

BRIDGET JONES AS CULTURAL ICON:
MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF SINGLE WOMEN

by

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(Under the Direction of Janice Hume)

ABSTRACT

This study addresses a recent demographic shift, a sharp increase in the number of single women in American society, and the response to this shift in media. Seeking to add to previous research on the unique interaction of mass media and the modern single woman, this study qualitatively analyzes how the single woman is defined in the best-selling novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*, in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and in national daily newspapers. Examining the single woman as she is created and “legitimized” in these texts will add to a genre of scholarship on media-generated female icons/heroines and their reflection of cultural values.

INDEX WORDS: Single Women; Media Criticism; Cosmopolitan Magazine; Bridget Jones's Diary; Feminism

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DEDICATION

First and foremost for Mom and Dad with much, much, MUCH gratitude for your never-ending supply of love, encouragement and support. You are everything I strive to be. I love you!

For my incredible sisters Rachael and Laura, the best friends anyone could ask for. To Nana and Aunt Susan for always being there, supporting me and truly listening from beginning to end.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of single women represents an interesting demographic shift in American society. According to the United States Census, such growth is a fairly recent phenomenon. Scholars note that many factors such as the feminist movement, the growing number of women in the workforce and increased fertility options for older women have played a part in its continuing evolution (Gordon 2003, Lewis 1994, Dubler 2003, Anderson & Stewart 1994). This recent growth could challenge our cultural understanding of what women are “supposed to be” or “should want.” Traditionally, the mass media have been a source for examining cultural values. This study seeks to learn about current social values for this new demographic by examining media representations of modern single women. The premise is that this icon, the modern single woman, is significant in both the values she represents and the values she does not.

The media version of the woman indicated here has major implications for, and offers vast possibilities to all mass media, particularly the book and magazine publishing industries, the products upon which this study will focus. The success of the “plight-of-the-single girl” genre of literature has been exemplified by *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, the best-selling book by Helen Fielding. The novel created a flurry of discussion in mainstream media, which suggested the modern single woman is somehow encapsulated in Bridget Jones, the book’s heroine. Similarly,

in the magazine industry, *Cosmopolitan* magazine has celebrated—and exploited—the single woman. Targeting the “Fun, Fearless, Female,” *Cosmopolitan* sells to more than four million women worldwide, making it the largest magazine franchise in the world (www.hearst.com).

Circulation figures reveal a fascinating intersection of *Cosmopolitan* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*: *Cosmopolitan* was the number one selling monthly magazine in what could be termed the “Bridget Demographic” in the United States in 1998, the year of the novel’s release in America (World Almanac 2000 273). This “Bridget Demographic” includes single, 20-40 year old, professional women. The overlap of these two texts creates a credible entry point for describing the modern media-generated heroine for single working women. Thus this study examines descriptions of the single female heroine of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and single women in 1998’s *Cosmopolitan*. This study seeks to analyze these texts to offer a window into the real lives of the unmarried female’s characteristics and personality traits. This analysis is placed within the framework of a media discussion that took place in major newspapers in the United States in 1998, and in 2001, the year that “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” the movie was released. The major themes in this public debate help clarify the position of the single woman in relation to Bridget Jones within modern society.

Theoretical Rationale

Bridget Jones’s Diary and *Cosmopolitan* magazine are treated here as significant “texts” worthy of cultural analysis. This type of analysis is inspired by Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, published in 1973. Barthes broke through the conventions of culture analysis in that he treated popular culture seriously, as texts to be analyzed. Fiske recommends using the term “text” to mean the meaningful outcome of the encounter between content and reader, stating that a “text

becomes a text at the moment of reading...when its interaction with one of its many audiences activates some of the meanings/pleasures that it is capable of provoking” (Fiske 14). In calling *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Cosmopolitan* magazine “texts,” it is implied that these works are not only significant, but might also simultaneously reflect and help construct a sense of identity and community for the emerging public of modern single females. For, as Barthes theorized, a text is more than a single message; it is complicated by codes of meaning on one hand and social experiences on the other (Barthes 1993). People learn and reinforce certain attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about gender roles and relations by viewing them among other cultural products, namely literature and magazines. After all, popular culture is an entry point into social education, and as a people we begin to learn early and well from mass media (Williams 1976).

This type of cultural analysis using media as a primary source relies on “levels of meaning” used by Katherine Toland Frith. Frith linked authors’ preferred meaning to readers’ ideological meaning, then intertwined the resulting cultural meaning to longstanding political-economic relations which have and continue to structure inequalities in access. Frith states that media producers “constantly, though not always consciously, refer to cultural myths when designing effective messages...and in so doing help cement into place a status quo version of reality” (Frith 23). In other words, it is possible to view the various presentations found in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Cosmopolitan* as status quo representations of single women. Therefore, this study will engage in the academic tradition Jurgen Habermas calls ‘critical studies,’ which “asks what lies behind the consensus, presented as fact, that supports the dominant tradition of the time, and does so with a view to the relations of power surreptitiously incorporated in the symbolic structures of the systems of speech and action” (Habermas 12).

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's notions of "civil society" and the production of hegemony are notable here (1971). These ideas allow *Cosmopolitan* to be conceived of as a political arena rather than simply a production site of ideology. Gramsci conceives of hegemony as a situation in which a class—here, single women—is able to secure a moral, cultural, intellectual and political leadership in society through ongoing ideological struggle and compromise. Hegemony, therefore, is not a "given." Rather, it is a process requiring accommodation in which space is accorded to oppositional ideas and interests. Hegemony is understood as a "compromise equilibrium"—though it is an equilibrium that ultimately works to articulate the interests of subordinate groups to those of the dominant (Gramsci 161).

These texts will be analyzed with a feminist eye. In an analysis of the range of feminist media research, van Zoonen finds three main themes of contemporary feminist critique: stereotypes/socialization, pornography and ideology. These themes are situated within liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism currents, respectively, and in research on all three themes, media are conceptualized as agents of social control. Given its epistemological and political-philosophical premises, this research is a feminist media study that adopts a liberal feminist perspective. Liberal feminist criticism focuses on the ways women are constructed in media. It blames gender inequality for irrational prejudice and stereotypes against women, and strives to achieve change within the existing male dominated capitalist society. The present study will add to literature in this current by shedding light on the ways the phenomenon of the single woman has recently been manifested in mainstream media.

In what has been termed contemporary feminism, a structuralist functionalist media theory has historically been used. However, many scholars have criticized this transmission view of feminism and now argue that the academic study of mass communication has undergone a

paradigm shift involving a movement toward perspectives like those of Barthes and Frith, in which meaning is understood as constructed out of the negotiation between audiences and institutional producers. No longer approached as a more or less consistent entity, meaning is now seen as contradictory, divided and plural, in other words, as polysemic. For, as Morley found, “one cannot conclude from a person’s class, race, gender, sexual orientation and so on, how she or he will read a given text (though those factors do indicate what cultural codes she or he has access to). It is also a question of how she or he thinks and feels about living her/his social situation” (Morley 43). The present study draws on this post-structuralist view in the sense that media texts are viewed as carrying multiple meanings and as open to a range of interpretations. Morley’s study stemmed from Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model (Hall 1987). He states that as a result of the tensions in the encoding process, media texts do not constitute a closed ideological system, but “reflect” the contradictions of production.

Literature Review

The media-generated single female is not a new concept. From Jane Austen’s unforgettable Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*, to the torrid and fear-inciting—yet notably popular—tales of the fallen and disgraced single women in the penny newspapers of the 1800s, plight-of-the-single-girl writings abound. This single woman now exists in society in great numbers (Hobbs and Stoops 51, 148, 158). The modern media-generated heroine now has a real-life counterpart—no longer is she simply a window through which the masses speculate on her life as “other.” Believing that media constructions simultaneously reflect and define how she does/should act and how culture does/should regard her, examining this heroine’s media

presentation will aid in the quest to understand the complex relationship between media and cultural values.

According to Hobbs and Stoops of the U.S. Census Bureau, there is a larger population of single women in the United States today than ever before. Since 1950, females have constituted the majority of the population, and between 1950 and 2000, married-couple households declined from more than three fourths, to just over one half of all households. Many single women now own their own homes and live alone. In 1970, women maintained 21 percent of households. By 2000, one-person households maintained by women constituted 57 percent of all one-person households and 42 percent of all other non-family households (Hobbs and Stoops 2000).

The advances of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s have undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of this phenomenon. The women of this movement struggled for equality and level playing fields for women in every venue. The legacy they passed down to women currently between the ages of 20 and 40 brought with it the question of how to deal with the increased options, freedom and independence. Paula Kamen writes, “women of the next generation from all walks of life are individually and uniformly determined to realize some of the movement’s most fundamental goals: self-sufficiency, self-definition and self-determination. More than any other word or philosophy, independence describes the next generation of women, their goals and their ideals” (Kamen 160).

This shift in ideological goals as a result of second wave advances has not been an easy transition. In the past decade, numerous “popular press feminist” (Gring-Pemle, 2000) works have charged women’s studies and feminists in the academy with being elitist and aristocratic; propagating falsehoods and exaggerations about the condition of women in society; imagining all women as helpless victims; and being sexually, emotionally and intellectually repressed (see

Paglia 1994, Wolf 1993, Sommers 1994, R. Walker 1995, Findlen 2001, Roiphe1993). Academic feminism has responded with critiques of these works, citing the use of covert techniques to garner media attention and mass popularity, as well as the use of counter-productive class, race and orientation biases (Gring-Pemble, 2000).

What has emerged from this paradigmatic split is third wave feminism. While claiming not to be ungrateful to the second wavers, this movement hinges on the assumption that the time for social revolution is past, views of women as oppressed and men as oppressors are both unnecessary and harmful, and women are responsible for and representative of only themselves, not the collective movement or previous generations of women. In “Isn’t It Ironic?: The Intersection of Third Wave Feminism and Generation X,” Helene Shugart cites a tendency for contradiction in the Third Wave as an enacting pluralism. Many feminists still take issue with the obvious applicability of the movement to only white, heterosexual, middle class females. As Stimpson says, “third wavers may know about marginality, but they find little glamour in it” (Stimpson 74). Both *Cosmopolitan* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* are third wave texts. Examining the relationship between feminism and the single women portrayed in these texts, this study will add to the relatively new genre of third wave literature.

Since the 1970s, the media have been a target for feminists, due in part to ample documentation of its power over people’s lives, in particular women’s lives. Studies abound discussing why media are harmful to women, helpful to women, representative of women and atypical of women. The war waged between women and media is not a simplistic one. It is a “complex struggle between feminism and anti-feminism that has reflected, reinforced and exaggerated our culture’s ambivalence about women’s roles for over 35 years” (Douglas 13).

This study adds to the discussion of this struggle in that it reveals the representations of the modern single woman in mediated popular culture: mass produced commodities—*Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Cosmopolitan*—that are “created and disseminated by the media for wide consumption by various targeted segments of the population” (Meyers 5). Media are important texts because of their intrinsic ability to reveal societal mores, and the images of modern single women in the media are so powerful because they are still relatively new in society.

Popular novels such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* are legitimate forms of mass media, especially for women, as demonstrated in Janice Radway's “Reading the Romance” (Radway 1994). Researching the ideologies and motivations contained in Harlequin romance novels, Ann Snitow writes:

These novels are too pallid to shape consciousness but they feed certain regressive elements in the female experience...these books are interesting because they define a set of relations, feelings, and assumptions that do indeed permeate our minds. They are *mass* paperbacks, not only because they are easy to read pablum but also because they reflect—sometimes more, sometimes less consciously, sometimes amazingly naively—commonly experienced psychological and social elements in the daily lives of women. (Snitow 247)

Snitow's statement has major implications for the reading of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, for if audiences perceive this character as reflecting the lives of single women, her representation offers a window into images this newly-emerged public are ingesting, regarding who they “should be” or how they are “supposed to act.”

The two texts of this study are the single women depicted in *Cosmopolitan* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*, both their heroic and anti-heroic qualities. The online dictionary of literary terms,

Bartleby.com, defines an anti-heroine as “a woman protagonist, as in a play or book, characterized by a lack of traditional heroic qualities.” In his book *Dialectics and Passive Resistance: The Comic Antihero in Modern Fiction*, William Walker defines an anti-hero as society’s “little man,” the outsider, the underdog, the fool (Walker 1985). The anti-heroine, therefore, has some of the personality flaws and ultimate bad fortune traditionally assigned to a villain, but also possesses heroic qualities or intentions to gain the sympathy of readers. Anti-heroines can be awkward, obnoxious, passive, pitiful or obtuse—but they are always, in some fundamental way, flawed or failed heroines, serving to endear the character to readers.

Bridget Jones and her *Cosmopolitan* counterpart could be seen as having heroic qualities and intentions in that these characters represent a segment of society that has not, in recent years, been adequately represented in the media. Simply by her existence as media-generated modern single women, Bridget Jones and the single women of *Cosmopolitan* could be seen as having heroic qualities and intentions. In *The Hero in America*, Warren calls heroes the symbols of the highest aims of a culture:

For if the hero is the embodiment of our ideals, the fulfillment of our secret needs, and the image of the daydream self, then to analyze him is likely to mean, in the end, an analysis of the hero-makers and the hero-worshippers who are, indeed, ourselves. By a man’s hero ye shall know him. So we may come to know ourselves even better than we had ever wanted to. To create a hero is, indeed to create a self. (Warren, xiv)

Charles Horton Cooley, for instance, believed that heroes function as aids of internalization for social norms, representing and reinforcing the values and aspirations of the time, while Ralph Waldo Emerson depicts the hero as having great attributes only when those attributes are

recognized by society as being useful for the realization of its own purpose. The hero, then, must become a mirror through which society becomes conscious of itself (Schwartz, 1985). Today's hero does not necessarily have to be an extraordinary person endowed with extraordinary powers.

Similarly, the heroine has been defined as emerging from the nexus of ordinary women, one of her enduring characteristics being her attainability, her "normal" traits (Aisenberg 191). This is a powerful image. As Norma Goodrich discusses in *Heroines: Demigoddesses, Prima Donnas, Movie Stars*, modern heroines can be seen as reincarnations of mythical ones: "None of us can afford to shrug them off. Why not? Because for centuries upon centuries uncounted, they have remained before readers and viewers perennially" (Goodrich xvi).

Janice Hume defines characteristics of heroic women as portrayed in major women's periodicals *Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Lady's Book*. Her study is placed in a historical context by comparing the media presentation of heroines both before and after the beginning of the women's movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. Hume finds that in these magazines, heroines reflect the ideal morals of mainstream society, but these heroines were mothers and wives. Good single women seldom remained so, but were rewarded with husbands and families (Hume 1997, Hume 2000).

Following in this stream of research, this study focuses on the presentation of the modern single female in today's best-selling women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*. There has been no dearth of research on the complex relationship between women and women's magazines: the coverage of career options (Cass 2001), women's portrayals in advertising (Ferguson, Kreshel, Tinkham 1990), sex in women's magazines (Grenier 1999) and women's magazine fiction (Peirce 1997), to name a few. Marjorie Ferguson has even drawn a parallel between the

femininity enforced by women's magazines and the social purposes of the religious cult. These studies speak to the relevance of magazines in the lives of women.

In recent years, much research has been conducted in the social sciences about the single woman. The perceptions other women hold of her (Lewis 1997), the psychological effects on women who choose to never marry (Gordon 2003), the effects of single-ness on a woman's career (Schneer 1993), the legal "shadow" of marriage on single women (Dubler 2003) and therapy options for single women (Schwartzberg 1994), have all been studied. In 1998, Marcelle Clements conducted extensive interviews with various single women: young, old, poor, rich, divorced, never married, lesbian, handicapped, etc., to show the world the "real" picture of life for single women. Unlike most media images of single females, Clements' study found that unmarried women are not a homogenous group. They expect different things out of life, have numerous views, and live a variety of lifestyles (Clements 1998).

In the nineteenth century, these single women were known as "spinsters." Their existence—albeit in small numbers—and interaction within American society is a source of contention in recent studies. These women have been described both as pioneers who consciously chose "single-blessedness" (Chambers-Schiller 1984), and as middle class women whose choice was not between marrying or not marrying, but whether to marry a particular man (Berend 2000). Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct* discusses that these women, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, had organized in feminist organizations that transformed dominant ideology; they maintained a distinctly separate women's culture throughout the century; and they sustained themselves and that culture through a network of close female friendships, many of them homo-erotic (Smith-Rosenberg 1985).

Martha Vicinus's *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women* distinguishes between three generations of single women in the nineteenth century: the "heroic pioneers" born before 1830, who laid the foundation for educational and economic independence, the generation born in the 1840s and 1850s "who built and sustained women's communities," and the third generation, born in the 1870s and 1880s, who "demanded fundamental changes in society and politics" (Vicinus 7). The study of the lives of single women in society is an important one. It teaches us more than simply what this group of women experience, for "attitudes toward single women are indicative of societal definitions of all women... the struggles of such women are part of the struggle for women's emancipation, no matter what form they take" (Lerner 1998).

Representations of single women in media has been analyzed most recently by Naomi Braun Rosenthal, who claims that fictional images of spinsters in American popular culture—historically used to frighten women into the married-with-children status quo—have disappeared altogether (Rosenthal 2002). Betsy Israel's *Bachelor Girl* tracks media representations and misrepresentations of the single female throughout twentieth century, focusing on how this woman has changed and grown in the eyes of American society. She finds that the first single archetype of the 1990s and the new century is "the young, defiantly post-feminist woman who believes she must take care of the 'single situation' in a prompt and businesslike fashion. Before she turns twenty-seven. Or else" (Israel 251).

It is imperative that an analysis of the themes in articles about single women in major newspapers be included in the present research, if only for the noticeable gap in the literature of this type of research. For, as Michael Schudson says, "news is part of the background through which and with which people think" (Schudson 16). In viewing the presence of this emerging

demographic within the context of Schudson's concept of news as "cultural knowledge" (Schudson 3), we are inquiring about "what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in, and what range of considerations we should take seriously" (Schudson 14), and in particular, where the modern single woman fits into this framework.

Bridget Jones's Diary

Throughout history, fiction literature has had many enduring female characters: Henry James' Pamela, Emily Bronte's Catherine, Jacqueline Susann's Anne Welles, F. Scott Fitzgerald's Daisy, Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina and the list goes on. Recently, authors have bred a new generation of heroines.

The books that comprise this modern genre—*Dating Big Bird*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, *Animal Husbandry*, *Running in Heels*, *Good In Bed* and countless others—are concerned with smart single women whose search for love is one part of a need to find a comfortable place in a world they know rewards those who settle into marriage. These books are *not* all the same, yet there are similarities. The heroine is usually an attractive woman in her 20s or 30s; she is educated, self-aware, quick-witted and funny; she lives in a large urban city and works in publishing or advertising; and her family appears every few chapters, Greek chorus-style, to shake their heads in synchronized dismay (Zeisler 60). Bridget Jones is a prime example and a good representative of the women in this genre.

In 1996, Picador published Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, in the United Kingdom. The book struck a chord with readers there and by 1999 it had sold a total of 1,289,087 copies (Hamilton, Alex). In 1998, Viking republished and released *Bridget Jones's Diary* in America. The book was once again glorified for its universality and ability to "get" the

plight of the single girl. The hardback copy reached number 3 on the *New York Times* Bestseller List (“Best Sellers: June”), and remained in the top 15 for 17 weeks from June to October 1998 (“Best Sellers: October”). Miramax Home Entertainment subsequently made *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, the movie, starring Renee Zellweger and Hugh Grant. It debuted in 2001, pulling in 5.7 million pounds in England (“Bridget Smashes”) and \$10 million in the U.S. (“Showbiz Today”). Alex Kuczynski of the *New York Times* was not amused:

Bridget is such a sorry spectacle, wallowing in her man-crazed helplessness, that her foolishness cannot be excused...the learned helplessness thrust upon women by advertisers, popular entertainment and, yes, women’s magazines. Ms. Fielding constructs her heroine out of every myth that has ever sprung from the ground of *Cosmopolitan* and television sitcoms. (Kuczynski, Alex)

While the book is a nod to the modern-independent-career-woman lifestyle, and obviously represents a formula that works in selling books, some critics wondered if publishers may have taken its marketing a step too far. Book campaigns, publicists, literature critics and jacket blurbs on both sides of the Atlantic embarked on a Bridget feeding frenzy. Marketers everywhere saw a publishing zeitgeist waiting to happen and quickly positioned Bridget as its patron saint. Thinking they had found the key to reaching the single girl market, it has been said that this segment of the media industry became a little Bridget-obsessed (Zeisler 60).

For instance: “If you thought Bridget Jones had the corner on angst, you haven’t met the heroine of Markoe’s first novel,” says a reviewer for *It’s My *&%#! Birthday* (Glasbrenner 150). Of *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and its heroine Rebecca Bloomwood, the publisher’s Vice President says, “It’s easy to say that Rebecca Bloomwood is Bridget Jones’s younger sister” (Andriani 90).

What these books have in common is that they center on single women, and as such, provide ruminations on what it means to be single. Finding which principles the main single female character of *Bridget Jones's Diary* represents is most fitting, in that the novel has been positioned at the center of this genre. Yet little scholarly work has been conducted on any of these modern books. Betsy Israel mentions Bridget Jones in *Bachelor Girl* (2002) in a section titled "The Spinster as Bemused Slacker." Placing Bridget Jones alongside Ally McBeal, the heroine of a post-modern, pop-culture, drama American television show, Israel concludes:

These two, like so many women I know in their thirties, seem to be kind of hanging out in the lives that have evolved around them, making sporadic efforts to connect with men, then retreating back to the couch, the TV, or the phone or into an elaborate fantasy. They believe in the possibilities of love, though it's not clear they fully believe in the beautiful possibilities of marriage. They've lived through the same kind of chaos that baby brides list on their resumes. But they've come to different conclusions. Primarily, getting married will never guarantee a feeling of safety. Not that they won't try. Try hard. (Israel 258)

Mary Elizabeth Adams also studies Bridget in her 2001 doctoral dissertation "Female Fear: The Body, Gender, and the Burdens of Beauty" at the University of Oklahoma. Adams posits that for Bridget, beauty culture and self-help books are ways of staying in control of her gender, but "despite Fielding's comic intentions, the ridiculous nature of Bridget's obsessions cannot be ignored" (Adams 140). Adams expresses disgust at the fact that "regardless of how much Bridget appears to be victimized by beauty culture, readers are expected to see the light-hearted aspects of each fear" (Adams 138).

Cosmopolitan Magazine

Women's magazines have often been at the center of feminist critiques. Scholars have noted their widespread, pervasive nature and inherent ability to directly target women as a primary source for messages to and about women (Baumgardner & Richards 1998). Magazines contribute to cultural processes that define the position of women in society, shaping both a woman's view of herself and society's view of her (Ferguson, 1983: 1). Thus, in the context of defining the modern media-generated single woman, the women's mass circulating magazine *Cosmopolitan* is a valid primary source.

Published by Hearst Magazines Corporation in more than 28 countries, *Cosmopolitan's* content is described in *Magazines for Libraries* as "sex, looks, relationships, success and more sex" (Magazines for Libraries 1499). *Willing's Press Guide* describes it as "addressing the issues all women face...aimed at young professional women" (Willing's Press Guide 2002 348). In 2000, the most recent year for which figures are available, *Cosmopolitan's* circulation in the United States was 2,651,192, more than half of which comes from newsstand sales (The New York Times Almanac 390). Editor Kate White, author of two self-help books and a fiction mystery, currently serves as Editor-in-Chief. As an advertising-driven, primarily urban glossy, *Cosmopolitan* sells for \$3.50 an issue, and is currently the number-one selling magazine in its demographic (World Almanac 2002 273).

First published in 1886, *Cosmopolitan* was once a muckraking crusader. In the early 1900s, the magazine's cover carried the line "The Magazine for People Who Can Read" (Wolseley 82). Its twentieth-century transformation can be attributed almost solely to the contributions of Helen Gurley Brown, who became Editor-in-Chief of the magazine in the 1960s. Circulation rose by more than 100,000 and advertising sales grew 43 percent during the first year

Brown revolutionized the magazine, making it the first successful consumer magazine to target what could now be called the “Bridget demographic”: single girls-with-jobs (Millett 60). Her influence can still be seen in much of *Cosmopolitan*’s content today.

