Taking a break

In one day in the modern world, everybody does more or less the same thing at more or less the same time, but each person is really alone in doing it. (Lefebvre 2004, 75)

The life courses of single women are characterized by shifting schedules, rhythms, breaks, and returns. However, as they grow older the common perception is that their time becomes a sacred and a highly limited resource. This now limited timeframe requires new temporal planning and, accordingly, they are expected to do everything possible towards achieving their overriding life objective: un-singling themselves (DePaulo 2006). At this point in time, the pressing need to take action and speed up the search for a suitable partner becomes evident. Against this background, an extended break from conjugal relationships or from “looking for the one” becomes bestowed with clear temporal limits. These temporal perceptions do not tolerate any pauses, especially given that the clock will keep on ticking, entrenched in a general cultural climate of time urgency, what Negra (2009) describes as *time panic*. Consequently, single women must take all possible steps to avoid unnecessary pauses and to evade distractions or diversions from the relentless tempo generated by the search for “Mr. Right.”

In this chapter, I examine some of the background discourses that create these beliefs, and evaluate their ensuing consequences. This, I think, presents an opportunity to examine how temporal constructs such as a *timeout*, *time on hold*, or *frozen time* are contingent, situated in contexts which are relational to single women’s positions in the life course. Developing this theme further, the discussion that follows will unpack concepts such as *taking a timeout*, *breaks*, *speed*, and *mobility*, and will problematize the cultural script through which single women are perceived as having *their time on hold* and/or *being frozen* in time. These socially defined temporal schemes not only prescribe rigid models of temporal rhythms, but reinforce what are considered as natural and inevitable modes of being.

Many of the extracts analyzed in this chapter will demonstrate how single women internalize such beliefs, by negotiating, conforming to, and resisting them. Some of the women are viewed, and perceive themselves, as being “stuck”; others resist these norms and claim their temporal agency. In the following reflections, the concept of

time is unpacked as being both dynamic and static: a resource that should be acted upon, but at the same time an entity beyond anyone's control. Single women are expected to act between these multiple poles of time.

In what follows, I seek to develop a new framework for rethinking these temporal templates, and to scrutinize the effects that these templates have on one's temporal self. By also engaging with scholarship seeking to queer time, I call for a re-articulation of prevailing normative narratives of time, particularly in relation to its rhythms, demarcations, and restraints. Following Halberstam's suggestion of examining the possibilities of leaving "temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (Halberstam 2005, 6), I will also examine how late singlehood offers such a possibility.

A timeout

In his beautiful essay "The Adventure," Georg Simmel (1997) grasps timeout as a platform upon which people detach themselves from collective rhythms and causalities. From this viewpoint, the adventure is seen as a positive timeout, embedded with intensity and excitement, a time which lets us "feel life in just this instance" (ibid., 230). Simmel explains that this experience is possible because adventures have unique qualities, which enable them to be liberated from the before and after. Nevertheless, even adventures are clearly demarcated by temporal limits. According to Simmel, "We ascribe to an adventure a beginning and an end much sharper than those to be discovered in the other forms of our experiences ... An action torn out of the inclusive context of life and that simultaneously the whole strength and intensity of life stream into it" (ibid., 222).

Simmel's observations concerning the adventure uncover a unique temporality, a mode of being which is made possible due to its clear boundaries, demarcating its beginnings and its ends, the before and the after. I have turned to Simmel's essay because singlehood is often perceived as a short-term adventure, a break, a timeout, a time for experiencing, dating different people, travelling, soul-searching, and living on one's own. Yet this adventure, as we will see, can only temporarily be ascribed with a beginning and an end. Thus, I find the construct of the timeout as particularly enriching for our analysis, especially as it entails possibilities for resistance.

In a broad sense, therefore, a timeout can be perceived as a time within which individuals can relax and play, as they are temporarily released from socially dictated temporal frameworks. While on holiday, for example, one is given the chance to break away from clock discipline and mundane behavioral patterns.¹ In a similar vein, the popular, globally distributed magazine *Time Out*, for example, highlights this perception in its very name, proposing that a *timeout* is not just a time to be *out* but might also suggest it to represent leisure time, taking a timeout from work.

The length of a timeout can vary, from the brief two-minute pause during a basketball game to a break that might last weeks or years; it could be spontaneous or well-planned, chosen or imposed. However, timeout as a concept should be viewed in relational and situated terms. This perspective was employed by Yïan (2004), in his

fascinating work on unemployment among young people in Norway. Yīan distinguished between two different types of unemployed youth: those considered as taking a *timeout*, and those who *dropout* from the linear trajectory altogether.

