ABSTRACT

MEANINGS OF LEISURE FOR LATER-LIFE NEVER-MARRIED, CHILDLESS WOMEN

By Merrin Jump

This paper reports on the meanings of leisure for seven later-life, never-married, childless women. The study is qualitative, using semi-structured, open-ended interviews to explore the meanings and perceptions of leisure for this group of women living in the same Midwestern city. Interview data were analyzed via analytic coding (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Analysis of the interviews indicated that the women varied in their experiences of being single and never having children. That is, the contexts of these women’s lives and leisure differed and shaped how they participated in leisure. Further, these women reported that leisure held a variety of meanings for them including self worth, nurturance, challenge, that which is not required, time away/escape, and constraint. Most striking in the results is that the meanings of leisure for later-life, never-married, childless women is not that different from the meanings of leisure for ever-married (i.e., currently married, divorced, or widowed) women. The implications of these findings for future research and practice, as well as study limitations, are also discussed.
MEANINGS OF LEISURE FOR LATER-LIFE NEVER-MARRIED, CHILDLESS WOMEN

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
Department of Physical Education, Health and Sport Studies

By
Merrin Elizabeth Jump
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2005

Advisor_________________________
Valeria J. Freysinger

Reader________________________
Susan Cross Lipnickey

Reader________________________
Jay Kimiecik
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. **INTRODUCTION**

II. **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**
   - Leisure: Definitions and Historical Background 5
   - Context of Women’s Lives and Leisure 8
     - General Changes 8
     - Social Support 9
     - Life Satisfaction 15
     - Social Contacts 19
   - The Effect of Marital Status on Health 21
     - Contention #1: Married women have better health 21
     - Contention #2: Never-married women have better Health 22
   - The Leisure of Adult Women 22
     - Constraints 25
   - The Meaning of Singlehood: A Leisure Constraint? 28
   - Summary 33

III. **METHOD**

IV. **RESULTS**
   - Description of the Participants 45
   - Variety in How One is Never-Married and Without Children 46
   - Leisure Meanings 53
     - Leisure as Self Worth 54
Leisure as Nurturance 54
Leisure as Challenge 55
That Which is Not Required 56
Going Away/Escape From 57
Leisure as Constraint 59
Summary 64

V. DISCUSSION 66
Life Contexts 67
Later-Life Concerns 68
Leisure Meanings 69
Constraints to Leisure 71
Limitations and Implications for Future Research 71
Implications for Practice 73

VI. TABLE 74
Table 1 74

VII. APPENDICES 75
Appendix A 75
Appendix B 76
Appendix C 77
Appendix D 79

VIII. REFERENCES 80
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisers, Drs. Freysinger, Lipnickey and Kimiecik. Without your continued guidance and support, I couldn’t have finished this without you. Thank you for helping me achieve one of my greater accomplishments in life thus far.
CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the meanings of leisure for later life never-married, childless women. Researching this topic can be justified by the fact that single women are one of the most rapidly growing populations in society (Lingren, Kimmans, & Van Sandt, 1987; Stein, 1978). Women who continue their education beyond high school tend to remain single or become single through divorce more than any other group of women (Houseknecht, Vaughan, & Statham, 1987). As of 1985, there were approximately 55 million single adults over the age of 18; in 1950, there were 4 million never-married adults and this number increased to 19.4 million in 1982 (Cockrum & White, 1985). In 2000, women living alone made up 58% of one-person households (U.S. Census, 2000). Furthermore, the total percent of never-married women over age 35 is 18 percent of the population (U.S. Census, 1998), and this number likely will increase as the population and baby boomers age.

Despite the growing numbers of single women, little theoretical or empirical literature about them exists. Even though the research on women and leisure over the past 20 years has shed light on how and why gender shapes leisure, the vast majority of this research has focused on married women and/or women with children. It has not explored if, how, and why not marrying or having children reconstructs the relationship between gender and leisure. Hence, our understanding of the complex ways that gender “works” and shapes leisure constraints and opportunities, meanings and satisfactions, is limited.

One area where never-married women's lives have been studied extensively is the area of life satisfaction; and it is in the focus on the life satisfaction of never-married, childless women that the issue of leisure has emerged. For example, Lewis and Borders (1995) studied the life satisfaction of single middle-aged professional women, a study that was justified by the fact that only two other studies related to women's life satisfaction had been performed. In their quantitative study, they contacted all female members of three professional organizations in North Carolina, searching for women who were single, middle-aged (i.e., between the ages of 35 and 65 years), and childless. Members were requested to enlist the participants of two eligible colleagues on their
A total of 686 questionnaires were distributed to 526 women (some women received two questionnaires because of dual membership in professional organizations). The final response rate was 22%, with 152 questionnaires being completed. In answer to their question, what predicts the life satisfaction of these women, Lewis and Borders found that five variables – job satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, regrets regarding life circumstances, internal locus of control, and leisure-time activities – were highly predictive. Leisure activity was not even a variable that Lewis and Borders measured or included in their study. However, a majority of women wrote in on the questionnaire that “time spent alone” as a leisure-time activity was necessary to their life enjoyment. In addition, the women in the study indicated that leisure time activities were important to them, rating them on average as “often important.” Lewis and Borders (1995) concluded, “The fact that leisure-time activities were a significant predictor of life satisfaction suggests that it should be included in future studies of single middle-aged women and life satisfaction in general” (p. 98).

In addition to the fact that little research has been conducted on this demographic group and that understanding of gender and leisure is limited because of this, a study of the leisure of never-married, childless women is also warranted because of the potential benefits leisure provides individuals. Csikszentmihalyi (1975), for example, found that sport is one of a number of leisure activities that may be a context for “flow” and a sense of mastery and competence. In addition, participation in leisure-time physical activity has been found to have positive consequences for mental health (Pate, 1995) for people of all ages (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). These benefits may be due to improved physical performance and physiological functioning, increased opportunity for social interaction, and enhanced feelings of confidence and competence (Shepherd, 1995). Further, leisure also has been shown to buffer stress (Chalip, Thomas, & Voyle, 1992; Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993).

As previously stated, most research to date that has centered on women’s leisure, has focused on women who are married and/or have children. Never-married, childless women have had a different life course than women who are or have been married and/or who have had children. Thus, they may perceive and experience leisure differently. Some researchers have studied the difference in health status of never-married women,
women who were divorced or separated, and women who were currently married (Houseknecht et. al, 1987; Laditka, Laditka, Wolf, 2002; Hoeffer, 1987; Hughes, Waldron, Weiss, 1997; Bulcroft, Hatch, 1992; Rice, 1989; Lewis & Moon, 1997; Dawson, Harrington, 1995). These studies have shown differences in health status linked to marital status, which may indicate there may be a difference in their leisure experiences and meanings as well. For instance, if leisure is related to life satisfaction, and life satisfaction is related to health status, then it is possible that their health status differs by marital status in part due to leisure activities.

Furthermore, traditional developmental theories, including those of Erikson (1963) and Neugarten (1981), primarily are based on studies of men, resulting in a “deficient view” of women and contributing to myths and misconceptions about single women in particular. According to these theorists, single women, especially those who have no children, theoretically could not successfully resolve the midlife crisis of generativity because such resolution includes marriage, children, and career (Lewis & Borders, 1995). The few speculations about women’s development (i.e., Giele, 1982; Gilligan, 1982; Hulbert, 1993; Scarf, 1980) do not adequately include single and childless middle-aged women, but instead attempt to describe women’s development from infancy to early adult years (Hulbert, 1993) and focus on a woman’s struggle to choose between or to balance family and work (Gallos, 1989). Most developmental theories focus on women who have children and then must deal with children leaving the home and issues related to this event. These theories indicate that when children leave, women must cope with losing roles that gave them power, identity and meaning, and learn to become more independent, assertive, and career-oriented (Giele, 1982). However, single women often have already achieved these goals, rendering the traditional developmental models insufficient to describe this demographic group of women (Lewis & Borders, 1995). In essence, little is known about this population of women, and this example demonstrates that this population may be misunderstood. Hence, the literature, and leisure studies in particular, could gain much from a study centered on never-married, childless women’s leisure perceptions.

What this thesis research asked is: what does leisure mean to this group of women? What do they hope to gain from leisure? And how has being single and without
children shaped their leisure lives? As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is to examine the meanings of leisure for later life never-married, childless women. Given my interest in these women’s perceptions and experiences of leisure, that is, what leisure means to them in relation to their lives as a whole, a qualitative study was conducted. Specifically, a face-to-face, semi-structured and open-ended interview format was used. Each participant was asked to discuss her perceptions and experiences of leisure including meanings, activities, satisfactions, dissatisfactions, constraints, and opportunities.

To provide a context for the current study, the relevant literature most closely related to this topic has been reviewed and is summarized in the next section.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Leisure has been examined through quantitative and qualitative analyses and within a variety of contexts. First, it is important to define leisure as it has been studied thus far to provide a framework for the current study. Thus, this chapter commences with an overview of the various notions or understandings of leisure and its definitions. In the second part of this chapter, the research literature on women and leisure is discussed, including general themes that emerged from the extant research: the general changes women experience; their sources of social support; key relationships they have; their life satisfaction; marital status’s effect on health, which is divided into two subsections that discuss a contradiction that exists in the research: never-married women have general better health than married women and never-married women generally are in worse health than married women. After this, constraints to leisure, the meaning of singlehood, and other factors that shape single women’s leisure are discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the literature review. This literature provides a background and rationale for the current study.

Leisure: Definitions and Historical Background

Within the last two decades, much research has been conducted on the topic of the meaning of leisure. Diane Samdahl’s (1988) research provides one model or understanding of the meaning of leisure. In her study, she questioned whether role constraint and self-expression distinguished leisure from non-leisure. She found that role constraint and self-expression could predict 43 percent of the time whether someone considered an activity to be “pure leisure” (characterized by high self expression and low role constraint). More specifically, she found that role constraint distinguished leisure from non-leisure, and that self-expression distinguished positive from negative affect. Samdahl stated:

“…Interactive constraints from social role processes, including perceived role constraints and self-objectification, may be an important basis for the freedom within leisure. However, that freedom may be either empty or rewarding. It is suggested that self-expression is the critical component
which must be encouraged and nurtured in order for interactive freedom to move from empty to rewarding” (p. 37).

Rojek (1985) discusses leisure in a different way. Rather than freedom of the individual, “legitimated pleasure,” according to Rojek, is what defines leisure. By this, Rojek means that what individuals learn to find pleasure in, or what individuals are “allowed” to find pleasure in, is influenced by society and what society deems appropriate. From Rojek’s perspective, the individual cannot be separated from society or society from the individual. What individuals perceive as leisure and what they seek as leisure occurs in the interaction of the individual with her/his socio-cultural and historical environments. According to Rojek, one characteristic of modern society that shapes leisure is **pacification**. Pacification is a process of increased emotional control or the decreased expression of strong, “passionate” emotions in public settings. Yet despite expectations for such repression, individuals continue to feel or experience such emotions. Therefore, in order to keep peace and order in society, and maintain the mental health of individuals, venues are created to allow the public expression of these emotions. Specifically, forms of leisure develop and are supported by society to allow expression or release of strong emotions in a public sphere. Rojek’s findings may be particularly relevant to never-married, childless women’s leisure for two reasons. First, women in general have had more constraints on what is deemed appropriate for their gender. For example, aggressive or physical contact sports, such as kickboxing, rugby and soccer, have only recently become more acceptable for women. For the women in the current study, these sports were not even available as it was between 1940 and 1950 when these women were in their teens to early and late 20s. For this cohort of women professional or career options were also limited with nursing, secretarial work or teaching dominating. Hence, for this generation, society had a narrower scope of what it deemed appropriate for women, which extended into leisure activities. Second, the fact that the women in this study are single or have never been married and have not had children defies what society deemed as appropriate when they were of “marrying age” (between 18 and 30 years old). Because being and remaining single was against the norm in the 1940s and 1950s, society inherently saw never-married women’s lives as being “unacceptable” or “inappropriate” (Rubinstein, Alexander, Goodman, & Luborsky, 1991). This may have
affected how these women viewed themselves and affected in what leisure activities they chose to participate. It is possible they may have chosen more “acceptable” leisure activities so as to balance or counteract any disapproval society may have held due to the fact they were single and childless, or perhaps leisure was a context of further “resistance” (Shaw, 2001).

Edwards (1981) in his research on sport, provides insights that are important to understanding Rojek’s (1985) socio-cultural perspective on leisure generally, and women and leisure specifically. According to Edwards, social relations between women and men in modern society are characterized by a system of “benevolent despotism.” In such a system, the dominant group (males) sees the subordinate group (females) as inferior but loveable, as long as they stay in their place. From this perspective, males will continue to accept females into “their world” as long as the females are not threatening or do not challenge the existing patriarchal order or distribution of power. Edwards cites Metheny’s (1970) discussion of gender and sport. According to Metheny, there is no biological basis for the exclusion of women from sport (and other physically active leisure activities). Rather, women are excluded because of western notions of gender. In western culture gender is dualistic; that is, consists of opposites. Because to be male or masculine in western culture means to have the prerogative to use one’s body to physically overpower, dominate, or coerce others, to be female or feminine means not using one’s body in this way. Hence, females are excluded from sport participation, especially those that require physical contact. Conversely, males are not encouraged to participate in activities associated with feminine qualities (e.g., grace, fine motor skills). Women’s (and men’s) leisure opportunities are thus limited by social concepts of what is deemed “feminine” and “appropriate” for women. In this sense leisure may be better defined as relative freedom of choice (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992), which also relates to Rojek’s statement that people only find pleasure in what is deemed “acceptable.”

This limitation on leisure is important. Yet, at the same time, play and leisure may provide a venue for awareness of self and an opportunity to overturn or transgress culture’s roles and regulations (Finnan, 1982; Freysinger, 1988; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1986, Shaw, 2001; Wilson, 1998). Leisure may be a place where women are relatively free to create a time and space in which they can define and express who they are and
step outside ascribed roles (Samdahl, 1988) and challenge who others say they should be (Kleiber & Kane, 1984; Wearing, 1990).

Context of Women’s Lives and Leisure

As stated earlier, in the past 20 years increasing research has been conducted on women and women’s leisure with a particular emphasis on how family life affects their leisure. Yet little research has directly investigated the leisure of never-married, childless women of any age. There is, however, a body of research exploring other dimensions of these women’s lives. In the following sections this research is reviewed with particular emphasis on the lives of older women. Understanding the contexts of never-married childless women’s lives provides a framework for understanding their leisure. Further, some of this research, while not focused on leisure, found leisure to be an important component of women’s lives. However, as will be seen, the research on never-married, childless women’s lives is often contradictory or inconsistent, specifically that on marital status and health. Further, much of the research on never-married, childless women does not focus specifically on older women (i.e., those 65 years of age and older). Still this research provides an informative backdrop for a study of never-married, childless older women and is presented here. Following a discussion of this literature, the research on women’s leisure is summarized.

General Changes

Women who are 60 years old and older begin to cope with different issues than seen in midlife. First of all, women usually live longer than men, so oftentimes married women in later life must face losing a spouse. With this loss comes a new set of responsibilities, perhaps ones with which these women did not previously have to deal (Hartman & Korte, 1990). One example is finances. If a woman’s spouse dies, she faces several possibilities including financial independence, economic insecurity, and learning how to manage bills for the first time. Married women also have to relearn how to live alone. By this time a woman may have been living with her spouse for more than 60 years, and now she must cope with living alone for the first time since her twenties and cope with increased independence. This may lead to placing more importance on friendships or enhancing familial relationships. At this age, women still are concerned with being sexually attractive and their sexuality, but also may be more concerned about
their health and/or that of their friends’ as health begins to fail (Hartman & Korte, 1990). Of course for women who do not marry, widowhood and the concomitant changes it presents, are not issues. However, social support experiences and friendship networks have been studied across populations of women.

**Social Support**

Research has found that supportive relationships are imperative for singles in that they help validate that singlehood is an acceptable adult status. Further, friendships with others who are like oneself and are significant others to the individual have been found to be an important source of self-worth and approval (Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979).

