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Stop waiting! Hegemonic and alternative scripts of single women's subjectivity

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Abstract

The present article argues that despite growing rates of single living worldwide, alternative representations of the single women who do not necessarily spend their life 'waiting for the one' are regularly absent from public view. By exploring the injunction as well as the option of *non-waiting,* this paper contributes to time studies by stressing how understandings of waiting inform hegemonic and alternative forms of temporal subjectivity and sociality. In the first part of this paper, I explore the ways in which the injunction to stop waiting is articulated in heteronormative imagery. This call is regularly expressed with temporal urgency, and from this vantage point waiting comes to represent passivity and immobility. Accordingly, women are expected to 'move on' and be active in their own self-governance, which adapts to conventional norms of femininity. In the second part of this article, I demonstrate how the option of non-waiting dismantles and reworks heteronormative life scripts, and offers new subject positions for single women. These reflections propose alternative timetables that allow single women to reclaim their temporal agency and re-define their own temporal rhythms and life trajectories.

Keywords

Waiting, non-waiting, single women, subjectivity, hetrenormative time

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Nowadays, popular culture seems fascinated by stories about singlehood and by single women. Television shows like *Sex and the City* (SATC) and *Girls,* along with box office hits like the *Bridget Jones* series*, Bridesmaids, 27 Dresses* and many others have enjoyed tremendous commercial success and media attention. This interest in the lives of single women is further evidenced by the burgeoning market of self-help books and magazines articles, as well as vibrant discussions in online forums and weblogs.

In a previous study, I have argued that female singlehood is perceived as an extensive, and at times uncertain, waiting period (Lahad, 2012). The customary narrative of female singlehood regularly perceives this life phase as temporary, one that will eventually lead single women to the desired permanent status of being married with children. A familiar illustration of these yearnings can be found in the opening scene of the first *Bridget Jones* movie. This scene depicts Bridget sitting on her sofa, miserable and lonely on New Year's Eve, dreaming of a different, couple-oriented future in which she will not be spending New Year's Eve on her own. This image accords with the general interpretations of a single woman's temporal identity, dictated by the rhythms of the biological clock (Amir, 2007) and reproductive futurism (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2005).

Despite the growing rates of single women worldwide, alternative representations of single women who do not necessarily spend their life "waiting for the one" are regularly excluded and invisible from public view. One of my central claims here is that this invisibility sustains the power relations and stigmatization process that single women are subjected to. In line with the feminist tradition, I wish to draw attention to the multiplicity of single women's voices and multiplicity of waiting times.

Over the last ten years, various scholars have composed an inspiring collection of critical works about single women (Byrne, 2000; Budgeon, 2008; Byrne and Carr, 2005; DePaulo, 2006; Klinenberg, 2012; Lahad, 2013, 2014; Lahad and Hazan, 2014; Macvarish, 2006; Reynolds, 2013; Simpson, 2006; Taylor, 2012; Trimberger, 2006). This paper aims to bring this strand of research together with critical perspectives on waiting time. My contention is that these important works offer a new direction from which the prevailing assumptions on singlehood can be further problematized. Indeed, various scholars across the disciplines have shown how waiting is always contextual, dependent on different social circumstances and positions (Auyero, 2010; Bissell, 2007; Bourdieu, 2000; Crapanzano, 1985; Vitus, 2010), within this body of literature some have evidenced the manner in which experiences of waiting are significant aspects for identity construction, and have emphasized the link between waiting time and subjectivity (Bourdieu, 2000; Vitus, 2010).

Basing my analysis on a textual analysis of commercials, self-help books, excerpts from blogs and articles published online, my claim is that

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advancing the option of a *non-waiting* female subject position enables the reworking of traditional temporal subject positions, and the articulation of new ones. This in turn can provide single women with a renewed sense of temporal agency, one which is habitually constricted in traditional representations of single women. Following from this, I ask what can *non-waiting*—not being held captive by temporal subjectivities—tell us about multiple temporalities and envisioning diverse forms of female subjecthood.

In this sense, this paper contributes to time studies by stressing how temporal understandings inform subjectivity and subject making. In the first part of this paper, I explore the ways in which the injunction to *stop waiting* is articulated in heteronormative imagery combined with a requirement for responsible self-management. The textual analysis reveals the ways in which women are expected to be active in their own self-governance which adapts to conventional norms of femininity. I argue that this form of temporality leads ultimately to everyday forms of exclusion, as it prescribes the kinds of subjectivity and forms of sociality that are acceptable for single women. In the second part, I explore some of alternative cultural scripts available to replace this temporal identity. By a close analysis of various self-help books and online articles written about and for single women, I argue that the call for non-waiting dismantles and reworks heteronormative life scripts and offers alternative temporal imaginaries.

