructive forces of worldliness and so only certain kinds of men are viewed as fit to take up the responsibility that marriage brings. The responses from in-depth interviewees clearly indicate that their preference is to be married to men who are ‘their own’ religious and ethnic counterparts, that is, Black Seventh-day Adventist men.

Claudette suggests that the church has failed to bring men into its ranks because they do not have effective proselytising strategies. Claudette states:

Claudette: You are actively discouraged to mingle with the un-churched. You are not encouraged to take part or even to have too many um, um kind of fraternising with non-Adventists. And the church has never had any kind of active programme for recruiting and retaining men within the church. It is abysmal as the church hierarchy is predominantly male and I have not seen any intentional approach that the church has adopted. The people who propagate the concept it is good to be married are generally men who are married and they themselves do not go out and think about how to get men to be in the church and even how do we keep the men in church. This is a failing in the church....

Claudette is critical of the promotion of religious endogamy as a practice that generally restricts women’s opportunities to marry although the Seventh-day Adventist patriarchy continues to do so. By making reference to the married status of leaders, Claudette shows how marriage is normalised. She is also critical of the lack of formal conversation on recruiting men into the church or the gendered implications of uneven sex ratios for single women. For Claudette religious endogamy is impractical, oppressive and patriarchal. Claudette is critical of men and especially those who are leaders in the church for not

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addressing the gendered anxieties of single Seventh-day Adventist women by their failure to look into the problem of the lack of available men to marry. As a result Seventh-day Adventist patriarchy is portrayed as failing in the task of promoting marriage.

The single women in this study also subscribe to notions that men are responsible for keeping their families protected. There is some indication that respondents construct accounts of men similar to Vance's (1999) construction of ideal Seventh-day Adventist masculinities as 'benevolent patriarchy'. The women in Vance's study put forward Seventh-day Adventist ideas about husbands being protectors and nurturers and the women in this study also did this. As illustrated in questionnaire responses to the question '*What are your main concerns as a single woman?*,' the women identify that they desire eligible caring Seventh-day Adventist men, who exhibit God-like characteristics:

'I would like someone to share my life with' Participant no 3

'I would like to have a successful relationship with a caring Christian man' Participant no 27

'...find a suitable God-like man' Participant no 50

'...to gain a companion to ease off my loneliness' Participant no 62

'...to find a companion to share my hopes and dreams with' Participant no 35

Eight of the ten interviewees also made reference to the view that marriage is the place to experience a caring and nurturing masculinity. In responding to range of questions, interviewees produced accounts that fitted with the above questionnaire responses.

Flora produced an account of husbands as embodying romantic caring masculinity:

Flora: I don't have someone to like, appreciate me, like Valentine for example, no one to send me a card, a box of chocolates, no flowers. When you go out you see people ringing home and saying 'darling I am coming home', there is no one to ring me and say I am coming home. No one comes to the airport to hug you, when you are ill; you still have to get out of bed.

For Flora, the absence of such a relationship betokens her difference from other people. She normalises caring and support as masculine activities. Claudette draws a similar picture:

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Claudette: *But you do not have anyone to cook for you either or say darling do this ...please rub this and I have no one to rub it.*

Both Claudette and Flora draw on readily available discourses that reinforce conservative ideals regarding ‘natural’ gender roles, absence of male role models and intergenerational transmissions of roles. Janice links her lack of male attention to the fact that that she had an absent father:

Janice: *There was no father. I did not have a male figure, a protective presence of a father. Not having a man to show love to me as a father should have definitely affected my understanding or view of men.*

Janice, a never married woman in her mid-fifties, gives considerable weight to the connection between lack of male protection in childhood and her inadequate knowledge of men as an adult woman. She emphasises the abnormality of her gendered knowledge by using the term ‘*should have*’. In other words knowing about fatherly love is a normal natural aspect of becoming a woman.

Despite cross-cultural differences, these women depict married Seventh-day Adventist men in a similar way that the American women in Vance’s study portrayed the men in their lives. Vance (1999) found that the Seventh-day Adventist married women in her study were very clear about the characteristics that a good Seventh-day Adventist husband should possess. These constructions of nurturing, protective Seventh-day Adventist husbands also contain idealisations a good Seventh-day Adventist wife. In a similar way, women in this study also suggest that they want to be able to occupy traditional gendered identities in order to gain the benefits promoted by Seventh-day Adventists for heteronormative coupling.

Although there is a consistency in these women’s accounts of what it is they are looking for in a partner, some women indicated that they were prepared to be flexible about what they would accept. In particular they raise the issue of whether divorced Seventh-day Adventist men or non-Seventh-day Adventist men would be suitable. In practice, however, they find that it is not straightforward to be flexible. Two respondents Angela and Verona an older

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never married woman in her late-forties, exemplify this. Verona recalls her decision, when in her mid-thirties, to extend the eligibility criteria to include divorced Seventh-day Adventist men. She details an emotive episode between her and her father where he had reacted negatively to her suggestion that divorced Seventh-day Adventists were eligible for marriage:

Verona: I was at the time seeing someone who was a divorcee, previously married and as you do with family, we were sitting around a table and talking, not that I was planning to get married but we were discussing, and I was sharing this around the table with my mum and dad. And so I asked them what would they do if I married someone who was married before and my father said quite blatantly that he would not be there, and I remember an unbelievable rage came over me...I remember ranting and raging around the table telling my dad of my hurt...he was not able to see from the point of view of his daughter who had not been married before and his expectation was that it was better for me to remain unmarried than to break that mould. I was so angry with his lack of sensitivity’.

There are several features of Verona’s account that provide a view of singleness as an identity limited by demographic and patriarchal dictates. By extending her criteria, Verona gives some indication of the adjustment she was prepared to make in response to her ‘failure’ to access idealised masculinity. Having accepted the limitations of her quest, Verona takes a more flexible approach to achieving marriage. Verona acknowledges her family’s entrenched views of divorced men and how important it was for her to have her family ratify her flexibility regarding this. Her recollection of her father’s response and her anger, illuminate a clash of two positions; a tenacity of Seventh-day Adventists’ ideals about religious endogamy and her recognition that such ideals marginalise and undermine her opportunities to marry. Tracey shows how, although she is realistic about the scarcity of potential Seventh-day Adventist partners, ideas about religious endogamy are entrenched in her own thinking. She is a never married woman of thirty-five years who is also in the middle of redefining what she wants from life. I asked her to clarify her earlier suggestion that Black women had high expectations when seeking partners. In response to the question; ‘*So do you think that Black women are more picky?*’

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Tracey: *Yes most definitely. I find that I am stringent, strict and rigid and I think at this rate I will not get anybody; I will have to do what the rest of the world is doing. You just can't live in a box.*

I further probed by then asking 'Is that how you feel now?' Tracey replied in the affirmative.

Tracey: *Yes, what is God actually telling me? You can't have a drink, you can't marry a non-Adventist etc. and a whole list of things that Adventists are not meant to do and so it restricts you further This is not biblical God said do not be unequally yoked, not that you should marry a Seventh-day Adventist. So screw it, I will go out with somebody who believes in God.*

Tracey also went on to state that she was in the middle of taking time out to review her plans about relationships.

Tracey: *I want to reflect on me, on what I am doing with my mind set, what barriers that I am putting up.*

Taking time out to do this showed the importance of the task for her. She later alluded to the difficulties she may face in her attempt to alter her mind-set on this matter.

Tracey: *I could be on the same place after all that. That's because belief systems are very strong aren't they?*

In order to increase their opportunities to marry, both Verona and Tracey consider extending their eligibility criteria by contesting those ideologies that constrain them. These women show how they consider problematic, any policing of their eligibility criteria. Yet, Verona's anger at her father's unsupportive response, and Tracey's comment on the strength of belief systems, both show the tenacity of religious regimes that police their gendered identities and notions of acceptable relationships.

Monotheistic faiths (such as Seventh-day Adventism) are seen by some feminist scholars (Daly, 1978; De Beauvoir, 1953) as intensely patriarchal. They suggest that men are regarded as representatives of God's authority with women positioned as subject to men. For the participants in this study, allegiances to their faith must also accommodate allegiances to its interpretations of the gendered order. Seventh-day Adventists, by their promotion of religious endogamy, encourage the establishment of heterosexual coupling as intimate contexts for protecting SDA marriages and families from worldly influences. In this light,

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marriage is invested with a protective salvific quality (Vance, 1999), critical for reproducing and ‘saving’ Seventh-day Adventist adults and their children (Vance, 1999; Godina, 2013; Rock, 1996). Participants generally accept Seventh-day Adventism’s idealisation of marriage as a vital necessity for its members to be able to withstand the ‘degenerative changes in the secular world’ (Vance 1999, p. 6).

The in-depth interviews highlighted a further eligibility criterion. Eight of the ten interviewees indicated that they racialised ideals about Seventh-day Adventist husbands. Whilst religious endogamy might be viewed as an externally imposed restriction in the sense that a formal organisation attempts to uphold it, participants suggest that racial endogamy is internal and therefore self-imposed. The reasons for this include attraction to Black men, issues of racial identity and expectations that Black men may be more likely to protect Black women.

The following two extracts assert that heterosexual attraction is racialised:

Lorraine: Although I am not into Jamaican men at the moment and I am not attracted to Caucasian, Chinese, Japanese or Indian, I find that I am only attracted to my own Black men.

Chantelle: I am a Black woman and I do not look at White men. If he is a star or something I may look at him and think that he is attractive.

Angela: I prefer Black men although I would never say never; my preference is to marry a Black man.

Other responses indicate that the attraction that Black women have toward Black men is also related to their racial gendered projects for increasing self-awareness and self-respect, securing greater self-comfort and being protected. Eight interviewees said this in different ways, about wanting to be with men who could understand and protect them. The converse of this is discomfort with White men.

Below, Chantelle shares an experience of an encounter with a White man at a social function at church. She was responding to a question about single men in the church and I asked her to clarify if she was speaking specifically about Black men.

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Chantelle: *I have no experience of White men apart from last week. There was this White man at my friend's place who invaded my personal space and said 'so you are an (he referred to her professional role) and I was thinking this man is invading my space and eventually I ended up in the sitting room and he followed me and he pulled up a chair and sat in my personal space and then he said... I was thinking this man is invading my personal space and so I moved nearer to X. I do not have a lot of experience with White men in my space; my experience is with Black men. And it was uncomfortable because he was White.*

Above Chantelle describes an aspect of her personal self that she resisted sharing with the White man because she was uncomfortable with him in her space. Her account suggests that she is unfamiliar with White men as unknown, unwelcome suitors, although clearly she comes into contact with some.

hooks (1982; 1993; 200b) and Clarke (2011) for instance have been critical for rethinking sexual gendered politics through the lens of racialisation. In her discussions of Black women, hooks (1982) discusses the historic legacy of White men's power over Black women's bodies. In one sense Chantelle's reaction constitutes an instance of hook's analysis, illuminating Black women's apprehensions about White men's stereotypic perceptions of Black women. On further probing, Chantelle confessed that if it had been a good-looking Black man she would probably also have felt uncomfortable being followed in this way. Despite this, she considers that Black men have more legitimate rights than White men to connect with her in what she refers to as a 'personal space'.

While eight of the interviewees expressed preferences for Black men, the picture was made more complicated through the varied nuances of the women's narratives. For example, although Flora said that she found only Black men attractive, she specified that she was particularly attracted to African American men because of her past experiences: '*[T]hey were the ones that treated me with respect*' She also said that she recognised that she needed to include other men in her eligibility criteria if she wanted to increase her chances of marrying: '*I am putting myself in a box and I need to come out of that box.*'

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A couple of women considered the possibility of relationships with White men. Angela spoke about the possibility of interracial marriage, but only with someone who shared her beliefs: *'I have no problem marrying White men as long as they share my beliefs.'*

Janice said that although she had dated a White Christian man who had expressed an interest in Seventh-day Adventism, she was very happy when a Black man showed an interest in her: *'I felt so good, for at last and finally, I was chosen by a Black man.'* By portraying herself as one who was chosen she reinforces her own position at that time as one of waiting. Her waiting for a Black man to choose her, and so giving gendered power in the heterosexual market place of relationships to Black men.

Barriers to marrying; Anomic deviant and oppressed masculinities

Although some of the women (in this study) viewed White men as unsuitable, this did not mean that all Black men were considered. Participants expressed a view that there are certain types of masculinities that are ineligible. Their contributions suggest that they were actively making choices about waiting for the 'right type' of man. In doing so, they undermine those accounts that portray Black single Seventh-day Adventist women as deficient.

Anomic masculinities

It was Durkheim (cited in Swingewood, 2000) who coined the term 'anomie' in his account of the modern social world. Walker's (2006) work utilises the concept of anomie to discuss a form of working-class masculinity unable to meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinities within capitalist societies. Taking a lead from Durkheim's (ibid) concept of anomie which he defined as normlessness; Walker (2006) develops more specifically an account of 'anomic masculinity, as that form of masculinity that is unguided, lonely and without restraint. This chapter builds on Walker's (2006) portrayal of anomic masculinity to

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outline a type of masculinity that emerges from participants descriptions of a failing masculinity incapable of meeting the hegemonic standards laid down for achieving traditional heterosexual coupling. This discussion of anomic masculinities covers those narratives that present single men who are unable to make choices regarding which women to marry, men who engage in immoral or illegal lifestyles and men who are oppressed.

Just over a quarter of women's questionnaire responses to the question; '*what do you think are the issues that single men face?*' refer to either '*too many women*' or '*too much choice*'. Both responses introduce men's capacity to choose as an issue that single men have to contend with in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Uneven sex ratios also come up in women's questionnaire responses to the question '*what do you think are the main issues for single women?*' with over a quarter of the responses to this question indicating that single Seventh-day Adventist men have too much power as a result of uneven sex ratios. The following are a selection of what participants wrote in their responses:

Too many women - Respondent no. 3,

Being minority, too much power - Respondent no. 6,

Flirting - too much choice, cannot commit - Respondent no. 35,

Too much choice, lack of purpose, lack of spirituality - Respondent no. 45,

Too much choice, girls throw themselves at them - Respondent no. 54.

When questionnaire participants were asked to note down the main issue for single women, six of them indicated that uneven sex ratio issues was a key issue:

Not enough men to choose from – Respondent no 3

Not enough men – Respondent no. 9

Not enough men -- Respondent no. 16

Not too many spiritual or non-spiritual men -- Respondent no. 30

Being acceptable as a single. Not enough men -- Respondent no. 36

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Lack of men within the church. Pressure to marry — Respondent no. 49

The above contributions when combined, suggest that these participants think that a large number of available women to marry in a very small pool of available men, yield excessive opportunities for men to exercise gendered power in a way that is not positive for single women. Although in questionnaire responses women do not explicitly state that it is uneven sex ratios that prolong their singleness, some interviewees did make that direct link. For instance, in answer to the question; ‘*why do some women in the church marry and some do not?*’ Claudette responded;

Claudette: The numbers game and the sheer numbers that there are more women than men. Women fish in a smaller pool, and there is that ...and I think that sometimes because of the numbers game the men tend to be more choosy.

What is novel when considering this issue of too much choice for single men and too little for the single women in the church, is the notion that single men and by that most of them refer to Black men are constructed as having more power than women with regard accessing partners for marriage. Guttentag and Secord’s (1983) ‘*Too many women*’ posits that men who live in a community with a large pool of available women begin to treat them negatively as a direct result of imbalance in sex ratios.

Deviant masculinities

While the women in the study were exercised by the dearth of eligible Black Seventh-day Adventist men, they did not accept uncritically that any Black, single Seventh-day Adventist man would be a suitable partner for them. In particular, some spoke of ruling out men for reasons of criminal activity, immorality and unemployment characteristics they associated with Black men, including Seventh-day Adventist men. Deviant masculinity is a term used in this study to capture participants’ portrayal of those men who deviate from requirements laid down by ‘benevolent masculinity’. These kinds of men are constructed by

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women in the sample as unsatisfactory, undesirable and unsuitable types of Black masculinities.

Below, Susan's (a never married woman in her mid-forties) evaluation of her experience with her ex-partner graphically depicts him as an example of deviant Black masculinity, as a man on the edge of society, incapable and inaccessible. Although he was not a Seventh-day Adventist (and she joined the church sometime after the relationship had ended), her account provides a benchmark for identifying deviant men. As one of the responses to the question '*Was your six year relationship with a Black man?*' Susan affirms; *Yes and that is another story...I found out that he was doing some underhanded stuff and the reason he went away was because he was probably hiding from the police.*

She outlines that in spite of using her financial and emotional 'resources' to sustain the relationship, this Black man's unacceptable behaviour included criminal activities that led to the breaking of their bond. Although her partner was not a Seventh-day Adventist, she does go on to suggest that some Black single men would not want to become a Seventh-day Adventist because of their criminal lifestyles.

Susan: Most of our men are in prison...yea - most of our Black men are ...we as women...it's either we know but we just brush it under the carpet. We just don't have a clue because that side is just closed. So who is not in prison are doing things that if they're caught - we're going to be like...and people will say 'no, no, she must know.' So that is something that goes against us. and the fact that we're Adventists makes it even more limiting - when I say it's even more limiting – because most of the men are in prison and the rest that aren't, are not looking to come into church because they know what they're doing...

Whilst those who are not Seventh-day Adventist are depicted as incarcerated and criminal, those who are, are portrayed by Susan as unavailable and immoral;

... and even some that are in church they can't be involved too fully because they know what they're doing.

Susan develops this account by expressing how she had a couple of 'relationships' with untrustworthy single Seventh-day Adventist men:

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Susan: There was someone who showed an interest in me and it was reciprocated however there was something that was saying you know...just hold and it was God. I even had dreams vision. We just got on like a house on fire- we just spoke about everything. He said that he had been going out with someone and that they had got engaged but it had been broken off and they were no longer seeing each other... that was ok, fine, only after a while to have some woman call my house and ask me questions about him and wanted to know what was going on between us. I told her to get off my phone and if there is anything that she needs to know then she should ask him. The long and short of it is that I found out that he was actually engaged to this girl! It was lies, lies, lies and he had a prominent position in the church.

For Tracey single Seventh-day Adventist men are unsuitable because they cheat on women.

Tracey illustrates how for her, Black Seventh-day Adventist men's 'contraventions' have devastating consequences for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women.

Tracey: It is Black men, they are horrid, ...especially in the church, especially if they are good looking and they have a job and so, it's like they think you will want me and I am going to treat you like rubbish and so a lot of them have a lot of girls in the world and this is not expected... my mum and dad got married and lived happily ever after...this is a massive shock for me.

Despite her reported shock and desire to marry, Tracey is not prepared to accept anything that Black men might do, and poor treatment and infidelity is something she does not accept or see as inevitable, given that her parents' marriage lasted.

Tracey, demonises Black men (with the exception of her father) in wider society and the SDA Church because she thinks that they transgress the conventions of Seventh-day Adventist masculinities by taking advantage of single women and contravening the church's prescriptions on religious endogamy; having relationships with women who do not meet the criteria for Seventh-day Adventist wives. Tracey suggests that this extends men's choices but complicates and intensifies the competition for, and lack of access to single, eligible, Black Seventh-day Adventist men. This contravening of the rules of religious endogamy highlights the presence of a stratification system that rejects unmarried women who are not Seventh-day Adventist and is critical of Seventh-day Adventist men who contravene.

Four other interviewees identify ageing as a further intersecting another criterion in their picture of deviant masculinity. It is the men in these women's own age group who

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present as unsuitable. For instance Janice and Lorraine speaking specifically of Seventh-day Adventist men saw singleness, masculinities, age, unemployment, and race as intersecting in unsuitable men:

Flora: There is something just not connected about them. And they are getting older and I think that panic is setting in..... What is common amongst all that I have mentioned is that they are all Black, unemployed; they are mid-40s to 60s. None is in their 30s....

Lorraine: For those men who are spiritually conscientious, generally it helps them to focus and marry earlier, but older men, it is usually because there is something that is not right, either some sexual deviance ...

Lorraine suggests, then, that an ageing single man might be single because he is sexually deviant. Although she does not define what she actually means by ‘*some sexual deviance*’, it is likely that she is referring to a level of sexual expression that she deems inappropriate from a Seventh-day Adventist standpoint. Vance (1999) argues that the Seventh-day Adventist Church makes a clear demarcation between inappropriate and appropriate sexual behaviour, placing increasing emphasis on sexual freedom within marriage in order to counter worldly influences and centralise marriage. Furthermore, by employing a range of procedures, such as prayer meetings, women and men’s support groups, single ministries, mission work etc. to further the work of the church and increase its memberships, the church also aims to regulate people’s sexual identities (Aune, 2004; Sharma, 2008; Kwee et al. 2007; Moultrie, 2011). In spite of this, Aune (2004) and Kwee et al. (2007) show how a discourse of unmarried masculinity and sexual deviance is at work within Christian congregations.

Lorraine’s suspicions of sexual deviance in some single men might be an expression of regulatory norms that pathologise those that do not fit into the gendered heteronormative order that prescribes marriage early in the life course. In this light married men take up responsibility and are able to present acceptable identities. They are also sexually active within the confines of the ‘right’ relationship, and so are sexually trustworthy and

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accountable. The implication here is that married men represent a type of regulated, fully integrated, socially acceptable identity where men can age appropriately.

Oppressed masculinities

When Lorraine begins to try to make sense of the disaffection that she argues makes it difficult for Black men to be available for Black women, she produces a sympathetic and complex portrayal of oppressed post-slavery masculinities. She makes a link between the negative impact of slavery and poor parenting. Lorraine is the only interviewee to make this connection hence the lengthy quote:

Lorraine: A lot of Black guys have issues... They do not want anyone to know that they have been physically abused. I know some men who were beaten.... There are a lot of guys with problems. They beat you and insult you and are stingy with money and we also have this colonial problem back in slavery days they used men and I think that this has really messed up our own.

It is still in our race, it has messed up our race because of that I see it... father, after father, after father have laid it down [physical abuse] on their sons. And that is what is happening and until that generational situation is sorted out Black men will always have a problem. I bet you any money that if you have six guys in a room my age or even younger and tell them to be honest about how they were brought up they will get up and walk out as they will be too scared to say what has happened to them. Even the professional ones are the same way.

You can't take that pain away unless you deal with it, or maybe they just like to play the field and they get a kick out of it as they can't cope with being that one man with one woman, they have to have three or four kids and the sad thing is the baby that they leave behind... that child grows up dealing with the dad's issues and this is not fair and this is probably a part of it too.'

Lorraine's explanation provides a psycho-social historical perspective that suggests that the issue of oppressed masculinities is a generational problem that has not been addressed within the Black community. She depicts it as an entrenched aspect of oppressed men's identities where they cheat on Black women and have too many children because they have been 'messed up' in childhood as a legacy of post-slavery ills. Unlike Tracey's account of frustration and disappointment with Black men in general, Lorraine sets this type of masculinity apart from her ideal Seventh-day Adventist masculinity.

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Although women produce essentialist accounts of masculinities, an analysis of these considerations make visible diverse masculinities. The above analysis on masculinities therefore aims to signpost some of the multiple ways in which masculinities are situated. These Black women's commentary on Black masculinities, as benevolent, anomic, desirable and illegible both contest and collude with stereotypical accounts of Black men. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding Black men's availability, only those with social capital are able to fill the requirements necessary for being identified as eligible.

Summary

This chapter has argued that, by and large, Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's accounts regarding their experience of singleness centralise marriage. Being married is set as the yardstick by which the single identity is evaluated. Some participants also highlight the significance of being married as an accomplishment that confirms their status as women subject to God's will. Marriage is further identified as important to the participants because it offers protection and belonging and is essential for facilitating idealised gendered identities for Christian adults.

Participants' discussions of eligible masculinities indicate that traditional gendered arrangements are idealised, particularly in relation to racial and religious endogamy. Furthermore, by presenting a patriarchal discourse of 'benevolent masculinity', they highlight vulnerability as an aspect of their unmarried identities.

Their accounts further suggest that their vulnerabilities should be addressed, and in this way they seek an intensely feminine self. Although there is a populist couplet of 'strong Black woman' and 'pathological Black man' at work, there is also evidence of an idealised narrative of 'protective Black man' with 'vulnerable Black woman'. Beauboeuf-Lafontant

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(2009) argues that such portrayals of vulnerability with regards to Black women are limited, and that little is known about the ways that Black women construct a vulnerable self.

Although the single women in this study appear (as discussed in the following chapter), to have the trappings of ‘progressiveness’ such as careers, educational and personal development aspirations, they simultaneously consider and operate within the understanding that they should submit to men’s gendered authority in the heterosexual market place of relationships. Their comments indicate that being married affords new opportunities to allow vulnerabilities to show. The stereotype of ‘strong Black woman’ is undermined by this suggestion. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) argues that achieving vulnerability is crucial for Black women’s liberation and self-preservation. She further identifies a coalition between Black men and women as key to this achievement.

By attributing women’s singleness to external factors such as uneven sex ratios and deviant masculinities, notions that single women are inadequate, unattractive and deficient are destabilised. Taylor et al., (2007) found that single women, in their study of White non-Christian women, engaged in complex identity manoeuvres as a defence mechanism to present themselves as autonomous as possible. Despite their desire to marry Black Seventh-day Adventist men, the women in this study are not uncritically accepting of men who display deviant or ineffective behaviours. In this vein, participants evidence the choices that they have despite strong desires to couple. Additionally, by ‘preferring’ Black men, they extend their practice of religious endogamy by subscribing to a self-imposed practice of racial endogamy. Consequently, when they do this, they shrink the pool of available potential partners even further.