Brown’s credo required an understanding of identity as something that could always be reworked, improved upon, and even dramatically changed (Ouellette, 1999). In 1962, Brown wrote *Sex and The Single Girl*, an unabashed self-help credo written for, in her words, “the girl who doesn’t have anything going for her...who’s not pretty, who maybe didn’t go to college and who may not even have a decent family background” (Didion 35). This book appealed to women who were living out a growing gap between girlhood and marriage made possible by shifting urban migration patterns and the expanding pink-collar labor force. Brown was characterized as the “working girl’s Simone de Beauvoir” of her era (Millett 60). While early feminist leaders like Betty Friedan found Brown’s message “obscene and horrible,” few could deny that she had developed an “astounding rapport with America’s single girl-dom” (Welles 65).

Brown’s editorial strategy has been described by the popular press as practically revolutionary in terms of women’s magazines. One of the most enduring traits of *Cosmopolitan* can be traced solely to Brown: sex is subsumed under the work ethic, thus effectively diffusing guilt about sexual pleasure (Faust 1980). *The New York Times* declared that Brown’s *Cosmopolitan* offered “half a feminist message” to women who would otherwise have none (Harrington 36). *Ms.*, in its thirteenth anniversary issue, featured an article by Brown, introducing the piece as “from the women’s magazine editor who first admitted that women were sexual, too.” Other women’s magazines had treated sex but most often in the context of its domestication (Ehrenreich 54).

In “Inventing the *Cosmo* Girl,” Laurie Ouellette traces Helen Gurley Brown’s rise to editor of *Cosmopolitan*. She posits that the cultural discourse Brown articulated between 1965 and 1975 legitimated sexism and the capitalist exploitation of women’s labor, while simultaneously expressing hardships and desires in a voice that spoke with credibility to an expanding class of pink-collar women. Ouellette also suggests that she articulated a girl-style American Dream that promised transcendence from class roles as well as sexual ones (Ouellette, 1999). Kathryn McMahon discusses how gender and class antagonisms are coded as sexual fantasy in the text of *Cosmopolitan*. She concludes that the text offers the fantasy of revenge for class and gender subordination through images of women’s sexuality used to dominate and control men on their own turf. The middle-class man is represented as an enemy; the middle-class woman as a privileged rival. In this context, McMahon suggests, femininity, reduced to sex, must be honed to a weapon to be used in what amounts to guerrilla warfare (McMahon 385). This study adds to research on editorial messages within *Cosmopolitan* as well as on the text as a whole, particularly in regard to how it relates to single women.

Feminists have criticized *Cosmopolitan* for many things. It has been said that the magazine lacks diversity in race and economic class, and habitually omits, or marginalizes, representations of black women, signifying them categorically as “other.” Some feminists suggest that the magazine is aimed at and depicts white, heterosexual, upper middle class women exclusively (McMahon 384).

Methods

The study seeks to answer two questions: How was the single woman portrayed in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and in the editorial content of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in the United States

in 1998? What were the themes of the mainstream print media in 1998 and 2001 concerning the phenomenon of the single woman and *Bridget Jones's Diary*? *Bridget Jones's Diary* was published in the United States in 1998, the movie was released in 2001. Portrayals in these texts will be analyzed to help define the mass media-generated single heroine depicted within their pages. Recurring themes and categories regarding this woman will be examined, and the overall text itself will be analyzed, focusing on these themes and categories.

First, single female characters and the passages describing them will be identified within the pages of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. These women will be analyzed according to two major categories: their attributes and actions. Each description of a single woman's attributes, including her personality traits and her appearance, and actions will be listed to see what common themes emerge.

Next, editorial content featuring single women in all 12 issues of *Cosmopolitan* in 1998 will be examined, again in terms of attributes and actions. Articles will be chosen by performing a search for the word "single" using MasterFile Search Premier with limiters set to include only the 12 issues of *Cosmopolitan* produced in 1998. This analysis will determine whether the same themes in personality traits, appearance, actions and interactions that appeared in the novel exist in this mass circulating magazine. Examining the similarities and differences in portrayals of these characters across two kinds of mass media, a best-selling book and a women's magazine, will help begin to define the modern media-constructed single woman. The overlap of these two texts creates a credible entry point.

Finally, this study will evaluate the media-generated woman in reference to media discussions that took place during 1998, the year of *Bridget Jones's Diary's* release in America and 2001, the year the movie was released. This analysis will be conducted by performing a

Lexis/Nexis search of General News in Major Newspapers published in the United States for the terms “single women” and “Bridget Jones” for 1998 and 2001. Articles will be analyzed and major themes will be recorded. This positions descriptions of the modern single woman in a historical context, providing a snapshot for this point-in-time analysis.

If the “Bridget Jones” character has become a metaphor for the modern single woman, such a metaphor, based in collectively held images, has symbolic cultural significance, for as historian Richard Slotkin argues, “Metaphors are primitive hypotheses about the nature of reality.” He writes: “When we study cultural history we are examining the processes by which metaphors are generated, projected into a material world, and socially reified” (Slotkin 22-23). The media play a part in projecting cultural metaphors to a mass audience.

The analysis conducted in this study will reveal the character and personality traits that these particular media portray as ideal, and will offer insight into the qualities of the anti-heroine. The modern single female is being sent messages by these chosen texts about what she should or should not be. In defining this woman, the worldviews these media are utilizing, as well as their essential values, will also be examined. It is hoped that this analysis will help reveal, in some small way, how the media is helping—or hindering, for that matter—the women in this “new demographic” define and justify themselves to the rest of society.

CHAPTER 2

AN ANTI-HEROINE FOR SINGLE WOMEN: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FICTIONAL CHARACTER BRIDGET JONES

Introduction

Bridget Jones's Diary, the best-selling novel by Helen Fielding, is a first-person account of a year in the life of its heroine, Bridget Jones. It is part of a new genre of literature that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, concerned with smart, single, female characters. The emergence of such a genre provides clues about changes in culture and values, particularly for the cultural subgroup it reaches. Attallah describes genres as consisting of bundles of expectations that readers come to know and receive pleasure from repeating in various guises, a process that is a “historical internalization of the institution by the audience” (Attallah 234). The popularity of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, its sales figures and position on best-seller lists, speaks to the importance of its place within this new genre and its presence in readers' life experiences.

The genre provides one way for single women to understand their place in society. Kenneth Burke writes, “Repetitive form, the restatement of a theme by new details, is basic to any work of art, or to any other kind of orientation, for that matter. It is our only method of ‘talking on the subject’” (Burke 125). The genre featuring single women is not new. What is new is that her real-life counterpart exists in large numbers. Burke argues that all understanding relies on some form of comparison or a linking of discrete experiences, which “can be said to have a

prior existence in the mind of the person hearing or reading the work of art,” (Burke 143). The women featured in this genre both reflect and influence their real life counterparts.

Bridget Jones's Diary is written as a diary; its narrative techniques, as such, guide interpretations by audiences: “the new is made familiar through the recognition of relevant similarities” (Miller, C. 157). Readers are led to place their own lives alongside Bridget’s, comparing the two with the use of the intensely personal diary as a site for the comparison. Form tells a reader how to interpret content: “form shapes the response of the reader or listener to substance by providing instruction, so to speak, about how to perceive and interpret; this guidance disposes the audience to anticipate, to be gratified, to respond in a particular way” (Miller, C. 159). In other words, as Bridget Jones tells her story, the reader sees the main character’s life through the main character’s eyes, much the same as she sees her own life through her own eyes.

Bridget Jones is analyzed here, highlighting attributes, in the form of personality traits and appearance, and actions. To do this, each word and phrase describing Bridget has been identified and listed (See Appendix A). Several categories emerging from this analysis provide clues into the character and values of the modern single woman in popular culture.

Attributes and Actions

Bridget Jones is a relatively simple character; the reader is provided little personal history or detail about her physical, emotional and mental makeup. Her friends are, however, a large part of Bridget’s life, and it is in her interactions with them that her character emerges. For audiences to be invested in the continuing integrity of a group of characters, those characters must have stable and familiar relationships. Such a relationship exists between Jude, Bridget and Sharon.

They, along with Tom, the main male gay character, rely on one another as a family would. Due to the fact that none of the three are married and many of them have older parents, they create what could be viewed as an urban family.

Bridget Jones's Diary is written in first-person narrative. The reader is allowed to view only how Bridget feels about herself, her opinions of others and how she assumes others are viewing her. In much of the novel, Bridget describes herself in terms that she alternately hopes or fears other people are using to describe her. The picture of Bridget Jones that she herself paints reveals five defining characteristics consistent across the categories of “action” and “attribute.” These characteristics relate to and are labeled here as: Shame Regarding Vices, Concept of Self and Self-Esteem, Physical Appearance, Loneliness In Relation to Single Status, Intellect and Career.

Shame Regarding Vices

“129 lbs. (but post-Christmas), alcohol units 14 (but effectively covers 2 days as 4 hours of party was on New Year’s Day), cigarettes 22, calories 5424” (Fielding 7). Each entry in *Bridget Jones's Diary* begins with this methodical list of Bridget’s self-perceived vices. She is ashamed that she is an obsessive-compulsive smoker, drinker, dieter and procrastinator. Many times she extends the lists to include 1471 calls, lottery tickets, or hateful thoughts. This list is constructed for the purpose of self-improvement, and provides insight into Bridget’s motivation for shame. One motivation could be society, as many of these vices are considered such by society’s standards. Bridget makes efforts to alter, downplay, or delete them altogether, if only in her mind: “Thursday 5 January: 129 lbs. (excellent progress—2 lbs. of fat spontaneously combusted through joy and sexual promise), alcohol units 6 (v.g. for party), cigarettes 12 (continuing good work), calories 1258 (love has eradicated need to pig out)” (Fielding 19).

Though she expresses guilt about it, the amount of alcohol, cigarettes and food Bridget consumes implies that she does not care about her health. Drinking and smoking are two important aspects of the novel due to the sheer amount of time the main characters are portrayed doing each. Jude, Tom, Sharon and Bridget get drunk and smoke Silk Cut cigarettes repeatedly throughout the book.

Shame underlies most aspects of Bridget's personality. Almost all her actions and attributes show she is ashamed of herself. In particular, she is ashamed about being single. She effectively places much of the blame for her unmarried status on her weight and her looks, the attributes about which she is most ashamed.

During Bridget's Inner Poise phase, she loses weight and cuts back on drinking and smoking. Her friends and family object to the "New" Bridget. Tom "complained that spending the evening with the new vice-free me was like going out for dinner with a whelk, scallop or other flaccid sea-creature" (Fielding 77). The reader is treated to an outsider's point of view; despite Bridget's shame and guilt about her vices, they are irreplaceable parts of her personality and character. In other words, Bridget would not be Bridget if she did not drink, smoke and diet; and Bridget would not be Bridget if after drinking, smoking and dieting, she did not obsess about doing all of the above.

One part of this shame creates a dichotomy: Bridget is described as both a child and a whore. Her clumsy, bumbling tendencies force the reader to see her as childish, while her shame about sex leads her to describe herself as a slut. Other voices in the novel, as well as Bridget herself, portray her as acting, looking or feeling like a child (Fielding 257), a teenager (Fielding 44, 267, 128, 35), even a "a five-year-old" (Fielding 127). This technique has become known in feminist theory as the Virgin/Whore dichotomy, a representation used by mainstream media to

perpetuate myths that are misleading and harmful to women (Benedict, 1993). It is because of this strange dichotomy that Bridget “gets the guy” in the end. Her love interest Mark Darcy tells her “Bridget, all the other girls I know are so lacquered over. I don’t know anyone else who would fasten a bunny tail to their pants” (Fielding 207).

Concept of Self and Self-Esteem

Bridget’s concept of self is fluid. She views her actions as others will view them, and invents numerous personalities in efforts to “become” someone else. Bridget’s personas change throughout the book: “brilliant but apparently effortless cook” (Fielding 223), “Calvin Klein-style mother figure” (Fielding 100), “perfect saint-style person” (Fielding 25). Bridget changes these visions of herself based on her mood, her actions, or just in daydreams out of boredom. Bridget’s train of thought often wanders in elaborate fantasy:

...My new role as carer and, though I say it myself, wise counselor. It is so long since I have done anything at all for anyone else that it is a totally new and heady sensation. This is what has been missing in my life. I am having fantasies about becoming a Samaritan or Sunday school teacher, making soup for the homeless...or even retraining as a doctor. Maybe going out with a doctor would be better still, both sexually and spiritually fulfilling. (Fielding 43)

She uses these delusions as self-help mechanisms, and constantly daydreams about herself in alternate situations with other-than-her-own character traits and personas. In doing this, she seems to search for a filler for a void within, as when she daydreams of being a “festive Home Alone Singleton like Princess Diana,” (Fielding 259), a “Queen of Hearts or Soup Kitchen” (Fielding 260), and a “grand society hostess” (Fielding 68). It is easy for the reader to see what type of person Bridget wants to be, but little time spent honestly discussing who she

actually is. The reader is thus forced to draw conclusions about her based upon her low self-esteem and chronic efforts to change.

Bridget often seeks advice and counsel from her friends, family and the media. It seems that all of her actions and reactions are part of self-help theories or paradigms of her mother, Jude, Sharon or Tom. Many times this advice relates to insecurities, her two biggest being weight and relationships. Bridget's concept of self hinges on how well she is faring in these areas. She goes by various professional diets including the Scarsdale Diet, the F-Plan, the Anti-Cellulite Raw-Food Diet, and the Hay Diet. Her self-consciousness in dating results in her belief in *Women Who Love Too Much* (Fielding 19), *Men Are From Mars Women Are From Venus* (Fielding 19), *Zen* (Fielding 81), *Goddesses In Everywoman* (Fielding 168), Feng Shui (Fielding 222) and the advice of her friends and family (Fielding 158).

Bridget, Tom, Jude and Sharon resort to a sort of male-bashing rant many times in the book, using feminism as a defense mechanism to explain why they are being hurt by men, as demonstrated when a man wrongs Bridget and a "siren blared in [her] head and a huge neon sign started flashing with Sharon's head in the middle going, "FUCKWITTAGE, FUCKWITTAGE" (Fielding 66). This leads to Bridget's obvious and seemingly logical overlap of self-help and feminism. She views feminism as another set of rules to subscribe to, a new plan to follow in order to achieve happiness. Sharon is the feminist voice in the book, however, the way she smokes, drinks and rants with Jude and Bridget causes Bridget to further confuse feminism with her coping strategy of simply getting drunk:

Sharon was in top form. 'Bastards!' she was already yelling by 8:35, pouring three-quarters of a glass of Kir Royale straight down her throat. 'Stupid, smug, arrogant, manipulative, self-indulgent bastards. They exist in a total Culture of

Entitlement. Pass me one of those mini-pizzas, will you?'...By 11:30 Sharon was in full and splendid auto-rant...shouting, sticking her fingers into the tiramisu and transferring it straight to her mouth. (Fielding 108)

Bridget calls times like these “delicious night of drunken feminist ranting” (Fielding 107). Yet she denies feminism (Fielding 18), and demonstrates a true ignorance of the movement (Fielding 214).

Bridget’s icons of aging feminists are Goldie Hawn and Susan Sarandon. Bridget thinks of the two as older, satisfied women, and desires to be the same. She tries to live up to other female paragons in this way, as when she idolizes Kathleen Tynan:

I read in an article that Kathleen Tynan, late wife of the late Kenneth, had ‘inner poise’ and, when writing, was to be found immaculately dressed, sitting at a small table in the center of the room sipping a glass of chilled white wine. Kathleen Tynan would not, when late with a press release for Perpetua, lie fully dressed and terrified under the duvet, chain-smoking, glugging cold *sake* out of a beaker and putting on makeup as a hysterical displacement activity. Kathleen Tynan would not allow Daniel Cleaver to sleep with her whenever he felt like it but not be her boyfriend. Nor would she become insensible with drink and be sick. Wish to be like Kathleen Tynan (though not, obviously, dead). (Fielding 77)

Bridget rarely lives up to these images of perfection and daydreams, and one of her frequently recurring personality traits is self-deprecation about this inability. She is overly critical about every aspect of her life and constantly puts herself down, describing herself as “so neurotic” (Fielding 74), “horrible” (Fielding 15), “total geek” (Fielding 85), “complete jerk” (Fielding 211), “stupid” (Fielding 99). Bridget is especially hard on herself when she feels rejected by

others, mainly men. Her friends and family also contribute to her self-deprecating tendencies in their recurring harsh judgment and criticism of her.

Physical Appearance

Bridget's nature is also exemplified in descriptions of her appearance. She is obsessed with her weight, calling herself a "lard mountain" (Fielding 170), stating that she "can actually feel the fat splurging out of [her] body" (Fielding 16), and has "rippling stomach and thighs" (Fielding 105). Bridget's worldview implies indisputable links between losing weight, improving her looks and getting a boyfriend. She believes that only by losing weight will she be perceived as beautiful and only by being beautiful will she get a boyfriend. This vicious cycle keeps her on a perpetual diet, and she is only happy when she is thin. This is evident in Bridget's descriptions of her love interest, Mark Darcy's, girlfriend Natasha as beautiful, tall, thin and glamorous (Fielding, 88, 146, 148, 202). Natasha, of course, has a boyfriend.

Daniel Cleaver, Bridget's boss and lover, speaks a logical extension of what Bridget really thinks when he details an idea for a diet: "All you do is not eat any food which you have to pay for. So at the start of the diet, you're a bit porky and no one asks you out to dinner. Then you lose weight and get a bit leggy and shag-me hippy and people start taking you out for meals. So then you put a few pounds on, the invitations trail off and you start losing weight again" (Fielding 136). This statement causes Bridget to suddenly wonder if he is right about her linkage of the concepts of weight loss, beauty and men. Bridget accuses the media of being the culprit behind these insecurities, and acknowledges herself as a metaphorical product of the media when she thinks that "Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices" (Fielding 52).

Judging by her entries recording her weight at the beginning of each diary entry, Bridget is not fat. The most she weighs at any point in the novel is 133 lbs., the least she weighs is 119 lbs., and she fluctuates between the two throughout. The weight loss during Bridget's Inner Poise phase, however, leads the reader to believe that "the real Bridget," the Bridget-with-vices, should prevail. Her friends tell her she looks tired (Fielding 91), "drawn" (Fielding 92) and that she "looked better before" (Fielding 92). The only other character to comment on Bridget's size is the woman with whom Daniel Cleaver cheats on Bridget: "Honey, I thought you said she was *thin*" (Fielding 153).

Mrs. Jones, Bridget's mother, actively criticizes Bridget's clothes and appearance: "You look like something out of Chairman Mao" (Fielding 93), "You look like a common prostitute" (Fielding 147), "You look like some sort of Mary Poppins person who's fallen on hard times" (Fielding 8). The reader is made very aware of the fact that Bridget is not chic; her work wardrobe usually consists of a short black skirt and a T-shirt. When Bridget follows her Mom's advice, wears a suit and puts on makeup, however, Tom tells her "You look like Barbara Cartland" (Fielding 127), and she describes herself as "looking like a door-to-door cosmetics saleswoman in a bright blue suit with slithery green blouse underneath and blue eyeshadow right up to my eyebrows" (Fielding 166).

Male voices in the book repeatedly compliment Bridget's looks, calling her a "Dusky Beauty" (Fielding 45), gorgeous (Fielding 64), and lovely (Fielding 100). Men are pictured looking at her breasts (Fielding 26), groping her (Fielding 10), and, in the case of her boss Richard Finch, exploiting her. Judging from these male voices, Bridget is attractive. The men here refer to her appearance in terms of her sexuality, and react to her as such. The reader thus sees Bridget as an un-presumptuous, sexual, average person.

Loneliness In Relation To Single Status

Another classic Bridget characteristic is her sadness and loneliness about being single. One of the main reasons Bridget begins the diary is to turn her life around and get a boyfriend, writing New Year's Resolutions on Page One: "I Will Not... Sulk about having no boyfriend, but develop inner poise and authority and a sense of self as a woman of substance, complete *without* boyfriend, as best way to obtain boyfriend" (Fielding 2).

Bridget thinks her position as singleton is anything but enviable, yet goes to great measures to convince others, and seemingly herself, otherwise. When she feels slighted or taken advantage of, she becomes self-conscious about being unmarried (Fielding 14, 114, 258). She views married life through a window and is constantly critical of condescending and patronizing married couples. Bridget ponders whether they are actually trying to make single women feel like failures or if they are possibly in sexual ruts and "hoping for vicarious thrills by getting us to tell them the roller-coaster details of our sex lives" (Fielding 35). Her true conflicted feelings about husband and children are revealed when Bridget has a pregnancy scare and simultaneously feels sappy about her boyfriend, maternal about the baby, horror at the idea of "no more nights out with the girls, shopping, flirting, sex, bottles of wine and fags," and fear of turning into a "hideous grow-bag-cum-milk-dispensing-machine which no one will fancy" (Fielding 103).

Behind Bridget's expressions of loneliness lies a muted fear of "spinsterhood." This hackneyed image appears throughout her diary in various forms: "Miss Havisham" (Fielding 35), "Old Woman of the Hills" (Fielding 189), "tragic spinster" (Fielding 242). She writes of a recurring fear of dying "alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian" (Fielding 29, 250) when feeling particularly lonely. Bridget looks to the media for reflections or affirmations of her single status (Fielding 67, 214). At one point in the novel, Bridget, Jude, Sharon and Tom become incensed

by a newspaper article and its “arrogant hand-wringing about single life” (Fielding 214). The friends react with disgust and fury: “Huh. Bloody nerve. How does Mrs. Smug Married-at-twenty-two think she knows, thank you very much?... Anyway we’re not lonely...” (Fielding 214). True to form, Bridget begins the very next diary entry with, “Oh God, I’m so lonely” (Fielding 214).

Despite her feelings of loneliness, Bridget is rarely alone. She is constantly surrounded by friends, family, love interests, but still describes herself as alone (Fielding 29, 53, 157, 185, 259, 260, 261), sad and depressed (Fielding 24, 29, 58, 195, 236, 258). The obvious message: Bridget’s definition of “alone” is simply “single.” Perhaps the greatest theme in Bridget’s life is “getting a guy,” and thus no longer being lonely.

Intellect and Career

There is a dichotomy between the way Bridget thinks of her intelligence, and the way others describe it. Her boss Richard Finch calls her brilliant (Fielding 183, 217) and Una Alconbury, her mother’s best friend, describes her to Mark Darcy as “a sort of literary whiz-woman, completely obsessed with books...a radical feminist...an incredibly glamorous life...with millions of guys taking [her] out” (Fielding 206). Passages such as these put the character in perspective. Bridget would most likely never think of herself in these terms outside of a fantasy or daydream about reinventing herself. In fact, Bridget discusses her actual intelligence on just five occasions in the novel. She describes herself as: “dizzy” (Fielding 33), “bewildered” (Fielding 92), “stupid” (Fielding 99), and “foolish” (Fielding 131, 153). Education is mentioned only once, when Bridget tells Daniel “It’s alright for you with your bloody Cambridge First...I’ll never forget the moment when I looked at the notice board and saw a D

next to French and knew I couldn't go to Manchester. It altered the course of my whole life" (Fielding 143).

One of Bridget's most memorable characteristics is her tendency to get into scrapes and sticky situations. She admits these mishaps are self-induced, and therefore seems to see herself as a joke. She "feel[s] incompetent fool and as if everyone else in world understands something which is being kept from me" (Fielding 131). She gets into scrape after scrape and recounts the situations with wit and self-deprecating humor. For instance, when Mark Darcy offers to get his car to take Bridget to London, she says "What, all on its own?" not realizing that he is referring to the company car and his driver (Fielding 15). In another instance, Bridget "made a complete arse" of herself when she overhears a conversation about footballers being arrested for throwing matches. "'Have you heard about this Bridget?' said Daniel. 'Oh yes,' I lied, groping for an opinion. 'Actually, I think it's all rather petty. I know it's a thuggish way to behave, but as long as they didn't actually set light to anyone I don't see what all the fuss is about'" (Fielding 50).

Bridget's career is a minor part of her life. She works in publishing at the beginning of the novel and for a great part of the rare descriptions of this job, Bridget dreads work. The reader is not told exactly what Bridget does at the publishing company, merely that she does not want to do it: "Ugh. Cannot face thought of going to work" (Fielding 15), "Have to go to work in three and a half hours. Can't do it. Help, help" (Fielding 158). Bridget seems to think her career is a joke, and presents it to the reader as such: "I had a career. Well—a job anyway" (Fielding, 62), "pretended to be busy (try not to laugh)...sighing and tossing my hair about as if I were a very glamorous, important person under a great deal of pressure" (Fielding 63), and even states that "work has become like going to a party in order to get off with someone and finding they haven't turned up" (Fielding 35).