Women in old age without a spouse or child lack two sources of social support. There are two theories that seek to explain how social support “works” and why it is important. One theory, substitution theory, holds that when close kin are not available, individuals turn to more distant relatives for support. This can also extend to friends (Goldberg, Kantrow, Kremen, & Lauter, 1986).

Differential primary-group theory suggests that because each of the major primary groups has a different structure, each is best suited to a different type of supportive task (Goldberg et al., 1986). Friends are best suited to activities requiring consensus, such as companionship, and family are most capable of providing support that require long-term commitment. In contrast to substitution theory, this theory asserts that different primary groups may not be interchangeable, and therefore there may be limits to substitution. Further, reciprocity – mutual exchange of support - is a factor that has been found to be conducive to security in old age (Goldberg et al., 1986).

Goldberg and colleagues (1986) conducted a study of widowed, divorced, and never-married older women who did not have children as these women lack two kinship relationships (i.e., spouse and children) that are potentially strong in reciprocity. They were interested in whether these women developed reciprocal relationships with other kin and friends, and if never-married women differed from those once married. They noted that while women who never married may be seen as more isolated than other marital groups, because they do not expect to have the support of spouses as they grow older, they may be more likely than widows to engage in certain “anticipatory socialization”
and to be “better off” as a consequence. Goldberg and colleagues (1986) sought to answer the following questions in their study:

1. What sources of support do spouseless, childless elderly women use to meet needs for companionship and socialization?
2. What sources of support do spouseless, childless elderly women use to cope with illness, social-psychological problems and financial need?
3. Are there differences in the support provided by kin and friends?
4. Are spouseless and childless elderly women engaged in a mutual exchange of benefits with friends and kin?
5. Does living with or close to relatives and friends affect the provision and exchange of social supports?
6. Does marital history affect the provision and exchange of social supports?

Their study included in-person interviews with 52 single, noninstitutionalized, childless women age 65 years old and older. Efforts were made to obtain respondents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and communities in the northeastern United States. Directors of senior citizen centers in several suburban communities were responsible for recruiting two-fifths of the respondents. The remainder were obtained from diverse sources; for example, a university personnel director wrote to single women reitrees asking them to participate and a garment workers’ union in New York City sought respondents from among its retirees. The study was explicit in requisites regarding childlessness, marital status and employment. Women had to either have been never married, or been without their husbands for at least three years prior to the study, to be childless, and not to be working full time at the time they were interviewed.

As one of the study’s objectives was to learn how the women met everyday needs for companionship and socialization, respondents were asked to identify any living relatives to whom they felt close. All but 10 percent had one close relative and over three-fifths had three or more. Of the 90 percent with at least one close relative, one-third had two close relatives or fewer, and two-fifths had no younger-generation relatives to whom they felt close. For the never-married and divorced-separated women, there was a scarcity of substitution for children, meaning the women in this group did not have any close relationships with non-kin children. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents felt
close to one or more siblings; women who never married or were widows were equally likely to have a close sibling. Most of the women were able to develop a close circle of friends: over half had five or more friends to whom they felt close. In addition, respondents tended to have more close friends than they had relatives. The younger elderly women were less likely to have frequent contact with relatives than were the older elderly. Women over 80 years of age were somewhat more likely than the sample as a whole to see a relative weekly.

On average, women in the sample had close ties and frequent contacts with family, friends, or both. Moreover, they recognized the importance of these primary-group ties. When asked what advice they would give to someone near retirement, they were most likely to mention keeping up with friends (80 percent) or keeping up with family (71 percent) (Goldberg et al., 1986).

Participation in community organizations was also reported. For example, forty-two percent of the women attended church once a week or more and the never married were most likely to attend frequently. Senior center membership was significantly related to income. Women in the highest and second lowest income categories were least likely to belong. Of those who belonged, 85 percent attended three times a week or more. According to Goldberg and colleagues, for those who have relatively little contact with close friends or relatives, formal organizations can provide substitute forms of contact and activity.

Based on the researchers’ definition of reciprocity, 65 percent of the spouseless, childless elderly women had reciprocal relationships with friends or relatives. None of the small group of women with incomes below the poverty level was engaged in reciprocity as defined in this study. The divorced-separated were least likely (57 percent) to have reciprocal relationships and the widows were most likely (71 percent) to have these relationships. Never-married women were somewhat less reciprocal than widows (63 percent). Women over 80 were less likely to be engaged in reciprocity than the younger women – 50 percent compared to 70 percent.

Thirty-three percent of the women reported sharing a home with another person, and they found a number of advantages in this arrangement. Companionship was mentioned most often, but sharing expenses, mutual aid and protection against crime
were also cited. Never-married women were more likely to be home sharers than other marital groups. Perhaps home sharing is one way in which women who have never married extend their opportunities for primary group contact and support. Reciprocity also was more frequent among home sharers and building mates than it was among others in the sample, although the differences were not statistically significant.

This study should help to dispel the notion that spouseless, childless elderly women are a neglected and isolated group. Clearly primary relationships that extend beyond the nuclear family are vital to older women and should be recognized, valued, and strengthened.

As part of a larger project on childless older women, Rubinstein R. L., Alexander, Baine B., Goodman, M., Luborksy M. (1991) conducted qualitative research conversations with 31 never married, childless women age 60 and older. They had two aims: (1) to report types of and attitudes toward key interpersonal relationships of these women and (2) to examine limits to these key relations, describing some strategies these women adopted for gaining kin-like relations and the problems inherent in them for the expectation of care in later life. Informants were solicited through newspapers, senior and retirement centers, former research participants and referrals from informants. Each was interviewed in three sessions across 3 to 4 weeks. The first interview collected background data, elicitation of a life history narrative, and asked participants to complete the Social Network and Social Support Inventory (Rubinstein et al., 1991). The second and third interviews examined life achievements and accomplishments, outlets for generativity, and feelings about parental status. Items that assessed social network expectations for support, the most important person in life at the time, generative and nurturant behaviors and relationships, and perceived patterns of interpersonal influence were of particular interest.

By key relationships Rubinstein and colleagues (1991) meant those ties that informants indicated were central, compelling, enduring, or most significant throughout their lifetimes. This included blood relationships such as being a daughter, a sibling, an aunt or a niece. Other relations included fictive parenthood, consociation with a non-related family, and same-generation companionate relations with other women. These were labeled “constructed” ties.
Two basic concerns became apparent in the interviews. The women saw their key relations in one of two ways: they viewed them as problematic on a variety of bases (such as potentially not having care-giving support should it be needed, not being supported by a “formal, socially sanctioned system” such as marriage, adoption and others) because they were not the same as the cultural norm (i.e., married with children); or they saw them as equally or even more successful than central relations based on normative cultural premises. Thus, some informants argued that they had better relationships than those women with families of their own or that they had avoided the many problems associated with parent-child relations and with marriage. Most felt that their relationships had great merit and authenticity and provided meaning in their lives (Rubinstein et al., 1991).

According to Rubinstein and colleagues (1991), there are two main components of kinship: blood tie and code for conduct. The code for conduct specifies that individuals who are biologically related should offer loyalty, trust, faith, affection, help when needed, and the kind of help that is needed. The blood tie has primacy and forms the basis for the relationship. Basically, in western cultures only blood relatives are seen to be obligated or expected to help with health care, whereas friends who are not related do not share this same obligation.

Because the women in the Rubinstein et al. (1991) study lacked the biogenetic ties and the obligations of the marriage tie, it is not surprising that some of the most salient relationships these women developed were not blood ties. Yet, they also found that these relationships in part were metaphorically likened to blood ties and this seemed to increase their legitimation. However, this may also partly be because there is not the words or language to describe such relationships and because they may share many of the qualities that blood ties are said to have.

Results of the Rubinstein et al. (1991) study revealed six types of key personal relationships were most often discussed. Two were based on blood ties, three were types of constructed relationships, and the sixth type was friendship.

Blood ties: These relationships followed either lineal or collateral lines. The lineal is exemplified by the co-resident daughter role – extended residence with parents until they die. Women in this role generally viewed their relationship as morally obligatory
and necessary. Their care efforts required personal sacrifice and often took precedence over these women forming their own relationships and even marrying. Collateral relationships include aunthood, an enduring significant relation with nephews and nieces that in some cases approaches quasi-parenthood. Nieces and nephews were central in many of the respondents’ lives. Most informants were extensively involved in raising and shaping the lives of these collaterals, particularly when they were young.

Constructed ties: There were three types of key constructed relationships: affiliation with non-kin, non-affinal family; the establishment of a quasi-parental tie with a younger person who is “like a son or daughter;” and the establishment of long-term, same-generation companionate relationships, often with another woman. Eleven women in the Rubinstein et al. (1991) study felt themselves to be “adopted into” or close to a family to which they were not biologically related. Relationships were voluntary, there was a good deal of affection and support, and relationships were enduring over time. Six of the women had relationships with younger non-relatives to whom they acted like parents. Despite the infrequency of the contacts, Rubinstein and colleagues (1991) contend that these relationships are important because they show how individuals attempt to use the system of cultural meaning to formulate secure relations. Thus, while lacking the biogenetic tie, the content of the relationship was specifically modeled on a parent-child relationship. Those who took on quasi-parental roles felt they themselves had been dominant forces in the lives of these young people.

In terms of companionate relationships: eight of the women described same-generation, same-gender companionate relations as key in their lives. These relationships included enduringness, subjective closeness, periods of co-residence, extensive traveling together, and in some cases involvements with the other’s extended family.

Friendships were very significant in 29 of the 31 women’s lives. However, these women did not generally feel that such relationships would provide them with certain and secure care if the need arose. Several had remained close with the friends of their youth well into late life, which produced family-like relationships. In a few cases, these friendships provided a feeling of security and certainty in time of need, an untapped resource upon which one could call. Several of the women saw their enhanced friendships as a definite advantage of not marrying. Some described men they had been
close to, or nearly married when they were younger, but they did not seem to be significant relationships anymore. Almost none named men in their inner circle of friends. Rubinstein and colleagues (1991) concluded that overall, many of the never-married women had led generative lives both in their work and their relationships.

Susan Rice (1989) also studied the lives of single, older childless women and the differences between never-married and widowed women, specifically, their social support and life satisfaction. This study was based on the notion of role consistency as it applies to social support and life satisfaction. Rice (1989) found that the never-married group had fewer overall contacts than the widowed group, and she compared this to Gubrium’s (1975) notion of the difference between isolation and desolation. Gubrium (1975) studied 22 single, elderly people and examined their social behavior. He found a distinct difference in personality and routine for the single elderly person, such that he/she valued the independence of being single because it eliminated the burdens of dependent relatives. In addition, the single elder’s world, while relatively isolated, was not perceived in terms of loneliness or desolation. Rice found the same thing in her study in that the never-married appeared to have become “comfortable” with having time alone and did not experience it as a loss as much as the widowed group. Rice (1989) also noted that the never-married had an “easier” task of entering old age alone because they had been practicing the skill of adapting to the roles of single women all their lives.

In terms of life satisfaction, she found that in general the things that distinguished higher life satisfaction from lower life satisfaction were related to the extent to which people felt enmeshed in other roles. This finding is significant to research regarding never-married women’s perception of leisure.

Life Satisfaction

As stated earlier, no studies were found that specifically focused on never-married, childless women and their perceptions of leisure. However, quite a bit of research has been conducted on life satisfaction, relationships, and single status. This research helps “flesh out” the contexts of never-married childless women’s leisure. It is also in this research that leisure sometimes emerges as an important factor. In studies that focused on single adults’ life satisfaction (Jacoby, 1974; Libby, 1977; Melville, 1977; Pearlin & Johnson, 1981; Rice, 1989; Stein, 1981), differences based on gender
and age often were cited as factors influencing adjustment and life satisfaction of single adults (Stein, 1981). College education, high occupational prestige, and a “good” income have also been found to be factors that make singlehood a more satisfying lifestyle (Jacoby, 1974; Pearlin & Johnson, 1981).

Cockrum and White (1985), in their study of life satisfaction of single adults, identified potential study participants from singles’ organizations, club memberships, and church groups in Knoxville, Tennessee. They also asked these potential participants to identify other individuals who met their study criteria and would possibly be willing to participate in the study. To participate, individuals needed to be Caucasian; never-married and not currently cohabitating; not emotionally, sexually or financially dependent on one person; and between the ages of 27-46. Thirty never-married men and women participated in their study by completing a questionnaire. Most participants were college educated (84 percent of the females had graduated from college and 83 percent of the men had) and had a “high level of occupational prestige.”

In a regression analysis factors related to both the quality and quantity of human relationships were found to be important to the life satisfaction of single adults. Important factors included good health, friends, and opportunities for personal growth. For women, emotional loneliness was the most important variable in predicting level of life satisfaction, followed by attachment. Hayes (1981) also found that professional never-married women were most likely to say that the lack of male companionship was the main ingredient missing in their lives, preventing greater life satisfaction. Friends were important to the happiness and life satisfaction of single adults (Cockrum & White, 1985), and visiting friends was one of the major activities used by single adults to reduce loneliness and unhappiness (Adams, 1976; Staff & Carns, 1972). Cockrum and White (1985) concluded that, “the importance of attachment relationships for unmarried women may be heightened by the fact that they do not have a marital relationship in which to have intimacy needs met” (p. 555). Cockrum and White also noted that women’s educational and occupational accomplishments might help compensate for the fact that they are unmarried, such that singlehood may be seen as a lifestyle chosen to facilitate these accomplishments.
Another factor that has been found to influence life satisfaction is relationships. Loewenstein, S. F., Bloch, N. E., Campion, J., Epstein, J. S., Gale, P., & Salvatore, M. (1981) studied what influences life satisfaction and found that two of the significant predictors involved relationships with others: living with a peer companion and having steady companionship. At the same time Lewis and Borders (1995) found that the absence of intimate friendships did not preclude high life satisfaction, and that the presence of major relationships did not ensure high life satisfaction. Additionally, Rice (1989) found that having a confidante, having someone upon whom someone could rely in a crisis situation, and the number and kinds of contact with others, all impacted life satisfaction.

Rice (1989) also found that role consistency affects life satisfaction. Role consistency has been found to be related to the ability to communicate and socialize (Rice, 1989). Using Erikson’s (1963) theory of development, Rice cited Heilbrun and Lair (1964) who contend that the aged struggle with attaining the stages of “ego identity” in a way similar to adolescents. In this process a person first perceives herself as behaviorally consistent over interpersonal situations of different kinds; others perceive her as interpersonally consistent across a variety of situations; and role consistency exists when a person has confidence that her perception is congruent with those in her social environment (Rice, 1989). Indeed, research has found that lower role consistency is associated with greater pathology. The women in Rice’s (1989) study – all over age 65, with a mean age of 73.7 – had all lost, or never had, three of the major roles that women usually hold: wife, mother, and employee.

With this nonrandom sample of 30 never-married and 30 widowed elderly, single, childless women, Rice (1989) conducted 90-minute interviews, usually at the women’s homes, using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions. Rice wanted to see if four variables were related to life satisfaction, and if so, which were most related: presence or absence of a confidante; the numbers and kinds of contact with others; the facility with which one could rely on others in times of crisis; the reciprocity of interactions.

Seventy-three percent of the never-married sample had some professional training, while only 38.3 percent of the widowed sample had, and 55 percent of the
widowed sample was in the top two social classes while 86.7 percent of the never-married were. Rice points out that these factors alone may have influenced the women’s life satisfaction. Still she also found that all the four variables she studied were related to life satisfaction. In general, she found that the things that distinguished higher life satisfaction from lower life satisfaction among this subsample of women were related to the extent to which individuals felt enmeshed in roles other than marital status. Rice (1989, p. 45) states:

It is logical to surmise that in order to feel ensconced in a role, one needs that personal contact, rather than merely contact per se. In fact, the never-married have, in a way had an easier task, since they have been practicing the skill of adapting to the roles of single women all of their lives. They have become used to adjusting to major changes in life circumstances without the support of a spouse, which makes change less frightening than it is for the widowed group.

