

"I Will Not Be Wearing Heels Tonight!"

A Feminist Exploration of Singlehood, Dating, and Leisure

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Abstract

Utilizing a feminist lens inspired by third wave feminism, this paper explores the gendered complexity of singlehood. To begin to unpack this complexity, I argue dating—a social practice commonly associated with leisure—is a useful conduit to achieve this end. Using autoethnography, I share personal narratives to illustrate the complexities and tensions I experienced negotiating singlehood as an adult woman and examine the ways gendered ideologies and expectations influenced how I performed womanhood in my own life. In so doing, I urge researchers to think about the diversity of ways gendered ideologies and expectations can discipline, constrain, and liberate single women's leisure lives and their engagement with dating. I also highlight why leisure researchers and feminist leisure scholars in particular should pay closer attention to exploring the diversity of ways single women may experience dating and its ties to leisure.

Keywords: *third wave feminism, singlehood, autoethnography, creative analytic practice (CAP), dating*

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He pulls up to the entrance of my apartment building and stops the car. I already know I'm not inviting him in. I don't want to seem too forward. Instead, I decide to wait passively, but intentionally for several minutes. We continue to talk and laugh. Finally, I move my right hand towards the car door and I slowly pull the handle. Part of me wants to make a break for it, but another interested part of me insists on staying.

"Okay, thanks. I had a nice time!" I say, as I glance briefly at him, then at the door. I look back at him again, take a deep breath, and spontaneously lean in. Our lips find each other's, stumbling at first, but then relaxing into a comfortable and familiar rhythm. I should be lost in the moment, but instead my stream of consciousness plays distractingly in my head: "Oh right, this is what it's like to kiss someone. This is nice. I'm kissing someone!! When was the last time I kissed someone? I hope he doesn't ask to come up. Would it be bad if he did? STOP!"

I pull away. "I should probably go," I note.

"Okay. I had a great time tonight. I will talk to you soon," he replies.

"Me too. And yes, let's talk soon." I reply, attempting to play it cool. I move out of the car, and give him a sheepish wave, before bolting toward the entrance of my apartment building.

In sharing this personal narrative, I reveal the tensions I experienced dating as a single, adult woman, tensions that I continue to question and reflect on. As a feminist, these tensions felt and continue to feel uncomfortable. Why did I not want to appear too forward when dating? Why did I choose to initiate a kiss? Why did my decisions adhere to, but also contradict traditional gendered expectations of dating, sometimes simultaneously? Why did my adherence to different gendered expectations at times feel more comfortable? With these ideas in mind, in this paper I unpack the tensions I experienced dating as a single, adult woman. More specifically, inspired by third wave feminism, I use autoethnography to share personal narratives of my own experiences dating. I argue dating is a useful conduit for understanding the complex ways stigmatization and pressures work with broader ideological influences and expectations to impact experiences of single life and leisure for women. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I focus on the complexity and tensions I experienced negotiating singlehood as an adult woman in my late twenties by examining the ways gendered ideologies and expectations worked to influence performances of womanhood in my own life. In so doing, I urge researchers to think about the diversity of ways gendered ideologies and expectations can discipline, constrain, and liberate single women's leisure lives and their engagement with dating. Second, I bring attention to why leisure researchers and feminist leisure scholars in particular should pay closer attention to exploring the diversity of ways single women may experience dating and its ties to leisure.

Social Justice and Singlehood

In recent years, there has been a strengthened focus in the leisure literature toward exploring issues of prejudice, oppression, and marginalization (cf. Mowatt & Schmalz, 2014; Stewart, 2014). In particular, many leisure researchers exploring issues of oppression stress the importance of considering the diverse ways leisure is lived as a way to enact social justice as an outcome of their research (Parry, Johnson, & Stewart, 2013; Parry, 2014). Social justice research, as described by Parry et al. (2013), works to identify "the specific end state of social change that accounts for power differentials" (p. 82). The growing body of leisure literature focused on doing social justice work has illuminated issues related to sexism (cf. Johnson & Samdahl, 2005; Parry, 2005), classism (Samdahl, 2011), racism (cf. Arai & Kivel, 2009; Glover, 2007; Johnson, Kivel, & Scraton, 2009), and ageism (e.g., Dupuis, Whyte, Carson, Genoe, Meschino, & Sadler, 2012) in leisure experiences and spaces (to name a few). However, this important body of work has yet

to consider the ways leisure practices and spaces are experienced for people who identify as romantically single. That is, people who are not involved in a romantic relationship and, although perhaps not actively looking for a romantic relationship at the moment, desire to be in a romantic relationship at some point in their lives.