The selection of data for this paper stems from the contention that popular culture, everyday talk, and new media technologies affect, sustain, and deeply alter the ingrained understandings through which singlehood is constituted and reworked. As such, the various texts under examination are viewed as cultural sites, in which the discursive construction of the socio-temporal aspects of singlehood are reflected and produced.

It is also important to note that most academic literature on singlehood tends to cluster together different forms of non-marriage. However, singlehood is not a homogenous category of membership or social relations. Indeed, never married women, widows, divorced women, and single mothers are sometimes all conceptualized under the general umbrella of singlehood. Although there are undoubtedly many shared discursive patterns binding these categories together, some of the fundamental disparities between them are frequently overlooked.

My working definition of singlehood throughout this paper mainly refers to single women, mostly living in the United States and Israel, who are not engaged in a committed long-term relationship and do not have children. Furthermore, in this paper I mainly refer to what has been termed as *late singlehood*, mainly with representations of the socio-temporal phase, wherein singlehood becomes a ''problem'', a ''feminized temporal crisis''

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(Negra, 2009: 54), or in other words ceases to be a normative stage preceding marriage and parenthood.

Waiting and heteronormativity: Subscribing to straight time

In 1923, the American oral hygiene brand *Listerine* launched a successful campaign using the idiom "Always or often a bride's maid, never a bride." This campaign was comprised of a series of ads featuring "eligible" yet unmarried single women in their prime. The reason for their overly extended singlehood was simple and obvious: they all suffered from bad breath. This logic is exemplified by the following printed commercial which presents the readers with Edna's story:

> Edna's case was really a pathetic one. Like every woman, her primary ambition was to marry. Most of the girls of her set were married—or about to be. Yet not one possessed more grace or charm or loveliness than she...And as her birthdays crept gradually toward that tragic thirty mark, marriage seemed further from her life than ever... She was often a bridesmaid; but never a bride. That's the insidious thing about halitosis (unpleasant breath). You yourself rarely know when you have it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

The underlying message of the *Listerine* campaign was that Edna lagged behind "other girls", and wanted—and needed—to be released from this position. The subject position she is ascribed with is a conventional passive waiting position, as "Like every woman, her primary ambition was to marry". Edna now is expected to regain control of her life by purchasing the right kind of mouth wash. As always, advertising provides one with the promise of salvation and self-improvement, and in this case the route to end waiting. The conservative tone of the *Listerine* ad could easily be dismissed as outdated, merely reflecting the conservative climate of the era. However, and as will be shown in this chapter, these heteronormative formulations remain widespread until today.

The intensity of this wait is exemplified in the 2013 *Elite-Strauss* advertising campaign in Israel, for chocolate. *Elite-Strauss*, one of Israel's biggest food manufacturers, launched a billboard campaign portraying an elderly woman with a chocolate bar in her hand. The slogan next to this image stated: "Even if your granddaughter is still single, have a sweet day". This slogan, publicized on many billboards on Israel's highway network, conveys a clear message: if one's granddaughter is still single, her grandmother is in need of comfort and consolation, preferably sweet in nature. From this

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perspective, singlehood can only be a temporary position, and when it exceeds its temporal boundaries it becomes cause for collective agony and distress.

Herein, one's single status is not only a matter for private concern but also collective, one which positions both grandchild and grandmother in a *shared waiting* position. To put it another way, in a pro-natal and family oriented society like Israel's, the single woman's wait is hardly ever her own alone: it often involves her family, friends, neighbors, and even random acquaintances. *Everyone* is waiting with her for the right guy to come along (and they all offer advice, often unsolicited, on how to minimize this wait).

In the above illustrations, waiting is cause for distress. Their waiting also marks the disruption of socio-temporal time tables, as the *Listerine* adds notes: ''Most of the girls of her set were married—or about to be'', or with the phrase ''Even if your granddaughter is still single, have a sweet day''.

This kind of waiting mode resonates with anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano (1985) and his observations about waiting in South Africa in the last days of Apartheid. As he states: ''At the mercy of time, the waiting individual is subject to feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability—infantile feelings—and all the rage that these feelings evoke'' (Crapanzano, 1985). Seen this way, waiting signifies stasis, immobility, and lack of agency, as one is ''at the mercy of time''. This message is conveyed in the chocolate advertisement, as obviously the grandmother's wait comes to represent the despair she suffers thanks to her granddaughter's status as unmarried.

In a short video clip advertisement, produced as part of the same *Elite-Strauss* campaign, this very message is further reinforced when Reut, a single woman is offered a basket of chocolates by the cartoon grandmother figure featured in the previous ad (who is now depicted as an old maid). The clip features a discussion between Reut and the elderly figure, in which they discuss a list of possible marriage candidates that may be suitable for Reut. Towards the end of the clip, the grandmother tells a story of an old woman who was not successful in love, and is now left to die alone. The moral could not be any clearer.

