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Singles Need Not Apply: Evangelical Church Responses Reveal Longer Response Latencies to Requests of Single Adults

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Singles Need Not Apply: Evangelical Church Responses Reveal Longer Response Latencies to
Requests of Single Adults

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Clinical Psychology
George Fox University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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in Clinical Psychology

Newberg, Oregon

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Adult Singles

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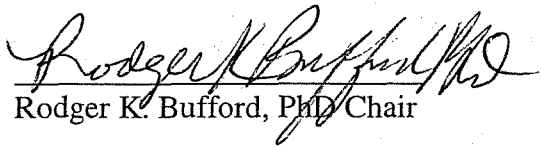
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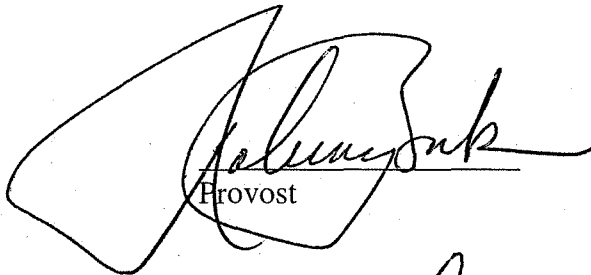
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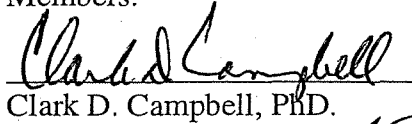
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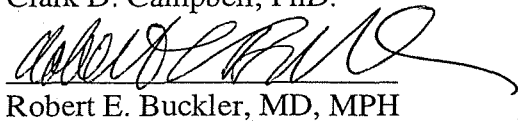
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Singles Need Not Apply: Church Responses Reveal an Underlying Negative Attitude Toward
Single Adults

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Abstract

For single Christians over the age of twenty-five, finding support and acceptance within the church can be a very high hurdle to cross. While the church as a whole promotes itself as a place of acceptance, it is rare to find a church with activities focused toward single persons older than college age. Attempts by single persons to become involved in different facets of discipleship, service, and ministry are not always well received. In a preliminary uncontrolled study the results suggested that the church may have a bias against single adults. The present study considers whether the church operates with bias in favor of couples and families and against single adults. By studying how churches react to and handle requests from single adults to become involved in the church, the possibility of intended and unintended biases can be revealed.

Data was collected from 36 churches located in a metropolitan community in the Pacific Northwest by confederates posing as married or single adults requesting assistance in locating a cell group. The amount of time needed to respond to the request for assistance was recorded for

each of the conditions. These data were examined through analysis of multivariate variance (MANOVA), *t*-tests, and post hoc comparisons.

Married people had response latencies averaging 34 hours. Never-married women had a mean response latency of 62.1 hours. Responses for single mothers had a mean of 140.6 hours. For single men response latencies had a mean of 318.8 hours. Analysis of variance results show that church size was not a predictor of response latencies and the response latencies for all conditions were consistent.

These results are highly significant despite underestimating response latencies for single mothers and single men due to truncation. These results indicate a significantly slower response by the churches to requests from single adults, and underscore the extent of the biases experienced by single adults. Data from this study may be very beneficial in helping the church re-evaluate its approach toward single adults.

Anecdotally, it appears that single mothers are viewed as a potential drain on the church's resources. Similar anecdotes suggest single men are viewed as potential sexual predators searching for women or children. These attitudes toward single adults may be an underlying origin for the biases expressed toward the single adult population.

Results of the study are consistent with the notion that church are interested in families as their primary constituents and seldom consider single adults unless they are never-married women. Unfortunately, there appears to be very little room at the inn for single mothers and single men.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The church represents itself as a place where people from all backgrounds can find support and acceptance. Visitors are informed that they are important and that the easiest way to enter into relationships and develop connections within many churches is to join a cell group. A cell group is defined as a small intimate home Bible study where close relationships are formed. Cell groups are represented as one of the primary methods churches use to facilitate the assimilation of new people into their congregations. Many times it seems that churches offer cell groups to interested couples and families while overlooking single adults. Churches seem to have an atmosphere of neglect or non-acceptance that keeps single adults from feeling welcomed or accepted within the church. How well the church accepts and deals with single adults over the age of twenty-five is a question that has been left uninvestigated. Many churches have services and ministries focused upon single adults of college age but lack services for older single adults. As single adults look for support and acceptance, many single adults look without success to the church as a place for meeting these needs.

The goal of the research project is to assess whether churches show bias against single adults. The research is intended to clarify the church's response and attitude toward single adults in general. By identifying attitudes within the church that may inhibit single adults from pursuing church involvement as members or regular attendees, the church may become more effective in interacting with single adults.

Research literature on the topic of church response to single adults does not exist. There is a great deal of literature addressing the churches' ministries to several other groups. There are large amounts of literature concerning methods and means of understanding and ministering to college aged single adults (Cook, 2003), young married people (Gospel Light, 2003), families (Gospel Light, 2003), and recovery from loss (Cook, 2003). The literature seems to recognize single adults only as college aged, divorced, or widowed senior citizens. Single adults over the age of twenty-five seem to have escaped the attention of the churches as a field of ministry.

Individuals over the age of twenty-five that choose to remain single make up a significant segment of the adult population. The United States Census Bureau in 1998 (Luagaila, 1998) reported that 44% (four of every nine) Americans over the age of 25 are single. The largest group, divorced single adults, represent 9.8% of the overall population or 19.4 million people. Single adults between 25 and 34 years of age who have never married make up the next largest segment of this population, representing 6.5% of the population or 13.6 million people. The two groups combined represent 33 million people that appear to be largely left out of the ministry focus of the church. The church has several ministries that include single senior citizens, but fails to minister to the largest group of single adults, those who are between 25-34 who are either divorced or never married (Farington, 2002). Recent research from the Center for Disease Control (Schoenborn, 2004) investigating the physical health of married people as compared to single people placed the population of single adults at 41.8% of the adult population. It appears that the church may focus so much on ministering to married couples and families that it overlooks a major segment of the population.