Singlism is a term coined by DePaulo (2006) representing the "stigmatizing of people who are single—whether divorced, widowed, or ever single" (p. 2). DePaulo contended singlism represents a 21st century problem that has not been previously labeled or considered. Singlehood is often referred to as a troubled identity category (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) or deviant status (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2005) and the emotions most often attributed to single people are loneliness and sadness (Cobb, 2011). In addition to loneliness and sadness, people who are single are often perceived as immature, unfulfilled, unable to commit, (Budgeon, 2008), selfish, shallow, too picky (Bielski, 2013, January 12), narcissistic (Klinenberg, 2012), and envious of those who are coupled (DePaulo, 2006). Such stigmatization, argued DePaulo, manifests in the everyday lives of single people that also includes their leisure. She explained further, "That's one of the secrets to the persistence of singlism. It often manifests itself in the minutiae of everyday life" (p. 9), which is why it often goes unnoticed.

The stigma associated with singlehood stems from the social privileging of couple status (Cobb, 2011) rooted in the ideology of couplehood. More specifically, this ideology emphasizes the social value placed on the necessity of being in a couple and ties a person's social and cultural worth to her or his relationship status. The ideology of couplehood centers couplehood as the normative relationship status/category, wherein every person should want to be and strive to be in a couple. Couplehood also reflects the belief that being part of a couple represents happiness and fulfillment, thereby establishing it as the most important type of personal relationship (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

While all single people may face stigmatization in a couple-dominated society, some groups are more susceptible to judgement than others. For instance, there are gender differences that influence perceptions of singlehood. That is, women who are single and post-college/university are more stigmatized than single men of the same age (DePaulo, 2006). This gender difference is exposed in derogatory names for single women including husband hunter and spinster, that implies single women are desperate to find love, but ultimately unsuccessful (Douglas, 2010; Pozner, 2010). In contrast, single men who are post-college/university are often described as bachelors (Pozner), which has a positive connotation and in some cases may even elevate a man's social status. Thus, adult men often face less judgement or stigmatization of singlehood than women.

In addition to gender, age also influences experiences of being single. For example, single adults who have newly transitioned out of college/university undergraduate years face increasingly mounting pressures about the necessity of being part of a couple (Cobb, 2011; DePaulo, 2006; Klinenberg, 2012), as they are more likely to live independently (Bielski, 2013, January 12), are often working towards establishing a career, and have less time for leisure and socializing (Bogle, 2008, Kravertz, 2005). The changes and adjustments single adults experience demarcate adult experiences of singlehood from experiences of singlehood in the teenage and college/university years. Moreover, research shows single adults who actively put effort toward achieving the ideal "couple" status are less scrutinized than people who are single who do not (DePaulo). In other words, single people who are actively trying to get out of singlehood and into couplehood are less stigmatized. Subsequently, it is not surprising many single people are eager to move out of singlehood, are aware of the benefits of couplehood, and seek to establish themselves as part of a couple by engaging in different dating practices.

Most broadly speaking, dating has been considered a public practice (Eaton & Rose, 2011), based upon the intention of two people getting to know each other that might possibly lead to a romantic and/or sexual partnership with one another (Bailey, 1988; Eshleman & Wilson, 1995; Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007). Conceptualizations of dating over time have also been closely associated with leisure insofar as dating has been described as a leisure experience (Eshleman & Wilson, 1995), a means of engaging in leisure and recreational contexts, and a source of entertainment (Turner, 2003). Dating is also often described as a fun and enjoyable activity that people engage in freely to meet others (Eshleman & Wilson) and can involve the consumption of personal resources, such as time, as well as financial resources (Samp & Cohen, 2010). These conceptualizations of dating, when considered together, align closely with a definition of leisure by Stebbins (2008), who described leisure as an “uncoerced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both), use their abilities and resources to succeed at” (p. 4). Although dating is closely tied with leisure, little to no research to date has explored how, or if, dating is tied to leisure for single, adult women.

Using Autoethnography

My feminist lens is inspired by third wave feminism. In particular, I am drawn to the tensions, contradictions, messiness, complexities and ambiguities of women's experiences and identities that are examined in many third wave feminist accounts (cf. Spencer & Paisley, 2013). Moreover, feminists inspired by the third wave infuse elements such as diversity, pop culture, plurality, and personal narrative in their research (Parry & Fullagar, 2013; Thornton Dill & Kohlman, 2012) and emphasize the need for women to look at their everyday lives as important sources of research inspiration. Feminists inspired by third wave feminism also demonstrate a commitment to applying a critical lens to all aspects of their life, including discursive, institutional, and cultural practices (Snyder, 2008). As such, I am also drawn to research methodologies that enable me to look critically at my own life as a valid form of knowledge production (Ellis, 1999).