Rice (1989) found that occupation also was related to life satisfaction. Rice cites Baker’s (1968) study of 38 never-married women and 38 married mothers that measured personal and social adjustment. Baker found that both groups scored above the national norm and there was almost complete congruence between the never-married and married women. He concluded that occupation was a way of creatively contributing to society and could compensate for the lack of a husband and children, enabling some women to live a fulfilled life. While times have changed and today being a mother is not the only role for women, Rice (1989) contends that occupation still would affect women’s life satisfaction and would still affect them into retirement. While 90 percent of the never-married group in her study had professional careers, the 47 percent of the widowed group reporting lower life satisfaction were more likely to have been employed in menial jobs including office and factory work.

In regard to role consistency, Rice found that the widows had less role consistency in at least one area of their lives because of the loss of their spouse at one point in time. The never-married group may have developed alternative lifestyles over a period of time, and had not had to make as many major changes as a result of growing older. The widows, however, did have to make a major change in self-identity because of
the loss of their spouse (Rice, 1989). As the never-married reported significantly higher life satisfaction, it seems that role consistency is one factor that is associated with life satisfaction.

Much of the extant literature has focused on finding differences between never-married women and women who have been divorced, separated and/or widowed. Rice (1989) found in her study that the two groups of women significantly differed in their life satisfaction scores: in all cases, the never-married women had higher life satisfaction scores. Even though the widowed sample had more relationships and was more likely to have a confidante, the never-married group still had higher life satisfaction. The number of social visits also had more of an impact on the widowed group, where life satisfaction dropped more drastically in the widowed group as the number of social visits decreased. This drop was less drastic for the never-married group. Rice attributes these findings to role consistency; that is, the widows have had less role consistency in at least one area of their lives because of the loss of their spouse at one point in time, which may have caused lower life satisfaction. The never-married group did not undergo this major role change. Further, because they have always been single and have developed life-styles over time accommodating this, it may be that they did not depend as much on one other person.

**Social Contacts**

Because of its relationship to life satisfaction and well-being, another focus of research has been the social contacts or networks of married and single adults. For example, Hatch and Bulcroft (1992) argued that women’s and men’s social contacts are largely dependent on their life circumstances in adulthood, including their marital status. They further hypothesized that each gender’s social contacts would differ when subdividing the single group (widowed, never-married, and divorced/separated) instead of lumping them into one category. Hatch and Bulcroft (1992) asked, “It is likely that social networks and patterns of interaction differ for widowed persons as compared with those who have never married, for example, but do women and men have different levels and types of social contacts, regardless of whether they are widowed or have never married?” (p. 224). To answer this question, Hatch and Bulcroft used data from the Social Security Administration’s longitudinal Retirement History Study (RHS), which began in 1969. This study included 11,153 people aged 58 to 63 years. Six waves of data collection
occurred and by 1979 there were 6,000 original respondents and more than 1,000 surviving spouses due to attrition from deaths and those who decided to no longer participate in the study. Thus, 1,435 RHS respondents were included: 238 never-married women, 136 never-married men, 363 widowed women, 298 widowed men, 269 divorced/separated women, 131 divorced/separated men. Hatch and Bulcroft (1992) measured six variables related to contacts with friends, including quantity of contacts and a qualitative variable, the willingness to leave friends for a good job. Four variables measured the number of friends respondents saw during a specified period.

Overall Hatch and Bulcroft (1992) found a recurring theme: women in general have richer, more intimate relationships than men and tend to confide in other women more often while men tend to confide in their spouses. Results also showed that never-married women were more likely to move because of job or career changes and leave their friends. Never-married women and men showed greater similarities in their social contacts than divorced/separated or widowed women and men. Hatch and Bulcroft attributed this to more similar patterns of labor force participation. Further, the widowed women had more contact with friends compared to respondents in all other gender and marital groups, and relative to the men the widowed and never-married women reported significantly more frequent contact with at least one friend. Hatch and Bulcroft contended that this is because women are better able to maintain intimate friendship relationships over time. Other researchers have claimed that it is due to the stigma associated with divorce. That is, there is greater compassion and thus social contact for those who are widowed compared to those who are divorced (Hennon, 1983; Keith, 1986). While Keith (1986) found that those who never marry develop more friendship bonds to compensate for lack of familial contacts than do members of other unmarried groups, Hatch and Bulcroft (1992) did not. Hence, while the never-married are not as isolated as other unmarried groups, they still are less likely than widowed women to have close contact with friends. Hatch and Bulcroft concluded that overall, their research clearly shows that social contacts vary with marital status.

A number of other studies on marital status and social networks have been conducted as well. Moore (1990), for example, found that marital status was important to social networks with unmarried persons having more non-kin ties. Moore compared
married and unmarried people, however, and thus how particular groups of unmarried respondents (i.e., never married, divorced, widowed) compared with one another is unknown. Keith (1986) found that older married persons interact more with family while older unmarried persons interact more with friends. In addition, the never-married had fewer contacts with relatives than ever-married (i.e., never married, divorced, widowed) persons. Among the formerly married, however, widowed individuals have been found to keep more contact with kin than divorced or separated individuals (Babchuck, 1979; Keith 1986; Ward, 1979). What is not clear is whether never-married individuals maintain more contact with friends than those in other unmarried categories to compensate for their limited family contacts. Yet Ward (1979) found few differences in the frequency of seeing friends or neighbors between the widowed, divorced/separated, or never married groups in his study.

The Effect of Marital Status on Health

The limited research that exists regarding marital status and its effect on health is inconsistent and contradictory. Some studies find that married women have better health, while others find that never-married women have better health. Below is a review of the existing literature regarding marital status and its effect on women’s health.

Contention #1: Married women have better health

Waldron, Weiss and Hughes (1997) studied the effect of marital status on health to see if there is a difference between never-married women and divorced/separated women. Prior to their study, research had shown that married women are generally healthier than unmarried women for three reasons: married women have greater financial and material resources, greater social support, and better health-related behavior (Goldman, N., Korenman, S. and Weinstein, R.; Joung, 1996; Umberson, 1992; Waldron et al., 1997; Wyke & Ford, 1992). Another reason that marriage is related to health is health’s effect on the likelihood of being married. Limited research has shown that for some women, poor health may reduce the probability of marriage and increase the probability of divorce (Pless, 1989; Waldron, et al., 1997). At the same time other research has not shown an increased health risk for divorced and separated women relative to never-married women, but has found that never-married women may actually
have the highest mortality risk (Smith & Waltzman, 1994). In sum, previous evidence suggests that divorced/separated women may experience greater morbidity risk, but not a greater mortality risk than never-married women, as never-married women may have greater risk of mortality than the former two groups. Never-married women also have higher residence rates in health institutions than divorced and separated women (Joung, 1996; Verbrugge, 1979).

There is other evidence of greater health risks as well. Waldron and colleagues (1997) used data from a study conducted by the Center for Human Resource Research of Ohio State University and the Bureau of the Census – the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience – to examine the health effects of marital status and the relationships between initial marital status and subsequent health trends in each follow-up interview. The original sample in 1968 consisted of women aged 14-24. The women were interviewed again in 1978, 1983, and 1988 (then aged 34-44). Seventeen interview questions were asked, 11 assessing activities of daily living and six assessing psychosomatic symptoms (such as pain, tiring easily, weakness, dizziness, etc). Three categories of marital status were included: never married, divorced/separated, and married women (there were too few widowed women to include in the study).

Results showed that women who were not married generally had worse health trends than married women. Overall, Waldron and colleagues (1997) found that the health disadvantages of divorced and separated women may primarily apply to older women, whereas never-married younger women may experience as harmful or more harmful health effects than divorced/separated women. Further, among the middle-aged, while never-married women may have higher mortality than divorced/separated women, older divorced/separated women may have higher mortality than older never-married women (Smith & Waitzmann, 1994; Sorlie, 1995). The authors note, however, that in the future the morbidity disadvantage of divorced/separated women may disappear as divorce becomes more accepted.

Contestation #2: Never-married women have better health

In contrast to the above, there is research indicating that being divorced or separated might have worse health effects than being never married. Reasons given for this include that divorced/separated women undergo more financial problems, more
psychological stress, and more health-damaging behaviors such as smoking and heavy drinking (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Cramer, 1993; Goldman et al. 1995; Joung, 1996; Waldron & Lye, 1989; Williams, 1992). Other analyses of prospective morbidity data also suggest that divorced/separated women may have worse health trends than never-married women. One study included women aged 25-74 and found that there was greater morbidity risk for divorced/separated women than for never-married women (Joung, 1996). Another analysis for women 70 years and older assessed increased disability and found that married and divorced women had similar health trends, but never-married women had better health trends (Goldman et al., 1995).

Overall, some research has shown that being divorced/separated may be more harmful than being never married, while mortality data have not found consistent differences between the groups. One reason, however, the data show that divorced/separated women have worse health trends than never-married women may be due to the fact that women who have been married may have more financial support than women who are never-married. This support may allow the divorced/separated women to seek medical attention more easily than those who have never been married. Thus, divorced/separated women may not actually be less healthy, but may seek help more often, resulting in the appearance of a greater morbidity rate.

Hoeffer (1987) contended that older single women’s experience of late-life singlehood had been studied infrequently. Further, while widowhood has received considerable research attention during the past several decades, most of the research has focused on coping with grief and bereavement rather than adjusting to singlehood. Hence, Hoeffer studied predictors of life outlook in older single women. Specifically, she was interested in the effect of the “wife identity” on psychological well being after widowhood (see also Brock & O’Sullivan, 1985). In addition, Hoeffer examined whether women who experience discontinuity in social engagement and previous roles have a less positive life outlook or sense of well being.

Hoeffer used a subsample from the 1975 National Survey of the Aged, yielding 2,143 noninstitutionalized women aged 65 and older. Of these women, 82 percent were widowed, 8 percent were separated or divorced, and 10 percent were never married. The mean age was 75 years old. She measured background characteristics (age, race, marital
status, education), personal resources (current mobility, general health, health compared to their peers), social resources (social network), social relationship deficits (loneliness), and life outlook (e.g., “I can’t help feeling now that my life is not very useful”).

Results showed a number of differences by marital status. First, widows and divorced or separated women perceived their health as poorer than did never married women. Second, 85 percent all subjects reported some contact with friends during the week. Forty eight percent of never married women lived with another person, which was a higher percentage than the widowed or separated/divorced. Third, widows also reported being lonelier than never-married women, and never-married women had a more positive outlook than did widows. Overall, never married women were better educated, healthier, less lonely, and had a more positive life outlook than the widowed women.

Specific to never-married women, Hoeffer (1987) concluded, as Rice (1989) did, that they may be better prepared to adapt to late-life singlehood than widowed and divorced or separated older women. She attributes this to the discontinuity in social engagement and relative isolation that widows and divorced older women experience.

Wolf, D.A., Laditka, S.B., Laditka, J.N. (2002) performed a longitudinal study on the patterns of active life among older women, paying particular attention to the differences within and between groups as defined by marital status (ever-married and never-married women), race, and educational levels. They wanted to see the total “unimpaired” and “impaired” life among these groups. Individuals were classified as impaired if they reported any difficulty performing one or more of these activities of daily living: bathing, eating, dressing, transferring and using the toilet.

The researchers used data from the 1984, 1986, 1988, and 1990 waves of the Longitudinal Study of Aging. The baseline sample included 7,527 non-institutionalized people aged 70 or older, but their sample was restricted to 4,281 female respondents. They looked at years of life remaining after age 70 and of these years, how many were impaired. Impaired living was defined as needing assistance or being unable to carry out one activity of daily living.

They found that the remaining years of life and the proportion of these years with disability vary substantially within each group of women and between the pairs of groups. That is, the never-married, more-educated white women lived the longest,
healthiest lives and the ever-married, nonwhite women with lower education had the shortest life expectancy and experienced the most disability. In addition, the ever-married white women were more likely to remain impaired (relative to recovering) and also were more likely to die (relative to recovering) compared to the never-married women. In addition, the never-married white women with the most education lived longer and more years unimpaired than the most educated, ever-married white women. These findings support other studies, which have consistently shown that older women with more education live longer and healthier lives. Further, they are consistent with previous research that has found (1) that women’s mortality rates are significantly higher 7-12 months after the death of their spouse, but not before or thereafter (Schaefer, Quesenberry, & Wi, 1995), (2) that never-married women have significantly lower probabilities of being disabled than ever-married women (Goldman et al., 1995), and (3) that never-married women are the most socially active women (Goldman et al., 1995). These findings also support the conclusions of Rice (1989) and Anson (1989) that some unmarried groups create social environments that are associated with improved health.

The findings of Wolf and colleagues (2002) are also consistent with Rice’s (1989) finding that never-married women live longer. Perhaps one reason, according to Rice, is because they have higher life satisfaction. Further, the never-married women who live longest have the most education, supporting Rice’s finding that never-married women were more likely to have held a professional job, also enhancing life satisfaction.

In sum, clearly the research is inconsistent and inconclusive about the health status of never-married women compared to other marital status groups. As stated earlier, studies may have found that married women had better health simply because they had more financial resources and thus were able to have better health care. Conversely, never-married women may have had better health in some studies due to life satisfaction; women with more career training and education tend to have higher life satisfaction than women who have had less career training and education, and studies show that never-married women tend to have had more career training and education. Future research should further inquire as to the reasons for these discrepancies (Baker, 1968; Jacoby, 1974; Pearlin & Johnson, 1981; Rice, 1999).

The Leisure of Adult Women
The previous section discussed the contexts of women’s lives in terms of some of the psychological and social changes that are experienced by older women and how marital status relates to social support, life satisfaction, social networks, and health. The next section discusses some of the factors that shape women’s leisure specifically identifying some of the leisure constraints women experience and raising the possibility that singlehood may be a constraint to leisure for women.

Constraints

Henderson (1991) states that many women feel a lack of entitlement, a compelling ethic of care for others, and a concern for personal security and safety, all of which act as constraints to women’s leisure but are seldom mentioned in the literature. Henderson also notes that a distinction should be made between objective and subjective constraints to leisure (see also Harrington & Dawson, 1995). For instance, women sometimes feel that they should not spend money on personal leisure even if discretionary funds are available. Hence, women may have the means to engage in leisure, but their perception of what leisure should and should not entail may inhibit their participation. Married women may perceive leisure to be self-indulgent and feel guilty about not attending to the family, and therefore not engage in leisure.

Henderson (1990) contends that the research indicates that there are contradictions between outside employment and women’s perceptions of their entitlement to leisure. She states:

Wimbush and Taylor (1988) suggested that neither women who worked for pay or worked at home indicated they had the right to take time off from work. Deem (1986) found that employed women had more leisure interests and activities than non-employed women and concluded this behavior was because these women had money, household help, and felt they could routinize and compartmentalize their day better to plan for work, family, and personal leisure. On the other hand, Bialeschki and Henderson (1986) found that women who worked at home were less conflicted about leisure than those who were employed outside the home mainly because they were not trying to “do it all” (p. 103).
Like Deem (1996), Green, Hebron, and Woodward (1990) also found that full-time working women were more likely to see leisure as discrete periods of time, and found it easier than homemakers to “compartmentalize” different spheres of their lives. In addition, Green and colleagues (1990) found that full-time workers enhanced their leisure experiences through social opportunities outside the home due to friends made at work, having their own money, and having a greater sense of entitlement to leisure. On the other hand, Shaw (1987) has shown that employed and non-employed women do not differ significantly in the amount of time they experience as leisure. Further, Bialeschki and Henderson (1986) have argued that women share a “common world” in that they are primarily and ultimately responsible for the home and family, regardless of any employment held and that because of this, women seem to perceive similar criteria as important to the leisure experience. However, whether or not this is true of never-married, childless women has yet to be examined.

Harrington and Dawson (1995) used a mail survey to examine the leisure meanings, experiences of leisure, and constraints to enjoyment of leisure among adult females (n=1,549) in Ontario, Canada. They used Roberts’s (1970) definition of leisure: “Leisure time can be defined as time that is not obligated, and leisure activities can be defined as activities that are non-obligatory.” They classified the participants’ labor force participation into three categories: employed full time (55.4 percent), employed part time (24 percent), and homemakers not employed outside the home (20.6 percent). The mean age of the subjects was 41.7 years old with a standard deviation of 13.7 years and 71 percent were married.