The chapter’s discussion of the centralised status of marriage makes an important contribution towards broadening an understanding of Black women’s single identities. They emerge as conservative, desiring marriage, desiring protection, managing and manoeuvring

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religious, gendered and racialised dilemmas. It is striking, however, that they exercise agency in decisions about potential heterosexual partners. In this light it is apparent that Black single Seventh-day Adventist women do not simply allow themselves to be chosen by men.

This Chapter's consideration of marriage from the point of view of single Seventh-day Adventist Black participants, demonstrate how racialised, gendered and religious narratives converge and underpin their marginalisations in distinctive ways. Furthermore, when participants produce accounts that focus specifically on being single, as illustrated in the following chapter, they not only show how their marginalities interlock with their racialised, gendered and religious identities, they also show how they persist.

Chapter 5 - Singleness: A Problematic and Marginal Identity

Introduction

Despite improvements in women's social positioning, many women continue to construct their identities with reference to traditional gendered narratives (Reynolds et al., 2007; DePaulo, 2006; Taylor, 2010). The cultural repertoires that inform western societies continually change but have not dismantled older narratives (Reynolds, 2004). As a result, women who are not in relationships operate within a social context with competing ideals that include notions that they should be coupled. In various studies, single women report that they experience singleness as an ambivalent and problematic identity (DePaulo, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Byrne, 2006; Byrne and Carr, 2005), however, many contemporary single women attempt to construct positive single identities (Byrne, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Taylor, 2012; Lahad, 2013).

This chapter investigates how Black single Seventh-day Adventist women reflect on being single. The data indicates that in the main, participants depict singleness as a marginal identity, but that marginality is only part of the story because their accounts also show resilience and agency even as they include loneliness and vulnerability. The descriptions of their experiences of men's intrusive behaviors, pressure to marry, demands on their time, bodies and energies as well as their discussions of waiting, choice, attractiveness and celibacy belie simple notions that single Seventh-day Adventist women are merely marginal. An intersectional analysis of their racial, religious and gendered resources highlights the complex relationships between their identities (Swingewood, 2000). These women's descriptions also provide insights into the opportunities that society affords to those who are constructed as

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belonging and to those who are not. Regulations that punish and discomfit singles for being single also produce notions that their identities are incomplete.

The women's questionnaire responses suggest that their family and friends draw from cultural conceptions of singleness as deficit, abnormal and denigrated. They also illuminate the way prevailing cultural gendered expectations alienate and exclude single women. These participants' accounts illustrate, as found in other studies, women, their families and other intimate social networks promote the importance of coupling (DePaulo, 2006; Budgeon, 2008; Aune, 2004). This alienates them and compounds their difficulties and marginalisations as unmarried women. Like the women in Aune's (2004) study, the participants' discussion of aspects of their single lives, fit with and reinforce the regulatory expectations that they should be married.

Marginal yet capable, productive yet lonely

Whilst this chapter focuses on negative and often painful aspects of single women's identities, the theorisation of identities as multiple (McCall, 2005; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Lutz et al., 2011) means this is not the whole story. The women present various aspects of their lives as positive despite the many difficulties they face.

Participants describe themselves as achieving, capable and having productive lives. For example, 27 of the 53 questionnaire respondents make positive reference to personal development pursuits in responding to the question on personal development and singleness. Ten of them indicate that achieving a positive single identity is possible and two of these ten indicate that they have achieved it. One respondent, a never married woman wrote in response to the question: '*What is your main concern or interest as a single woman?*' that '*People think that I should be sad and won't accept that I like being single*', whereas another woman wrote in response to the question on the issues that singles face, that they '*like being*

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single'. Three of the seven women who produced written narratives also indicated that there are some aspects of their singleness that they experience positively. All in-depth interviewees describe themselves as proactive and capable. Three of them gave some positive examples.

For example, in response to the question: *Is there anything else that you would like to add?*

Flora states:

Yes, I can come home when I want to, I can stay in bed as long as I want. I have the freedom to do whatever I want but not the freedom to misbehave but the freedom to be my own person, not to be questioned and not to worry about trying to live up to someone else's expectations. And if I should meet someone ...

In response to the question: *Do you think that you view singleness positively and that it is difficult for you to give it up?* Claudette replies:

My view of singleness will be different from those who have been single for most of their lives because I have those experiences of being married and I am not troubled about being single.

Pauline responds to the question: *What are the circumstances surrounding your singleness?*

Pauline: *[A]t the singles group I started to settle, to value my singleness. This has helped me and I found that I was not quite ready to settle with anybody. I started to feel a bit more sure of myself and focus in on who I am and what I am about and that is a good feeling. My friend and I then began to pray for our partners...*

Three extracts present positive views of singleness. Yet, although being single is described positively, the women also present it as having deficiencies and being problematic. Single identities were more likely to be viewed as positive when they were seen as temporary, either because they had been married in the past, or hoped to be married in the future. Flora's '*and if I should meet someone*', Claudette's '*because I have those experiences of being married I am not troubled about being single*' and Pauline's '*my friend and I then began to pray for our partners*' illustrate this point.

This chapter draws on Black feminists' perspectives that have challenged Black women's invisibilities (Crenshaw 2011a:2011b; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). It also draws on studies that highlight the marginalisation of single women (White and Black) (Aune, 2004; Reynolds, 2007; Budgeon, 2004; Lahad, 2013). It focuses on singleness as another

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feature of Black women's marginal deficit status. Drawing specifically on Crenshaw's (1989) analysis of Black women's intersectional marginalities, this chapter sheds some light on some of the complexities underpinning Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's experiences and identities. Wetherell and Taylor's (2007) consideration of '*Choice and chance: negotiating agency in narratives of singleness*' argue that agency is not primarily how single women construct their identities but rather that their identity work is a complex submission to and resistance of, the predominant expectation that adult women should be coupled. The women in Wetherell and Taylor's (ibid) study had resources of resistance to draw upon for constructing a less negative account of singleness. By contrast some of the women in this study do not appear to employ resistance in their accounts of singleness. Instead they use notions of choice to manage and negotiate a relatively positive singleness made deficient only by those narratives that centralise coupling.

Participants speak in different ways of being marginalised and refer to loneliness as a key way in which this marginality is experienced. Loneliness was the most dominant issue coming from the questionnaire, written accounts and interviews. Loneliness, reflected in the data, refers to a marginal identity. The women desire to have greater social and personal connection. They indicate that it is their lack of a man to partner that serves as the catalyst for the loneliness they describe. Approximately two thirds of the data from the questionnaire and written narratives focus on loneliness as an aspect of the single identity; in fact, it is the main theme arising from all written narratives. All seven women producing written narratives addressed the issue of loneliness in one way or another in 9 out of 11 pieces.

What is seen as the 'failure' to marry produces social responses that are exclusive. In general, scholarship that has tended to focus on the benefits of marriage has presented loneliness as one of the problems that unmarried people tend to encounter (see Waite and Gallagher, 2000; Lopata, 1969; Zasloff and Kidd, 1994). However, discussions with single

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women suggest that they work with the concept of loneliness in varying ways. Reynolds (2004) found that unmarried women tended to negotiate a narrative of independence and agency rather than submit to assumptions that they were unable to socialise with other people. Schutz and DePaulo (2007) found that despite the stereotype that single people were lonely, participants in their study presented single people as more sociable than married people. Most interviewees in this present study demonstrated that they were sociable, actively involved in wider community activities and had a sense of belonging that comes from that. However, when they expressed how they felt about being single, they referred to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Loneliness: racialised and incomplete

Loneliness was a recurring theme in the written contributions as around two thirds of questionnaire respondents and all written pieces focused on loneliness. As indicated by questionnaire participants below, personal loneliness was related to an unfulfilled intention to share their lives with someone of the opposite sex. Because loneliness comes from the lack of a partner, it functions as a regulatory emotion that undermines notions of a positive singleness. In answer to the questionnaire question: *what in your opinion are the loneliness issues of singles?* Participants wrote:

Being alone, not having partners, no-one to understand - Participant 12

I need someone to share my life with - Participant 14

Lack of someone special to share and living alone - Participant 19

Not having special person to share particular moments with, Participant 31 *Having to deal with life alone* - Participant 33

The need to share our lives with someone that we can trust - Participant 61

Not having someone to share life with, feeling unloved - Participant 62

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Other comments suggest an account of social loneliness which on the other hand highlights the socially exclusive reactions of friends, church and family members:

Excluded by church ... - Participant 3

Not welcome in married groups - Participant 2

Lack of understanding from others - Participant 15

Lack of social support - Participant 32

Married people do not value you enough to include you in their social circles - Participant 39

SDA cliques are difficult to socialise with. No-one to share thoughts with as people move on when they are married - Participant 63

By giving accounts of loneliness as social exclusion, most of the women's comments serve to shore up marriage as a site for belonging and singleness as inevitably lonely. However, there are three questionnaire contributions that challenged this view;

False assumptions about loneliness - Participant 38

I like being on my own - Participant 50

No time to experience loneliness - Participant 53.

One of the writers described loneliness as a socially constructed experience; '*some feel that loneliness is a state of mind. They enjoy their own company and like loneliness*'.

Another participants who produced written pieces wrote '*I am in a transitional period of my life and I sometimes feel lonely...I overcome my loneliness by making myself busy*'. Clearly not all accounts of loneliness are negative but the majority is negative, as reflected by another written narrator '*I not understood, I am alone in the world, I am alone in the world. My thirst is insatiable...*' The poem submitted by the poet provides an in-depth intersectional expression of loneliness, sexual need and spirituality. Helen's contribution is discussed in the chapter on celibacy.

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The in-depth interviews enrich an understanding of loneliness, particularly in the responses to a question that foregrounded the intersection of ethnicity and religion: *Is there anything that you would like to add regarding loneliness and singleness for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women?* Chantelle refers to loneliness with Black Seventh-day Adventist women as symptomatic of their failure to comply with what she sees as those religious dictates that Seventh-day Adventist women should be submissive to men. As a result of failing to submit, women are not chosen by men for marriage and Chantelle infers that Black single women who want to get married need to begin displaying submissiveness as single women. Furthermore, failure to comply results in prolonged loneliness. It is possible that Chantelle also works from the assumption that submissiveness is not ‘a natural’ feature of Black women’s gendered work.

Chantelle: Well yea, I think that Black SDA [Seventh-day Adventist] women are performing because of the social pressure. They are doing what is expected because of the social context of the SDA church – like the idea that wives should submit to your husband and all of that, and Eve sinned and it’s kinda like her fault, all that, all those little narratives that exist in the church. So yes, so I think that this does contribute to them being lonely because I think that you don’t feel that you can truly be yourself...I think, yea definitely, it does contribute and might exacerbate that loneliness....

Chantelle suggests therefore, that should Black single Seventh-day Adventist women fail to conform to the standards set by heteronormative ideals and so they are marginalised. By the statement ‘cannot be yourself’, Chantelle draws attention to single women’s surrender to the pressure which undermine those personal characteristics and behaviours that would negate traditional gendered work and leave them single.

Claudette’s account of loneliness includes ethnicity and outlines the daily struggles that Black women face in the workplace:

Claudette: In this context (the workplace) I would go as far as to say that there are particular issues with Black women and loneliness as they have a disadvantage because of the struggle to find a place in society... There is a typical view of Black women that you are overly promiscuous or you are not very well adjusted. You are viewed from that perspective...they were never viewed on the same level as the host country’s females and so they are fighting against that. And so the difference is continually ever present with them... you’re always

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seeking to be accepted into a system that is not necessarily welcoming and it is very difficult...I think that those issues, I think, have an impact on how you see yourself and view yourself... On the one hand I feel that I have been fortunate that I have grown up with really positive experiences (in the Caribbean) in terms of who I am and how I feel about myself as I never had to think about being Black and disadvantaged as I lived in a place where most of the people are Black.

Claudette paints a picture of the workplace as a discriminatory space that generates stereotypical accounts of Black women; as such it is a place where exclusion is experienced. She concludes that Black spaces such as the Caribbean provide opportunities for a more positive autonomous identity. In this way Claudette indicates that single women have greater scope to carve out their own autonomous identities in the Caribbean rather than Britain. Claudette, by extending a view of Black women's marginalities beyond the domain of marriage, emphasises a central issue on which Black feminists agree and that is, that marginality is a key factor of Black women's lives (Reynolds, 1997; Mirza, 2010). Both Claudette and Chantelle illustrate how Black single women's identities in the face of religiously and nationally motivated gendered racial prescriptions, complicate the loneliness they experience as unmarried women.

When participants refer to their marginalities they produce an account of social exclusion similar to the women in Reynolds' (2004, pp. 115-119) study. Women in Reynolds' and this study show how this type of exclusion creates a strong contrast between singleness and coupledness, where married people are promoted as privileged and single people as excluded (Reynolds 2004, p. 118). Additionally, participants in Reynolds's (2004) study were analysed as working with a repertoire of social exclusion rather than personal deficit. This was a strategy that placed emphasis on other people's faulty understanding of single women, rather than a capitulation to the idea that there is something wrong with single women. The Black single Seventh-day Adventist women in this study highlight other notable complexities with regard to their exclusions as single women; they show how their social exclusions as single women intersect with exclusions that are racialised.

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Pressures that illuminate deficiencies

Chantelle's reference to the pressures that Black women encounter to achieve idealised femininity highlights a function of social pressure within participants' networks. Pressures to marry emerge as strategies that highlight the single identity as abnormal. The cumulative picture is that the participants' identities as single people are discredited and subject to the authority, scrutiny and obtrusions of others.

There are varying types of 'pressures to marry' that participants contend with. Over a third of the data from both written narratives and questionnaires suggest that 'pressures to marry' is a key aspect of the single identity. For the most part these pressures are external. The participants report receiving comments about expectations that they should marry; they experience normative ideas about marriage in the media as well as expectations and demands that they should be available for others (including, as shall be discussed in the chapter on celibacy; sexual availability). Although contemplations of the demands from others does not seem to capture what is commonly expressed by participants as pressures to marry, this latter 'pressure' is included within the chapter's description of 'pressures to marry' because the effect of demands and impositions for the single women in this study is a reinforcement of a hyper-visible deficit single identity devoid of and yet desiring masculine protection and care.

'Pressures to marry' emerges as the most common response to the questionnaire question regarding attitude of family and friends to the women's single status. Apart from one comment stating that the pressure was partly ambivalent but supportive, participants employ terms such as '*insensitive*', '*berated*', '*judgmental*', '*worry*', '*blame*' and phrases such as '*something wrong with you*' to describe the negative nature of the pressure that they experience. In response to questions about the attitudes of family and friends (questions 4 and 5), participants made the following statements:

Pressure to find partner - Participant 7

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Insensitive statements like you will be next to marry - Participant 12

Hurry up and get married and end the celibacy pressure - Participant 23

Being berated by brother for not having children for young relatives-my father did the same- this makes me angry - Participant 27

Pressure from family as they think that something is wrong and wish to see you live a normal life - Participant 52

All eight never married interviewees further reveal the uncomfortable extent to which their social networks make clear expectations that they should be in relationships. Angela spoke at length about celebrating her thirtieth birthday. Working with what on the surface might appear as two contradictory scripts, she self-identified as generally confident but less so when confronted about her single status:

Angela: I can also remember my 30th birthday... and I remember the evening when I came back all dressed and I thought that will show you... I saw them and they were thinking in another way and a guy said 'where is your boyfriend and I was kind of struggling, like ah um and one guy came to my rescue and said that 'I see there are too many to choose from' and there was a little feeling of vulnerability...it did not bad colour the evening fortunately because there was so much goodness, but there was that little feeling of awkwardness'.

For Angela the awkwardness comes from expectations that by the age of thirty she should have fulfilled her adult responsibilities by being married. She is therefore considered immature, normatively off schedule, pathologically different and inept because of her failure to do so. Her mention of feeling awkward is a reminder of Bourdieu's (2008) work on the peasant farmers of Bearn who were unmarried. By looking at how their disposition or habitus was uncomfortably hyper-visible, Bourdieu (ibid) aimed to expose those gendered conventions that expect men to marry as reinforcing the peasant farmers' awkwardness.

One interviewee commented that she has made a conscious decision to manage feelings of awkwardness by keeping away from certain social functions, thereby avoiding attention that makes her uneasy. Janice, a middle aged interviewee stated that since moving into her mid- fifties, her singleness is less visible and hence 'the pressures to marry' has

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reduced. Her comments suggest that singleness as hyper-visible deficiency is particularly relevant to younger women. By extension, Janice discusses ‘pressures to marry’ that does amplify her singleness, but is also supportive and embracing:

Janice: There are people around me who have wanted me to get married, they have prayed for me and have tried to get me in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex and so people have wanted to see me married and so they see it as something that I should strive for and something that God gives and they would like that for me...I think that if they saw me walk into the church with a man the whole place would rejoice –

‘Pressures to marry’ is consistently represented as a narrative that makes singleness a problematic and awkward identity. This regulation continually highlights participants’ deficiencies as single women. Such awkward encounters serve to reinforce assumptions about gendered normality (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Reynolds, 2006; Budgeon, 2008). ‘Pressures to marry’ in this study unfolds as a policing strategy employed in the women’s close networks that serves to shore up the superior positioning of coupledness as an aspect of credible adulthood and, in consequence, ensures that unmarried people are excluded.

Pressure from problematic intruders

‘Pressures to marry’ is also expressed as unwelcome demands from others. Participants highlight how the absence of a partner is frequently seen to signify their availability to address others’ needs and desires. Their contributions on this matter show how they also feel policed. Women’s accounts in this section tell a story of how significant others and members within their church community make demands on their time, their money and their skills which has the effect of reinforcing a hyper-visible deficit single identity devoid of and yet desiring masculine protection and care. Furthermore these demands, by highlighting participants’ lack of masculine protection also exposes a narrative that unmarried women are indeed available, unprotected and available for intruders.

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It is within the considerations of vulnerability (*What in your opinion are the vulnerability issues that singles face?*) that a narrative of *using single women's resources*, which I refer to as 'time and energy-bound pressures' emerges. For example, the following questionnaire responses were typical:

Demands on single person's time - Respondent no. 7

Being put upon - Respondent no. 14

[My] family has not been able to accept the restrictions placed upon my time especially at weekends - Respondent no. 30

[The] family may think that you are available to meet their needs and put yours on hold,
Respondent no. 39

[My] family feels that you are at their beck and call - Respondent no. 40

In her interview, Claudette commented at length on her experiences of being 'put upon' regularly by friends both in and out of the church:

Claudette: I can remember a married friend saying that she and her husband wanted to go away for a marriage retreat and at that time my sons were older but they were still here and she wanted me to come and go to her house and look after her children. So I thought, should I leave my children to look after yours? I don't think that at that time she even thought about it, I don't think that she was being nasty...

Developing her point Claudette went on to report that:

Someone called me at midnight, I answered, and when I did I thought to myself this is not a good idea. It was all about them and I thought how thoughtless..... Sometimes people want to tell you about their issues. Or people in church thinking that you will be available at the drop of a hat. People calling me at four, to have a meeting that day, and do something that they want me to do. They want me to sort something by six that evening. It is stuff like that that I think people do not think about.

Biographical historical (Tucker, 1983) and social historical (Froide, 2005) accounts also indicate that unmarried women of the lower-middle and middle-classes were expected to meet the needs of other families. Thus the idea of an unmarried woman working to meet the needs of others is not new. Convents are promoted as Catholicism's formal spaces for some unmarried women to live, and as a space where nuns can be preoccupied with God's work

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(Froide, 2005; Trzebiatowska, 2012). The experiences of such single women have also been found to be difficult but there is some social capital in the form of what Trzebiatowska (ibid) refers to as '*consecrated femininity*'. Responses in this study suggest that the informal expectation that women should be preoccupied with meeting the needs of others is experienced as intrusive and difficult. Unlike the Polish nuns Trzebiatowska (2013) studied, some of these participants indicate that they resent the expectation that they should be available for others. Their resentments against those who try to make demands on their time and energies show their resistance to such demands. The pressure that some participants refer to, also evoke those traditions that insist that single women should support their networks by being nannies, home helpers etc. (Froide 2005, p. 20). While singleness for the women in this study involves a pressure that amplifies informal tendencies to 'mammify' them as in on Omolade's (1994) concept of 'mammification', Trzebiatowska's (2013) Polish nuns show how meeting the demands of others is a choice.

The questionnaires, written narratives and in-depth interviews suggest that intrusiveness is directly related to the women's lack of success in securing a partner – a masculine presence whose role is to secure them within the protective boundaries of marriage. The intrusions or impositions that participants describe have the effect of illuminating their marginalities. As such, narratives of marriage as a safe protected space remain salient for the women. In the same vein, whilst pressure as discussed above appears to marginalise, in some other way it sheds light on a familiar narrative that offers opportunities for inclusion.

Nurturing and caring are central attributes of both Hill Collins' (2000) and Omolade's (1994) critical accounts of the representations of Black women. The expectation that they should be available to others is a reminder of the 'mammification' narratives that African American women face. Being available for others as 'mammy' could be one route through

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which Black women experience enhanced levels of gendered belonging. If this is the case then the invitation for participants to perform ‘mother’ might also evoke narratives of the post-slavery Black matriarch. Taken together, impositions on their time and energy and comments that they should marry have the effect of maintaining a post-slavery gendered order where Black women’s strength is continually foregrounded. While the pressures they face continually confirm the women’s marginal status, they also allow them opportunities to develop counter responses that serve to strengthen them and make them resilient. This is achieved when Black single Seventh-day Adventist participants respond by self-protective attempts to manage these impositions. Black feminist writers suggest that it is the unprotected feature of Black women’s identities that produce regimes of self-protection that are interpreted by outsiders as strength (Hill Collins, 2000; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). In turn, this pervasive construction of the strong Black woman has implications for how these women negotiate singleness.

Strong Black woman: forfeiting marriage

When outlining how they see themselves, a common theme was that participants see themselves as productive and self-determined. They also illustrate how they see such attributes as making it difficult for them as single women. They considered that being strong undermines their ability to marry because one of the responsibilities of strong women is to protect others and when they do so as a central aspect of their identity, they forfeit the right to be ‘protected’.

The discussion above has illustrated the difficulties Black single Seventh-day Adventist women face and how others take advantage of their time and skills because they are single women. However, when the question; ‘*how would you describe yourself?*’ is posed, interviewees invariably complicate the description of single women as vulnerable. They

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describe themselves as capable, in charge of their lives, very independent and committed to personal development. Lorraine declares:

Lorraine: Oh my goodness gracious, I am very adventurous, an explorer. I like challenges and I see myself as full of life, yea full of life. I am loving and I am, I am (pause) excitable, a thinker and at the same time I am a fun person. I am not a straitlaced Adventist person. I like music, dance I am deep and funny and so I think that I am a bit of a schizo.

Janice, on the other hand stated:

I would say that I am an independent possibly self-sufficient Black woman who gets on with life and you know, that makes me fairly happy. I don't want to be defined as single but as a Black woman that does not have a partner but has other interests in life.....

Janice's view is that identifying herself as 'single' serves to limit who she is. By centralising her identity as a Black woman rather than a single woman she suggests that there are alternative story lines for independent Black women.

Susan constructs an identity as a strong Black woman also:

Susan: I am a woman. I wouldn't say I am strong outwardly, I am a strong Black woman but I think when talking about strength, I am usually calm. I am usually a calm person and I think my strength is in my calmness."

In fact four other interviewees in response to the same question asking for a self-description; 'how would you describe yourself?' produced a complexly positive view. Chantelle's comments on how she thought others viewed her also drew on the strength narrative: 'Strong, dignified, hardworking, professional, spiritual, yea I agree with all.'

Flora, however, indicating that her strength was a cultural attribute stated:

Flora: mm yes I never thought of it ...I am a strong Black woman. I am a Black woman in terms of my belief, culture and the things that I love to do.

Verona laughed in her response to the question: 'how would you describe yourself?'

She said "I suppose that I would describe myself as a single Black female – a Christian, a strong personality."

Although this is not necessarily the same as 'strong, Black woman', by mentioning 'strong' she is saying something about resilience being an aspect of her self-identification.

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Although the word ‘strong’ was not directly mentioned in other interviewees’ commentaries, a general notion of strength underpinned their self-reflections. For example:

Tracey: I have always been really independent and I have wanted to do things myself. When I was little I was ill and used to take care of myself. I have always wanted to do it myself, when they were sick my other siblings would be dramatic and I would think why can't they get on with it themselves.

These comments signify that the women were inclined to view themselves as psychologically and physically strong. However, this strength was not entirely positive in that it also served to undermine women’s eligibility for marriage. In discussing reasons why they were single some participants referred to their selves as *too tall, too big* or *too independent*. Such accounts illuminate some of those narratives that construct an account of the ideal wife as small, slender and dependent. This puts many of the women in a double bind as exemplified by Claudette:

Claudette: Maybe at a deep unconscious level I have embraced all the messages that I have heard about not being dependent And I think that there is a bit of me that thinks it would be nice to be partnered and there is another bit that makes me think do you really want that. I think that I have not been able to allow men to be men at times and I suppose that I am only learning that with my children, in that you have to allow them to be men and I am not very good at that. I want to keep some of my own space and control.

In a complementary way, Angela sees her physicality as one that expresses strength but is a barrier for obtaining men’s attention: Sojourner’s question to the crowd ‘Ain’t I a woman?’ (Brah and Phoenix, 2004) also drew attention to herself as a Black woman who was physically strong to emphasise the problem of linking ideas of strength with masculinity.