With these ideas in mind, I used autoethnography to shape a series of personal narratives that explore my own experiences negotiating single life as a late 20-something, heterosexual, white woman in the midst of completing her doctoral degree. Autoethnography “is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). It merges personally lived experience and ethnographical analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and it does this through stories, because people use stories to make sense of their worlds (Ellis). Therefore, it is no surprise the goal of autoethnography is to choose a topic that is meaningful and to write honestly, evocatively, and vulnerably on the topic, considering both the emotional and sensory depth of the experience (Ellis; Shelton, 1995).

I began my process of autoethnographic writing by first creating a chronology of experiences and reflections of my dating experiences over a two-year period of time from 2010–2011. The dates that I went on during this time stemmed from meeting men through different friendship groups. As part of this process, I read and reread personal journal entries I had recorded before and after many of the dating experiences I had gone on during this time. Looking back at those journal entries provided a starting point to begin my autoethnographic exploration. Focusing on moments and experiences in my past, I worked to pull those moments and experiences into my present, in an attempt to build a greater understanding of those moments and experiences through my autoethnographic writing. I created a draft of my stories writing chronologically, using these main events to create structure around my experiences (Ellis, 1999). Throughout the

process, I engaged in what Ellis (1999) referred to as emotional recall, bringing myself back to the experience to consider the emotional and physical depth of the experience. I worked on the chronology frequently over a four month period of time in 2012, attempting to fill in additional details and memories as they surfaced to create a more nuanced chronology of the experiences (Ellis).

To begin creating the narratives, I used the chronology to shape drafts of the personal narratives over a three month period of time in the winter of 2012–2013. The narratives created do not focus on one particular dating experience, but rather blend experiences from several dates to form composite narratives. Throughout the process of writing the autoethnographic chronology as well as the construction of each of the personal narratives, I embraced what Dupuis (1999) referred to as a reflexive research methodology, by keeping a reflexive journal to consider both my autoethnography/researcher self and researched/human self throughout the research process. Engaging in a reflexive research practice was important, because as Pinn (2001) described, “Our processes as researchers, our fears and perfectionism as well as our successes, need to be brought consciously into the research process. In this way we can reveal the uncertainty, contradictions, multiplicities and ambiguities of ourselves” (p. 194). I used the reflexive journal to continuously reflect on curiosities, discoveries, and tensions that were emerging through the writing process as well as to note connections that were surfacing between my story and the research literature. In addition, I used my reflexive journal to reflect on the ways my understandings of the experiences were shifting and evolving as the research process unfolded.

Creative Analytic Practice as Representation

While feminist researchers who share personal narratives focus on identifying the issues that present themselves in their everyday lives, they do not aim to present a unified vision of women’s lived experience. By sharing narratives from their own lived experiences, feminist researchers shape personal narratives to show an “intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism” (Snyder, 2008, p. 175). Feminists working from the third wave emphasize the use of personal narrative as a way to represent complexity within women’s experiences and to illustrate how experiences are shaped by larger social ideological structures and expectations (cf. Lyons, 2013; Parry & Fullagar, 2013; Pavlidis, 2013). In this way, feminists share personal narratives “to voice their ideas, describe their experiences, engage in critical self-reflection, and practice feminisms (‘the personal is political’)” (Bromley, 2012, p. 176). Personal narratives represented as Creative Analytic Practice (CAP) can be used to share playful, humorous, awkward, tense, emotional, and engaging representations of lived experience, without generalizing understandings or interpretations. As Parry and Johnson (2007) noted, “CAP is well suited for scholarship that seeks to contextualize lived experiences and address the complexity of life and leisure” (p. 122).

Although researchers using personal narratives are often encouraged to show not tell to avoid simplifying or reducing experiences as way of generalizing (Parry & Johnson, 2007), I agree with Snyder (2008) who argued researchers sharing personal narratives must be careful not to leave all of the work of critiquing dominant ideologies to the reader/audience. These sentiments are echoed in the autoethnography literature encouraging researchers to connect the personal back to the cultural in their writing (cf. Ellis, 1999). Without analysis, personal stories can read as confessions, rather than examples that challenge dominant ideological structures (Snyder, 2008).