Over the course of twenty years there has been a dramatic shift from marriage to living as single adults. From 1980 to 1990 the marriage rates for adults over the age of 25 has dropped

from 66% to 60% overall (Luagaila, 1998). This trend is true for all racial groups. Broken down by race, blacks have had the greatest change with marriage rates dropping from 51% to 41%, Hispanics fell from 66% to 59% and whites fell from 67% to 62% (Luagaila, 1998). Interestingly, 82% of all single adults describe themselves as Christians and 81% hold a favorable view of evangelical Christians (Barna, 2003).

The Barna Group recently published a report detailing the lifestyle preferences and attitudes of single adults (Barna, 2003). Barna identifies three separate groups of single adults. The three groups are: (a) never married, (b) widowed, and (c) divorced. As an indication of the church's attitude toward single adults the text has a only a brief chapter on how to minister to the three groups of single adults described in the text. Barna's text spends 124 pages describing the intricate nature of single adults; then in one nine-page chapter, Barna details how to minister to the three group of single adults. This approach to single adult ministry over-simplifies the means by which the church needs to approach single adults.

Anecdotally, when reviewing literature focusing on issues regarding single adults, it can be observed that the articles generally depict single adults as suffering from psychopathology or developmental problems. Some of the titles are: "Solitary Refinement" (Winner, 2001); "A Closer Look at Gender and Distress among the Never Married, Relationship Patterns of Never-Married Men and Their Implications For Psychopathology" (Waehler, 1994); "Desire for Marriage and Life Among Unmarried Heterosexual Adults" (Frazier, Arikian, Benson, & Lossoff, 1996); "Gender and Perceived Social Support of Married and Never Married Persons as Predictors of Self-esteem" (Fahrenkamp, 2001); and "Influences on the Life Satisfaction of Never Married Men and Women" (Cockrum & White, 1985). The themes of these articles suggest a bias that may be pervasive throughout the Christian community toward single adults.

Additionally, articles concerning the church's view of ministry to single adults focus upon ministry as something specialized for college-aged persons. There is a lack of articles concerning methods or means for ministering to single adults over 25 years old.

There is also a dearth of empirical research on the question of the church's attitude toward single adults. The only articles available on this topic are anecdotal and published in monthly periodicals such as *Christianity Today*, *U.S. Catholic*, and the *Alberta Report*. In general, the literature concerning single adults portrays single adults in a manner that suggests being single is a result of psychopathology. However, a search of Psychinfo (www.apa.org/psychinfo), the National Institute for Mental Health (www.nihm.nih.gov) web site, and Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) statistical records found no data to support such beliefs.

The church sits in a unique position to change the environment for single adults and become a place where single adults can find support and reassurance. Acceptance of single adults as complete without being married can open the door to active ministry to a large segment of the adult population. Many single adults are not looking for opportunities to meet others to become whole, but for a place where they can be accepted for who they are.

A preliminary study was conducted in 2002 in a rural community in Oregon (Harmon, 2002). The results suggested a bias against single adults and single men in particular. Local churches were contacted by five confederates who represented themselves as (a) married with children, (b) single with children, or (c) single. Each of the five confederates contacted every church in the study requesting help in locating a cell group to attend. Confederates supplied the churches with their phone number to receive information by phone. The amount of time needed

to respond to the confederate's initial phone inquiry was recorded as the measure of the churches' responses.

The responses of churches toward inquiries were measured in terms of the amount of time it took for the churches to respond to the request. Married couples received a response on average within 48 hours, while single adults received different results. Single women received a response on average within 72 hours, single mothers received a response on average in 7 days, and single men did not receive a response by the end of two weeks when the study ended.

Unfortunately, the data from this study could not be considered valid or reliable due to flaws found in the original protocols. The original protocols did not use a script for the confederates. Responses were recorded as the number of days it took to respond, but failed to consider time in units of hours, as required for more sensitive statistical analysis. For this present study, the protocols have been modified to correct these inadequacies.

Preliminary results seem to support the accuracy of single adults' perception of the church's attitude toward them. "Without meaning to, churches make single adults feel unwelcome..." (Farington, 2002). Some churches have used the title "Pairs and Spares" to identify adult groups that are made up of married and single adults (Farington, 2002). Some single adults have complained that church greeters are quick to let them know the church they are visiting is a family church (Farington, 2002). The response of churches seems odd considering the church was founded by a single man and spread throughout the world by single men.

Those who minister to single adults are quick to point out that single adults are not interested in having services tailored just for them but desire to be included in the congregation. The number one desire expressed by these leaders is the desire of single adults that they not be excluded just because they are single. In addition, single adults don't see themselves as

defective or inferior because they are single. Too many times churches spend most of their time trying to match single adults with opposite sex partners. Single adults are quick to point out that romantic relationships develop naturally and they don't want to be manipulated.

Prejudice and Bias

The issue of the church's view of single adults and how it interacts with this population begs the question, is the church biased, prejudiced, or discriminating against single adults? Many holding positions of authority within the church would deny any intended inappropriate behavior toward single adults. However, unintended behaviors can have the same limiting impact as intended behaviors. Considering the difference between bias, prejudice, and discrimination is an important step in understanding how the church interacts with single adults. Contemplating the differences between bias, prejudice, and discrimination can help explain the church's the attitude and actions toward single adults.

Having a clear understanding of the difference between these three concepts is the place to start. Many psychology texts have addressed the question of how to define prejudice and bias. The Random House Dictionary defines *prejudice* as "an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed before hand or without knowledge, thought, or reason" (Stein, 1982). The most prevalent definition of prejudice within psychological texts is "to have an unjustifiable (usually negative) attitude toward a group and its members" (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002). Prejudice generally involves stereotypic beliefs, negative feelings, and a predisposition to discriminatory actions. While prejudice is the cognitive piece of acting against another person, discrimination is the behavioral component. Discrimination involves purposeful actions toward a person or persons based upon stereotypic beliefs. This definition implies that prejudice has purposed actions toward the targeted group (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002).