Taken together, Sojourner’s speech and Angela’s comments (see below) highlight how gendered ideals about the body’s physical abilities endure.

Angela: I can say, the idea of being statuesque I really like it, I am feeling blessed the way my body is I really enjoy it. I like the form and I like the way that I look in my clothes. I see and I hear that others think that also,...I am very well received but for some men I seem like a threat. A guy that was interested in me said something about me looking strong’

Angela identifies physical strength and tallness as threatening to men who may be interested in her.

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Chantelle, who as a recently divorced woman, introduces and racialises the idea of demureness by her identification of it as a feature of White women. She presents White women as being successful in attracting and maintaining men's protective attention. Demureness, for her is a characteristic Black women need to perform to secure male attention and protection. For Chantelle, demure women are 'chosen' and had she played the 'demure' role, she would probably still be married. Flora, a never married woman expands this viewpoint by focusing on the characteristics of women who are chosen for marriage. For her women who are submissive to men are preferred to self-actualised women. In these contributions, 'strength' signifies challenge to the traditional gendered order and this 'challenge' is seen to result in Black women's relegation within the heteronormative field.

The idea of Black women as resilient mothers is naturalised in Claudette's response to the initial question '*What do you think are the circumstances around your singleness?*'

Claudette: There is also the bit where you come from a societal context where women being alone and doing it on their own was so natural that I did not see it as different. In this context, this society, it is very much different and viewed from a totally different perspective. Here you hear of single parent families making up negative demographics, whereas where I came from at that time, it was, wow! Look at how well these women are doing!

Here, Claudette considers lone mothering in the Caribbean from which she comes, as an example of independent and celebrated singleness. The two interconnected narratives simultaneously at work here i.e. 'strong Black woman' (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009) and Black woman as 'lone mother' (Reynolds, 1997; Woodward and Mastin, 2005; Johnson and Staples, 2004) provide opportunities to live out those gendered ideals that are available for Black women. Claudette's comments on her observations on single women in the Caribbean proposes that single women who are also mothers have opportunities to be celebrated as women and have a place of respect within those societies.

Pauline found however, that as a single mother who had got pregnant whilst actively involved in her local church (with a large Caribbean membership) that single mothering was

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frowned upon as evidence of illegitimate sex. Although the church did not embrace her as a ‘strong Black mother’, her response to the marginal status that was conferred upon her by her church paradoxically centers the ‘strong Black mother’ narrative. Her story, which shall be revisited in the chapters on spirituality and celibacy, pinpoint how this church’s marginalising tactics reinforced those narratives that legitimated celibacy for singles and denigrated unmarried mothering. Pauline illustrates how she eventually resisted the exclusionary manoeuvres of those in her local church community, by publicly taking a stand and naming her oppression. Participants by referring to strong Black woman or similar phrases illustrate that this is an important description for them. The participants also discuss it as a resource that enables them to cope with the marginalities that they encounter even as they recognise the difficulties that come with this association. The extent to which Black women entrench their oppressions by colluding with these notions of strength is an ongoing debate amongst Black feminists. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) suggests that it is the construction of Black women’s strength that serves to marginalise them:

when we appeal to this narrative of invulnerability to justify predatory social policies that blame victims of poverty, abuse, and neglect for not being ‘strong enough’, we are each ‘doing’ strength and contributing mightily to the structure and seeming permanence of racialized gender.

(Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009, p.153)

Black single Seventh-day Adventist women see strength as entrenching their marginalised statuses outside the domains of the heteronormative gendered order. In the above statement Beauboeuf-Lafontant (ibid) implies that Black women who challenge assumptions that they should be strong should do this by engaging in a political act of placing responsibility on those who have colluded with this claim. Yet when she positions vulnerability as a personal and political quest for African American women, conventional gendered arrangements are legitimised. For as these women ‘do’ vulnerability they will place responsibility on the shoulders of men who have a responsibility to acknowledge their needs and to engage in acts of ‘*ongoing commitments, care, recognition and trust...*’ (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009, p.

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154). Some participants confirm this argument when they present Black women's strengths as a barrier to receiving men's attention. In other words when Black women give up claims to strength, they increase their chance of marrying.

Choice: a marginalising opportunity

Choice emerges as a complex resource in participants' lives with contradictory possibilities. As discussed in the previous chapter, women point out that there are factors outside their control that make it difficult for them to choose or be chosen for marriage. They work within prescribed conventions regarding the matter of choice; choosing a partner is something that men do and most participants abide by this convention. Although around two thirds of written narratives and all interviews in this study convey a message of progress, autonomy and control when considering personal development or independence and 'strength' in their self-descriptions, their sense of agency appears limited when interviewees wish to change from a single status to a married one.

The interview discussions where choice was foregrounded were ones in which most interviewees were hesitant, halting and troubled. In the interview I asked participants; *'what would you say are the circumstances surrounding your singleness?'*

Janice discussed the choices she felt she had around managing her unchosen identity as a middle-aged woman:

Janice: The reality is that I am 55 and I am still not married. So I have to conclude that it is probably not the best thing for me. People may argue with that but the reality of my situation is that there is nobody ringing me up. I have not in recent years had experiences of going out with a man. No-one one is ringing my phone....and no one is calling to take me out... So there is nothing in the background of my life to suggest that the possibility is there. I know that this could change in time but there is nothing to suggest otherwise... there is nothing, nothing.

Chantelle, who had hoped to re-unite with her estranged husband, stated how important it was for her to be re-chosen by him. She described how she deliberately behaved in ways designed

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to get him to “re-choose” her and so hopefully re-signify her value as his wife. She explained that she was eventually not chosen by him and that this was difficult to manage.

Chantelle: It's an additional layer of rejection as one of the things that I needed was for my ex-husband to make more of an effort, inconvenience himself to come and get us- that did not happen. Part of it for me is coming to terms with the fact that he was not prepared to step outside his comfort zone.....[T]o see him not step outside the comfort zone is a double rejection, like a slap in the face..

Highlighting her sense of marginalisation Chantelle concludes:

I have never been good enough as good enough for him as White women.

Chantelle racialises her failed relationship by her suggestion that her husband had discriminated against her because he preferred White women. She felt this because her ex-husband opted to date a White Seventh-day Adventist woman rather than ‘*come and get*’ [her]. Chantelle illustrates that by waiting for her estranged husband to choose her (and the children), she supported those traditional conventions where men choose women for wives. The result of this meant that Chantelle had to settle for a dis-preferred identity instead.

On the other hand two participants, Tracey and Claudette, render themselves as actively making decisions about their marital statuses. Tracey, despite the limitations imposed by sex ratios and other factors, does choose to accept or to reject relationships. She has to make choices and yet she is not ready to choose:

Tracey: I entered my first real relationship, He proposed and then two to three years later, nothing was happening...I met another guy who was lovely but the issues that I carried with the first guy went on into this relationship. I was not ready to settle down and before we knew it seven years..... I was not being serious and so when it came to the crunch I needed to make a choice and then it dawned on me that I have to be serious, can't be like a child I am now in my thirties.... I was not ready to make decisions because of the first issue in the first relationship.

Closer scrutiny illustrates how Tracey's choices are actually quite limited. This is illustrated in her response to the question: *If someone stated that you would be single for the rest of your life what would you do?*

Tracey: I know I can get married to anyone. I have turned a lot of people down so if I wanted to get married I could. To hell with you I am getting married!

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This response is an example of how this participant showed the limited nature of her discursive positioning in the identity she has not chosen because, should the situation present itself, she would use her agency to choose one of the ‘unsuitable’ men on her list rather than remain single. Because she rejects the idea that she would never marry.

Claudette also sees herself as making choices about remaining single. In response to the question; ‘*Do you think that Black single Seventh-day Adventist women choose singleness?*’ she weaves a retrospective ‘autonomous’ account:

Claudette: I think that I have chosen by default..., by my own actions I have chosen it. I remember distinctly that as a child I used to say that I would not be married and I was reminded of that quite recently. So maybe by default I have chosen it... Although I have been in relationships, they have not worked, or have not because I probably on an unconscious level have not given it one hundred and fifty percent to make it work.

Claudette implies that her status as a woman who has been married twice (and therefore twice chosen by men), gives her license to reconstruct an autonomous account: *by my own actions I have chosen it*. Claudette depicts her ‘failed’ relationships as being the result of her unconscious decision to give less commitment than what is normally expected from those who are married.

Tracey, on the other hand, suggests that she would rather marry any man (including one that she had previously turned down) rather than remain single. She implies that it is better to expect much less than her ideal, from a man, if it means being included in the traditional gendered order. Claudette’s and Tracey’s accounts both highlight how their autonomous choices are constrained by old conventions. They both agree with Chantelle’s earlier comment on the ‘power’ of demure women as able to obtain a man’s attention and commitment. Reynolds (2004) found that women’s accounts of singleness drew on constructions of the reflexive autonomous self (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) to emphasise their agency. Their descriptions also showed the contradictions of older conventions at work for these single women in that when they indicated that they had chosen

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singleness and also expressed that they wanted to be in a relationship, they faced the ideological dilemma of living between two very different positions; between the desire to be coupled and expectations that women should now be independent. Because marriage is an idealised identity within the religious fields, the women in this present study manage dilemmas surrounding the difficulties in getting married, but are unequivocal about their desire to marry.

Waiting to be chosen; marginalised hyper-visibility

The women in this study do very little to de-centralise marriage as the legitimate arena for completing their adult identities. Unable to access marriage they secure alternative opportunities for establishing their place in the gendered order; waiting becomes part of the process for doing so. Most of them see opportunities in waiting and yet their marginal status is exaggerated when they ‘choose’ to wait. As waiting is prolonged, these women’s marginalisation becomes more visible and illuminates social expectations about the inappropriateness of remaining single (Lahad, 2012). Despite the uncomfortableness that is associated with waiting, those who wait are continually constrained to choose it.

The Interviewees depicted waiting as a gendered activity that single women hoping for marriage have to adopt. It is one of the activities that add value to the Seventh-day Adventist identity. By reciting her father’s pronouncement that good women do not pursue men, Lorraine sets up her identity as a mature, available, single woman:

Lorraine: When I see someone I just stand my ground. I don’t do anything and I always remember my father in the background saying that real women do not hunt. My father used to tell me that. I just don’t go there... When you are in the world you just move towards him [a man that you like]... If he likes you he would respond...in the church they will think that you are too forward, too up front, that you are not spiritual My daddy used to say real women do not hunt.

Lorraine’s comments serve to disrupt concepts of feminist independence and proactivity and by reinforcing patriarchal authority. She does this by drawing on a ‘separate spheres’

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discourse promoted by her father. Her father had advised her to maintain her womanhood by not going after any man and she in turn supports this. Lorraine portrays waiting as a critical performance for securing gendered, religious and patriarchal recognition.

On the other hand, both Janice and Angela indicate that waiting provides important fuel for marriages. The responses below pertain to the question ‘*do you think that single women should wait or seek after a man that they like?*’

Janice: women who kind of really barrage men may get them in the end and something is lost and it is that precious thing that makes the relationship... I want to be special and that the person would see me as the best thing since sliced bread...

Angela’s response was: My thing is being actively available, I do not think that it is my job. If I was seeking it would be with a small s ... If I was a single man I would grab the bull by the horns but as a woman you are waiting on God and waiting on men... One of the reasons is because I really want to feel that whoever I end up with just really wanted me... and would think ‘this was the lady I want and not that she presented herself and I went with it’... It’s nice to tell the children that ‘when I met your father... ‘rather than your Dad was not interested in me at all, but I was just burning up I don’t want that I want to feel wanted... but it is not my job to say. It is not right to go up to Mr. Blogs and say ‘I am Jane and I would like to be a Blogs too.’

In anticipation of a conversation with her future children, Angela claims that by virtue of waiting to be chosen, she will secure her standing as the ‘chosen’ and credible wife (‘Mrs. Blogs’) and mother in the future.

Janice and Angela’s accounts above illustrate what they see as two functions of waiting. First, women who wait are more likely to be chosen and in the second instance waiting makes it more possible to maximise their value to the men who should choose them. Not only do the women in the sample feel they have to wait, but those who have violated waiting report that nothing is gained when they chose not to wait. They therefore re-inscribe the narrative that passive women accrue immediate and long term value. Susan drew on biblical authority when discussing the above issue.

Susan: I don’t think I should. I tend to go back to the story of Isaac and Rebecca. If you look at the biblical stories, I don’t see any women putting themselves out there. I know that was then..... but I’ve never been that type of competitive person and the last thing I’d want to do is be out there, putting myself out there competing for a guy’s attention. I just think he’ll see

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what he wants to see and who he wants to see.

For Susan, there is a biblical mandate for conducting herself as a single woman and she also presents that it is natural for her to wait to be chosen. Susan promotes herself as traditionally feminine and eschews competition with other women. She is also reluctant to do anything that will draw attention to herself.

All single women in the in-depth interviews were clear that they were not proactive in attempting to gain men's attention. Furthermore, as SDA women, they espoused beliefs that women who wait on God occupy a stronger position than those who do not because it would be God who would choose the man who would eventually choose them. Those who waited would be rewarded. The consideration of waiting illuminates another way in which the women negotiate their identities within conventional gender scripts and perform waiting as an activity that centralises patriarchal authority and therefore single women's acts of submission. Angela succinctly puts it thus: *[A]s a woman you are waiting on God and waiting on men.* Many of the never married women in this study would agree with Angela.

Waiting as a racialised procedure; grappling with idealised accounts of beauty

Participants' accounts of the types of women who are chosen by men for heterosexual relationships and therefore the types of women who wait the shortest length of time are overwhelmingly similar. The concept of hegemony underlines physical beauty as a decisive factor for those single women who wait marketplace of relationships. Studies on hegemonic beauty generally accept that the standards for physical beauty are European (Hill Collins, 2000: 2005; Kwan and Trautner, 2009). Participants in this study show how the strength of these ideals positions their waiting as a racialised procedure.

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As previously discussed the women's self-descriptions portray interviewees as progressive, capable women. Questionnaire respondents also show how they are actively engaged in personal development pursuits. In the interview, Angela for example, talked about how she looks after herself, and is frequently complimented on her on her appearance. Yet, these are not attributes that they consider will lead to their being chosen because, according to their accounts, they consider that they are not attractive enough. Three of the interviewees consider that middle aged single women have decreasing abilities to attract suitors but racialised repertoires of attractiveness were also central.

The concept of attractiveness surfaced in in-depth interviewees' discussion of episodes related to their singleness and their relationship with men. All consider that it is important for women. Although not all interviewees openly labelled themselves as attractive, all referred to events and experiences they felt demonstrated that they were able to attract men's attention in some way. Those who openly described themselves as attractive expressed the greatest dilemma in understanding why they were single. In other words, they perceive that their attractiveness had not functioned as a stepping stone towards marriage. Instead, they identified a key feature of their dilemma as connected to shadism, racialisation, disability and size. Interviewees constructed accounts that ascribed significant importance to what they saw as embodied deficits and by doing so, they inadvertently colluded in the promotion of a hegemonically defined beauty that is racialised.

Both Angela and Tracey's comments below are examples of women who spoke openly about being attractive. They suggest that there is a disjunction between having attractiveness and their ability to capitalise on it.

Angela: I am definitely admired by men to a degree but I do question whether or not I am seen as an accessible type of female by virtue of the fact that I am single. ...Ok first thing that comes to mind is I am opinionated and the other thing that comes to mind is strong tall um spiritual, intelligent, single, and attractive well dressed.

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Tracey: I find that people blame you for it, like you must have issues, so it must be your fault. You are an attractive Black woman and you have the world at your feet as far as Black men are concerned...

There is some indication from the comment below that Tracey's inability to communicate her attractiveness effectively is located within her failure to meet one of the specifications of attractiveness – light skin. Tracey was responding to a question on the issue of loneliness for Black women and introduced the issue of pigment as a factor in how she personally identified with the issue.

Tracey: Yes Black men like light skinned girls with long hair. If you are not then you are screwed and so you don't get chosen. You are at the bottom of the pile and so you will find that light skinned friends and family members will have relationship after relationship and you will find the pastor wives are light skinned and I have been turned down many a time because my skin has not been light enough. They [meaning the men that have shown some interest] have told me and they have told friends of mine; "She is gorgeous but she is not light skinned enough". Nobody actually say it. They don't do that. It's just sad. I knew that my sister and mates who are light skinned would get married. They are dating who they want. They are being chased after ...but I have been shunned for being darker skinned.

Tracey draws strongly on the idealised notions of attractiveness amongst the men in her sphere to highlight the presence of systems of pigmentocracy that she sees working to entrench her in her singleness. Presenting Black men as discriminators she reveals how the issue of pigment discrimination informs her experience of being single.

Tracey's use of the word 'shunned' suggests a level of rejection that is intentional that she perceives her dark skin has led to her being rejected as a marriage partner. The regularity with which participants claim that pigmentocracy exists within Seventh-day Adventist men's choice of partners, shows the extent to which ideals of post-colonial embodiment informs their accounts. Seven of the ten interviewees in response to a variety of questions and prompts on the issue of singleness identified pigmentation and European physical make up as important factors complicating their ability to attract Black Seventh-day Adventist men. Verona presents a multilayered explanation that draws on several narratives

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in response to the question; *‘What do you think are the circumstances around your singleness?’*

Verona: *When I think about it I think that changes as well. When younger I put it down to looks. Girls with fair skin and long hair got chosen and then it started to become an issue and then you talk about it and then you hear that you have your own car and... guys find you too intimidating and then it was [you] girls are too holy. They all wear hats and it was a bit of this is and a bit of that. As you get older you get to the point and you reflect more deeply and I think that I am settled with the idea that it is a combination of things and when I look at my generation I see that there are generation of (inserted family name) women who have not got married. I am interested in what has been passed down to me psychologically and emotionally that mean that we do not get married.*

Presenting herself as an older reflective agent with much deeper analysis to offer, Verona identifies social causes as contributory factors. Her response suggests that she is hesitant about locating the reasons for her singleness within a narrative of personal deficiency.

However, it is important to note that it is only when Verona mentions academic reasons that she names the issue that is worthy of investigation:

Verona: *I am interested in what has been passed down to me psychologically and emotionally that mean that we do not get married.*

“We” serves the function of placing her singleness with other single women in her family whose single identities she sees as complex and intriguing.

Angela like Verona was hesitant about drawing on a narrative of personal deficit. In response to the question, *‘what do you see as the circumstances surrounding your singleness?’* she responded:

Angela: *I find that hard to answer*

Me: *You don’t have to answer this question*

Angela: *I am not sure that I want to dig deep- that question can feed into the ‘I am not enough, maybe I am not good enough, maybe I am not fair enough’.*

As the interview progressed she re-visited the issue of her skin shade and located it as operating within the wider church community:

Angela: *So I think that it could be good in that sense as a darker skin Black woman you can get the sense that darker skin comes with a lower value and what makes it more profound is*

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the idea of pastor's wives ,again not always, but generally... that these things can prevail, those little inconsistencies that can leave you with the sense that irrespective of what you bring to the table, the same degree of value won't be placed on it if you, if you are not of a particular hue..

Angela's views regarding the presence of shadism in Seventh-day Adventist communities concur with Tracey's view. With regards to pigmentocracy, Tracey compares the Black-led Pentecostal churches with the Seventh-day Adventist church. She points out that in Black-led churches members tend to choose people based on what they believe is divinely directed. She also expressed surprise at what she sees as an undermining of shadism in these communities. Another interviewee also referred to the tendency for Seventh-day Adventist leaders to choose women who 'looked white' as wives. In this way, Angela and Tracey attribute pigmentocracy to the leadership.

Some scholarship (Hill, 2002; Hunter, 2002; Patton, 2006; Wilder, 2008) suggest that an intersection of shadism and gender is important for investigating the prevalence of racist ideology in Black American communities. The 'mammy' figure is a case in point. Hill (2002, p. 77) suggests that this stereotype arose out of a *White supremacist strategy to justify racial slavery where whiteness was affiliated with virtue and beauty and blackness was all that was ugly and sinful*. Hill's (2002) study of African Americans' view on attractiveness, focused on the intersection of colorism, gender and attractiveness. Hill (ibid) suggests that many African Americans find women who exhibit physical attributes close to those of white women, such as lighter skin and European features, to be more attractive than those who have darker skin and more African features. Attractiveness as articulated through European lenses has the effect of marginalising Black women in the field of heterosexual relationships. Weekes' (1997) appeal to countering such ideas attempts to deflect their marginalising and divisive impact. Colourism frequently polarises Black women and undermines political struggle that require their alliance. Weekes (ibid) interrogates, instead, how this issue is just one route of oppression for Black British women. Phoenix's (2011) intersectional analysis of shadism

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within her consideration of identity construction in British adults, shows that fifteen years after Reynolds' (1997) contributions, pigmentation continues to be a site for constructing superior and inferior identities.

Tracey's narrative highlights how hierarchies around skin tone are experienced amongst siblings:

Tracey: That definitely features but not as heavily...it's the same for me as I have a light skinned sister and I experienced all my life growing up with people saying 'your sister is pretty', that's all that I heard throughout my life and so it features for me big time ...She would get annoyed with men who would like her because of her skin tone and long hair. She did not like it all.

Although Tracey explained that light skin was considered an attractive attribute for Black women and men, she also indicated that the Black Seventh-day Adventist men that she knew would not build relationships outside their ethnic community. She qualifies her point by explaining that this is because Black Caribbean women can cook good food and this is what Black men also desire. Such contributions do not undermine colorist ideas that celebrate European ideals of beauty but stress instead cultural specifics where some Black men elevate Black women of Caribbean heritage over White women. Interviewees advocated that it is Black men's desire for Whiteness which contributes significantly to Black women's singleness.

Aune (2004) also touches on the issue of attractiveness and Christian single women. She found that physical beauty was valued in the community of Christians that she investigated. At one social gathering, Aune notes, one single woman uttered that she wanted to be like Barbie. Aune (2004, p. 241) observes that this comment, although uttered in jest, 'presumed a shared cultural understanding that women with blond hair are more attractive to men', is very real. Her explanation fits with colorist constructions that deem beauty as synonymous with Whiteness. Scholars such as Patton (2006), Hill (2002) and Hill Collins

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(2000:2004) suggest that there is a long standing idealisation of White womanhood as a post-slavery symptom that undermines and penalises Black women.

The notion that the embodiment of beauty is racialised extends to the idea that waiting women are expected to have ‘appropriate’ body measurements. As covered in the previous discussion on, ‘strong Black women’ embodiment for Black women was identified as a sign of ‘strength’ as well as a marker of physical appeal. Drawing attention to disability and ageing, Lorraine attributed her decreased confidence and consequently her ability to attract men to increasing hearing problems and greying hair.

Overall, the evidence regarding attractiveness suggests that participants do not challenge those prescriptions that operate to demarcate what is an attractive and unattractive body. Instead it appears that their discussions constitute a normalisation of hegemonic beauty as an obstacle that problematises their ability to attract men for marriage. The issue of attractiveness in Black women is further complicated by unequal sex ratios of Black, single Seventh-day Adventist women and men where there are many more women than men. The gendered arrangements as presented by the interviewees reveal a complex intersection of racialised, religious and gendered identities.

Aune (2004) briefly discusses how attractiveness was situated within the Christian community that she investigated. She shows how group discussions at times provided a context for group members to reaffirm the importance of attraction as a mechanism for securing marriage. What is implied but not dealt with directly by Aune is the way that attractiveness is a gendered resource. Aune (2004) describes herself as attractive and young, thus she underscores the importance of these resources for her as a single Christian woman. It is probable that Aune measured her level of attractiveness against European notions of beauty. Other studies show how single women participate in various consumption activities to increase personal attractiveness (Reynolds, 2004; McRobbie, 2004; Taylor, 2012).

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Summary

The picture thus far, portrays the singleness of Seventh-day Adventist women as fragile, permeable and deficient. Because their accounts of singleness legitimise coupling, they do little to contest the centralisation of conjugal narratives. Their accounts show how they experience intense difficulties with this and they navigate their identities as outsiders looking in and wanting to get in. Although they feel positive about certain aspects of their lives, they have a keen sense that their gendered identity work has failed or is incomplete. The insights that they give into how their religion, race and gender intersect with their singleness illustrate their complex and troubled accounts. By constructing a negatively vulnerable, deficient and unprotected identity they bring to light multiple regulatory discourses. These ensure the promotion of idealised, colorist gendered relationships where attractive women are chosen and rewarded with protection from men. On the other hand, their accounts contribute to the perpetuation of essentialist racialised discourses where Black women, construct an account of Black women's strength as complicating their ability to have their desire for protection met. The picture that they paint suggests pressures and impositions that centralise marriage ideals as well as interconnecting narratives of marginal singleness (the strong Black woman, motherhood and hegemonic attractiveness) in ways that have contemporary resonance for single Black Seventh-day Adventist women. As has been shown, this requires them to manage an interlocking series of oppressions and marginalities located in narratives that speak of their religious and racial affiliations. The following chapter will extend and elaborate the discussion of their marginalities by situating their sexual identities in a context where there are religious prescriptions that unmarried Christians should be celibate.