With these ideas in mind, I aim to *show* through my personal narratives, by bringing the reader into my narratives. Rather than *tell* the reader how to interpret the stories, I prefer to *share* my feminist interpretation of the experiences, layering personal reflections and theoretical

insights of the feminist and leisure tensions present in the narratives. However, I urge readers to be willing to take up the narratives in their own way as they read through each. Perhaps the narratives will strongly resonate with the reader's past or current experiences. Perhaps readers will only see themselves in parts or moments of the narratives. Perhaps the narratives will not resonate with the reader's experiences at all. All of these reverberations of the narratives in the reader's mind and body are okay. I offer my story as a way to start a conversation about commonalities, complexities, tensions, and diversity of experiences of singlehood and dating. Barbary (2011) explained,

It seems that CAP changes our expectations of research because rather than disconnect and reduce experiences, it instead encourages involvement, inspires curiosity, creates inclusivity, and constructs depictions that remain in the thoughts of readers in ways that traditional representations sometimes do not. (p. 195)

It is through the reader's engagement with personal narratives, that it becomes possible to begin to carve out different or alternative interpretations of experiences wherein complexity and diversity can be revealed.

My Stories of Dating

I Will Not be Wearing Heels Tonight

Books, highlighters, articles, and Tupperware containers are strewn across the top of my metal framed desk. I am working in my cramped, communal office space on campus. Glancing at my cell phone, I realise the time has gotten away from me. It is already late in the afternoon. I begin packing up my belongings to head home. I work hurriedly to stuff them in my bag, realising I am cutting it close. I have a date tonight. He is picking me up at 7 p.m.

Closing my office door, I set off down the narrow hallway towards the stairwell. I am almost to the end when my friend pokes her head out of her office and says jokingly, "Freeze....not so fast!" She motions for me to come back to her office. I inch reluctantly back down the hall and hover in the doorway.

"So, you're going on a date this eve. How fun! I just love first dates. Are you excited?," she says with a mischievous grin on her face, sitting cross legged, pivoting back and forth noticeably on her swivel chair.

"Ahhh, I guess." I mumble doubtfully. Thinking to myself, fun? This is not my idea of fun. In fact, it is the exact opposite. It might even be bordering on torturous.

Before I can elaborate, she asks, "Have you decided on what you are going to wear? You should probably wear heels. What time is he picking you up for dinner? Do you think he will pay for dinner? You should think about maybe covering the tip anyway. What if you go for drinks afterwards? Does he have anything else planned?"

"I haven't given the details much thought," I lie, trying to seem nonchalant, even though anxiety begins to swell in my chest, pushing against my ribcage. I breathe deeply, trying to keep it subdued. Glancing at my phone, I catch a glimpse of the time, 5:30 p.m.

"I've got to head home," I tell her quickly, as I turn towards the exit. But before leaving her sight, add, "Oh, and I will definitely not be wearing heels tonight!"

"What? Well, have fun!" She says, "And don't forget to..."

Her voice trails off, and I make a break towards the red, glowing exit sign at the end of the hall.

Although the dates that I went on as a single, adult woman often took place in leisure or recreational contexts (e.g., restaurants, bars) (Turner, 2003) and involved the consumption of personal resources (time and money) (Samp & Cohen, 2010), I did not find my experiences dating in adulthood closely aligned with conceptions of dating that position dating as a fun and enjoyable practice that people choose to engage in freely (Eshleman & Wilson, 1995). Rather, dating in adulthood was often a stressful and overwhelming practice that I felt I needed to engage in if I ever wanted to move out of singlehood. In this way, my experiences dating in my late twenties blurred together leisurely and not-so-leisurely elements in complex and messy ways (Rojek, 1995). Yet, as a feminist, this posed a tension for me: Why do I continue to date if I find it stressful and overwhelming?

Bogle (2008) found motivations to date change between the teenage and college/university years and young adulthood, wherein, dates begin to serve as filtering processes, helping adults to narrow the field of potential long-term partners. Bogle described, "After college, the men and women I interviewed became increasingly focused on finding a boyfriend/girlfriend, and in order to do so, most virtually abandoned hooking up in favour of traditional dating" (p. 164). Accordingly, many adults are aware of the benefits of couplehood and are eager to move into that social category (Bogle). However, when women and men decide to pursue a more traditional approach to dating, as Bogle suggested, they must learn to negotiate certain gendered expectations that are connected with a more traditional approach to dating. For instance, when dating, women "must play by a different set of rules and set different goals than males" (Eshleman & Wilson, 1995, p. 229). More specifically, when following a traditional dating approach, women are encouraged to assume a more passive and reactive role on dates that can limit women's power and control over dating practices. In comparison, men are encouraged to take a more active role, planning, paying for, and initiating physical contact on dates that can give men power over traditional dating practices (Laner & Ventrone, 2000).

