# All by myself: an exploration of perceptions and experiences of single adults in Ireland

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**Declaration**


Declaration


'I declare that this thesis that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of BA (Hons) Psychology / HDip Psychology [delete as appropriate] is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.'


Word count: 9,198


Signed:        Kate O'Shaughnessy


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## Acknowledgements

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And finally, to those ridin' solo…. know that *you* are enough.

# Abstract

Despite being the fastest growing demographic in the world, there is a paucity of research on the lives of single people. In a society structured for couples, the goal of this research study is to explore societal perceptions and the real-life experiences of single adults in their thirties, living in Ireland and give a voice to this overlooked minority. A qualitative study was carried out using semi-structured interviews conducted with four participants. A thematic analysis was used to examine the dataset that emerged from these in-depth interviews. Four overarching themes emerged from the data obtained: Perceptions, social comparison, pressure and how singles feel about their own singlehood.

## Introduction

The majority of cultures, both historically and presently, have held the view that adulthood is synonymous with finding a partner and raising a family. Western society views singlehood as a transitional period that individuals experience before getting involved in a committed relationship or marriage - a typical precedent afore 'settling down'. Society is inclined to believe that a person does not *choose* to be single. De Paulo & Morris (2005) cite the ideology of the marriage and family as the primary cause of this notion, with singles posing a challenge to this belief system. The traditional family unit, comprising of a heteresoexual couple and dependent children, built on a foundation of love, marriage and commitment, remains the ideal social norm in our culture (Byrne, 2007). In spite of all of this, single people are the fastest growing demographic in the western world (Thompson, 2019). Still, a societal expectation to be involved in a romantic relationship is still resounding exists in Ireland today (Byrne, 2007).

Following a literature review, the researcher found a paucity of research on the experiences of single people, particularly within an Irish context. Prior research has overwhelmingly focused on romantic and marital relationships, and the issue of singlehood has been largely ignored. At the 2018 APA Conference, Bella DePaulo, an American social psychologist, and one of the only public intellectuals to focus on single people, stated that "*hardly anyone studies single life from the perspective of single people.*" At the same conference, De Paulo also highlighted that a Google search of academic articles on the topic of marriage between 2000 and 2015 returned 19,582 journal articles. Remarkably, a search of the database for scholarly articles on single people, over that same five year period, returned a result of just 501 articles on the topic of people who have always been single.

The social phenomenon of singlehood is reflected in Irish society: 44% of people living in Ireland in the 30-39 age bracket currently identify as single (McWilliams, 2018). The 1981 census unveiled that only 11.2% of women aged between 35 and 39 were unmarried. On the other hand, the 2016 census told quite a different story: this statistic had soared to 35% - a three-fold increase in unmarried women (Central Statistics Office, 2016). Similarily, comparisons of the censuses from those years has revealed a 20% increase in the percentage of unmarried men, with 39.8% of the 35-39 year old male population in Ireland unmarried (Central Statistics Office, 1981, 2066). These statisitics reflect a substantial lifestyle change in Irish society.

Though singlehood is less stigmatised today than in the past, many people still view single people as lonely individuals, enduring a low self-concept (Greitmeryer, 2009; Piatowski, 2012). Moreover, past reseach uncovered in the literature review consistently suggests that negative perceptions of single people are still prevalent in society (De Paulo & Morris, 2006). Women, in particular, are raised to believe that failure to engage in a romantic, commited relationship is unacceptable. Conflictingly, the literature review discovered research which observed that single people are happier, more independent and have larger friendship circles than their married counterparts (Gerstel & Sarkisian, 2006; Girme, Overall, Faingatta & Sibley, 2015). Ultimately, the previous research suggests that the impact of relationship status on life satisfaction is small.

The sheer growth of the single people globally warrants scientific study on this population. The aim of this study is to uncover the experiences of single adults in relation to their relationship status and to enable them to contest, in their own words, societal perceptions within an Irish context.

This literature review will examine concepts such as societal perceptions of singlehood, loneliness and the need to belong, singlehood in relation to life satisfaction, and the self-concept of single people. The researcher will subsequently outline the methodology implemented in this qualitative study and discuss the observed results.

It is worth noting that 'single' is a subjective term, which can be interpreted in many ways; it can mean unmarried, widowed, divorced or not involved in an romantic relationship. Due to the complexity of the definition of the word single, for the purpose of this study, the researcher defines single as never married, currently not involved in any sexual, romantic or civil partnership, and having no children.

## Literature Review

### Stereotpyes and perceptions of singles

Early research conducted by Etaugh and Maelstrom (1981, as cited in Duke et. al, 2015) looked at how people were percieved based on relationship status alone. Participants were asked to rate an individual described as either married, divoced, widowed, or never married. The results showed that married people were rated higher than their single counterparts. More recent research showed that single people were pereived as being "*more risky, less responsible, more promiscuos and perceived more negatively overall than partnered targets*" (Conley & Collins, 2002, p. 1489). This study also found that single adults were assumed more likely to have a sexually transmitted disease than those in a romantic relationship. Furthermore, Morris et al., (2006), asked 1,000 undergraduate participants to list the charactertistics that they associated with single people and similiarily, with married people. Single people were associated with words such as lonely, irresponsible, selfish and even more unattractive than their married counterparts. On the other hand, married people were overwhelmingly percevied in a more positive light, described as happy, fulfilled, reliable, kind, forgiving and stable.

Shachar et al. (2013), evidenced through narrative research that single adults, particularly women, are generally perceived as being less successful and having weaker social skills. Further recent research has desmonstrated that singles were harshly judged as being less moral than married people, particularly by those romantically attached themselves (Zhang, 2015). One could conclude from this research, that married people are simply perceived as being superior to singles (De Paulo & Morris, 2005, as cited in Greitmeyer, 2009).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a stereotype as a "*widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of perrson or a thing*" (as cited in Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaiolo, & Shliefer, 2015, p.1). Stereotypes can powerfully enhance or reduce the accuracy of an individual's perception (Jussim, 2012; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006). 'Singlism' is a term coined to characterise the phenomenon of  stereotyping, discrimation and stigmatisation of single adults (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Discrimination of singles is ordinarily legal. A survey carried out by Jamieson et al. (2002) found that women, more so than men, highlighted financial insecurity as an important issue (Reynolds, 2013). For instance, singles are often penalised financially. If travelling solo, group tours or hotel accommodations often require a payment known as a 'single supplement'. Buying or renting a property alone is often not financially feasible on a single income. Moreover, Morris, Sinclair & DePaulo (2006), found empirical evidence of housing discrimination against singles. The researchers asked three groups of participants to review applications for a rental property and choose their preferred their hypothetical occupants. The findings showed that rental agencies were more likely to choose a married couple (60%) over a cohabiting couple (23%) or over a pair of friends (17%). An even stronger preference for the married couple was shown by undergraduate participants with 80% choosing the married couple, 12% choosing the cohabiting couple and just 8%

choosing the friends as preferred lessees (DePaulo et al., 2006, as cited by DePaulo & Morris, 2006). These may be subtle gestures of discrimination, but they are still palpable.