Chapter 6 - Troubled Celibacy

Introduction

It has become commonplace that sex pervades all corners of Western society (Terry, 2012; Cline, 1994; Attwood, 2006) and is a natural adult imperative. It therefore stands to reason that those who do not fulfill this imperative are likely to face varying levels of trouble in their subject positioning (Wetherell, 1998; Frahm-Arp, 2012). Seventh-day Adventists who are single are expected to adhere to the general Christian principle that they should abstain from sex until married (Vance, 1999; Bull and Lockhart, 1989) and as evidenced in this study, they encounter a host of difficulties in their attempts to comply. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' position on non-marital sex is that:

Seventh-day Adventists maintain the biblical stance on human intimacy. Marriage is the only context where true and complete closeness can be achieved with the most benefits and security.
(Kis 2001, p. 6)

Vance (1999) notes that the Seventh-day Adventist leadership only recognises the sexual relationships of those who are married and heterosexual:

The ideal setting for Adventist expressions of sexuality, then, is within a monogamous, heterosexual marital relationship.
(Vance 1999, p. 196)

The General conference of Seventh-day Adventists has recently reiterated this position in light of legal changes aimed at extending the right to marry to gay couples (Executive committee of Seventh-day Adventist, 2012). Although celibacy is something that participants 'accept' as an aspect of Christian singleness, they do not want to be celibate, and so find the taking on of a celibate life perplexing, difficult and painful. Furthermore, they do not accept identities that require them to 'accept' the celibate life; for them, singleness is unwanted. So they are locked within the constraints laid down by their system of beliefs regarding sexual matters, and yet their contributions suggest that they also get something

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from acceding to those sexual constraints. This chapter will discuss how the troubles participants face regarding their sexual identities fit within three overlapping broad categories: *compliance* as evident in accounts that centralise celibacy; *disruptions* as those activities that disrupt and threaten the participants' intentions to maintain celibate selves and *contestations* which describes one participant's attempt to de-centre and problematise the celibate project. In different ways all three descriptions reinforce the prescription that singles should be celibate and only marital sex is legitimate. The chapter will also show how participants' accounts complicate populist assumptions about Black women's sexual lives.

Compliance as Problematic: Centralising Celibacy

The most dominant portrayal of sex is that it should be an activity within the confines of marriage. Those for whom celibacy was a sexual identity illustrated that this identity functioned as an indicator of that single woman's commitment to God and their Seventh-day Adventist faith and religious community. These participants showed how they continually negotiated their sexual drives within their religious and spiritual responsibilities and, in consequence, found it difficult to achieve a robust narrative of sexual purity.

Most participants to varying extents indicate that celibacy is both idealised and problematic. Three written narratives, around two thirds of questionnaire responses and all ten interviewees indicated that they found it difficult to maintain the celibate life. However, despite the problematic presence of celibacy in their accounts, being celibate represented an accomplishment in that it enabled them to demonstrate that they were acquiescing to the church's sexual conventions and so engaging in acts of membership in their religious communities and expressions of spiritual commitment to God. Despite the trouble they attribute to their celibate identities, participants suggest that being celibate affords

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opportunities for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women to achieve the status of a good Christian, within the church.

The legitimacy that is accorded to celibacy arises from the Christian tradition of dichotomies of the flesh and the spirit (Hobbs, 2005). The tradition usually depicts these states as being in contention. According to such views, humanity tends to submit to sins of the flesh and Christians should avail themselves of spiritual power to do otherwise. One participant sent me a poem that encapsulates some of the difficulties experienced by celibate Christian women. Although this writer, whom I have named Helen could not attend the writing workshop (where written narratives for this research were produced), she wanted to contribute to the research and did so by emailing her contribution in the form of the following poem.

*Father, tell me what you know of the loneliness of men?
 For this ache and this longing consumes me again
 This burning desire, this need to be touched,
 Kissed, caressed, completed. Is it really too much?
 To ask and be asking for you now to send
 This dream you've given to others, so how can you defend
 Your apparent refusal to give it to me
 Where is this good gift? I demand now to see
 My position is weak to make demand this is true
 I am not your equal but what else can I do
 I feel like I need it though I want to do right
 But I also want someone to hold at night
 Over this need I stumble again and again
 I blame me I blame them. But it all seems in vain
 I'm lost and I'm drowning. How can I win?
 My body is twisted and succumbs to this sin
 If I'm meant to be lonely then help me this burden to bear
 Remove this burden of guilt let my conscience be clear.
 Now I ask you to remember the loneliness of men
 For this ache and this longing consumes me again
 For in the midst of perfection even Adam felt lonely
 This yearning of the heart can't apply to him only.
 He had You around him. No other joy should there be
 Yet with all he felt lonely, so what about me?
 I'm fighting this loneliness. I am losing my will
 To continue this fight though I do love you still
 But father I am lonely I have tried life alone
 I got used, to never enjoy the hard pillow of stone*

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*Now lord I ask you for a soft pillow of flesh
 With a heart that is yours lord, I want nothing less.
 So anchor me lord in Your will and Your way
 For right now my soul is beginning to stray
 Satan is riding me into depths of despair
 He says what you are doing to me is not fair
 I know you are God and all that You do is right
 But I also want someone to hold me tonight
 I'm lonely I am tired. What else can I say?
 I'll wait for your answer. Please answer I pray.*

The poem conveys a battle between this participant's spiritual and sexual selves and religious and divine expectations. Her contribution, expressed as a prayer, gives an account of extreme anguish and loneliness, with prayer highlighted as an outlet for venting her feelings. It also illustrates how sexual desire is constrained through renewed commitment to the project of achieving a celibate state and how prayer operates as a medium through which Christian principles are continually re-activated. By using this medium of 'sacred' communication, she asserts her spiritual pedigree as someone used to communing with God, but who also, piously subjects herself to patriarchal authority.

By casting her plea as a prayer, Helen situates her trouble within a traditional Christian framework of temptation and sin. The Seventh-day Adventist narrative of mind-body contestation has particular resonance in the lines that capture the intense sexual struggles she encounters. The narrative conveys emotional turbulence where evil is trying to overcome her will and she prays for God's intervention to help her. The biblical emphasis on a weak body, unable to resist the passions of the flesh and a willing spirit wanting to have power over the flesh (Matthew 26.v 41) characterises her trouble. The poet is positioned here as an unwilling subject in a controversy not of her own making:

*Satan is riding me into the depths of despair
 He says what you're doing to me just isn't fair.*

Being single is not her choice, struggling with sexual desire is not her choice. She makes it clear that she does not want to be single and that celibacy is something that God wants but

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that she does not. Ultimately, she submits to her divine patriarchy's requirement regarding unmarried bodies. The result is that the celibate identity is not only centralised as an involuntary identity but also as one that is subject to the power of the 'Father' to decide what to do.

Whilst the example above shows celibacy as a forced choice, Bethany, one of the women who submitted a written narrative, portrays compliance to celibacy as a difficult act of individual choice.

Bethany: The Bible promises us that all things are possible with God. That includes controlling sexual desires. This has been put to the test and it worked. As singles, we need to claim this promise and believe that God is in control.

By invoking biblical language, Bethany casts celibacy as something all single Christians can achieve. She suggests by use of the terms 'claiming' and 'believing' that spiritual resources are available to be used in the resistance of sexual sin. Agency emerges here as singles controlling sexual desires and so believing that God is in control and sexual abstinence is possible. Later on, Bethany suggests that individual strategies would be aided by strengthened community initiatives for singles that would, in effect, help them to resist temptation.

Bethany: Churches should have more group activities for singles where they will be able to interact with each other. This would reduce opportunities to fornicate.

For Bethany, celibacy is a legitimate and normal aspect of the single Seventh-day Adventist sexual identity.

In response to the prompt '*let's take that forward*' (and by that I refer to her previous statement about the importance of celibacy) the interviewee, Janice stated:

Based on the teachings of sexuality if you are not in relationship then you keep away from anything that would go against what God expects of us. So if I am single and celibate then the expectation is that you do not get into situations that would compromise your standing as a Christian. But we are called to be holy and so we have to ask God to give us the strength to live holy.

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In this way Janice echoes biblical language: *we are called to be holy*. She portrays the celibate person as maintaining a divinely legitimate identity by deploying the appropriate precautions (life style choices and prayer) required to resist sexual temptation. She suggests that there is a space for the celibate in the religious field but that it is a very hard place to maintain and requires additional divinely available resources. Lorraine's transition to a celibate sexual identity was more explicit. She situates the maintenance of her celibate identity as part of her commitment to the sexual prescriptions laid down by the church. Arriving at this position was not an easy task for her. Lorraine shares the time that she realised the sexual implications of choosing to live as a Christian. In response to the question: *You said earlier that you have been celibate for twenty five years; can you tell me more about this?* Lorraine, the eldest interviewed states:

It was not easy when I first came to church ...I remember one day that ... I was taking a bath I had to get out of the bath throw on my clothes on my wet body and go for a walk and I thought "Damn! Is this how it is going to be?"

The intention to maintain a celibate identity and the difficulty it posed for her can be seen in the last line: *"Damn! Is this how it is going to be?"*

In response to the question "what is singleness like for you?" Flora, the never married woman in her fifties, identifies the strategic work she does in her attempts to remain celibate and presents her celibate identity as constantly exposed to opportunities to undo it. There is no indication in her comments that she had ever capitulated at this stage of her life. However, she admits that as a younger single, she did.

Flora: It's very challenging as I have sexuality, it's very challenging, because of the exposure that I have had in life, work, studies and travel. I meet very attractive intellectual men of all races, men and I have dated all sorts...

The above shows how Flora owns her sexual desire as a feature of her everyday life. In this way her declared success at attracting men incorporates her sexual impulses as an aspect of her attractiveness:

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Flora: *“He said to me do you think that I want to go to bed with God? I had to hide my sexuality, because if you dress a certain way people comment. God gave me the body he gave me, I walk the street and men would stop me and I would be petrified because of the Adventist thing and so really I had to kill myself and it is worst thing that you can do to our young women and even now that I am fifty-eight / fifty-nine and I still have this veil, this boundary when I mix with opposite sex and flirt but I am still scared. Because you are meant to lead a virtuous life, you don’t let them know that you are celibate and you talk in a smart intellectual way about it, so that no nobody knows that you are not and you are fearful and that people might think that you are gay”*

Flora indicates that achieving and maintaining celibacy is an important prescription ‘*you are meant to lead a virtuous life.*’ She signals how her attractiveness assures her of her feminine appeal, despite the fact that she remains a never married woman.

Her account undermines those discourses that equate a never married long term celibate identity with the negative connotations associated with spinsterhood (Macvarish, 2006). Lorraine demonstrates that she is sexually sensitive and attractive and that she has repeated opportunities to stop being celibate. A celibate identity emerges as fearful and threatening for Flora because it can easily be undone and it carries the risk of being considered gay, which is also proscribed in Seventh-day Adventism and threatens to dismantle her womanhood. By using the second person pronoun ‘*You are gay*’, Flora appears to distance herself from being seen as homosexual. Protecting her celibate identity is important but she further shows how this obligation to be celibate, whilst confirming her religious commitment, is costly because it removes possibilities for her to be desired by men. Chantelle in contrast shows unwavering support for the practice of celibacy suggesting that celibacy did not have to limit single Seventh-day Adventist women’s capacity to mother. She suggested that the church should consider the use of artificial insemination as a viable option for unmarried women to achieve motherhood. In response to the question: how practical is the view that single Seventh-day Adventist women should remain celibate? She stated:

Chantelle: *What I think about is biological clock in terms of children is that women do not need to have sex to have children. The ideal in the church is that it should be through familyEverything is shifting (I am not saying right) what I mean is that we as a church should do is not necessarily to shift with it but to think things through. Is it sin? I don’t think that it is*

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sin but I think that the church would see it as sin, so I think it would be frowned upon on so I think that we need to wrestle with such issues.

Chantelle repositions pregnancy and motherhood by profiling artificial insemination as one route to motherhood. She is complicit with the prescription that sex is for marriage and celibacy for the unmarried, but carves out an individual solution to the constraints of Seventh-day Adventist principles that allows the possible achievement of a woman's traditional gendered identity: motherhood. Her stance illuminates the varying difficulties she perceives Black single Seventh-day Adventist women to be facing in their quest to marry. Should they choose to consume appropriate technologies, they can still achieve motherhood and participate in the important gendered rites of pregnancy and childbirth. By doing this they can still uphold the Church's sexual conventions regarding pre-marital sex. Chantelle by suggesting the consumption of technological devices for achieving traditional gendered ends illustrates Taylor's (2012) point, that women living in the west can take advantage of technologies to assist them in achieving more traditional gendered ideals.

As is detailed in the next chapter, Pauline found that there were serious penalties involved when her sexual desires resulted in motherhood. In response to the question *what is singleness like for you?* Pauline offers a description of intense policing by her Church community:

Pauline: I wanted to have children and I met somebody who was not in the church and I loved this guy ...so I ended up being pregnant and when I did, I felt bad because I was not married and the church... they did not want their children near me, the teens used to come and practice and they stopped their kids coming to my house because I was pregnant...

Pauline also illustrates how her personal desire – *'I wanted to have children'* – became problematic when it failed to submit to the conscience of the group. The penalty for her 'transgression' involved acts of marginalisation that reinforced the group's exclusion of her. Although she goes on to show that she felt strongly about their mistreatment of her, Pauline indicates in the extract how for her, the legitimate space for sexual activity is marriage: *I felt*

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bad because I was not married. Her comments indicate how participants accept the ruling that they should be celibate as single Seventh-day Adventists, and also demonstrates that this acceptance coexists with sexual desire. The women strategically manage their sexual desire by re-centering the celibate project and establishing a moral gendered identity. By acquiescing to church doctrines on sexuality, participants demonstrate how their complicity with those narratives that privilege marriage, actively re-positions sexual desire as threatening to undo their hard work to be celibate.

Disruptive desires: threats that centralise celibacy

This section discusses how the ways in which participants discuss the threats they face in negotiating and achieving celibacy serve to disrupt their intention to achieve a celibate self and also constructs Black women as vulnerable. Their accounts of sexual liaisons and sexual pressure depict them as having diminished agency because they are exposed to masculine desire and so not responsible for the temptations, to which they are subject. Their accounts of sexual attractiveness and masculine desire, presents them as vulnerable and feminine. They also show how circumventing sexual pressure and their sexual desire are critical for achieving a coherent, inclusive and spiritual Seventh-day Adventist self.

Studies on Christian singles indicate that sexual desire is problematic and creates significant problems for the celibate Christian (Aune: 2002, 2004; Sharma, 2008; Hobbs, 2005; Frahm-Arp, 2012). On the surface sexual desire appears, particularly in in-depth interviews, to be a minor part of these single women's lives. However, in their initial reluctance to talk about it some interview participants inadvertently illustrate how sexual desire is a key factor undermining the production of a coherent celibate identity. Silence or reticence in talking about desire brings it into view as an unacknowledged or undesired presence.

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Only two interviewees explicitly highlighted sexual desire in their accounts. The other interviewees made no mention of it. However, in contrast, the questionnaire respondents and authors of the written narratives mention sexual desire in ways that encapsulate themes of struggle and difficulty. In response to the question ‘*what do you think are the sexual issues that singles within the SDA community are facing?*’ questionnaire respondents identify unfulfilled sexual desire, sexual activity, struggling with celibacy and managing media pressure as key issues. Just over half of the fifty three women in the questionnaire study focus on unfulfilled sexual desire. They state that singles (referring to both men and women) are ‘*day dreaming about sex*’, ‘*missing intimacy*’, ‘*masturbating*’, ‘*having sex*’, ‘*struggling to resist*’, ‘*wanting to fulfill sexual desire*’, ‘*want sex and cannot have it*’, ‘*want to be seen as sexual*’ etc. Two of the seven written narratives address the issue of desire with one describing sexual desire as *an insatiable longing and thirst*, while the poet discussed earlier describes it as *ache, longing, burning desire, needing to be touched caressed and completed* and managing *a twisted body*. There is therefore an acknowledgement of the presence of intense sexual desire as an aspect of the single SDA identity for these women. In contrast only two interviewees explicitly acknowledged sexual desire as an aspect of their single lives. One other, Lorraine, refers to sexual desire as having been a feature of her youth and being a feature of middle age. All other interviewees who mention desire refer to it in the past. This ‘omission’ could be because there is no direct sexual question in the interviews.

The questionnaire question ‘*what do you think are the sexual issues that UK singles are facing?*’ elicited some direct responses. There are however, two written narratives acknowledging the presence of desire (the poem from Bethany as discussed and one other narrative writer: Precious). The poem is the only account volunteered that offers a comprehensive treatment of desire as an aspect of the author’s sexual self. Perhaps it was the

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freedom of writing in her personal space that enabled this poet to produce a candid narrative of sexual longing. In fact, she centres sexual desire as the main feature of her loneliness:

Bethany: *Father, tell me what you know of the loneliness of men?
For this ache and this longing consumes me again
This burning desire, this need to be touched,*

This author links loneliness with sexual desire and situates it as powerful needs that she sometimes fills. A small number of questionnaire respondents (five of fifty-three) also suggest that satisfying sexual desire is a feature of the single Seventh-day Adventist woman's life.

Interviewees tended to position desire as non-existent or in the past. In answer to the question 'What about celibacy?' Pauline openly acknowledges sexual desire as located in her past: 'There were times when I thought I can have sex now'. 'There were times' places desire back in time. Some reported that past struggle as having been difficult and painful. For example Flora's disturbingly painful comment in response to the question "Can you tell me about the issue of celibacy?" is: "I had to kill myself". She focuses on the difficulties she had encountered as a young woman in negotiating the call of her sexual urges and sexual attention from men. She locates sexual desire in the past as something that is now dead. Flora also refers to celibacy as difficult for young women in the church: "it's difficult for young women not to have sex unless they kill their sexuality." By using the imagery of death, Flora asserts the intense sense of loss that young celibate women in the church endure. She indicates that 'sexual death' was something she herself had encountered as a young woman. Flora's location of her sexual desires as an integral part of her identity that she 'killed': "I had to kill myself" does not undermine her presentation of herself as attractive. So when addressing her appeal as a woman, Lorraine depicts herself as sexual: "I have sexuality". Although these two accounts might seem contradictory, they both fulfill the same important function and that is to minimise her marginalities. By having to 'kill' her sexuality, Flora

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shows how she is both actively committed to the church's sexual conventions and by being attractive she is still able to achieve male attention.

Previously Lorraine showed how for her, being celibate is difficult and that she had no idea that there would be such pressure (from the church community) to maintain it. Her contribution with regard to this matter, illustrates that she has also grown spiritually and with age has less need for sex. For her, sexual desire is therefore a thing of the past. She looks on her sexual desires as a series of intensely difficult feelings. She states, "*I remember one day*", to introduce her account of a time when she felt intense sexual desire and had to have a cold bath as an interim solution for managing sexual desire:

Lorraine: I have been celibate and no it is not practical and I think that how I have been able to deal with it is because I have had my children and I was sexually active and had boyfriends and I guess I have had enough sex to last me a life time.. It has not been easy... I remember one day that I was living in (she named the place) and I was taking a bath and I had to get out of the bath and throw on my clothes on my wet body and go for a walk and I thought damn is this how it is going to be?..... But it was horrible, it was dreadful, the feelings and desires they were all there and it never went away...

Lorraine negotiates herself out of a potentially troubled subject position by explaining this. *'I guess I have had enough sex to last me a lifetime.* Sex was something she had had a lot of before becoming a Seventh-day Adventist and so effectively dissociates her current self from sexual desire in favour of celibate identity work: *...and after a while it dissipated as I did not want to anyway.*

Susan in response to the question: 'And what about the matter of celibacy for single women in the church' states that she 'no longer has urges' and leaves no room for discussing sexual desire as a current feature of her life. For both these women, then, sexual desire is constructed as historical. For those women who present these discourses the tendency to render sexual desire as irrelevant and as something they once contended with or submitted to, makes sexual desire irrelevant to their commitment to celibacy. These women suggest that their sexual desire is neutered, unthreatening, and historical. It is not, therefore, surprising

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that sexual desire has not been given much space in interviewees' discussions of celibacy. Sharma's (2008) analysis of sex and singleness in the Protestant Church describe how the policing regimes present in conservative Christian spaces contribute to pushing unmarried sex underground. Unmarried women therefore kept their sexual relationships secret in an attempt to maintain membership of religious spaces that promote traditional gendered sexual mores. The relative invisibility of sexual desire in interviewees' accounts might similarly be seen as having the effect of pushing sexual desire underground in their efforts to fit into traditional sexual gendered ideals.

In one sense the limited discussion on sexual desire as an aspect of their current lives resonates with Lorraine's declaration on her sexual desire that: *'I had to kill myself.'* Sexual desire is so powerful and potentially so disruptive that it has to be 'buried' in order not to disrupt her celibate identity. Burial then, is central to managing and regulating her sexual desire. The regulation of sexuality is central to the achievement of celibacy. When Angela says that she *'call[s] to the lord for strength,'* to manage her sexual frustrations, she signals, (as shall be discussed in the chapter on spirituality), the place of spirituality as a critical resource for regulating sexual desire. She also introduces the importance of the relationship between celibacy, strength, spirituality and sexuality (developed in the next chapter's consideration of spirituality).

Angela, one of the youngest never married interview participants, maintains that a celibate self is possible but also admits to a sense of agitation about her advancing age. In answering the question *'Do you think celibacy is a practical way for single women to live?'* she states:

Angela: It can definitely be done; it is the way to live. I think beyond being practical it is a necessity and for those that choose to live that way, it is a necessity, sometimes there is a frustration in your faith when you see scriptures like 'it is better to marry than burn' and you

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feel as a woman that you do not have a ‘no burn’ option. You can’t go to the brother and make an approach, it is for us to wait and we do not have the tools to cope with it. Sometimes it is disappointing and we just call on the lord for strength. However, sometimes on the other side, there is a real feeling of freshness and that it is not a part of your life and you are feeling good about yourself and you don’t have to fuss about not having...to think about... sexual desires.

Although she previously described herself as a type who does not present as vulnerable and has not been victim to the sexual advances of men, she reveals that she too wrestles with unfulfilled sexual drives in her adherence to a celibate life style. She implies that traditional wisdom cannot provide the guidance for managing the physical intensities that come with sexual desire. Her closing comments *‘there is a real feeling of freshness that it is not part of your life’*, contradicts her former position by providing a more positive account of celibacy that centralises innocence and purity. In this way she is able to regulate any possible negative effects of sexual desire and negotiate the contradictions she faces by positioning it within those narratives of purity, youthfulness and hope.

The relative silence on sexual desire may well support those narratives that construct Black women as strong. By extracting sexual need from their identity work, they may be viewed as less emotional and less vulnerable. Moreover, the self-regulatory tactics these participants employ in their attempts to maintain and achieve a celibate self also portrays disciplined self-management. Within this discussion, I argue along with others (Wyatt, 2008; hooks, 1991; Hill Collins 2000:2004; Marshall and Maynard, 2009) that some old racialised sexual legacies regarding Black women’s sexual identities remain. By admitting sexual need, the interviewees would have to work against the generally accepted view and also their personal view that Black women are capable, independent and coping. Like the Black South African religious women in Frahm-Arp’s study (2012), interviewees identified commitment

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to celibacy as a decision to achieve celibate identities and achieve sexual capital. Others suggest that the contrary might also be true. According to Black feminists, the needs of Black women have been marginalised in order to shore up racist and sexist systems. For instance they argue, slavery required the myth of strength in order to justify the slave woman's oppression, sexual and otherwise, in the hands of slave owners. This justification required the engineering of racial gendered stereotypes and hierarchies that elevated whiteness. Hence contradictory stereotypes of Black women as being hypersexual and promiscuous or asexual 'mammy' types have since been powerful (Marshall and Maynard 2009, p. 328). It is, however, the case that participants in this study invert these extreme stereotypes of mammy and Jezebel or Sapphire producing instead an account of sexually sensitive celibates who are intent on achieving a credible celibate identity. This is indicated in their narratives of self-control.

For women who use self-regulation to maintain celibacy, physical intimacy is constructed as emerging at times when regulation has failed. Black men were reported to be the main disrupters, thwarting the women's regulatory work. Their descriptions frequently construct an essentialist picture of men as sexual predators.

Chapter Four's discussion of marriage presents constructions of Black men as both benevolent and anomic. In the previous chapter's consideration of singleness, Black men emerge in the women's accounts as excessively powerful within the field of potential partners. This chapter extends this portrayal of Black men's power by analysing the ways in which the women discussed experiencing them as both sexually oppressive and sexually desirable.

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External threats: predatory masculinities

When the women in the study reflected on sexual relations they constructed accounts of predatory masculinities. The portrayal of predatory sexual masculinities by Black single Seventh-day Adventist women, served to defend them against charges of women's sexual culpability and sexual shame, thus undermining the potential threat of religious exclusion for sexual involvement. Their accounts suggest that ultimately they are not accountable. For instance on the questionnaire responses, half of the women (twenty-seven of fifty-three) that address the issue of vulnerability, just under a quarter of these (six) indicate it is predatory men who produce their sexual vulnerability:

[O]pen to abuse by men, Participant 2

Some men take advantage of single women, Participant 38

Uneasy about attention from someone of the opposite sex, Participant 42

Pressures from abusers seducer, pressures from within, Participant 52

Concerned about being approached or someone making a bee line for you, Participant 53

Men think that you are up for anything, Participant 40

The above contributions depict men as sexual thinkers, seducers, giving unwanted attention, abusers and 'advantage takers'. These brief contributions construct single women's bodies as material spaces with fragile borders that are available for 'penetration'. Many participants suggest that Seventh-day Adventist men who approach them are duplicitous for excluding them on one hand and 'including' them on the other. They suggest that some of the same men, who exclude them because they are single, employ sexually 'inclusive' tactics because they perceive them as sexually and emotionally vulnerable and available.