Results indicated that the most widely held leisure meanings for the women in this study were self-gratification, relaxation, and personal freedom. Results also showed that women, regardless of labor force participation, did not believe that leisure is either activity or free time. While achievement was the least held leisure meaning, women who were not employed were more likely than full or part-time workers to see leisure as achievement. Overall, women were most likely to experience competence, security, and playfulness during leisure. Homemakers were least likely to feel assertive, competent, or independent during their leisure. They also reported feeling more constrained in leisure than the other groups due to lack of skills, opportunity, poor self-image, fear, their
personal values, and the belief that some activities are only for men. Those employed full time indicated their constraints to leisure were other responsibilities, fatigue, insufficient time, and scheduling problems. However, the women who worked part time seemed to benefit most in leisure as they reported feeling serene, playful, and feminine and were less likely to feel tired, have scheduling problems, perceive that they lacked time for leisure, or to be overwhelmed by responsibilities.

In summary, this study showed that the extent of labor force participation (working part time, full time, or not working) did not significantly affect the meanings women attached to their leisure, though there was a tendency for leisure to mean “achievement” to full-time homemakers. On the other hand, labor force participation was found to impact the ways in which these women experienced leisure and their constraints to enjoying leisure.

The Meaning of Singlehood: A Leisure Constraint?

Another factor that may constrain the leisure of single women is stereotypes. Some studies have found that single women are stereotyped negatively; specifically, they are viewed as less feminine, less loving and nurturing, less sexually attractive, and more selfish (Knupfer, Clark, & Ram, 1966; Nadelson & Notman, 1981; Srole, Langes, Michale, Opler, & Rennie, 1981). These stereotypes could impact the choices women make about leisure activities, despite the fact that it has become more acceptable for women to remain single (Cockrum & White, 1985). While in 1957 the failure to marry was seen as a pathology, by the mid-70s not marrying was seen as a potential mechanism for increasing one’s happiness (Cockrum & White, 1985). Hence, the negative or positive images of “seld olmadom” could influence never-married women’s experiences of leisure.

More recently, Karen Gail Lewis (1998) discussed the issues of single women, especially their stereotyping, in today’s society. Based on her research, she contends that society, especially through the media, portrays two types of single women: the “old maid,” a more negative view of single women, and in contrast, one that idealizes the single woman, presenting her as a woman who has a meaningful professional career, is beautiful, financially stable, and not only happy about being single, but “willingly opting for a life without a husband” (p. 4). Lewis states that this second image can be just as
damaging as the first, however, because it also is not a realistic view of all single women. The result of these two images for women, according to Lewis, is ambivalence about being single: if they are single, then they are an old maid, and if they are single but do not lead the successful, glamorous lifestyle, then they are a failure.

Lewis (1998) believes that part of the problem is due to the fact that there are no life stage models that include single men and women; rather, most are centered around and include marriage. Lewis cites Erikson’s (1968) theory of stages of life as an example. Two of the stages are young adulthood, where the task is to establish enough intimacy in a heterosexual relationship so that a couple may marry and procreate, and middle adulthood, where the task is generativity and giving birth to and guiding the next generation. Erikson claims that without mastering both stages, one is personally impoverished. Based on her review of the developmental literature, Lewis (1991) concludes that there are not any models that specifically mention the issues unique to single adults and proposes that a life stage model that did would help single women with their feelings of ambivalence.

An additional challenge single women face in addressing their feelings about being single is society’s ambivalence about being single. Lewis (1998) explains that the image of single women and general expectations of women has changed dramatically since the mid-1950s. In the middle of the 20th century the importance of marriage in the United States was higher than at any other time in history (Coontz, 1992), evidenced by the fact that 96 percent of adults were or had been married at this time (Eisler, 1986). In 1950, the number of married women (of all races) was almost three times higher than single women (includes those who were always single, widowed, and divorced). However, in 1995 the Census Report revealed that the number of married women of all races was only slightly more than half the number of those who were always single or divorced. This change was reflected in and/or may have been influenced by how the media portrayed women. In the 1950s and 1960s, television glorified the “upwardly mobile white middle-class family with shows such as Father Knows Best and Ozzie and Harriet” (Lewis, 1998). The single woman (whether never married or divorced) was seen negatively as she was a departure from the norm. The 1960s and 1970s brought a cultural revolution and with it, new roles for women. According to Lewis (1998), The
Feminine Mystique (Friedan, 1963) was written for women in general, and Sex and the Single Girl (Brown, 1962) was written for single women. Furthermore, by the mid 1980s more women were choosing to remain single and more married women were working, giving them greater financial resources and a more realistic option of choosing to leave their husbands. Thus emerges society’s ambivalence toward single women, with the dichotomy of the old maid and the glamorized, self-sufficient, ever-happy single female.

Lewis (1998) contended that there are many ways in which society plays out or reinforces its ambivalence about single women including: lack of institutional support (e.g., activities in organizations that are offered for singles and with the implication that they are happy to be single and not a gathering for singles who hope to meet someone and become un-single); an absence of rituals (i.e., most rituals – weddings, showers, anniversaries, christenings, etc. – are centered around married, reproductive families); verbal messages (e.g., many women talk as if they learned from birth that they were expected to marry); and language (e.g., applications asking for “marital status” which grammatically indicates that the status of marriage is the norm and a woman either has reached it or has not), hence, Lewis’ terms of Single Again (for those divorced or widowed) and Always Single (for those never married).

According to Lewis and Moon (1997), single women, in their ambivalence, see the drawbacks and advantages of being single. Advantages include freedom from being obliged to take care of a man, personal independence without fear of losing themselves in a relationship, and freedom to devote energy to personal growth (Lewis & Moon, 1997). At the same time, single women realize they miss emotional and physical contact and possible financial support at present and in the future. Lewis (1998) contends that there are five possible meanings for single women’s depression: lost dreams, ambiguous loss, lack of intimacy, lack of meaning in life, and touch deprivation. Lost dreams means coming to terms with perhaps not filling childhood dreams, such as a loving husband, kids, and a “white picket fence.” Ambiguous loss refers to being sad about not being married, and not knowing if one will be married in the future. Because of this uncertainty they are not sure if they should grieve over the present state of singlehood or the fact that they will never marry, and hence are not able to fully deal with their feelings. Lack of intimacy is usually more of an issue for women without close female friends, since
women often get their intimacy needs met through female friends, according to Lewis (1998). Lack of meaning may indicate that single women are depressed, but not necessarily about not having a male partner; they could be missing a spiritual or religious fulfillment. Lastly, Lewis (1998) notes that one must look at how much touch deprivation may be affecting single women’s happiness and urge them to consider finding other venues for getting this need met.

Chasteen (1994) looked at the “environment” and women’s roles within it. More specifically, she claimed that society has produced roles for women that are deemed “appropriate” (p. 310). Furthermore, she contended that being single takes a woman outside the traditional expectations of what a “woman’s place” should be (Bakos, 1985; Chandler, 1991; Peterson, 1981; Stein, 1981). Chasteen writes, “In making housing, transportation, and leisure activity choices, single women face an environment not designed with their needs or ideas in mind, shaped not around the individual woman’s life but around what the ideal (heterosexual) couple and woman are expected to need or want” (p. 311). Hence, single women are subjected to the economic disadvantages of being a woman, as well as the social and economic drawbacks of being single in a couple-oriented society.

For example, since the 1970s there has been a shift toward building smaller households in the United States as 25 percent of all adults were living alone by the mid-1980s (Apgar, Brown, Masnick & Pitikin, 1985). The development of the single-family detached house (Hayden, 1984) has increased as a result, yet many single people, especially women, are often unable to afford it (Mulroy, 1988). The household income of single women is on average 60 percent lower than husband and wife households. In contrast, the household income of single men is on average only 15 percent less than married couples (Klodawsky & Spector, 1988). Women also are less likely than men to have regular access to a car, making transportation difficult. Women may also have a concern for their safety, which affects their choices about the environment in which they put themselves. Women are socialized to have a fear of being raped by an unknown person, which greatly restricts the types of environment that she sees as “suitable” (Chasteen, 1992). Due to their disadvantaged economic situation and considering their lack of transportation, leisure activity is likely affected.
Chasteen (1992) performed a qualitative study on single women’s perceptions of and adaptation to a particular environment: a mid-sized city in the South. The “environment” was defined as the physical constructs in space and also the social and symbolic significance women gave to these structures (p. 312). “Single” was defined as all women not married or involved in a relationship that would provide a similar economic and social situation as a married relationship; thus women who were divorced, separated, widowed and never married were all grouped together. She solicited study participants through public announcements, letters to singles groups, and by posting flyers in grocery stores, exercise gyms, telephone poles and newspaper stands. She asked for women who were between 25 and 55 years old and then asked these volunteers to name one other person who also fit her criteria (snowball sampling). This resulted in 25 single women who she then interviewed.

Chasteen (1992) found that the women in her sample reported that it was difficult to find a place to live that fit their budget and that their biggest expense was housing. Almost all women found it difficult to financially “make ends meet.” When asked about leisure activities, most said they engaged in low-cost activities, such as dinner with friends, talking, reading, playing music, and going to singles groups. About half said their leisure time was minimal, and wished they had more money to travel, go out to eat, and see movies with friends. The other half of women did not feel as constrained financially. Two did not because they rarely went out. In addition, the majority of women felt the notion of “free time” did not apply to their lives. However, they did find time to socialize, usually by making dinner with friends. Further, Chasteen found that “women will pay more, drive further, work longer hours, and sacrifice their aesthetic preferences to be able to live in a place they consider safe” (p. 319), and they will rarely engage in a leisure activity alone because of their fear. For example, one woman said that riding a bike is inappropriate because you “look” as though you are “asking for trouble” (p. 320). Those who had to engage in unsafe environments, such as walking after dark, said they were always conscious of their surroundings. In addition, about half of the women limited their driving to the daytime or changed their driving routes after dark. Overall, the only clear factor that influenced the level of reported fear was the
length of time a woman was single: the longer she had been single, the less her fears restricted her behaviors.

Lastly, the women in her study expressed negative feelings about being single. One said, “Society has an image of single women, a double standard. We’re looked down on if we go to bars. We’re not expected to do what the men do. We’re supposed to be ‘ladies’ … the perception people have of you is strange. You’ve got people on the one hand who admire what you’ve done and others who look down on you” (p. 323). Women also found it difficult to fit into a culture that is built around couples. They said that most of their friends were married or were with another person and that usually socializing for these couples occurred in couples. They also indicated that these couples seemed to struggle over whether to ask their single friends to join them.

Summary

In summary, the research on women’s lives and the impact of marital and parental status on these lives, as well as their leisure, suggests that there may be differences between never married, widowed and divorced women in regard to their leisure experiences and meanings. However, little research exists that solely studies never-married women and research with never-married, childless older women is even more sparse.

As stated earlier, most of the research on women’s leisure focuses on women who are married and/or have had children and are in middle age, between 40 and 60 years old. For example, Harrington and Dawson’s (1995) study did not focus specifically on single or never-married women. However, their justification for doing their study could also be used to justify a study of never-married, childless older women. According to Harrington and Dawson, women’s leisure in general is often seen as secondary to men’s leisure, and their leisure is often restricted to family and home-centered activities. While this finding is common throughout the research, what about older women who are not and never were constrained by children or a husband? Are their leisure experiences different than those who are married and had children? Do they have different constraints to their leisure? Furthermore, what are those constraints and how do they change older women’s leisure? Never-married older women without children are unlikely to have all of the same
constraints or responsibilities as married older women with children, and so the question of if, how and why their leisure is constrained remains unanswered.

Freysinger and Flannery (1992) found that mid-life women with children and families saw leisure as the freedom to do what they wanted, when they wanted, and having time alone. Their perception of leisure was facilitated by a change of setting, schedule, activity or companions, and the freedom to vary or change one’s context which led to feelings of well-being and relaxation. However, older women who are not married and do not have children may have different leisure meanings, and because of age and different responsibilities and opportunities, they may seek different leisure experiences or may want something different from leisure than those who are not older, are or were married, and who had children.

Not only does little research exist in regard to never-married, childless older women, much of the existing research is conflicting. While some studies find that women who are married are in better health than women who have never been married (Waldron, Weiss, & Hughes, 1997), other studies indicate the exact opposite: that women who were never married were in better health than women who were or are married (Hoeffer, 1987; Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Cramer, 1993; Goldman et al. 1995; Joung, 1996; Waldron & Lye, 1989; Williams, 1992). In studies that specifically target never-married women and compare them to divorced/widowed women, differences between the groups have been found. Hoeffer (1987) found that widows and divorced or separated women perceived their health as poorer than did never married women, which may have to do with changing roles from being a wife (married/divorced women) and never having to deal with losing a spouse (never married women) (Rice, 1989). Thus, never married women may have better health because they have learned to adapt to being alone, and may – through leisure – have found ways to enjoy or cope with being alone. Furthermore, some studies indicate that never-married, older women live longest and have higher life satisfaction than women have who have been or are married (Rice, 1989; Wolf, Laditka & Laditka, 2002).

The relationships of never-married, older women also were discussed in this literature review. Never-married, older, and childless women viewed their relationships as problematic because they were not the same as the cultural norm (being married) or
they saw their relationships as equally or more successful than women who were married and their relationships (Rubenstein et. al, 1991).

Constraints to leisure also have been examined. Henderson (1991) found that many women feel a lack of entitlement, a compelling ethic of care for others, and a concern for personal security and safety, all of which act as constraints to women’s leisure but are seldom mentioned in the literature. However, the extent to which these factors may shape the leisure of never-married, childless women is not known. Chasteen (1994) also found that single women feel they are economically, socially, and symbolically left out of the mainstream culture, which affects their feelings of safety. Single women, unlike married women or women with significant others, often live on one income – their own - which is likely to be significantly less than the average man’s. For this reason, they find it difficult to afford quality housing in safe areas. Single women may also often feel like a “fifth wheel” when participating in leisure in social settings.

In contrast, and based on the research reviewed above, leisure may be a context in which to cope with or address issues of singlehood and to enhance quality of life. For example, leisure activities may provide important social networks for single women. Relationships with others affect life satisfaction in multiple ways and pursuing or enhancing relationships may take place during leisure. If never-married women have higher life satisfaction because they have “learned” how to be alone and because they are enmeshed in other roles (Chasteen, 1994), it is likely that their perception of leisure will be different than widowed or married women. The fact that life satisfaction is highest among the never-married women and they are more likely to be more highly educated, in higher status occupations, and socially active (Hoeffer, 1987; Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Cramer, 1993; Chasteen, 1994; Goldman et al. 1995; Joung, 1996; Waldron & Lye, 1989; Williams, 1992) may affect never-married women’s perception of leisure. So far, no study of this nature has been conducted.

Overall, research is lacking that relates specifically to never-married, childless older women’s leisure experiences and meanings. While life satisfaction and perceptions about being female, older, single and childless may shape leisure activities, to what extent and in what ways are unknown. This study is an attempt to begin to explore these issues.
CHAPTER THREE
Methodology
This section begins with a discussion of the interpretive paradigm and an explanation of why it is used. In this explanation the interpretive paradigm is contrasted with the positivistic paradigm. Reliability and validity also are discussed as they relate to the interpretive paradigm. The methods and procedures used in this study follow and included in this discussion are a description of the (a) pre-interview procedures and the process of participant recruitment, (b) the conduct of the interview, and (c) the process of data analysis.

Quantitative and Qualitative Paradigms
Until recently, the dominant paradigm for studying leisure has been positivism. In fact, in a content analysis of the Journal of Leisure Research Henderson (1991) found that of the studies published, only 7 percent used qualitative methods. Because leisure is holistic, pluralistic, and has changing meanings, Henderson (1991) stated that the study of it requires an expanded view of appropriate research questions and methods. The research question is what should dictate the methods used (Henderson, 1991; Silverman, 2001). Given that the focus of this study was on individual’s perceptions of leisure, an interpretive paradigm (using qualitative methodology) was used. Specifically, the question examined was: What does leisure mean to older women (i.e., 65 years and older) who have never been married and have never had children? This section compares and contrasts the positivistic and interpretive paradigms.