While the latter denotes a young, working-class school dropout, the former describes an upper-middle-class young man, one who took a break from his education and career trajectory. Each case signifies different subjects, produced by discourses of temporal linearity. While in the dropout case the young unemployed man is cut off—perhaps permanently—from the linear path, the timeout case represents a temporary departure from linearity, the implication being that he will eventually, and at a time of his choosing, re-join the linear trajectory. This particular timeout mode reflects a continuation between present and future, while the other stresses discontinuity (*ibid.*).

Social interpretations of the concept of a timeout can additionally express relations between one's self-identity and social constructions of linear time. In pursuing Yīan's theoretical proposition, I argue that the parameters of age and gender play a crucial role in differentiating between constructions of early singlehood as a legitimate timeout from the linear trajectory, and singlehood at a later age, where it is perceived as "jumping off the train" or dropping out altogether (*ibid.*, 179). As per Yīan's contention, two different modes of temporalization are presented here, conveying different subject positions and life trajectories.

The next passage, written by Dana Sa'ar, a single woman writing on the *Ynet* portal, exemplifies how timeout is contingent upon gendered age norms, and is regulated by societal timing:

People will think you're strange if you say that you are taking timeout. Who needs a timeout? What do you mean by a timeout? Who needs a break from sex and love? What happened? What exactly aren't you telling us? We always knew that something was wrong with her! (Sa'ar 2007)

Dana Sa'ar expresses here the suspicious attitudes she encountered when she announced that she was taking a break. Who would possibly wish to take break from love and sex? The claim that one needs a break triggers the suspicion and criticism that single women regularly encounter in their everyday lives. Dana's quest is another indication that "something is wrong with her." In this instance, taking a break means detaching oneself from the heteronormative dictum that one must be on the perpetual, frenzied lookout for a husband.

These commonsensical perceptions are an apt example of the temporal regimentation of social life. According to this view, the non-stop journey during which one date follows another is regarded as a productive and meaningful temporal trajectory. To detach oneself from the constant yearning and search for a potential husband is inconceivable. Dana further describes her experience.

Recently, I ended a long relationship. During the first few weeks, my friends shared my sorrow, bringing me food as though I had just been widowed. But as time went by, they became less concerned, more bored; their encouragement was now formulated in terms like "It's time to get back on the market," "It's time to get back on the horse," and other phrases that made me feel like I was up for sale. Believe it or not, this does not suit me

... I don't want to enter a committed relationship no matter what, just so that I will not be, God forbid, a single woman ... what's wrong with a little quiet time for myself? (ibid.)

Dana Davidovitz, another writer for the *Ynet* portal, narrates a similar story:

At the age of 30-plus, and after a series of disappointing and tedious dates, I have decided to take a break, a sabbatical, a fast from dating, whatever you wish to call it. Nonetheless, in the terms of Israeli society, this is considered a hubristic decision. Who do I think I am, how dare I leave the race to the *Hupa* [bridal canopy]? Although I have clearly stated that I do not wish to be fixed up with any man, be he single, divorced with children or widowed, my close family and friends keep handing me phone numbers of men who are potentially marriage material. In addition to that, after a week they check up on me to make sure that I called him. How is it that in Israel of 2010, a single woman who dares to take a break from the tedious search for a date is so harshly criticized? (Davidovitz 2010)

Dana Davidovitz points out that her wish for a pause from the dating world is interpreted by her environment as unjustifiable hubris. In a similar yet different vein, these sentiments echo Karen Stein's (2012) study on the temporal experiences of vacations, which observed that taking a vacation for too long can be viewed by others as indulgent. Dana comments that in Israeli society, her behavior is construed as arrogant, and further reflects that as a thirty-plus single woman, she has no option but to join the collective "race to the *Hupa*." These sets of beliefs are also consistent with the current post-feminist rhetoric in Israel, one which urges women to return to their heteronormative life trajectories and traditional feminine roles.² As a result, marriage and parenthood are illustrated as undisputed life goals, which do not allow for senseless pauses away from the pressurized search for Mr. Right, no matter how tedious the search might turn out to be. Seen this way, timeouts are considered as nonproductive and meaningless time, during which single women have "failed" to progress towards realizing their prescribed life goals.

It could be argued then that an overly extended timeout bears the risk of distancing the subject from the future, or having no future at all. Both columnists regard time as a resource which they can take and own. I suggest that the very expression "taking a break" can also express the desire to take control of time, attempting to prescribe the subject's own pace in a collectively determined timetable. This in part might explain why their autonomous claim for time prompts so much criticism, as it both defies conventional socio-temporal norms and asserts a sovereign selfhood which does not conform to these prearranged rhythms. The common explanation that many single women hear is that taking a break is a *temporal privilege* that they can no longer afford.