When considering dating and its ties to leisure, feminist leisure researchers (cf. Green, 1998; Shaw, 2001) have identified leisure as a site where power relations are present yet power is not always equally acquired and maintained (Shaw, 2001). Leisure practices are sites where people may lose power, but leisure can also be used by women to negotiate power relations, whereby leisure can be used to gain power. In this way, leisure practices, such as dating, can be used by women to reproduce, but also resist gendered expectations (Shaw). With these ideas in mind, in both the opening narrative to the paper as well as the aforementioned narrative, it is clear I adhered to a more passive role when dating. In part, I was passive because I did not want to appear too forward or pushy, characteristics traditionally deemed undesirable for women to assume when dating (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). I also chose to adhere to this more passive role when dating because it felt comfortable, safe, and was expected. But in choosing to assume a more passive role when dating, I limited the control and power I had over my dating experiences.

However, my passiveness (or reproduction of expectations tied to a traditional approach to dating) can also be positioned as a form of empowerment. I used my passiveness as a way to protect myself from being overly vulnerable to the men I dated. Adhering to a more passive role on dates helped me to maintain some sense of control over the dating process. Why? Because in playing a more passive role, I was not forced to put myself out there or be vulnerable in the moment. Men who wanted to date me had to initiate the date, assuming the risk that I might reject or hurt them. In turn, playing a more passive role when dating gave me a choice whether to go on dates or not, and in that choice, I found a sense of control.

Despite finding ways to feel empowered through my reproduction of these gendered expectations when dating, as a feminist, I continued to find this reproduction uncomfortable. As such, I found opportunities to resist these expectations. For instance, I resisted gendered expectations by professing that I would not be wearing heels. Uttering these words made me feel independent, because I was freeing myself in the moment from the gendered roles and expectations that were governing my dating experiences. It was my feminist self refusing to adhere to all of the gendered expectations dictated by a traditional approach to dating. But in looking more closely, making that declaration was also a way for me to subdue my feminist guilt in that moment, given the fact that I had not only been passive in many other dating decisions, but that my passivity felt comfortable and safe.

Liquid Courage

Arriving back at my apartment, the door slides closed, and I sigh as I drop the heavy bags from my fatigued forearm. I become aware of the gnawing angst that sits patiently in the pit of my chest. I don't want to go. I mean yes, I do want to go. But no, no, I don't want to go.

My mind begins to contemplate how to back out. There is still time. What excuse would be best? There has been a family emergency? I am coming down with something? My mind continues to swirl with wild possibilities as I plot my escape plan, when one of the bags I set down in the hall falls onto its side. Thump! I'm pulled back to reality. I tell myself, no! It's too late. You have to go. At this point, blowing him off would be rude.

Walking over to the fridge and opening the door, I grab the half full bottle of pinot grigio and fill a wine glass nearly to the brim. Liquid courage should help ease my nerves. I promptly take a big gulp, and then a second, practically finishing the glass, before setting it down on the counter beside the fridge. A warm ease washes over my body, flowing downwards to the tips of my fingers and toes, then back up, bringing with it a comforting light headedness. My mind calms and I proceed to self-talk again. Get your shit together! You can do this. Heading down the hallway towards the bathroom, I leave a trail of clothes on my way. Jumping into the shower, I turn the shower radio on.

In addition to negotiating gendered expectations tied to a more traditional approach to dating, my experiences dating as a single, adult woman were also influenced by a number of gendered ideologies, such as an ethic of care. As evidenced in the narrative excerpt above, my ethic of care voice resonated loudly in my dating choices. In particular, I felt obligated to the men I dated. I felt bad and at times guilty saying no to dates, but also wavering on whether I wanted to go on dates after I had accepted. Not surprisingly, gendered expectations reinforced by an ethic of care have been shown to encourage women to be selfless, putting the needs and wants of others in front of their own (Parry, 2013). This selflessness can place a demand on women to care that can compromise women's autonomy (Clement, 1996) and can discipline women into performing certain gendered identities (Parry).