Bias has a somewhat different definition from prejudice. While prejudice generally involves negative behavioral actions, bias may be either a positive or negative view of self or others. The Random House Dictionary defines *bias* as a tendency or inclination of outlook; a subjective point of view (Stein, 1982). Psychology goes further by breaking bias down into several types of bias. All of the sub-grouping about bias deals with attitudes and how attitudes sway a person's perception of events or a person's behavior. For example self-serving bias is the practice of taking credit for our own success while blaming outside forces for our failures. Additionally, social desirability bias is the tendency for people to say what they believe is appropriate or acceptable. Bias is not based upon beliefs about a particular group but appears to be contained within a person's worldview and involves how that worldview may unconsciously impact his or her actions toward others.

It is important to have an understanding of the difference between bias and prejudice as we look at the relationships the churches have with single adults. Churches seem to have an unintended bias favoring couples and families over single adults. The church has had a long history of serving and focusing upon families and their needs. Historically, single adults have not been a focus of the church because single people in the church have represented two groups in the church, college age single adults and elderly persons who have lost their partners to death.

The modern patterns of divorce and delayed age of marriage are creating a new social structure. Perhaps churches have failed to adapt to this changing social patterns.

Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to systematically explore the response of churches to single adults, the presence and strength of any bias, and how bias impacts the church's attitude toward single adults. Responses to inquiries for support groups will be used as an index.

Chapter 2

Methods

Sample

Sample churches within a selected community and listed in the yellow pages were contacted by phone and questioned about whether they offered small group Bible studies (commonly referred to as cell groups). Churches that did not offer cell groups were excluded from the study. Only churches identified as offering cell groups were included in the study. The study developed a sample of 36 to ensure a statistically reliable sample.

Each of the churches in the study were contacted by five confederates represented themselves as (a) married female with children, (b) married male with children, (c) never married female, (d) single woman with children, and (e) single male. Each of the five confederates contacted each church in the study requesting help in locating a cell group to attend. All the confederates supplied the churches with their phone numbers, US postal service addresses, and e-mail addresses to allow information to be received by phone, mail or e-mail. The number of hours needed to respond to the confederate's initial phone inquiry was recorded as the measure of the church's response. The amount of time the church took to respond was used as an index of its receptivity to single adults. The length of time for a church to respond was limited to a two week time period for purposes of this study (see Appendix A).

Procedure

Confederates used a script when contacting participant churches. The script informed the church of the person's interest in a cell group and gave the confederate directions on how to

answer questions (see Appendix B). The purpose of the script was to make sure that each church was provide standard information concerning marital status, family size, and desire for finding a cell group. The script helped limit extraneous variable from impacting the results of the study. A church was considered contacted at the time the confederate making the phone call had verbal communication with a church representative. A church was not considered contacted if the telephone call of inquiry was answered by a telephone answering machine. Since churches in this study were selected from the yellow page section of the phone book, the names of the churches taken from the phone book were assigned random numbers chosen from a bowl to guarantee each church had an equal chance of being selected.

The confederates represented one of five categories; the first confederate represented a woman who was married with a family requesting the time and location of a cell group. Category two consisted of a man who represented himself as married with a family requesting the location of a cell group. Category three consisted of a woman who presented herself as a single woman with the same request. Category four consisted of a woman who presented herself as a single mother of two children with the same request. Category five consists of a man presenting himself as single with no children requesting the same information as the previous confederates. The use of a confederate representing single men with children was considered but excluded due to the small percentage of the population this group represents. The United States Census Bureau (Luagaila, 1998) reports that fewer then 3% of single men have full custody of their children. The response times were recorded as the number of hours from initial contact and analyzed to determine the churches' responses toward married and single adults

In most cases persons desiring to attend a cell group contact the church to request the location and time of a cell group that is either located close to them or designed for a special purpose. For example, some cell groups are focused on financial matters, developing strong families, how to build a career or other topics. For the purposes of this study the confederates made a general request for a cell group. In most cases, requests for a cell group were forwarded to a cell group leader who responded to the request by phone. The purpose of the study was to measure the responses of these churches toward single adults, married adults, and men versus women. The amount of time to respond to requests for a cell group were recorded and used as the means of measuring the churches' responses. If the church responded by mail the time was recorded as 5 p.m. on the day of the postmark. The confederate recorded the time of the initial phone call and then recorded the exact time of the church's response. For churches not responding to inquiries after a period of 2 weeks the number of hours was recorded as 336 hours, representing the total hours within the 2-week time period.

Scripts for confederates were rotated to ensure each confederate used each of the scripts appropriate for their sex. Female confederates each used the three female scripts while male confederates each used the two different scripts. This procedure was employed to make sure the personality or style of the confederates did not affect the response latency for any of the conditions (see Table 1).

Formal application was made to the human subjects committee for review method and procedure. The human subjects committee approved the procedures without modification.

Instruments

The study was conducted with the use of a script to ensure consistency in the information given and requested from the subjects. The results were recorded on a response sheet that

Table 1

Design

		<u>Confederates</u>			
		Female		Male	
Script	1	2	3	4	5
Married with Children	12	12	12		
Never Married	12	12	12		
Single with Children	12	12	12		
Married with Children				18	18
Single				18	18
Total Contacts	36	36	36	36	36

recorded the name of the church, the time contacted, the method used by the confederates to make contact, time contact was made, date and time of response, the specifics of the response (yes, no) and any additional comments. The confederates gathered data on specific data collection protocols designated for the specific script and gender of the confederate making the contact (see Appendix C).

A pastoral questionnaire was sent to participating churches requesting information about ministries designed for single adults and the church's attitudes toward single adults. The questionnaire asked churches the number of single adults in their congregation, number of single adults involved in ministry, how many of their single adults are women, how many single adults are single mothers, how many of their single adults are men, what specific ministries do they have for single adults, when was the last time they had a single adult visitor, and how important the pastor considered ministries to single adults? The goal of the questionnaire is to measure the

consistency of the pastor's attitude toward single adults compared to the congregation (see Appendix D).