Strikingly, the majority of people are oblivious to the concept of singlism.When DePaulo & Morris (2006) asked adults to list groups that may be subjected to stigmatisation, only 4% of singles themselves mentioned singles as a targeted group. In addition, when explicity asked whether singles might be a stigmatised group, only 23% of couples and 30% of singles agreed.  In comparison to the 100% of homosexuals, 86% of African Americans and 72% of women who acknowledged stigma around their group, this indicates a low level of awareness and a high level of acceptance of singlism (Morris, 2005, as cited in DePaulo & Morris, 2006).

A qualitative study conducted by Simpson (2016), focused on the perception of single women found that single women were often stigmatised against, with pejorative labels used to describe those who remained single. Single women reported that they were frequently asccused of being "gay", "man haters" and that friends and family caution them about being too "picky and independent" (Farrell, 2018). Single people are often expected to have an excuse for being single whereas married couples are seldom asked to explain the circumstances of their relationship status (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003, as cited by Farrell, 2018). In addition, it is not uncommon to hear negative connations about single women. For instance, stereoypical terms "spinsters" or "crazy cat lady" are often used to descibe single women (Tran, 2016). On the other hand, McKeown (2015) states that single men are less stigmatised than single women in regards to their relationship status, often labelled with somewhat poitive terms like "playboy" or "eligible bachelor". Still though, men too are also targets of negative labelling. In an interview carried out by Beaty (2020) single men in their thirties in the UK reported been branded a "commitment phobe" and an "overgrown child". Furthemore, some of the men

reported that the felt society did not take them seriously as they were not in a serious relationship.

## Loneliness and need for belonging

As evidenced in the research above, the word 'lonely' frequently swirls around the concept of singlehood. Perlman (2004) conceptualised loneliness as an unpleasant feeling that occurs when there is a discrepancy between their desired and existing social relationship and is therefore a subjective experience. According to Lopata (1969), there are three dimensions to loneliness: the past, the present, and the future. Many people often feel lonely for a person, event, or mood they experienced in the past. A person may also experience loneliness in the present tense, if there is no one there. Thirdly, Lopata (1969) coined the term "loneliness anxiety" to describe loneliness felt in connection to the future.

Outside of a broad need to belong to social groups, attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1969) specifically focuses on the human need for close bonds with trusted attachment figures. The fundamental principle of attachment theory stems from the infant-caregiver relationship. In times of distress, an infant will seek assistance from an attachment figure, to act as a source of security and comfort (Bowlby, 1969, as cited in Spielman et al., 2013). Attachment theory expands beyond childhood and into adulthood, where people seek to form close attachments with others. Mikulincer & Shaver (2007) state it is a natural part of human development to seek out someone who can provide them a secure base and that they can turn to for comfort in times of distress. Typically, society tends to view the relationship between husband and wife as the most vital social bond in providing such a haven. Therefore, it makes sense that an intrinsic desire for intimate, romantic relationships is a normative human experience (Spielman et al., 2013).

The Beatles (1966) famously sang "All the lonely people, where do they all belong?" According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), the need for love and belongingness is an innate motivation to affiliate with others and feel socially accepted. Maslow proposed that belongingness was a necessary step to achieve self-actualisation, the ideal human state (McLeod, 2018).Supporting this ideology, Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed the Need to Belong theory. The central idea of this theory is that human have a powerful internal motivation to establish and uphold deep, stable interpersonal connections (Baumeister, 2012). From an evolutionary perspective, social connections are key to survival and reproduction (Caporael, 2001). When an individual's social connection needs are unmet, it can lead to negative emotional states such as low self-concept, hostility and aggression (Baumeister, 2012).

Dearth of these essential biological and physiological needs may contribute to a fear of being single. Singlehood has the potential to cause feelings of isolation and marginalisation of a number of levels. Western societies endorse the idea that romantic, committed relationships are the most important relationship (Day et al., 2011) and furthermore, single people are aware there is an expectation on them to conform to this belief system (Sharp & Ganoon, 2011). Failure to establish intimate, romantic connections can lead single people feeling uncertain about their futures and their place in society (Sharp & Ganon, 2007, as cited in Spielman et al., 2013).

However, it is important to note that there are individual differences in the level of need for belonging (Maslow, 1943). An extensive qualitative study, on never-married women in their thirties, was conducted by psychotherapist Mary Cole (1999). The study found substantial differences in the experiences of singlehood. Cole (1999) categorised the emotional responses of being single into three groups. Firstly, the largest group comprised of those who felt undecided about their relationship status. While acknowledging the disadvantages that

singlehood can bring, such as loneliness and stigma from others, the women in this group also pointed out the positives of being single, such as autonomy and independence. The second group cosisted of women who embraced singlehood and held themselves in positive regard, irrespective of their relationship status. In the third group, some of the women expressed anxiety, insecurity and depression as a result of their single status (Cole, 1999; Spielman et al., 2013).

Feelings of anxiety in relation to singlehood is not unique to the female population. Males too can suffer feelings of desolation about being single. A study of unmarried heterosexual men in their thirties found that men actually wanted to be married more so than women (Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Losoff, & Maurer, 1996). Moreover, Nock (2005) suggests that in reality, it is men who feel more unconformatable being single and are more likely to distance themselves from their social circle, ultimately leading to feelings of isolation.

### Singlehood and life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a multimensional, complex term but Goldenson (1954, as cited in Burbaite, 2017) decribes life satisfaction as an individual's overall level of satisfaction and their attitude towards their life circumstances.Traditionally, being single has been associated with having lower life-satisfaction (Burbaite, 2017). This finding is corrobated by research which revealed that a high level of intimacy with a romantic partner are amongst the strongest predictors of high life-satisfaction and well-being (Morris, Morris, & Britton, 1988).

However, previous research surrounding the impact of relationship status on life satistacfaction is varying. For instance, higher life satisfcation associated with being in a romantic relationship may be linked with the findings that a partner can help facilitate coping with life stress and boost self-esteem (Fletcher & Simpson, 2010). Similarly, recent research by

Zhu et al., (2018) found "*evidence that marriage and cohabitation might contribute to individual psychological benefits including higher life satisfaction*" (p.8).