First and foremost, quantitative research tends to focus on analysis, whereas qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning of an experience to the participants in a specific setting (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). The positivistic paradigm characterizes truth and knowledge as being external, and contends that the facts making up truth or knowledge can be categorized and separated. In essence, independent parts can be added because the whole is not greater than the sum of its parts. On the other hand, the interpretive paradigm requires the researcher to seek to describe, understand, and develop meaning for a phenomenon, not measure it. Questions studied are not based upon any preconceived hypotheses; rather qualitative research strives to develop or generate hypotheses during the process of data collection (interviews, observations) and analysis;
that is, it is an inductive process, not a deductive, hypothesis-testing process (Silverman, 2001; Thomas & Nelson, 2001).

Whereas truth is assumed to be singular and universal (i.e., there is a truth) in the positivistic paradigm, the interpretive paradigm assumes multiple truths or realities. This is because truth is seen as residing within an individual’s interpretation of a situation or behavior that may well change across time and contexts. Qualitative research has a preference for meanings rather than behavior, and attempts to document the world from the point of view of the people studied (Silverman, 2001). As Denzin and Lincoln (1997) state:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p.3).

This approach is appropriate to use in this study, which seeks to understand how older, never-married, childless women experience leisure, particularly because the lack of research done in this area and the wish to not use pre-existing understandings of women’s leisure as the norm. Until one begins to understand how this population experiences and makes meaning of leisure, one cannot adequately provide leisure activities for this group or seek to enhance their quality of life through leisure.

From a quantitative point of view, “facts” are directly given to careful, unprejudiced observers via the senses (Chalmers, 1999). However, when studying women’s leisure, there may be no one “fact” or “correct” way that women perceive leisure. As noted above, the qualitative paradigm accepts that there are multiple truths and that the reality resides within the individual. Thus, one way to find each woman’s reality and experience of leisure is by asking her to tell her story. This study did so through semi-structured interviews.
Qualitative research is criticized for a lack of reliability and validity but only if judging qualitative research by the standards or assumptions of positivism. Certainly trustworthiness of study results is the overarching goal. Silverman (2001) warns against anecdotalism, where researchers may report results that appeal to a few, telling “examples” of some apparent phenomenon, without any attempt to analyze less clear – or even contradictory – findings. This leads to questions about the validity of much of qualitative research. However, the “problem” lies not within the qualitative methodology itself, but rather in the fact that the methodology requires a different standard by which to measure validity and reliability. Many qualitative researchers argue that positivist methods are but one way of telling stories about society or the social world. These methods may be no better or no worse than any other methods; they just tell different kinds of stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 1997).

One advantage an interpretive approach holds over the positivist is the intensive firsthand presence of the researcher to clarify for the participant any questions asked. Simultaneous data analysis and member checks were used in this study to strengthen the credibility of interpretations (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). While I was analyzing data, my thesis advisor also analyzed the data. After we both had analyzed the data, we compared and contrasted our interpretations of the women’s “leisure stories.” This simultaneous analysis also served to ensure that the researcher’s findings made sense to someone else, and that it was possible to come to the arrived-at conclusions based on the data collected. In addition, after the initial analysis of all interviews, the researcher sent the results to the study participants and asked some of them follow up questions regarding her interpretations (some participants opted not to have a second interview). “Member checks” allowed study participants to modify or verify conclusions. Face-to-face interviews with the participants also allowed the researcher to get closer to the individual’s perspective than a questionnaire would have allowed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1997).

In contrast to quantitative approaches, some researchers argue that the purpose of qualitative research is not to produce results that are generalizable to a larger population but to provide a “thick” description of a particular context or situation (in the case of this research, the leisure of a group of never-married, childless, older women) (Denzin &
Lincoln, 1994). However, Silverman (2001) argues that generalizability should be sought in qualitative research, and one way in which this can be achieved is through purposive sampling. This study employed purposive sampling, as opposed to random sampling, to obtain participants. Purposive sampling allows the researchers to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which they are interested. This is critical when studying such a narrow population: later-life, never-married, childless women. Another method to obtain generalizability is theoretical sampling, also used in this study (Silverman, 2001). One feature of theoretical sampling is choosing “deviant” cases, where the researcher avoids and overcomes the tendency to select a case that is likely to support an argument and instead seek out instances that go against the researcher’s theory (Silverman, 2001). This also helps avoid anecdotalism and provide a more accurate depiction of the population being studied.

As with validity, reliability requires a different definition in research based in the interpretive paradigm. Thomas and Nelson (2001) state that from the positivistic perspective, a test cannot be considered valid if it is not reliable; in other words, if the test is not consistent and does not repeatedly yield the same results, then it cannot be accurate or valid. From the interpretive perspective, reliability in the sense of consistency, is not necessarily expected as truth is constantly changing and multiple. Instead, dependability, or a fit between what data is recorded by the researcher and what actually occurs (Bullock, 1983) is sought. A number of techniques are suggested to increase dependability including “having a plan but being flexible with it, while documenting how the changes in the plan occurred” (Henderson, 1991), a second opinion in data interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1982), meticulous recording of observations and using verbatim accounts of what people say (Silverman, 2001), and member checks. To increase reliability, Silverman (2001) encourages tape-recording all face-to-face interviews, carefully transcribing these tapes according to the needs of reliable analysis, and presenting long extracts of data in the research report, including the question that provoked any answer. Further, the researcher needs to carefully describe how she/he came to the conclusions she/he did such that another person could follow the researcher’s analysis and come to the same conclusions (Henderson, 1991).
Certainly in-depth interviewing can be seen as expensive, time consuming, biased, and sometimes inefficient but the methods also provide some of the richest data (Henderson, 1991). Interviews are difficult to pretest, have unpredictable results because different people tend to respond differently, and are difficult to standardize and replicate. On the other hand, they offer many advantages by allowing the researcher to have a greater understanding of the complexities of social reality from a number of perspectives (Henderson, 1991). Within the interpretive paradigm, grounded theory is developed through data collection and analysis, which results in further data collection based on the previous analysis. This continues until a pattern or replication emerges. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) state, the researcher stops when theoretical saturation is reached. That is, once common themes keep emerging and no new information is obtained. In these ways dependability is established through the interpretive approach.

Qualitative researchers also face ethical challenges, which usually are a consequence of long-term and close personal involvement, interviewing, and/or participant observation (Lipson, 1994). One ethical challenge is that of informed consent: Do the participants fully understand what it means for them to participate in the study and have they consented to do so? Participants need to have enough information about the risks and benefits of participating in the study, the purpose of the study and any consequences (or lack thereof) by not participating in the study or choosing to discontinue once the study has began (Lipson, 1994). One way in which this issue was dealt with before beginning data collection was by taking a human subjects workshop. A proposal for and outline of this study was submitted to a human subjects review board, which reviewed the procedures and deemed them acceptable. The review board ensured a number of things, including that: research participants would have sufficient information to make an informed decision to volunteer; that the participants would be allowed to withdraw from the study at any point; that all unnecessary risks would be eliminated; and the benefits to society or the individual would outweigh the risks (Lipson, 1994). A letter of informed consent (see attachment A), which explained the study to the participants, helped the participants understand their rights. Another ethical issue that was encountered was that of anonymity. According to Lipson (1994), one of the safest ways to ensure anonymity is not to record the names of informants at all, as well as omit
such information from one’s field notes. Thus, the researcher assigned a pseudonym to each participant and used the pseudonym when analyzing data to identify and differentiate each participant.

Procedures

Pre-Interview and Recruitment of Participants

After presenting my research proposal to the Residents’ Board, I received permission to recruit older participants from *Independent Life* (a pseudonym to protect participant anonymity), a senior services corporation that operates several continuum of care retirement communities in the greater metropolitan area of a medium-sized Midwestern city. A flyer (see Appendix B) was developed, which described the study purpose and provided the researcher’s name and phone number. This was posted in four different *Independent Life* facilities. In addition, a director of one *Independent Life* community mailed the flyer to residents who fit the profile sought in the study participants’ population. A total of six women called the researcher upon reading the mailing. During this phone call, they agreed to participate in the study and a date and time were arranged, and the location of the participant’s house was given for the face-to-face interview. The purpose of the study was reiterated and any questions were answered. All those who called identified themselves as never married and childless. The snowball method was subsequently used as the initial study volunteers were also asked after the interview if they knew of any other women who also were childless and have never married. One participant provided a name and phone number for one other woman, bringing the total number of participants in the study to seven.

The participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire (see Appendix D) before the interview that asked for information on: their education level; whether they rented or owned their housing arrangements; their total household income in the last year; their age; their current work status [if currently employed, it asked their occupation, and if retired, it asked their previous occupation(s)]; how long they were employed; and whether they live in a large city, suburb, small city, small town, or rural area. The women were told that they had the right not to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable answering.
The researcher began the interview process after the pre-interview procedures, continuing with the seven volunteers as a possible starting number of participants. Later, data saturation indicated that no more than seven participants would be needed.

**Interview Sequence and Questions**

The interview session began with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and all participants were asked to sign a letter of informed consent (see Appendix C). Participants were told that they would be asked to participate in one hour-long, audio-taped recorded interview at the beginning of the study, and a possible telephone interview at the end of data collection to share my findings with them and answer any questions they may have. I explained that the interview would include questions about their leisure perceptions and activities. The letter of informed consent also explained this, and the fact that participation was voluntary, and that they could refuse to answer specific questions and could discontinue participation at any time. The researcher’s name and phone number were included on the informed consent letter, as well as the phone number of the researcher’s thesis adviser and the Office for the Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching at Miami University.

The letter of consent was formatted (i.e. type size, spacing) to be easily readable for those who may have had impaired vision. The participants were then asked to complete a brief socio-demographic questionnaire, which asked their name, age, living situation, level of education, income and occupation. After completing the initial paperwork and establishing preliminary rapport, the interview began. The interview was audio-tape recorded. The initial interview questions were very general and broad, allowing the participants to express what they felt was important to know about them, and to establish rapport and a feeling of comfort with the researcher (see Interview Guide, Appendix D). Throughout the interview, more probing and specific questions were asked, often based upon the participant’s responses in order to further delve into their leisure experiences. That is, interview questions varied somewhat from one participant to another based upon each participant's responses. However, the Interview Guide, which included sample questions, was used in each interview. Generally, all questions that were listed in the interview guide were asked of each participant, however, based on the flow of the interview some participants were asked follow-up questions that
others were not asked. Each initial interview lasted approximately one hour. Audiotapes of the interviews were destroyed upon completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Once all interviews were conducted and transcribed, data coding and analysis continued. Lofland and Lofland (1995) describe categories of analysis strategies. They are: social science framing; socializing anxiety; various forms of coding; memoing; diagramming; thinking flexibly. However, Lofland and Lofland also note that the researcher should use an adaptive approach when analyzing data:

We want also to stress that the six categories of strategies of developing analysis we detail are not used by every analyst and do not work for every analyst all the time. Instead, this array of strategies is a storehouse of possibilities from which to devise ways of working at analysis (and from which you might devise your own new ways). This being the case, you should employ a flexible and adaptive approach. These strategies are guidelines and pointers rather than exact specifications. Said differently, there is no single way to achieve analysis (p. 182, emphasis in text).

Thus, the strategies described by Lofland and Lofland (1995) were used as they intended: as guidelines. Data analysis is guided by the research question or purpose and the hypotheses that emerge from the data themselves. When beginning to code data, Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest that the researcher ask questions about specific topics in the data and about items in the corpus of information after data collection has stopped, including: Of what topic, unit, or aspect is this an instance? What question about a topic does this item of data suggest? What is this an example of? As a result, the word or set of words applied by the researcher to the item of data is a code. Coding begins the process of categorization and sorting data, and becomes the fundamental means of developing analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Lofland and Lofland describe three types of coding: housekeeping, analytic, and fieldwork. In this study the analytic form, which is emergent and experimental, was employed:

Especially in the early stages of a project, the worker is not particularly concerned about the eventual viability of a code or whether it will
ultimately make any kind of sense. The aim, instead, is to generate as many separate codes as one is prompted to and about which one can feel reasonably excited (p. 190)

During the coding phase, I used initial and focused coding. In the initial phase, I read and re-read the interviews, looking for what I could define and discover in the data, known as emergent induction of analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). After my initial coding commenced, I began to find main topics and then identified sub themes for the topics (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2001). This comprised the focused stage of coding. Using this approach, I first looked for topics that seemed to reoccur, and labeled them as themes. I also looked for “negative cases” of themes. As the themes emerged, it became apparent that they were situated in (or the women varied according to) life contexts; specifically, they appeared to emerge from a woman’s living or residential pattern (i.e., always lived alone, lived with someone until recently, lives with a friend). I then put the themes in an Excel document, grouping them according to these life contexts. Then, I regrouped the themes so all themes were on one page, separated by the life context. I also looked at the themes according to context and looked for any patterns and how leisure may be shaped by one’s life context. During this process of breaking apart the interviews, the entire interviews were constantly re-read to make sure that all data were used to discern how the data “fit” together. During the process, my advisor was analyzing the data as well and analysis and emerging themes were discussed to further increase trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the meanings of leisure for later life never-married, childless women. This chapter presents the results of this study beginning with a description of the participants. Next, the three categories or contexts of singlehood that emerged from the interviews are outlined and described. These categories of singlehood provided varying contexts for the women’s leisure. Following this discussion the leisure meanings that the women talked about are described. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the results.

Description of the Participants

The participants were seven never-married, childless women between the ages of 70 and 87 residing in the metropolitan area of a medium-size Midwestern city. Four of the seven women lived independently in a continuum of care retirement community and three of the women lived in and owned their own homes in suburban communities. Participants varied in education level: five of the seven were college graduates (one also had her Ph.D.), one had some college coursework, and one had completed high school. All participants were European American. Most of the women did not indicate their annual household income. For the two who did, annual household income ranged from $20,000 to $50,000. Below is a description of each participant in more detail (pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity) (see also Table 1).

- **Mae, 85:** Finished high school and had a few years of vocational training; is retired; worked as a secretary for 30 years; owns a home in the suburbs of a Midwestern city; did not report income. Lived with a family member until she passed away 10 years ago.

- **Jenny, 72:** Has a graduate degree; is retired; worked as teacher, principal, and director of a mental health center for 35 years; rents a cottage in a continuum of care retirement community; income $20,000-$30,000. She lives with another woman, Laura (below).

- **Laura, 76:** Has a PhD; is retired; worked as clinical psychologist for 40 years; rents a cottage in a continuum of care retirement community; income $40,000-$50,000. She lives with another woman, Jenny (above).
• April, 70: College graduate; is retired; was a manager of consumer services for 40 years; rents a cottage in a continuum of care retirement community; did not indicate income. Lived alone across her adult life.

• Joy, 76: Finished high school; is retired; worked 21 years in office sales, 13 as a nanny; did not indicate income; owns a home in the suburbs of a medium-sized Midwestern city. Lived alone across her adult life.

• Linda, 87: College graduate; is retired; professional librarian for 46 years; rents a cottage in a continuum of care retirement community; did not report income. Lived alone across her adult life.

• Bonnie, 70: College graduate; is retired; worked as consumer correspondent for 40 years; owns a home in a “village” that is part of the greater metropolitan area. Lived with a family member until 10 years ago.

Variety in How One Is Never-Married and Without Children

In analyzing the interview data it was clear that these women were not the same in “how” they were single/never married and without children and that these differences shaped and distinguished these women’s lives and senses of self. That is, this research revealed that while all these later-life women had never married or had children, their experiences of singlehood and not having children varied. Hence, the context of their leisure varied as well.