Design and Analysis

The cumulative results of the time taken to respond to each of the confederates were analyzed with descriptive statistics for obtaining means and relative frequencies of response to inquiries for cell groups participation. The response times were examined through analysis of variance (MANOVA); for this analysis 336 hours was used for all churches that did not respond sooner. The data was also examined through *post hoc* comparisons.

Chapter 3

Results

A total of 94 churches located in the suburbs of a large metropolitan city in the Pacific Northwest were contacted by phone; 58 (62%) were excluded because they did not offer cell group ministries, leaving a total of $N = 36$. Churches from a wide variety of denominations were contacted representing Presbyterian, United Methodist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Catholic, Baptist, Nazarene, Seventh Day Adventist and Independent congregations were represented within the sample (see Table 1). The responses were sufficient to provide a statistically significant sample.

Each denomination was tracked for the number of congregations contacted, the percentage of churches eligible for the study, the number of churches from each denomination eligible for the study, and the number of eligible churches responding (see Table 1). Results show that all eligible churches responded in some manner to the requests made for involvement in cell group Bible studies (see Table 2).

Follow up pastoral questionnaires were mailed to pastors of all 36 churches qualified for inclusion the study. The response rate was disappointing, with a total of three responses received, and only two useable. This sample was too small to have psychometric value due to the low response rate to the questionnaire. Thus the pastoral questionnaire portion of the study was dropped. The focus of the pastoral questionnaire was to elicit the pastor's stated attitude toward single adults compared to the response latency of the church members. It is unknown why the

Table 2

Number of Churches Contacted by Denomination, Percentage of Churches Eligible, Number Responding, and Number Responding by Denomination

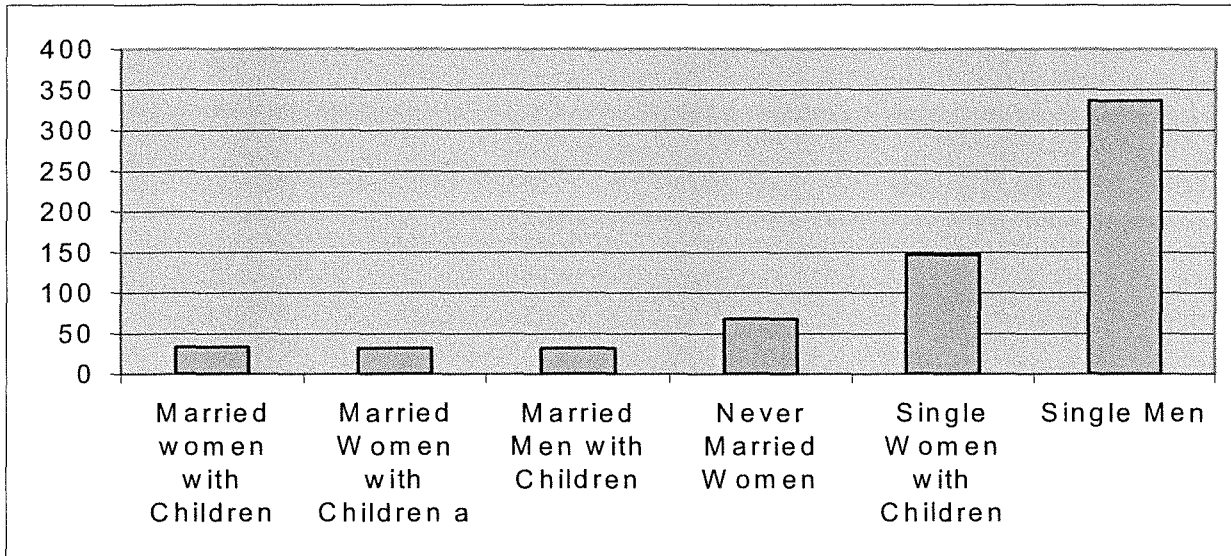
Denomination	Number of Churches Contacted	Percentage of Eligible churches	Number Responding	Number Eligible
Presbyterian	5	40	2	2
Christian Church	4	100	4	4
Lutheran	6	17	1	1
Independent	18	62	11	11
United Methodist	4	50	2	2
Baptist	11	64	7	7
Pentecostal	4	50	2	2
Church of God	1	100	1	1
Friends	1	100	1	1
Church of Christ	3	33	1	1
Nazarene	1	100	1	1
Catholic	2	50	1	1
Seventh Day Adv.	1	100	1	1
Episcopal	1	100	1	1
Total			36	36

response to the questionnaire was so poor. One problem may have been the construction of the questionnaire itself. The questionnaire was focused on single adults to the exclusion of families and never married women, the format of the questionnaire may have seemed to focused on one

issue. It is unknown if a questionnaire considering families and never married women would have had a better response rate. Future research should consider the use of telephone interviews as a method of collecting data from pastors.

The results showed a large degree of variation in response latency for the various conditions. Married women, married men and never married women had results that are not significantly different from one another. Married women with children had the next shortest response latency with a median of 32 hours (mode 26; mean 33.1). Married men with children received the shortest response latency with a median of 32 (mode of 26; mean of 34.2) hours. Medians are reported as better representing central tendency because of the truncated nature of some of the data and the impact of an outlier in one of the data sets (see Figure 1). Never married women received the third shortest response latency with a median of 67.5 (mode of 54; mean of 62.1.) The next shortest results were for single women with children with a median of 148 (mode of 146; mean of 140.6; see Table 3). The mode and median for single men are 336 (with a mean of 318.8; see Table 3). Considering the data for single men is truncated with a limit of 336 hours for a response latency, without the limit of 336 hours the data would have shown a much stronger difference for single men.

On first examination, married women received the second most favorable response. They had a mode of 26, a median of 33 and a mean of 41.5. However, the response latency for married women may have been skewed by one response time that was an anomaly because it did not receive a response and became truncated data. When this anomalous response was withdrawn from the data set, the mean for married women with children received the most favorable response. This result is reflected in Table 3 with the data identified as Married Women



a = adjusted data for married women with children.