After dating her boss, Daniel Cleaver, Bridget decides it is time to quit the publishing company. She gets a job at the news television show *Good Afternoon!* after coming up with a quick response to an idea the producer has for a show. Bridget's characteristic scrapes and blunders are often on the job:

The trouble with this job is that people keep flinging names and stories at you and you have a split second to decide whether or not to admit you have no idea what they're talking about, and if you let the moment go then you'll spend the next half hour desperately flailing for clues to what it is you are discussing in depth and at length with a confident air: which is precisely what happened with Isabella Rossellini. (Fielding 209)

She is not dedicated or hard working when it comes to her career, yet at *Good Afternoon!*, things continuously seem to fall perfectly into place. Without much effort, Bridget comes up with story ideas and is quick witted enough to keep her boss Richard Finch happy.

Conclusions

Bridget Jones, approached as a modern fiction heroine, has five very strong recurring characteristics or personality traits. She has a fluid concept of self, compounded by low self esteem; she is described as alternately smart and dumb; she feels shame about her numerous vices; she is single and convinced she is lonely; she sees indisputable links between losing weight, being pretty and getting a man. Her self-deprecating tendencies, though presented with humor, portray the modern single woman as obsessive-compulsive, constantly trying to better herself primarily in order to get a man. Using Bridget Jones as an example, the modern single

woman has been somehow beat into submission, emerging self-conscious and unsure of herself, looking anywhere for answers about who she is supposed to be and how she should act.

Traditionally, female self-identity is less bound up with work and more with relationships and motherhood. Single female characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary* exemplify this, because although they have jobs, each is much more concerned with having a man. It could be argued that in this respect, the novel is an example of hegemonic discourse that puts the pursuit of a meaningful heterosexual relationship at the be-and-end-all of a woman's existence. The single woman exhibited here is not so much boy-crazy, sex-crazed, or even husband-hunting. She is merely acting in a knee-jerk-response to her paralyzing fear of being lonely.

The flaws in Bridget Jones's character are detrimental to viewing her as an anti-heroine. These have a transformative power: Bridget functions as an anti-heroine to highlight her non-conformity to the status quo. Fishwick states that anti-heroes are those who "enact the dilemmas and crises of the generation" they represent (Fishwick 3). In breaking with the "married-with-children" mold that others her age have chosen, Bridget is not a status quo version of the traditional literary heroine. Her character as anti-heroine is a media response to a longing for transformation in society. Bridget Jones could be seen as expressing the "idealistic dissatisfaction of the young with the values of the old and their fervent longing for a better pattern of living than they had inherited and for a more attractive destination than that to which their elders' pattern seemed to likely lead them" (O'Faolain xxx).

One of Bridget's most glaring flaws is her addiction to self-help literature. The number of self-help books on the market has grown immensely over the last ten to fifteen years, and publishing analysts claim that seventy-five to eighty percent of self-help books are bought by women (Ebben, 1995). In fact, many of these books are written expressly for women (Grodin,

1995; Simonds, 1992; DeFrancisco, 1995). Zimmerman finds, however, that top-selling self-help books are more likely to be non-feminist than feminist, and that some, including Bridget's favorite *Women Are From Mars, Men Are From Venus* (Gray, 1992), are based largely on opinion and serve to endorse and encourage power differentials and traditional roles for men and women (Zimmerman, 2001). In reading this sort of self-help, Bridget is exposed not only to patriarchal definitions of happiness, but also to status quo versions of reality.

In typical anti-heroic fashion, Bridget feels much shame over the fact that she never seems to live up to these images she has so desperately seeks from the media, her family, or her self-help books, and instead wallows in her vices as coping strategies. Trumbull defines shame as a "potent affective response that is precipitated by the psychological shock of seeing an unacceptable view of oneself" (Trumbull, 2003). Bridget's shame, then, could be seen as a result of the intensely personal, inward-looking nature of diary writing. In halting her actions to sit and reflect on herself and her life, she is effectively forced to be critical, thus inducing shame. This emotion shapes loyalty to parental standards and moral codes, for instance the traditional married lifestyle. Bridget feels she is not living up to these standards and codes; in disappointing these forces, she disappoints herself.

The anti-heroic vices that Bridget is so ashamed of, however, also perform the function of pseudo-liberation for her character. The reader is presented with a woman who basically does whatever she wants, with no one to answer to but herself, simply because she can; previous generations of women, of course, did not have this luxury. This gives readers the opportunity to view Bridget Jones in the context of the modern single media-generated woman whose presentation represents great strides for the female race. Bridget Jones instead represents a contradictory and compromised feminism. The recurring loneliness that Bridget feels, as well as

her fear of dying “alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian” (Fielding 29), taps into the post-feminist anxieties of those who think the feminist movement went too far, as well as those who think it did not go far enough. The underlying message here is that although Bridget’s generation has the option of independence and liberation, they fear the implications of what such autonomy means for the pattern of their lives.

Bridget’s individualistic lifestyle choice offers a parallel and competing world to domesticity. She and her friends—most overtly Sharon—pit themselves against married people time and time again in the novel, with the effect of successfully creating yet another “us against them” division between women. In her analysis of the 1990s television show *Murphy Brown* in *Primetime Feminism*, Bonnie Dow finds:

This stereotype of the feminist heroine works well for pop culture and its almost always assumed white middle-class audience, but not so well for feminist politics. Not only does it make identification difficult for women not privileged by class or race, but it is easily used to create a devil-figure for white, middle-class homemakers and mothers. (Dow 53)

Much of the humor in the novel is associated with the incongruity of Bridget’s powerful, single, liberated status and her anti-heroic, clumsy, child-like personality. Dow states “classically, comedy stresses the triumph of the individual and the possibilities of social integration” (Dow 37). Here, comedy functions as a negotiation of social change. The novel introduces the independent single female heroine to modern society. Although this particular female possibly creates more problems than she solves, it is impossible to overlook the impact made on literature and media simply by the chain-smoking, dieting, binge-drinking presence of Bridget Jones.

CHAPTER 3

SINGLE WOMEN IN *COSMOPOLITAN*, 1998

Introduction

The heroine of the best-selling novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* once said she believes neither her personality nor her body is up to par because she is “a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture” (Fielding 52). Bridget Jones struggles with the concept of the modern single woman as represented in the mass-circulating *Cosmopolitan* magazine, yet she is herself a product of popular culture. This chapter seeks to compare and contrast representations of the fictional heroine and her magazine counterparts. The similarities and differences in these characters will offer insight into whether Bridget Jones encapsulates the modern single woman as so many reviewers claim. Such a comparison creates a fascinating window into the media presentation of the modern single woman in 1998.

The analysis of *Cosmopolitan* was performed using the online database MasterFile Academic on the Galileo Website. The term “single” was searched, limited to articles contained in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1998. This yielded 113 articles. Passages that do not refer to marital status have been eliminated (i.e. “a single strand of hair,” “not one single time,” etc.), narrowing the results to a field of 36 articles. These articles are examined for their treatment of the single woman. To provide a comparison to the single woman portrayed in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as reported in Chapter 2, each of the 36 articles featuring single women were analyzed

highlighting the single women's attributes, in the form of personality traits and appearance, and their actions. To do this, each word and phrase describing single women was identified and listed (see Appendix B).

Attributes and Actions

As a women's glossy magazine, *Cosmopolitan* consists largely of "how-to" advice and self-help features. These types of articles prescribe action for readers. The prescriptions, along with the attributes and actions of interviewees, are included in this analysis. The themes identified here represent the most defining and most often-listed characteristics in the 36-article text. These fall into three of the same five categories as those in *Bridget Jones's Diary*—Intellect and Career, Shame, and Appearance—as well as four new categories: Single Woman as Man-Hunter, Single Woman as Victim, Single Woman as Contented, and Single Motherhood.

Single Woman as Man Hunter

The most prevalent description of single women in these articles likens them to "man-hunters." Twenty-two articles portrayed these women as such, and the main theme throughout this category is the goal of finding a man. The articles describing desperation in single women assume one of two positions: the reader is a single woman, desperate for a man and for instruction on how to "get" him; or the subject of the article is a single woman, desperate for a man and giving advice to other women on how to "get" him. These women are seen: lassoing a "hunky cornpoke" (Fabian 118), "weeding through potential suitors" (Hensley 128), considering affairs with married men (Kaufman 290), sobbing into Froot Loops (Dolgoff 238), being devastated (Fabian (b) 176), "using their phones for easy sex" (Campbell, L. 130), longing to have children (Knadler 188), whining about a "man famine" (Fabian and Moore 246), making it

crystal clear that they are “browsing the male market” (Harris 146), complaining about their area as being “man-poor”(Boyle 200), sleeping with Hollywood studs (Lewittes 220), and “Singing the Single Belle Blues” (Knadler 188).

Many of these women offer reasons why they are single, the most common of which is a lack of eligible men. Two articles state that location is the culprit. Single women talk about the disproportionate male-to-female ratios in urban areas, saying, “So many guys here come off like they’re entitled to act like weenies because we women are so desperate” (Boyle 200). By encouraging single women to move or vacation to find a man, the theme of “man-hunting” is especially evident. Further, the use of action verbs such as “ravaged,” “cruised,” “checked out,” implies a sense of urgency in this man-hunting (Fabian and Moore 246). The single women in this category are not satisfied. They want to find a man as quickly as possible. A phrase that is used on two separate occasions in the text is “on-the prowl” (Arnold, T. 42; Katz, J. 152), as if dating were a hunt or a chase. Men in the text approach the concept of a single woman on the hunt for a man as a positive thing despite the use of strong desperate undertones in these descriptions (Arnold, T. 42; Gutfield 164).

Some articles use a reader’s single status as an opportunity to give advice on how not having a man can attract a man. This concept is very similar to Bridget’s New Year’s Resolution to become complete without a boyfriend because it is the best way to get a boyfriend. *Cosmopolitan* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* intersect in this category: it is within the portrayal of single women as lonely that the only reference to Bridget Jones in *Cosmopolitan* 1998 is found. Jessie Knadler, in “The Single Girl’s Holiday Survival Guide,” advises single women who are in a relationship dry spell that even though they feel “about as desirable as a loaf of vacuum-packed

fruitcake,” they should take five before reaching “for your diary like Bridget Jones on a bad day” (Knadler 188).

Women fearing single-ness are also described in *Cosmopolitan*. The “risk of becoming a crazy old spinster cat lady” (Dolgoft 238), and the image of the “sterile old spinster” (Knadler 188), are representations that have historically served to scare women into following the married-with-children status quo. This fear is prevalent also in Bridget Jones’s mind. While Bridget fears dying alone, the desperate man-hunting women fear living alone. Both make efforts to avoid the situation by getting a man.

These single women are uncomfortable; they seek men to solve their problems of being “stressed out” (Kemp 152), “overwhelmed” (Hensley 128), and “desperate” (Knadler 188). In prescriptions for being simultaneously single and sexually satisfied, actions in this category indicate that a woman “needs” men, though she may not want or have time for them. *Cosmopolitan*’s single women in this category are depressed and unhappy without men. They are described as crying, whining and complaining about not having a man in their lives.

A psychologist consulted in “Use This New Dating Directory to Get the Love Life You Deserve,” Dr. Entin, suggests that a lot of women misunderstand their unhappiness: “It’s easy to look for something to blame for your lacking love life; it’s harder to take responsibility for it and make changes, like appreciating yourself and your surroundings more...But once you do...you’ll give off the kind of attitude that men will find attractive” (Boyle 200). This advice represents an interesting combination of self-help guidance and dating advice.

Single Woman as Contented

Fourteen articles portrayed single women as contented. Unlike Bridget Jones, this woman braves the world alone and unafraid. She does not fear being unmarried and many times is

described as being more secure and mature than the single women who are man hunters. She is described as “single and happy” (Brown and Miller 142), having a “strong sense of self” (Handelman 230), liking her life (Boyle 200), “really enjoying [her] singleness” (Brown and Crain 272), being “not interested in men now” (Frankel 264), taking a dating hiatus and shopping for a vibrator (Dolgoff 238), dipping into savings and buying land alone (Katz, J. 152), “raising hell and thoroughly toasting the freedom of the single life at a bar or strip joint” (Etter 156), ditching complaining friends to gain a better perspective (Ellsworth 160), renovating a house alone (Sgroi 256) and flirting “outrageously” (Knadler 188).

The single women in these articles have no regrets about their lives. Take, for instance, the woman who had an abortion and states that she knows it was the best decision for her (Ziv 152), or the single woman who used a sexual tryst to advance her career and has never looked back (Kaufman 290). The contented women in this category realize that the road to satisfaction does not inevitably include a man. In some instances they state they are simply not ready to date.

The most admirable contented single woman in *Cosmopolitan* in 1998 seems to be Fiona Duff in “Single Girl Summer House,”: “Undaunted by the idea that she was a single woman with no hope of hiring a handyman, Fiona headed for the nearest hardware store determined to do much of the work herself.” She is presented with admiration and called a “one-woman houseworkaholic” (Sgroi 256). Duff is reminiscent of the contented single females Bridget Jones is constantly looking up to as ideal. The picture painted here is one of singular perfection and happiness, as are the ones Bridget Jones paints in her mind of Kathleen Tynan, Goldie Hawn and Susan Sarandon.

The most poignant article about the actions of contented women in the text is: “6 Brave Moves for Single Women to Make; Solo? So What! Here’s How You Can Deep-Freeze Your

Fear of Being out Alone and Make Being a Party of One Pay off Big Time.” One of the “Scary Solo Moves” suggests that dining out alone makes one single woman feel “strong, independent and ballsy.” Single women are encouraged to take a vacation alone, to “party hearty,” and to “be bold: Adjust your attitude and solo isn’t scary” (Katz, J. 152). The worldviews in these articles are like Bridget Jones’s fluid concept of self. Her repeated self-reinventions and renovations in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* seem to be fueled by the same emotions exhibited here: the desire to become contented with one’s life as a single woman.

The contented woman is satisfied and happy. She has a “fun-loving...vibrant personality” and an “oracious appetite for life” (Handleman 230). She “braves the man-lite” areas mourned by the man-hunters and is “perfectly satisfied there” (Boyle 200). She has fun because she is “not reliant on anyone else to have a good time” (Katz, J. 152), and she renovates her house despite the fact that she is “a single woman with no hope of hiring a handyman” (SgROI 256).

In some of these articles, however, this woman has just ended a relationship (DolgoFF 238) or is in a relationship and calling herself single (Brown and Crain 272). For instance, in June’s Cosmo Quiz: “Compatible or Combatable,” the reader is asked to choose how she would feel if her boyfriend took a trip to Atlantic City with the boys for the weekend. One of the choices is “thrilled. It’s just like being single again” (Gillies and Simmons 200). These happy women in relationships speculating on true singlehood perpetuate the myth “man equals happiness.”

Intellect and Career

The women in the 12 *Cosmopolitan* issues for 1998 are routinely labeled in a name-age-occupation format. The focus here seems to be the occupation many times, as it relates to the woman and her age. Thirteen *Cosmopolitan* articles mention a single woman’s intellect or career.

Women described as single in this text work in a variety of occupations, including actress, carpenter, chef, lobbyist, grad student, district attorney, art dealer, nurse and investment analyst. These women are seen juggling a high-pressure career (Boyle 200), starring in a “chickcom” (Frankel 264), using a fling to advance her career (Kaufman 290), going to college and getting a good job (Hensley 128), and continuing to work despite an illness (Brown and Miller 142).

While careers seem to be a very minor part of the lives of characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, jobs are consistently the main point of reference for single females in *Cosmopolitan*, who are described as “single, ambitious career” women (Handelman 230), and “prestigious” women who are “on a professional high” (Brown and Miller 142). None are described as not caring about their jobs or hating where they work like Bridget Jones. The single career women in *Cosmopolitan* are “efficient and in control” (Dolgoff 238), “always on top” (Hensley 128) “frazzled career women” (Campbell, L. 130). These women are hard-workers who care a great deal about their jobs. A wide range of professions are represented here, indicative of the wide range of “types” of women themselves.

However, similar to *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the intellect of these women is treated as minor, and is mentioned only six times in the text: “genius” (Kaufman 290), “brilliant” (Dolgoff 238, Boyle 200), “smart and shrewd” (Frankel 264), “so stupid” (Ziv 152), “young, stupid and naïve” (Ziv 152). Out of 597 articles published in the magazine during that year, only one woman in *Cosmopolitan* is described as single and college educated. It is important to note that the descriptions of single women as “stupid” are found only within “The Abortion Survey Results,” and refer to failure to use birth control.

Brynn, the main character in “Casting Couch Confidential,” sits at the computer while a major Hollywood actor drinks cognac and barks dictation at her. When she “shyly offers a

suggestion” he rolls his eyes repeatedly. However, Brynn reveals sudden ambition and focus when she takes money from him and asks him to cast her in a film in exchange for her silence about their fling (Kaufman 290). Bridget Jones also sleeps with her boss, Daniel Cleaver. Unlike Brynn, however, Bridget does not use the fling to advance her career.

Single Motherhood

Descriptions and ruminations of single mothers are presented in nine articles in 1998’s *Cosmopolitan*. She is seen as: scared and alone (Ziv 152), a “tough single mom who doesn’t need a man for validation” (Handelman 230), a registered nurse (Maynard 204), a “motorcycle mama” (Miller and Brown 149), “very fulfilled” (Frankel 264), desperate and in danger (Moore 224).

Her portrayals are varied, yet are bound by their rendering of her as a type of martyr. She perpetuates the single mom as martyr theme in the way she discusses her path as some sort of rite of passage: “I earned my womanhood, and it took a rape and a pregnancy to show me my strength” (“I Was” 156). A 21-year-old single interview subject of “The Abortion Survey Results” also fits into this category. She describes a painful, dangerous, near-death pregnancy and delivery, which resulted in her “beautiful 4 year old daughter” (Ziv 152).

Three teenage mothers are interviewed 12 years after their pregnancies in “Against All Odds.” Although none were married when they had their kids, only one of the three is described by the word “single” when referring to her pregnancy. Rece Walford, now 28, had her son when she was 16. She describes herself as “more or less on my own,” and uses the words “self-reliant,” “exhaustion,” “determined,” “frustration,” “stuck to my guns” when talking about raising a baby born two months premature. She describes looking for an apartment alone:

...the only apartment I could afford was a crack-infested dump in the Bronx. Preparing to move in, I sat in the U-Haul out in the rain, slumped over the steering wheel, crying. That's when I decided we deserved a better life. Children grow up identifying with their neighborhoods, and Daymond was entitled to a nurturing atmosphere. I turned the truck around and rented a house in Queens with another single mom. (Sinclair 236)

Strength and toughness of character are both dimensions of the women in this category. These traits help them get through the trials of singlehood and motherhood, from which they emerge as martyrs. Pregnancy, giving birth and raising a child alone are presented as traumas that this type of woman overcomes. She emerges a better person and is to be looked upon with respect for the strength, willpower and determination that brought her through the ordeal. The one exception is actress, Playboy model and single mother Pamela Anderson, as described in "Very Important Pamela: Star of VIP." Anderson is described as "America's hottest blonde," a "vixen" and "a sex symbol." She is also called "the den mother," and "a full-blown mother" since she was a little girl (Frankel 264).

Another discussion within the text of *Cosmopolitan* involves the fear of becoming a single mother. Particularly in "The Abortion Survey Results," single women express this fear, saying: "I could not provide for a child" ("I Was" 156), "I could never see myself killing a baby. But the father of the baby said he wouldn't support me if I had the child," "I wasn't ready to raise a baby alone," "I was looking for some support," "I was scared and felt so alone" (Ziv 152). This fear is similar to the emotion that Bridget Jones expresses during her pregnancy scare. The scariest part of the ordeal for Bridget, however, is not the possibility of being a single mother, but the possibility of giving up her carefree lifestyle. Abortion was never an option for her.

Other single mothers in the text provide for their kids through their jobs. Twenty-seven-year-old Amy Levin poignantly says that “as a single mother, I’d been working double shifts as a waitress” (Moore 224). Similarly, the main character of “I Was Raped and I Kept the Baby,” worked as a carpenter on steel beams 30 to 40 feet in the air when she was two months pregnant. She never missed a day so she could have medical benefits for the natal care and delivery (“I Was” 156).

Physical Appearance

The appearance of the single women in 1998’s *Cosmopolitan* is not often stated, yet of those who are physically described, all are attractive. Six articles describe physical appearance with terms like: “gorgeous” (Kaufman 290), “beautiful” (Dolgoft 238), “sex appeal” (Frankel 264), “sexy” (“Dating and” 88), “attractive” (Boyle 200).

These women wear “fitted white Levi’s, and a tight striped tank” (Kaufman 290) and “tight Capri pants and a tiny tee” (Frankel 264). In the October 1998 issue of *Cosmopolitan*, Pamela Anderson discusses her wardrobe, saying “I like being a Barbie” (Frankel 264). The styles of these women differ greatly from Bridget Jones’s staple black skirt and tee shirt.

Single women in *Cosmopolitan* are “in excellent condition” (“I Was” 156), in shape and body conscious (“Dating and” 88), another contrast with Bridget Jones. Her body-consciousness consists of her sporadic obsessive dieting. She does not once exercise in the book, and although she is perceived as attractive, descriptions of her looks are in stark contrast to the women who “easily turn heads” in *Cosmopolitan* (Kaufman 290).

Single Woman as Victim

Single women in five articles are presented as victims: “I Was Raped and I Kept the Baby,” “The Abortion Survey Results,” “Cosmo’s 11 Fun, Fearless Forces,” “When A Stalker

Stops At Nothing,” and “Lethal Lovers.” The lasting trait of the single female victims is their seeming helplessness, alone-ness and vulnerability due in part to their being single. As one victim says “This was more that I could handle alone. I realized I should call the police” (Moore 224).

Actress Karen Duffy is featured in *Cosmopolitan* in February 1998 as a “Super-Inspiring Success.” She is described as single and happy, but “awoke one morning...diagnosed with a rare and dangerous illness” (Brown and Miller 142). “When a Stalker Stops At Nothing,” includes the stories of two single mothers who became victims of stalkers due in part to their naïveté and generosity. One woman hired her future stalker as a babysitter, while the other allowed hers to use the family garage for storage. A warning to single women seems to be given in “Lethal Lovers; How Did This Beautiful Couple Who Has Everything Become So Evil?” The couple preyed on “unsuspecting singles...They married their victims and murdered them, staging elaborately choreographed accidents to cover up their crimes. They then collected on their spouses’ sizeable life insurance policies” (Drummond 208).

The women in this category are portrayed as calm in the face of adversity because they survived tragedy. All deal with their victimization in different ways but all choose outside help over autonomous means. This category is the most noted departure from those found in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. Bridget is never in danger or feels physical fear. She is not in any way portrayed as a victim of a crime. She is, however, the victim of a bad relationship. Bridget falls for Daniel Cleaver and is victimized when she catches him cheating on her. Both Bridget, and the women in the articles in this category are alone, helpless and vulnerable due—at least in part—to the fact that they are single.

Shame

Three articles in 1998's *Cosmopolitan* focus on the issue of a single woman dealing with shame. These are "I Was Raped and I Kept the Baby," "The Abortion Survey Results," and "Casting Couch Confidential." All three present the emotion of shame as a result of or a repercussion from sex: one single woman agonizes for weeks about being pregnant ("I Was" 156), one cries before getting an abortion (Ziv 152) and another holds back tears while giving a blow job (Kaufman 290).

In "I Was Raped and I Kept the Baby," the victim is "so ashamed and guilty" and feels she "must've asked for it" ("I Was" 156). Many respondents to the abortion survey in the February 1998 issue of *Cosmopolitan* express shame over their choices. They, like the subject of "I Was Raped" consider suicide and deal with feelings of loss and guilt (Ziv 152). Similarly, Brynn, of "Casting Couch Confidential," feels used and mad at herself "for being so naïve" after she sleeps with a married man (Kaufman 290).