The women comprised three categories of singlehood: three had always lived alone, two had lived together most of their lives, and two had lived with a family member (sister or parents) all of their lives until the past 10 years due to the death of this family member. Those who had always lived with someone until recently were perhaps the most distinct. These women (n=2; Mae and Bonnie) placed the most emphasis on having a large circle of friends and seeing them as often as possible. However, time or leisure with friends was a source of both comfort and constraint. For example, Mae lived with her sister until she recently died. She said that now that her main social support is gone, having time with friends has become more important. However, she said that some of her friends have families and they talk about them – which sometimes makes her feel sad particularly around holidays, a time when many families get together. Bonnie, who lived with her parents until they died recently, also stressed the importance of maintaining
friendships. She stated that she feels her married friends have more constraints to leisure than she does due to family events and obligations they must attend. This affects her leisure time with her friends because she sometimes has trouble finding friends to socialize with who are not preoccupied with family engagements. These two women were the only ones who expressed any feelings of loneliness, and also preferred to be with other people rather than being alone, and said they would go out with friends every opportunity that they had. Both women liked to travel, mostly to learn about new places, have new experiences and to learn about culture and history.

The three women who had always lived alone (April, Linda and Joy), in contrast, seemed to value alone time more than spending time with friends or family. If given the choice, they often chose to be alone and were most content this way. All had a strong relationship or someone upon whom they could rely: one with her sister, who lived close to her, one who relied strongly on her housekeeper as her friend, and the other with the family for whom she was a nanny. Having a large circle of friends was not important to them, and both expressed that they were never bored or lonely and that they had always seen themselves as a “loner.” April, who worked in management before retiring, spent a lot of time working, sometimes 12-hour days. She also spent a lot of time with nieces and nephews. She said that she likes the freedom she now has to be able to do what she wants, when she wants. Joy grew up on a farm, and then worked in clothing retail until she was about 60 years old. At age 60 she became a nanny, which is also the time when her nieces and nephews had grown up and moved away. She also said that she likes that she is able to do what she wants, when she wants.

Linda, who worked as a librarian, likes to spend most of her time alone. Her favorite hobby is reading, mostly about art and theology. She says she is never bored and was raised to always find a way to entertain herself and make decisions alone. She said a drawback to being with someone is that she would have to “share” her time and decision-making capabilities. Linda says she prefers to do activities alone so that she may spend her time in that activity however she likes.

See, I never have – when I was a little girl if I said I was bored she (mom) would say, ‘Don’t tell me about it; go do something – go find something to do; there is a lot to do around here.’ She didn’t mean clean up the
kitchen or sweep up the floor. I honestly can say I have never been bored. And of course one of the things I always do if I am going some place and I am going to be stuck in a room, I always take something with me I am going to read – something I am interested in, not just what I can pick up. Once in a while I have to deal with what I pick up, but I usually try to – I really don’t have any trouble filling the days. People say, ‘Oh, what are you doing?’ And most of the time I just say, ‘Go away (laughing); I am doing fine. You go find something to do.’ Because they are not interested in what I want to do.

However, Linda also said that in order to do some things, she sometimes needs the help of other people for transportation. Because she has stopped driving, her leisure is limited. This seems to be the main reason she spends her time with other people – not because she necessarily wants the company (she would prefer to do things alone), but because she needs their help:

**Linda:** We go pretty regularly but there is not a whole lot of people interested in that (the museum).

**Researcher:** Really?

**Linda:** Or they are interested, oh I don’t know. I can’t quite decide what they are interested in. At the moment I am still managing to do things with my old friends.

**Researcher:** How often do you see them?

**Linda:** My old friends?

**Researcher:** Yes.

**Linda:** Oh, pretty often. I don’t know if it is on any kind of schedule. One old friend comes out here any time he thinks I am going to need some help. He helped me move. He decided how all these pictures were going to go up and I though he did a good job. These are all places I had from Europe. I don’t plan to be disappointed, if you know what I am saying, by my friends. Because everybody is under time constraints and all the people that are my age or even ten years younger are thinking, ‘Should I
drive?’ Or they don’t drive at night, so that just has to work itself out. I don’t think it ever will…”

Two women were roommates at the time of the interviews (Jenny and Laura). They have lived together all of their adult lives and said that they equally value their time alone and their time with other people, but said that much of their time was spent alone. However, much of their time is spent with each other, whether actively engaged or just cohabiting the same space. Neither woman expressed any feelings of loneliness, and both spend the holidays with each other or each other’s families; neither talked about any feelings of loneliness around the holidays. Jenny has a large extended family with whom she and Laura keep in close contact. Both live in a closely-knit community (the continuum of care retirement community, Independent Life) and help volunteer at the community’s social functions. Jenny said she feels free because she doesn’t have to think about what others want to do when making decisions, such as traveling or planning the day’s events. She also said she has the ability to donate to charity, due to having more financial resources, which she attributes to not having any family on which she must spend her money. Jenny served in the convent until midlife, and worked as the director of a mental health institution and a teacher. She described herself as very career-oriented and traveled a lot for her work. Laura and Jenny live together; they met in the convent and left the convent together, citing conflict of interest as the reason for leaving. Laura said she feels that married women don’t like having unmarried women around because they seem afraid that the unmarried women are after the married women’s husbands. She said that most of her friends have similar interests as her, except for a few things (like dinner parties). She was a psychologist, was very career-oriented and traveled a lot for work as well.

In contrast to Jenny and Laura, April and Joy, who had always lived alone, were comfortable with time alone and often preferred it. When asked: “About how much time would you say in a day or a week, would you spend with friends, family, your sister, or by yourself?” April said:

Most of it (time) is by myself, really. With friends and family, I don’t know, 20% of the available time that is including sleeping time. My sister and I were talking this morning and she said, “Do you want to come down
tonight?” … And I said, ‘No, I don’t think so (laughs).’ Since I have
retired I have definitely chosen to have more time by myself.
Lastly, Jenny and Laura, who lived together at the time of the study, often spent
time alone or with roommate and valued both forms of leisure equally. Jenny said:
Probably I don’t need them (friends) in the same ways. I have my support
systems in place; I don’t need them for validation of me.
The differences in perceptions of themselves, their lives, and their leisure may be
explained by Rice’s (1989) research on never-married, married, and widowed women and
her discussion of role-consistency theory. According to Rice (1989), widows have less
role consistency due to the loss of a spouse. In the current study, the women who had
always lived with someone until recently are similar to widows. Those who had always
lived alone as adults or always have and continue to live with someone are more like the
“never married” women or “married” women of Rice’s research because they have more
role consistency; that is, they have not had to cope with a change in lifestyle due to a loss
of a spouse or, in this case, friend or family member.
Bonnie and Mae each had a significant role change when they lost the family
members with whom they had lived most of their adult lives. While the other women
also had family members die, they did not live with them as adults. Thus, Bonnie’s and
Mae’s lives changed dramatically when they lost their family members. Currently, they
emphasized time with friends and wanted leisure was a context for friendships and being
with others; in so doing they reduced their time alone. Conversely, April and Joy had
always lived alone and seemed not only comfortable with this living arrangement, but
liked it and liked having time alone. This preference for alone time remained consistent
as their roles or life contexts also remained consistent. Similarly, Jenny and Laura had
lived together upon leaving the convent, and were accustomed to sharing their time and
space with another person; they were similar to Bonnie and Mae before Bonnie and Mae
lost their family members. At the time of the study, Jenny and Laura had a constant level
of support from each other. Because they lived together, being “alone” often meant still
having the other person in the house even when they were not interacting. This form of
aloneness is different than the other two groups: Bonnie and Mae generally felt more
alone when their family members with whom they lived died compared to when they
were alive. April and Joy did not have anyone living in their house, but because they always lived alone their adult lives, they were accustomed to being alone. In sum, the women’s life contexts seemed to determine whether leisure meant being alone or with others, which also seemed to affect whether they sought “surrogate” families.

Many of the women seemed to find surrogate families other than and sometimes as a replacement for their traditional nuclear family. The phrase “like family to me” emerged often, and seemed to be central to the leisure experiences sought by each woman. Having a surrogate family was seen most among the women who did not have any nearby relative. Those who did have nearby relatives, including nieces, nephews and brothers and sisters, did not express having surrogate families, but did mention the importance of their relationships with their relatives. Bonnie, who lived with her parents all her life until their deaths, seems to fill a void that her parents’ absence brings:

**Bonnie:** My mother was my best friend; she was more like a sister and we – all our lives – since my dad died in 1962, we did a lot of traveling to Europe and Hawaii, with a couple that we met on one of the trips and we just had a very good time with these people. And but then mother’s health failed and I was really taking care of her for about the first – no, she died in about ’94 so for about the previous 6 years I took care of her here. So my socializing and so forth were rather limited because of taking care of her. And since I don’t have any brothers or sisters I was the main caregiver. But I would do it again but it was just sort of limited. So now that I am free to do what I want, it has been a very nice retirement.

**Researcher:** O.k., good. Did you travel much before you were retired?

**Bonnie:** Very much, yes. I traveled with my friends and my mother, mostly on tours. And we had a real good life together so I remember that with fond memories.

Now that both parents are gone and she comes home to an empty house, her days are filled with socializing with other people; friendships are extremely important to her, and she often finds groups of people she calls “family.”

I mentioned I am in cardiac rehab in Jewish Hospital and they more or less sort of become a family to me. In fact, I visited one of our members
yesterday in the nursing home and I am going to bring him some ribs back from (French restaurant) tomorrow!
Later Bonnie spoke of this again…
I forgot to tell you what I do mainly! I am a volunteer at (a nursing home) … That is where my mother died. I got to the point where I just couldn’t handle her anymore. She was a tiny thing, but I couldn’t handle her. And she died there. She was there three months and one of the women down there, after mom died, she said to me, “I bet you are gonna’ come back; I bet you are going to be a volunteer here.” Because I was there every day. So I started there nine years ago and I volunteer there every Friday and a lot of times in between in activities … I help them wheel the chairs and work at happy hour and help serve the refreshments – that sort of thing. I really enjoy that too. It keeps me out of trouble and off the street! Oh, I enjoy it. That’s like a whole new family too because a lot of people have been there for years and I know them by name. A lot of people die regularly unfortunately, but we always have a new crop coming in and I really enjoy it.

Friendships also became very important to those who had the least role consistency, as if in effort to replace or fill in for the lost family members with whom they had always lived. Bonnie also seems to use friendships to fill in where her family used to keep her company. She said she felt a certain level of loneliness, even though she says she is used to being single, but that it still would be nice to have someone to talk to and not always “come home to an empty house.” This is where friendships seem to become more important to her:

So I am really blessed to have good friends because with no brothers or sisters, or children or nieces or nephews, I am pretty much solo so I am really happy to have all those friends. I work at friendship though, I try to keep it active and initiate a lot of events.

Unlike Bonnie, Joy had brothers, but they all have either passed away or moved. She also had a “favorite” niece and nephew who she often took care of, gave presents,
and with whom she spent a lot of time, but as they got older she began to look for other ways to fulfill her love of children; that is when she became a nanny:

**Joy:** Well, I wasn’t trained in computers. It was back when they were just coming in, and I was 60 years old – who was going to hire a 60-year-old in office work? And I didn’t want to go back to the nights of sales and I love children. In fact, I had dinner with this family last night – 14th birthday of the younger one, and they are like my family. So it was an enjoyable time.

**Researcher:** How did you know about this family?

**Joy:** Really, I answered an ad in the paper. She was the vice president of Lazarus and he was a salesman and often had to work at night so I stayed with the children whenever they needed someone. The children, until they got a little older, they didn’t know who their parents were; they were very close to me and still are.

Jenny and Laura who lived together were like each other’s family. In addition, Jenny had an extended Italian family who she saw often, and Laura seemed to “adopt” Jenny’s family as her own. Jenny said:

> I consider us (she and Laura) a family. And her family and my family – her kids call me aunt, my nieces and nephew consider her an aunt, and so we are close to one another’s families.

In sum, everyone seemed to have some sort of family, whether that was through nieces and nephews, through a good friend, or through social groups and organizations. The way in which these women sought family seemed to be dependent on their life contexts: those who had cousins, brothers, nieces and nephews did not discuss having any other friends or groups that were “like family;” those who lived with someone else saw that person as “like family,” as well as had extended families to visit and thus did not express anyone else being like family; and those who lived with family until recently seemed to turn toward friends to help fill the need for the closeness of family.

**Leisure Meanings**

The focus of the study was on meanings of leisure and such were discussed throughout the interviews. While these meanings did not seem to be distinguished by the
“categories of singlehood” just discussed, how one pursued leisure and did vary by these categories. Meanings that emerged were leisure as self worth, nurturance, challenge, doing that which is not required, going away/escape from, and constraint. These are presented below.

**Leisure as Self Worth**

For all of the women, leisure was a means for creating a feeling of self worth. Often this feeling was generated through volunteering, as five of the seven women volunteered regularly. Laura said:

> It (volunteering) makes me feel as if I am still valuable, doing something.

Other experiences of self worth during leisure came through yard work and being able to stay physically active. Joy said:

> I own my own mower, do all my own housework. I think for 76 that’s pretty good … I have a pretty good size lawn, but I can mow it in little under an hour with a push mower; pretty strong that way.”Linda found self worth through studying and critiquing art, and reading more than 50 books per year:

> Plus the fact that I really did like the library work and I have always been interested in books, and I like being able to introduce students to what the library held for them. I always said that nobody knows what’s in your head, or your questions, except you. And if you don’t know where to find the answers, you are stuck, because you don’t know how to put your – most people don’t know how to formulate the question … it’s better to be able to look for it yourself

**Leisure as Nurturance**

Another sub-theme was leisure as nurturance. Many of the women talked about their participation in volunteering as leisure and experienced this as nurturing activity, an opportunity to help others. For some of the women, this leisure meaning may have reflected a lifelong orientation toward nurturance – perhaps as an outcome of social norms that stressed such interests for this generation of females (Henderson, 1991). For example, four women “chose” professions characterized by nurturance: a psychologist, a director of a mental health institution, a nanny, and a librarian for a local high school. Joy, who was a nanny for several years, said:
In fact, I had dinner with this family last night – 14th birthday of the younger one, and they are like my family … The children, until they got a little older, they didn’t know who their parents were; they were very close to me and still are.” Laura, the psychologist, also spoke of the opportunity for nurturance her profession provided and the enjoyment she gained from this:

It was really fun to see how with just a little assistance, how women especially, could learn how to interact with their kids and not be afraid to take a stand on issues and they all seem to want to be liked by their children and that was a big hurdle for them … it was fun to see how they could develop a relationship as a parent with their children. In addition, some of the women in speaking of their leisure said that they liked to take care of their nieces and nephews by seeing them regularly and taking them to social events, and some were called upon to take care of their parents or siblings.

**Leisure as Challenge**

Another sub-theme was leisure as a form of challenge. Whether or not a woman expressed this meaning of leisure seemed to depend more upon her education level than upon her life context. For example, those with the highest levels of formal education liked intellectually stimulating activities such as crossword puzzles, reading (mystery novels, non-fiction, biographies), and studying art. Bonnie, who worked in a communications department, said:

We went to (historical area), the first one; I am a history buff so I really enjoyed that – going out on the battlefields and we would hear lectures in the morning about the battles and then we would go out to the battlefields. It was sad, but I enjoyed that. And then we went to one in (Beach) … conservative politics and the history of jazz. So that is why I went – I am a jazz fan.

Linda, a librarian, expressed feeling challenged when reading books:

You do learn a lot through reading, but you also learn to …. You know to pivot this against this. You learn to say, ‘Well, that book I read last week is all wrong according to this author.’ … you don’t have to pester other people with your questions; that’s a good reason for reading.
The women with the lowest levels of formal education either were challenged through physical activity, or did not mention any intellectually stimulating activities. For example, Joy said she likes doing housework as a form of leisure:

I own my own mower, do all my own housework. I think for 76 that’s pretty good…I have a pretty good size lawn, but I can mow it in little under an hour with a push mower; pretty strong that way.