In this case, like many others, all that the single woman can hope for is to un-single herself (DePaulo, 2006), otherwise the warning is that she will end up on her own, just like the cartoon figure of the old maid who had no luck in love and whose wait ended with unfortunate results. Her hope has become the remorse of unrealized dreams. Giovanni Gasparini claims that waiting lies at the crossroads of the present and the future, and certainty and uncertainty (1995: 30). In his study, Gasparini refers to the *Random House* and *Oxford English* dictionary definitions of waiting

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which support his claim. Waiting is defined as "the action of remaining stationary or quiescent in expectation of something...or as the fact of remaining until something expected happens" (Gasparini, 1995: 29–30).

Reut—and to some extent Edna, the eternal bride's maid in the Listerine advertisement—represent a waiting mode which combines hope and despair. These adverts reflect and reproduce a traditional gender order, by promoting a narrative in which single women can only wait to find the right man, and which warns them what will happen if they won't (they'll end up as old maids).[1] This accords with Michelle Lazar's claim that in contemporary advertising "love and personal relations are set up as the absolute all-consuming priority in women's lives" (2002: 112).

This gendered temporal scheduling exemplifies how waiting implicates the submission to ideological commands, through which single women are sanctioned and punished if they fail to comply with socio-temporal norms. In this instance, the punishment is emblemized in the second *Elite-Strauss* clip, where the elderly cartoon figure ends up cast in the role of an eccentric old maid. The danger of "ending up as an old maid" is a principal source for this social anxiety in Israel and many other societies. The old maid figure is an outcast, marginalized from society, an object of pity and ridicule (Lahad and Hazan, 2014). From this vantage point, we can deduce that to wait is to experience one's submission to the ideology of familisim, ageism, and singlism.

Waiting, as Bourdieu explains:

> "is one of the privileged ways of experiencing the effect of power, and the link between time and power—and one would need to catalogue, and analyze, all the behaviors associated with the exercise of power over other people's time both on the side of the powerful (adjourning, deferring, delaying, raising false hopes or conversely rushing, taking by surprise) and on the side of the 'patient' as they say in the medical universe, one of the sites par excellence of anxious powerless waiting. Waiting implies submission." (Bourdieu, 2000: 228)

Bourdieu's observations are further examined in Hans Lucht's fascinating ethnography of African migrants in Italy (2011). Lucht stresses how having one's time negated or wasted is a central experience of subaltern experience. According to Lucht, for the migrants their time is considered as "non-time": a testimony of one's social insignificance and marks the end of the possible (2011: 72–73). This formulation of non-time and dead time is highly significant to our understandings of waiting. Waiting, as various observers have noted (Auyero, 2010; Bourdieu, 2000; Crapanzano, 1985; Vitus, 2010) is considered as a time during which nothing happens and there is nothing to expect. In the same vein, Gasan Hage (2009) referred to

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waiting as a state of stuckedness, the experience of a ''sense of existential immobility'' (p. 7).

Another important interpretation of Bourdieu's insights on time, waiting and power can be found in Auyero's studies (2010) on welfare recipients in Argentine. When welfare recipients are obliged to wait for long days and indeterminable hours in welfare offices, they become patients of state. Their time is negated and devalued. From a slightly different perspective, Katherine Vitus (2010), in her work with refugee minors living in asylum centers in Denmark, claims that this form of waiting empties their lives from a justified existence, and accordingly they undergo a processes of de-subjectification.

It is from a synthesis of the above work that we can gain insight how waiting produces compliant subjectivities and a devaluation of the present and future. From this vantage point, married life resonates with more structure, faster rhythms, purpose, value and is a source of potential. These observations are relevant to this analysis because they demonstrate how depictions of temporality and the waiting time of single women are implanted within the heteronormative order. Their waiting position is an unquestioned presumption, and forms part of the power formations and the gendered order which assumes that a woman's central objective in life is marriage and procreation. This is one reason why single women's time is so often negated and devalued. Prevalent representations of single women often depict them as leading empty lives, in which all they can do is wait for a man and for salvation.

Another example demonstrating this temporal order can be found in a 2005 campaign in the United States for the *Diamond Trading Company,* advertising diamond rings. The campaign, entitled *Waiting,* is comprised of a trilogy of printed ads in which a beautiful model is depicted as waiting for a diamond ring. The advertisement demonstrates how her wait is an embodied experience. In one the adverts, the model sits, examining her outstretched hand with concentration and expectation. The woman is alert, yet she passively waits examining her hand and imagining what it would look like with an engagement ring on her finger.