Actions and attributes in this category result from shame about sex. When utilizing or describing the emotion of shame as it relates to single women in *Cosmopolitan* in 1998, sex is always the culprit. Bridget Jones, on the other hand, feels shame mainly about her vices—smoking, drinking, and eating too much—which are presented as quirky and cute parts of her personality. She does not see sex as one of these vices, but does express some shame about it. The concept of shame is therefore parallel in the two texts, in that single women are shameful and guilty about what they perceive to be wrong with themselves. This could be seen as serving the function of enforcing status quo. If women are presented as feeling shameful about drinking, smoking, gaining weight and having sex, the lasting impression is that these are "bad" attributes and actions, and should be avoided.

Conclusions

The word “single” was used in 36 out of a total of 597 articles in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1998. *Cosmopolitan*’s motto is “Fun, Fearless, Female,” and judging from the text used for this analysis, this woman is not necessarily single. Who is this magazine really writing to? A great portion of the 597 articles written in the 1998 publication year is written for the unmarried woman in a relationship. Words like “boyfriend,” “girlfriend,” and “dating” are the taglines used to deduce the marital status of this woman. These terms do not explicitly mean that she is unmarried, however, and thus were not included in this analysis.

In *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the term “single woman” indicates one who is not married, not in a relationship, and not dating. It means, more or less, “alone,” a concept that is key in understanding the various women described in the seven categories gleaned from the 1998 articles. These women are placed in the categories of Man-Hunter, Contented, Single Mothers, Intellect and Career, Appearance, Shame and Victims.

None of the women in the seven labels demonstrate anti-heroic qualities or ideals. These females are not bumbling, clumsy or in any way similar to Bridget Jones other than in marital status. They are heroines in that they are presented as “braving” the world alone, albeit many times unwillingly. The power of these images lies not in the characters themselves—the single women in the text are too varied and rarely mentioned to hold real transformative power individually—but in the characters’ parallel struggles for legitimization in their respective stories, as well as in the text itself. While Bridget Jones’s struggle is highlighted and presented as an Everywoman plight, these women are glaringly presented as “other,” and effectively placed before the reader as objects of pity or objects of praise. The lasting effect of this situation is that

the modern single woman is an outsider. By placing reader sympathy opposite this figure, her heroic position serves to maintain the married-with-children status quo. It is to be concluded that truly single women are heroines in 1998's *Cosmopolitan*.

These women are similar to Bridget Jones in one main aspect: neither chooses to be single. Not one woman in the 36 articles examined here states that she is single by choice. Even the contented single woman found in these articles never expresses a desire to stay single without also expressing the desire to one day get married. This contented single woman is glaringly absent in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. What is interesting about this involuntary single-hood is the way that these two texts solve the "problem" of being single. Bridget Jones and her friends get drunk, rant to one another about the single state and sulk in gloom because of loneliness. The single women in *Cosmopolitan* in 1998, however, actively seek solution to the problem, looking for men as demonstrated in the Man-Hunter attributes and actions. These findings are consistent with Illouz, who finds that the difficulty of finding a mate is a main rhetorical theme in women's magazines. Citing repeated tips on where one is likely to meet a man, Illouz notes "the solution advocated by women's magazines explicitly counters the idea of predestination and instead advises treating mate-seeking much as one would a job search" (Illouz 234).

The women presented in *Cosmopolitan* are also more varied than those in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, due mainly to the fact that there are simply more represented in the present text. The single mothers, the victims, the contented single women and the man-hunters add breadth to the single women in *Cosmopolitan*. However, when viewed as artifacts of the third wave of feminism, the overall result of their presence in *Cosmopolitan* is

not simply a few more positive, egalitarian models for women, but a complicated mix of images that may be more confusing than liberating. The representations of

women just prior to the next millennium could more accurately be described as fractured, the images and messages inconsistent and contradictory, torn between traditional, misogynistic notions about women and their roles on the one hand, and feminist ideals of equality for women on the other. (Meyers 12)

Modern single women, confronted with images of themselves as regular victims of crime, but also as superwomen working-single-moms, may find the mix confusing, but not surprising. A glaring pitfall of modern mass media is that it multiplies forms of representation, but leaves balances of power fundamentally unaltered (Macdonald 1995, 6).

While *Cosmopolitan* does not contain a plethora of messages explicitly aimed at or depicting the modern single woman, the overwhelming self-help nature of these messages reinforces the stereotype of the “flawed woman.” Self-esteem is not discussed in *Cosmopolitan* as it is in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, yet Bridget is a product of the popular culture embodied by *Cosmopolitan*. One presents while the other absorbs. The self-help, make-your-single-life-better aspect of many of these 36 articles, could be seen as contributing to Bridget and her friends’ concept of self, self-esteem and loneliness.

The use of blame in the text is also worthy of discussion. In Boyle’s “Use This New Dating Directory,” it seems that New York City is teeming with “brilliant” “gorgeous” women who are forced to be single because of the lack of eligible men (Boyle 200). This effectively blames the men, the location and the situation for the women’s single status. By using blame, the writer implies that these women’s single status is a problem. The lasting effect of these articles is that the women seem bitter and desperate, thus overshadowing the almost-effective superwoman descriptions of each as an “attractive, brilliant 27-year-old investment analyst” and a “gorgeous 30-year-old art dealer” (Boyle 200).

The concept of the single woman is approached in distinct ways through its presentation in 1998's *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The character traits and actions of this woman fit into the seven categories discussed accordingly, and her presence in the best-selling magazine to single women of 1998 both reflects and alters real life counterparts as such.

CHAPTER 4

PRESS DEBATES ABOUT BRIDGET JONES AND SINGLE WOMEN

Introduction

The character Bridget Jones has made quite an impact as evidenced in the mainstream press coverage of her. During 1998, as well as in 2001—the year “Bridget Jones’s Diary” the movie was released—Bridget was debated and discussed repeatedly in American newspapers. An examination of these articles place this fictional icon within a larger cultural and social framework. Thus, the modern single female represented in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and 1998’s *Cosmopolitan*, is further identified here through the incorporation of a third medium, the newspaper, into analysis.

Sociologist Michael Schudson defines news as “cultural knowledge,” incorporating assumptions about what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in and what we should take seriously. Newspaper discussions concerning Bridget Jones and single women adds to their public legitimacy. The medium of the newspaper brings the subject into a public forum for a more general audience, for, “the media organize not just information but audiences. They legitimize not just events and the sources that report them but readers and viewers. Their capacity to publicly include is perhaps theirs most important feature” (Schudson 25). This public inclusion of single women brings to light their position in, and importance to, modern society.

Articles discussing the modern single female were selected using a LexisNexis Academic search of the general news sections of major newspapers. The intersection of Bridget Jones in particular and single females in general was identified by performing two searches. Headlines, lead paragraphs and terms in the database were searched, using the qualifier “Bridget Jones,” and the full text of articles was searched, using the term “single wom*n” (indicating both “single women,” and “single woman”). This term-specific search was conducted for the years 1998 and 2001. As “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” the movie, was released in 2001, there was much discussion and speculation about the single woman that year. Therefore, newspaper articles published during those 12 months are included, as well as those published in 1998.

Sixty-one articles were returned for 1998; 121 articles were returned for 2001. Those not originating in the United States were eliminated, leaving 90 newspaper articles, which were further narrowed to a text of 46 articles by eliminating Best Seller Lists. These articles approach single women in general, specifically the character of Bridget Jones, in many interesting ways. In the words of Stack, “the book has caused quite a stir, due as much to its popularity as to a seemingly endless stream of pundits bent on deconstructing that popularity” (Stack, Teresa).

General Themes

The 46 newspaper articles examined here indicate an intersection of single women in the mass media and the fictional character of Bridget Jones. The major themes of these articles fall into four distinct categories: those that treat Bridget Jones as a modern-day Everywoman, those that criticize Bridget Jones, those discussing popular culture and those that discuss a “New” genre of novels.

Bridget Jones as Everywoman

Twenty-three articles in this sample focus on how readers and viewers identify with Bridget Jones who is “a symbol of modern single women” (Thorn, Patty). These articles repeatedly discuss the novel’s welcome reception in both England and the United States, citing the self-identification of single women with the main character as the driving force behind the novel’s popularity. Repeatedly, the newspapers use this perception to tout Bridget’s universality. The main character “struck a nerve” (Frey, Jennifer), and is called “an institution” (Kunz, Mary): “Bridget Jones is Every Single Woman, and every other single woman knows what she’s going through” (Hildebrand, Holly).

The Rocky Mountain News quotes one “twentysomething” woman who says she “just picked [*Bridget Jones’s Diary*] up and I was looking through it and I thought, ‘cool, it’s like a diary.’ Then I started reading it and it was like, ‘Oh my God, it’s me’” (Thorn, Patty). Bridget’s universality is touted; she is called a “90’s archetype for an entire gender” (Stack, Teresa). One of the reasons for the resounding quality of this character could be in the observation that “no one knows what it’s like to be a single woman in her 30s but a single woman in her 30s. And right now, the woman who speaks for all of us is Bridget Jones” (Amatangelo, Amy).

Bridget is viewed as a “real woman” by the single females quoted, which seems to mean “one of us”: “just as she did on the page, Bridget shattered these false images and gave us a real woman” (Amatangelo, Amy). These “real” womanly qualities, however, are always imperfections in this text. Helen Fielding ponders her character’s popularity in an interview with *The Washington Post*. She states people relate so easily to Bridget because “There’s a bonding thing. Instead of having some sort of role model thrust at you, some Miss Perfect, you have someone who is well-intentioned, fun and funny—and a human being and vulnerable” (Frey,

Jennifer). *Bridget Jones's Diary* is said to have made Bridget the best friend of “hundreds of thousands of British women who recognize her closet drawers crammed with a fury of black opaque pantyhose twisted into ropelike tangles with speckles of tissue as their own, or at least their next-door neighbor’s” (Hoge, Warren).

This imperfection carries over to Bridget’s looks, cited by some papers as far from perfect:

On-screen, Bridget’s skin is a little blotchy. Her hair is a little limp. There are some ripples on those thighs. You know what she looks like? She looks like we do when we’re carrying some period bloat and have a hangover from too many chardonnays the night before. (Frey, Jennifer)

The Houston Chronicle writes that *Bridget Jones's Diary* “struck a chord” because young, single women “identified with its pudgy heroine” (Harrison, Eric). Articles in this category refer to her weakness, vulnerability, and naïveté as evidence that she is not a role model. Her unfocused—and not overtly beautiful—appearance, as well as her struggles with diet and weight-loss, are presented as points of endearment. The absence of a steady boyfriend, Bridget’s frantic desire to “get the guy,” and her inevitable tendency to fail in these endeavors, are approached as serious problems that modern single women face every day.

These articles sympathize with Bridget, and thus assume much about the state of the single female. This sympathy is most often presented in the form of Bridget’s fears. *The Omaha World Herald* cites Match.com, an on-line dating service, as having coined the term “Bridget Jones Effect,” a situation in which single women become hyper-concerned with their methods for meeting Mr. Right. The article further quotes one single woman as saying “it’s about how every single woman feels but doesn’t want to admit...Everybody wants to find true love, but it’s

scary” (Proskocil, Niz). Bridget does not always obey her own advice, especially in relationships. *The Houston Chronicle* cites this as the reason that so many people identify with her, calling Bridget a “literary breath of fresh air” (Hildebrand, Holly).

Bridget’s obsessive paranoia also endears her to single female readers and viewers alike:

Bridget Jones carries the banner for all those single women in their 30s who go through life with self-image hang-ups, who think somehow they’ve never got it quite right. Things haven’t worked out for these singletons the way the media promised they would. It’s starting to dawn on her that she may never find the right man. (Graham, Bob)

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Helen Fielding expresses surprise at this identification because “a lot of [Bridget’s] thoughts are very paranoid, and when you realize that so many women have the same thoughts, it’s massively reassuring but at the same time alarming... We’re all mad” (Hoge, Warren).

Pressures of being a modern single woman are viewed as a shared grief among these unmarried women. Bridget is also described as being attuned to many women’s common focus on weight loss (McClure, Holly) and perfection: “there’s this societal pressure to do well in everything. You can relate to the awkwardness when things aren’t working for Bridget” (Proskocil, Niz). An article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* ventures to state: “women are Bridget’s biggest fans. Mood-swinging singles pass around the book among themselves, and entreat their loved ones to read it, saying, ‘If you want to understand how a woman’s mind works . . .’” (Smoron, Paige). *The Omaha World Herald* calls her a “dead-on representation of the overworked, overstressed modern woman” (Proskocil, Niz) and “overloaded,” stating Bridget knows “she can have it all and [feels] like a failure because she doesn’t” (Keenan, John).

Media representations that are impossible to attain are seemingly positioned as the cause for single women being hard on themselves. Fielding responds to this in an interview with *The Washington Post*, saying it must be a “relief” to be Bridget because “women by nature are very hard on themselves. Even the most intelligent, educated woman can somehow end up somewhere in her head believing that she’s supposed to be an anorexic teenage model she’s seen on an advert” (Frey, Jennifer). The gap between how these females believe they are expected to be and how they actually are is a great cause for insecurity here, with Bridget’s imperfections offering a happy and easily attainable alternative.

The single women interviewed in these articles, although not overtly named so, are assumed intelligent and educated. Despite this, however, they are seen as unconfident as they discuss scourging the media for reflections and representations of themselves. Some articles take the position that single women’s professional careers delay the formation of their own families. One single woman, for instance, writes a letter to the editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*, stating that Bridget Jones “so well captures the frustration and wistfulness of those millions of us with careers who fall through the nets of a society that has lost adequate mechanisms for matchmaking” (“Compassionate Globalization”).

The name Bridget Jones has now become synonymous with “compulsive conduct of young women braving continually collapsing bridges to self-improvement yet trying to maintain an amused perspective on that fraught space between bounding hope and tumbling defeat” (Hoge, Warren). Her faux pas have made it into the vernacular; people who screw up or demonstrate a Bridget-Jones-like characteristic will say they are having “a Bridget Jones moment” (See: Graham, Hoge, Smoron, Thorn). The words “singleton” and “smug married” are now in common use because of Bridget (Kennedy; Frey). These terms and the discussion about

them in the mainstream media help cement Bridget Jones as a perceived archetype of the modern single woman.

Criticisms of Bridget Jones

Twelve articles in this text express contempt for Bridget Jones, citing her immaturity, her helplessness and her ridiculous nature as being unrepresentative of and harmful to single women. One article reads that “Bridget—with her drinking, her smoking, her cursing, her hangovers, her raging biological clock and her slapdash efforts at what she calls a career—is all the bad stereotypes about thirty-something single women poured into one inappropriately micro-miniskirt” (Frey, Jennifer).

Many of these judgments relate to Bridget’s clumsiness. The consensus of the newspaper articles in this category seems to be that her foolishness evokes both humor and pity in readers and viewers. In feeling sympathy for her, female audiences mistakenly sympathize with Bridget. One writer in the *Buffalo News* questions the implications of this tragicomic nature of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*:

Because if women identify with her, that means there are a lot of women going around doing nothing but counting calories. We all do it, sure, but it shouldn’t be the defining theme in anyone’s life...It also means that there are a lot of women who talk about nothing to their friends other than how miserable they are...And it means that those people, being miserable, will fail to attract the love they crave.

(Kunz, Mary)

The elements of Bridget’s life that she deems most important—her social life and her love life—are seen as central foci of the entire single female population when Bridget is positioned as the representative of this type of woman. These articles take the stance that in sending confusing and

inappropriate messages to single females who are trying to determine what to expect from life, the character of Bridget Jones is harmful rather than helpful. A letter to the editor of *The New York Times* states that Bridget Jones-type images are disturbing

...not only because it is an inaccurate depiction of a diverse and interesting part of the population but, more important, because it sends confusing and inappropriate messages to young women trying to determine what to expect from life ('career is important . . . until you meet a man'; 'it doesn't matter if you're uninformed as long as you're cute'). ("Bridget Jones's")

In other words, if Bridget is Everywoman, and audiences are told that every woman identifies with her, then every single woman in her 30s drinks very regularly, smokes incessantly, and is concerned mainly with her weight, her love life and her friends. An article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* states that Bridget:

rightly upsets feminists, who clamor that the novel is far from an accurate portrayal of young single women. It isn't, and for it to be taken as such is both absurd and offensive. The book is a satire, a clash of Bridget's retro neuroses with her embryonic modern aspirations. It's hard to imagine a popular book about a totally fictional male, an all-out satire to boot, being elevated to the status of Gender Representative. It would never happen. (Stack, Teresa)

A common accusation of the articles here is that Bridget Jones represents anti-feminism. Feminists take umbrage at the "too-flawed anti-heroines who routinely sacrifice dignity in the pursuit of men" (Ganahl, Jane). This type of article routinely cites Bridget's lack of noble qualities and lack of admirable traits—in other words, she is an "anti-heroine" (Hoge, Warren)—as being harmful to women. Bridget Jones is portrayed as a setback for the feminist movement.

The character of Bridget Jones is sometimes viewed in these texts as catering to the needs of patriarchy. Marcelle Clements, author of *The Improvised Woman: Single Women Reinventing Single Life*, is quoted in *The New York Times* as saying she finds the novel greatly disturbing. “It’s the humor of the pathetic...it’s as if as women become more successful and powerful, they need to be punished for defying the old laws. They have to be with their nose in the Haagen-Dazs; they have to be made to look ridiculous and pitiful” (Kuczynski, Alex). Articles in this category also blame the media and society for Bridget’s neuroses. Her self-deprecation is presented as stemming from media images, and her anxiety and insecurity are brought on by the pressures of living as a bright and attractive single woman in a male-dominated culture. One article states that men suffer from similar neuroses brought on by images, yet their images are “always much glossier and better than reality. Women don’t do that. Society wants the woman to be self-deprecating” (Kuczynski, Alex). *The Plain Dealer* calls Bridget “a feminist manifesto in disguise, a hilariously satirical novel that shows how a male-dominated culture turns bright and attractive single women into anxious and insecure captives of their bathroom scales” (Harayda, Janice).

The role of humor in Bridget Jones seems to be a point of contention in these newspaper articles. A movie reviewer in *The Houston Chronicle* reports being embarrassed and uncomfortable by these displays. He refers to the opening scene in the movie, which involves Bridget, drunk in her pajamas, mouthing the words to “All By Myself” with tears running down her cheeks. Another article states that these situations make “humor out of the premise that being neurotic is cute. That women eat too much. That we succumb to the lure of too many cocktails. That if we don’t enjoy our jobs, we just stick around and, heck, sleep with the boss (who never calls us back)” (Kuczynski, Alex).

Some of these newspapers note that *Bridget Jones's Diary* is meant to be a satire, and as such should not be taken seriously as a comment on true life for modern single women. Although remaining critical of Bridget Jones, these relative few articles simply state that the media discussion spurred by the book is simply unnecessary: “Well, I read it, despite the moral outrage. Here’s my review: It’s a very, very funny book. Here’s my political/moral deconstruction: It’s a very, very funny book. Enough said... The book is so funny, I found it hard to take seriously on any level. So what's the problem here?” (Stack, Teresa).

Critiques of Popular Culture

Thirteen of these newspaper articles work to place Bridget Jones within the framework of popular culture, comparing and contrasting the character to other media images. She is often compared to other pop culture icons, many times Ally McBeal, the title character of a television drama sitcom. The show is concerned with the exploits and fantasies of Ally, a single female lawyer living in Boston. Their similarities are often discussed in this text. An article in *The New York Times* states that both Ally and Bridget are “pre-feminist throwbacks—Stone Age women who just want to be hauled off to a nice warm cave by some cute, dishy guy” (Kakutani, Michiko). Many articles cite a link between the two fictional characters, calling Bridget the Ally McBeal of fiction (Harayda, Janice), Ally McBeal with a British accent (Blinkhorn, Lois), and referring to the “Ally McBeal-Bridget Jones trend” (“Bridget Jones’s”).

Some articles force Ally and Bridget to be compared not only to one another, but also to single women as a whole. Both are pop culture icons, and are presented as characters that the female audience may identify with, for instance as in an article in the *Daily News*:

But like Ally, Bridget’s appeal lies in the reader’s sense of embarrassed recognition that maybe she’s not the only one who thinks all her exes should be

required by law to stay celibate until they die. Or who has ever forced herself to go to a scary party instead of vegging on the couch and then stumbled home to scrawl illegible journal entries featuring lots of exclamation points. (Kennedy, Helen)

In an article in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Bridget is compared to the heroine in “Someone Like You,” a movie based on the novel *Animal Husbandry*. These characters are placed alongside one another simply because they end with a similar scene: the girl gets the guy and kisses him in the snow on an urban street as Van Morrison’s “Someone Like You” plays in the background. The article states that the two heroines are very similar merely because they are both “working single women in their 30s who are torn between two very different men” (“Two Movies”). One writer for *The Seattle Times* questions the formula of the happy ending: “Not very long ago, the ideal life for a woman was adjudged a careful balance of meaningful work, good friendships and solid relationships. Mr. Right was a component of this formula - important, but not the glue that held it together. Now, abruptly, the search for a man has become all in popular culture” (McFadden, Kay).

Some articles criticize the stereotype of the slacker single woman in popular culture, viewing Bridget Jones as the symbol of this body of images. In this way, media-generated single women are criticized for being “throwbacks,” and not representative of the advancements women have made over the last few decades. One article in *The Boston Globe*, for instance, states that popular culture “portrays the 1990s single woman as still waiting for Mr. Right. She may have a better job, and more money, but no matter how smart and successful she is, she’s stereotyped as neurotic, needy, man-obsessed, marriage-obsessed, sex-obsessed” (White, Diane). Bridget is seen as simultaneously reflecting and reacting to her popular culture contemporaries:

That's what *Bridget Jones's Diary* is about: the learned helplessness thrust upon women by advertisers, popular entertainment and, yes, women's magazines. Ms. Fielding constructs her heroine out of every myth that has ever sprung from the ground of *Cosmopolitan* and television sitcoms. To wit, that men are, in the words of one character, "stupid, smug, arrogant, manipulative and self-indulgent"; that women are obsessed with boyfriends, diets and body hair, and that every emotional reversal is cause for a chocolate binge. (Kuczynski, Alex)

These are not reflections of real life, some writers in the text say, and neither is Bridget.

Candace Bushnell, author of the "sometimes lonely but mostly confident" single female characters who inspired HBO's "Sex and the City" television show, states in an interview with *The New York Times* that she feels *Bridget Jones's Diary* is a fun read, but about 10 years out of date for America. "Now, in Manhattan, if you're over 35 and you're not married, frankly it's not a big deal. People say you're lucky and don't bother" (Kuczynski, Alex). The characters on "Sex and the City" are lumped into a media criticism category with Bridget, in that Bridget's "desperation—and the antics on "Sex in the City"—may be funny, but hardly reflect real lives, many women say" (Campbell, Kim).

Some articles approach the modern media-generated single female as part of a positive genre of pop culture that includes both "Sex and the City" and its predecessor, Helen Gurly Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl*. For instance, *The San Francisco Chronicle* states that beginning with Brown's zeitgeist-altering book in the 1960s and continuing with "Sex and the City" at the new millennium, "the world has devoured tales of unmarried women like exotic fruit." This trend continues, the article states, with the *Bridget Jones's Diary* movie:

And for women, singledom has become less defined as the women's movement continues to morph. With the death of the notion of the "spinster"—once cited in Webster's Dictionary as an unmarried woman older than 30—the culture seems to be embracing Bridget Jones and the randy gals of "Sex and the City" as the definition of the new self-realized female. (Ganahl, Jane)

The Creation of a "New" Genre

Twelve articles describe Bridget Jones as the archetypical heroine in a new genre of fiction, emerging in the mid-1990s. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Fanny Blake, a freelance writer specializing in the publishing industry, says that books like *Bridget Jones's Diary* are representative of "a brave new women's fiction humorously and realistically addressing themes recognizable to women trying to make their way in their 20s and 30s: often career women with disposable income, unable to find either a heterosexual man or anything in the fridge" (Hoge, Warren).

It is common for Bridget to be referred to as the first of this genre. *The Chicago Sun-Times* cites that *Bridget Jones's Diary* gave "birth to a new genre: novels about single women in their 20s and 30s trying to balance work, friends, and lovers" (Hunley, Kristine). *Bridget Jones's Diary* is tagged as ushering in a "new phase" (Hoge, Warren), and one of the best-known novels in this new genre (Campbell, Kim).