That Which is Not Required

The women also spoke of leisure in ways similar to Samdahl’s (1988) notion of pure leisure: low role-constraint and high self-expression. When asked “What do or would you define as pure leisure?” all said that leisure was something that was not required and that it is done by choice. That is, it was the freedom to do whatever one wanted, however one wanted, and when one wanted. Such leisure experiences yielded feelings of please, enjoyment, relaxation, and/or renewal. This was the case for April:

Well, it’s (leisure) not required. I don’t have to do it. It brings me pleasure – something that I enjoy. I don’t have anyone watching over me, telling me how to do it the way I want to. If I want to stay up until 2 a.m. and read a book, I do it! So that is all kind of tied in with leisure.

Laura expressed similar feelings. This freedom of being able to do what one wanted seemed to contrast their lives when they were working. Because all of the women worked full-time when they were younger, some noticed a contrast of their time when it used to be constrained by work, and now, when they are not constrained by work. Laura said:

Researcher: When you think about the word leisure, what comes to mind?
Laura: Probably reading and music (laughs). Um…I guess because I never got time really to myself when I was working. I don’t want you to think I worked 24 hours a day or something but it was like when I wasn’t working there was so much reading, you know professional reading and stuff connected with the mental health center that I wouldn’t say there was much leisure.

Researcher: So you didn’t consider that type of reading leisure, it was kind of …
Laura: (Shakes head no). Well, I enjoyed it, again it was necessary, but it was all directed in one way, but no I thought of leisure more when I was working as vacation time or um...going to the symphony or the opera or something like that. Leisure now I guess is doing more what I want to do because there aren’t any things I really have to do … And I enjoy that because it is just something I want to do, there is no pressure to do anything you don’t want to do.

Some said it was a break from routine, and that it was relaxing and a means for rejuvenation. Jenny said that leisure was a state of mind and a withdrawal of the self:

Well, it (leisure) is a connector for me; if I’m tired or I am tense, I find God outside and it becomes very peaceful for me. If I am hiking through the woods or up a mountain, all of it, it just rolls off me. I am sort of free, and feel very comfortable…. I am not sure leisure is just a lot of things you do; it is almost like a state of mind, to be able to withdraw yourself and just relax. I don’t have to be doing something to be at leisure. And when I started thinking about this I started thinking about all the things I do for fun and I think that’s not necessarily it. It is what do you do to relax, sort of renew.

Going Away/Escape From

When asked what their ultimate leisure experience would be, all but two described it as going somewhere. The only two who did not describe their ultimate leisure experience as traveling were the two who currently lived together, had the fewest perceived health constraints, extensively traveled when they were employed, and occasionally traveled now. For those who had more perceived health constraints, traveling seemed to represent the ultimate freedom: the freedom of spontaneity and freedom from physical constraints. For April, traveling represented both of these freedoms:

The only thing I can think of is if I could get back to traveling again. And I have to get this (her knee) a little better to continue to do that. Because I did enjoy traveling. Even, as I mentioned, I would take a bus trip by myself; there were always other people you could talk to if you wanted to
talk or you could curl up in your seat and read a book … but I would like
to be in better health and that would make it perfect.” At age 87 and the
oldest of the participants, Linda also has heart problems. For her, traveling also would be
her ultimate leisure experience:

My ideal is to make a plan, call up an airline and take off. I can’t do that
anymore … I can’t take for granted that I can manage it by myself. … I
don’t have that energy. I mean I don’t know, I could sort of fall down, I
mean literally fall. So what I would do as a choice in previous times is
different than what I can do today.”

In these two cases, the women describe a longing for the ability to be spontaneous
and not be constrained by their health or confined to a certain region for fear of falling or
hurting oneself. The actual act of traveling seemed to be paramount to define their
leisure experience, more so than what they did during their trip.

For the two women with the least limiting health problems, Jenny and Laura, their
description of their ultimate leisure experience was different than all the other women.
Their ultimate leisure experience was characterized by the feelings they got from being
on a trip, more so than the act of traveling itself. Because they were able to travel and did
not perceive themselves as constrained by health issues, the act of traveling was not as
important. For Laura, traveling was not mentioned. When asked to describe her ultimate
leisure experience, Laura said:

Probably a good book and um, and I love to have good music in the
background. Sometimes I just listen to music and watch the birds and
squirrels and what not. I think it would be reading a good book with some
really good music.

Jenny, on the other hand, did include traveling in her answer, but her answer
differed from those who perceived themselves as constrained by health issues:

**Jenny**: Ultimate? Good grief! Be on the ocean, in a tropical setting.
Hawaii (laughs). Just sort of laid back and Hawaii is laid back. Have you
been there?

**Researcher**: Yes.
**Jenny:** The nice mix of people. I would like the world to be a lot more polite, where you live and let live and that was my experience in Hawaii. I don’t know if it is that way all the time, but I would like there to be more peace in the world amongst people.

For all the women, the ultimate leisure experience appeared to be a form of escape; from what, though, is what differed. For those with health constraints, traveling represented an escape from having health issues and being confined by them. For those who did not perceive themselves as having health problems, their ultimate leisure experience was an escape from the everyday world and a vehicle that allowed them to withdraw from everyday life and just relax, free of stress.

**Leisure as Constraint**

Leisure also meant constraint. Five of the seven women described various constraints to leisure. The two women who lived together said they did not feel they had any constraints to leisure, and that leisure seemed to flow into everything they did. April spoke of this as well and talked of a significant change in her leisure time after she retired:

**April:** A weekend is the same as any two days during the week, really. I get up, I have breakfast out, you know I can go shopping or come home and do things, and I have a little group of people that have also retired and we get together every couple months. And have lunch and talk about the good old days, except these days are just as good (laughs). So weekends are not any different anymore. Sometimes it is hard to think, “Is it Saturday? Or is it Wednesday?”

**Researcher:** Do you like it like that?

**April:** Yeah, yeah… Ok. I am a very regimented person so I make a list of everything I have to do everyday. So I wonder if I didn’t have to, because a lot of times my day is constrained by working, so if I didn’t have that, maybe I wouldn’t… Well, one of the things I would do when I got into the office was to make my list for the day. And then I also had a list for the month, and a list for the year; set goals. I make shopping lists, but other than that I don’t do a list anymore because that was a constraint;
that was something you had to do. And I definitely don’t have to do anything. And I don’t have stress anymore in my life. I have a friend I talk to a couple of times a week, and things always go wrong for her. And I just can’t understand why so much goes wrong for her because I don’t have any problems like that.

**Researcher:** Like what types of things?

**April:** Well, she gets her insurance premium and she sees that they have increased the amount of her premium. And the explanation – she doesn’t understand the explanation, so she calls up and they explain it to her, and she has no option of paying the increase premium so she pays it. But, my insurance company is not that way. They usually call me and say, do you want to increase your premium or the value of your property? And we talk about it and do it or not.

**Researcher:** That’s nice. Well, how would you say your leisure time compares to other women you know? Now, and maybe before when you were working.

**April:** Well, my sister is a lot busier than I am because she volunteers 2 days a week and she belongs to a couple of women’s groups and is more committed. She has a husband. Even this friend that everything seems to go wrong for has a garden club and what else does she have… oh, bridge club, and things that she has to do, and I don’t really feel that way, that I have things that I have to do.

**Researcher:** Because you don’t want to have things that you have to do?

**April:** Yes.

**Researcher:** So would you say you have any constraints to leisure?

**April:** Well, just myself.

**Researcher:** Yourself?

**April:** Yeah, if I don’t feel well, I won’t do it. If I have something planned, and I do have a few health problems and I don’t feel great, I will call and cancel. I don’t feel though I have to do things anymore.

**Researcher:** So, if you have a constraint, it would be your health?
April: Yes.

Researcher: But the other side is you don’t feel you have to be obligated to things.

April: Yes.

Researcher: Do you think you always felt that way?

April: No. No. I always felt obligated to do things; get my work in on time and to be a responsible manager. And now, maybe I don’t care as much. But I really enjoy my life right now, and I don’t – you say do you have enough time – and I feel that I have the time to do what I want to do.

Researcher: Do you ever think about how you are today and your happiness now and thinking, if it was possible if you could have done it earlier?

April: Oh, well I have always had a theory that what you should do is be able to travel when you are young, somehow have the money, you can travel because when you get old, you may have the money but you don’t feel as much like traveling as you did when you were young. And sometimes older people feel they need the security of a job, something to do, someplace to go. But I think it is kind of reverse of what it should be!

For the two who had lived with someone until recently, they said that safety, health and lack of a travel companion kept them from their leisure activities. Bonnie said that because many of her friends were married and had children and grandchildren, she found it difficult to spend as much time with her friends as she would like, as they often were engaged in family affairs. When asked how her leisure compared to most other women she knew, Bonnie said:

Most of my friends, like in club, are married and they have children and I can hear them saying, “When I have grandchildren, I am not going to be tied down with them.” Well, it’s different when most of them have them (laughs). I would so most of them spend several days a week getting their grandchildren while their mothers work and I understand the need for that in this day and age, but they are much more constrained in what they can do. But, they have the activities with their family that I don’t do, like the
birthdays with the family and weddings and so forth, and first
communions and that sort of thing. But they are more tied down, I would
say, as far as leisure.

**Researcher:** How do you think your friends’ leisure lives – being a little
different than yours – how do you think that shaped your leisure time?

**Bonnie:** Well, we still manage to go out. Like I went out to this concert in
Arlington Sunday and I went with two women who are both widows and
have children and grandchildren and they manage to get out once in a
while, so we can work it in sometimes, but probably not as much as I
would like or they would like.

Bonnie also felt she was constrained by her friends, not because of their lack of
time, but their lack of interest in what she liked to do:

That’s a problem sometimes. I like to go to museums, but it’s not as much
fun if you have to go by yourself. Not everybody likes to do that and they
certainly don’t like to go with me because I read every word! It takes
forever to go through. But when you are by yourself you just have to bite
the bullet and do it or you would never get anywhere.

Linda had a similar experience. Linda has given up driving, which constrains
how easily she can get to places she wants to go. Now she has to either rely on friends
wanting to do the same things she does, or call a taxi to take her where she wants, which
can be a financial burden at times. Linda said:

Well, it all depends out here on transportation. For the most part, I have
stopped driving and after that sad accident out in California, I am more
convinced than ever that it is probably wise to stop driving. I’m 87, and if
I have an accident, they are going to throw the book at me automatically.
They are going to examine me, ask me questions, and the police are not
very nice to old people. And so, I mean there is a lot of things that I
would like to do that I have to see if there is anybody that wants to do
them besides me. Fortunately, I have a friend who goes to the symphony
on Friday nights and when he moves to Timbuktu that will be that.

**Researcher:** Can you take a cab?
**Linda:** Well, you can take a cab, but getting back is the problem and has been for years. I spend a lot of money for cabs and a substitute of a cab and if somebody takes me, I don’t feel like the just, you know I take them to dinner or I do something that is equivalent of what the cab fare would be.

Mae had many hobbies that were time consuming, such as quilting and china painting, but said she never had time to do these activities because she spent so much time meeting friends for social activities. Only one woman said she would not travel outside the United States because of the language barrier.

May and Joy – the two women with the lowest levels of formal education - were the only ones who experienced any subjective form of constraint. As noted earlier, Henderson (1991) states that there is a distinction between objective and subjective constraints to leisure (see also Harrington & Dawson, 1995). Mae, 85, expressed that she “had” to do certain activities, such as cleaning the house or gardening:

**Researcher:** If you could describe a typical weekday, what would it look like for you?

**Mae:** Fiddling around (laughs). Going to lunch, going to dinner and doing things you have to do. I mean, you know, to maintain a house. This morning I worked in the yard before I got called to get ready for lunch, so I really had to; the house was a mess!

On the other hand, the other women in the other categories had expressed no such constraint. While April made a distinction between work activities and leisure activities, she still expressed that the work activities can be worked into leisure activities.

**Researcher:** Well, we are talking about the word leisure – what comes to mind? How would you describe it?

**April:** Being able to do what you want to do, when you want to do it.

**Researcher:** So would that include laundry?

**April:** Well, I wouldn’t consider laundry a leisure activity. I mean there are leisure activities and there are work activities (laughs). Um, but, I do work the laundry into – I threw a load in right before you came; the laundry room is right inside the garage now so I don’t have to go down
steps anymore to get to it. And then I had a gift to wrap and did that, which is why I had the table out, and then I started reading, so I kind of just work it in, and if I don’t go back for another hour or two to take it out, OK, so there is a few wrinkles, but that doesn’t make a big difference to me – it’s clean!

**Researcher:** So you can leisurely do your laundry.

**April:** Yes.

The difference between the way the women perceive an activity as work and how they manage it throughout their day is what distinguishes one activity as a constraint and another similar activity as just something to work into the day. Mae decided if there was work to be done, she was going to do it whether she wanted to or not, while April found a way to work it into her day and would take breaks from the “work” so that she did not perceive it as a constraint to other things she wanted to do.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the life course or context of these women’s lives shaped their leisure lives. The two women who were housemates might be seen as the equivalent of some “married couples” in that they often spent most of their free time together. The two women who always lived alone preferred having “alone time,” and seemed content being alone. The two women who had lived with someone until recently may be seen as similar to some who have experienced divorce in that they had to adjust to the role change of losing a sibling or parent. As a result, they said they often felt lonely, especially around the holidays, and preferred to have a large group of friends that they could go out with often.

Meanings of leisure included leisure as self worth, nurturance, challenge, pure, going to/escape from, and constraint. There were consistencies and differences among the women in their discussion of these meanings. Traveling represented the ultimate leisure experience for many of these women, perhaps because it represented freedom from health constraints. The main reason the women no longer traveled was due to health concerns. This relates to Eisenhandler’s (1989) discussion of the centrality of health status to perceptions of being “old”
A change in health is often the precipitating factor in the shift of identity and social time because it emphatically transforms the individual’s relationship and ties with the social world as well as with the life she has lived and the life she expects to live by blocking typical conduct (p. 164).

Due to some of the women’s health concerns, they were less able to travel as often and as spontaneously as before they had health problems. This also meant that they were less able to keep pace with the “wider community of time,” causing them to “fall out of step with the flux of time,” experiences that eventually “entrapping and enfeeble” the individual (Eisenhandler, 1989).

In the next chapter these results are discussed further in relation to previous research. The limitations of the study implications for future research and practice are also presented.
CHAPTER FIVE
Discussion

This study was conducted in order to gain insight into later-life, never-married, childless women’s leisure experiences and meanings. Previous research on the lives and leisure of women who are or had been married and who had children, as well as that exploring the impact of marital status on women’s life satisfaction, health, and social networks, provided the initial framework for this study.

It was initially thought that these women, because they had never married nor had children, might perceive leisure differently and have different leisure meanings than women who were ever-married and had children. However, it was found that these women were almost no different than other older women. That these later life women did not perceive their leisure experiences much differently than later life women of different marital and parental status may be due to the fact that many ever-married later life women are also single due to loss of a spouse through divorce or widowhood. Overall, it was extraordinary how “ordinary” these women’s lives were, which was the most significant finding of the study.

The current study found that experiences and meanings of leisure were shaped by the women’s “singlehood status” (i.e., their varying experiences of never marrying and having children). This finding may be explained using the research of Rice (1989) who found that role consistency played a large part in the life satisfaction of never-married, childless women over age 65. When comparing widowed women and never-married women, Rice (1989) found that the never-married women had higher life satisfaction. She attributed this to role consistency, of which widows had less in at least one area of their lives because of the loss of their spouse at one point in time. The never-married group had developed alternative lifestyles over a period of time and did not have to make as many major changes as a result of growing older. The widows, on the other hand, did have to make a major change in self-identity. While most research groups together the never-married women with the ever-married, findings of the current study indicate that the never-married group is diverse in terms of its role consistency and should include subcategories of “never-married.” In other words, the category of never-married single women could take on many meanings, including never-married but cohabitating, never-
married but used to cohabitate with someone, and the most straight-forward meaning of never-married – lives alone and always has across her adult life.

Life Contexts

The research showed that while the women in this study were all never married and without children, they did not necessarily see themselves as without families. Goldberg et al.’s (1986) notion of “substitute families” seems to apply to this group of never-married, childless women in that three distinct categories emerged: Those who had always lived alone – equivalent to the “never-married” group; those who had always lived with someone – equivalent to the “married” group; and those who had lived with someone until recently – equivalent to the “widowed” group.