As a feminist, I felt a tension between my ethic of care voice and my feminist voice. My feminist voice would often speak up against my feelings of guilt and my need to be polite when dating: *Don't go on dates that you don't want to go on. You don't owe anyone anything. Speak up for yourself. Put your feelings first. Who cares about being polite? Stop feeling guilty!* I would listen, and feel empowered by my feminist voice. *Okay, I won't go. I don't want to. I don't have to go.* I would be convinced to break out of these gendered constraints impacting my dating choices. *That's right, I'm not going!* But then, my ethic of care voice would creep back into the conversation, but this time louder and more persistent: *maybe you should just go? You don't want to be*

rude. My inner guilt would bubble up again, convincing me to put my feelings of uncertainty and discomfort aside.

In line with this tension, a study by Schäfer (2008) examined how the relational imperative, which views "normal" women as wanting and needing love, romance, and relationships (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009), influenced heterosexual women's understandings of romantic love and relationships. Schäfer found many women continued to be influenced by the idea of the "nurturing female" and its connection with an ethic of care. The women in her study were conflicted, because although they placed value on having a romantic partner and enjoyed the connection involved with romantic love, they also had negative associations with romantic love, including the emotional labor and energy involved in developing romantic relationships. Indeed, I felt these tensions when dating. However, as Arisse (2010) noted, the tensions involved in dating can be difficult to question when living in a social and cultural context "which assumes heterosexual couple relationships are almost always personally and socially beneficial" (p. 37) and, in particular, when couplehood is positioned as a prerequisite for having a family and children.

I Would Do Anything for Love?

"Get your umbrellas out. This weekend is going to be a wet one!" I groan, as the warm water from the shower hits my face and runs down my neck.

Tapping the scan button again, I land on a station where the radio jockey is dishing on current celebrity gossip.

"Wedding bells might finally be ringing this weekend for the thirty-nine year old starlet. Several celebrity news sources are also reporting she was seen leaving a baby boutique in West Hollywood yesterday. Looks like the wedding and baby she has always wanted might finally become a reality."

I push the scan button again.

"And I would do anything for love," Meatloaf belts out.

Next.

A Katy Perry song is on. I turn it up, and begin singing, without abandon, loudly and likely out of tune, "Baby you're a firework..."

This narrative highlights how other compounding ideological forces, including pro-family ideology or familism and pronatalism also influenced my engagement with dating. Familism or pro-family ideology emphasizes the value and importance of family life and works to subordinate and degrade other lifestyle choices, engagements, arrangements, as well as other structures not centered on the family (e.g., singlehood) (Shaw, 1992). Working in close connection with familism is pronatalist ideology that reflects the belief that men's and women's social roles are inextricably linked to biological parenthood. Although pronatalist ideology impacts men and women, it impacts more strongly upon women, by promoting the idea that a woman's social worth and social status as a "real woman" are tied directly to her ability to biologically bear children (Parry, 2005; Valenti, 2007). In part, the influence of pronatalist ideology on women is linked to biological timelines. Bogle (2008) explained, in relationships "the idea that a woman's 'clock is ticking' while a man has 'all the time in the world' fundamentally affects who holds the power" (p. 175). For adults, the window of opportunity to have biological children becomes a more immediate reality as they get older, and this is especially true for women (Parry).

As a single, adult woman, I became acutely aware of these compounding ideological influences promoting couplehood as a necessary step towards achieving family and the biological imperative. Messages connecting couplehood with family and biological children popped up in everything I did: on the radio, TV, in conversations with friends and family and were bombard-

ing me from all angles. Not surprisingly, messages tied to these gendered ideologies have been shown to be disseminated and reinforced through a number of cultural and social channels, including media, family, and friends (Strong et al., 2005).

Messages tied to these gendered ideologies made me aware of my biological clock and forced me to confront my desires for having biological children. Every woman wants children. Don't they? Shouldn't they? And to have biological children, ideally, shouldn't you first establish yourself in a couple? Have a family? The fear of never having children (biologically) began to settle in my uterus, my heart, and my mind. I was never certain whether I wanted to have children (biologically), but being confronted with the realization that I might not have the option, because I was running out of *time* made me feel restricted, limited, trapped by my single-ness.

In turn, my resistance to these messages often included acts of avoidance, even if seemingly small, such as the example in the aforementioned narrative where I changed the radio station to avoid being exposed to these messages. This is not surprising, given that Parry (2005) in her study exploring how women dealt with infertility, found women used leisure as resistance to pronatalist ideology. In particular, women engaged in different leisure pursuits they enjoyed, such as reading and walking, that helped them feel empowered and to define themselves outside of the patriarchal and pronatalist confines of motherhood and infertility. The women in her study also intentionally avoided certain leisure activities where pronatalism was perpetuated, such as baby showers. Indeed, my performances of dating reinforced as well as resisted gendered expectations set forth by pro-family and pronatalist ideologies. In addition to these gendered ideologies, my performances were also influenced by different dating contexts.