As *Bridget Jones's Diary* seems to be the quintessential novel in this group, Bridget Jones is presented as the quintessential heroine. Other main characters, such as Helen Fielding's Rosie of her first novel, *Cause Celeb*, are equated with Bridget. This technique uses Bridget-by-extension-type descriptions to name heroines in other works, for example, "a heroine with Bridget-like pluck" (Galehouse, Maggie). Reviews of the genre in this text clearly hinge on

Bridget Jones's Diary. One article cites that *The Girl's Guide to Hunting and Fishing* was reviewed “often as the intelligent woman’s Bridget Jones” (Jefferson, Margo). In an interview with *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Laura Zigman, author of *Animal Husbandry*, compares her heroine, Jane Goodall, with Bridget, “I think more women identify with a Bridget Jones than a superwoman” (Ganahl, Jane).

An article in *USA Today* posits that one of the main themes of books in this genre is “romantic woe at the hands of men” (Donahue, Dierdre). As *The New York Times* states, “the male as oaf and worse, long a rich and lucrative literary tradition, appears to be blooming this year as usual in a variety of fiction... Bridget’s men are described as ‘stupid, smug, arrogant, manipulative.’ And that’s the least of their badness” (Arnold, Martin).

Some reviews refer to the books that make up the new genre as “imitations” (Katz, Frances). One critique of the novel *Good In Bed*, calls it a “charming Bridget Jones clone novel—if Bridget were Jewish and overweight and lived in Philadelphia” (Collins, Monica). Similarly, a review in the *Buffalo News* calls the heroine of Terry McMillan’s *Waiting To Exhale* “the ‘Bridget Jones’ of five years ago...both women network, grimly and joylessly, in hopes of finding soul mates. Both kiss a lot of toads. Neither can really enjoy anything until after she finds Mr. Right” (Kunz, Mary).

The main reasons these articles provide for the similarity among these books is the main character is a professional single female in her 20s or 30s. These reviews do not discuss the books themselves, and many times identify simply the feelings the books will give readers. In this way, mass circulating newspapers have positioned Bridget Jones at the center of a publishing zeitgeist that began with the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Conclusions

Important media discussions about the single woman in modern society took place in 1998 and 2001. Spurred by the release of the *Bridget Jones's Diary* movie and novel, this type of debate in American newspapers is one part of a social commentary on the concept of the single woman. How these articles approach both the real women and their fictional counterparts offers clues about cultural values for single women in modern society.

Although many of the newspaper articles dissected here focus on the character of Bridget Jones in the novel or the movie, their immediate relevance to the lives of single women is revealed in the largest category of articles: Bridget Jones as Everywoman. For if mass-circulating daily newspapers are telling single women that this character is a media representation and point of identification for “all” single women, then Bridget Jones is an important starting place in dissecting who the modern single woman media-generated female is.

The concept of identification poses many problems, however. The large number of single professional women ages 20 to 40 is a new phenomenon in society. These women exist in large numbers and are looking, as any new demographic would, to the media for where they “fit” in society. The media are telling single women that their archetypal character is Bridget Jones, reinforcing the concept with examples of real-life identification with Bridget’s lifestyle, actions and attributes.

In using Bridget’s flaws to position her as Everywoman, these articles reveal what is behind readers’ identification with Bridget: pure fear. Bridget’s fears of not living up to expectations, of being alone, of getting older are presented as “how every single woman feels but doesn’t want to admit” (Proskocil, Niz). In this way, the writers represented here help create and implement a status quo—and thus a sense of community—for the modern single woman. Some

write in the first person or address the reader personally, as one would a friend. Societal pressures, familial expectations and examples of married-with-children women are presented here as reasons for the paranoia that single women feel. Their community is reinforced by “us-against-them” rhetoric and “outsider” mentality behind these texts. Bridget is presented as “perfectly attuned to the inner paranoiac voice that hits single women in their 30s” (McFadden, Kay).

Essentializing an entire demographic to one “type” of media image is just as harmful to single women as omitting the group from the media altogether. It is related to what Ferguson calls the “feminist fallacy”: the idea that the mere presence of women in media texts translates into “cultural visibility and institutional empowerment” (Ferguson, 1990: 215). There is a blatant lack of self in the identification repeatedly discussed in the articles in this category. The self-consciousness in media images of single women looking to the media for answers as to who they “should be” or what they are “supposed to want” also serves to remind these women that they are still outsiders, and still do not belong. Because one fictional character is worthy of such a lengthy media discussion, she must be “different” or “new.”

One of the main charges that critics make against Bridget Jones is that she is not real and certainly not representative. The criticisms in this category are decidedly feminist, and the main problem is first with the character and secondly with the plot. The central plot concerns Bridget’s love life and sex life, thus revolving not around Bridget herself, but Bridget’s relationships with men. The writers of articles who make this criticism posit that Bridget’s is a male-dominated world, and by constantly holding her world up as a mirror of true life, the story tells us that single women live in a patriarchal society and should be satisfied with such.

Undoubtedly, Bridget Jones is an integral part of the popular culture fascination with single women that began in the late 1990s. The writers of the articles discussed here place her within the framework of Ally McBeal and the four single characters of “Sex and the City,” yet they do not pass judgment or make social comment on these media-generated women. It is here that the various representations are presented as simply that: varied. The images discussed are not touted as universal or as identifiable, they are simply images and as such transformed into the background of constant media images now typical of other previously unrepresented sectors of society. Bridget Jones is seen as just one part of this background, the latest incarnation of the format.

Popular culture has a critical and transformative power for women, especially previously under-represented groups of women. It is a “site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed” (Gamman and Marshment 1). It is important to remember that in this realm, all texts are constructed within competing social, economic and political contexts, yet offer the culture’s dominant definition of groups of people. It becomes crucial, therefore, to “intervene in the mainstream to make feminist meanings as part of everyday common sense” (Kirca 1999).

It is interesting that many of the articles are reviews for other books. In comparing these to *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Bridget is heralded as the “first” of the new genre of novels about single women. This is not, however, a new genre. Books about single women have been around for centuries, many examples exist proving that there has always been an underlying media fascination with the life of the single woman. What Bridget did, however, was make a previously existing genre popular, and thus “new” again. Many of these articles tout that the novel ushered in a new phase in literature. What this tells us, however, is that the novel itself did not make

Bridget an archetype of single women or a quintessential heroine. The media discussion about *Bridget Jones's Diary* positioned her as this figure.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Media portrayals of single women provide clues about cultural values, about real-life single women in society, who they are “supposed to be” and what they “should want.” These media-generated representations create a stereotype or icon that both reflects and influences cultural attitudes about gender.

This study focuses on single women in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Bound by their unmarried status, the single women in these texts center their existence in relation to one thing: men. Whether they are sad and lonely, happy and independent, or strong and sassy, the single women examined here discuss their station in life in terms of dating, being in-between boyfriends or looking for a man. These women did not make a conscious choice to be single, and none express the desire to remain so. While not necessarily seeking husbands, these media-generated single women tell us that a modern single woman “should want,” simply, a man.

These texts approach single women in one of two ways: with praise or with pity; their characteristics are either glamorized or stigmatized. Bridget Jones, for example, rarely describes herself outside of terms of extreme exaltation or extreme self-pity. The stereotypes of the “woman as superwoman” as well as the “inherently flawed woman” are alive and well in these media descriptions of single women.

Attributes and Actions

The emotion these women most commonly express is loneliness. The worst possible outcome of not finding a man, these texts seem to say, is being alone. The point that *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Cosmopolitan* and these newspapers make is not that these women are living by themselves: these women are living *alone*. Loneliness is presented as an inevitable fact-of-life for single women. It is their greatest fear. The desire to escape this emotion is their most important motivation. Self-sufficiency is rarely discussed or admired.

Single women in these texts are also motivated by shame regarding attributes and actions that society has traditionally labeled “bad.” Bridget Jones’s drinking, smoking and obsessive-compulsive dieting cause her to shamefully enumerate her participation in these vices each day, while single women in *Cosmopolitan* explicitly name guilt, shame or regret when discussing sex. These feelings expressed in mass media function to hold single women to societal standards that are not aligned with reality.

Both 1998’s *Cosmopolitan* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* discuss single women in terms of intelligence and their careers. Bridget’s intellect—or lack thereof—is highlighted. She has a college degree, works in publishing then broadcasting, yet repeatedly describes herself as stupid. *Cosmopolitan*, however, places the importance on the careers of single women, downplaying their actual intelligence. In fact, just one woman within this text is described as college educated.

Judging from the texts examined here, the iconic single woman is attractive. *Cosmopolitan* explicitly identifies her as such, while other voices—mainly male voices—call Bridget Jones attractive. Bridget, however, is discussed in terms of sexuality, while the women in the magazine are physically beautiful. One of the reasons for some discrepancies between the

categories of characterizations in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Cosmopolitan* could be the fact that Bridget is a character in a novel, while *Cosmopolitan* leans more towards real-world representations of single women. For instance, the single mothers as well as the single female victims present in the magazine are harsher realities for single women than the characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Media Reaction

The common struggle of Bridget Jones and the unmarried women in 1998's *Cosmopolitan* magazine and major daily newspapers in 1998 and 2001 is one of legitimization. All fight for a place in a society that has historically functioned with and for the nuclear family. Each text addresses this struggle in a different way. The anti-heroic main character of *Bridget Jones's Diary* mopes, sulks, drinks and smokes about it. The multi-faceted and varied representations of single women in 1998's *Cosmopolitan* struggle for legitimization "despite" being single. Newspaper coverage of Bridget Jones and single women examined for 1998 and 2001 make strides to compartmentalize the entire demographic into relatively few neat definitions and stereotypes produced by popular culture.

In dissecting popular culture images and commenting on some of the messages media send to single women, the newspaper articles examined here make steps toward outlining a blueprint for who these women are "supposed to be." However, in this comment they are merely reinforcing the single woman's position in society as an outsider. Other sectors of society have multiple media representations, yet the single women in these three texts are overwhelmingly white and all heterosexual. This may be because these women themselves are seen as minorities living deviant lifestyles. This finding is inconsistent with Marcelle Clements research on the

lives of actual single women. Through extensive interviews, Clements finds that there are many “types” of single women, seeking multifaceted and numerous things out of life (Clements 1998).

Much hand wringing about single women was conducted in daily newspapers in 1998 and 2001. Spawned by the release of the *Bridget Jones’s Diary* book and movie, newspaper articles debated the character, the plot and the real-life single female counterpart of the best-selling, blockbusting story. This media discussion is important merely because it occurred. The press, according to Schudson, brings legitimacy to a topic. It is in these newspaper accounts, however, that the single woman seems most schizophrenic. Rather than comment on the varied lifestyles these real-life women lead, the newspapers focused on the accuracy/inaccuracy of the narrow media portrayals of them. The writers of these newspaper articles make efforts to pigeonhole all single women time and time again, leading to the conclusion that media seem to be frantically searching for stereotypes of this demographic.

Cultural Implications

The novel, the magazine, and the press accounts resurrect one hackneyed stereotype: the spinster. Scholars have noted this image has repeatedly been a reinforcement of the status quo throughout history. Pictures of sad, lonely, old, unmarried women have been the choice images to scare and pressure young women into avoiding the paths they took in life by not getting married. The findings of this study dispute those of Naomi Braun Rosenthal (2002) that this figure has disappeared altogether from media, folklore and fiction. Judging from 1998’s *Cosmopolitan*, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and the daily American newspapers of 1998 and 2001, the image of the spinster is still notably present. This figure continues to function to warn young women of the consequences of staying single too long.

In American culture, marriage has become a “marker for the culture, family and self in the expected progression from dependency to adulthood” (Schwartzberg 4). In not marrying at an age determined by the family, the community or the previous generation, single women deviate from the mainstream. Thus a lack of societal validation many times accompanies this perceived deviant lifestyle. The texts examined here approach marriage as the “norm” and the single life as abnormal. For instance, although Bridget Jones makes snide comments about “smug marrieds,” and despite numerous unhappy marriages in the book, the plot centers on Bridget “getting the guy.”

In “Messages to Women on Love and Marriage from Women’s Magazines,” Susan Alexander found that as of 1994, “the glories of the single culture are past. It is no longer considered square to ‘tie the knot’ ...magazines laud the advantages of marriage” (Alexander 29). Further, Alexander predicted that “the marriage mania is continuing and most likely increasing as far as women are concerned” (Alexander 31). In the texts examined here, it is concluded that although marriage is not explicitly named, getting the guy is the goal of these media-generated single women.

This finding is consistent with Betsy Israel’s conclusion that modern single women are merely “hanging out in the lives that have evolved around them” (Israel 258). This study concurs with her position that these women have lived through the confusion resulting from divorced parents and greater freedoms for women. These single women believe in the possibilities of love as demonstrated by their dating habits, yet they do not necessarily believe in the possibilities of marriage. For marriage is not the end goal of the women in the texts analyzed here; men are.

Economics undoubtedly plays a role in how women are portrayed in media. All forms of media must seek a large audience in order to make money. Much of the self-help-get-the-guy

editorial advice for single women in 1998's *Cosmopolitan* is consistent with the self-help-buy-this-product advertising aspect of the rest of the magazine. What is printed in popular media is not necessarily meant to represent reality. The findings here are consistent with McMahon's study of *Cosmopolitan*: the reader is offered "techniques for survival coded in terms set by the contemporary marketplace: means-to-ends relations motivated by self-interest." Such a topic deserves further study.

Feminist Implications

Cosmopolitan in 1998, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and the newspaper articles examined here, all present options for unmarried women to operate within the realm of patriarchy. These texts show single female characters whose lives revolve around men. The message behind these presentations is that single women can be independent and self-sufficient, yet still need men. Liberal feminism tries to enact change in the existing system by following its rules and adhering to its entrenched guidelines. However, by sending male-dominated messages with characters that seem to be feminist in their mere existence as unmarried women, these texts reinforce women's subordination on a deeper level.

In a piece from *The New Republic*, Ruth Shalit argues that the term "post-feminist" describes many prime-time TV programs that have featured women, such as "Dharma & Greg," "Veronica's Closet," and "Ally McBeal." These female protagonists, who are hyper feminine even as they have demanding careers, represent "really nothing but a male producer's fantasy of feminism, which manages simultaneously to exploit and to deplore, to arouse and to moralize" (Shalit 30). Finally, Shalit notes, these programs "have made male power and female

powerlessness seem harmless, cuddly, sexy, safe, and sellable. They have merely raised conservatism's hem" (Shalit 32).

The media discussion concerning these images of single women reached its most fervent with the release of the now infamous *Time* magazine cover story "Is Feminism Dead?" Gina Bellafante used popular culture texts including both *Bridget Jones's Diary* and "Ally McBeal" as evidence of feminism gone bad:

Much of feminism has devolved into the silly. And it has powerful support for this: a popular culture insistent on offering images of grown single women as frazzled, self-absorbed girls The problem with Bridget and Ally is that they are presented as archetypes of single womanhood even though they are little more than composites of frivolous neuroses. (Bellafante 57)

One aspect of all the single women in the texts examined here, is whether explicitly or implicitly, positively or negatively, each pays homage to feminism in some way. The mere presence of 20 to 40-year-old, single females in media is proof positive of advances women have made through the women's movement in the past century. Beyond that, however, these texts rarely express satisfaction or gratitude for this freedom. Single women in 1998's *Cosmopolitan*, America daily newspapers in 1998 and 2001, and Bridget Jones herself, merely pay lip service to feminism, while reinforcing patriarchy on a deeper level. These are post-feminist texts, in that they are prime examples of the forgetfulness caused by a few hard-earned advances for women. The messages here encourage independent women to desire, and in some cases seek, domination and domestication by men.

These media-generated single women each serve the needs of patriarchy in some way. Bridget Jones, as an anti-heroine, holds up for readers and viewers an image of novelty and

ridicule. In her relative boredom with everything in her life except men, Bridget enforces the idea that this is the only aspect of life that means something and leads somewhere. The daily newspaper articles in 1998 and 2001 concerning this character and single women in general, continue in this vein by both positioning Bridget as Everywoman and denying her likeness to real single women. The articles discuss narrow mainstream examples of single women in popular culture, comparing and contrasting them with Bridget mainly in terms of how each dealt with men and dating. Further, *Cosmopolitan* in 1998 presented either a stigmatization or a glamorization of the lifestyle by giving advice on how to get a man or positioning single women up as “other.”

Bridget Jones's Diary uses humor to comment on the lives of single women. Satire allows the main character to call herself a feminist, while the novel itself demonstrates dissatisfaction with the freedom the feminist movement gained for women over the past twenty years. Bridget Jones places the pursuit of a man at the center of her existence, daydreams of domestic bliss and wallows in self-pity over her single state, yet has been positioned by some mainstream media as a modern-day Everywoman. It is to be concluded that these messages function to encourage women to follow the traditional path and marry young. For if Everywoman Bridget Jones is 30, unmarried, lonely and miserable, then the message this text is sending is that single women everywhere are lonely and miserable.

The present study is admittedly not without flaw. Conducting research on one publication year of one magazine limits the application of findings. Also, the book and magazine indicated here target a rather particular “type” of woman. It is not assumed that this is anything other than a focused study of strictly mainstream media. What this research will do, however, is add a tiny

layer to the body of research and thus advance academic knowledge of media presentations of single women.

Research on single women in media is relatively scarce in academe, considering their increasing presence in society. Future research on similar topics could address representations of single women in other forms of popular culture such as television, movies or music. Audience research could also be conducted, studying the opinions of and reactions to media generated single women by actual single women. Single women are a valuable sector of society. As their numbers continue to grow, it is important that media produce more nuanced and varied representations of these women than those found in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 1998's *Cosmopolitan* magazine and the newspaper media debate that occurred in 1998 and 2001.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIONS OF BRIDGET JONES

Shame Regarding Vices

- “look as if you’ve been caught playing with matches”—Simon, 51
“my traumatized expression”—Bridget, 59
“Bit hungover”—Bridget, 13
“horrible”—Bridget, 15
“ashamed”—Bridget, 16
“sad and traumatized”—Bridget, 24
“alarmed”—Bridget, 25
“panic-stricken”—Bridget, 25
“crippled with embarrassment”—Bridget, 25
“Apparently there is a Martin Amis character who is so crazily addicted that he starts wanting a cigarette even when he is smoking one. That’s me.”—Bridget, 33
“reduce my ego to size of snail”—Bridget, 35
“frigid cow”—Daniel, 39
“like a humiliated teenager”—Bridget, 44
“too polite”—Bridget, 45
“darling little frigid cow”—Daniel, 46
“obsessed with sex”—Jamie, 48
“very cynical and suspicious”—Mum, 49
“V. tired”—Bridget, 50
“preoccupied...tired”—Bridget, 50
“made a complete arse of myself”—Bridget, 50
“shag-drunkenness”—Bridget, 52
“begin to feel alarm”—Bridget, 52
“being so neurotic and dreading things”—Bridget, 74
“vice-free me was like...a whelk, scallop or other flaccid sea-creature”—Bridget, 77
“constant lateness for work and failure to address in-tray bulging with threats from bailiffs, etc.”—Bridget, 79
“have been going wrong by going to parties armed only with objective of not getting too pissed”—Bridget, 84
“total geek”—Bridget, 85
“dirty little bitch”—Daniel, 90
“flat”—Tom, 92

- “weren’t your usual self”—Tom, 92
- “empty and bewildered”—Bridget, 92
- “impotent and cheated”—Bridget, 93
- “I am now also between one and all of the following: a) Back on thirty a day. b) Engaged. c) Stupid. d) Pregnant.”—Bridget, 96
- “pregnant”—Bridget, 99
- “hungover”—Bridget, 99
- “exhausted by pregnancy”—Bridget, 100
- “neurotic hysterics over a phantom pregnancy”—Bridget, 104
- “obsessed by shopping in a shallow, materialistic way”—Bridget, 106
- “...I spend every Saturday night getting blind drunk and moaning to Jude and Shazzer or Tom about my chaotic emotional life”—Bridget, 114
- “...whatever I am doing, I really think I ought to be doing something else.”—Bridget, 128
- “call girl”—Bridget, 146
- “...as if I were in a French farce”—Bridget, 151
- “...as if I was mad”—Bridget, 151
- “And I was making a complete prat of myself behaving like a mad-woman”—Bridget, 153
- “I’m falling apart”—Bridget, 157
- “...alone in middle of night, smoking and sniveling like mad psychopath”—Bridget, 157
- “‘Stop obsessing. Leave it to me.’ Sometimes feel without Tom I would sink without trace and disappear.”—Bridget, 189
- “prick teaser”—Bridget, 189
- “Old Woman of the Hills”—Bridget, 189
- “completely full of myself”—Bridget, 189
- “I’m sure he thought I was a prostitute or something”—Bridget, 190
- “I am too old”—Bridget, 190
- “humiliated”—Bridget, 194
- “am in disgrace and am laughingstock”—Bridget, 195
- “shambles,’ ‘disgrace,’ ‘bleedin’ bloody idiot”—Richard Finch, 195
- “I’m so depressed...I’m no good at anything. Not men. Not social skills. Nothing.”—Bridget, 195
- “pissed floozy...like a prostitute in a Yates Wine Lodge”—Bridget, 204
- “flattered”—Bridget, 204
- “older woman”—Bridget, 204
- “...I said, childishly, hoping he would say something about sex”—Bridget, 206
- “How embarrassing. Am complete jerk.”—Bridget, 211
- “bit late, actually, sort of thing that could happen to anyone”—Bridget, 216
- “Bridget-fucking-late-again”—Richard Finch, 217
- “the pressures we women have long been subjected to...insecure appearance obsessed and borderline anorexic”—Bridget, 225
- “Start to wonder whether am really good friend. We are all so selfish and busy in London.”—Bridget, 228
- “prima bloody donna”—Sharon, 230
- “Horror-struck...am disastrous failure. Michelin-star cookery? Kwik-fit more like”—Bridget, 237
- “‘Suddenly Single’'s Jailbird’s Daughter...Suddenly Sacked on air.”—Bridget, 238

“Found myself feeling guilty, since part of self—despite horror—was hugely enjoying the fact of normal business being suspended, everything different from usual and everyone allowed to throw entire glasses of sherry and salmon-paste sandwiches down their throats in manner of Christmas.”—Bridget, 239

“feed him blue soup and turn out to be the daughter of criminal”—Bridget, 240

“naughty Bridget”—Bridget, 242

“I don’t feel like an adult, I feel like a teenage boy who everyone’s annoyed with”—Bridget, 262

Concept of Self and Self-Esteem

“repulsive”—Bridget, 16

“irresistible Sex Goddess”—Bridget, 23

“what I would be like if left to revert to nature—with a full beard and handlebar moustache on each shin, Dennis Healey eyebrows, face a graveyard of dead skin cells, spots erupting, long curly fingernails like Struwwelpeter, blind as bad and stupid runt of species as no contact lenses, flabby body flobbering around”—Bridget, 27

“Dusky Beauty”—Daniel, 45)

“lard splurging from bottom and thighs under skin”—Bridget, 50

“like drowning corpse—drowning in fat”—Bridget, 51

“Am just off to work looking like Ivana bloody Trump wearing a suit and lip gloss”—Bridget, 159

“me looking like a door-to-door cosmetics saleswoman in a bright blue suit with slithery green blouse underneath and blue eyeshadow right up to my eyebrows”—Bridget, 166

“..blanched at my Jigsaw suit, as if, in a hideously misjudged attempt to be formal, I had turned up in a floor-length shot-silk Laura Ashley ball gown”—Bridget, 170

“furious”—Bridget, 9

“not being a natural liar...”—Bridget, 10

“marvelous”—Bridget, 23

“perfect saint-style person”—Bridget, 25

“will feel like caring angel or saint”—Bridget, 37

“Am I to be the tragic victim of a broken home now, on top of everything else?”—Bridget, 38

“posed and cool and remember that I am a woman of substance and do not need men in order to be complete, especially not him”—Bridget, 38

“heartbroken...parallel and shameful feeling of smugness over my new role as carer and, though I say it myself, wise counselor”—Bridget, 43

“becoming a Samaritan or Sunday School teacher...even retraining as a doctor”—Bridget, 430

“a feminist”—Bridget, 47

“alone...repulsion...outrage...heady, selfish optimism...frequent thoughts of Goldie Hawn and Susan Sarandon...extreme sense of jealousy of failure and foolishness”—Bridget, 53

“triumphantly returned from heroic expedition”—Bridget, 60

“ice-queen combined with *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*”—Bridget, 65)