The following account exemplifies the way that one interviewee (who shared anxieties about being identified with regards to this issue of sex) constructs herself as sexually unaware and naive, in her portrayal of sexual attentions from one man. In this way

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she shows how she was not a proactive participant in the liaison but one who succumbed to tactics that undermined her commitment to a celibate identity. Having established previously that she was still a virgin she evokes narratives of sexual innocence and purity. The fact that she qualifies this identity as being only physical she illustrates how sexual tensions and contradictions inform her description of virgin: “*when I tell people that I am a virgin, I qualify it by saying that I am physical virgin but I am not mentally a virgin*”, Janice sets the context for the telling of a sexual episode:

Interviewee: “*I look back and I examine and say why did I succumb – why did I find it not hard to succumb? I have asked myself a thousand times – why did I succumb-maybe it was because he was the only example of a black male I had been close to...I was taken advantage of ... I think because he was Black and a friend and he groomed me. I was vulnerable and ... I did not expect it to happen but the feeling was good and in my mind it was physical because nothing could come out of it...*”

This interviewee goes on to say that she takes responsibility for this liaison ‘*I am not going to blame them and say that it was them who did it to me, I take responsibility*’, but the way in which she does so is somehow muted particularly because she also says that she was groomed. This intricate account, constructs Black men as powerful and desirable, suggests that it is difficult to maintain a celibate identity when the opportunity for Black heterosexual intimacy presents itself. In Janice’s account a sexual encounter with a Black man was wrong but felt good. Her description illustrates how some Black women might view sexual intimacies with Black men as rare opportunities for inclusion when she says: *why did I succumb-maybe it was because he was the only example of a Black male I had been close to*. However, she concluded by saying that ‘*nothing could come out of it*’. She seems to resolve the dilemmas surrounding this sexual episode by incorporating a view of ‘learning’ as the opportunity for repositioning herself. The statement ‘*nothing could come out of it*’ further indicates her resolve to end a relationship that she saw as inappropriate. By describing the sexual liaison as a mistake of the past she does what was common among the single Christian women in this study and locates inappropriate sexual conduct and sexual desire in the past:

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Interviewee: *“I am able to learn from these experiences and I am going forward determined not to make the same mistakes again”*

She defends herself against possible claims that she is fully accountable for this indiscretion, for it is redefined as an experience error that needed correcting and that she fully intends to avoid in the future. By establishing that she has learned from this experience she affirms that she has a more mature identity, one that she re-inscribes with celibate sexual coherence and wisdom – important attributes for her sexual identity as a Seventh-day Adventist woman. This interviewee invalidated this ‘sexual liaison’ by situating it in the past and by depicting herself as fortified, powerful, less vulnerable and un-partnered. Clarke’s (2011) intersectional analysis of African American women’s unequal experience regarding romance identifies celibacy as an aspect of educated African American women’s lives. Her findings illustrate that opportunities for a sexually fulfilling life intersect with the social class of African American women. Those who are college educated appear to have fewer opportunities than those women in the same class but from other racial categories. She discusses celibacy as central to African American women’s lives including college educated unmarried African American Christian women in relationships. Both groups experience longer periods of celibacy than Whites and Hispanics and find themselves having to accept sex without romance or periodic romance without sex. Clarke (ibid) attributes these Christian African American women’s desire to achieve romance without sex to the development of negatively complex relationships that do not last. These Black Christian women find that the levels of commitment required to maintain celibate romantic relationships is often difficult to achieve for African American women in general but particularly those who are Christian. Celibacy is for Clarke (2011) one by-product of the racial discriminations and inequalities that Black women encounter.

Although, according to Clarke (ibid), the celibate self is one representation of Black women’s oppressions, Christian women in Black majority churches have been found to

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submit to the regulations that maintain effective celibate projects (Moultrie, 2011). In this study, Chantelle advocates the strategies that single Christian women should apply in order to ensure that the celibate identity endures. By weaving a complex account of innocence she presents a narrative that it is men who disrupt Seventh-day Adventist women's intentions to be celibate. She maintains her allegiance to celibacy but shows that it is difficult to uphold in practice. Chantelle makes clear that the church has a responsibility to protect and empower unmarried women in order to maintain their celibate identity. Additionally, she suggests that single women should be able to form a collective front against potential assailants.

Chantelle: I think that it's probably true. I would not want to judge, I mean, promiscuity or sex outside of marriage is wrong, there is no doubt about that, I would not want to. And I don't think it's right, but I think in the church we need more open discussion about sex and single women and because I think by keeping it silent it benefits the men in the church and outside and women are the victims so umm yes ,... So I think that we need to talk about it tackle it and wrestle with it, and say what they are doing, they are sleeping around to get some satisfaction. If you can talk about that and women share their experiences that they can share and say 'I won't do that again. 'And have an open non -judgmental debate so that it empowers women to say no to brother so and so and she will know that brother so and so tried it on with other people and so we need some forums to talk.

In this account managing sexual advances from men should be part of the SDA public space. For this participant, women who encounter sexual pressure from men in the church are capable of empowering each other if they publicise their experiences and recognise that it fits within a highly predatory terrain. For her, a key way of accomplishing this is to mobilise single women's collective voices to undermine the potential threat of masculine sexuality. This terrain is inhabited by men both Seventh-day Adventist and non-SDA, but it is the Seventh-day Adventist men, '*brother so and so*', who are '*sleeping around to get some satisfaction*' who constitute a sexual threat. She suggests that the naming of those Seventh-day Adventist men who 'disrupt' single Seventh-day Adventist women's commitment to celibacy would provide the information that women need in order to protect them from sexual 'predators'. In this account unmarried women are not held sexually accountable since it is the men who are predatory. Mobilisation of unmarried Seventh-day Adventist women is

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presented by this interviewee as a crucial step in engendering the task of being celibate with political features. By suggesting that sexual irregularities should be brought into the public domain Chantelle shows how the church in general and single women more specifically have a responsibility to regulate men's predatory behaviours towards Seventh-day Adventist single women.

In the above accounts men are identified as responsible for women's succumbing to predatory 'pressure' and so having an occasional lapse. Women therefore indicate that they need to strengthen their boundaries so that they become impenetrable. The women did not see defence strategies as only individual, but viewed collective strategies as protective both from sexual sin, public shame, personal guilt and loss of membership in the SDA church. Regulations that protect adherents from sexual sin also, according to Sharma's (2008) interpretation of the women in her study, protect them from public shame, personal guilt and loss of church membership. Sharma's (ibid) investigation focused on the experiences of White, mostly middle-class, young women from different Protestant denominations. She found that collective support helped to regulate the sexual behaviour of single women, for example, through group activities such as prayers, fasting and giving advice. Such activities policed the correct context for sexual behaviours and served to reinforce women's understanding of the Church's sanctioning of traditional sexual arrangements. According to some interpretations, guilt for being sexual is one of the resources utilised in religious communities to regulate the behaviour of its membership (Sharma, 2008; Moultrie, 2011). It is therefore possible to see how accounts of sexual culpability (as seen with Pauline's trouble with her Church), can serve to exclude the women from membership of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Participants feel that attributions of a guilty sexual identity might be too risky and as Sharma (2008) illustrates in her account, the effect of managing the pressure of guilt for the

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young women in her study, can result in risky behaviors, such as self-harming. Additionally, it could be argued that by presenting themselves as groomed for sexual activity or in need of other women's support against sexual intruders, these Black women produce alternative but still limited narratives of Black women's sexual selves as vulnerable. Although singleness is not something they want, the women tend to accept the prescription that as single women they should be celibate. They suggest that they react against temporary sexual liaisons or temptation with strategies designed to fortify their celibate selves. Their own regulatory behaviours which seek to resist or justify sexual indiscretions not only legitimate celibacy but also show them producing sexual resilience as they seek control over their own bodies. They also portray Black men as desirable, promiscuous and sexually threatening. Ultimately the descriptions reveal the complexity of their negotiations of their sexual identities. Its importance is associated with the fact that restraining sexual behavior is integral to maintaining a credible identity within Christian communities (Sharma, 2008).

Contesting Celibacy

While the above sections have given an overview of the sample as a whole, this section focuses on the case of two women Verona and Claudette who questioned the practicalities of celibacy. These participants indicated that they were uncomfortable with the expectation that unmarried Christians should abstain from sex. Whilst Claudette spoke of its impracticalities for others, Verona focused on its impracticality for her.

Claudette, a divorced woman with two adult children responds to the question; '*What are your views on celibacy and the Seventh-day Adventist single woman?*' by indicating that for her there is a tension between presenting the truth of a situation and the dictates of the church. She continued by stating that:

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Claudette: *I think that it is impractical to have a church with a greater population of single females and expect them, when the church holds up the principle of the joys of relationships, and not expect that there will be some women who will not be able to remain celibate ...*

Claudette states that celibacy is practical for some single people but not all. She chooses to discuss celibacy in general, rather than giving any information about her current sexual identity. Verona, a never married woman, does not work to take up and justify a celibate identity but instead recognises its hold on her and objects to the way in which celibacy functions in her life, as a mature woman. She made clear that she had little or no allegiance to the idea that she should be celibate but is. She argues that her ‘allegiance’ to her church’s sexual rules feels like her undoing, for it has resulted in her failure to develop a sustainable identity as a sexually active being:

Verona: *At this stage forty plus, you meet guys and they want to know that you are sexually active and they will be getting something ...*

Discussing the practicalities of celibacy for her, she stated:

Verona: *Wow! I think this is one that is not about Black women it is about the church. I think that it is possible for the church, for women, to be celibate there is no point that we preach this umm unrealistic message and then nobody is adhering to it, I know and as a single woman. .. I find that you meet someone and you are talking to them and you find out that you are scorned when they find out that you are living a celibate life and so my answer to that question is no, it is not realistic, because you are in a church where people who are preaching celibacy do not live by it, did not live by it and only live by it if they are married.*

Although Verona as a celibate virgin felt that it was possible to be celibate, she did not think that other Seventh-day Adventist singles were actually taking celibacy seriously and this convinced her that a celibate identity was not a good status to have, even in the church. By sarcastically describing celibacy as something that (apart from herself) only married people practised, she shows her contempt for a practice that she sees as irrelevant. Drawing upon a personal experience, her comments about being ‘scorned’ suggest that for her, the celibate identity does not serve the function of attracting men but repels them and evokes ridicule from them.

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Whilst some women constructed their troubled celibate identity as innocent, this participant refused notions of celibate innocence in discussing her desire to achieve full gendered maturity. Verona's trouble is located in her inability to develop a mature identity as a 'chosen' woman. For her, older women who are sexually inexperienced were not capable of attracting male attention and this contributed to their potential poor self-esteem. For Verona, it is younger Seventh-day Adventist women who are able to secure the validation generally accorded to celibate members. She draws on the narrative of youthfulness not as a justification of her celibacy but to pour ridicule on it. Mature celibate women by virtue of their age are relatively rare and so become hyper-visible, marginalised and objectified:

Verona: On one the level you are single and you are living by it. Then you try it you put yourself in a glass case and lock away the key and you become something that people look at because you are so rare and that is my experience, I do not think it works.

Verona suggests that her celibacy is brought into the spotlight of a social gaze that denigrates a feminine 'abnormality', and so is lacking in what Green (2011) refers to as sexual capital. Bourdieu's (2008: 2004) discussion on the peasant farmers of Bearn makes reference to the physical awkwardness of these peasant farmers because they were single celibate men who had failed to meet the gendered expectations of their village by not marrying. Verona identified both secular and religious narratives that expect adults to be sexually active. For reasons such as these, Verona and Claudette suggest that celibacy is impracticable. Their 'contestation' has little efficacy in the church because of the tenacity of those discourses (as is evident in the comments of other interviewees) that idealise celibacy for Seventh-day Adventist single Christians. Unlike the South African single Black women in Frahm-Arp's (2012) focus on Pentecostal Charismatic churches, Verona and Claudette do not use their church's religious narrative to resolve their dilemmas regarding sex and celibacy.

These comments reveal the way in which interviewees describe the difficulties they face in securing the rewards that should be available to them as single women in the Seventh-

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day Adventist church. Whilst all recognise that celibacy can function as a resource for securing membership as Christians, they considered that it has very little to offer mature women.

Summary

The literature currently available presents useful insights into celibate identity (Cline, 1994; Terry, 2012). There is, however, limited discussion of celibacy as it intersects with religious and or ethnic identities. Moultrie's (2011) examination of African American Christian women's sexual lives does help to make sense of single Seventh-day Adventist women's relationship with celibacy. She suggests that recent attempts to reposition celibacy in African-American Churches in America have re-inscribed a series of policing tactics to repress Black women's sexualities. Frahm-Arp's (2010) study of professional women as members of the Pentecostal Charismatic churches of South Africa addressed the issues surrounding singleness and celibacy to identify how self-policing was important to maintaining a credible gendered identity worthy of marriage. Unlike Moultrie's (2011) interpretation of Black women's bodies as controlled by a Black religious patriarchy's desire to control stereotypical images of Black women's sexual excess, Frahm-Arp's (ibid) discussion situates the celibate project as one with opportunities to undo stereotypes and lived trajectories about Black women's bodies.

Participants in this study confirmed that celibacy for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women is a central aspect of identity and gives some insight into the multifarious, intricate and contradictory work that they do in order to negotiate its presence in their lives. The overwhelming agreement that celibacy is the correct way to live suggests that what Moultrie (2011) identifies as the policing strategies of the church is very effective for these participants. In practice, the women interviewed in this study found these strictures difficult

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to follow and so their commentaries present their sexual identities as unsettled. Therefore in portrayals of their personal compliance with the church's canons on celibacy and their problems in managing the intense sexual difficulties that they face, participants undermine the stereotypes of Black women as highly sexual (Jezebel) and or asexual (mammy). By producing an analysis of religious Black South African women's celibacy within an understanding of post-apartheid social changes and conservative Pentecostal belief systems, Frahm-Arp (2012) identifies unmarried conservative Pentecostal adherents' commitment to celibacy as one expression of personal progress. Most of the women in my study show how both sexual agitation and resilience undergird their celibate identities. Despite being older women, they view the tactic of waiting (to be chosen by a man for marriage and or an act of submission to God) as a procedure that intersect with their celibate projects and desires for both gendered and religious promotion.

The numbers of Black British women who are single increase each year. Census figures indicate that around sixty per cent of Black women live either as single parents or alone (ONS, 2011). On the basis of her research on the inequalities that African American women encounter in their experiences of love, Clarke (2011) outlines how factors such as sex ratios, unemployment inequalities for African American men and so on, exacerbate the relational inequalities that African American women encounter. While Clarke's (2011) research was done on a general population in the USA, the insights gained from her research are useful for appreciating what appears to be Black British SDA women's general understanding, regarding the limits of their relational choices. According to Clarke's (ibid) reasoning, this limitation means that sexual opportunities are also limited and so celibacy becomes an aspect of many African American women's experience. This assumption seems to be an important narrative for contextualising singleness for Black women in this study. In fact Sharp and Ganong (2011) argue that African American women understand the relational

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challenges that they face as structural. They note that White women, when compared to African American women, are more likely to attribute being unmarried to individual deficiency rather than structural issues while Black women are more likely to acknowledge structural issues, such as uneven sex ratios, in their explanations. In spite of this there is some indication that an increasing number of Black women now have relationships with White men. According to the 2011 British census figures, 36% of Black British Caribbean women are in relationships with men outside their race (ONS, 2011). This may be an indication that Black women engage in interracial relationships because of those structural factors.

The chapter on the centrality of marriage discusses participants' sensitivity to structural constraints undermining their ability to marry. It follows from their line of reasoning on the structural constraints Black women face in relation to marriage and relationships that it might be less problematic to stay in the church than to leave it. In fact given their desire for a kind of benevolent patriarchy (Vance, 1999) they may have greater opportunity to find the 'right' man if they stay. When all the above issues and factors are taken together, being celibate offers more within a religious context than outside of it. Decisions to stay within the SDA church may indicate a decision to construct a celibate self within the church's ranks rather than attempting to take up a 'worldly' celibate identity outside of it. Their comments strongly suggest that being celibate has the potential (generally unrealised) to mitigate their marginalities in the face of coupling narratives that incorporate sexual relationships.

By generating narratives of sexual resilience the women in this study emphasise popular caricatures of Black women as strong. The regulatory strategies they employ to protect or reclaim their commitment to celibacy show how important achieving the celibate self is for them. By remaining in a community that 'idealises' celibacy, most interviewees appear resigned to working on a troubled celibate identity in the church than one in the

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‘world’. In this way they achieve a preferred identity because by drawing from religious narratives of self-control, dignity and religious conviction with regards the celibate project, participants undermine any secular pathologising narratives of celibacy. Markus and Nurius (1998) claim that one of the processes involved in the production of an individual identity is the navigation towards a possible self. Although participants say that they have not directly chosen to be single, they do appear to ‘accept’ the celibate self with all its accompanying troubles.

Regardless of the above, there is no challenge to the idea of marriage as a credible state for Christian adults. Overall, the descriptions of celibacy consistently illuminate the extent to which participants accept heterosexual sex as central to marriage and celibacy as a centralised legitimate sexual identity for single Christians. The Black single Seventh-day Adventist women in this study, present interlocking depictions of celibacy as an identity that is compliant, disrupted and contentious. This identity also encounters disruption from factors that weaken their resolve to remain celibate and leads the woman to challenge the idea that celibacy is right for singles of all ages. They suggest that the achievement of a celibate identity inscribes the single person’s body with a spiritual authority that makes them worthy of membership in the community of believers. Sharma’s (2008) study of twenty-six British young Christian women’s oppression and empowerment regarding issues of sex focused on the accounts of middle-class White single women. Her findings attribute those participants’ decisions to leave the church to the stress, difficulties, shame and guilt they experienced on failing to uphold the Church’s sexual conventions. In contrast, women in this study did not talk about wanting to leave the SDA church, due to sexual temptation, sexual liaisons or relationships. By acquiescing to conventions that centralise celibacy for singles, these Black single Seventh-day Adventist women illuminate the existence of complex and intense narratives of commitment to the SDA church and to God. Frahm-Arp (2012) argued that

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charismatic Pentecostal churches provided useful interpretations which helped young Black middle-class single women who were members of these religious communities. The Charismatic Pentecostal churches appear to utilise post-apartheid credible social discourses: breaking with the past, new opportunities and progress, maintaining tradition. This present study demonstrates another kind of opportunity for Black single Seventh-day Adventist women. The opportunity relates to the long term and involuntary feature of their celibate identities. Based on Clarke's (2011) claim that Black American women are more likely to be celibate than women in other ethnic groups and experience longer periods of celibacy, I argue that deciding to commit to the celibate project is a complex expression of agency. The Seventh-day Adventist church's 'emphasis' on celibacy as a sexual identity for single women, amounts to one credible discourse that has been made available for them to make sense of their sexual deprivations.

The final empirical chapter will explore participants' accounts of their spiritual and religious commitments. It will identify the contradictions and privileges they experience. It will argue that, by taking up their spiritual privileges, they are able to minimise some of the problematic aspects of their lives and so maintain their commitment to staying in their religious communities.

Chapter 7 - Spirituality as a Resource

Introduction

An examination of participants' contributions would be incomplete without exploration of the significance of their membership within their religious community, that is, the Seventh-day Adventist church. Other studies (Davidman, 1993; Brusco, 1995; Ozorak, 1996; Brasher, 1998; Yadgar, 2006; Frahm-Arp, 2010) illustrate that women have been able to secure different levels of agency even as participants in very conservative religious enclaves. Such 'achievements' problematise the idea that religions tend to marginalise and oppress women. They instead reveal how women's interpretations of their participation in religious communities offer invaluable insight into their personal religious experiences. This chapter interrogates the key constructions of spirituality; their personal reflections on personal faith, as a central aspect of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's identities. The previous chapters show the ways in which they align their narratives with Seventh-day Adventist thinking regarding marriage, how to be single, and the management of their sexual identities. It also illustrates the importance a sense of belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist church, is for all interviewees. Because all participants accept the Christian edict that they should be celibate, they considered that celibacy was evidence of their personal Christian commitment and active church membership. These alignments are not straightforward or unproblematic but the women show an unquestioning acceptance of the powerful influence of the Church's conventions and assumptions that inform their identity work. Although the religious identity is one of the intersecting identities that is the focus of this study, religious affiliation is not what is being discussed here. Instead this chapter's attention to religion is a response to the recurring presence of participants' discussions of their personal faith.

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Spirituality emerges as a key resource that permeates their religious statements. Furthermore, the presence of resilience which is captured in their discussion of strength intersects with their intensely personal interpretations of faith. The nuances that become available advise that the task of separating their personal faith statements from the social basis of their religion continues this study's intersectional commitment.

Studies that focus on religion are beginning to distinguish the specific attributes of spirituality as connected to, but distinct from, religious establishments (Verter, 2003; Woodhead, 2008; Hunt, 2005). Whilst debates about what spirituality really is, continue, this chapter contributes to these developments by focusing specifically on how participants reflect on their personal faith. In many ways participants in this study depict their production and consumption of spirituality as a result of intensely personal religious experiences that they refer to as their relationships with God.

This chapter will engage with some of the discussion on spiritual capital (Verter, 2003; Guest, 2007) to contextualise these reflections. By delineating spiritual capital from religious membership and, to some extent, religious capital, these discussions help to take forward the task of analysing how other identities, apart from racialised, gendered and religious identities intersect, inform and extend accounts of singleness.

Defining spirituality

There are, currently, various definitions of what is meant by spirituality and debate about its precise meaning continues (Flanagan and Jupp, 2007; Aune, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Selvam, 2013; Aune, 2014). One area of contestation involves the differences, complexities and interconnections between the concepts 'religious' and 'spiritual'. Some writers such as Aune (2014) contend that such divisions undermine the lived identities of women who are religious.

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This study will apply the term ‘religious’ to those activities that have a social import, therefore those activities that represent belonging to a social terrain such as membership to a community of believers incorporate what is meant by the use of the term religious. It also incorporates the notion of a community that is fixed, with a visible historical and collective identity (Aune, 2011). Religious can be viewed as the space where a collective engages in ritualism, formalised belief, structure and institution (Selvam, 2013). In contrast the term ‘spirituality’ is employed in this study to illuminate those intensely personal accounts of faith (Flanagan and Jupp, 2007; Iannaccone and Klick, 2003).

Since this study contends that social realities as well as identities are intersectional it acknowledges that ‘divisions’ between spiritual and religious identities for those who are members of a religious community are not entirely separated (Verter, 2003; Guest, 2007; Aune, 2014). Furthermore, my treatment of them as distinct will however, recognise the utility of the burgeoning work on spiritual capital in foregrounding the spiritual aspects of these Black women’s religious identities. I will be drawing on the work of Verter (2003) and Guest (2007) to discuss spirituality as capital. Both scholars have used Bourdieu’s cultural capital in their theorisations of spirituality. It is useful to recap Bourdieu’s main argument.

Bourdieu (1986) offers an extensive reinterpretation of Marx’s theory of capital by conceptualising it as the effect of processes of accumulation that is not just monetary (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2011). For Bourdieu (1986), the social actor is a reflective agent, both socialised and subjective (Swingewood 2000, p. 214) who are bound to navigate their lives according to the rules of accumulation. All are involved in the task of accumulating the material and social symbols of success: capital. Capital in all its forms is unequally distributed throughout society and so, according to Bourdieu, the social actor participates in a struggle to accrue the symbols of success, which are material and non-material forms of capital. For Bourdieu (1986) there are four types of capital: economic, social, cultural and

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symbolic. The acquisition of these forms of capital determines the social actors' position in society. So the person who gains capital in the economic field is equipped to convert that capital to achieve some other form of capital such as prestige amongst their networks in their social fields. These fields then prescribe how someone with capital within that field will behave. Knowing how to behave is an expression of embodied capital. People come to embody the principles of the systems in which they live and they do this through a process of internalisation and externalisation.

His analysis is complex and multi-layered offering scope to view the relationship and tensions between the active agent and the structures of society. Despite this, he is seen as failing to provide a complex multi-layered viewing when theorising religion (Verter, 2003; Guest, 2007). Both Verter (2003) and Guest (2007) agree that although Bourdieu (1991) wrote about religious capital, he placed it within a very rigid framework. For Bourdieu, religious capital expresses the formalised power that religious leaders have over their congregations. Having not yet developed concepts which helped to position the social agent with some degree of autonomy, he presented religion as the symbolic medium through which ideologies that promoted class oppressions were maintained (Rey, 2014). In this view, some contend that there is very little room for the empowered religious agent (Verter 2003; Guest (2007). But Rey (2014) suggests that Bourdieu's theorising of habitus brings the religious active agent into view. By acknowledging the strengths and limitations of Bourdieu's religious capital, Verter (2003, p.151) asserts that religious capital is not sufficient for an understanding of spirituality. He posits that it is in an analysis of cultural capital that tools are provided for conceiving more complex religious identities. Bourdieu presents cultural capital in three forms; embodied, institutionalised and objectified. Each form is both distinct and interrelated.