Nevertheless, studies on the connection between relationship status and life satisfaction have generated inconsistent results. Girme et al., (2015) found that the effect of relationship status on life satisfaction is minimal. Besides, involvement in a poor quality romantic relationship can actually result in more adverse emotional outcomes than being single. Relationships can be a source of rejection and conflict which single people can avoid (Holt-Lunstad, Birmingham,& Jones, 2008; Girme et al., 2015). Additionally, singlehood can allow for greater opportunities for enriching non-romantic relationships in a person's life, such as friends, siblings and parents (Musick & Bumpass, 2012). Singlehood also enables an individual to focus on career and personal interests (DePaulo, 2006).

Although the latter research refers to both sexes, Gove (1972) suggested that single men are unhappier than single women, as men rely on their significant other for social support. Women, on the other hand, have a higher propensity of receiving social support from family and friends and tend to have a wider social network (Soons & Liefbroer, 2008). Gender difference studies have produced conflicting results however. According to Chipperfield and Havens (2001), men's life satisfaction is more aversely affected than women's following the loss of a partner. Interestingly, there were greater benefits to getting married for men than women; though single women were found to have better overall well-being than single men, the opposite was true for married men and women (Marks, 1996, as cited in Soons & Liefbroer, 2008). Due to the discrepencies in the literature, the researcher will pay attention to the role of gender in the results of this study.

**Singlehood and self-concept**

Sociologist Roy Baumesiter (1999) defines self-concept as "*The individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is*" (as cited in McLeod, 2008). Humanistic psychologist Carol Rogers (1959) agreed with the main philosophies of Maslow. Rogers (1959) suggested that self-concept comprises of three components: self-image, self-esteem and the ideal self. The first component, self-image refers to the way we see ourselves in terms of our physical appearance, our social roles (for instance, mother, husband or friend) and our personality traits (Rogers, 1959, as cited in Vinney, 2018). Secondly, self-esteem is how an individual evaluates himself or herself, incorporating personal comparisons to others, as well as social comparison. Leon Festinger (1954) developed social comparison theory, which suggests that individuals determine their own social and personal value based on how they compare to others. The final component of self-concept is the ideal self. The ideal self is the self an individual wishes to be. Often, there is an incongruity between a person's self-image and their ideal self. Consequently, this discrepancy can result in a negative impact on a person's self-esteem (Vinney, 2018).

Given the findings of this literature review, it is unsuprising that singlehood influences heavily on a person's self-concept. Previous research has illustrated how prejudiced behaviour can effect a person's self-esteem (Major, McCoy, Kaiser & Quinton, 2003). Being regarded as different, coupled with having to explain oneself repeatedly, can be a source of much frustration. A study by Bruckmüller (2012) found that participants who had digressed from the social 'norm' and thus, not adhereing to the status quo, had lower levels of self-esteem. It is human nature to care about how others see us. As a result, we tend to internalise steretotypes, including those that come with being single (Farrell, 2018).

Furthermore, the negative impact of singlism can detrimentally effect an individual's psychological well-being and result in lower self-esteem and avoidant behaviour (Hancock,

2017; Hertel, Schutz, DePaulo, Morris & Stucke, 2013). Consequently, this creates pressure on singles to alter their relationship status (Hancock, 2017). Indeed, this idea corroborated by the findings of Hall (1975), who showed that the pressure to get married and raise a family was the greatest pressure a single woman endures during her lifetime. In a separate study conducted by Sharp & Ganong (2011) women under 35 regularly report that they feel pressure from others to be in a committed relationship (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Psychologist Dr. Lisa Moran of NUIG Galway also acknowledges the pressure that women feel in relation to their single status: *"I think there's far more pressure on women to be married by a certain age than on men. Young men are subject to the same kind of peer pressures as young women concerning their single status but have greater autonomy to 'be themselves"* (Moran, 2016, n.p.n.). However, according to a study carried out by dating website eHarmony, men actually feel more pressure to be in a relationship than women (Burnett, 2017). The study found that 71% of single males felt *"significant pressure"* to be involved in a relationship, in comparison to 58% of single females in the study. Interestingly, the study found that 41% would rather be alone than be a with an incompatible partner.

On the other hand, self-esteem levels may be not be as impacted by relationship status as much as supposed. In a survey of participants from 30 European countries, individuals who had always been single had levels of self-esteem that were identical to their married counterparts (De Paulo, 2019).  Another study on more than 10,000 Australian women showed that single women were more optimistic than married women, with ot withour children (De Paulo, 2017).

Moreover, singlehood can boost self-esteem levels as it allows for personal growth (De Paulo, 2020). A study by Kislev (2017) examined the key differences between happy singles and unhappy singles. The results demonstrated that those who were happily single were content

with their alone time, yet also spent time with friends, found satisfaction in working towards their career goals, and focused on fulfilling their potential. Essentially, the focus on personal growth and self-awareness raised levels of self-esteem.

The aim of this qualitative study is to help clarify reality and demystify perceptions at a societal level from the perspective of single adults themselves. The study will further research academically on an overlooked minority and contribute to the public discussion of singlehood. Therefore, the two research questions are:

1. How does society view single people?
2. What are the experiences of single adults in Ireland?

## Methodology
### Participants

The researcher interviewed four participants for this study. In order to respect the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher created pseudonyms. The participants are Anne, a 36-year-old teacher; Eimear, a 31-year-old events manager; Antoine, a 37-year-old accountant and Neil, 31, and an accountant. Participants were all aged between 30-39 years old, identified as heterosexual, did not have children, have never been married, are not currently involved in a romantic relationship and living in Co. Dublin. According to the Central Statistics Office (2017), the average age for a heterosexual woman to marry is 34.1 years old, while for a man of the same sexual orientation it is 36.1 years old. Additionally, 65% of babies in Ireland are born to mothers aged 30-39 years old (CSO, 2017). Bearing those statistics in mind, it was decided to focus on this age bracket as this decade is a considered to be the optimal age when significant life choices (such as marriage or having children) are made. As the literature review revealed an overwhelming focus on women's experiences of singlehood, the researcher

recruited two male participants and two female participants with the intention of attaining a balanced view.

Participants were sourced by means of purposive and virtual snowball sampling. The researcher sought out participants purposefully fitting the criteria required for this study via a social media call-out. This method was efficient and effective and allowed for a diversity of narratives. The researcher did not have difficulty finding suitable and willing participants. The researcher did not know three of the participants prior to the interview, and one participant was an acquaintance. Participants did not receive any payment for their participation; they had a natural interest in the topic of singlehood and were happy to speak about their experiences.