Labeling the Lines and Bags Imperfections

Standing in my towel, I clear the fog from the steam covered bathroom mirror. I lean close, to examine my makeup-free face. A slight laugh line has begun to surface; the barely visible indent tracing a line from the right hand corner of my nose down to the outer edge of my mouth. Grey bags cast a shadow below my eyes, making me look tired, and somehow older than I remember. For a moment, I picture the smooth, unmarked, youthful face of my early 20s being reflected in the mirror. I can feel the envy beginning to stir in the pit of my stomach, as I long to return to those days.

I label the lines and bags imperfections and I swiftly begin covering them with porcelain concealer. I then spend time carefully gliding chocolate brown liner along the top of each crest that runs the length of my small almond shaped eyes, before circling bubble gum coloured blush gently on the apples of my cheeks. I am sweeping black mascara up and outwards through my sparse, thin lashes, when the mascara wand slips, and I accidentally blink hard.

"Shit!" I curse, as I realise black mascara now covers the top and bottom of my eyelid. I carefully remove the excess mascara, before beginning to straighten my sandy brown hair down my back. This continuous primping does not stop, until I am satisfied with the painted version of me that stares back.

I am walking back to my bedroom, when the phone rings. I glance at the caller I.D. It's him. Why is he calling me? We've only communicated through text message. Does this mean I have to actually pick up the phone and talk to him in real time? A glaze of sweat coats my palm, as I draw the phone to my ear and push the button that illustrates a tiny green phone symbol.

"Hello!" I answer too loudly, in a high pitch, screechy voice. Where the hell did that voice come from? I question.

"Oh hi, how are you?" He answers, in a seemingly calm, but quick voice that hints he might also be a little nervous.

We make uncomfortable small talk.

He then asks, "Will you be ready in 10 minutes for me to pick you up for our date?"

I respond, "That works for me. But don't keep me waiting!" My inner voice immediately judges my choice of wording. You idiot, why did you say that? Why?

This is followed by an awkward pause.

He then replies, "I won't. See you soon."

As the above narrative highlights, I put a lot of effort into the made-up version of me, the version of me I performed on dates. Clearly, gendered ideologies and expectations influenced my choices to perform, but how were my dating performances shaped by different dating contexts? Goffman (1959) explained, when people are performing in front of an audience they are constructing a presentation of their self in the frontstage. When performers are performing in the frontstage they will use expressive equipment, such as appearance and manner, to define the type of performance being performed and the social expectations associated with that performance (Goffman). In the frontstage, referring to when I was on a date, I would use appearance as a form of expressive equipment. This is not surprising, given that Coltrane and Adams (2008) explained, much of the love advice disseminated through social and cultural channels, including media, focuses on the need for women to live up to specific beauty standards (e.g., youth, thinness, hypersexuality) and then to use their physical appearance to get men's attention. In this way, my performances of dating in the frontstage reproduced gendered expectations tied to women's appearances. However, my reproduction of these gendered beauty expectations was also empowering, given that the painted version of me that I presented in the frontstage made me feel more confident and in control when I would go on dates.

Considering my backstage performances of dating, Goffman (1959) explained, when performers are in the backstage they can relax and step out of the character they employed in the frontstage, because they are no longer in front of an audience. Goffman noted that the backstage is often a place where performers can critique the expressive equipment they employ/ed in the frontstage, and that includes their appearance. When I was in the backstage of my apartment, I felt safe to let my walls down and express inner judgment over my appearance, such as when I labeled the lines and bags on my face imperfections. In the backstage, I questioned my overall attractiveness, because I was growing older and made the assumption I was inevitably growing less desirable (Pozner, 2010). In turn, I felt the need to spend time on my appearance when preparing to go on dates, not only conforming, but also reaffirming gendered expectations tied to female beauty. My feminist voice, as illustrated in the above narrative, was often stifled in my backstage performances of dating, particularly when my frontstage performances were top of mind.