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Sticking closely to Bourdieu's interpretation of cultural capital, Verter (ibid) defines spiritual capital as objectified (and by that he refers to material and symbolic commodities such as crosses) and spiritual capital as the institutionalized state (such as the power located in churches to legitimise and promote its religious goods). The third application, according to Verter (2003), focuses attention on spirituality that is expressed as intensely personal embodied capabilities. Verter's (2003) idea of an embodied spiritual capital offers this thesis an important basis for its consideration of spirituality. Staying with Bourdieu's classifications, Verter (ibid) suggests that when applied to spirituality as an embodied state, spiritual capital emerges as the consumption and expression of religious competencies that facilitate an individual's progression within the religious and other fields:

In the embodied state, spiritual capital is a measure of not only position, but also disposition, it is the knowledge, abilities, tastes, and credentials an individual amassed in the field of religion and is the outcome of explicit education or unconscious processes of socialization. Its efficacy resides in the fact that it is not recognised as capital-that is, as the product of a primitive accumulation within a struggle to impose an arbitrary symbolic hierarchy- but rather is mistaken for competence within a naturalized social order. Like cultural capital, spiritual capital is embodied in the habitus, the socially structured mode of apprehending and acting in the world.

(Verter, 2003, p.159)

Although Verter (2003) applied all three states to his discussion of spiritual capital, this study will only use insights on spirituality in its embodied form to examine the interconnections between the personal and spiritual aspects of participants' religious identities. I have opted for capital as embodiment as it helps to contextualise and delineate the intensely personal identities of religious adherents from their religious identities. Verter (2003), Guest (2007) and Guest and Davis (2007) all illustrate how spiritual capital is acquired as a transgenerational resource with material and psychological effects. This discussion uses this insight to situate a discussion of some of the gendered legacies that have been passed down to Black single Seventh-day Adventist women.

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The discussion will be underpinned by the concepts habitus and social fields to open up a conceptual route for articulating the women's intensely personal accounts of spiritual struggles, needs and identities.

The term resource has specific application for a consideration of spirituality. Bacchus and Holley's (2008) application of the term 'resource' in their study of Black American women's spirituality fits in with Guest's (2003) and Verter's (2007) discussion of spirituality. Bacchus and Holley (2008) in their study of Black women, discuss personal faith as a medium to facilitate Black women's struggle with the inequalities they encounter. It is depicted as something that is generated within the religious group but also as a facility distinct from it. They found that the women utilise spirituality as prayer, meditation, and inspirational readings to gain personal strength, inner peace and guidance and to reflect on and reappraise stressful situations in the workplace. Starks and Huey (2003) found that spirituality not only helped in difficult experiences but also contributed to the life satisfaction of African American women. It is useful to view, particularly in light of this study's recognition of intersectional identities, the nuances, contradictions and conventions that are components of participants' spiritual selves. It offsets a traditional and limited reading of women as oppressed members of static patriarchal edifices and delineates instead the complex contradictions and opportunities that they encounter. Johnson (2012) also utilises the term 'resource' when investigating Black men's coping strategies in the face of racism. Once again there is a notion of an available spiritual reservoir that provides opportunities for those Black people struggling against, and because of, oppression. Woodhead (*ibid*) suggests that spirituality for some women is an empowering resource for re-situating 'alternative' spiritualities where, according to Reid (2008), women are able to express their personal convictions in non-hierarchical communities that centralise women's leadership and guidance.

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Earlier studies have suggested that women are able to achieve positive and affirming identities from their religions. Such accounts note religious women's abilities to 'craft' their religious identities as active agents. There is evidence that many Christian women who are members of very conservative religions produce devoted religious lives despite patriarchal dictates that devalue them (Brusco, 1995; Ozorak, 1996; Woodhead, 2005; Frahm-Arp, 2012). There are different ways in which the available literature theorises this. Women have, for example, been viewed as expressing their agentic identities as godly feminists (Brasher 1998) with personal connections to God and connectedness with their communities. Trzebiatowska's (2013) study illustrates how the cloistered life appeals to some young Polish women whose decisions to become nuns were critical to the sense of power they described themselves as having. Ozorak (1996) analysed how religious women experience autonomy through active cognitive restructuring that decentres the impact of the gendered inequalities they face whilst centralising their faith experiences. Brusco (1995) suggests that Columbian women experience increasing equality when Columbian husbands who convert to evangelical Christianity are then expected to practise a converted masculinity and get more involved with their wives' domestic lives. These and other studies, by drawing attention to religious identities as agentic, also reveal religious communities and discourses as able to reinvigorate women's commitment to faith.

In the main, discussions of religious women and agency have not generally focused attention on women who are unmarried. Aune (2004), Trzebiatowska (2011) and Frahm-Arp (2010) provide evidence that unmarried religious women also display agency. Sojourner's now iconic public declarations are a reminder that women have long accumulated and maximised religious practices for transformation of their struggles. Spiritual capital is used to express the successful accumulation and maximisation of spiritual resources by Black single Seventh-day Adventist women.

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Sojourner Truth's 1851 '*Ain't I a woman*' speech (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Smiet, 2015) as noted in the Introduction chapter has particular resonance for this study's interpretation of singleness. The incorporation of her spiritual self adds further significance. Brah and Phoenix (2004, p.77) illustrate how Sojourner's expressed belief in God foregrounds a spirituality that '*finds affirmation through a belief in the figure of a Jesus who listens*'. Her speech connects pain and spirituality where Jesus, a divine being, is depicted as being so closely connected to her, despite her social positioning, that He acknowledges her grief. This speech gives a lens through which participants' accounts of their pain and suffering can be focused and examined. It is also an important context for pulling out those narratives that suggest liberation and transformation as possibilities that spirituality allows. Sojourner's account of who she is as a woman disrupts ideologies that dehumanise Black women. By showing her womanhood as varied, multi-layered and contextual she gives important pointers towards the complex ways in which Black women's gendered identities are subjected to White oppression. This womanhood also emphasises how Black women, by drawing on spirituality, help to develop post-slavery narratives of resilience. Seventh-day Adventism's eschatological focus adds greater context to this chapter's discussion of spirituality. Seventh-day Adventists view the material world as saturated with spiritual forces which are actively engaged in a battle (Vance, 1999). This chapter argues that participants evoke accounts of this controversy in their descriptions of their spiritual selves.

Contextualising spirituality: coping with trouble

Spirituality expressed as a reflection of relationship with God is not heavily represented in participants' questionnaire responses. However, it is present in the written narratives and infuses all the in-depth interviews. The findings illustrate how participants' reflections tend to construct accounts of spirituality in response to the troubles they encounter

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as single women. Their attempts at managing the difficulties stemming from their desires to marry, the deficiencies attributed to being single and the sexual pressures they encounter paint a very complex picture. Participants portray their lives as devoid of some key aspects of adult life, namely sexuality and marriage. The narratives that they construct suggest that their spiritual selves are a contradictory and complex mixture of traditional dictates and personal belief. On one hand participants' submission to the traditions of their faith is reproduced as personal belief with which they concur and on the other, as personal belief that is difficult and uncomfortable. Ultimately, the production of a spiritual identity is an act of agency.

The previous chapter's consideration of celibacy showed that personal faith was one strategy for undermining the sexual impulses and pressures that some participants receive. This chapter illustrates how a commitment to celibacy is partly designed to secure their claims for belonging in the Seventh-day Adventist church, despite being unmarried women and that a spiritual self is central to this. The celibate identity is thus achieved and sustained by faith. For single people, it serves to promote the Seventh-day Adventist view of marriage, to navigate the difficulties that come with maintaining the single identity and to reproduce resilience.

Spirituality as a resource for centralising heteronormative ideals and managing contradictions

A key finding of this study is that heterosexual marriage is without question the ideal adult intimate relationship for all participants. Their 'spiritual' commentaries detail marriage as something that is God ordained, natural and right. In addition, as they present their beliefs about the centrality of marriage they set up a context in which the unmarried status is brought into serious question, and in doing so produce a 'troubled subject position' for themselves

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(c.f. Wetherell, 1998). Some justify commitment to the ideal of marriage by making reference to biblical teachings regarding marriage.

This section will discuss how participants' habitus includes internalised experiences within contradictory social fields. More specifically their embodied dispositions highlight how these contradictions are entrenched in religious ideals. In addition, symbolic capital as spiritual capital is central to the women's attempts to resolve their problematic dispositions. Although they identify God as ultimately responsible for their experience of involuntary singleness, the discussion will show how they consume religious discourses in order to negotiate their religious beliefs, membership of the church and their personal convictions. In the comments below, the production of a spiritual self is evidence of their struggle with expectations regarding religious rootedness, gendered expectations and their sense of personal agency.

In her interview, Susan, a never married woman in her mid-forties, refers to biblical women who had achieved marriage by relying on men to choose them for marriage, as good biblical success stories:

Susan: I go back to the stories of Isaac and Rebecca. If you look at the biblical stories, I don't see any woman putting themselves out there.

According to this view, given that marriage is something instituted by God then it is something that He can give to them. They do not have to put themselves 'out there' because doing so would undermine their identities as eligible women; waiting is the correct thing to do. They do face, particularly for the never married participants, the question of whether God would make it possible for them to marry. Seven of the eight never married interviewees work consistently with the idea that God *could* choose a partner for them. Of this group, two consider that he *would* choose a partner for them. Some questionnaire responses also centralise prayer as the medium through which this is likely to be achieved. For example, questionnaire respondent no. 8 mentioned the importance of '*just praying to meet someone*

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special', praying for something, positions it as good, beneficial and valuable, because it is perceived to be worthy of God-like attention. But praying to be married raises its own complexities.

By employing spiritual lenses to justify what they see as God's will, most participants confront the painful reality that, thus far, He has not chosen it for them. They have, therefore, attempted to make sense of this. For instance, one woman's written narrative states:

God didn't intend for any of us to be alone... It was not God's ideal that man should be lonely.

The participant who produced the poem '*Loneliness of men*' encapsulates the frustration of single Christians in the question '*Where is this good gift?*' She shows the complex spiritual repertoires that she and other participants utilise to depict God as the benefactor who, for reasons unknown, has not given marriage to them:

For in the midst of perfection even Adam felt lonely

This yearning of the heart can't apply to him only

This poetic contribution recognises God as the complete authority for meeting the participant's need for intimacy. Although the focus is primarily about sexual need, the presentation of it as a prayer to God, places intimacy for her as a Seventh-day Adventist woman within the traditional Christian view of marriage. Indeed the struggle that she depicts suggests that it is not just sexual intimacy but sexual intimacy in marriage that is the vexing issue here. The poet moves on to present God as the main obstacle in achieving her desire:

This dream you've given to others, so how can you defend your apparent refusal to give it to me?

God is omnipotent and therefore able to solve her problem but has not done so. Investing God with human propensities, she describes Him as without defence and unyielding. Turning attention away from her dilemma she returns to her familiar gendered

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position – waiting and shows a resolve to continue to wait on God for marriage, despite the sexual frustrations that accompany this:

Lord I beg you to remember the loneliness of Men

For the weight of my loneliness consumes me again.

Helen ends her poem with a footnote that reinforces this idea of submission to God. It is a submission that is justified on future expectations (i.e. faith). This tactic shows the critical relationship between faith and a waiting that reinforces old gendered regimes that relegate women's agency. Resolution is achievable because by accepting the appropriateness of waiting, Helen uses belief as the framework for resolving her dilemmas. This renewed hope re-establishes her understanding of a patriarchal God who is benevolent:

Helen: This poem I hope will give comfort to other people who live alone. It is an honest reflection of how I felt and how I am sure other people feel at night and even through the day. It starts as an accusation, almost an argument with God, my father and then becomes a request as my position becomes clearer and the realisation hits me. God knows, he understands and he is answering.

The complexities of singleness and a divine will that withholds marriage, yet also recognises men's power results in continuing dilemmas for Janice. In her account there is a powerful portrayal of an unelected woman 'constrained' by masculinities, God and men.

Janice: So I think that in my case. I have had circumstances when I thought why did it not work? Why did he not choose me? Why did Peter not pay me a lot of attention and yet he wanted Alex and married her in the end. And Simon, I went out with him for eight years and he could not make the decision to take me to marry ...and he did not choose me in the end.

I remember that when I was twenty four.... I prayed to the lord and the answer that I got was God's plans are best and he was basically saying, 'if something is not good for you even though it is good in itself, God may not grant it to you'. And I believe that God was saying that marriage is not the best for me. So I have had instances where it was played out. And so I believe that I have the context for me to place my situation of not being married. Whether that is an escape, I do not know but the realityis that I am still not married.

It can be argued that cataloguing episodes of not being chosen, presents real difficulties for this participant and so she attempts to resolve her difficulties by attributing the cause of her single status ultimately to God. This approach works to minimise the dilemmas she faces in

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not being chosen, as suggested in her words ‘*Whether this is an escape I do not know*’, or as explained by another participant’s written account on singleness and vulnerability ‘*We tend to spiritualise things when we cannot deal with it.*’

At different points across the interviews, other women centralised ‘relationship with God’ as a key means of ensuring marriage. Such women believe in a bountiful God who will eventually somehow grant their desires. Angela justifies her stance on the grounds of what she sees as evidence of God’s favour. By itemising her achievements and foregrounding her spirituality she invalidates any doubts that she may not marry.

Angela: I am woman who loves the lord and I am following him, check, I am a well presented person. I am clean and hygienic and I try to keep myself accountable to deal with people in a good way and one of the things that I have been taught is that ‘a man who is to have friends must show himself friendly’ I am warm and pleasant. Am I trying to be sociable? – check. Is God good? – check. Even with an imperfect model there is scope enough for my singleness not to continue.

For Angela the cumulative presence of spiritual, physical and social capital constitute the key ingredients for finally getting married. Like the poet she shows how her readiness for marriage confirms her preparedness to embrace a new gendered identity that does not include singleness.

Taylor’s (2011) discussion of single women in popular culture shows how single women draw on popularised notions of the attractive body as a yardstick for enhancing their chances to be in relationships. In a similar way Angela’s check list confirms her assumption that bodily capital is symbolic of her right to access God’s privileges. She continues this line of reasoning but in this extract she faces the contradiction that God has withheld His beneficence:

Angela: The line that I take in terms of actually thinking about my singleness is that God orders my steps and knows all things... and it is the same God who is hearing me pray and call out to him that I would like a husband and I would like him to prepare me about my desire to move on and do new things. It is the same God who hears me pray about my personal, professional and practical life and has answered and has moved in my life tangibly

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and seems to have me wait for others to be answered and I just have to trust that if I am single at this moment it is because God is allowing it to be so.

A narrative of a God who orders her life demonstrates how Angela finds some resolution to her dilemmas regarding God's apparent reluctance to help her to marry. She appeals to evidence of God's positive response to her in other areas of her life. Why then should this method fail when it comes to matters of marriage? Taking a new turn in her line of reasoning she argues that she is not ready: *'I would like him to prepare me for that'*. By suggesting that she is not yet ready, Angela undermines any opportunity for spiritual impasse by promoting continuing faith in God. She also shows how narratives of human deficiency re-assert narratives of God's perfection. Susan avoids the above dilemmas by arguing that she needs more time to be ready for marriage by achieving a more spiritual self in order to be worthy of the relational responsibilities in marriage:

Susan: Because there may be something that He needs me to work on. I think that I can be selfish; it has always been me! me! me! I have to do everything myself, I have to fight for myself, fend for myself. So if I am in a relationship, I need to think that it is not about me. It's about me and the other person.

Susan suggests that singleness has produced a self-centred attitude which serves to extend her singleness. By highlighting that she is not quite ready for marriage, Susan joins Ann in maintaining the legitimacy of divine patriarchal authority. The dilemmas that these participants work with find some resolution within a discourse of waiting on God's will.

The above participants illustrate how dilemmas over singleness interact with fundamental questions about the intervention of God in their personal lives. They engage in what Reynolds (2004) refers to as rhetorical work in order to account for the lack of what should be divinely appointed in their lives. An account of waiting proves to be very useful in maintaining their acceptance and confidence in a faithful God who *will* eventually fulfil His divine plan.

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In the previous chapter ‘waiting’ surfaces as an important feature of single women’s gendered identity. The questionnaire responses showed that around one third of women commented on waiting, as an aspect of their single identities. The interviewees constructed ‘waiting’ as important for reinforcing traditional gendered ideals about attractive women. They also invested waiting with spiritual qualities and so confirmed ‘God’s authority’ in their lives. In matters of marriage, then, choice is located within patriarchal confines. Accounts of waiting on God concur with other accounts that show how important it is for them also to wait on men to choose them. The dilemmas they encounter as waiting women are neutralised when articulated as really waiting on God.

The demarcations between men and women in religious spaces have been noted in studies of religion and gender (Storkey, 2001; Reilly, 2011). Women’s campaigns for greater equality with men in matters of public practice have gained ground, despite this, Christian women continue to live their religious lives up against the backdrop of the idealisation of domestic spheres (Page, 2011). The single women in this study appear to consume spirituality as a product that will assist them in the procurement of identities as wives. The never married women in particular seem to believe that their task is to continue in faith and expect to marry.

Participants show how spiritual reflections ground those narratives that instruct single women to submit to a higher authority by waiting. Submitting to the idea of a benevolent or resourceful God remains contradictory because they depict what they see as God’s ‘promotion’ of marriage, His ‘expectation’ that they should want it and His ‘decision’ not to provide it for them. Despite this contradiction, faith in God allows these Black single Seventh-day Adventist women to make sense of their ‘failure’ to achieve. By waiting on men to be led by God to choose them, they embrace the limited opportunity available to them as single women and in waiting they reinforce traditional gendered demarcations over an extended time frame.

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The above examples illustrate how those ideals that the participants embrace as important to their futures, such as maintaining relationship with God and achieving marriage, are interconnected aspects of the women's identity projects (spiritual and gendered). The achievement of spiritual 'coherence' means rendering a deficit account of the unmarried self and this is problematic for the women (since they believe that it is God who has ordained marriage for adults and so they have not opposed His will). This problem is generally considered to take second place to the important task of validating and centering God's authority over their lives.

Waiting on God's will is an important requirement. Firstly, it is evidence of submission to God's authority and secondly, it raises their social standing across at least three interconnecting fields; heteronormative, religious and spiritual. Waiting on God is a strategy for attaining what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as symbolic capital. Waiting women can construct themselves as respectable, devout, intensely feminine and spiritual. These are important features of their habitus. The women's perception of God's decision to withhold marriage (so far) as his divine appointment sets up a psychological crisis, but they are able to sublimate their intense disadvantages in favour of attaining a higher goal through submission and waiting. Paradoxically, waiting emerges as a concentrated act of spiritual submission that produces gendered power. When participants submit to dictates that they should wait for sexual fulfilment until they are married, they accumulate spiritual capital that underlines their gender and religion. Belief in an accessible god furnishes these women with the capacity to circumvent the very contradictions they face. The section below considers how they do this.

Spirituality: situating the single self

So far this chapter has considered how some participants explain the importance of marriage in the context of their spiritual lives. Yet, when the importance of marriage is

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highlighted participants open up a space wherein their faith becomes intensely problematic for them. In other words, when participants present marriage as a will of God, they also undermine the view of God's hand in their lives as beneficent. Although never married women in particular struggle with their singleness and issues that relate to God's will in their lives, they have, as analysed in the previous section, used the act of waiting in order to maintain an understanding of God as active and faithful. They are also able to give an account of God as critical to helping them through other areas of their lives and for giving them success. They do this by portraying God to be the key support: first enabling their personal development; second, helping them to cope with their struggles; third, assisting them to positively re-define their single identities and finally, facilitating the production of strength. These 'achievements' present their privileged positions and dispositions in their identity work.

Although few questionnaire responses directly mention spirituality, those that do, acknowledge the ultimate authority of God and thanked Him for the successes they have achieved. When the written narratives and in-depth interviews are incorporated, it becomes clear that notions of God as the director of their lives are inextricably involved in the situating of the single self. Take for instance, the following comments by questionnaire participants. In considering the question, *'What do you think are the attitude of family issues that singles face?'* Participant no. 8 recorded, *'I am focusing on God's timing not man's.'* When reporting on what she thinks are *'the main issues for single women?'* Participant no. 60 stated *'the struggle to be in the world and not of it, God's words helps.'* In response to the question *'What is your main concern or interest as a single woman?'* Participant no. 20 recorded *'to be happy with myself and God's purpose in my life'*. Whereas Participant no 27's consideration of *'areas important for research'* was, *'Is singleness unacceptable to God, is it*

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possible to be single and happy?' the above illustrate that God's timing, environment and purpose are important factors informing their world view.

Some questionnaire participants suggest that God has been instrumental in their professional and personal development opportunities and successes. Participants indicate that God is also responsible for their 'material' successes that undoubtedly impact other spheres of their lives. Since God 'is' instrumental in their achievements, they are of the opinion that He should be acknowledged as such by their thanks and praise. The positive tone of these contributions do very little to alter the troubled feelings that they attribute to being single. These brief questionnaire responses are not evidence of positive accounts of singleness but rather of their positive feelings about personal development opportunities and episodes. Personal development is the area where spiritual commentaries are most evident; eleven of the twenty-four questionnaire responses to the question '*What are the development issues for singles*', attribute development experiences to God's leadership. The comments below illustrate this.

Accomplish more since divorce, praise God – Participant no. 3

Being the best through the help of God, through prayer – Participant no. 40

Finding out about one-self – what do I like and what does the Lord want me to do –
Participant no. 42

Growing in Jesus Christ – Participant no. 5

God is portrayed as opening up opportunities. Two in-depth interviewees, Pauline and Claudette refer to God as blessing them with children. Angela and Flora both feel blessed with good looks, and Janice speaks of her financial means. Participants report that they have evidence that God is actively involved in their lives, for them, they have direct access to God and He responds to their needs. Their relationship with him is active and trustworthy. One questionnaire participant indicates that being single and successful gives both personal and

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spiritual power: *'People see your success as a result of singleness, not God, although you can have more choices than married'* – Participant no. 45.

Although it is likely that they have developed practical skills in the religious environment, some of the participants show how it is possible to use their spiritual capital to secure personal development. Their construction of a god who is actively engaged in the social fields that they occupy confirm to the women that they have religious and more importantly for the purposes of this discussion, spiritual capital. Some suggest that God is so closely connected to them that He is able, if He wishes, to alter social fields to accommodate their needs. This has the effect of constructing God as beneficent and personally concerned with their material and social success. Some of the women suggest that they have achieved professional, educational and personal capital as a result of God's goodness. Even though the above spiritual reflections showcase God's positive responses to them, the dilemmas and contradictions of singleness continue to highlight the underlying contradictions of their faith.

An examination of the comments that relate generally to issues that single women face include struggle as one feature. Overall their constructions of struggle irradiate the Seventh-day Adventist discourse of controversy as a striving against sin in the world (Vance, 1991; Bull and Lockhart, 1997). Participants' accounts present themselves as tested, tried and dislocated. It becomes important then to achieve some level of coherence in their plight, and some interviewees portray their personal faith as a resource for coping.

Six in-depth interviewees made faith in God a decisive factor in their attempts to ground or root their selves as single women. Claudette who rendered the least pessimistic account of singleness attests to struggle and loneliness as a central feature of singleness. In answer to the question *'what captures singleness for you?'* she states:

Claudette: I don't know, I suppose one of the times that stood out for me in terms of what I really felt singleness as being, when it had an impact was when I received a call that my son was in the hospital and I was at work... and I remember thinking that there was nobody that I could call. And it did make me feel quite alone and then having to-- it made me realise also

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that I had to depend on God and I remember about the decisions for him to have surgery... that it was quite an important decision and I remember coming home and it was very traumatic having been at the hospital from the morning..... I said to God that I needed to hear from Him and the impact of not having anyone that I could talk to about it.... I came home and said 'God that I need to feel your presence and be directed by you' and that for me was quite a profound experience.

She also reflected on a time when she had fallen down the stairs and she was alone and that she felt that it was only God who was available to help her: *'And I laid on the floor and I said God you have to help me'.*

Claudette says something important here about her intimate connection with God who is available and meets her emotional needs as a mother and woman alone. Like Sojourner, Claudette can cling to her faith when no one else understands. What is also present in her account is the presentation of herself as extremely alone and vulnerable.

Sharon, in response to the question *'How does your religion impact on your experience as a single woman?'*, refers to God as supporting her through her loneliness:

Sharon: It's when I cry out to God and once I have an outburst then it's gone. But there are times when I do. It is as though when I cry out to God he is cuddling me, holding me, I don't know how to explain it, it gives me that comfort, that reassurance ...

Janice used the term 'hope' to describe what her faith gives her. Her response to the question *'What about Children?'*, includes the following:

Janice: God gives us hope and it shines itself in areas that you think that it is not possible to find hope. And so I am not where I was at forty and I do not have any regrets any more, not to say that every now and then I say it would be nice, but not a great sense of pain and loss that I have not fulfilled my potential... none of that...

By acknowledging the pain of childlessness in her earlier years, Janice presents a resolved self. She suggests that any doubts that she may have nursed about not getting married and having children are resolved and God is vindicated.

The difficulties surrounding singleness then, have the capacity, when brought under the umbrella of faith, to reposition these single women's account of their struggles.

Participants present a more actualised self within their spiritual narratives. All ten

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interviewees redefine their marginalised singleness by promoting an identity capable of achieving intimate relationship with a powerful God. In a sense this is the central factor underscoring spiritual accounts because it emerges as one opportunity to undermine the multi-marginalities they encounter as unmarried women. The opportunity to lay claim to an intensely personal relationship with God resonates with Sojourner Truth's statement that none '*but Jesus hears*' (Brah and Phoenix 2004, p. 77) which illustrates her social isolation and marginality but also her power and citizenship in the spiritual realm as one who has access to God. Pauline illustrates an intimate connection with God in answer to the question '*How would you describe yourself?*'

Pauline: ...*I am praying a lot I pray and God has directed me in different ways and I feel that I have got to a stage where I feel that now I can say that I am on the right track to something.*

Her intensely personal relationship with God as graphically illustrated below, is Pauline's account of an autonomous self, claiming full membership in her church despite the members' denunciation of her for having had a child out of wedlock.