**Design**

In this study, the researcher sought to explore how single adults experience singlehood in Ireland. A qualitative research methodology was chosen to enable the researcher to abduct, deduct and co-construct the real-life experiences of single adults in contemporary society.

The exploratory nature of the topic stipulates the pertinence of a qualitative research approach. The researcher conducted the interviews in person. Qualitative research in the form of interviews allow for insightful conversations in a secure manner, and thus, is a rich source of raw data (Peterson-Sweeney, 2005). Qualitative research is an appropriate research method when an issue needs to be explored a more comprehensive perspective is sought (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). With qualitative research, the interviewer is a crucial tool for data collection (Hatch, 2002). In-person interviews also enable the interviewer to adopt a holistic approach to the conversation, whilst simultaneously applying their own life experience to construing the interviewee's responses and reactions (Hatch, 2016). Semi-structured questions are an inductive method of inquiry and elicit individual interpretations. This supports the researcher in identifying and deducting themes in the data (Creswell, 2013).

For the purpose of this research project, an informal, semi-structured interview was developed (Appendix A) by the researcher. The interview consisted of a blend of closed and open-ended questions, accompanied by follow-up or questions in order to elicit vague answers. Even though qualitative interviews are labour intensive, they are excellent in terms of the insights and information gained.

**Apparatus**

For the purpose of this study, the apparatus used was a Philips DVT1150 Dictation Machine, employed to record each of the interviews. Dictaphones ensure that the interview is recorded in its entirety, allowing for transcription afterwards. In the case of any technical issues, the researcher had a secondary recording device in the form on a Huawei phone. The researcher had a list of semi-structured interview questions prepared in advance.

**Ethics**

Prior to the data collection, the researcher submitted all facets of the research project to the Department of Psychology and the Dublin Business School Ethics for approval. All aspects subsequently passed as they were in line with the PSI Code of Ethics. Before commencing each interview, the participant read, dated and signed an informed consent form (Appendix C). The form clearly outlined the general topic of the interview, and the researcher emphasised to participants that their participation in the interview was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw and the interview would be terminated at any time should the participant not want to continue . Through an information sheet (Appendix B), participants were made fully aware of the dissemination process: the data collected from the interview was confidential, and in the final work, pseudonyms would be in place of their real names. The researcher notified

participants that their interviews would be recorded on a dictaphone, and the audio would only available to the researcher, the project supervisor and any external marker. Participants were assured that the interview was recorded solely for transcription purposes. Following the interview, the interview asked the participants how they were feeling to ensure they were in no way distressed.

## Procedure

Interviews were conducted on an individual basis, at a time and location convenient to the participant. Interviews were completed in the participant's home, allowing for privacy, less interruptions and a comfortable setting. Prior to the interview, each participant was briefed with the topic 'the experiences of single adults living in Ireland'. The researcher presented the participants with the relevant documentation; the consent form (Appendix C) and any potential ethical issues were deliberated. A semi-structured interview was implemented to allow the participants to express themselves liberally. At times, the researcher, noting body language, could sense that a participant had difficulty articulating their feelings or were hesitant to speak their opinion, for fear of causing offence. As a result, the researcher encouraged the participant to speak the truth, and either gently prompted the participant or moved on from a question that was making them uncomfortable.

## Thematic Analysis

This research study drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework and used thematic analysis (TA) to identify reoccurring themes. TA is a revelatory process, involving the researcher searching for themes through the data to identify patterns, with the objective to elucidate the issue under investigation (Smith & Firth, 2011). There are many advantages to using thematic analysis such, as flexibility. This approach is suitable due to the nature of the data collection (i.e. recording and verbatim transcriptions). The researcher ensured that the

analysis was systematic and used manual coding to create themes. Thematic analysis can be subject to bias. In order to minimise bias, the researcher enlisted the help of a friend to review the data and any codes or themes that the researcher identified. As this study sought to interpret data, TA was an appropriate method to identify the central themes and address the research questions.

The analysis followed Bran and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis, outlined in Table ?: Accordingly, the researcher began the process by transcribing data verbatim, reading the data multiple times, identifying codes, searching for and reviewing themes, defining said themes and finally, identifying themes, with the aim of reporting the analysis.

By adhering to the steps in Braun and Clarke's (2006) method, the researcher could ensure proper used of the raw data (figure 1).

| Familiarising yourself with the data | Transcribing data (if necessary) reading and re-reading the data , noting down initial ideas |
|---|---|
| Generating initial codes | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code |
| Searching for themes | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme |
| Reviewing themes | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis |
| Defining and naming themes | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme |
| Producing the report | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis |

*Figure 1: Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Phase Guide to Thematic Analysis*

**Discussion**

**Findings and future research**

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of single people living in Ireland. The researcher interviewed participants individually. This section will analyse the findings of the study and will discuss any weaknesses and limitations of the study. In order to conduct this research, the researcher obtained data from four face-to face interviews of adults living in Ireland. The participants in this sample ranged ages 30-37 and all residing in Co. Dublin, Ireland. The average age of respondents was 33.5.

The researcher anticipated these participants would provide important insights into the recurrent experiences of single adults. The researcher sought to explore how society perceives singlehood and how singles themselves experience singlehood in Ireland. In order to establish a pattern of themes, the researcher coded the data, reviewed it extensively and defined themes. Several themes and sub-themes emerged from details of the data collected from the four interviews. Four overarching themes were chosen based on their prevalence within the data. According to Braun & Clarke (2008), a theme is a topic that relates to the research question and has a pattern within the dataset. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, there is a certain level of openness in the conversation. This subsequently allowed for topics to emerge that future research could focus on.

The four themes to be discussed are as follows:

1. Perceptions
2. Social Comparison
3. Pressure
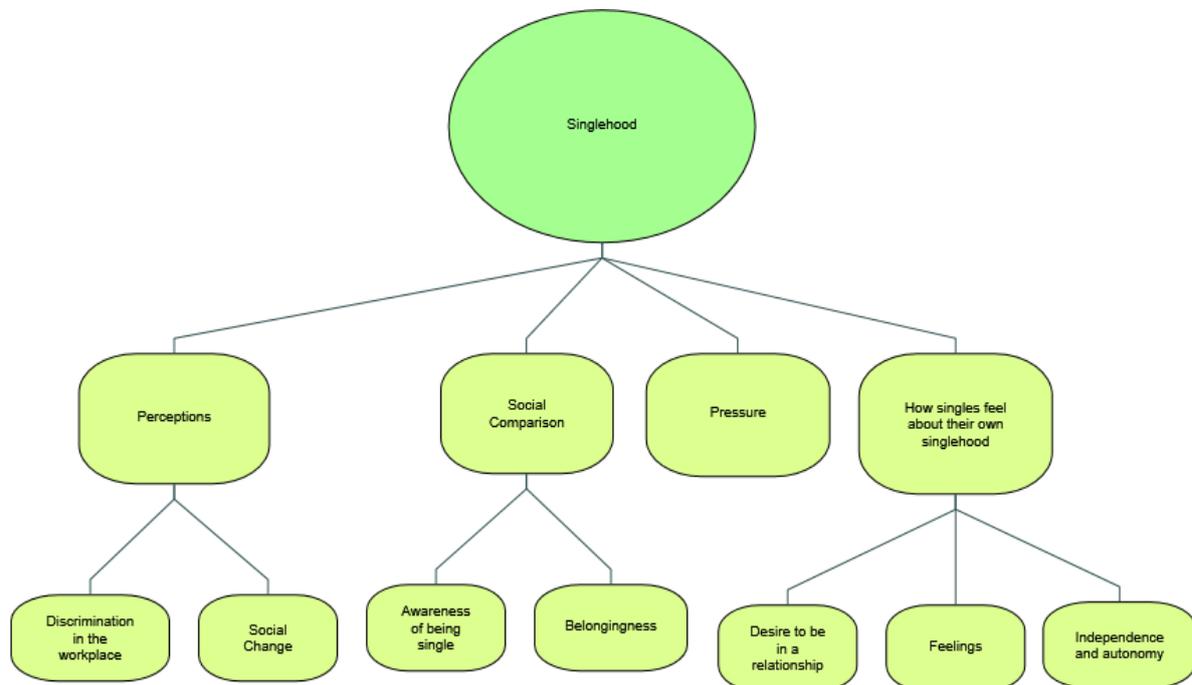4. How singles feel about their own singlehood

*Figure 2: A hierarchical illustration of themes of sub-themes that emerged*

**Theme 1: Perceptions**

The literature review highlighted research relating to societal perceptions of singlehood and singlehood. This new research was aimed at exploring a single person's experience of such perceptions. Throughout the answers in the interviews, the overarching theme of perceptions emerged, along with two sub - themes: discrimination in the workplace and social change. The results showed that the participants felt they were perceived in an overwhelmingly negative light. The researcher asked the participants several questions about how they believe single people are viewed by society. This provided a fascinating insight into the social perception of single people. When the respondents discussed how society views singles, it was overwhelmingly negative views were articulated. One tangible issue that emerged from these

questions was the social abnormality of being single. Most participants spoke about something being '*wrong* with them' or '*wrong* with me' in relation to singlehood.

When asked what characteristics society might associate with singles, Antoine noted, "they think you're strange, odd, a recluse – they think you're weird" and "immediately you're a minority and people are like, what's wrong with you?" Eimear echoed Antoine's sentiments: "they probably think they're a bit odd" and "society probably thinks there's something wrong with them". When discussing how society might view a single woman in her thirties, Neil said: "I would be thinking…is there something going on here? Why is she single?" In addition, Neil said he would think of a single woman in their thirties as "maybe carefree…maybe not serious" and society might view them as "desperate".  However, speaking about how society would view a single man, Neil said: "they probably think he's happy out, doing he's own thing". Unsurprisingly, conflicting answers arose when discussing the role of gender in perceptions. Neil admitted that he himself harbours negative stereotypes of single women in their thirties. Neil's perception of single women might suggest he has internalised negative social stereotypes towards single women. This supports the research in the literature by Farrell (2018) who suggested that it is human nature to care about how we are viewed by others,and as a result, have tendency to assume stereotypes. What is interesting, is that Neil did not have this perception of single men, but single women. This further supports previous the  research that single women are judged more harshly than single men, with single women being percevied as having weaker social skills (Shachar et al., 2013). Antoine expressed how he is unhappy being single, though there were differences in how his male and female friends perceived his singlehood: "all my mates who are blokes think "aw it must be great being single"…it's not, it's shit like….and all my girlfriends, my…my friends who are girls, that eh…are in relationships, think it's terrible to be single." These findings contest previous research, but only from a male perspective. Rather than perceiving his singlehood to be a lonely cross to bear (Morris et al.,

2006), Antoine's married friends envied his autonomy. Another interesting points was that Anne suspected her friends thought she was a "commitment phobe". This contradicts previous research by Beaty (2020) that suggest this stereotype is only associated with men.

The researcher noticed a thought-provoking observation that emerged from these answers: the participants' incapability to associate themselves with the negative aspects of singlehood. In the above statements, both Neil and Eimear spoke in the third person, using words like "they" and "them", rather than "we" or "us" when speaking about her own demographic. This researcher inferred this reflected Neil and Eimear wanting to distance themselves from a collective group of singles. One might perceive that due to the negative connotations imposed on singles, both chose to detach from the social stigmas associated with singles.

### Subtheme 1: Discrimination in the workplace

An unanticipated subtheme to emerge from the interviews with the male participants was discrimination in the workplace. While DePaulo & Morris (2006) claimed that singlism is prevalent in society, they refer mostly to the financial and housing aspects. Further research could delve into how the personal lives of married people are perceived as being more important than the personal lives of single people. While both female participants said no difference in the way they treated in the workplace in comparison with their coupled counterparts, both male participants said there is occasionally an expectation on them to work late, as they are single. Neil said, "I've been in situation before where definitely… kinda the company would take liberties with your time……there's people with families who just have to leave". Similarly, Antoine, displaying signs of annoyance, spoke of how the company he works prioritised the personal time of a co-worker with children:

Why is his personal life not as important as my personal life?…just because he chooses to

spend time with his kids….I wanna go home and hang out with my friends or do a bit of

exercise or go to the gym or….or….go to a gig or whatever…but it's like oh you'll stay late

tonight and finish this client's job off because the other fella has to leave cause sure he's

gotta collect the kids.

### Subtheme 2: Social change

A positive unexpected subtheme that emerged in from the interviews, was that a social

change is occurring. Many participants noted that there is a more lenient view attitude towards

singlehood in modern society.

Eimear stated:

I do think it's changing and I do think there are a lot more single people…people are

travelling and living in different places…like it's, it is changing but I think like, ye know just

with our generation that won't be the case…because like our parents are still in that

traditional phase and that's been fed back to us.

Adding further credence to the concept of social change, Neil stated "being single in your
thirties is no big deal anymore".

### Theme 2: Social comparison

An unsurprising theme to emerge from the data was social comparison. All participants

mentioned several times that looking at their friends getting married and 'settling down',

prompted them to look at their own lives. This supports the concept of Festinger's Social

Comparison Theory (1954), which suggests people evaluate themselves based on comparisons

with others.  This theme was more prevalent amongst the female participants, who mentioned

their friends moving on and "ticking all the boxes" that society says they should have by now.