“Hitler Youth ice-maiden”—Daniel, 66

“irresistible sex kitten”—Daniel, 67

“Jeremy Paxman”—Daniel, 67

“marvelous”—Bridget, 67

“v. pleased with self”—Bridget, 67

- “v. empowered”—Bridget, 67
- “Tremendous”—Bridget, 67
- “so unhappy”—Bridget, 67
- “v. fed up”—Bridget, 67
- “grand society hostess”—Bridget, 68
- “brilliant cook and hostess”—Bridget, 72
- “child of a *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices”—Bridget, 52
- “marvelous”—Bridget, 77
- “inner poise”—Bridget, 77
- “inner poise”—Bridget, 78
- “inner poise, inner poise”—Bridget, 86
- “preprogrammed Stepford wife”—Bridget, 89
- “inner poise”—Bridget, 94
- “inner poise”—Bridget, 96
- “Calvin Klein-style mother figure”—Bridget, 100
- “am single mother”—Bridget, 101
- “weird sort of hermaphrodite or Push-me-pull you”—Bridget, 102
- “neisty and gooey about Daniel”—Bridget, 102
- “smug about being a real woman”—Bridget, 102
- “hideous grow-bag-cum-milk-dispensing-machine which no one will fancy and which ill not fit into any of my trousers, particularly my brand new acid green Agnes B jeans”—Bridget, 102
- “modern woman”—Bridget, 103
- “Have I sensed with a woman’s intuition that he is having an affair?”—Bridget, 123
- “as if I were an emotionally unbalanced ex-wife or something”—Bridget, 161
- “I wasn’t fit to be in society anymore, and just needed to get away till I stopped feeling like this”—Bridget, 167
- “Even my own mother wishes I’d never been born”—Bridget, 169
- “Also everyone will be more successful and having a better time than me.”—Bridget, 172
- “Perpetua thinks I’m mad”—Bridget, 173
- “new calm, authoritative image”—Bridget, 181
- “being danced about in front of Mark Darcy like a spoonful of pureed turnip in front of a baby”—Bridget, 185
- “middle-class”—Bridget, 188
- “The youths clearly thought I had a syndrome that made me want to pretend I worked in TV”—Bridget, 188
- “euphoric”—Bridget, 200
- “harmless daughter”—Bridget, 201
- “big feller”—Dad, 201
- “overcome with curiosity”—Bridget, 202
- “feeling as if I were a member of a war cabinet”—Bridget, 204
- “Will be marvelous. Will become known as brilliant but apparently effortless cook...Mark Darcy will be v. impressed and will realize I am not common or incompetent”—Bridget, 223
- “Am practically Tom’s best friend so everyone is ringing me and am adopting calm yet deeply concerned air about whole thing”—Bridget, 227

- “I came out of my fantasy about how dignified, tragic and articulate I would be”—Bridget, 229
- “Started behaving like people who are interviewed on the television after plane crashes in their front gardens, talking in formulaic phrases borrowed from news broadcasts, courtroom dramas or similar. Found myself describing my mother as being ‘Caucasian’ and ‘of medium build.’”—Bridget, 241
- “in manner of tragic spinster spurned by all men instead of in manner to which have been accustomed: in chauffeur-driven car with top barrister”—Bridget, 242
- “modest...saintly”—Bridget, 249
- “No one likes me”—Bridget, 251
- “I shuddered with humiliation...not very popular”—Bridget, 252
- “no boyfriend, no money, your mother is going out with a missing Portuguese criminal and your friends don’t want to be your friend anymore...social outcasts”—Bridget, 253
- “am unpopular”—Bridget, 255
- “Am clearly Emissary of Baby Jesus here to help those persecuted at Christmas by Herod-Wannabes, e.g. Vile Richard”—Bridget, 259
- “in manner of Queen of Hearts or Soup Kitchen. But that’s just the kind of person I am: liking to love others.”—Bridget, 260
- “in manner of benefactor”—Bridget, 271

Physical Appearance

- “You look like some sort of Mary Poppins person who’s fallen on hard times”—Mum, 8
- “unattractive”—Bridget, 15
- “fat, have spot on chin”—Bridget, 15
- “can actually feel the fat splurging out from my body”—Bridget, 16
- “unattractive”—Bridget, 24
- “I like your tits in that top”—Daniel, 26
- “One side of my hair was plastered to my head, the other sticking out in a series of peaks and horns”—Bridget, 57
- “gorgeous creature”—Daniel, 64
- “I was 130 when I went to bed, 128 at 4 a.m. and 131 when I got up...I don’t look fatter. I can fasten the button, though not, alas, the zipper on my ’89 jeans. So maybe my whole body is getting smaller but denser.”—Bridget, 64
- “You look dreadful. You look about ninety.”—Mum, 71
- “I am thin”—Bridget, 90
- “thin”—Bridget, 91
- “tight little black dress to show off figure”—Bridget, 91
- “You look really tired... maybe you’ve lost it a bit quickly off your...face”—Jude 91
- “my admittedly somewhat deflated cleavage”—Bridget, 91
- “drawn”—Simon, 92
- “There’s nothing worse than people telling you you look tired. They might as well have done with it and say you look like five kinds of shit.”—Bridget, 92
- “thin”—Bridget, 92
- “I think you looked better before, hon.”—Tom, 92
- “tired and flat”—Bridget, 93
- “my plumptious”—Daniel, 96

“rippling stomach and thighs”—Bridget, 105

“being lovely even when you’re squiffy”—Daniel, 100

“you wandering round in all these dingy slurries and fogs. You look like something out of Chairman Mao.”—Mum, 112

“Auntie Una was just saying the other day: if you’d had something a bit more bright and cheerful on at the Turkey Curry Buffet Mark Darcy might have shown a bit more interest. Nobody wants a girlfriend who wanders round looking like someone from Auschwitz, darling.”—Mum, 112

“Bridget, why can’t you get all done up on Saturdays like your mum?”—Daniel, 117

“I mean, she doesn’t smile as much as you do. That’s probably why she hasn’t got so many lines.”—Rebecca, 126

“my thick, age-hardened, sagging flesh”—Bridget, 126

“Why do I look old? Why?”—Bridget, 127

“Decided needed to spend more time on appearance like Hollywood stars and have therefore spent ages putting concealer under eyes, blusher on cheeks and defining fading features...”—Bridget, 127

“Your face. You look like Barbara Cartland...No you look like a five-year-old in your mother’s makeup.”—Tom, 127

“I looked like a garish clown with bright pink cheeks, two dead crows for eyes and the bulk of the white cliffs of Dover smeared underneath.”—Bridget, 127

“You look about sixteen.”—Tom, 128

“You look like a common prostitute”—Mum, 147

“I spent the rest of the party wearing, over my bunny girl outfit, a puff-sleeved, floral-sprig Laura Ashley bridesmaid dress of Janine’s with Mark Darcy’s Natasha smirking and my mother periodically rushing past going, ‘That’s a pretty dress, darling. Cut!’”—Bridget, 147

“‘Honey,’ said the woman, in an American accent, looking over my head at him. ‘I thought you said she was *thin*.’”—Daniel’s lover, 153

“It is because I am too fat”—Bridget, 157

“If you don’t do *something* about your appearance you’ll never get another job, nevermind another boyfriend!”—Mum, 166

“lard mountain for interview, also have spot”—Bridget, 170

“my short black skirt and a T-shirt”—Bridget, 182

“*sloppy tramp* in dull colors”—Mum, 182

“standing in my socks and nightie trying to wipe the mascara from under my eyes”—Bridget, 184

“Eventually he managed to slide his hand over my stomach at which point he said—it was so humiliating—‘Mmm. You’re all squashy.’”—Bridget, 190

“I keep telling you nobody wants legs like a stick insect. They want a bottom they can park a bike in and balance a pint of beer on’ I was torn between a gross image of myself with a bicycle parked in my bottom and a pint of beer balanced on it, fury at Daniel for his blatantly provocative sexism and suddenly wondering if he might be right about my concept of my body in relation to men, and, in which case, whether I should have something delicious to eat straight away and what that might be.”—Bridget, 137

“...aloof over-made-up ice-queen on anticellulite diet”—Bridget, 160

“In physically disastrous state but emotionally v. much cheered up by night out”—Bridget, 162

“Am repulsive to all men now”—Bridget, 165

“I realized that I have spent so many years being on a diet that the idea that you might actually need calories to survive has been completely wiped out of my consciousness...Tom says I am sick but I happen to know for a fact that I am normal and no different from everyone else, i.e. Sharon and Jude.”—Bridget, 225

“oh God, have turned into Santa Claus, Christmas pudding or similar”—Bridget, 261

Loneliness in Relation to Single Status

“sat slumped in my dressing gown, sulkily painting my toenails and watching the preamble to the racing”—Bridget, 57

“...leaving me standing on my own by the bookshelf while everybody stared at me, thinking ‘So that’s why Bridget isn’t married. She repulses men.’”—Bridget, 14

“completely alone”—Bridget, 29

“V. depressed”—Bridget, 29

“sunk into gloom”—Bridget, 29

“alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian”—Bridget, 29

“...past a certain age...”—Alex, 36

“old girl”—Cosmo, 36

“old girl”—Jeremy, 36

“she hasn’t got a man”—Cosmo, 36

“Singleton”—Sharon, 37

“single girls like me with their own incomes and homes who have lots of fun and don’t need to wash anyone else’s socks”—Sharon, 37

“turned into Miss Havisham”—Bridget, 35

“Do not care about figure. Is no point as no one loves or cares about me”—Bridget, 44

“so depressed”—Bridget, 58

“congratulating myself on being single”—Bridget, 61

“single”—Bridget, 91

“free”—Bridget, 91

“extremely miserable”—Bridget, 104

“left out”—Bridget, 104

“sheepish Singleton”—Bridget, 113

“God I so much wish I was like you, Bridge, and could just have an affair. Or have bubble baths for two hours on Sunday morning. Or stay out all night with no questions asked...”—Magda, 114

“...’someone *younger*...someone premenopausal and Suddenly Single who can talk about, well, you know, darling, the pressures of impending childlessness and so on.’—Mum, 115

‘I’m *not* premenopausal, Mother!’ I exploded. ‘And I’m not Suddenly Single either. I’m suddenly part of a couple.’...’I’ve got a boyfriend.’”—Bridget, 115

“When you are partnerless in your thirties, the mild bore of not being in a relationship—no sex, not having anyone to hang out with on Sundays, going home from parties on your own all the time—gets infused with the paranoid notion that the reason you are not in a relationship is your age, you have had your last ever relationship and sexual experience ever, and it is all your fault for being too wild or willful to settle down in the first bloom of youth.”—Bridget, 123

“I struggle to make ends meet and am ridiculed as an unmarried freak...”—Bridget, 114

“...it *is* difficult, single women do tend to get desperate as they get older...”—Rebecca, 168

“picky and romantic...you’ve simply got too much choice”—Mum, 169
 “...trying to pretend I didn’t mind not having any friends”—Bridget, 174
 “alone again...my emotional failure and isolation...single”—Bridget, 185
 “They’re young, ambitious and rich but their lives hide an aching loneliness...When they leave work a gaping emotional hole opens up before them...Lonely style-obsessed individuals seek consolation in packeted comfort food of the kind their mother might have made.”—Newspaper Article: “The Joy of Single Life,” 213
 “Oh God, I’m so lonely”—Bridget, 214
 “v. sad”—Bridget, 236
 “tragic spinster spurned by all men”—Bridget, 242
 “Am going to be eaten by Alsatian despite all efforts to the contrary”—Bridget, 250
 “single”—Bridget, 258
 “find self feeling sentimental about Daniel...V. sad”—Bridget, 258
 “festive Home Alone Singleton like Princess Diana”—Bridget, 259
 “*Oh God, I’m so lonely*”—Bridget, 259
 “Totally alone. Entire year has been failure.”—Bridget, 260
 “The only thing that connects me to the real world is that once again I am humiliatingly spending Christmas Eve alone in my parents’ house in a single bed.”—Bridget, 261

Intellect and Career

“silly”—Una Alconbury, 15
 “stupid”—Bridget, 99
 “look a bit freaked out”—Patchouli, 210
 “nauseous, vile-headed, acidic”—Bridget, 9
 “suffering from road-rage residue”—Bridget, 9
 “You career girls!”—Una Alconbury, 11
 “works in publishing”—Una Alconbury, 12
 “dizzy”—Bridget, 33
 “...if one were a Freudian. Which I am not.”—Bridget, 34
 “seem to reduce everything to level of teen”—Bridget, 35
 “bored”—Bridget, 39
 “And some horrible mean part of me felt happy and smug because I had a career. Well—a job, anyway. I was a grasshopper collecting a big pile of grass, or flies, or whatever it is grasshoppers eat ready for the winter, even if I didn’t have a boyfriend.”—Bridget, 62
 “naïve”—Tom, 63
 “a top postmodernist”—Mark Darcy, 88
 “ridiculous human being”—Sharon, 103
 “ninny”—Sharon, 103
 “If Bridget had a child she’d lose it”—Daniel, 117
 “Feel incompetent fool and as if everyone else in world understands something which is being kept from me”—Bridget, 131
 “‘Anyway’...’ he started laughing, ‘... there’s nothing wrong with a degree from...from...’ (he was *so* amused now he could hardly speak) ‘...Bangor’”—Daniel, 143
 “‘You know I think you’re a...an intellectual *giant*.’”—Daniel, 144

- “It means that the vain pursuit of an intellectual life is getting in the way of your true purpose.”—Daniel, 144
- “You career girls! Can’t put it off forever you know: tick-tock-tick-tock.”—Una Alconbury, 148
- “cheerfully, without thinking”—Bridget, 149
- “cunning as a fox”—Bridget, 149
- “I felt a complete fool”—Bridget, 153
- “silly”—Mum, 166
- “bizarre”—Mark Darcy, 182
- “‘Brilliant,’ he said to my breasts. ‘Absolutely fucking brilliant.’”—Richard Finch, 183
- “bitch thirtysomethings”—a co-worker, 184
- “silly”—Mum, 184
- “It’s great when you start thinking about your career instead of worrying about trivial things—men and relationships.”—Bridget, 193
- “Una Alconbury told me you were a sort of literary whiz-woman, completely obsessed with books...that you’re a radical feminist and have an incredibly glamorous life...with millions of men taking you out.”—Mark Darcy, 206
- “‘Bridget, all the other girls I know are so lacquered over. I don’t know anyone else who would fasten a bunny tail to their pants or...’”—Mark Darcy, 207
- “home news correspondent”—Bridget, 212
- “‘Brilliant’... ‘Absolutely fucking brilliant’... ‘You, my darling,’ he said to one of my breasts, ‘are an absolute fucking genius.’”—Richard Finch, 217
- “intensely instinctive and intuitive person”—Bridget, 228
- “daft cow”—Tom, 230
- “silly-willy”—Mum, 234
- “naively assuming”—Bridget, 243
- “Completely shattered...rumpled, startled and confused”—Bridget, 244
- “*silly*”—Mum, 258
- “silly willy”—Mum, 265

APPENDIX B

ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIONS OF SINGLE WOMEN IN *COSMOPOLITAN*, 1998

Single Woman as Man Hunter

- “scared that he would get mad at me if I insisted that he wear a condom” (Ziv 152)
- “But how could my sexually-peaking-at-30 body bear the celibacy that goes with the boyfriend-free lifestyle?” (Dolgoﬀ 238)
- “make you feel like you’re projecting an on-the-prowl vibe” (Katz, J. 152)
- “still a mess, particularly where matters of the heart are concerned” (Hensley 128)
- “not perfect” (Hensley 128)
- “doesn’t have it all together” (Hensley 128)
- “overwhelmed” (Hensley 128)
- “considers just giving it all up and becoming a street person. But then she ‘wouldn’t get to wear [her] outfits’” (Hensley 128)
- “so what we try not to be like in real life—honest” (Hensley 128)
- “a 28-year-old single makeup (and make-out) artist in Los Angeles” (Burton 184)
- “her field-playing is self-admittedly prolific” (Burton 184)
- “In other words, I was hot and very much in vogue—prime rib for the single woman on the prowl” (Arnold, T. 42)
- “Plus, the freedom to flirt when you’re ostensibly single cuts both ways, and if he’s into you, that’ll stick in his craw” (Gutfield 164)
- “at risk of becoming a crazy old spinster cat lady” (Dolgoﬀ 238)
- “enjoy getting wrapped up in a man’s day-to-day” (Dolgoﬀ 238)
- “And in my heart of hearts, I wanted something more substantial” (Dolgoﬀ 238)
- “I think when you’re ready to date again after a breakup, you unconsciously start looking better, walking taller, and being more attractive to men” (Dolgoﬀ 238)
- “...was as outraged as Molly and I were that we were still single” (Dolgoﬀ 238)
- “Dating felt like job-hunting in a tight market” (Dolgoﬀ 238)
- “I had hit a new low in desperation” (Campbell, L. 130)
- “so impersonal” (Campbell, L. 130)
- “So many guys here come oﬀ like they’re entitled to act like weenies because we women are so desperate” (Boyle 200)
- “I’ve never had any trouble finding a man” (Boyle 200)
- “She’s not looking for Prince Charming—she would simply like to have sex one more time before the millennium” (Boyle 200)

“Because it’s football season, and if you have a boyfriend or husband who’s a sports addict, you may as well be single” (Brown, J. 320)
 “archaic image of single woman as desperate woman” (Knadler 188)
 “I’m still married to Tommy” (Frankel 264)
 “I’ve never really been alone” (Frankel 264)
 “I’ve always been, well, an overlapper in the boyfriend department” (Frankel 264)
 “Sandy Bell, a dating coach in Dallas who has counseled more than 3,000 stressed-out singles” (Kemp 152)
 “you have no man at the moment” (Knadler 188)
 “You’re in a relationship dry spell” (Knadler 188)
 “feeling about as desirable as a loaf of vacuum-packed fruitcake” (Knadler 188)
 “But before you reach for your diary like Bridget Jones on a bad day, take five” (Knadler 188)
 “the one single person at a table full of happy, glowing couples” (Knadler 188)
 “sterile old spinster” (Knadler 188)
 “the hostess called her obnoxious bodybuilding neighbor over as my consolation prize for being dateless” (Knadler 188)
 “you’re not necessarily better off staying home alone just because you’re the single woman out” (Knadler 188)
 “Single Girl’s Holiday Hell 2: The Christmas Kiddie Soft Spot” (Knadler 188)
 “biological clock ticking like a time bomb” (Knadler 188)
 “Single Girl’s Holiday Hell 3: Christmas Time Cold-Calling” (Knadler 188)
 “Chances are, if you want to reignite some expired emotions, it’s because you miss those feelings, not your old fling” (Knadler 188)
 “wallflowers” (Knadler 188)
 “shy woman” (Knadler 188)
 “(‘I’m really a bachelorette type of girl,’ she says. ‘I like to explore my options’) but prone to pangs about marriage and offspring” (Handelman 230)
 “At night, you can get corny with other singles, square dancing country music or crooners like Hank Williams in front of the campfire. And when the embers die down, lasso some hunky cornpoke and go for a romantic hayride under the Texas stars” (Fabian 118)
 “My boyfriend and I broke up before I found out was pregnant. When I told him that I had missed two periods, he accused me of lying as a way of getting back together with him.—21, single, abortion at 19” (Ziv 152)
 “When I told my boyfriend that I was pregnant, he left me.—22, single (abortion at 17)” (Ziv 152)
 “has an interesting way of weeding through potential suitors. ‘I base it on who can pronounce my name,’ laughs the single actress” (Hensley 128)
 “I write them off. Obviously they’re not paying attention or they just don’t care” (Hensley 128)
 “1. It’s time for your 10-year high school reunion, and you’re single. You: a. Have your best male friend escort you. b. Skip it. You’re not going to meet anyone new and exciting there. c. Spend the evening flirtatiously insult-sparing with the jerk who tormented you all through your sophomore year. d. Squeeze into your senior prom dress and spend the whole night reminiscing with your high-school sweetheart.” (Brady 230)
 “I knew the man was married with kids, but I couldn’t help myself: I’d already turned to jelly” (Kaufman 290)

“He carried me into his bedroom and as we undressed each other, my mind began reeling. Maybe this would be the start of an affair. We’d be each other’s secret, safe from his wife” (Kaufman 290)

“So after sobbing into my Froot Loops for a few days (I get to eat anything I want as a reward for being strong in the face of adversity)” (Dolgoﬀ 238)

“The answer, I decided, was boyfriend lite: someone to knock boots with minus the heavy love trip.” (Dolgoﬀ 238)

“I proposed that we have an emotionally platonic physical arrangement.” (Dolgoﬀ 238)

“What will devastate you more: Staying silent or being suddenly single? Ultimately, says Horn, you have got to go with your gut” (Fabian (b) 176)

“phone sex...a brand-new solution to being alone but not lonely” (Campbell, L. 130)

“using their phones for easy sex” (Campbell, L. 130)

“throwing away their inhibitions and calling strangers for sex” (Campbell, L. 130)

“So after a lot of debate, I finally said, ‘Oh what the hell,’ and called a phone-sex line.” (Campbell, L. 130)

“Normally, I’m too busy to think about kids. But once Frosty the Snowman airs, I’m out pricing managers.” (Knadler 188)

“Tighten the reins on those hormones before you even think about pricking holes in your diaphragm.” (Knadler 188)

“The desire to be a mother intensifies during this family-focused season.” (Knadler 188)

“Acting on an urge that’s festivity-fueled is about as rational as resorting to the G.I. Jane look because it happens to be humid.” (Knadler 188)

“True, braving the world solo can be a scary proposition.” (Katz, J. 152)

“You worry that you’ll feel like a fool, look like a loser, or just have a torturous time.” (Katz, J. 152)

“Was she scared? ‘Of course. But I kept telling myself, the worst thing that can happen is I won’t talk to anyone for 10 days. That’s the last thing I had to worry about.” (Katz, J. 152)

“It was like I was searching the bottom of the barrel to get my kicks.” (Campbell, L. 130)

“always whining about the “man famine” here in New York City” (Fabian and Moore 246)

“tap into what The Great Land has to offer” (Fabian and Moore 246)

“four single Cosmo writers...had our parkas packed, seat belts fastened, and were chattering with anticipation on the 10-hour trip to the land of three million lakes and—we hoped—at least as many men.” (Fabian and Moore 246)

“On a whirlwind eight-day tour in frigid February” (Fabian and Moore 246)

“We ravaged Alaska, hitting Anchorage, the hip ski town of Alyeska, and Seward, a quaint port town teaming with fishermen.” (Fabian and Moore 246)

“We snowmobiled, dogsledded, cruised some fjords, and checked out the wildlife—and the nightlife.” (Fabian and Moore 246)

“We met more than 100 surprisingly diverse men, everywhere from bars to basketball games, ski slopes to cultural events.” (Fabian and Moore 246)

“And by all means, make it crystal clear that you’re browsing the male market. ‘When a woman lets me know she’s single, I immediately start looking at her differently. It’s like a window of opportunity that I didn’t even know was there just opened up.’” (Harris 146)

“Uh-oh, I thought. This would mean breaking my rule: I always insist on condoms with any new lover.” (Kaufman 290)

“But I was so far gone, I was willing to play it unsafe. ‘I did bring along my birth control pills,’ I said, winking.” (Kaufman 290)

“complain about this area as being man-poor” (Boyle 200)

“women blame their romantic troubles—and unhappiness in general—on the ratio, when what’s keeping them solitary is really their attitudes.” (Boyle 200)

“A typical complaint, he says, is ‘if I only had a man, the rest of my life would fall into place, but every man I meet is a freak.’ Not exactly a come-hither attitude.” (Boyle 200)

“I believe a lot of women are misreading why they’re unhappy. It’s easy to look for something to blame for your lacking love life; it’s harder to take responsibility for it and make changes, like appreciating yourself and your surroundings more,’ Entin explains. But once you do, he says, you’ll give off the kind of attitude that men will find attractive.” (Boyle 200)

“Do starlets sleep with a lot of Hollywood studs?: “The short answer: Yes. Long days on the set, sometimes doing love scenes, breed intimacy—and keep you from meeting guys elsewhere, say the starlets. Plus, industry parties are the place to be and operate as Hollywood’s unofficial singles-bar scene.” (Lewittes 220)

“Singing the Single Belle Blues?” (Knadler 188)

