



The Single Woman: A Discursive Investigation (Women and Psychology)

Jill Reynolds

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The increase in numbers of single people has been described as one of the greatest social phenomena of western society. Most women will spend periods of their lives alone, without a committed partner relationship. Yet there is still a degree of social stigma attached to this status. Single women are a crucial group for study in relation to perceived changes in family life and relationships. This book provides a new understanding of what is often taken-for-granted – female single identity.

In an examination of extracts from her interviews with women aged 30 to 60 years and living alone, Jill Reynolds explores how women deal with this potentially stigmatized identity. She focuses on identity and self-representation through consideration of discourse and the conversational moves made by the participants. Her analysis highlights that the culturally available and familiar resources for understanding singleness are highly polarized. Single women weave their way through the extreme contrasts of a denigrated or an empowered identity. Thus, while most participants give very positive accounts, they also pay attention to widespread social expectations that success in life involves a long-term committed relationship.

This book makes an important contribution to the understanding of the lives of single women and represents a challenge to the considerable literature on gender and family life which has inadequately theorized singleness. It will be of great interest to academics and students in social psychology, sociology, social work and social policy. It will also be of particular interest to students of gender studies, qualitative research, narrative studies, conversation analysis and discourse analysis.

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