Eimear shared: "whereas a lot of my friends have settled down now I'm kinda like… awww I actually kinda want that now" and elaborated on this point saying "I'm 31 now and it kinda is hitting me that other people are settling down". Resonating with Eimear, Neil spoke of his colleagues: "you wouldn't be embarrassed to say you're single but kinda everyone I'm working with now they do have kids". Neil went on to imply that he compared himself with the stages his friends were at:

They've started like looking into buying a house or apartment for themselves, but single or not. I kinda feel that is say you were to buy a house now you kinda have to be in a relationship so from my friends no, I'm not pressured, but I do think….maybe, there's probably the impression that I'm like….a few years behind them in life.

Antoine also admitted he struggled with the identity of being "the token single" in his group of friends: "I'm like one of the only single guys, possibly the only single guy in the entire group." This discussion lead to the following sub-theme emerging.

**Subtheme 1: Awareness of being single**

From discussing the stages their friends are at, the subtheme of awareness of being single emerged. Each participant brought up weddings as being the occasion where their their level of awareness of being single was amplified. The researcher found it quite interesting to listen to the reasons for this and how weddings are structured for couples, for instance, arriving at the church together, the seating plan, the first dance, the single supplement single people must pay and of course, the celebration of love. Antoine said:

The bride and groom that are organising the wedding they don't think about is how single

people in the room might feel affected, even if they're not giving a given a +1 as an invite,

because I've gone to plenty of weddings on my own and you really do feel on your own that

day because you know, it's all about a couple getting married and spending the rest lives

together and committing to each other for the rest of their lives and that's fantastic but, as

you get a little bit older, those weddings, everyone starts getting married and then you realise

you're the only single person of wedding or you're sitting at a table of, you know, four

couples and you're on your own woman and that's something I find that really makes you

feel more single.


Eimear too discussed how she felt aware of her being single at weddings: "I used to, like

I love a good wedding, but em….in the last, again two years, more and more people, there's

less and less single people." Both Neil and Anne also referenced weddings made them feel

more aware of being single, as it a day for couples and for celebrating love.


**Subtheme 2: Belongingness**

The Need to Belong theory (Baumeister, 2012) was supported by answers given by the

female respondents. Anne spoke about how she occasionally felt out of place at weddings,

voicing how she felt like a "third wheel" at weddings and that there is an "awkwardness" about

that. Eimear also spoke about the seating plan of a wedding she recently attended: *"I wasn't put

at the table I naturally would have been…because I was a single person I was put at a different

table and I felt like…like with people I was less friendly with."* Mentioning the seating

arrangement may seem trivial. However, the researcher observed that it clearly stirred emotion

within Eimear as it is symbolic of the social marginalisation singles endure. Furthermore,

Eimear twice mentioned in the interview about where "she fits in" in her group dynamic as she

is the 'single one' amongst her friends. From this data, the researcher interpreted that Eimear struggled to identify where she belongs within her social group. As per Baumeister's need to belong theory (2012), Eimear's fundamental needs to be accepted and belong are unmet.

From conducting the literature review, the researcher found very little research concerning the social comparisons of singles to their social network. This is an area of research that could be investigated in the future, as it emerged as a strong theme in this study so it would be worth exploring further.

**Theme 3: Pressure**

A third strong theme to emerge from the interviews was pressure. Pressure derived from two main sources: friends and society. Anne admitted that she felt pressure from her friends, who regularly try to set her up with someone: "they're all like, "oh, we'll find a man for you...I'm quite happy to find a man for myself, so yeah, I feel a little bit of pressure". Anne elaborated on this, saying she suspects her romantically involved female friends pity her: "there are times I feel like they might feel a bit sorry for me." Moreover, she explained how she finds herself making excuses to justify being single, to relieve societal pressure:

Sometimes I feel like I'm making excuses just for being single, a bit like, oh, I'm focusing on you know, my masters, or I'm busy at work and I'm, you know, taking care of myself because, you know, like, let's say mentally, physically, that kind of thing. I feel like I'm almost making excuses for being single in my life sometimes.

This data supports the previous research of Reynolds & Wetherell (2003), who observed that single people are expected to have an excuse for being single.

A surprising statement was that Eimear too felt pressure, but only from herself: "you know analysing everything and overtalking and actually creating pressure for ourselves". Each of the respondents talked about pressure on single women who wanted to have children due to the 'biological clock ticking'. Recalling a conversation at social gathering last year, Anne showed visible signs of annoyance. During the conversation, a friend asked her had she considered freezing her eggs. Anne-Marie said she felt singled out and "angry" about the incident. Following on from this part of the interview, Anne also cited gender differences in how men and women are viewed by society:

You know, no one's going to turn to a man and say, you want to freeze your…do you want to, you know, freeze your sperm or whatever it is, you know, in their 30s. But it's something that people will, and have, said to me.

What was especially interesting, was that Andy discussed that the notion that men can have children at any age was very subjective and that he feels pressure too due to his age. Antoine said he has contested this perception with his female friends many times:

The response you get from girls is "ah sure you're grand, you can have kids 'til you're 70 or 60" and I'm like….my, my reply is always yeah but I don't want to be 50 running around after a one year old or a two year old and they're like "ah but you can, so, you're not missing

out on it"….and I'm like yeah, fair enough but what are the chances of a 50 year old meeting a 30 year old and starting a family like?

This was exciting as it contradicted the societal view that man have no time limit to having children. Further research could look at the 'non-physical' biological clock that some men may feel.

Neil and Eimear each spoke about the pressure of the woman's "biological clock" and how men "just don't have the same pressure" as women for this reason. Neil shared that he doesn't think "there's any pressure really put on men to find someone." This contradicts the research of dating website eHarmony (Burnett, 2017) which found that 71% of men feel a significant amount of pressure to be in a romantic relationship. However, supporting the findings of Burnett (2017), Antoine claimed there is pressure on single men, due to society being structured for couples:

I mean society is totally geared towards. Like society just makes you believe that if you're single for your life, you're a failure in some respects because society makes you believe that your job here on Earth is just to get in a relationship and reproduce and create children for the future.

In order to give further clarity, it would be beneficial for future research to explore the pressure of singlehood on men.

Remarkably, none of the respondents much pressure from their families in relation to their singlehood. Most participants did reference at family occasions, family members may be inquisitive about if they were dating someone, but the participants understood this to be more out of jest than malice.

### Theme 4: How singles feel about their own singlehood

As the researcher was homing in on the impact of singlehood on life satisfaction, several themes emerged under the overarching theme of how singles feel about their singlehood – the crux of the study. There was not one complete view as a theme – rather, different aspects of singlehood came to light.