“face the two skewed festivities head-on and put the ho-ho-ho back into your hell-iday.” (Knadler 188)

“being sentenced to playing spectator to giddy, gushing couples and cuddly kids.” (Knadler 188)

Single Girl’s Holiday Hell 4: New Year’s Eve Kiss Countdown “Last year during my solo ski holiday, I attended a wild New Year’s Eve party by myself. But because I was so uncomfortable being alone, I stood out like a single sore thumb and spent the entire night in a corner fending off drunken men on the make!” (Knadler 188)

Tis the Season to be Single: Check out these ways to celebrate in singular style: “Love Boat-like singles cruise” (Knadler 188)

“Take a skiing lesson with a superhot instructor, and then teach him a thing or two—warm him up in the hot tub with an eggnog nightcap (spiked, of course) once the sun goes down.” (Knadler 188)

Single Woman as Contented

“I do not feel any guilt.” (Ziv 152)

“Although I never wanted to go through it again, it was the best decision for me.” (Ziv 152)

“single and happy” (Brown and Miller 142)

“I’m not proud of the fact that I traded sex for success, but I have not serious regrets either.” (Kaufman 290)

“I’ll compliment myself on a job very well done.” (Kaufman 290)

“not yet ready to be back in romantic rotation” (Dolgoff 238)

“mysterious, and yes, empowered” (Dolgoff 238)

“sophisticated woman of my brazenness” (Dolgoff 238)

“Anyguy’s fantasy: the in-control, self-actualized, sexually assertive woman who truly wants only sex and would view any emotional entanglement as encumbering” (Dolgoff 238)

“The crazy old spinster cat lady option was starting to look pretty good.” (Dolgoff 238)

“I had to stop looking and start living.” (Dolgoff 238)

“I wasn’t ready to date yet.” (Dolgoff 238)

“prefers going alone” (Katz, J. 152)

“I’m not reliant on anyone else to have a good time.” (Katz, J. 152)
 “forthright, sexy, poised, sassy-but-classy women who help keep everyone around them honest. And both have struck a chord with ‘90s single women.” (Handelman 230)
 “fun-loving” (Handelman 230)
 “vibrant personality” (Handelman 230)
 “oracious appetite for life that is contagious. You can’t help but be sucked in by it.” (Handelman 230)
 “can-do attitude” (Handelman 230)
 “strong sense of self” (Handelman 230)
 “And her Renee is the ideal single woman’s best buddy—supportive and nurturing but also prodding and brutally honest.” (Handelman 230)
 “handyman-less city woman” (Sgriro 256)
 “a single woman with no hope of hiring a handyman” (Sgriro 256)
 “4. He’s off to Atlantic City with the boys. You feel: a. mopey. You hate time apart. b. Okay. It’ll give you a chance to catch up with your own friends. But the next weekend away had better include you. c. Thrilled. It’s just like being single again.” (Gillies and Simmons 200)
 “been living single in Manhattan for five years.” (Boyle 200)
 “28-year-old lobbyist who is braving the man-light D.C. area” (Boyle 200)
 “perfectly satisfied there.” (Boyle 200)
 “she likes her life” (Boyle 200)
 “not desperate to glom onto him” (Boyle 200)
 “are hardly boy-crazy husband-hunters.” (Boyle 200)
 “loves living with her boyfriend” (Brown and Crain 272)
 “has no intentions of tying the knot anytime in the near future.” (Brown and Crain 272)
 “I love that our lives are entwined but still separate,” (Brown and Crain 272)
 “but for now, I’m still really enjoying my singleness.” (Brown and Crain 272)
 “I hear lusty stories from single friends” (Brown and Crain)
 “I am so not interested in men now.” (Frankel 264)
 “You’ll look like a voluntarily solo social butterfly, and pretty soon you’ll have the entire table pining for their own carefree single days.” (Knadler 188)
 “While Renee might help Ally take revenge on a guy who dumped her (stranding him on a cold street with his pants around his ankles), she’ll also demand to know what Ally had seen in him in the first place.” (Handelman 230)
 “I said nicely but firmly, ‘We should get a good night’s sleep, Derek—in separate beds.’” (Kaufman 290)
 “So I took it. Money, like sex, didn’t mean anything to the man, so I figured, why not?” (Kaufman 290)
 “Yes, a dating hiatus was the healthy thing to do” (Dolgoft 238)
 “That week, as I shopped for a vibrator, pretending it made me feel empowered...” (Dolgoft 238)
 Scary Solo Move 2: Make A Big-Time Investment: (Katz, J. 152)
 “she dipped into her savings and bought some land.” (Katz, J. 152)
 “A friend convinced me to go to Greece alone and it was one of the most positive things I’ve ever done.” (Katz, J. 152)
 “I was more open to strangers because I wanted to meet people” (Katz, J. 152)

“as a single woman, I was constantly approached by tourists and locals giving me travel tips or asking me to join them for dinner.” (Katz, J. 152)

“But a bachelorette bash can be a rare opportunity for socially sanctioned debauchery: saucy gals raising hell and thoroughly toasting the freedom of the single life at a bar or strip joint.” (Etter 156)

“Going to an adult theater was a hilarious way to celebrate my bachelorettehood. Just be careful where you sit.” (Etter 156)

“she dropped out of her circle of 13 world-class gripers.” (Hanson 208)

“‘Psychologically, it isn’t good to play ‘Ain’t it awful,’ and that’s all we ever did when we got together,’ says McGee-Cooper. ‘I invited them to change, and with those who didn’t, I stopped accepting their invitations or limited contact. I started taking night classes, where I met people who were positive and interesting.’” (Hanson 208)

“Undaunted...Fiona headed for the nearest hardware store determined to do much of the work herself.” (Sgroi 256)

“Armed with little more than power tools and willpower” (Sgroi 256)

“taught herself everything from carpentry to basic plumbing by asking the right questions at the hardware store” (Sgroi 256)

“she worked her way through the house, insulating, painting, sanding, wainscoting, wallpapering, and slipcovering one room a year.” (Sgroi 256)

“‘The inside took me four years to finish,’ says Fiona” (Sgroi 256)

“she hauled the mammoth stove oven to the window for the view, stained her bedroom’s wood-clad walls with a homemade coffee concoction when the hardware store couldn’t come up with a shade she liked, and painted every door a different color inside and out to give guests a surprise coming and going.” (Sgroi 256)

“So the best way to pull off that holiday perkiness? ‘Flirt outrageously” (Knadler 188)

“Give them the impression that you’re dateless because you have so much fun meeting new friends” (Knadler 188)

“Throw a single-girls-only slumber party” (Knadler 188)

“Treat yourself to a shopping spree” (Knadler 188)

Intellect and Career

“carpenter” (“I Was” 156)

“so stupid.” (Ziv 152)

“young, stupid, and naïve” (Ziv 152)

“an it-won't-happen-to-me attitude.” (Ziv 152)

“Calista Flockhart, the star of the much-talked-about new comedy series Ally McBeal...single actress.” (Hensley 128)

“I was a climber...At least they called me sexy.” (Hensley 128)

“in control” (Hensley 128)

“difficult...a diva” (Hensley 128)

“always on top” (Hensley 128)

“never satisfied with what I had.” (Hensley 128))

“I always wanted more.” (Hensley 128)

“a real tomboy” (Hensley 128)

“so competitive” (Hensley 128)

“pretty crafty” (Hensley 128)
 “on a professional high” (Brown and Miller 142)
 “actress...from the Midwest” (Kaufman 290)
 “he murmured, ‘You’re a genius!’” (Kaufman 290)
 “brilliant I, in fact, am” (Dolgoff 238)
 “efficient and in-control” (Dolgoff 238)
 “frazzled career women” (Campbell, L. 130)
 “would love to be with a guy tonight, but the fact is, working 14-hour days isn’t the best formula for meeting men.” (Campbell, L. 130)
 “good, responsible, hard worker all day” (Campbell, L. 130)
 “30-year-old graphic designer in Dallas.” (Campbell, L. 130)
 “single, ambitious career woman” (Handelman 230)
 “prestigious, meaty double-duty would make any actress turn green with envy” (Handelman 230)
 “And she also falls prey to McBeal-ish flights of imagination, like the famous ‘cha-cha baby’ hallucinations: ‘I can be in fairytale land, singing and fantasizing all day.’” (Handelman 230)
 “restauranteur” (Handelman 230)
 “Ally’s district attorney roommate Renee—a role not originally written as a black character.” (Handelman 230)
 “39...former freelance fashion photo shoot producer” (Sgroi 256)
 “such a stickler for detail” (Sgroi 256)
 “one-woman houseworkaholic” (Sgroi 256)
 “brilliant 27-year-old investment analyst” (Boyle 200)
 “30-year-old art dealer with her own gallery.” (Boyle 200)
 “minor celebrity” (Frankel 264)
 “a lot smarter than she lets on. It suits her needs to play innocent, but she’s smart and shrewd and knows exactly what she wants.” (Frankel 264)
 “recalls Rosalie, 23, a nurse.” (Knadler 188)
 “currently single 29-year-old copywriter” (Katz, J. 152)
 “35-year-old fabric designer from Seattle” (Katz, J. 152)
 “28, a bond trader” (Knadler 188)
 “seemingly done everything right—went to college, got a good job” (Hensley 128)
 “She tries to do the right thing and makes a lot of mistakes.” (Hensley 128)
 “She had just signed a contract with Revlon, had scored juicy parts in two big films, and had a Disney sitcom in the works.” (Brown and Miller 142)
 “continued working and kept her illness a secret” (Brown and Miller 142)
 “she came to Los Angeles...four years ago but quickly ran through her saving after going on lots of auditions that led to nowhere.” (Kaufman 290)
 “To make the rent, she took a job at a leading Hollywood talent agency to assist one of the partners.” (Kaufman 290)
 “I would sit at the computer while he paced, barked out dialogue, drank cognac, cursed, ripped up pages, smoked cigars, and paced some more” (Kaufman 290)
 “When he’d get hung up on a line, I’d make a suggestion, but he’d only roll his eyes.” (Kaufman 290)
 “I shyly offered a suggestion, which I expected him to dis in his usual way.” (Kaufman 290)
 “I have a hectic life—I’m juggling a high-pressure career, an intense social schedule, and parents and relatives who want time with me.” (Boyle 200)

“back on the boob tube this fall in a new chickcom that’s promising to do for baby bodyguards what Seinfeld did for standup.” (Frankel 264)

“But when that idea went down in flames, I turned to Plan B and used our little fling to advance my career.” (Kaufman 290)

Single Motherhood

“I was even more afraid of being a single parent.” (“I Was” 156)

“I could not provide for a child.” (“I Was” 156)

“could never see myself killing a baby. But the father of the baby said he wouldn’t support me if I had the child.” (Ziv 152)

“I wasn’t ready to raise a baby alone.” (Ziv 152)

“I was looking for some support.” (Ziv 152)

“I was scared and felt so alone.” (Ziv 152)

“My mother gave me an ultimatum: Abort or move out. To this day, I will never forgive her for pressuring me. I was going to move in with my boyfriend, but then he went to jail.—20, single (abortion at 15)” (Ziv 152)

“34-year-old” (Miller and Brown 149)

“hadn’t been on a motorcycle in more than six years” (Miller and Brown 149)

“the single mom of two” (Miller and Brown 149)

“as a single mother and college professor” (Hanson 208)

“bore a child” (Handelman 230)

“tough single mom who doesn’t need a man for validation” (Handelman 230)

“I get a lot of women telling me ‘You Go Girl!’ They really like me to give Peter a hard time.” (Handelman 230)

“not always easy. An only child, she was raised by her mother, a registered nurse” (Maynard 204)

“Being raised by a single parent forced me to be independent,’ she says proudly. ‘I had to learn how to dress and feed myself early on.’” (Maynard 204)

“appears to be the den mother of the set” (Frankel 264)

“full-blown mother since I was a little girl.” (Frankel 264)

“But I have two beautiful children, so I am very fulfilled.” (Frankel 264)

“I was in desperate need of a baby-sitter for my two young daughters.” (Moore 224)

“It was one thing for me to be in danger, but I had my three young daughters to think about” (Moore 224)

“I worked as a carpenter on steel beams 30 to 40 feet in the air when I was two months pregnant, never missing a day, so I could have medical benefits for the natal care and delivery.” (“I Was” 156)

“jumped at the chance” (Miller and Brown 149)

“I never pass up an opportunity because I don’t know what new things I’m capable of until I’ve tried them.” (Miller and Brown 149)

“seven-day, 1,200-mile motorcycle adventure through the steep mountains of Baja California, Mexico...sped off, tackling a trip so perilous she was the only woman who dared to brave it.” (Miller and Brown 149)

“As a single mother, I’d been working double shifts as a waitress.” (Moore 224)

Single and Surviving: "...the only apartment I could afford was a crack-infested dump in the Bronx. Preparing to move in, I say in the U-Haul out in the rain, slumped over the steering wheel, crying. That's when I decided we deserved a better life. Children grow up identifying with their neighborhoods, and Daymond was entitled to a nurturing atmosphere. I turned the truck around and rented a house in Queens with another single mom." (Sinclair 236)

Physical Appearance

"Bryn[*], 24 and single, stands 5 feet 8 inches and has almond shaped blue eyes and enough chestnut-brown hair to make Cindy Crawford weep. Wearing red Converse high-tops, fitted white Levi's, and a tight striped tank, she easily turns heads as she walks into the trendy coffeehouse where we've agreed to meet." (Kaufman 290)

"he then leaned over a softly whispered, 'Your body is so incredibly hot. I want you!'" (Kaufman 290)

"he kept telling me how gorgeous I was." (Kaufman 290)

"'You're beautiful girls! What's the problem with men these days anyway?'" (Dolgoff 238)

"America's hottest blonde" (Frankel 264)

"tight Capri pants and a tiny tee" (Frankel 264)

"softer, less extreme. Instead of the wild I-just-got-out-of-bed-hair, she has a sleek, understated do, pulled back with a little clip." (Frankel 264)

"I like being a Barbie." (Frankel 264)

"in excellent condition" ("I Was" 156)

"gorgeous, fabulous" (Dolgoff 238)

"4. You'll 'let yourself go.' A guy thinks that if he gets too comfortable with a woman she won't keep her body in shape and be the same sexy woman he was attracted to. 'It seems like women are so conscious of their bodies when they're single, but when they're in a relationship they stop caring about it all because the chase is over,' worries 34-year-old Steven, a real-estate developer." ("Dating and" 88)

"attractive" (Boyle 200)

"gorgeous" (Boyle 200)

"sex symbol" (Frankel)

"obvious sex appeal and instant popularity" (Frankel 264)

Single Woman as Victim

"I was 27 years old, single, and living alone in a small town in Illinois." ("I Was" 156)

"believed I could handle anyone or anything. I was wrong." ("I Was" 156)

"awoke one morning with an excruciating headache and, at age 30, was diagnosed with a rare and dangerous illness: a lesion on the base of her brain stem and spinal cord was rapidly affecting her central nervous system." (Brown and Miller 142)

"used their good looks and charm to prey on unsuspecting singles over a period of three years. They married their victims and murdered them, staging elaborately choreographed accidents to cover up their crimes. They then collected on their spouses' sizeable life insurance policies." (Drummond 208)

"I'm a single mom, This was more that I could handle alone." (Moore 224)

"I realized I should call the police." (Moore 224)

“I had to wait three and a half weeks to get into a clinic, and when I got there, it was so demeaning: Approximately 50 people were picketing outside, yelling ‘Baby killer!’ and ‘You’re going to burn in hell?’ as I entered the clinic. I tried to ignore them, but a few tried to dive past the picket line and wrap themselves around my ankles to stop me from going in. Thank God for the volunteers who helped escort me safely into the clinic.—20, single (abortion at 18)” (Ziv 152)

“Duff scared? Fugeed-daboutit.” (Brown and Miller 142)

“dignity, courage, and a killer sense of humor” (Brown and Miller 142)

“I never reported the rape or received counseling.” (“I Was” 156)

“I confronted the acquaintance.” (“I Was” 156)

“So I made an appointment to have an abortion, but I simply could not go through with it. I subsequently made—and broke—two more appointments.” (“I Was” 156)

Shame

“so ashamed and guilt-ridden.” (“I Was” 156)

“I felt I must’ve asked for it.” (“I Was” 156)

“I wanted to kill myself.” (“I Was” 156)

“All I could think about was suicide.” (“I Was” 156)

“pain and shame of the rape.” (“I Was” 156)

“recurring nightmares, anxiety attacks, and flashbacks.” (“I Was” 156)

“I was so grateful that the church agreed to baptize my son, even though he is illegitimate, that I volunteered to do some renovation work on the church.” (“I Was” 156)

“shame and guilt” (Ziv 152)

“scared and disgusted” (Ziv 152)

“still emotional, but most of the grief came afterward.” (Ziv 152)

“feelings of loss and guilt.” (Ziv 152)

“not proud of having had an abortion” (Ziv 152)

“I hated myself for being so cruel and selfish” (Ziv 152)

“I have thought about killing myself.” (Ziv 152)

“so ashamed.” (Ziv 152)

“The guilt is unbearable, but I deserve it.” (Ziv 152)

“All my pain is locked up, and I don’t know who has the key to let it all out.—20, single (abortion at 15)” (Ziv 152)

“little sad every year around the time it would have been born.” (Ziv 152)

“I felt cheap” (Kaufman 290)

“mad at myself for being so naïve.” (Kaufman 290)

“I wasn’t special—he could have called an escort service.” (Kaufman 290)

“I didn’t want to be confrontational” (Kaufman 290)

“I take equal responsibility for what happened.” (Kaufman 290)

“After agonizing for weeks, I decided to keep the baby. I told the man who raped me that I had an abortion. Then I moved to a neighboring town and hid from my family for the next seven months.” (“I Was” 156)

“The night before my abortion, I cried and rubbed stomach, begging my baby to forgive me. I paid \$325 to kill my child...now I cry every Mother’s Day. I can’t watch a diaper commercial without crying...—20, single (abortion at 15)” (Ziv 152)

“Trembling, I did what he asked, orally gratifying him while holding back my tears.” (Kaufman 290)

APPENDIX C

BRIDGET JONES AND SINGLE WOMEN IN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS, 1998 AND 2001

Bridget Jones as Everywoman

“But no one knows what it’s like to be a single woman in her 30s but a single woman in her 30s. And right now, the woman who speaks for all of us is Bridget Jones.”—Amatangelo, Amy

“But just as she did on the page, Bridget shattered these false images and gave us a real woman.”—Amatangelo, Amy

“The uncomfortable situations faced by single women in “Bridget Jones’s Diary” are accurate. It is the insensitivity of family members and couples that spurs thirtysomething women to desperately seek husbands.”—“Bridget Jones’s”

“The British comedy starring Renee Zellweger, Hugh Grant and Colin Firth is based on the best-selling novel by Helen Fielding, embraced by harried young single women on both sides of the pond.”—Eldredge, Richard

“Kelly Holton, 27 of Decatur. Holton and the six equally “Bridget”-blond, 20-something single friends with her had passed around copies of “Bridget” and its sequel and made sure they all had pre-ordered tickets to the screening.”—Eldredge, Richard

“Zellweger doesn’t mind that she’s a single woman. In fact, she draws many parallels between her and the character Jones, who is also single. But, while Jones fuels herself with cigarettes and alcohol and obsesses about her weight, Zellweger takes an alternate route. “[I’m] probably enjoying [being single] differently ... but enjoying it very much,” she said following Monday’s Ziegfeld Theater premiere of “Bridget.”—Fink, Mitchell

“As to whether he could ever date an average-looking klutz like Bridget Jones, Grant said, “I quite like disaster girls, I always have. I like a bit of food spilled down their shirt, you know. It’s sexy.”—Fink, Mitchell

“Singletons love Bridget -- she is wildly imperfect.”—Frey, Jennifer

“Perhaps we’re sounding a bit ridiculous here, but this is not a complex thing, this hold Bridget has on the single woman’s soul. The book, by British author Helen Fielding, sold 4 million copies worldwide. It struck a nerve. Let’s have Fielding explain why. “It’s to do with the gap between how women feel they are expected to be and how they actually are,” she says by phone from Los Angeles, where she moved 18 months ago. “I think women by nature are very hard on themselves. Even the most intelligent, educated woman can somehow end up somewhere in her head believing that she’s supposed to be an anorexic teenage model she’s seen on an advert. “It’s a relief to be Bridget.””—Frey, Jennifer

“It’s a relief that Bridget makes bad blue soup and marmalade for her dinner parties, because you just know every time we try to go straight from being our perfect businesswomen selves to the perfect little party hostess, we just screw it all up. Who has time to make the house perfect, the food perfect and, of course, ourselves perfect? Please. We’ve seen those women who do it and let’s just say this: They are evil. Evil, evil, evil. We, on the other hand, are happy to eat Cheerios for dinner, thank you. With a glass of chardonnay, of course. Or maybe two. And our friends -- the ones Fielding refers to as “the dating war committee” -- understand that perfectly.”—Frey, Jennifer

““There’s a bonding thing,” Fielding says. “Instead of having some sort of role model thrust at you, some Miss Perfect, you have someone who is well-intentioned, fun and funny -- and a human being and vulnerable. And I think that’s why people relate to her.””—Frey, Jennifer

“On-screen, Bridget’s skin is a little blotchy. Her hair is a little limp. There are some ripples on those thighs. You know what she looks like? She looks like we do when we’re carrying some period bloat and have a hangover from too many chardonnays the night before.”—Frey, Jennifer

“And Mr. Darcy likes her just as she is! Hurrah! Hurrah! But, sadly, this is the one place in Fielding’s story where we must admit that, deep down, we’re not sure she got Bridget right. You see, Bridget picks the nice guy. The marriageable guy. The guy her mother likes. Even when the impossibly, wickedly sexy--and, of course, horribly manipulative) guy begs for her to take him back. And we all know, don’t we, that our problem is we always take the bad boy back. Even when the dating war committee threatens to cut off our cigarette supply. “Ah, yes. . . . I think it’s quite possible that women will go off for some time with a cad,” Fielding admits, when confronted with this conundrum. “I think the question is: How many times does she do that?” How many times do we do it? Oh, too many. Way, way too many. But Bridget, well, she wises up. Of course, this is supposed to be a modern-day “Pride and Prejudice.” As Fielding explained, Bridget is supposed to -- brace yourselves here -- “learn something in the end.” Learn something? That, we fear, sounds an awful lot like something a Smug Married would say. Of course, if we know Bridget -- and oh, do we know Bridget -- there’s always still time to screw it up.”—Frey, Jennifer

“Bridget Jones carries the banner for all those single women in their 30s who go through life with self-image hang-ups, who think somehow they’ve never got it quite right. Things haven’t worked out for these singletons the way the media promised they would. It’s starting to dawn on her that she may never find the right man. Her faux pas have made it into the language: People who muck up will say they are having “a Bridget Jones moment.””—Graham, Bob

““I think in some ways a much more melancholy example of somebody like Bridget Jones is Princess Diana. We’re looking at a thirtysomething in a very disappointing marriage with a husband who didn’t treat her very well. She has eating disorders and is lonely, and it becomes a kind of national soap opera to see how her life’s going to turn out. But nobody found anything very funny in it. In ‘Bridget Jones,’ there’s this kind of wholesale relief that all these people with these problems are able to laugh collectively about them.”—Colin Firth”—Graham, Bob

“Told him I want to write about “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” but that the novel may be an acquired taste: Bridget Jones is the Ally McBeal of fiction. For all her vulnerability, she has that most endearing of traits in a heroine: Like Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet, she says what all of us think but says it better.”—Harayda, Janice

“Funny, that’s just what Bridget always tells herself. Can it be that the huge success of this novel in Britain results from near-verbatim accounts of tragicomic scenes from the real lives of modern single women? Definitely must think about this while having another cigarette.”—Harayda, Janice

“But women are Bridget’s biggest fans. Mood-swinging singles pass around the book among themselves, and entreat their loved ones to read it, saying, “If you want to understand how a woman’s mind works . . .””—Smoron, Paige

“The book, by Helen Fielding, struck a chord with young, single women who identified with its pudgy heroine.”—Harrison, Eric

“But, then, how could a reader resist the plucky Bridget, with her own London flat, her own job, her own car and her special network of friends who cheer her up every time a romantic disaster occurs and she thinks she will “end up all alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian”? Bridget Jones is Every Single Woman, and every other single woman knows what she’s going through.”—Hildebrand, Holly