The object of the wait is clear: a wedding proposal and the ring to accompany it, to declare her new social status. The gender role-play is quite blatant: the woman is waiting for her diamond ring to be purchased by a present or future lover. The woman looks at her hand as it represents her anticipated future. Such a future holds the promise of moving forward and securing her future, a coupled one. Elsewhere, I have shown that modalities of waiting are dependent on one's age and gender (Lahad, 2012). Thinking about waiting and singlehood relationally demonstrates how waiting, for single women, is in fact waiting with a ticking clock, an expiration

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date. Thus, waiting for Mr Right is set within a rigid social timetable or calendar. To elaborate, waiting, for a single woman in her twenties for example, can be perceived as an expression of romantic longings. But for a single woman, in her fifties let's say, can be seen as absurd and inappropriate. In this sense, no wonder the model featured in this trilogy fits with the fits with beauty regimes that place a premium on being a slim, young and white woman.

Stop waiting-Start dating!

The notion of waiting is also ubiquitous in advertisements and various online columns which promote online dating. In most of these texts, waiting represents a disruptive experience as expectations about the predicted life course are not met (Becker, 1997). Accordingly, the message promoted in these advertisements is that one has to stop waiting and subscribe to the right online dating site, in order to fulfil the heteronormative, familial cultural ideal. In these ads there is often a split-screen frame depicting a man and women who will soon be united, thanks to this particular website. In this way, a clear division is set, differentiating between the single and the coupled existence, and between the single present to the desired future.

This message is captured vividly by *e-Harmony* in their explanation to their "What If?" search engine webpage:

> "We're encouraging you to trust your instincts and make a decision. Why? Because life and love don't wait. People join and leave our service every day. Someone that you see today could be gone tomorrow. If there's even a small chance that you see someone you would really like to talk to, then don't wait. Take the plunge and send them a note or a guided communication request. You won't regret it. What If? is also available on our Android, iPhone, and iPad apps."

In a video advertisement, Neil Clark Warren, *e-Harmony* founder, asks "who is the one person who is waiting for you?" Plentyoffish, another popular online dating site, announce in their own TV commercial: "Your Other Half is Waiting", and *Match.com* asks: "What are you waiting for? Start for free today". In other web-dating advertisements for *e-Harmony,* Clark urges future potential customers "Stop waiting start communicating!" or "Do not leave it to chance—start communicating".

Most of these websites emphasize the links between acting in the present and a desired and anticipated future. See, for example these *eHarmo*ny slogans: "It's FREE to communicate with your *eHarmony* matches this weekend! Start now!"; "Tired of bad first dates? Start here!"; or, elsewhere,

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''Love—what's stopping you?'' That's right—nothing. Get started, start here, now, today, these all convey a strong sense of the present which promises a faster and linear transition into a desired future.

Jdate an international dating website, also conveys a similar message in one of its editorial pieces discussing love that transcends geographical borders:

> ''If you still feel willing to open your heart to someone who lives just a few hours flight from you, why wait? Join *Jdate* and meet people like you who are looking for love all over the world''

Some of these adverts show single men and single women leading their separate lives until they find their other half, awaiting them on these dating websites. These commercials echo some of the traditional narratives addressed to single persons and their surroundings: singlehood can only be a temporary, liminal phase, and in turn female singlehood is merely a transitory stage on the path to couplehood and family life.

Waiting and non-waiting are prevailing features in matchmaking success stories. In her analysis of *Match.com* successful love stories, Sharon Mazzarella (2007) contends that many of the success stories published on the site ''tell the tale of individuals who have been searching their whole lives for the prefect partner, a search which has ended successfully thanks to their experiences on Match.com.'' One can find similar stories on dating web sites around the world, highlighting tales of single men and women who have been waiting for years, living separate lives until united by the dating website in question.

The analysis thus far demonstrates that waiting has multiple registers. The messages promoted in both the ads and successful love stories (which, in fact, are another form of advertising for these websites) capture singlehood in itself as a waiting period, during which one must do all in one's power to exit the waiting mode. The happy couples shown in the adverts and depicted in the successful matchmaking stories convey the conventional understanding that love and coupledom are essential to self-fulfilment (Evans, 2003; Swidler, 2013), and that one's well-being is dependent on being involved in a heterosexual, romantic relationship (Ingraham, 1999). Seen this way, trapped in the waiting, single status represents a lack, emptiness. However, as opposed to the previous commercials wherein waiting is depicted as passive, in the online dating ones action is required.