### Subtheme 1: Independence and autonomy

As evident in previous research, the themes of independence and autonomy emerged from all conversations with participants. The sample discussed the advantages to single life regarding independence in their lives, and not having to "answer" to anyone else. The researcher focused on how the participants felt about their own singlehood. Each of the participants expressed a feeling that they were 'happy enough' with their current lifestyle and being in their own company. Each participant pointed out a positive aspect of being single is that they are not restricted by another person in their lives – people they feel would make demands on their time. However, while highlighting the sense of autonomy that they have from being single, most of the participants simultaneously acknowledged that they still would like a romantic partner.

When asked about the positives to being single, each participant noted that singlehood allowed for independence and autonomy. Elaine, 32, an events manager, stated, "I have a

certain level of my own space" and "being single means you don't have to make decisions based on other people". Notably however, she also felt "there aren't that many benefits to being single". Moreover, Anne also expressed she enjoys the freedom of being single : "I suppose freedom and you know, when I get up in the morning, I don't….I just have to look after myself…I don't have to think about anybody else." However, Antoine stated that:

Single people will tell you that there's lots of positive things you can do what you want when you want…You don't have to answer to anybody but I don't really see them as positives because if you're in a good, healthy relationship, you can probably do what you want when you want anyhow.

Overall, the participants expressed they were content with their lives, yet it was clear that they felt something was lacking.

**Subtheme 2: Desire to be in a relationship**

A desire for intimacy was a powerful theme throughout the dataset. Though each participant felt content for the most part with their lives and their platonic relationships, most of the participants said romantic companionship and intimacy was missing from their lives. Therefore, the literature review strongly supports this interpretation of the data. Speaking about her search for "that person", Eimear said:

That's a closer relationship that you have with a lot of people because there's intimacy and all that kinda stuff that you don't have, even if you're best friends, with even those two girls, my sisters like they know everything but there's intimacy with someone else.

Eimear also went on to say that she would like someone to "build her life around". Similarly, Antoine spoke of his longing for a romantic connection: "To be in a relationship and you can have that trust with somebody and that closeness, it's something you miss when you're not in a relationship", while Anne also expressed her desire for intimacy and several times throughout her interview: "that companionship or whatever, that closeness of intimacy may be". This data acutely corresponds with the ideology of Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) and the subsequent research of Mikulincer & Shaver (2007), which suggests that infant attachment processes play out in adulthood and drive humans to seek out secure base.

### Subtheme 2: Feelings

Discussions about topics cited in the previous teams lead to the triggering of emotions, which fed into how the participants viewed themselves. Feelings of loneliness were conveyed by most participants. Again, weddings seemed to stir this negative emotion. Antoine offered that he feels: "Like loneliness. Definitely, loneliness, a lot… (pause) …yeah. Loneliness a lot". While Elaine expressed that lonely was "too strong a word" to describe how she feels now, she did express that she has a fear of being alone if she remains single: "I just have this thing of being lonely like being alone when I'm older." Niall said: "there's definitely times where you feel probably lonely and you probably start, start looking at other people and thinking what…what's wrong with me? Why can't I find that? Someone who likes me for…for who I am." The researcher observed it was challenging for some of the participants to vocalise feeling lonely, though the researcher observed loneliness was evident though their words and their body language. That being said, the researcher did not infer that these singles were lonely, recluse, and miserable individuals as prior research might suggest, such as the survey by Morris et al (2006). Instead, they apperared to be individuals living well-rounded, sociable lives who were just missing something.

Moreover, feelings of regret or potential regret was expressed by two of the respondents. Antoine felt he had spent too much time focusing on his career. However, he also spoke about how it was a vicious circle – he spent so much time on his career, because he was not in a relationship:

I would have some regret I didn't spend some more time on myself and…I'm glad I realised it now because if I was 47 realising this I might be past my sell-by date and I'd be like shit, I realised too late I have regret for something I didn't do.

Eimear also discussed how she feared that if she did not put work into someone now, she might look back with regret, saying "look if it didn't happen then at least I'll be like, well actually you gave it socks it just wasn't meant to be…I just I think regret would be the worst thing."

Relating to the earlier quote from Anne regarding freezing her eggs, this invoked feelings of anger. Anne also expressed feelings of annoyance when discussing wedding invitations: "Most of the time it would say Anne and guest but sometimes it stays just my name. And that irritates me a bit because they're just presuming that, oh, I have met anyone yet."

Hope was another emotion that experienced by Antoine – he hoped he would meet someone in the near future, reviewing how we would often by two tickets for a future event: "you book two tickets because you want to a gig and you don't know who you're gonna go with. OK. So, there's always the inherent thing. I'll just book two tickets and I might have a girlfriend by then"

Following on from that, Eimear reviewed how being single didn't allow for financial freedom in building a house (as mortgages are structured for couples) or moving away from

Dublin. She also stated that while she is comfortable now, she feared the uncertainty of the future. The following quotation from Eimear highlights these feelings of fear, anxiety and hope:

I'm comfortable, I'm enjoying myself, but actually…there's no long-term to this because I'm living month to month and it's actually scary enough to think…and it's pathetic to think that I'm actually thinking…no but I didn't realise that that was actually what I was waiting for to make all these life decisions. I was waiting for some man to come along.

Each of the patricipants believed they were in a 'transitional stage', waiting to meet the one. However, when confronted with future uncertainty, feelings of fear and anxiety came to the surface for some participants. Once Eimear voiced she was building her life around the idea of a man, her articulation of the words caused her some embarrassment. She repeatedly referred to herself as "pathetic", which would infer a low self-concept. Antoine also admitted the impact it has on his life satisfaction:

It's not my choice, it's circumstances…it affects my life, or it impacts my life, because like I said I'm not getting any younger, I'm 37… I wanna…I don't wanna be single…I wanna meet someone I wanna spend the rest of my life with so we can share things.

Unexpected emotions also emerged from the dataset. Some participants expressed fear and anxiety in relation to their futures. For instance, Neil discussed how he was essentially saving to build a life and settle down in Ireland, and if that didn't happen, he would move abroad. He also mentioned the impact singlehood might have on him in the future:

Like it is still something I'd like desire and see myself in in a few years' time, being in a

relationship and being set up and having the family and the house and …so….if you realise

that's not going to happen then I think, it definitely does affect you.