“Betrayed by one boyfriend, often unable in the mornings to find a pair of pantyhose that isn’t balled up in the laundry, and trying to cut back on the number of lottery tickets she buys and calories she consumes, Bridget braves the life of a “ Singleton,” even gathering up enough courage to switch careers.”—Hildebrand, Holly

“But, of course, Bridget doesn’t always obey her own advice or observations, which is perhaps why so many people are identifying with her, loving her – and finding her a breath of fresh literary air.”—Hildebrand, Holly

“Her diary has made her the best friend of hundreds of thousands of British women who recognize her closet drawers crammed with a fury of black opaque pantyhose twisted into ropelike tangles with speckles of tissue as their own, or at least their next-door neighbor’s.”—Hoge, Warren

“Her name, Bridget Jones, has become shorthand for the compulsive conduct of young women braving continually collapsing bridges to self-improvement yet trying to maintain an amused perspective on that fraught space between bounding hope and tumbling defeat.”—Hoge, Warren

““I was really, really surprised at all the women who wrote in saying they identified with Bridget because a lot of her thoughts are very paranoid, and when you realize that so many women have the same thoughts, it’s massively reassuring but at the same time alarming.” She widened her eyes and cocked her head. “We’re all mad,” she hissed.”—Hoge, Warren [Helen Fielding]

“This popularity has been morphed by the media and the marketers (not the reading public), who have turned Bridget Jones into a ‘90s archetype for an entire gender.”—Stack, Teresa

“Her world is divided in two parts, singletons vs. Smug Marrieds. The Smug Marrieds are the ones who on spotting a singleton imitate the ticking sound of a body clock. The singletons are the ones close to Ms. Fielding’s heart. “I think ‘singleton’ is a very useful word to describe yourself if you’re not married: much better than spinster or bachelor,” she said. “Everyone now thinks that ‘bachelor’ means gay scoutmaster. And spinster is this tragic Miss Haversham-like person who’s going to end up 55 in a jersey lilac dressing gown with 15 cats imagining that the vicar is in love with her.”—Hoge, Warren

“These days in Britain, this would be pronounced a perfect Bridget Jones moment.”—Hoge, Warren

“So when your book came out in the States, I ran out to get a copy, and when I read it, I went, “Oh . . . my . . . God.” I suddenly pictured us . . . as trans-Atlantic clones”—Kakutani, Michiko

“Those who loved Bridget found her a hilarious representation of the overloaded modern woman, knowing she can have it all and feeling like a failure because she doesn’t. Others found the character whiny and shallow.”—Keenan, John

“If you’re a single woman in her 30s who has ever obsessively checked an answering machine, had a humiliating changing-room experience, juggled diets, sent flirty messages through the office computer, awakened semi-paralyzed and sworn off booze forever, cried in the bathroom at work, or pulled on three successive pairs of black tights in the morning only to find all had mysterious runs you are really going to love Bridget.”—Kennedy, Helen

“Helen Fielding’s “Bridget Jones’s Diary” a frank, poignant and laugh-out-loud hilarious account of a year in the life of a fictional single gal in London has become a cult phenomenon in Britain, where the book’s lingo “Singleton” as a proud alternative to spinster, “Smug Marrieds” for those patronizing friends who set up blind dates is all the rage.”—Kennedy, Helen

“Giulia Melucci, who handles book publicity for Scribner, was one of the few I surveyed who argued that the novel was a realistic look at single female life. “Haven’t you ever had a day where you spent two hours looking for pantyhose and couldn’t find any?” she asked. Sure, but a new pair of pantyhose costs \$5 at the corner drugstore. That shouldn’t be the price of self-respect.”—Kuczynski, Alex

“Luckily, my gentleman friend took a humorous view of Bridget. “She did behave sort of as if she were in jail,” he admitted. “She sat and watched TV.” But he said I shouldn’t be too hard on her. “A lot of people, men and women, are like that,” he pointed out. “People like us, people with hobbies,” he laughed, “are in the minority.””—Kunz, Mary

“It’s frightening, though, that Bridget has become, as I have read, “an institution.” Do people really identify closely with her? I sigh for them.”—Kunz, Mary

“Because if women identify with her, that means there are a lot of women going around doing nothing but counting calories. We all do it, sure, but it shouldn’t be the defining theme in anyone’s life...It also means that there are a lot of women who talk about nothing to their friends other than how miserable they are...And it means that those people, being miserable, will fail to attract the love they crave. ...And they’ll find themselves shelling out for more and more of these singles movies, five years, 10 years, 15 years from now and . . .Hmmm. Maybe I’m onto something here. Maybe filmmakers aren’t so dumb, after all.”—Kunz, Mary

“addresses some funny situations and poignant comments about single life”—McClure, Holly

“Her focus on losing weight is something almost every woman can relate to. Her sexual escapades with boyfriend-boss Grant are a painful reminder of exactly why women shouldn’t date their bosses or co-workers.”—McClure, Holly

“Fielding is perfectly attuned to the inner paranoiac voice that hits single women in their 30s and causes them to start worshiping the ageless trinity of Susan Sarandon, Goldie Hawn and Jane Seymour.”—McFadden, Kay

“Heather Ballard was having a Bridget Jones moment. Curled up on the couch, clad in a T-shirt and pajama bottoms, she spent a recent Thursday night in front of the television, glass of wine in one hand, cigarette in the other. All that was missing was the jar of chocolate fudge sauce and lip-synching to “All by Myself.” Like many single twenty- and thirtysomething women, Ballard, 26, says she can relate to the hapless British heroine Bridget Jones, the subject of the recently released movie “Bridget Jones’s Diary.”... Bridget epitomizes the insecurities in all of us, said Ballard, who also wants to find a reasonably nice guy and lead a reasonably happy life...”I’m klutzy like she is,” Ballard said after watching the movie last week. “I embarrass myself in front of everybody. I fall for jerks.””—Proskocil, Niz

“those who love her say she’s good-hearted, self-deprecating, neurotic, yet endearing. They find her a hilarious, dead-on representation of the overworked, overstressed modern woman.”—Proskocil, Niz

“Fans... say the movie is a must-see for all twenty- and thirtysomethings negotiating single life.”—Proskocil, Niz

“Been there and done that, Ballard says. She also knows what it’s like to say and do idiotic, Bridget-like things. She’s had bad-hair days and, like Bridget, once had an affair with a co-

worker...Even though she's a personal trainer, Smith admits to worrying about her weight, something most women do, she said. "There's this societal pressure to do well in everything. You can relate to the awkwardness when things aren't working for Bridget," Smith said."—Proskocil, Niz

"According to Match.com, an on-line dating service, the so-called Bridget Jones effect, where women in their 30s become hyper-concerned with their methodology for meeting Mr. Right, can be a dominant force in the psyche of both British and American single women. The Bridget Jones effect is a comic exaggeration of what many women fear, that they're going about meeting Mr. Right in all the wrong ways, says Lindsay Welsh, a Match.com spokeswoman. Single women in their 20s seem to focus more on their education and careers than they do on finding true love and starting a family, says Fran Greene, director of flirting and dating for Match.com. As women enter their 30s – and the urge intensifies to settle down and have a family - they may find it harder to find appropriate dates or romantic partners."—Proskocil, Niz

"Bridget Jones is typical of today's thirtysomething single woman and many Match.com members - she works long hours, is reluctant to be fixed up by her parents, yet isn't meeting suitable romantic partners on her own, said Greene, a certified social worker who is a relationship coach in Commack, N.Y."—Proskocil, Niz

"At family gatherings, Ballard said, relatives inevitably ask her if there's a man in her life. "My great-grandmother always asks me how my love life is."—Proskocil, Niz

"“The ending was predictable, but it was a cute movie,” Ballard said. “It’s about how every single woman feels but doesn’t want to admit. You know, there’s the mom that’s always trying to fix you up. ... Everybody wants to find true love, but it’s scary.”—Proskocil, Niz

"Heather Lee, a 25-year-old marketing professional from Omaha, says she and Bridget are both career-oriented rather than family-oriented. And like Bridget, Lee considers herself an intelligent, witty woman with an interesting outlook on life. But that's where the similarities end."—Proskocil, Niz

"“From a dating standpoint, I think she’s a nut,” Lee said of Bridget. “She’s absolutely neurotic.” But Lee says she can relate to the way Bridget, after feeling down in the dumps when a date doesn’t go well, finds solace in a night of drinking with friends, who offer comical insights to her romantic problems.”—Proskocil, Niz

"Her insecurities and tribulations strike solid chords with either gender."—Ross, Bob

"Young British women identify with her so strongly that her name has become an adjective. The above anecdote, for example, is what's known as a "Bridget Jones moment."—Smoron, Paige

"so endearing herself to Brits that she has become part of the vernacular: "That was very Bridget Jones," they'll say, or "that was a Bridget Jones moment."—Thorn, Patty

"Bridget has somehow become a symbol of modern single women."—Thorn, Patty

“Indeed, women everywhere, it seems, are relating to Bridget’s follies. Says one twentysomething American woman: ‘I just picked it up and I was looking through it and I thought, ‘cool, it’s like a diary.’ Then I started reading it and it was like, ‘Oh my god,’ it’s me.’” —Thorn, Patty

“‘I’ve had men say they’ve given this book to other men, saying it would help them understand how women’s minds work . . . (British author) Nick Hornby said that he thought it was written by a lunatic until his women friends said they identified with it.’” —Thorn, Patty

“her box office success is precisely because she so well captures the frustration and wistfulness of those millions of us with careers who fall through the nets of a society that has lost adequate mechanisms for matchmaking. The article also missed a critical element of the movie, the revolutionary concept of “liking you just as you are.” -Sarah Ross Seattle—“Compassionate Globalization”

Criticisms of Bridget Jones

“disturbing not only because it is an inaccurate depiction of a diverse and interesting part of the population but, more important, because it sends confusing and inappropriate messages to young women trying to determine what to expect from life (“career is important . . . until you meet a man”; “it doesn’t matter if you’re uninformed as long as you’re cute”).” —“Bridget Jones’s”

“Another friend -- a Smug Married -- noted that although men suffer from similar, and maybe even more toxic, neuroses and fears, “men always burnish their images.” “Their images are always much glossier and better than reality,” she said. “Women don’t do that. Society wants the woman to be self-deprecating.” —Kuczynski, Alex

“Some singletons think Bridget -- with her drinking, her smoking, her cursing, her hangovers, her raging biological clock and her slapdash efforts at what she calls a career -- is all the bad stereotypes about thirty-something single women poured into one inappropriately micro-miniskirt.” —Frey, Jennifer

““Bridget” is a feminist manifesto in disguise, a hilariously satirical novel that shows how a male-dominated culture turns bright and attractive single women into anxious and insecure captives of their bathroom scales.” —Harayda, Janice

“It makes humor out of the premise that being neurotic is cute. That women eat too much. That we succumb to the lure of too many cocktails. That if we don’t enjoy our jobs, we just stick around and, heck, sleep with the boss (who never calls us back).” —Kuczynski, Alex

“Recent portrayals draw fire from feminists, who take umbrage at the too-flawed anti-heroines who routinely sacrifice dignity in the pursuit of men.” —Ganahl, Jane

“The film is full of moments like this where we feel bad for Bridget while also scorning her stupidity.” —Harrison, Eric

“The movie strikes the wrong note in one of the very first scenes. Bridget sits on her sofa in red pajamas with little penguins on them, mouthing the words to All By Myself, which plays on the stereo. Tears run down her cheeks, and as the song reaches a crescendo, she emotes wildly, like a campy performer in a drag club. This is probably meant to strike us as both funny and sad. But, because we’ve just watched her get humiliated by a man at a party, and now she’s alone on New Year’s Eve - and the scene runs on so darn lonnnng - it succeeds only at making us uncomfortable.”—Harrison, Eric

“People sitting in the theater will feel as embarrassed for her as the people do at the party. We want to avert our eyes and pretend this isn’t happening.”—Harrison, Eric

“Yet Fielding has larded her book with enough humorously sardonic observations to gull some readers into thinking the main character is modern and self-aware.”—McFadden, Kay

“Some consider Bridget a hopeless, whimpering moron and anti-feminist model”—Proskocil, Niz

“He has a girlfriend and initially dismisses Bridget, as any thinking person would. But after witnessing her make a fool of herself a number of times, he starts coming to her rescue. His pity, apparently, shades into affection.”—Harrison, Eric

“Oh, sure, Bridget isn’t exactly a terrific feminist icon. She’s pretty pathetic, really a neurotic airhead who reads nothing but self-help books.”—Kennedy, Helen

“BRIDGET JONES makes me ill. She gives me a headache; she makes my stomach hurt and my heart heavy.”—Kuczynski, Alex

“But I wasn’t alone. Others, smart New Yorkers all, shared my antipathy for Bridget. “She’s a self-contained, one-woman mental institution,” said Joanie McDonell, a writer.”—Kuczynski, Alex

“I called an author who has written extensively on the status of single women today, Marcelle Clements, who wrote “The Improvised Woman: Single Women Reinventing Single Life.” She said the book disturbed her on so many levels she couldn’t begin to count. “It’s the humor of the pathetic,” she said. “It’s as if as women become more successful and powerful, they need to be punished for defying the old laws. They have to be with their nose in the Haagen-Dazs; they have to be made to look ridiculous and pitiful.”—Kuczynski, Alex

“offensively anti-feminist”—Stack, Teresa

“Well, I read it, despite the moral outrage. Here’s my review: It’s a very, very funny book. Here’s my political/moral deconstruction: It’s a very, very funny book. Enough said... The book is so funny, I found it hard to take seriously on any level. So what’s the problem here?”—Stack, Teresa

“rightly upsets feminists, who clamor that the novel is far from an accurate portrayal of young single women. It isn’t, and for it to be taken as such is both absurd and offensive. The book is a satire, a clash of Bridget’s retro neuroses with her embryonic modern aspirations. It’s hard to imagine a popular book about a totally fictional male, an all-out satire to boot, being elevated to the status of Gender Representative. It would never happen.”—Stack, Teresa

“Bridget is in her 30s, we’re told. Well, everyone in her 30s should know how to cook at least one dish. Everyone in her 30s should be able to hold her liquor. Everyone in her 30s should have interesting things to talk to her friends about. In other words, Bridget makes us all look bad!”—Kunz, Mary

“Why is everyone taking this book so seriously? The novel is so over-the-top that if Bridget Jones were a real person, she’d be heavily medicated.”—Stack, Teresa

“I have a right to complain, because I am this movie’s intended audience. I am single and in my 30s. I’m familiar with the flotsam and jetsam of the single life...”—Kunz, Mary

“Real single women are very different, according to Marcelle Clements”—White, Diane

Critiques of Popular Culture

“But like Ally, Bridget’s appeal lies in the reader’s sense of embarrassed recognition that maybe she’s not the only one who thinks all her exes should be required by law to stay celibate until they die. Or who has ever forced herself to go to a scary party instead of vegging on the couch and then stumbled home to scrawl illegible journal entries featuring lots of exclamation points.”—Kennedy, Helen

“Many women are apparently laughing as they recognize parts of themselves in Bridget’s jumble of insecurities (just as they smile knowingly along with Ally McBeal).”—Kuczynski, Alex

“It’s been said that “Bridget Jones’s Diary” is to the new-millennium woman what Helen Gurley Brown’s “Sex and the Single Girl” was to women in the ‘60s.”—Proskocil, Niz

“Told him I want to write about “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” but that the novel may be an acquired taste: Bridget Jones is the Ally McBeal of fiction. For all her vulnerability, she has that most endearing of traits in a heroine: Like Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet, she says what all of us think but says it better.”—Harayda, Janice

“In the end, feminism is not undermined by laughing out loud at Bridget Jones ‘exploits. It’s not diminished by dressing in sexy clothes and dancing to the Spice Girls, or curling up with a pint of ice cream to watch “Ally McBeal.” It’s not even dead because women chose the lesser of two evils by voting for Bill Clinton.”—Stack, Teresa

“Not according to popular culture, which portrays the 1990s single woman as still waiting for Mr. Right. She may have a better job, and more money, but no matter how smart and successful

she is, she's stereotyped as neurotic, needy, man-obsessed, marriage-obsessed, sex-obsessed... See "Bridget Jones's Diary," the hottest book in Britain, just published here."—White, Diane

"working single women in their 30s who are torn between two very different men"—"Two Movies"

"The Ally McBeal-Bridget Jones trend" ("Bridget Jones's")
 "Bridget (think Ally McBeal with a British accent)"—Blinkhorn, Lois

"In Tinseltown and on bookstore shelves, the media are beginning to present more nuanced portrayals of these women - from the self-sufficiency in CBS's "That's Life" to the candidness of "Bridget Jones's Diary," which opens in theaters tomorrow."—Campbell, Kim

"While the title character in "Bridget Jones's Diary" is likable and surprisingly open about her failings, she is also obsessed with her weight and finding Mr. Right. Bridget's desperation -and the antics on "Sex in the City" may be funny, but hardly reflect real lives, many women say."—Campbell, Kim

"From Helen Gurley Brown's zeitgeist-altering "Sex and the Single Girl" in the mid-'60s to HBO's "Sex and the City" at the millennium, the world has devoured tales of unmarried women like exotic fruit. The ingénue intrigue continues with the new Miramax film "Bridget Jones's Diary" (opening April 13), based on the most popular of the recent single-gal books."—Ganahl, Jane

"Let's add it up: What has been learned in the past 30 years of single-gal movies? In "Sex and the Single Girl" -- and later in the pages of Cosmopolitan --Helen Gurley Brown espoused that women should place a high premium on looking good, marrying well and having as many lovers as possible. Bridget Jones is obsessed with looking good, marrying well and having lovers. OK, not much has changed. But it's still good copy."—Ganahl, Jane

"like to wear short skirts: two babes, if I say so myself, with good legs, a good sense of humor and bad boyfriends."—Kakutani, Michiko

"And for women, singledom has become less defined as the women's movement continues to morph. With the death of the notion of the "spinster" -- once cited in Webster's Dictionary as an unmarried woman older than 30 -- the culture seems to be embracing Bridget Jones and the randy gals of "Sex and the City" as the definition of the new self-realized female."—Ganahl, Jane

"even though you didn't go to Harvard, you're obviously as over-educated . . . well, as over-read as I am, what with all those Jane Austen references in your "Diary."—"Kakutani, Michiko

"You talk all the time about not having enough self-confidence, about not being assertive enough, but it seems to me you're doing just fine in that department."—Kakutani, Michiko

“I was telling you how much I think we have in common. It’s not just the biological clock thing: you’re always talking about women’s “sell-by date””—Kakutani, Michiko

“imbecility when it comes to life.”—Kakutani, Michiko

“critics, all these mean, awful, nasty naysayers who complain that we’re some kind of pre-feminist throwbacks -- Stone Age women who just want to be hauled off to a nice warm cave by some cute, dishy guy.”—Kakutani, Michiko

“reasonably attractive women who want to find a mate”—Kakutani, Michiko

“All we want is what women have wanted for eons: to find a reasonably nice guy and have a reasonably happy life.”—Kakutani, Michiko

“I have that same fear all the time, and judging from our mutual fan clubs, I’d bet that a lot of other single women feel exactly the same way...we can get together, compare notes about British and American men, and have a good whine about all the women who hate us and all the other women who think they’re us.”—Kakutani, Michiko

“That’s what “Bridget Jones’s Diary” is about: the learned helplessness thrust upon women by advertisers, popular entertainment and, yes, women’s magazines. Ms. Fielding constructs her heroine out of every myth that has ever sprung from the ground of Cosmopolitan and television sitcoms. To wit, that men are, in the words of one character, “stupid, smug, arrogant, manipulative and self-indulgent “; that women are obsessed with boyfriends, diets and body hair, and that every emotional reversal is cause for a chocolate binge.”—Kuczynski, Alex

“Candace Bushnell, whose sometimes lonely but mostly confident female characters inspired the new HBO series “Sex and the City,” said she thought “Bridget Jones’s Diary” was fun to read, but 10 years out of date. “I think it’s the kind of thing that would have been written here in the 80’s,” she said. “Now, in Manhattan, if you’re over 35 and you’re not married, frankly it’s not a big deal. People say you’re lucky and don’t bother. But in England if you’re 30 and you’re not married, it’s totally weird. It says more about the state of feminism in England.”—Kuczynski, Alex

“our culture’s fascination with single women, inspired by the new movie “Bridget Jones’s Diary.”—Ganahl, Jane

““Bridget Jones’s Diary” also has the requisite happy ending – equally essential to a summertime smash. Therein lies the problem. Not very long ago, the ideal life for a woman was adjudged a careful balance of meaningful work, good friendships and solid relationships. Mr. Right was a component of this formula - important, but not the glue that held it together. Now, abruptly, the search for a man has become all in popular culture.”—McFadden, Kay

“And in “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” the heroine scours London for the Impossible He in a manner that would have appalled even that mistress of marriage-minded characters, Jane Austen.”—McFadden, Kay

“You remember that story a while back about how Ozaukee County is the most-married place in the entire country? Well, that story prompted another about what a horrible area this must be for, as Bridget Jones would say, singletons.”—Nichols, Mike

The Creation of a “New” Genre

“The male as oaf and worse, long a rich and lucrative literary tradition, appears to be blooming this year as usual in a variety of fiction... Bridget’s men are described as “stupid, smug, arrogant, manipulative.” And that’s the least of their badness.”—Arnold, Martin

“Still, Helen Fielding’s 1996 “Bridget” book -loosely based on Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice” -is one of the best-known novels in this new genre. It was a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic, prompting a sequel and the film, with Renee Zellweger.”—Campbell, Kim

“The book struck a chord with women on both sides of the pond and spawned a slew of imitations that never came close to replicating Bridget’s self-deprecating and honest portrayal of a single woman in the ‘90s.”—Katz, Frances

“Such is the premise of this charming “Bridget Jones” clone novel [Good In Bed] - if Bridget were Jewish and overweight and lived in Philadelphia.”—Collins, Monica

“Millions around the globe are gobbling up Bridget Jones’s Diary and other single women’s tales of romantic woe at the hands of men.”—Donahue, Dierdre

“a heroine with Bridget-like pluck”—Galehouse, Maggie

“While Bridget strode so close to caricature that the real-life panic of some single women got muffled in the comedy, Rosie represents a rangier worldview, one in which a post-relationship meltdown leads to a job that feeds the soul.”—Galehouse, Maggie

““I had a hard time with that debate,” Zigman says. “They really came at me and said -- what does this mean? But I think it’s natural to have those dueling desires: to be independent and to be in a relationship. Anyway, I think more women identify with a Bridget Jones than a superwoman.”“—Ganahl, Jane

““Bridget Jones’s Diary” seems to have ushered in a new phase.”—Hoge, Warren

““What we’re seeing now,” said Fanny Blake, a freelance writer specializing in the publishing industry, “is the growth of a brave new women’s fiction humorously and realistically addressing themes recognizable to women trying to make their way in their 20’s and 30’s: often career women with disposable income, unable to find either a heterosexual man or anything in the fridge.”“—Hoge, Warren

“In 1997, Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* took the U.S. and England by storm, giving birth to a new genre: novels about single women in their 20s and 30s trying to balance work, friends, and lovers.”—Hunley, Kristine

“Fans of *Bridget Jones* will see shades of their beloved heroine in her predecessor, *Rosie*, who is almost as neurotically endearing as *Bridget* herself.”—Hunley, Kristine

“Clearly, so does “*The Girl’s Guide*,” or it wouldn’t have sold and been reviewed so well, often as the intelligent woman’s “*Bridget Jones*.”—Jefferson, Margo

“The most interesting thing about “*Cause Celeb*,” the kind-of-new novel by Helen Fielding, is seeing the genesis of *Bridget Jones*, the heroine of Fielding’s smash best seller “*Bridget Jones’ Diary*.”—Keenan, John

“In “*Cause Celeb*,” which was published in England before “*Bridget*” but has only just been released here, readers can find *Bridget* in the person of heroine *Rosie Richardson*.”—Keenan, John

“Terry McMillan’s “*Waiting To Exhale*,” the “*Bridget Jones*” of five years ago. Its heroine had some things in common with Ms. Jones: Both women network, grimly and joylessly, in hopes of finding soul mates. Both kiss a lot of toads. Neither can really enjoy anything until after she finds Mr. Right.”—Kunz, Mary

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