Waiting, as various scholars have shown, is considered as a form of punishment, a form of ''doing time'' (Comfort, 2009; Foster, this issue; Scarce, 2002). Studies of time in prison, for example, demonstrate the

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doing time is waiting, which is imposed on its subjects. In this context, Sarah Armstrong notes that:

> ''Prison is a familiar metaphor of waiting, evoked when we feel stuck, caged, forced by others to endure a period of empty time...Prison waiting may be experienced as particularly burdensome because it stops time (for the prisoner) while the rest of the world moves on... Other people wait for something specific and meaningful to happen (a medical diagnosis, the Second Coming) while prisoners wait merely for the waiting to stop, for their sentence to be complete.'' (Armstrong, this issue)

Indeed, descriptions of single life are entangled within an array of culturally contested images, which connect waiting time with a sense of being imprisoned, losing control of time and sensing that time stops for you while everyone else moves on. This is demonstrated for example in the *Listerine* advertisement mentioned previously: ''Most of the girls of her set were married—or about to be''. It could be argued that the *release from waiting time and regaining control of time* are reoccurring themes with these websites. Slogans like ''Start now and find your soul mate'' promise continuity, certainty, and salvation from a protracted wait.

Release from being trapped in waiting time is dependent on purchasing the right kind of products. According to this logic, if one continues to wait one makes a bad consumer choice, risking one's future. According to this logic, those who wait are irresponsible consumers. In this sense, purchasing of an online subscription is a project of self-liberation, retaining self agency.

Another implicit assumption underlying in these slogans is that time is limited and so should be spent wisely. This kind of consumerist practice is, as the feminist scholar Anne Cronin (2000) emphasizes, both a right and a duty. Purchasing an online dating subscription grants the promise of a happier future and a transformed temporal existence. Start here, start now! If one puts one's faith in dating sites, they won't be left behind or need to keep on waiting. Further, within the context of consumer society one is doing good personhood and realizing authentic self.

The above discussed waiting scripts are so deeply embedded in our heterosexual imaginary that it seems hard to resist them. However, recently one can detect various forms of resistance to prevalent and hegemonic views on singlehood and time in popular culture and the media. In what follows, I will examine some of the alternative voices offering alternative views of waiting and gendered temporal scheduling in general.

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Singlehood as non-waiting

In the last decade, numerous Internet sites, personal blogs, and local initiatives have sought to debunk common understandings and stereotypical attitudes towards single men and single women. One such example is a website entitled *Unmarried America,* which has designated a week in September as the ''National Singles' Week''. Another site, *SingleEdition.com*, offers a different conception of singlehood. The website promotes the following message:

> ''[We] know there's life beyond just dating. SingleEdition.com offers a lifestyle destination that embraces the culture of single living. Most single adults, young and old alike, are living life on their own terms, carving out meaningful lives and creating their own communities without regrets. SingleEdition.com is the first lifestyle destination for unmarried individuals that delivers daily value to help them manage their everyday lives.''

This declaration conveys a temporal orientation which pays attention to what is present. Statements such as ''*there's life beyond just dating*'' offers an alternative way of understanding and practicing time, which does not involve waiting for the right man (or woman) to come along. Hence, it opens the possibility of a life schedule that does not revolve around serial dating and waiting for the 'right one'.

Obviously, these developments occur in a wider social context. Indeed, over the last ten years various scholars have composed an inspiring collection of critical works about single women (Budgeon, 2008; Byrne and Carr, 2005; DePaulo, 2006 Klinenberg, 2012; Lahad, 2012, 2013, 2014; Lahad and Hazan, 2014; Macvarish, 2006; Reynolds, 2008; Simpson, 2006; Taylor, 2012; Trimberger, 2006). A key research direction underlying these works is the intent to scrutinize and debunk the widespread attitudes and stereotypes attached to single women. To a large extent, these studies attempt to demystify the stereotypical attitudes ascribed to female singlehood, and offer new and critical perspectives on contemporary solo living (see, for example, DePaulo, 2006; Jamieson and Simpson, 2013; Trimberger, 2006).

An important contribution to understanding the ways in which cultural texts like self-help books and blogs resist dominant familial orders can be found in Anthea Taylor's (2011) work. In her analysis, Taylor argues that single women bloggers deploy a feminist interpretive lens, through which they make sense of their singleness and challenge the way single women are positioned within language, politics, and culture.

Incorporating a temporal reading to some of the blogs quoted in Taylor's study, and drawing from other sources, I explored the non-waiting and temporal articulations advanced in these texts. To a certain extent, such a stance

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opens up an opportunity for resisting prescribed social timetables and collective temporal orders. This view is expressed in the following examples:

> ''Welcome to *Singlutionary*. No more desperate dating, pitiful pining,and wahhhh wahhhh waiting!''

Or in another:

> ''As the years passed without a ring on my finger, it occurred to me that I couldn't keep waiting for someone else to give me a fulfilling life. I was going to have to find fulfilment for myself. While questioning how to do that, I began to deconstruct my concept of a good relationship and what it could provide me that was worth continued pursuit.''