Figure 1 Median Response Time in Hours by Gender and Marital Status

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Response Times in Hours by Gender and Marital Status.

Condition	N	Mode	Median	Mean	S. D.	Range
Married Women with Children	36	26	33.0	41.5	55.16	335
Married Women with Children ^a	35	26	32.0	33.1	22.50	98
Married Men with Children	36	26	32.0	34.2	18.62	95
Never Married Women	36	54	67.5	62.1	29.01	139
Single Women with Children	36	148	146.0	140.6	35.83	165
Single Men	36	336	336.0	318.8	55.63	336

Note. N = 36 Data for all variables is truncated with the maximum amount of time allowed for response limited to 336 hours.

^a = adjusted data for married women with children.

with Children ^a and illustrates the change in the latency response. While we cannot be sure, it is possible the message was not received, phone number was incorrectly recorded, or in some other way response was prevented. The initial results were evaluated and did not meet the Mauchly's assumption of sphericity. Means were thus compared by applying the Greenhouse-Geisser adjustment. Results demonstrated significant differences in response ($F_{(2.6, 90.3)} = 279.8, p < .001$; see Table 4). These results have an effect size of .89 (Eta Squared), which is "large" according to Cohen (2004).

Post hoc comparisons revealed that both marital status and gender of the person making a request for information for small group Bible studies had a direct effect upon the response latency. Requests made by married individuals and never married women received more favorable response than those who were single. Married men had a response time of 34.16 hours, married women with children had a mean response time of 33.1 hours, never married women had a response time of 62.13 hours, single mothers had a response latency of 140.55 hours, and single men had a response latency of 312.4 hours (see Table 4.) These results were dramatically demonstrated when the means were placed on a bar graph to contrast the differences between the means of the different conditions in Figure 1 above.

Post hoc tests confirmed these findings (see Table 5). Post Hoc tests demonstrate response latencies for married women, married men, and never married women, were shorter when compared to single women with children; these in turn were shorter than for single men. Both marital status and gender appeared to affect the results (see Table 6).

Table 4

Analysis of Variance Comparing Response Latencies for Inquiries Distinguished by Marital Status, Gender and Presence of Children

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>eta</i>	<i>P</i>
Between Groups	1955059.7	2.58	757859.78	279.8	.001	.89	1.00
Within Groups	244539.9	90.3	2708.39				
Total	2349604.2	179					

When church size was analyzed by means of a MANOVA to determine if church size influenced response latencies, no significant differences were found. Church size does not appear to have an impact upon response latencies as shown in Table 7. The lack of significance for church size results may be due to the small sample size and is reflected in the low observed power results. The statistical results may differ if a larger sample were to be employed. However, the *R* squared results suggest that even if significant, results may not have much practical significance (see Table 8).

Table 5

Multiple Comparisons (Sheffe' – Bonferroni)

(I) Level	(J) Level	Mean Difference	se	p	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Married Woman with Children	2	7.3	9.82	.967	-23.3	37.9
	3	-20.6	9.82	.357	-51.2	9.9
	4	99.0	9.82	.001	-129.6	-68.5
	5	-277.3	9.82	.001	-307.9	-246.7
Married man with children	1	-7.3	9.82	.967	-37.9	23.3
	3	-28.0	9.82	.093	-58.6	2.6
	4	-106.4	9.82	.001	-137.0	75.8
	5	-284.6	9.82	.001	-315.2	-254
Never Married woman	1	20.6	9.82	.357	-10.0	51.2
	2	28.0	9.82	.093	-2.6	58.6
	4	-78.4	9.82	.001	-109.0	47.8
	5	-256.7	9.82	.001	-287.3	-226.1
Single Woman with Children	1	99.1	9.82	.001	68.5	129.6
	2	106.4	9.82	.001	75.8	137.0
	3	78.4	9.82	.001	47.8	109.0
	5	178.3	9.82	.001	208.8	147.7
Single Men	1	277.3	9.82	.001	246.7	307.9
	2	284.6	9.82	.001	254.0	315.2
	3	256.7	9.82	.001	226.0	287.3
	4	178.0	9.82	.001	147.7	208.8

Table 6

Significant Differences Between Means Based Upon Post Hoc Tests Using Sheffé with Bonferroni Correction

Condition	Subsets		
	1	2	3
Married Man w/ Children	34.17		
Married Woman w/ Children	43.33		
Never Married Woman	59.00		
Single Woman w/ Children		140.56	
Single Men			318.81
Significance	0.183	.001	.001

Table 7

The Influence of Church Size Upon Mean and Standard Deviation by Marital Status

Church Size	1-200		201-400		401+	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Married Woman with Children	49.73	81.91	38.47	25.46	28.50	16.15
Married Man With Children	30.23	18.81	38.47	21.42	33.16	7.10
Never Married Woman	55.53	35.00	67.01	27.46	66.33	10.97
Single Woman with Children	140.00	41.97	139.00	36.60	145.83	16.24
Single Man	302.73	83.50	328.00	21.45	341.00	12.25

Table 8

MANOVA Assessing the Influence of Church Size Upon Response Latencies by Marital Status

Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	<i>Df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Significance	<i>R</i> ²
Married Woman With Children	2168.8	2	1084.4	.34	.71	.04
Married Men with Children	511.5	2	255.7	.72	.49	.01
Never Married Woman	1124.3	2	562.1	.65	.53	.02
Single Woman with Children	208.0	2	104.0	.07	.93	.06
Single Man	8073.4	2	4036.7	1.27	.29	.01
Error						
Married Woman with Children	104330.2	33	3161.5			
Married Man with Children	11631.5	33	352.5			
Never Married Woman	28338.0	33	858.7			
Single Woman with Children	44726.8	33	1355.4			
Single Man	104802.9	33	3175.8			

Chapter 4

Discussion

The results indicated that participating churches respond significantly more quickly to married individuals than to single adults. The two conditions for married individuals only had one instance (for a married woman) of not receiving a response. Married individuals could generally expect a response within 34 hours, single women with children could generally expect a response within 146 hours, but single men generally did not receive responses. Of the 36 churches included in the study, single men received only three responses, the fewest for any of the conditions tested.

