

Nurturing Creative Connections in SingleSpace

The fundamental **building block of authentic connection** is “self acceptance.” (Go back and read over “Am I the Only One,” “If only...,” “...,” and “Open to Love” if you still aren’t sure what this means.) Once you have self-acceptance as a single person, there are many ways in which to address your relationship needs; nonetheless, you may have to be creative and flexible in order to open up pathways, platforms and avenues for connection and community.

Friendships can be “family” for the single person. Solid friendships are the reason that many single people do not complain of loneliness to the degree suggested by the cultural myths. There are several things to keep in mind in building “friendship networks.” You have to be active and persistent. You also need to recognize and appreciate the many types of friends that will be part of your web (e.g. friends you can be emotionally real with, friends that you do things with, friends that know you over time). Having at least one confidant or person with whom you can openly and honestly share yourself becomes an extremely important relational anchor.

A “**friendship web**” is also valuable in counteracting the inevitable discontinuities and instabilities of friendships during adulthood (e.g. best friends marry or move to Borneo, interests change, people die). You can create friendship webs over time or you can connect to a more reliable and stable group or organization that meets regularly and continues to function despite the coming and going of individuals (e.g. ski clubs, circle of friends, women’s pizza night, book clubs, churches, support group meetings). It is also helpful to seek stability and balance through ongoing connections with married friends and family. Many single people have couples friends with whom they “hang out.” Such relationships can be a boon to all involved as they diminish the idea that “our lives are so different.”

Connections with communities also establish a greater sense of meaning, value and purpose. Communities provide opportunities to belong as well as to contribute and receive. The feeling you belong and are valued is enhanced when you offer your time to be a member of a team, group or organization. Giving in this way also allows you to be generative; that is, contribute to the development of those younger than you. You don’t have to be a parent to make a huge difference for younger people. Roles such as “Big Sister,” “favorite uncle,” mentor or teacher allow single people to satisfy their own generative needs while at the same time deeply impacting the communities of which they are a part.

Finally, there can be value in the **“balancing relationships”** that pull us out of our usual routines and habitual ways of thinking. Similarly, we may want to make room for the people who drag us to do things out of our comfort zone or the person who argues with us and doesn’t agree. We may want to reach out to the person who distracts us and makes us laugh, especially if we are someone who tends to isolate.

Holland (1992) poignantly describes the value of such relationships. “The man or woman living alone tends to ‘worry more.’ People in families can talk it over and get a bit of reassurance or a derisive horselaugh and then forget about it. People alone can sit in a room worrying ‘til their ulcers bleed and their hair falls out, and no one’s there to stop them.” She goes on to say, “In this job of building a solid core of esteem, those living alone are more affected by their habitual judgmental proclivities than those who are married. Then, too, the avenues of diversion available to those who are married, such as picking fights, focusing on children’s problems, or just playing Scrabble, are not readily at hand (p 223).

As single people, we have to create those balancing connections. It may mean developing and appreciating relationships with people who pull us out of our usual routines and habitual ways of thinking. We also may want to make room for the people who drag us to do things out of our comfort zone or the person who argues with us and doesn’t agree. We may want to reach out to the person who distracts us and makes us laugh, especially if we are someone who tends to isolate.

“Task people” are also extremely important. Indeed, it is important to dispel the idea that single people without children have so much time because they only have themselves to think about. On the contrary, being in charge of figuring out how to man all the positions and stations on our hypothetical sailboat means there is a lot to do. There are many adult “life maintenance” tasks that you alone are responsible for. If you feel overwhelmed or resentful at having to do it all, you may have to seriously consider ways to make your life simpler. For some, it may mean overcoming the guilt that blocks hiring a handyperson. It may mean asking a technically knowledgeable friend to help with the sound system. It may mean asking your friends to assist with the dinner party. You may also have to feel comfortable setting limits on what others ask of you since they may not realize how busy single life can be.

It is also important to recognize the possibility that deep and intimate connections and love can and do occur outside of traditional partnerships. These may include **“encapsulated intimacies”** (Anderson, 1995) such as “friendships with benefits,” long distance relationships, or flirting friendships. Holland (1992) again reminds us that “We need to stay open to the possibilities of loving...and

love comes in other shapes usable by us..." Several movies depict the significance of such relationships in the lives of single people: for example, "Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont" is a "flirting-soul mate" friendship between an elderly widow and a young man, while in "Living Out Loud," the heroine has an important passionate and lively relationship that bridges the transition from becoming divorced to becoming more alive and grounded on her own.

Being touched and held is an important part of human relating and well-being. In her study of midlife single women, Davis (2001) noted that this was an area of perceived lacking for many of the women she interviewed. Pet ownership is one way to address the longing for touch, and many individuals, single or coupled, describe the cuddling comfort of curling up on the couch with their cat or dog. Pet ownership provides other benefits as well: the pleasure of being greeted after work; the comfort that comes from daily rituals, including the "daily walk"; and conversations with other pet owners.

Finally, **spiritual connections** are important in the lives of many single persons (see Spiritual and Solo in MySingleSpace). For example, in an in depth study of 30-something single women, Marcy Cole (1999) found that among those who felt most positive and optimistic about their future, were those who had a sense that "God and Me are Partners." Having a framework for thinking about one's life and/or having some connection with a faith-based community or discipline, appeared to have been a source of meaning and inspiration for many of the single women in her study.

In summary, if you frequently find yourself struggling with feelings of "lonely-negative," you may want to review the depth and breadth of your web of connections. Although having just one confidant is associated with increased levels of life-satisfaction, a mosaic of relationships adds breadth, resiliency, and depth to one's experience in SingleSpace.

If you are interested in reading more about this topic, you may want to return to the annotated **Resources and Links for Creating Connections in My Single Space**.

References:

Holland, Barbara. (1992) One's Company: Reflections on Living Alone.

Anderson C. and Susan Stewart. (1994). Flying Solo: Single Women in Midlife. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co.

Mrs. Palfrey at the Fairmont (2005)

Living out Loud (1998)

"The Experience of Never-Married Women in Their Thirties Who Desire Marriage and Children." Marcy Cole (1999) Unpublished Dissertation, The Institute for Clinical Social Work, www.icsw.edu