In another post uploaded in *Singletude,* a similar temporal message is articulated:

> ''That's why it's so important to *stop waiting* for *someone else* to make you happy. Take your happiness into your own hands. Have you always wanted to move to California? Have dreams of directing your own film? What are you waiting for?''

These illustrations depict a process in which the authors resist the cultural position of a single woman waiting for someone to put a ring on her finger. In this sense, they challenge the normalizing tendencies deeply embedded with the temporal formula of waiting for ''the one''. Such a position, as I have shown previously, positions single women in a state of subjection and powerlessness. This is articulated in various forms ranging from aspiration, hopefulness, anxiety and despair (Gasparini, 1995; Lahad, 2012).

Thus, these messages posit a time line which does not adhere to heteronormative formulations of a couple-oriented and reproductive futurity, as articulated in Lee Edelman's (2004) terms. Their refusal to define themselves through heteronormative and familial norms subverts the authority of collective timetables, related to the way in which they conceptualize their time. As Bourdieu notes, ''Awareness of time is not simply one of the dimensions of [one's] life experience, but rather the form in terms of which that experience is organized.'' (Bourdieu, 1963: 56) These accounts draw our attention to both the form, in terms of which that experience is organized, and also how it could be challenged. The quoted bloggers do not perceive their life as being on ''hold'' or frozen in expectation of a desired change. Neither do they perceive their ''late singlehood'' as an excruciating disruption. Their offer could be seen, in Judith Halberstam's words, as

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"the potentiality of a life *unscripted* by the convention of family, inheritance and child rearing" (Halberstam, 2005: 2).

Taylor stresses that taking up these subject positions are politically important as:

> "These bloggers write themselves into being as an oppositional gesture; these public identifications as unashamedly single are politically important in that the blogger refuses to recognize the aberrance of being single and instead works to normalize it as an identity. In so doing, they also provide a forum for others to become part of a public forged from this shared recognition of singleness as more than a default way of being in the world." (Taylor, 2011: 90)

Indeed, these blogs can be read as significant sites for political resistance, as they expose the social relativity of time and waiting time. Indeed, as the single population continues to grow, one can find more therapists, coaches and various experts who promote a different view of waiting. Such views can be seen, for example, in an online article entitled: "Stress Less: Secrets of Successful Singlehood", which encourages its readers to stop waiting and live in the present:

> "Live in the present: Unfortunately too many single people squander the present by pining away for Mr. or Ms. Right. Today is all any of us have. Bemoaning what isn't will keep you from enjoying all of the wonderful things that are, right at this very moment." (Purcell, 2009)

> As one of the women interviewed for that article emphasizes, she does not "let non-marriage hold her back."

Such views are also alluded to by some of the single women who write for popular Israeli portal *Ynet*. Dvorit Shargal, a well-known Israeli blogger and film director, writes about her everyday experiences of singlehood:

> "It's four o'clock in the morning. Five o'clock in the morning. Six, Seven, Eight, Nine. Everything around me is quiet. There is no one snoring on the pillow next to me, no kids to take to kindergarten, no husband to drink my coffee with. Just me and, no one else but me. There is no organization which requires me to be part of it; everything is dependent on me, my daily schedule, work which I have to finish, or my training hour at the gym. And this peacefulness, this quietness of my life is my biggest happiness. This is an existential chosen static state which I wouldn't replace with any noise." (Shargal, 2006)

The portrayal of this typical morning challenges the profound presupposition that singlehood should be a temporary, non-chosen state. The writer

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monitors and creates her own schedules. Shargal stresses that her singlehood is an established and stable position that she has no intention of changing. In this sense, she opposes the widespread imagery that portrays single women as terrified by their imposed singlehood and what may turn out to be eternal loneliness.

This message is also advanced by Hadas Friedman, a regular columnist with *Ynet*:

> ''I carry with pride the title of a thirty-five year-old single woman who lives in Tel Aviv (but with no cats, as my dog won't allow them). I must say that it's pretty nice to be a thirty-five year-old single. What is less pleasant are the stereotypes about the aging single woman. If you meet three different thirty-five year-old single women and ask them to tell you about their romantic life stories, every story would be different...You would meet very different women with regard to look, character, personal taste in men and plans for the long and short-term. Not all of them are obsessed with marriage and childrearing.'' (Friedman, 2009)

In the above accounts, singlehood is figured as a legitimate and stable identity which offers counter-narratives to the existing societal norms. Take, for example, the alternative construction to the romantic ideal of ''being happily married'' posed here. The assumption that marriage leads to a maximization of happiness has long remained uncontested. This kind of widely accepted schema often asserts that late singlehood is the cause of and explanation for loneliness and unhappiness. It is in this sense that the alignment of happiness with singlehood and the assertion of being ''happily single'' demarcate a tangible alternative. In this way, the prevailing image of the miserable old maid (Lahad and Hazan, 2014) is destabilized, and different articulations of the conventional ''happy ending'' scripts can be presented.