Pauline: ... *[B]ut on this day, God said Pauline don't think about what people say just go down there and get yourself baptised. I just told the church exactly how I felt whilst I was in that pool and I said that I committed my sin and I pleaded with God for forgiveness and he forgave me and I felt the church had not and I struggled for a long time and that I hoped that anybody else that might go through what I had gone through would be loved.*

For Pauline, her public decision to re-enter her community, by getting re-baptised, was the direct result of what she depicts as a close relationship that she had with God. Describing her resolve publicly to confront her church, she further illustrates how drawing on what she refers to as the 'Holy Spirit', enabled her to make the decision and to renegotiate her identity on the basis that she had every right to access the forgiveness of God. Yet, by highlighting that she was forgiven, she accepts the sexual codes that her church promotes. Pauline was therefore able to reclaim membership of her local church community and shift her inferior status of unmarried mother to one of forgiven citizen. Pauline draws on her spiritual capital in order to

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establish new narratives about her rights in the religious community. Yet, even as she insists on her spiritual pedigree as a transformed woman, she reinforces marriage's legitimacy within her church community.

Two participants constructed their spiritual identities as more important than their single identities. Lorraine intentionally and consistently promoted her spiritual identity over her single one, while Flora established her legitimacy and credibility as a woman with special connections to God before reflecting on her vulnerabilities as a single woman. Her comments indicate that a commitment to faith is a major contributor to how she positions herself. She laid out her conversion story at the start of the interview and succeeded in centring her spiritual pedigree as the axial point for situating her identity. In response to the question, 'What is singleness like for you?' Lorraine begins by stating: 'The lord brought me out for a reason'. Being 'brought out', refers to where she was in the world outside God's will, to where she is now; 'brought' into a pure life, obedient to God's will. She recounted her conversion story which began with a visit to a Seventh-day Adventist church where she was confronted by a man she did not know.

Lorraine: So I went right round and when I got down the stairs he was there and he said the lord is calling you and I looked and said 'don't touch me' and after that I came home and got a bible and started to read. And one day I read Romans chapter 1, it blew my head off about how you sin and you pretend I thought 'wow!' I rang X up and said 'have you ever read Romans?' and I said 'I am troubled man'. How come I never heard this in the Sunday church and for me the SDA is what made it home for me and so for me it is an important part of my life being an SDA, it showed me the truth of where I really should be.

By showing her initial resistance to becoming a Seventh-day Adventist by using the phrase 'don't touch me' Lorraine gives greater emphasis to her special identity in her conversion account. She does this by indicating that spirituality was not of her choosing but rather that she was chosen. The idea of 'being called' or 'led' provides a canopy for grappling with the dilemmas that she catalogues regarding her prolonged singleness. In this way she is able to present herself as procuring capital, of achieving a privileged identity. The significance of her

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narrative can be seen against the background that Lorraine had also stated, as discussed in the chapter on celibacy, that had she known that being a Seventh-day Adventist would have meant a prolonged unmarried status, she would not have converted. Her narrative of divine calling indicates how important it is for Lorraine to perform and describe a more self-actualised identity.

Janice attributes her positive spiritual identity to membership in a community where there are opportunities to be involved.

Question: *Can you say more about how your religion impacts your singleness?:*

Janice: *I think if I am going to be honest, it has given me another coat hanger to hang this singleness on. It has given me alternatives to look at singleness you know squarely and see both the pros and cons of it. Maybe if I was a non-Christian I would think that it was the dire thing to be single but the church has provided some positive outlets for me as a single person because I have learned that surprisingly that Jesus was like me, he was single and he probably endured some of the frustrations of singleness that I endure. It is amazing, John the Baptist, Daniel, Ezekiel, etc they were all single. Biblical characters have provided wholesome examples of singleness that makes singleness more bearable that you can actually live that way and be productive and be an example.*

In a sense, Janice attempts to produce spiritual capital by drawing from unmarried exemplary biblical characters. Whilst there is some scope for constructing positive singleness, her reference to biblical characters only goes some way to achieving this. Her account also stigmatises singleness as an identity that should be endured and illustrates that being a positive single requires large (and possibly difficult to acquire) levels of spiritual capital. She does, however, illustrate how for her it is very important to locate the growth of her spiritual self in the church community that she attends. This community gives support and provides her with the templates of unmarried biblical characters to ‘perform’ a life script that is productive and exemplary:

Janice: *Biblical characters have provided wholesome examples of singleness that makes singleness more bearable that you can actually live that way and be productive and be an example.*

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In other words the church is presented as a critical learning space for Janice to achieve and to display her spiritual credentials. Apart from that Janice links her singleness with the figure of Jesus Christ and seems surprised and excited by the prospect that she has highlighted Jesus' single identity as a point of reference for her. This acknowledgement may offer Janice new and surprising opportunities in her identity work:

Janice: The church has provided some positive outlets for me as a single person because I have learned that surprisingly that Jesus was like me, he was like me!

Tracey, in response to the question, 'What experiences capture singleness for you?' describes her successful connection with God: 'Me and God have a brilliant absolutely fantastic relationship'. By making reference to what others have to say about her singleness she adds:

Tracey: But it comes to the point where people are like. It does not matter if they (a partner) are a Christian or not, God will work on that, you have not got much time, time is ticking. You are asking me to give up my beliefs about being unequally yoked in the bible as I have not got much time? Where is faith? And God will provide? So where is faith? And these are Christians telling me this!

In this contribution, singleness is portrayed as a chosen, considered identity. Agency is central as Tracey suggests that she has chosen to remain committed to her personal relationship with God. This means that like the poet above, she too chooses the difficult path of setting aside dissatisfaction in favour of believing. Belief becomes a context where God's resourcefulness and benevolence has both present and future currency. An intentional faith in God develops strategies for managing the journey through and out of singleness: "And God will provide!" Therefore, faith and commitment emerge as central aspects of Tracey's single self that will, eventually, make the transition into marriage.

Although these interviewees, along with some questionnaire and written narrative participants, promote a submission to God's faithful timing in a way that resonates with Seventh-day Adventist/Christian theologies, Verona did not. Verona expresses how she feels

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she had been duped into accepting a notion of a God that ‘demands’ ultimate allegiance to him to the point of sacrificing normal desires and drives. She castigates the church for promoting this view and rejects this reasoning. She expresses this rejection by recalling a group discussion on singleness that was held for singles at her church she states:

Verona: One of the women stated that what she treasured about being single was her alone time with God in the stillness of the night when you can speak with God. I remember thinking how clichéd and what a lot of crap! It is ridiculous, I tell you the truth, and it was very irritating... The church would like to promote the idea that being single is a golden opportunity to build a relationship with God and to work like Paul and I am thinking to keep it and give me a husband!... There is a part of me that hates the bible bashing Christians and possibly why I like somebody who is working things out and not quite there...

Verona ridicules what for her is a hypocritical attempt to portray a righteous attitude. She demonstrates that she is not complicit with certain ‘types’ of Seventh-day Adventists who she considers are over-religious but prefers instead, the authenticity of those Christians who are still growing. Presumably the person who is still working things out is someone who is in charge of their life and their spiritual development. Such people have not totally submitted to the dictates of the church and so it is possible for them to make choices regarding important matters of life. Verona indicates that she wants to determine her own pathway as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. She might also be implying that her spiritual identity is one that should not uncritically accept church dictates but take an intentional and critical approach to life. In Verter’s (2003) terms, Verona illustrates how she does not value the privileges of religious capital.

The renegotiated single identity is achieved within the context of a narrative depicting marginalisation and deficiency. However, because it is as an identity capable of achieving relationship with a powerful God, it is also presented as one with important connections.

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Thus spiritual capital, as described by Guest (2007) and Verter (2003), is produced and negotiated to elevate these participants from a position of exclusion and marginality to one of spiritual belonging.

Despite the distresses that single women identify, the participants are by and large resolute in applying spiritual interpretations to the understanding of their distress. They claim intimacy with God and show how struggles are also an opportunity to refuel their spirituality. Participant no. 60, as recorded earlier, makes reference to a struggle between worldly and non-worldly realities *‘the struggle to be in the world and not of it’*.

The challenge hinted at here, is to craft an existence that submits to those spiritual injunctions that constrain sinful ‘material’ drives. Contained in these religious dictates is the familiar theme of controversy between worldliness and righteousness. Evidence of the women’s participation in the struggle is contained in their accounts of ‘overcoming’, ‘holding on’, and spiritual strength.

Spirituality as a resource for producing strength

The narrative of strength generally emerged from considerations of spirituality as a resource for positively renegotiating the single identity, as one that can cope with adversities, and achieve personal development. These three areas centralise strength by linking it with achievement, despite great difficulties such as managing the emotional and sexual loneliness of singleness. More specifically, narratives of strength are located within those comments that directly refer to it as a by-product of relationship with God. For example:

Flora: It is a lonely place and I need strength and power to cope. It is an individual faith, not the preaching in the church, a praying faith in order to survive as a single. It has to be an individual heart opening faith to God to survive as a single woman in the church. Also, in the society that we live in...

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Susan: If I did not have that personal relationship with God I wouldn't be able to deal with this. I say that truthfully because there are times when I do feel a bit overwhelmed and the only person I can cry out to is God and once I have an outburst then it is gone.

Angela: Sometimes it is disappointing and we call on the lord for strength.

Flora incorporates her ability to access and draw from a divine resource in order to 'overcome'. This is an important underpinning theme. Susan indicates that the single identity is a beleaguered identity. She manages the intensity of her experience by periodical expressions of grief which are accompanied with resolution of some kind. In addition, as discussed in the chapter on celibacy, Angela's strategy for addressing her sexual disappointments as well as long term celibacy is also dealt with by invoking the divine support.

Such comments construct strength as an intrinsic aspect of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's lives. Edge and Rogers (2005) found that the Black British Caribbean women in their study often drew on narratives of spirituality as a way of managing the psycho-social distresses they faced as young, and in many cases, single mothers. They appeared to have little interest in acknowledging the construction of themselves as 'not coping' and were at pains to show themselves as capable. These participants sometimes evoked slave narratives as 'evidence' that 'strength' was tenaciously embedded in Black Caribbean women's psyches. They viewed spirituality, exemplified in attending church, praying etc. as the context in which their strength was legitimately reproduced and functioned as a resource that enabled these women to surpass their hindrances and oppressions by offering relationship with God and opportunities for coping. Spirituality was a means of making sense of their adversities (Edge and Rogers, 2005). Such strategies served to limit their intentions to access formal support. They tended to manage their difficulties instead of drawing on formal agencies for support. In view of this, it is possible to begin to see how the

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spirituality of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women might also draw on cultural and historical factors that stimulate narratives of strength.

When Tracey's, Susan's and Angela's comments are placed within stereotypical discourses about Black women it is possible to see how their accounts might also be viewed as resurrecting the strong Black woman narrative. All indicate that the catalyst for 'calling on God' were the struggles and pains associated with being single. They also illustrate how despite their calling out to God the struggles of singleness remain. In addition, the women can be depicted as 'resilient' because they present themselves as ultimately coping, and dealing with their struggles. Therefore, spirituality as a resource for transforming the way they handle their dilemmas, closes down opportunities for changing their circumstances and instead offers change on a psychological level. These women show how unbearable circumstances can become manageable realities because the notion of strength confirms their pedigree as women in relationship with the divine.

The opportunities available to the participants as strong women contrasts with the marginalities they tend to encounter as Black women in White society, unmarried women in coupled communities, Christians in secular contexts and women in conservative Christianity. By evoking Sojourner's claim to faith and Black Christian narratives of Jesus as co-sufferer and therefore acquainted with their difficulties (Williams, 2002; Lewis, 2004; Smiet, 2015), these participants portray their Christian faith as a central feature of their identity projects. By being able to cope, Black single Seventh-day Adventist women suggest then that their spirituality operates to maintain traditional values rather than contest it, thus producing strength. Some scholars (e.g. Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Moultrie, 2011) argue that narratives of strength enforce rather than challenge the inequities that Black women encounter.

Being strong obliges black women to exhibit a ready endurance to a life constructed against the backdrop of obstacles, unfairness []. Drawing on the historical reality of slavery and the

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continuing economic and political marginalization of African Americans, this imperative has much merit.

(Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009, p. 72)

By indicating that they are familiar with how strength should be employed and reproduced, participants highlight how strong Black women who are spiritual express one idealised gendered identity. The nomenclature ‘strong Black woman’ is a pervasive representation of Black women’s identities. In this context, the women’s self-presentation as strong was closely interlinked with ideas of spiritual fortitude and therefore spiritual capital. It is in the linking of strength with spirituality that some transgenerational features of spirituality are situated. The triad; strong Black and woman reify the habitus and social positioning of the participants within the religious fields. In these fields they are not positioned as disenfranchised but as agents able to make and take up new opportunities in the spiritual field.

Summary

Spirituality in this chapter is discussed as an aspect of religious behaviour that has the capacity to support the individual to achieve something of value. This something is directly related to their marginalities across the varying social fields that they encounter. They appear able to achieve transcendence over and above their circumstances because of their marginal status. The discussion, by disassociating spirituality from religion, sheds some light on the single Seventh-day Adventist women’s statements regarding the place of personal faith in their identity work. This discussion has shown how some participants face dilemmas that problematise God’s benevolence towards them as single women and contribute to their own marginalisation by centralising marriage. Nonetheless they utilise faith to provoke and expand their opportunities, actively redefining their realities, albeit still within prescribed conventions. The result is that the spiritual lenses that participants construct do little to

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disrupt old notions surrounding marriage and so they situate their identities within the traditional expectations of the church. By contrast they also illustrate how their portrayals of personal faith, by reproducing essentialist post-slavery narratives surrounding Black women's gendered identities, do little to disrupt old notions about Black women.

When this consideration of spirituality is linked with a discussion of celibacy there are some important interrelated factors that surface. One that is particularly relevant for this chapter is the contrast between the flesh and the spirit (Hobbs, 2005). Christianity's promotion of spirituality is often constructed in contrast to the idea of 'the flesh'. The flesh is seen as weak, lustful and unreliable whereas the spirit is seen as sustaining and credible. Practising celibacy is one way in which participants anchor their public commitment to their religious communities and ultimately to God.

The participants incorporated Seventh-day Adventist/Christian competencies into their spiritual repertoires. Spirituality does not resolve the struggle of singleness in this material field but legitimises those narratives that insist that they should wait on men to choose them, cope with difficult circumstances, celebrate their affiliations with divinity and ultimately be strong. It appears that the women garner whatever resources are available to procure spiritual resilience. The Black single Seventh-day Adventist women in this study gave accounts of relatively privileged positions within their religious and social fields in spite of their marginalised identities as single women.

The spiritual resourcefulness that they depict has origins in a history that naturalised struggle and dilemma for enslaved women's gendered work. Resilience is characteristic of Black women (Barnes, 2014) and an expression of agency. Resilience becomes the necessary disposition, the 'habitus', or the 'know how' that underpin their spiritual reflections. Guest's (2007) point that the consumption of spiritual capital is linked with the consumers' social status is particularly apposite. By using Verter's (2003) definition of spiritual capital, the

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study shows that Black single Seventh-day Adventist women are actively involved in the accumulation of resources outside the field of marriage. Because marriage is viewed as divinely appointed, participants' identities as spiritual women come into question.

Notwithstanding, they concur that God-centric principles inform their lives.

This study's participants illustrate how they are both bound and subject to durable systems that are both religious and non-religious. According to the Bourdieusian application of spiritual capital, they navigate their lives according to the rules of spiritual accumulation. They do this through acts of commitment expressed through the practice of celibacy and submissiveness such as waiting on patriarchal power, both godly and masculine. Although the women are involved in the task of accumulating the spiritual symbols of success (spiritual capital), some of them show how spiritual and gendered success are closely interconnected.

Those who struggle with the task of negotiating a coherent spiritual identity illustrate, by their struggles, how significant spiritual accumulation is for them. It is because they are subject to the unequal distribution of various forms of capital that relate to their ethnicities and gender and also because they are bound, according to Bourdieu (1986), by the social requirement to accumulate, that the production and maximising of the spiritual self assumes central importance to them.

The disadvantages they report have historical resonances that indicate that Black single Seventh-day Adventist women embody a transgenerational competency to cope with struggles. Sojourner's statement; "*none but Jesus,*" symbolises that inheritance. Furthermore, Seventh day Adventist ideas about spiritual warfare in this world are evoked in participants' accounts of personal struggle. They believe that they occupy fields that contain good and evil forces. As a result, the Black single Seventh-day Adventist woman is located in parallel realities; earthly and heavenly. They indicate, by their accumulation of spiritual capital that

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disadvantages that they encounter in the material field (this world) may also be catalysts for securing privileges in the spiritual.

This discussion, by taking a lead from the Bourdieusian description of spirituality as an embodied capital, provides scope to view the structural and agentic features of participants' spirituality. It has also helped to situate those historically located social arrangements that tend to marginalise Black women. The accumulation and consumption of spirituality by Black single Seventh-day Adventist women, illustrate how spiritual capital is an important yet contradictory source of personal power.

Chapter 8 - An Intersectional view of Singleness: Towards Conclusions

This thesis has investigated singleness as it features in the lives of Christian women who are Black. I have identified what these Seventh-day Adventist Black single women present as the key components of their singleness. I have taken an intersectional perspective by conducting thematic analysis on singleness as an ethnic, gendered and religious identity to highlight the complexities underpinning their single identities. In this concluding chapter I draw together the threads of the argument of my thesis. Firstly, I present the background to the research. Secondly, I summarise the findings in terms of the multiple positioning of unmarried Black British women who are religious; specifically Seventh-day Adventists. When these key findings are examined through an intersectional lens some of the complexities integral to their single identities come into view. Thirdly, I highlight the contribution made by my thesis to the literature on singleness.

The background of the research and thesis

At the outset of this study I argue that there is increasing attention to the subject of singleness for women, but the tendency has been to focus on White, middle-class and non-religious women. Although singleness is normally presented as a deficit identity, the women in this study occupy their single identities sometimes as a choice. The literature identifies how women navigate their singleness within social contexts that privilege those that are coupled. It further acknowledges that contemporary Western notions of singleness continue to marginalise those women who are not married. However, single women appear to develop effective skills for navigating their ‘deficit’ status and in so doing express agency. More

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recent studies (Taylor, 2012; Lahad, 2014) portray single women as achievers of effective lives and positive identities within marginalised and oppressive social contexts and discourses. These most recent studies (ibid) show how single women seek a more actualised self, as active consumers in the market place of relationships. The trajectories of individuality, choice and traditionalism converge to produce a complicated gendered identity project where women consume a diverse range of opportunities. Their consumption activities show their power to purchase products which provide the competencies required to achieve heteronormative romantic ideals. These consumption activities of single women are considered post-feminist by Taylor (2012) because of the way the women increasingly draw on individual freedoms and power to consume traditional gendered ideals, like getting married, if they choose to do so. Aune's (2004) ground-breaking work on singleness in one evangelical British church movement gives some opportunity to see the workings of post-feminist identities for some British single religious women. It is clear from this study that single women, who are Christian, navigate their singleness in a context where they are at odds with the Christian ideal that they should be married. Prior to the study reported here, there has been no substantive investigation into singleness for Black British women. Apart from the category Black single mother, academic scholarship has paid little attention to the subject of Black women's singleness. Scholarly and populist literatures tend to construct Black women who are single as single mothers, sexually aggressive mothers or, at the other extreme, unattractive and asexual women (Reynolds, 1997).

The major contribution made by this study is to help document the ways in which singleness is experienced by women who are also Black and religious. It recognises that these social categories, as an aspect of their intersectional selves, afford an invaluable entry point for delineating the scope of their complex identity projects. Thematic and intersectional analyses provided the analytical basis of this investigation. The employment of thematic

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analysis brought to the surface the more salient features of participants' main concerns. And the employment of an intersectional perspective served to 'de-essentialise' these Black women's identities.

The most effective way to generate data on an issue not previously addressed in the literature and with a sample that is difficult to obtain was to adopt an iterative research process that enabled the investigation to evolve through different research sequences. There were four phases of this study: focus group, questionnaires, written narratives and in-depth interviews. Two main questions drove this research. The first question; 'What do Black, single Seventh-day Adventist women identify as the key issues surrounding their singleness?' attempted to identify the key themes. Whereas the second question; 'How do Black, single Seventh-day Adventist women experience their singleness as a racialised, religious and gendered identity?' illuminated the intersecting identities of participants. The answers they gave to both questions were underpinned by the overriding theme that being single is very problematic.

The findings showed that four key issues/themes informed the singleness of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women: the centrality of marriage, singleness as problematic, celibacy as troubled, and spirituality as a resource. When these four themes are viewed simultaneously, participants' identities stand out as both agentic and marginalised. They also provide a route for discussing how discourses on the intersections of race, gender and religion challenge stereotypes about religious Black women who are 'not' married. Furthermore, most participants foregrounded marriage as a marker for both gendered achievement and marginality. Some of them also show how, as marginalised single women, they anticipate significant changes that will take them from the margins of heteronormativity into its centre and even beyond. The following presents the key findings as underpinned by intersectional and some other insights that have also contextualised the empirical chapters.

Taking an intersectional perspective

This investigation has shown that the themes that make up Black, single Seventh-day Adventist women's portrayals of singleness are connected to a range of racial, religious and gendered narratives and are therefore complex, with both common themes and differences across the sample.

Crenshaw's (1989; 2011b) work on intersectionality makes the case that Black women tend to be side-lined in feminist discussions and this contribution aimed to bring Black women's multiple oppressions into a feminist analysis. In a similar way, the relatively scant literature on single women in Britain has, for the most part, focused on secular society and portrayed singleness as a White woman's issue. The intersectional discussion in this study is informed by McCall's (2005) intracategorical approach which uses pre-existing social categories to illuminate less known intersecting identities.

Taking a lead from Aune's (2004) work which has been pivotal in exposing women's experience of singleness within the confines of a religion, this study has examined the experiences of Black single Seventh-day Adventist women. The study draws from scholarship that acknowledges women's practice of re-interpreting their religious beliefs to achieve a more personal and autonomous expression of their religious identities. Literature of this kind challenges the essentialising of religious women as dominated by religious men and highlights that they are able to navigate their religious experiences and religious interpretations so as to obtain power (Brusco, 1995; Ozorak, 1996; Brasher, 1998; Frahm-Arp, 2010). This study also acknowledges the insights from other scholars, such as Trzebiatowska (2013) and Sharma (2008), who illuminate how traditional narratives still inform the complex gender work of unmarried women who are religious. The intersectional

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perspective enabled an interpretation of participants' identities as subjects capable of negotiating some of the boundaries of their lives (Mirza, 2010). Additionally, the intersectional perspective allowed me to begin the examination of some of the salient features regarding singleness for Black Seventh-day Adventist women and to highlight the participants' single identities as complexly located. This study also uses insights from feminism and Bourdieusian (Bourdieu, 1986; Verter, 2003; Guest, 2007) interpretations of social capital to assist in unveiling some of the complicated ways that Black single Seventh-day Adventist women coexist interdependently with those social structures that regulate their lives. There was a tendency to focus on marriage when attempting to talk about being single. This kind of response pinpoint the significance of mono-coupling achievement in their identity work and so create a multiplex account of deprivation. When on the other hand they took advantage of non-coupling narratives that ensue from their religious, racialised and gendered fields, they began to produce interconnected and complex descriptions of privilege.

Marginalising difficult journeys

This study reveals that when singleness is viewed from the standpoint of social fields that centralise coupling, being single is marginalising and difficult. The women in this study suggest that being a single woman is a problematic identity because it does not fit with the gendered ideals that are promoted by wider society and their religious communities. Like the women in one of the first studies on single women (Gordon, 1994), Seventh-day Adventist single women are also constrained by external forces, specifically: heteronormative ideals, prescriptions surrounding hegemonic attractiveness, religious as well as Black cultural gendered regulations, impoverished masculinities and uneven sex ratios. These intersecting factors within the Seventh-day Adventist church make it more difficult for these women to meet their Church's expectation that they should marry, amplify their discomfort and feed

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their marginal identities as single women. In novel ways discourses on strength, celibacy, spirituality, ethnicity and pigmentocracy inform these women's identities.

Being strong Black women was expressed as physical, emotional and spiritual. Participants suggested that because they are strong Black women, it was difficult for them to meet someone for marriage. Strength impeded the production of the type of vulnerability that would bring them in line with an idealised femininity, one that centralises White women. So it is their strength that contributes to their disenfranchised positions. They suggested that, unlike White women who they saw as having the option of being vulnerable, attractive and privileged in the market of relationships, they, as Black women have no option but to use the resources found in interlocking narratives of resilience for stabilising their gendered identity work. I argue that a post-slavery narrative that produces and celebrates the strong Black woman, appears to simultaneously impede Black single Seventh-day Adventist women's capacity to participate in heteronormativity.