As more males than females expressed a detrimental impact of life satisfaction, the data

aligns with the research of Nock (2005) who proposed that despite societal perceptions, it is

men more than women who are more uncomfortable being single. The researcher suggests that

investigating further into the imact of life satisfaction of men would contribute to academic

research this neglected issue. The feelings of uncertainty about the future also corroborated the

findings of Sharp & Ganon, (2007, as cited in Spielman et al., 2013) who found that failure to

establish long-lasting romantic connections can lead people to feel uncertain about the future

and their place in society.

The findings of this study were mostly consistent with previous research, though conflictions

and interesting subthemes did emerge.  The purpose of the study was to offer valuable insight

into the lives of singles, and the researcher maintains it achieved its goal. Unfortunately, due to

the small sample used in this study, the findings could not be generalised to the experiences of

all single people. Research on a larger scale would be beneficial to add further clarity in relation

to themes that emerged from this study. A significant amount of further research is needed on

the experiences of singlehood. Due to the nature of the study and the dearth of existing research

on the experiences of single people, there are multiple topics, as outlined in the findings section,

that future research could investigate.

**Limitations**

The researcher acknowledges several limitations in this study that need to be addressed.

Firstly, the sample used for this survey comprised of three strangers and an acquaintance. As

the researcher knew this individual on a personal level, this participant may not have been as honest or forth coming with their answers as the strangers were. Secondly, the researcher would have liked to interview someone in their late thirties to add to the diversity of the data and as the research was focused on the 30-39-year-old age group. Furthermore, all participants were seeking love. The researcher would have found it beneficial to interview participants who had chosen to be celibate, as this may have led to different findings. On reflection, the researcher also felt there were missed opportunities. A study done on a larger scale may lead to better results. A subtheme that emerged was discrimination in the workplace from the men's point of view. The researcher could have delved further into this as it was an unexpected theme and gained a more in-depth insight on this issue. The researcher also felt that while the small sample size allowed for a rich dataset, a study with a larger sample size may lead to more conclusive results.

## Conclusion

Overall, researching the experiences of single people is important due to its social influence both on a societal level and a personal level. Having a greater understanding of the perceptions and experiences of single people is the first step to changing how individuals interact with single people. Being in a relationship does not complete a person, despite what society tells us. Likewise, being single does not mean someone is lonely or selfish. The findings of this study can be beneficial in real-world situations, by showing society the challenges that face this overlooked minority.

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# Appendix A

<u>Semi-Structured Interview Questions:</u>

1.  Please fill in the below information:
    - Name:
    - Age:
    - Sex:

2.  Tell me about your experience of single life.
    Prompt Questions:

    - Have you always been single?
    - Is it by choice or circumstance?

3.  How do you feel about being single?
4.  In what way does your relationship status impact on your quality of life?
5.  What do you think are some positives of being single?
6.  What do you think are some negatives of being single?
7.  What platonic relationships in your life are important?
    Prompt:

    - Do these relationships satisfy your need for human connection?
8.  What benefits do you think being in a relationship would have?
9.  How do you think society feels about single people in their thirties?
    Prompt:
    -Does gender play a role in this view?
10. What do you think your family and friends feel about your relationship status?

*Note: These questions will be issued to all participants. The questions will be used as a guide only to structure the interview and if the opportunity arises to expand on answers, the researcher may ask additional questions.

**Appendix B**

**INFORMATION SHEET**

**Purpose of the Study.** As part of the requirements for my Higher Diploma in Arts in Psychology, I must carry out a research study. The study is concerning the life experiences of single adults in Ireland.

**What will the study involve?** The study will involve an individual interview with me in person, where I will ask you to answer some semi-structured questions concerning your own experience of singlehood in Ireland. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. All interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. The interview will take place in a quiet room at an agreed location and time that is convenient for participants.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked because you fall into the specific demographic that this research study will examine i.e. aged 30-39 years old, never married, have no children, heterosexual and living in Ireland.

**Do you have to take part?**

No. Participation is entirely voluntary. You will also be required to sign a consent form outlining this. You do not have to answer any questions. You can withdraw from the study even before it commences, even if you have already agreed to participate. You can also discontinue after data collection has started. You can withdraw within two weeks of participation and have your data destroyed.

**Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. I will ensure that no traces to your identity will be included in this research study. Any direct quotes from you will be entirely anonymous.

**What will happen to the information which you give?**

Although the researcher will have primary responsibility and custody of the data collected, the researcher supervisor can also request access. Participants can also request access to their data, and this will be made available to them if they wish.

All data recorded in a hard copy format will be securely locked in a storeroom at the researcher's place of residence. Pseudonyms rather than real names or other identifiers will be utilised to prevent anything that may identify the participants. Soft copies of data will be stored on a password-protected laptop belonging to the researcher. Under DBS's guidelines, the data will be stored for one year after the exam process, in case of any appeals. Once that time has elapsed, all soft copies of data will be deleted from the researcher's laptop and all hard copies will be shredded.

**What will happen to the results?**

The results of the study will be presented in my thesis and therefore, seen by my research supervisor, a second assessor and the external examiner. It is possible the study will be published in a research journal, and students made read this work in the future.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

While I do not foresee any negative consequences for taking part in this study, it is possible that talking openly about your personal experiences will cause some distress.

**What if there is a problem?**

At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you about how you found the interview and check in with you about how you are feeling. If you do feel any distress, I will recommend that you contact either a close family member or friend, the Samaritans or your GP.

**Who has reviewed this study?** Approval must be given by the Dublin Business School prior to commencing this study.

**Any further queries?** If you need any further information, you can contact me: Kate O'Shaughnessy with contact details provided to you.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

**Appendix C**

**Informed Consent**

Principal Researcher: Kate O'Shaughnessy

Purpose

**This study will seek to gain an insight into the experiences of single adults in Ireland. As part of this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview and answer semi-structured questions. This study will take approximately 30 minutes.**

Participants' Rights

I understand that my responses will be kept in the strictest of confidence and will be available only to the researcher. No one will be able to identify me when the results are reported and my name will not appear anywhere in the written report. I also understand that I <u>may skip any questions or tasks that I do not wish to answer or complete</u>. I understand that the consent form will be kept separate from the data records to ensure confidentiality. I may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. I agree to have my verbal responses audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis with the understanding that my responses will not be linked to me personally in any way. One year after the examination process, all my recorded data (both soft and hard copies) will be destroyed.

I understand that upon completion, I will be given a full explanation of the study. If I am uncomfortable with any part of this study, I may contact Kate O'Shaughnessy directly.

I understand that I am participating in a study of my own free will.

Consent to Participate
I acknowledge that I am at least eighteen years old, and that I understand my rights as a research participant as outlined above. I acknowledge that my participation is voluntary.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____          Date: _____

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview          ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview          ☐

Signed:          ………………………………….          Date: ………………

PRINT NAME:          ………………………………….