The processes of objectifying and pathologizing single women are thereby challenged. Singlehood does not necessarily denote misery, desperation, and isolation. Personal narratives conveyed by these responses represent legitimate knowledge of what is often an unrecognized experience: feminine singlehood as a lifelong trajectory. Thus, the primacy of the family experience as the sole route for present and future happiness and contentment is diluted and subverted.

The other happy ending

Another fruitful and unexpected site for resistance by single women is the burgeoning genre of self-help books. Browsing online, one can easily find

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books such as: *Single Girl's Manifesta; Single: The Art of Being Satisfied, Fulfilled, and Independent; Living Alone and Loving It; and Better Single Than Sorry: A No-Regrets Guide to Loving Yourself and Never Settling*. Elsewhere, I have argued (Lahad, 2007) that this new genre provides significant alternatives to the ideology of marriage and family. Writing the current article has given me the opportunity to revisit these texts and track the temporal alternatives they offer. It is important to note, that despite their political potential, the messages underlined in these books are a part of a therapeutic, neo-liberal enterprise culture.[2] In fact, the overriding tone of these books, like so many others, employs an individualist, agentic rhetoric which ignores many of the structural, sociopolitical constraints imposed upon women.

This line of argument has been explored by various social critics, whom have argued that the ethos of self-realization is disconnected from social activism and political engagement with sociopolitical problems (see, for example Cloud, 1999) I concur with these important claims, yet I think that such a reading at time misses the political alternatives that these texts may offer.

Such an example can be found in Jerusha Stewart's self-help book a *Single Girl's Manifesta*. The message "don't wait" is rehearsed again and again in different guises throughout the book:

> "Don't wait till you are tying the knot to celebrate your marvellous self" (p. 172), "[You are] the head of the household you can buy a home on your own, invest for yourself and in your future", "Don't wait for someone else to make this timely decision" (p. 129), "Making choices in your life equals gaining control over your future" (p. 130).

In her analysis of Stewart's self-help book, Taylor (2011: 177) correctly argues that Stewart advocates a new kind of identity politics for single women.[3] According to Taylor, this kind of strategic deployment of choice—one which views singlehood as a chosen way of being—is an important political gesture, especially given that the idea is rarely deployed in relation to public understandings of female singlehood.[4] Adding to Taylor's argument and developing my previous analysis of self-help books (Lahad, 2007), I stress that Stewart also offers her readers a novel way to rethink their life schedules and to reclaim their temporal agency.

Such a strong sense of being in the present and carving out their singular future addresses various areas of the single woman's life, from managing taxes, buying a house or throwing holding one's own parties. The titles of some of her book chapters, such as "Managing milestones without marriage" or "The other happy ending", convey this temporal alternative.

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Stewart develops a refreshing alternative to prevailing depictions of single women's futurity. This is a future which offers another happy ending, one which does not follow the socio-temporal linear trajectory of marriage with kids.

Indeed, much has been written about the lonely and miserable figure of the aging single women (Lahad and Hazan, 2014; McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009; Sandfield and Percy, 2003; Trimberger, 2006). The above statements stand in contrast to so many popular representations of how this anxiety overrides women's visions of their possible single future. An apposite example is a famous quote taken the first *Bridget Jones* movies. As Bridget exclaims:

> ''I suddenly realized that unless something changed soon I was going to live a life where my major relationship was with a bottle of wine... and I'd finally die, fat and alone, and be found three week later half-eaten by Alsatians. Or I was about to turn into Glenn Close in Fatal Attraction.''

Waiting in this scenario signifies being stuck, a position which increases what Crapanzano states as one's ''feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability'' (Crapanzano, 1985: 45). ''In such a wait,'' as he writes, ''the meaning lies in the future—in the arrival or the non-arrival of the object of waiting'' (1985: 44). The ''other happy ending'' is also deliberated upon in another self-help book by Nika Beamon. In the introduction to her book, *I didn't work this hard just to get married: Successful Single Black Women Speak Out*, she writes the following:

> ''Like many women, when I envisioned my future, I did not anticipate that I would grow older alone. I expected that I would be married with children by the time I was thirty at the latest. Moreover, I felt pressured to be happily coupled. Simply put, whether or not I would get hitched wasn't even a thought—it was a given. It was a foregone conclusion that I would be settled with a husband and little ones, much like my parents and their parents before them. After all, as a well-educated, well-traveled, and financially secure black woman, why would I not be? Yet as I drifted into my mid-thirties I found myself and many of my equally successful friends alone.''