Living outside the 'privileges' of heterosexual coupling is an unwanted, deficient experience that exposes them to the oppressive, often pressuring and intrusive behaviour of others. The portrayal of sexual pressure as one example of intrusive behaviour draws attention to how some women claimed to have responded by a struggle to resist such illegitimate opportunities to be intimate with men. Some women also found that they were 'tempted' to engage in sexual relations which included married men. Some of them presented their opportunities to engage in heterosexual intimacies as functioning to 'confirm' their 'attractiveness' to men. They all recognised that they took risks that negated their spiritual capital when they submitted to sexual pressure. In this vein, sexual desire was presented as 'no longer' being an issue for them because it was now within the past. The interlocking presence of sexual activity, sexual desire and sexual repression in their contributions produce a multi-layered view of participants' celibate identities. Whilst these provide an important

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look into the sexual dynamics of their lives they also illustrate the importance of their religious gendered work. Their accounts highlight how difficult it is to wait without succumbing to ‘sexual pressures’, but some women also presented their extended periods of waiting as an opportunity to amplify their feminine qualities in order to show themselves apposite for marriage; reflecting the type of women who will make good wives. In this light, waiting is sometimes employed strategically. Conversely, waiting for a suitor to choose them for marriage also cast attention to their deficit status and had the effect of putting the ‘spot light’ on them, showing them up as hyper-visibly awkward and unattractive women on the margins of heterosexual ideals. This was particularly the case for never married, older participants. Although they felt that it was an important gendered work they undertook, it was a choice that also amplified where this waiting actually took place. It was not taking place inside the field of relationships but on the edge of that field: on its margins.

The interviewees offer novel insights into the waiting period through narratives that intersect ethnicity with eligibility. Some women suggested that some Black physical features have relatively little value in the marketplace of relationships. Subsequently, being Black or having too much ‘blackness’ is seen to make them ineligible for marriage, and compound their marginalisation. They stipulated that hegemonic attractiveness is achieved by Black women with European physical features or by White women. For most interviewees, White women display a greater capacity than Black women, for achieving heterosexual relationships. Some participants complicated the view of hegemonic attractiveness by drawing on narratives of pigmentocracy specific to Black communities where lighter coloured skin is valued more than darker coloured skin. Stereotyping and labelling of Black women are positioned in these accounts as behaviours inherent in Black Caribbean communities but more specifically as acts employed by Black masculinities.

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Furthermore, problematic masculinities which were in general portrayed as Seventh-day Adventist and Black were seen to intensify participants' marginal statuses not just by discriminating against them, but also by being ineligible and often unavailable. Participants desired Black men and linked their unavailability with structural oppressions as captured through this study's consideration of anomic and other types of masculinities. Black men's scarcity within the marketplace of relationships was identified by participants as a key contributor to Black Seventh-day Adventist men's privileged status in this field. This social capital had the other effect of disadvantaging available Black Seventh-day Adventist single women. The marginalised status of participants was directly related to the narratives that centralise marriage. However, when their accounts are considered in relation to issues of power, it becomes clear that they are also active in navigating their lives.

Complicated agentic intersectional identities

Whilst religious women who are members of very conservative religions have generally been considered to be marginalised members of their religious communities, the literature available (Ozorak, 1996; Aune, 2004; Frahm-Arp, 2010; Trezbiatowska, 2013) suggests that this is not the case. Instead, religious women have been found to draw from a range of opportunities that reflect feminist influences whilst maintaining and negotiating commitment to their faith. The Black single Seventh-day Adventist women who took part in this study are another illustration of women who although members of conservative religious communities, are also women who have identities that are complicatedly agentic.

The points of 'liberation' that the women in this study present are within narratives that give attention to personal development, resilience and growth. They suggest that it is possible to build a complex, coherent, single self, outside heteronormative ideals. This is a complicated achievement. There were several ways in which their agentic intersectional

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identities surfaced and these were present in descriptions of themselves: strong Black women, professional women concerned with personal and other areas of development, religious women struggling to maintain their commitment to celibacy and last but not least, religious women who are spiritual. They drew on a range of different resources to build gendered, religious and racialised identities. All the interviewees, in one way or another, drew directly or indirectly from the description ‘strong Black woman’. Contributions around personal development as indicators of personal and professional progress evoked narratives of resilience and growth. Even difficult narratives that focused specifically on not being chosen by men gave them the opportunity to compare their achievements positively with those of single men.

A further complex production of agency was evident when participants illustrated the achievement of celibacy as practices of sexual control and embodied agency. By diverting attention away from the embodied challenges they encounter because of hegemonic standards of beauty and the sublimation of sexual desire, these Black women transform their ‘redundant’ bodies into vessels that can be invested with spiritual purity. Despite this, accomplishing the celibate self has devastating consequences for some, in particular sexual and reproductive ‘assassination’. Commentaries about participants’ attempts to take control of their sexual selves and other comments that reveal the presence of sexual temptation, give some evidence of sexual complexity. This portrayal highlights and challenges essentialist views of Black women as sexually promiscuous or asexual. With this in mind, success at being celibate, even amidst this involuntary singleness, represents something participants can choose, something that they can aim for. Additionally, some women in their responses gave legitimacy to the surveillance by their church of members’ sexual lives.

When celibacy and spirituality intersect, the women can achieve a more empowered autonomous identity within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When spirituality intersects

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with traditional heteronormative ideals, the women show that by accepting marriage as the divine will of God they run the risk of emphasising their disenfranchised identities. This is because, despite claims of ‘intimacy’ with God, God has not ‘given them a partner’. They resolve their dilemmas by continuing to wait. This is a practice that illuminates their belief in a benevolent and wise God and enhances their spiritual capital.

Waiting on masculinity, expressed as both divine and human, requires much endurance that involves a convergence of both the physical and spiritual self. As religious women who are not married, they showed an intention to regulate their sexual selves and, by producing a celibate identity, they revealed the underlying significance of doing something productive and legitimate with the body as an expression of commitment to, as well as, intimacy with God. Ultimate belonging is achievable in the present (when presented as relationship with God) and is also anticipated in Seventh-day Adventist eschatology as an advanced futuristic space: heaven, where the ‘saved’ occupants are disembodied, liberated, genderless and unmarried:

In the resurrection they neither marry; nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

(Matt. 22:29, 30, KJV)

This heavenly condition is an anticipated achievement with rewards that will turn on its head all the marginalities they face. It is a perplexing terrain that they travel as Black religious women, who are unmarried, but they are not just objects in the face of racist, sexist and patriarchal ordeals; they are also subjects making complex choices. These choices involve the task of struggling to participate in practices that centralise spiritual identity. I argue that participants illuminate their difficulties surrounding their single identities, by taking ‘opportunities’ to exchange their ordeals to accomplish something else. They see possibilities to achieve a gender-driven spiritual identity, a ‘consecrated femininity’ akin to, but also (because of its non-cloistered, racialised, identity that seeks marriage) distinctively different from the gendered holy orders of Trzebiatowska’s (2013) Polish nuns.

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Participants' agentic accounts are therefore narratives about their privileged dispositions. Their dispositions reflect the interconnecting racialised, religious and gendered resources they have at their disposal. They show that religious women's practice to transform religious resources for their agentic ends is not new. Participants create an interlocking narrative of privileges that center their strengths, productiveness and intense spiritualities.

Postfeminist lenses have provided vehicles for articulating the shifting opportunities that are available for single women who are predominantly White, middle-class and secular. These lenses can be used to illustrate how single women express these opportunities as material, social and personal power (Aune, 2002; McRobbie, 2004; Taylor, 2012; Lahad, 2014). Their independence is often presented as contradictory because these single women are portrayed as using their financial and social power to eventually achieve coupling and live out the ideals of heteronormativity. Furthermore, a postfeminist application to single women in one UK religious context (Aune, 2008; 2004; 2002) shows how they too can be viewed as drawing on traditional and contemporary accounts of gender as an expression of increasing autonomy. Although the participants in this study testified to pursuing careers and in general 'doing well', there is no indication that they used their independence as capital for purchasing coupling. Although they presented themselves as self-actualised and productive, their 'power' did not emerge as a resource for achieving postfeminist ideals because for them signs of independence contribute to their unattractiveness and singleness. Power is located instead in those cultural and religious prescriptions that inadvertently participate in maintaining their single identities. Unlike the portrayals of White, secular middle-class women, Black single Seventh-day Adventist women do not express complex opportunities but complex deprivations. Whilst their contributions contest pathological assumptions about Black women, they do also illustrate how other essentialisms are still part of the Black woman's identity. The 'stuff' that they are able to procure for producing their distinctiveness do not

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come from heteronormative idealisations but from inherited indomitable narratives that have informed the lives of Black women for generations (Hill Collins, 2000; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Gilchrist, 2011).

Black single Seventh-day Adventist women in this study provide a ‘counter story’ that reveals how they negotiate their single identities. They give accounts of interconnecting agencies, deprivations and marginalities that converge, giving a concerted affirmative response to Sojourner’s rhetorical question: ‘Aint’t I a woman?’ The legacies at work in their lives contextualise a ‘habitus’ underpinned by those chronicles that remind Black single Seventh-day Adventist women that they must be strong. Although the consumption and production of strength may diminish ‘her’ value in the market place of relationships, it is a route to accomplish something else: something of great personal value.

If, as Roach (2013) states, religious and romantic narratives are both love stories, then Black single Seventh-day Adventist women, by focusing on perfect love with God, invest heteronormative coupling with divine significance. Whilst navigating their way through the very difficult and ‘controversial’ terrain of emotional deprivation and loss, they also acquire non-material possibilities of love and commitment as reflected in their descriptions of God. Paradoxically, whilst negotiating the marginalities that relate to being single, these Black single Seventh-day Adventist women participate in a romantic love story that promises a ‘happy’ ending.

The Significance of the Study

This study can claim to be a groundbreaking piece of work, capable of making contributions to multidisciplinary work on singleness, on women’s religious identities, on Black women’s social positioning and on intersectionality. Although there is primarily a focus on White women in the burgeoning literature on singleness, there has not been any

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substantial attention paid to ethnicity as one characteristic through which the singleness of White women can be explored. This does not mean that the specifics that underpin Whiteness are not at work. It is rather that it has not been acknowledged. This study on Black British single women, illustrates how ethnicity or race is pertinent to the discussion. The study therefore attempted to place Black British Women's singleness, within feminist literature on singleness in a context where there are tensions emanating from Black feminists' accusations that feminism has been primarily White-centric and mostly middle-class. This demographic is also the focus of the still-sparse, but burgeoning literature on singleness. This study shows that Black British single women should be included in scholarship on singleness and that race does matter. In addition it brings into question those discourses that generalise about the lives of Black British women who are not married.

Most of the recent literature on women's singleness has presented single women as located on the margins of coupledness whilst simultaneously drawing upon narratives of self-actualisation in the constructing of their identities (McRobbie, 2004; Reynolds, 2004; Taylor, 2012). They are increasingly depicted as capable of contesting old regimes about singleness for women (Taylor, 2012) and are no longer viewed just as marginalised victims within the gendered order but also as active intentional agents. Yet, there has been limited attention paid to singleness as an intersectional identity (Lahad, 2013; 2012a; 2012b). Informed by McCall's (2005) intracategorical approach, this study takes an intersectional perspective by investigating singleness as an identity that includes participants' religious, racial and gendered characteristics. It can therefore lay claim to identify with and reflect Crenshaw's (2011b) continued concerns about minority ethnic women's intersectional marginalities. The study shows for the Black single Seventh-day Adventist women interviewed, how aspects of the 'matrixes of oppression' as identified by Hill Collins (2000), endure.

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Aune's (2004) investigation of singleness within a religious context ensured the inclusion of religious women in feminist scholarship on singleness. However, Aune's (2004; 2002) work also focuses on middle-class White women. This study by looking at single Black women within the British Seventh-day Adventist Church, takes forward this discussion of singleness by including an intersectional analysis to the study of singleness for religious Black women.

This research further supports the scholarship that critiques essentialist ideas about women in religious spaces. For instance, Ozorak (1996), Aune (2004), Frahm-Arp (2010; 2012) and Trzebiatowska (2013) provide evidence that problematises the idea that women who are members of conservative religions are essentially oppressed. This present study, by addressing the narrative of 'strong Black woman', supports those discussions (ibid) that make reference to religious women as self-directed. Furthermore by highlighting the 'strong Black woman,' it shows the tenacious presence of this specific narrative in the identity work that participants undertake. As a result it makes an important contribution to the scholarly focus on 'strength and gender with regards Black women's identities.

A further contribution of this study is to the scholarship on masculinities. It examines participants' descriptions of how masculinities operate as desired, powerful, disenfranchised, deviant, Black unmarried Seventh-day Adventist men. Accounts that depict Black religious men as discriminating against those women seen to have too much 'blackness', provide new ground for enriching the study of gender inequality. Participants' descriptions therefore suggest that there is more opportunity now to discover some of the mechanisms that make up Black British patriarchy.

The study found that single Seventh-day Adventist women were concerned about uneven sex ratios within their local church communities. Furthermore, these women continue to remain on the margins of their churches with their needs almost invisible to the

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predominantly male leadership. In this light, the study provides an outlet for publishing their concerns and should be a catalyst for generating debate and interventions aimed at mitigating their perceived and actual marginal statuses within the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Concluding thoughts

I have reasoned that this research is relevant and that the findings are important to a number of areas of research. I do recognise, however, that there are limitations and challenges of the research process. For example, I first thought to include the contributions and insights made available through the data generated from the few single men who took part. Eventually however, because of the high response rate from mostly Black single women I decided to focus solely on them. I reasoned that incorporating single men in this study at every level would complicate the task of analysing what was emerging as a complex, uncharted endeavour. However, having not included men does subject this study to the criticism of contributing to a feminisation of singleness (Jamieson et al., 2009). Notwithstanding this, the investigation can add to the current body of literature on single women.

There are of course, other identities that are at work in the accounts of participants that have not been adequately addressed, and class is one such identity. Although recognised as operating within their accounts, the women did not produce extensive discussions as to how it contributes to their single identities. This, together with the task of identifying key, and to some extent, novel factors has made extensive attention to class and other social categories difficult. I have made every effort to fully represent the data but recognise that there are other insights that could be ‘extrapolated’ given more time and space. The extracts presented in the analytic chapters do offer some scope for the reader to see other interpretations.

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Furthermore, it was challenging to settle on how best to establish and pursue what I have referred to as an ‘intersectional sensitivity’ to the multiple categories within which participants were positioned.

Despite some of the difficulties I encountered, I hope that the study can help to advance a better understanding of singleness for the women in the sample and other Black British Seventh-day Adventist single women. It is also my hope that this study will provoke debate that can help to disrupt those regimes that tend to marginalise and essentialise Black women in general and Black single Seventh-day Adventist women more specifically.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to identify key research areas in the experiences and positions of single people within the Seventh Day Adventist community. It can be filled out by anyone who is committed to spending some time in putting their personal responses on paper. Please answer as clearly and honestly as you can. This questionnaire also uses 'issues' as a way of assisting you to identify negatives, positive or indifferent experiences or ideas.

1. The following are some of the key issues identified as important to singles at a "Conversation workshop" held last year;

A) vulnerability B) loneliness C) attitude of family D) attitude of friends E) personal development opportunities

a. How would you rank them in priority order?

(1 =very important and 5 = less important)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

If you see them as equally important give a tick in these brackets ()

Appendices

2. For singles in the SDA church in the UK, what do you think are the;

A. loneliness issues

B. vulnerability issues

C. attitude of family issues

D. attitude of friends issues

E. personal development issues

3a. Christian literature on singles identifies sex as an important issue for singles. Do you agree with this? Please circle yes / no. Please answer the question below regardless of whether you circled yes or no.

3b What do you think are the sexual issues that UK singles in the SDA community are facing?

4a What in your opinion are the main issues that single SDA men face?

4b. What in your opinion are the main issues that single SDA women face?

Please only answer question 5 if you are single.

5. What is your main concern interest or issue as a single man/woman?

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6. What other issues do you think are important to research when exploring single SDAs in the UK?

7. What is your marital status?

8. What age group are you in? Please circle the one that applies.

18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71-80 above

9. What is your ethnic group? (e.g. Asian).....

10. What is your country of birth?

11. Please circle

A. Are you a Seventh Day Adventist? Yes or No

B. Are you: Male / Female

C. Do you have a disability? Yes or No

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12. Please circle your occupational status:

- A. part time employed
- B. full time employed
- C. full time house wide/husband or caring for a relative
- D. temp worker
- E. self employed
- F. unemployed
- G. Other (please give details)

Thank you for answering this questionnaire. It is a small but significant step in supporting an important area of work. If you would like to make a contribution or to find out more about Singles Forum/Research, contact Val Bernard on XXXXXXXX

Appendices

Appendix 2

a vibrant
stimulating
experience giving
singles of
all ages a voice

making it real

a singles' conference
with a **difference!**

the action: presentations, workshops, poetry, music, conversations on singledom and adventism!

the reason: getting involved in an event culminating in a book reflecting the experiences and perspectives of singles in the Seventh-day Adventist community.

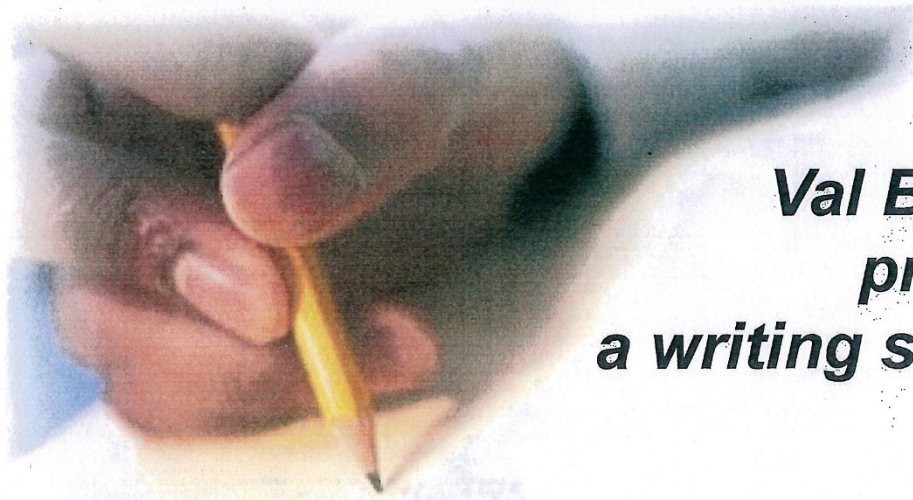
the people: anybody (including non-singles, academics, pastors, theologians, etc). There will be something of value for everyone.

the content: postively single, singleness and diversity, singleness and shame, singleness and ministry, the challenges of celibacy, sexual wholeness, singleness and joy, singleness and body image, plus much more . . .

Questions? contact Val Bernard,

Sponsored by the South England Conference.

Appendix 3



**Val Bernard
presents
a writing seminar**

**Sunday 21st November
11am-4pm**

***If you are interested in getting
some of your ideas
on singleness within Adventism
in print, then please come along!***

A meal will be provided

***To receive further information
email Val Bernard on***

***This event is sponsored
and the Family Ministries***

Appendices

Appendix 4

Interview Schedule

General introduction – confidentiality – outline of the process and the general aim of the study - appreciation for volunteering - opting out at any time during the interview - nothing is mandatory etc.

Singleness in general

- 1) I am interested in how you would you describe yourself - can you share this description with me?
- 2) How do others describe you, to what extent do you agree or disagree with their descriptions?
- 3) Can you think of an experience that summarises what singleness is like for you/I am interested in how you feel about being single and would like you to share/if you feel that you can what is singleness like for you?
- 4) What are the circumstances surrounding your singleness? In other words what are the factors that you see as having/does contribute to your singleness?

Religion, friends and family

- 5) What is singleness like for you as an SDA woman? What about your singleness with friends and family - how do you experience being single with people outside your immediate network/in wider society?
- 6) What might you tell someone if they ask you why you are not married?

Ethnicity and gender

- 7) Some people talk about loneliness being an aspect of singleness – what do you think about that in general and if you can, personally?

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- 8) Is there something about loneliness for Black SDA women/What about the issue of loneliness for Black SDA women?

- 9) Do you think that Black SDA women experience singleness different from other single women - what do you think?

- 10) Some people have indicated that single men are single for different reasons than women - statements such as - they are poor, have commitment issues – what do you think?

- 11) There are large numbers of Black single women – do you think that Black women in general choose singleness?

Spirituality and sex

- 12) Does your religion impact your experience of singleness? If so, in what way?

- 13) As you know the church expects that singles should be celibate. What about celibacy? Women have shared very different views about the issue of singleness for single Christians. How practical do you think it is for single Christians?

- 14) There is some indication that some single women in our church struggle with being celibate – do you have anything to say about this issue?

Dating

- 15) Would you date/have a relationship outside of your ethnic group?

- 16) Would you date someone that had different interests, lifestyles, aspirations from yourself?

- 17) Could you say something on actively seeking singleness - would you think about remarrying - marrying/getting married/How would you feel about the prospect of remaining single for life?

Appendices

18) Anything you would like to add/take away?

19) Thank you and reminder of process – get transcripts feedback

Appendices

Appendix 5

Introducing In-depth interviewees

Table of in-depth interviewees showing their marital status, number of children and age range.

Name	Marital Status	Children	Age
Angela	Always single	0	Middle thirties
Chantelle	Recently divorced	2 children	Middle fifties
Claudette	divorced	2 adult children	Middle fifties
Flora	Always single	0	Late fifties
Janice	Always single	0	Middle fifties
Lorraine	Always single	3 adult children	Early sixties
Pauline	Always single	2 children	Late forties
Susan	Always single	0	Middle forties
Tracey	Always single	0	Middle thirties
Verona	Always single	0	Late forties

Always single represents those who have never married.

All interviewees held professional jobs (two women were self-employed).

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Appendix 6

Black Single Seventh-day Adventist women

Recording consent form

Place of recorded interview

Date of recorded interview

I consent for my contribution to be recorded. I understand that my transcript will be anonymous and may be used in whole or in part, in any or all of the following ways (*NB please delete and initial any uses which you may wish to exclude*):

1. For education and research
2. In an edited or abridged form
3. For publication

Please indicate any additional restriction which you wish to place on the use of your contribution:

.....

Signed Name

Date Address

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Appendix 7

Transcription symbols used

...	Material deliberately omitted
xxxxxxxxx	Identifying details removed
(laughs)	Laughter heard from the speaker
(e.g. sighing)	Other responses from the speaker
Text	Speaker emphasis
Punctuation is given for ease of reading rather than to indicate speech patterns.	
Paragraphs are used to represent the opening and closing of a thought	

Transcribed sample

Pauline

1) How would you describe yourself?

Umm, I would describe As an outgoing woman I wouldn't actually talk , not talk about my colour, I would not say I am a strong Black woman as I would think that you can see that yourself

I would say that I am outgoing and sociable and I love being in the company of other people

I love children,

I am outgoing I love my job. I am thriving; it has been a struggle for me but have always had a vision of what I would like to do with my life. It has always been there and (Pause)- because of this vision that is in my head I actually think about where I am going to be as opposed to how I am going to get there so (Pause)

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in the process of that I am praying a lot. I pray and God has directing me in different ways and I feel that I have got to a stage where I feel that I can now can say I am on the right track to something.

So what is that something?

What I really want to do – at the moment I am a xxxxxxxx which I enjoy I was thinking about xxxxxxxx but because my boy is quite challenging I think I need to learn to know how to deal with his challenging behaviour. But I also feel that, that will be later on I am actually thinking of going in to xxxxxxxx because I like to take care for children and because of the communication with women...

I am a just about learning how to communicate with women and to keep female friends it has been hard for me. Lately I have been able to speak to women and feel empowered by them and also within myself. I feel that I have learned that I am a woman just like you are. Before it was like you are better than me – that's how I used to think now! Now I think no! I am just like you trying to make ends meet so whatever (pause). So I am starting xxxxxxxx in September and I am really looking forward to it.

2) How do others describe you to what extent do you agree or disagree with their descriptions?

My dad said when I was a little girl, 'Pauline you are so flamboyant', he would say that I have style, panache, he says all these wonderful things. My sisters would say that as well. I don't know what other, how other people see me as a friendly, easy to get on with, yea I like wearing nice clothes and looking good and all that sort of thing.

I generally agree with these comments. I know that I have been in conflict with people who have taken me wrongly. I don't like conflicts you know I don't like getting into arguments or causing it and if I do I will be the first to say that I am sorry. I will say that it was not intentional at all.

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3) OK thank you (pause) I would now like you to share with me how you feel about being single. What is singleness like for you Pauline?

Well to begin with I must admit that it was difficult being single because of the stigma that I should be married and because I was a single parent. It was not very easy to cope with my singleness in the church, for a while, they would say 'I would not want to be a single woman with a child' and the things that they would say about single parents, it was not pleasant, especially from the men. They would say things like 'I would not want to be with a woman with a child'. I had one guy say 'me no want nobaady pitney'. laugh

Anyway, they made me feel unattractive a lot of the men would see straight through me or they would come to me and ask me about my friends and they would not have any interest in me and I struggled with that for that for a long time.

And then after a while I started to speak with other females and that is when I started to feel better about myself. The experience that I mentioned with the male and the things that they said it was not nice and you felt like you were a doormat basically.

And church also made you feel that way. And there were incident that happened. I remember being in a church business meeting and how they felt that it was unacceptable that a single parent should have responsibilities in the church. One guy really stood up for me as a single parent but you find that the church makes you more aware of your single parent status as the church made me feel unacceptable and they made you feel like you were inadequate like you were nothing and a nobody.

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