The reason for the lack of response for the one inquiry by a married woman with children is unknown. It may have been the result of an oversight, the loss of the message requesting assistance, incorrect transcription of the phone number or some other error. It could be also be that the church in question was simply slow in responding.

Surprisingly, church size was not a predictor of church response latency. While larger churches may be seen as having greater resources for responding to ministry needs, the present data show no difference in response pattern related to church size. These results may be due to unique features of the sample, but provide no support for a hypothesis that church size and resources affect responses to single adults.

In considering the responses to married adults over single adults it is important to consider the role of gender and marital status in the response latency. Possible bias seems to

come into the question when the response latency for single women with children and single men are observed. Single women with children received responses from the 36 churches involved in the study but the response latency was just over six days. While single men seemed to disappear from consideration, the lack of responses for single men suggests that the churches may fail to meet the spiritual needs of single men.

It should be noted that the data for single men is severely truncated. The data was truncated because of the time limit for churches to respond to all conditions of the study. The time limit was 366 hours, or 2 weeks. The response latencies for single men would have been longer and hence more significant if there had not been a time limit for responses. Follow-up interviews were conducted with study confederates; all confederates reported no additional responses after the two-week time limit had expired. While we cannot be certain, this anecdotal data suggests that responses may never be received by single men from most churches. For all of the variables tested the result showed plausible bias toward single women with children and single men.

The reasons for the church's disappointing response to single adults are unknown but a range of innocent and realistic explanations are worth considering. Some of the reasons could be (a) a simple preference for families over single adults, (b) a lack of social connection between single adults and married adults, (c) a lack of preparation on the part of the church on how to deal with single adults, (d) single adults not expressing their needs to the church, (e) single adults not approaching the church because they fear rejection, (f) fear of failure on part of the church on ministering to single adults, (g) churches experiencing a sense of discomfort with single adults, (h) stereotypes held by society and the church.

The poor performance toward single adults may be due to the church viewing nuclear families as the most effective place to invest time and resources, a type of bigger bang for the buck approach to ministry. Resources in any institution need to be scrutinized and evaluated for effectiveness and the church may be no different. Resources spent to minister to families may produce the greatest impact at the lowest cost. Additionally, families make up the largest segment of the church and it would not be unreasonable for financial resources to be spent upon the constituency supplying the largest portion of financial support.

The results may also reflect a social disconnection of married couples from single adults. It would not be unlikely to conceive of singles and married adults having different interests and activities that would not place them in common social situations. The responsibilities of raising children and being involved in the children's activities would cause a separation between married couples and single adults.

The responses may also be a reflection of the church's lack of preparation for ministry to single adults. While churches have ministered to families for millennia, ministering to single adults is an area that is new and churches may lack strategies or be ignorant of how to minister to this population. It is note worthy that materials designed to minister to the various populations of the church lack materials for the single adult population. Individual churches may not be aware of or understand how to develop an approach to single adults.

One simple explanation for the poor response to single adults may be that single adults have not expressed their needs to the church. Churches may lack an awareness of the needs of single adults. Limited awareness could be reflected in the lack of ministry materials produced for this population. Given the social disconnection and insufficient communication between the church and single adults, the church may simply not be aware of the needs of single adults.

Fear may also play a part in the disconnection between the church and single adults.

Churches may not respond fearing they are inadequate to serve single adults, while single adults are fearful of entering into a family oriented environment, where the single adult would be conspicuous in their presence. Fear of failure may also play a part for the church. Moving into an untried area of ministry and risking resources may bring about fear of failure on the part of the church. However, the results may indicate that needs expressed by single adults may not receive a favorable response from most local churches.

The nature of the churches' responses may reflect the churches' discomfort with single adults and their needs. Adapting to meet the needs and issues of single adults may be unfamiliar and perceived as risky or threatening to the church. Some churches appear to have recognized their discomfort and attempted to deal with single adults by sponsoring groups that focus on helping single adults find partners for marriage. It appears some churches are attempting to deal with its discomfort by matching up single adults for marriage.

Stereotypical views of single adults may play a role in the church's poor performance. The belief that single adults have more problems than married couples may feed into the slower church's response to request from for single adults. Viewing single women with children as financially needy or likely to have unruly, undisciplined children may have influenced the response latencies for single adult women with children. Finally, the idea that single adult men are using the church as a place to seek sexual gratification may account for the almost non-existent response latencies for single adult men.

The most reasonable explanation may be a lack of awareness by the church concerning the needs and openness of single adults to the church's message (Barna, 2003). The anecdotal comments made by pastors about single adult men may indicate a misevaluation of the openness

of single men to the gospel and spiritual issues. Perhaps a greater emphasis on making the church aware of the desire of single adults to become apart of the church's ministry would help to rectify the problem.

We are not certain whether the church's attitude toward single adults is based in a discomfort, bias against single adults or just a matter of benign disregard (Farington, 2002; Fienberg, 2001; Nickel, 2004; Winner, 2001). However, the church's attitude seems to reflect the attitude of the culture at large (Cockrum, 1985; Fahrenkamp, 2001; Frazier, Arikian, Benson, & Lossoff, 1996; Waehler, 1994). The current culture seems to view single adults as having some type of psychopathology. A quick check of any metropolitan newspaper's church advertisements entertainment section reveals a large quantity of activities for families, couples, and young single adults looking for chances to intermingle with other young single adults. For example there are few activities for single adults planned or advertised (see *Oregonian*, February, 2005, p. E6). It appears secular culture holds the view that single adults are an anomaly. The responses of the church seem to confirm that the church and secular culture have similar views of single adults (Cockrum, 1985; Fahrenkamp, 2001; Farington, 2002; Fienberg, 2001; Frazier, Arikian, Benson, & Lossoff, 1996; Nickel, 2004; Waehler, 1994; Winner, 2001). Interestingly, searches of Psychinfo (www.apa.org/psychinfo), the National Institute of Mental Health website (www.nimh.nih.gov), Center for Disease Control website (www.cdc.gov), and the National Health Statistical Data Base (www.cdc.gov/nchs/datawh.htm) found no data available reflecting the relationship of psychopathology and marital status. It appears that beliefs about a person's mental health and marital status are unsupported by empirical research.