In addition, the narrative above illustrates how I used technology as a medium to negotiate my backstage and frontstage performances. More specifically, relying on text messaging as the primary form of communication when I was dating provided time and space for me to consider my choices to perform certain dating expectations more carefully. In this way, using text messaging to communicate with the men I dated was empowering, because I was given the time and the control to decide when and how I wanted to respond. Whereas, phone calls forced my performances into the frontstage, making me feel less in control and more vulnerable. To counter this lack of control and vulnerability, when talking over the phone, I would often employ a more passive "manner" as the above narrative highlights. Goffman (1959) noted that the manner a performer employs in the frontstage can indicate to the audience what to expect from the performer as the performance continues. With this idea in mind, my passive manner indicated to the men I dated that I would adhere to a more passive role on dates, a role women are encour-

aged to take when following a more traditional approach to dating (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). However, again, my reproduction of this passive role while dating posed a tension for my feminist self: Who am I performing this passive role for? To counter this reproduction, I found ways to resist this passive role, including in the narrative above when I assert, "Don't keep me waiting!" Unfortunately, immediately after making this declaration, I judged my choice of wording and worried that I may have presented a more assertive manner than I had intended. In this way, I reproduced as well as resisted gendered expectations tied to appearance and manner through both my frontstage and backstage performances of dating, but this reproduction and resistance happened in complex and messy ways that are difficult to separate and isolate.

Conclusion

Each of the personal narratives shared in this paper illustrates the ways gendered ideologies and expectations worked to constrain and discipline my engagement with singlehood, dating, and leisure. My reproduction of these gendered expectations is not surprising, given that it can be difficult to question desires to be romantically coupled when you are living outside of the "couplehood." On the other hand, when re-reading and reflecting on these narratives, I recognize the glimmers of resistance present in each of the personal narratives shared. Resistance, although not blatant, lurks near the surface of these narratives.

In reflecting back on these dating experiences, I am forced to confront a number of tensions related to how I chose to reproduce and resist gendered ideologies and expectations when dating. In part, I think these tensions stem from considering reproduction and resistance in polarised ways, wherein, reproduction is positioned as reinforcing gendered expectations, and resistance is positioned as liberating from gendered expectations (Raisborough & Bhatti, 2007). Rather, repositioning these ideas to consider the ways women can use both reproduction and resistance, at times, simultaneously (Parry, Glover & Shinew, 2005) and as sources of empowerment in their experiences (Spencer & Paisley, 2013), places reproduction and resistance into a more productive tension that embraces complexity and messiness of experiences. Choosing to view my experiences with singlehood and dating in this way, is, in itself, liberating as a feminist, given that I can embrace, learn from, and own my dating experiences, rather than scrutinize and judge those experiences for not being "feminist" enough.

With these ideas in mind, I contend there is a need to bring more attention to the marginalized experiences of single women negotiating the gendered world of dating, given that their experiences have been largely ignored in the leisure literature. In this paper, I focused on examining my own experiences dating as a single, adult woman along with the leisurely and not-so-leisurely elements involved in those experiences. Yet, there are multiple ways women can experience dating and its ties to leisure in adulthood. There are also multiple ways women can choose to reproduce and resist gendered expectations and ideologies tied to singlehood and dating. These multiple ways of experiencing and engaging with singlehood and dating are dependent on women's diverse identity factors and positionality within their social worlds. As such, there is a need to expand the social justice work currently being conducted in the leisure field to encompass broader representations and understandings of the ways women organize their leisure lives, including a focus on the experiences of adult women who are single.

Moreover, although the feminist leisure literature has brought attention to the importance of looking at gendered expectations and ideologies on leisure experiences (c.f. Parry, 2005; Shaw, 1992), the feminist leisure scholarship has yet to consider the ideology of couplehood in shaping single women's experiences with single life and dating, along with the ways women can

reproduce or resist this gendered ideology. Subsequently, more research is needed to examine the relationship between the ideology of couplehood and other ideological influences such as familism and pronatalism and the ways these ideological influences work together to discipline and constrain women's leisure lives in different ways, especially given that the impact of these gendered ideologies may be even more pronounced for women who are single (Freysinger, Shaw, Henderson & Bialeschki, 2013; Parry).

Finally, I hope this paper reinforces the importance of sharing personal narratives. Personal stories, when shared with commitment, honesty, and vulnerability have the capability of deepening understandings of women's experiences by revealing the ways gendered ideologies and expectations play out in women's everyday lives. By sharing personal narratives, feminist researchers work to illustrate the tensions and complex power relations that exist between dominant gendered ideologies and the reality of women's leisure lives (Snyder, 2008). In this way, personal narrative can be a fruitful way to introduce new and important topics into the research conversation (Baumgardner & Richards, 2010), but also a way to bring commonalities, complexities, tensions, and diversity of experiences into those conversations. With these ideas in mind, I hope this paper encourages other leisure scholars to draw research inspiration from their own lives and emboldens other women to tell their story, to take action, to speak up, and to have their voices heard around issues that present themselves as most pressing in their leisure worlds.

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