Beamon story illustrates what anthropologist Gaylene Becker (1997) terms as a ''disruption''. The fact that she and her friends are in their mid-thirties alone is opposed to the linear manner in which her life was supposed to unfold. In this connection, Becker writes: Western thought is organized to make sense of individual lives as orderly projects, but when this concept of the life course is translated into experiences of individual people, there is

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a great deal of slippage because real lives are more unpredictable than the cultural ideal (Becker, 1997: 5).

Drawing on Becker's observation, I suggest that the authors of these books and the writers of the blogs and columns referred to before provide alternatives to the cultural ideal of marriage and childrearing. However, many of them do not regard it as being as necessary as a disruption. Nika Beamon, for example, presents the story of Ella Brown, single, Female and a movie producer:

> ''Like all good Hollywood love stories, Brown is not opposed to having a man as part of her happy ending. 'God willing, my Mr. Right comes I do believe it will be unconventional. I don't believe I have any qualms with us having separate bedrooms'...In the meantime she will continue to blaze her own path to having a future that's complete, even if that means her personal movie will fade to black without a leading man. 'I'm definitely open to being knocked off my feet. But I'm not actively biting my nails waiting for it'.'' (Beamon, 2009: 78)

In the illustrations above, single women do not present themselves as ''biting their nails waiting for it''. As shown, some of the women interviewed in these self-help books did not rule out the option of coupled life in the future, but at the same time stated that they would continue to carve out their own life path, whether or not the right men doesn't come along.

One's anticipated future can be as formulated as what Stewart terms ''as the other happy ending''. As she writes: ''Marriage is still the ultimate goal of so many women and man. In my case I don't know if happily ever after means eternal singleness but I never believed that I must marry to be happy'' (Stewart, 2005: 5).

Discussion

What does it mean not to wait? asks Lucy Pickering (this issue) in her article about practices of non-waiting among 1960s-generation 'hippies' and younger 'drop outs' in Hawaii. What does it mean, not to wait, for single women? Is it, can it be, a viable realizable option? Can it signify a social existence which does not signal defeat and the loss of hope of one day tying the knot with the right one? In her ethnographic work with American hippies and ''drop outs'' living in Hawaii Pickering reached the conclusion that for them:

> ''To wait is to reflect and accept the moment, to ''be here now'' and enjoy it for what it is. To reject the anxieties of anticipation, to spurn future

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> orientation, to shun "diligent watchfulness" in favor of playful observation is to reject waiting, it is to not wait." (Pickering, this issue)

To a certain extent, some of the text analyzed in this paper presents similar temporal alternatives to the familiar formula that all that single women can do is wait to get married and have children. Critical studies of time demonstrate that social actors have the ability to re-invent time and pose alternative visions of time apprehension. The analysis of various cultural texts carried out in this paper reveals both the difficulties and the possibilities of imaging temporal position which rub against the hegemonic grain. The first part of my article shows how waiting, and the call to stop waiting, are embedded in the familial and heteronormative codes of conduct. In the second part, I have explored how non-waiting enables the capacity to resist traditional gendered identities and imagining alternative temporalities.

Indeed, the different bloggers and writers quoted urge their readers to live in the present, to carve a future in which marriage and conjugal parenthood are not the sole centers of meaning, happiness, and self-fulfillment. I take much inspiration from Sara Ahmed's words in the *Promise of Happiness*:

> "We need to think more about the relationship between the queer struggle for a bearable life and aspirational hopes for a good life... We could remember that the Latin root of the word aspiration means "to breathe" I think the struggle for a bearable life is the struggle for queers to have space to breathe. Having space to breath or being able to breathe freely... is an aspiration. With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom it might simply mean the freedom to breath." (Ahmed, 2010: 120)

The aim of this study was to engage in a process of imagining different temporalities and respectively alternative subject positions for single women. In my view, the temporal propositions offered in the second part of this article offer "a space to breathe", "being able to breathe freely" in Ahmed's words. In a culture which constantly warns single women of the lonely and miserable future awaiting them (unless they get married) I consider this to be a significant step.

The call to stop waiting offers new possibilities for breathing in the present and for anticipating the future. Time is above all, as Norbert Elias in his classic essay about time argues, a means of orientation in the social world (1993: 11).These perspectives should encourage us to consider the social relativity of time, and to envision alternative imagining in which a coupled and reproductive future is not the only available temporal model.

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Notes

1. See Lahad and Hazan for a discussion of the old maid figures.
2. For an excellent discussion of these issues, see Cloud (1999).
3. Taylor notes in this connection that Stewart's text also presumes that her single readers enjoy class privilege and foreground the ability to consume as an exercise of economist subjectivity.
4. For a more detailed discussion of singlehood and choice, see Lahad (2014), Reynolds (2013).

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