The lack of response for single adult men appears to have some connection to current cultural reactions to men who are around children. While having lunch with a group of pastors I

shared my interest in the church's attitude toward single adults and mentioned an interest in the specific response toward single men. One of the pastors made a curious statement. "Single men only come to church looking to find a woman or children for sex." The belief that most single adult men are sexual predators was surprising to me. I was even more surprised when the other pastors sitting at the same table did not challenge the prior statement. The prevailing attitude in this group of pastors was single adult men don't go to church for spiritual reasons, they attend church to seek sexual gratification. To the extent churches stereotype single adult men as sexual predators, they foster prejudice and discrimination against single adult men. This stereotype could lower the potential for the church to effectively meet the needs of single adult men. These anecdotal comments by clergy and the latency responses of churches for single adult men seem to suggest that the view of single adult men as sexual predators is widely accepted within the church. Prejudice, or at the very least bias, toward single men exists and may have some acceptance within the church.

An additional example of exclusion of single adult men from the church's activities is from a man who has attended the same church for the past three years. During that time he had volunteered to help teach Bible studies or adult Sunday school classes. The man has been passed over several times without explanation in favor of married individuals in the church. The man who volunteered his time holds degrees in Theology from two colleges, has an advanced degree in Theology from a Seminary, and has served as a senior pastor. Despite his experience and training, he is single; apparently, due to his marital status, he is not welcome to participate in the church's ministries.

The data suggest attitudes toward single adults may be based upon stereotypes about single adults. Some stereotypes portray single mothers as being very needy due to financial

difficulties or having children that maybe unruly. Anecdotally, two single mothers told me of their experiences at local churches. The first woman had attended a particular church for one year. During the year she requested help from the church for food due to lack of financial support from her ex-husband. Her son, who has special needs, started to attend services with her. After a few weeks she was contacted by the associate pastor and informed that she could no longer bring her son to church because the church lacked the personnel to care for her son. Effectively this left her without a place to attend services, since she lacked funds to hire care for her son while she attended on her own.

The second woman tells her story of attending a local church over a two-year period of time. Although she is a single mother, she is also a qualified “Child Development Specialist” and volunteered to work in the Sunday school. After several weeks had passed she again volunteered her services. When she did not receive a response, she inquired with the director of the Sunday School department. The director told her that single mothers were not usually allowed to be in the Sunday school program because “the children of single mother’s become too disruptive when their mothers are present.” The mother’s training and background were not discussed or considered.

One point of interest is the church’s response toward never married women. The response latency was not much different for them than the response latency for married individuals. The latency of response may reflect an attitude left over from earlier times. For people of the Christian faith many hold the belief that women should remain at home until they marry. While this belief for unmarried women is probably not overtly taught, the results of the study may reflect a tacit acceptance of this belief. The church’s belief that a women should not leave home until she has married seems to be supported by the study results and anecdotally by a

recent presentation at a local church. The presentation was advertised as a service for single adults in the church. The hour-long service dealt with two aspects of being single. The first addressed the needs and concerns of college-aged single adults and how to properly choose a potential marriage partner. The second focused on the needs of adult single in finding marriage partners with similar life experiences within the church.

Interestingly, the speaker had arranged to have three single adults address the audience. All three of the single adults were never married women who ranged in ages from 26 to 29 years old. Each of the women currently lived alone in the community; their families of origin were each located out of state. It was also surprising to hear the introduction of the women. As each woman was introduced by the main speaker, the speaker made a point of informing the church which particular church family the women were staying with or connected to for regular social activities. The women spoke of their joy of being in the church as single adults but also expressed their desire to marry in the future. The message seems to be supportive of the idea that marriage is the goal of life. Together the present results and this particular presentation go hand in hand in suggesting the current attitude of the church is that marriage is preferred to being a single adult.

An unexpected outcome of the study is the suggestion that the church may practice bias against the children of single adults. Unfortunately, children of single adults may be seen as more needy or unruly due to the families financial status. The response latency for single women with children and the anecdotal reports of single adults with children implies that possible bias against these children may exist. Future investigation of this question may be helpful in assisting churches adapt to the ministry needs of the single parent families.

One question that was not investigated in the study but may play a part in the church's attitude is the issue of divorce. Divorce is still considered to be a serious violation of the church's teachings. Precisely how divorce affects the church's attitude toward single adults is unknown. The issue of divorce may play a role in the church's responses and discomfort with single adults. Churches may see the divorced person as a failure or even as someone who is deficient when compared to other people who have not experienced a divorce. The question of divorce may be an area for further investigation in the future.

The lack of response of pastors to the questionnaire may be a reflection of the heavy workload many pastors are under or a reflection of their disinterest in single adults. It should be noted that pastors are often overwhelmed by the responsibilities of caring for the members of their congregations and pastors may believe it to be more effective to focus their efforts on families rather than single adults. Further investigation of this question may be needed. Changing the pastoral questionnaire to incorporate questions concerning single adults with questions about families may be a more effective means of increasing pastoral participation. The pastoral response may improve by contacting the pastors by phone to elicit the desired information. Additionally, this study was limited to a metropolitan city in the Pacific Northwest, an area noted for being unchurched, research conducted in other regions on the United States may yield different results. One variable that was not controlled in the data collection was the inability to control which church staff member answered the phone inquiry. While the results were consistent throughout the variables tested, the person addressing the inquiry could affect the result. Future research with a larger sample and a larger geographic region may help determine if these results reflect a regional result or are a reflection of a more general attitude within the church. Investigating what other forms of ministry churches offer to single adults may give a

better reflection of the church's attitude toward single adults. Future research may want to investigate the level of awareness within the church of the ministry opportunity with single adults and the impact of financial status on church attitudes toward single women with children. A research consideration may want to focus upon the possible difference between church and secular attitudes toward single adults.