Based on these life contexts, the women formed their relationships accordingly, thus affecting their leisure time, perceptions and activities. While Burr (1979) found that single women often used relationships with other single women as validation of their singlehood, this was not found to be the case in this study. For the “always lived alone” and the “always lived with someone” groups, relationships were not consciously central to their leisure. Furthermore, the “always lived with someone” group specifically said they did not need friends to validate their sense of self, and the “always lived alone” group preferred having alone time over spending time with friends. The “always lived with someone until recently” group found friends to be important and the center of their leisure activities, but seemed to do so to cope with their role consistency fluctuation as opposed to validating their singlehood. Most of the women seemed to accept their singlehood and not regret never getting married, while one seemed ambivalent about it.

Baker (1968) found that occupation was a way of creatively contributing to society and could compensate for the lack of a husband and children, enabling some women to live a fulfilled life. Cockrum and White (1985) also found that women’s educational and occupational accomplishments might help compensate for the fact that they are unmarried, such that. Further, Rice (1989) contends that occupation still would affect women’s life satisfaction today and would still affect them into retirement. This contention held true for the women in this study. Some women consciously chose to focus on their careers, putting their career first, including before the thought of getting married. Some of the participants even consciously decided that they would never marry
and had no interest in marrying, mostly because they did not want to give up the freedom of being able to do what they wanted, when they wanted and not having to answer to or consult a spouse. This fear of losing one’s freedom to make choices may be partly based upon the generation in which they grew up. One woman said she thought it was “perfectly dreadful” how when a woman marries, she doesn’t keep any part of her name – she becomes “Mrs. John Smith.” To her, this symbolized women losing their identity and independence when they marry, simply because in the 1950s, women were expected to marry, have children, and stay home with them. The mainstream and acceptable jobs for women were few, and most often included being a nurse, teacher, and/or secretary. Nevertheless, the women in this study did seem to use work to substitute or replace time they would have been spending with a family had they chosen to marry. Singlehood may be seen as a lifestyle chosen to facilitate these accomplishments.

Furthermore, the women who either lived with someone or had always lived alone did not express any feelings of loneliness. This parallel’s Rice’s (1989) theory of role consistency. Rice found that the never-married group appeared to have become “comfortable” with having time alone and did not experience it as a loss as much as the widowed group. In this study, those who had always lived alone or lived with someone currently said they did not mind having alone time, and sometimes preferred it. They were not hesitant to tell friends if they did not want to go out with them, whereas the two women who had lived with someone until recently said they always “go, go, go” and would cease any activity they were doing if a friend called and asked them for company. Again, this seemed to parallel Rice’s (1989) theory of role consistency among this group of never-married women.

Later-Life Concerns

Study participants faced similar issues to other older women who had been or continue to be married. The women in the current study who had lived with someone until recently faced the same challenge as separated/divorced and widowed women of relearning to live alone when their family member or cohabitant died. This phenomenon coincides with Rubinstein and colleagues’ (1991) discussion of constructed relationships; that is, the idea that those who have lost a spouse construct a new, non-kin tie in place of the spousal relationship. In their study, the never-married women saw their key relations
in one of two ways: they viewed them as problematic on a variety of bases because they were not the same as the cultural norm; or they saw them as equally or even more successful than central relations based on normative cultural premises. Thus, some of Rubenstein et al.’s informants argued that they had better relationships than those women with families of their own or that they had avoided the many problems associated with parent-child relations and with marriage. Most of the women in Rubenstein’s study felt that their relationships had great merit and authenticity and provided meaning in their lives. The women in the current study held similar views, in addition to having the constructed ties that Rubinstein et al. (1991) found in their study.

Hartman and colleagues (1990) found that another concern of later-life women was that of health. As the health of older women’s friends begins to fail, they themselves start becoming more cognizant of their own health status. This held true in the current study. The participants often compared their health to their friends’ health, or discussed helping others whose health was worse than their own. The women who had health problems also expressed how their freedom was limited due to health constraints, and this was a central issue for five of the seven women and circumscribed their leisure.

**Leisure Meanings**

The meaning of leisure and how the participants described leisure experiences were similar to Samdahl’s (1988) definition of leisure. Samdahl defined leisure as high self expression and low role constraint. Oftentimes the women said that leisure was something that was “not required” of them, and they did not have anyone “watching over their shoulder, telling them how to do something.” They also said that having the choice of which activity they chose to participate in was important to labeling an experience as a leisure activity. Another theme central to leisure meaning was having the freedom from any constraint in general, whether it was freedom from illness, work, or other responsibilities. These descriptions are characterizations of having low role constraint. In addition, the activities in which they participated in that they said they most enjoyed were ones in which they felt a sense of challenge or competence. For example, participants liked to do crossword puzzles, read, paint – all activities in which they felt they were able to express themselves in one form or another. Being able to have a venue
for self-expression also is in alignment with Samdahl’s (1988) definition of pure leisure as an experience of high self expression.

In contrast to what originally was expected, however, the meanings of leisure for these women were not much different than women who had or are married. Many of the more educated women used leisure to gain a feeling of competence or challenge, often through crafts or hobbies. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) found that sport is one of a number of leisure activities that may be a context for flow and a sense of mastery or competence. The women in this study also used leisure in the same way; several of the participants exercised regularly, either in organized groups or informally on hikes and walks. They seemed to feel a sense of mastery from these experiences.

Traveling was central to their leisure experiences, and seemed to symbolize their freedom of choice and freedom from health constraints. This theme is similar to Eisenhandler’s (1989) finding that older persons often find ways of “avoiding” or facing the fact that they are getting older. Because traveling embodies being “in step” with the rest of society, it represents the youthfulness they once enjoyed and took for granted at will. Losing their youthfulness makes them realize how much they did take it for granted and as a result, traveling whenever they want would be a way to prolong the inevitability of becoming older.

Leisure also was used as a means of recuperating and revitalizing themselves. Freysinger (1995) found that leisure for midlife, married women also meant time away from or separate from the family, and that leisure helped them to recuperate and revitalize themselves after spending much of their time devoted to caring or working for others. Five of the seven women in this study also found that leisure was a break from tasks that were more obligatory, and all of the women expressed a feeling of revitalization during and after a leisure experience.

Hayes (1981) found that professional never-married women were most likely to say that the lack of male companionship was the main ingredient missing in their lives, preventing a greater life satisfaction. The current study did not support this finding. Only two of the seven women ever mentioned any longing for male companionship, and both were in the “used to live with someone until recently” group. This may be due to their adjustment to relearning how to live alone now that their cohabitant had passed
away. Both women seemed to be ambivalent about the feeling, however. Both women claimed that they never wanted to marry anyone in particular, yet did express feelings of loss for not having married or loneliness when coming home to an empty house. Again, this may be due to relearning to live alone, since they were the only two of the seven who seemed to feel this way and belonged in the same life-context category.

Constraints to Leisure

The participants in this study experienced varying forms of constraint. Henderson (1991) discusses the distinction between objective and subjective constraints to leisure (see also Harrington & Dawson, 1995). Subjective constraints involve one’s perception that she should and should not engage in certain means of leisure, while objective constraints involve external factors, such as lack of resources. The women in this study mostly experienced objective constraints, such as fear for safety, lack of resources, and health problems. Two of the women often constrained themselves when they had a chore they had planned to do, and would do it whether they wanted to do it or not. Since all the women described leisure as that they wanted to do, making oneself do something because it was on her list of things to do seemed to be a subjective constraint. Two other women in this study said they had no constraints to leisure, and that leisure flowed into everything. These two women also lived together and reported having the fewest health problems. Even though one of the women had cancer, she still said she had no leisure constraints – rather, she did not perceive having any constraints. This may be due to having a higher quality of life than the “lived with someone until recently” group, since they did not have to undergo any major role change yet with the loss of their cohabitant. They also might not perceive any constraints because they usually spend time in the same space as each other, whether actively engaging with each other or simply existing in the same room or on the same trip. Having each other’s company may make them feel more secure about traveling or engaging in various leisure activities, whereas the other groups were alone and could have potentially worse consequences should they fall or hurt themselves due to possible lack of help.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The goal of the current research was to gain insight into never-married, childless older women’s experiences and meanings of leisure. Results of the current study must be
interpreted with this study’s limitation in mind. Further, these study limitations provide directions for future research.

Some of the meanings and perceptions that emerged from the data were no different than women who had ever married or had children, and some were no different than the little research that does exist regarding never-married, childless women. However, some of the themes identified were directly opposite of what the previous research had found. Of most significance, these women’s portrayal of their lives reveal that being never-married in old age is not a “life-condemning sentence.” All of the women seemed happy and all seemed to lead very “ordinary” lives; in fact, they were “extraordinarily” ordinary. Their leisure lives and meanings were similar to those of ever-married women, and had varying social ties just as any ever-married group of women would. This study supports that of Goldberg and colleagues (1989) in helping to dispel the notion that spouseless, childless elderly women are a neglected and isolated group. It also shows that it is vital to recognize, value and strengthen primary relationships that extend beyond the nuclear family. Future research should include qualitative studies that explore never-married, childless women’s quality of life and include the subcategories of singlehood that emerged from this research.

Lewis (1998) said it was of concern that there are not any life stage models that specifically mention the issues unique to single adults and proposed that a life stage model that did would help single women with their feelings of ambivalence. No data in this study suggested that these women were unable to progress upward through a life stage model such as Erikson’s (1963). In fact, one woman – a psychologist - had studied with Erikson, knew him personally, and taught his theory to her patients. She specifically said she did not feel that Erikson’s model was only for heterosexual or married people and that resolving intimacy versus isolation did not only mean physical intimacy. However, all of the participants were older than 70 years; they have had their entire lives to move through the life stage model. Thus, future research should include a longitudinal study that assesses never-married, childless women’s progression through a life stage model and compare it to women who have been married and/or had children.

Another way a longitudinal study would be helpful is if it compared the different categories of singlehood that emerged in this study to each other during early, middle,
and later life, specifically as these stages relate to role consistency. For instance, would the constraints among the categories of singlehood be more similar during early and middle adulthood? In this study it is not known whether those who had lived with someone until recently also felt they had no constraints to leisure before the loss of their cohabitant. In other words, was this difference actually due to role consistency, or was it coincidental? A longitudinal study would help answer this question.

Implications for Practice

From the research, there are numerous implications for practice. First, practitioners need to find ways to diminish two of the biggest constraints: transportation and lack of companions. Finding and offering affordable transportation would be a great help in the older population’s lives and enabling them to continue to do what they enjoy outside of the home. This may be particularly true for older women who also perceive constraints around safety. For those who liked to travel or engage in more cultural activities (arts, museum, historical landmarks, etc), they often seemed to have a difficult time finding someone who was interested in doing the same activity – not only just attending the activity, but also finding someone to share the activity with who would appreciate it as much as they did. Sign or bulletin boards, surveys and possibly in future generations even Web matching could help unite people with similar interests.

Another idea would be to offer activities or provide venues that help strengthen non-kin relationships. In this study, there seemed to be a dread of the dining room for those who lived in retirement communities. The main reason seemed to be the lack of a companion with whom one could share dinner time. One way to assuage this anxiety may be to have intermittently organized dinners with planned activities and assigned seating and mingling, so that all the residents have a chance to meet new people. On the other hand, for those who like spending time alone, there should also be activities available that are more individual, such as pottery, knitting, painting, etc. – activities that can be learned and performed alone.
## TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Life Context</th>
<th>Own/rent</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Always lived alone</td>
<td>Rents</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Always lived with someone until recently</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Lived with someone until recently</td>
<td>Owns</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Consumer correspondent</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Lives with another woman</td>
<td>Rents</td>
<td>$20,000-$30,000</td>
<td>Director of mental health facility/former nun</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Lives with another woman</td>
<td>Rents</td>
<td>$40,000-$50,000</td>
<td>Psychologist/former nun</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Always lived alone</td>
<td>Owns</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Retail sales for 21 years; Nanny for 13 years</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Always lived alone</td>
<td>Rents</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Manager of consumer services</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Volunteers needed to participate in a study about leisure

If you are a never-married woman who does not have children you are invited to participate in this study about women and leisure. I will be asking you questions about your perceptions of leisure (or free time) and what you like to do during your free time and why.

All you have to do is spend one hour with me, answering questions on the topics of free time and leisure; you can choose the date and location. If you are interested in helping those working with older adults better understand the lives and leisure of older women, please contact Merrin at 513-529-8175.

This study is being conducted as part of the requirements for my master’s degree in Health Studies at Miami University, Valeria Freysinger, Ph.D., Academic Supervisor (513-529-2710).
Appendix B

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of my research on leisure. Again, the purpose of the study is to understand how women who have never been married and never had children perceive and experience leisure. Your contribution is very important!

This letter confirms our interview date, time and location. Please call me at 513-529-8175 should you need to change our interview date.

Date: __________

Time: __________

Location:______________________________________

I look forward to meeting with you soon!

Sincerely,

Merrin Jump
Appendix C
Letter of Informed Consent
Project: Leisure in the Lives of Never-married, Childless Women

A research project is being conducted by Merrin, a Master's student from Miami University, to determine what never-married, childless women perceive as leisure and what they seek from leisure-time activities. You are being invited to participate in this exploratory study. The initial interview will last one hour and will be audio-tape recorded (with your consent). You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time, and you have the right to not answer any questions you may be asked. In addition, choosing not to participate will not in any way change the services you are receiving from the center and/or retirement community. The researcher will use the data for her Master's thesis on never-married, childless women and their leisure perceptions. The researcher may quote you but will not use your name or any information that would identify you. The researcher also may contact you for a second, hour-long interview to confirm her interpretations of your first interview. Once the study is completed, the tape recordings will be destroyed. If you understand the objectives of this project and would like to participate, please sign below. If you have any questions at any time you may contact the researcher, Merrin, at 513-529-8175 or her advisor, Dr. Valeria Freysinger, at 513-529-2710. You also may contact the Office for the Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching at 513-529-3734 for questions about your rights as a participant. I appreciate your cooperation.

PLEASE READ AND SIGN BELOW:
I, ________________________________, agree to participate in the thesis study on never-married, childless women being conducted by Merrin, a PHS graduate student at Miami University. All information I provide may be used in a professional research project. I understand that the researcher may quote me but will not use my name or any information that would identify me. To this end, I understand that individual participants, as well as the PHS program, will be given false names to keep confidential
the participants’ and Miami University’s PHS program’s identity. I also understand that I
am under no obligation to answer any of the questions asked of me, and that I may stop
the conversation or discontinue participation in the study at any time without any
negative consequences.

Signature of Participant


Date

Signature of Researcher


Date

I agree to allow the researcher, Merrin, to audio-tape record my interview. I understand
that she will be the only person to review this tape. I also understand that any interview
statements I make will be considered confidential and used anonymously. That is, any of
my statements that are used in the oral or written presentation of the research findings
will not use my name or any information that would identify me. This signed consent
form will be kept in a separate file from the audiotapes and transcripts. The consent form
will never be linked back to my audiotape or to the transcript.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date
Appendix D

Interview Guide

Tell me a little about yourself.
Describe a typical weekday.
What is a typical weekend like for you?
Tell me about the importance of leisure in your life; how do you define it? Do you feel
you have enough, not enough, or too much leisure?
What activities do you enjoy doing at home?
What activities do you enjoy doing away from home?
Describe an experience that you would call "true leisure." What was happening? Who
were you with? How did you feel?
How would you compare your leisure to most other women that you know?
What do you hope to gain from leisure activities? That is, what do you get out of leisure?
What motivates you to do leisure activities? When you think about doing a leisure
activity, what is it that draws you to doing it?
Tell me about your friends; Do you enjoy doing the same activities? Are they also single?
Tell me about the priorities in your life that you have concerning work, leisure and
family.
What is your biggest constraint to having your leisure time?
If you could change some things about your life, what would they be?
What else is important for me to know in order to understand the role of leisure in your
life?
REFERENCES