Comparing the median scores for married couples of 32 hours, never married women at 67 hour, single women with children at 146 hours and single men at 336 hours it is easy to see that there is a significant difference in the responses received by married and never married women and single adults. The results of this study demonstrate the problems single adults may experience when they attempt to develop a connection with a church. Whether the results are due to bias, fear, social disconnection, ignorance or a lack of communication from single adults cannot be determined by this study and further investigation is needed. However, the present data and anecdotal data are consistent in suggesting that churches do not respond well to the needs of single adults and may hold negative attitudes toward them.

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Appendix A
Data Collection Sheet

Appendix B

Guidelines for Confederates

Guidelines for Confederates

The purpose for the guidelines is not to tell you how to handle the entire conversation with the subject church. The purpose is to direct you in attaining specific information needed for the study. You may be asked spontaneous questions concerning your request for information. Example: If asked for the names of your spouse or children be conversational and answer the question with the names provided for you in the guidelines indicating your marital status.

A. Married female:

When asking for information ask for the following:

The location of the Bible study closest to your location?

Is there child care provided?

Hello, does your church have home Bible studies? I would like information on finding a home Bible study for my husband and children and I to attend. Can you help me get in contact with one?

Husband's name: Joe

Son: Matthew

Daughter: Amy

Guidelines for Confederates

The purpose for the guidelines is not to tell you how to handle the entire conversation with the subject church. The purpose is to direct you in attaining specific information needed for the study. You may be asked spontaneous questions concerning your request for information. Example: If asked for the names of your spouse or children be conversational and answer the question with the names provided for you in the guidelines indicating your marital status.

B. Married male:

When asking for information ask for the following:

The location of the Bible study closest to your location?

Is there child care provided?

Hello, does your church have home Bible studies? I would like information on finding a home Bible study for my wife and children and I to attend. Can you help me get in contact with one?

Wife's name: PAM

Son: John

Daughter: Rebecca

Guidelines for Confederates

The purpose for the guidelines is not to tell you how to handle the entire conversation with the subject church. The purpose is to direct you in attaining specific information needed for the study. You may be asked spontaneous questions concerning your request for information. Example: If asked for the names of your spouse or children be conversational and answer the question with the names provided for you in the guidelines indicating your marital status.

C. Never Married female:

When asking for information ask for the following:

The location of the Bible study closest to your location?

Hello, does your church have home Bible studies? I would like information on finding a home Bible study for me to attend. Can you help me get in contact with one? (If asked about your marital status or if there will be anyone attending with you, it is permissible to inform the person you are single, as long as you make it clear you have never been married..)

Guidelines for Confederates

The purpose for the guidelines is not to tell you how to handle the entire conversation with the subject church. The purpose is to direct you in attaining specific information needed for the study. You may be asked spontaneous questions concerning your request for information. Example: If asked for the names of your spouse or children be conversational and answer the question with the names provided for you in the guidelines indicating your marital status.

D. Single female with children:

When asking for information ask for the following:

The location of the Bible study closest to your location?

Is there child care provided?

Hello, Does your church have home Bible studies? I would like information on finding a home Bible study for my family and I to attend. Can you help me get in contact with one? (If asked about your marital status or if there will be anyone attending with you, it is permissible to inform the person you are single.)

Son: Billy

Daughter: Carrie

Guidelines for Confederates

The purpose for the guidelines is not to tell you how to handle the entire conversation with the subject church. The purpose is to direct you in attaining specific information needed for the study. You may be asked spontaneous questions concerning your request for information. Example: If asked for the names of your spouse or children be conversational and answer the question with the names provided for you in the guidelines indicating your marital status.

E. Single male:

When asking for information ask for the following:

The location of the Bible study closest to your location?

Hello, does your church have home Bible studies? I would like information on finding a home Bible study for my family and I to attend. Can you help me get in contact with one? (If asked about your marital status or if there will be anyone attending with you, it is permissible to inform the person you are single.)

Appendix C
Data Collection Form

Data Collection Form

A. Confederate's Name _____

B. Church name _____

C. Condition

- Married Male
- Married Female
- Single Female with Children
- Single Female
- Single Male

D. Date and time of initial contact

Date _____ Time _____

E. Date and time of response.

Date _____ Time _____

F. Specific Response

- Yes, date, time, contact person(s)
- No
- Other (explain) _____

G. Comments _____

Appendix D

Pastoral Questionnaire

Appendix E
Curriculum Vita

Curriculum Vita

Michael Harmon
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I. Education

- 2003– Present **Doctoral Student George Fox University Psy.D. Program**
Graduate School of Clinical Psychology, APA Accredited
George Fox University
Newberg, Oregon
- 2003 **Masters of Arts Clinical Psychology**
Graduate School of Clinical Psychology, APA Accredited
George Fox University
Newberg, Oregon
- 1993 **Masters of Arts: Counseling Psychology**
Western Evangelical Seminary
Tigard, Oregon
- 1983-1987 **Bachelors of Arts: Theology**
Portland Bible College
Portland, Oregon
-

II. Supervised Clinical Experience

- 8/2005 – Present **Oklahoma Health Consortium**
Norman, Oklahoma
Population: Medical school student and their families, inpatient care of spinal cord injured patients, outpatient neuropsychology evaluations.
Duties: conduct therapy and evaluations of medical school students and their families, conduct rehabilitation psychology with spinal cord inpatients, conduct neuropsychological evaluations for patients with brain injury.
- 7/2004 – 5/2005 **Oregon State Hospital**
2600 Center Street NE
Salem, OR. 97301
Population: Inpatient Hospitalization for the Severely Mentally Ill