In her attempt to restructure her own time, Dana Davidovitz draws on various metaphors:

Why do I need to fast or take a sabbatical now? Here is my answer: only those in the dating world can testify as to how difficult this ongoing search for something real is. Only those who are in the midst of the race and really want a relationship can understand how difficult it is at the age of 30-plus, to know someone and then discover that he is someone else ... Only someone who has been searching for so many years can understand what

it feels like to be disappointed, to feel that you have failed and to know that despite everything that from this train, you do not descend on your own but only as a paired unit.

Indeed, this is what you really want and you can't let go. This sabbatical for me is a post breakup period ... It is the time for me to gather my strength and look what is right for me. At this time I have no place for a new man. I am not a robot or an athlete in a marathon. This is the time for me to piece together my broken heart. It's a difficult time as it is, and all the advice [she addresses this to her pressuring environment] that you are giving me just makes it harder. I'm going out. I'll be back soon, but until then please give me a break. (Davidovitz 2010)

The writer configures the dating world here as a race, a marathon, and as a train. In subsequent chapters, I have discussed the metaphors of the train and the biological clock, which allude to the social pressures and accelerated pace to which many single women are expected to comply. In the above extract, the metaphors of time are significant discursive resources, which assist Dana Davidovitz in expressing and communicating the social pressures she experiences. They also enable her to break away (even temporally, as she herself admits) from constraining time pressures. I stress again the power of temporal metaphors, by quoting Ramón Torre's (2007) significant observation. For Torre, time metaphors are:

Ways of speaking, conceptualizing and experiencing [time], it is no less true that these ways are also (or end up being) ways of acting or doing. I therefore assume that the way in which the agents conceive of and speak of the world is also a way of shaping it. (ibid., 160)

These temporalized metaphors, as Torre suggests, are not merely ways of experiencing time, but actually a way of shaping time and re-conceptualizing what is conventionally considered as an interruption of the linear sequential flow of time. Indeed, the two columns accentuate the temporal boundaries of the socially legitimate timeframes for entrance, exit, and re-entrance to the linear flow. As one of the columnists pleads: "Give me a break."

The reflections quoted above are a useful focus for a discussion of the limited temporal tolerance towards single women who "use up their break time." To put it another way, a timeout or a pause between one relationship and another is counted, measured, and regulated by socio-temporal norms and their ensuing rhythms. Accordingly, the levels of approval, empathy, and support accorded to the single woman are determined by these temporal dictates. Both writers oppose and accommodate these dominant temporal frameworks. As Dana Sa'ar (2007) remarks, after a while her friends' empathy transforms into social pressures, articulated by instructions such as "get back on track," "get back on the horse," or "get back to the market."

If we draw on Yian's (2004) line of analysis, the writer's timeout is now re-interpreted as a preparation for her expected reincorporation onto the linear path. The legitimate time granted for her to "get over" her ex-boyfriend, along with fluctuating social expressions of empathy, are limited by these temporal social rhythms. The time has come to nudge the single woman forward, before her timeout turns into a dropout. This is exemplified by Dana Sa'ar's account:

When I told my friends that I want some quality time to myself, I got the message that the best way to get over someone is to meet a new man ... and just by chance, they had this amazing person to fix me up with; well, perhaps not amazing but really nice. Apparently, now I'm no longer allowed to be picky. We all saw what came out of my crazy standards [referring to her last relationship]: neither a wedding nor children. Now is the time to settle down and compromise, and at my age you can't wait much. Moreover, all of a sudden my mother began to look at me as though I had murdered her future grandchildren ... I have one or two years before I become too old; I can still make it ... All I want is a little break ... I don't know where this fear of breaks comes from; at school we all used to like them. (Sa'ar 2007)

As we can see, status transitions are inextricably bound to pressing social and temporal norms. Dana Sa'ar's timeout as a temporal interval is socially legitimate only insofar as it conforms to specific temporal norms and gendered age-based limits. During the first few weeks after her breakup, the writer is still positioned within the confines of heteronormative culture. The breakup is understood within the temporal order of conjugal and family life. Her timeout following the break up is considered as legitimate, highly recommended, and indeed "entitles" her to social support. Yet, as time passes and Dana moves further away from the world of couples and towards the world of singles, these levels of tolerance, empathy, and social support towards her single status gradually reduce. The more she distances herself from the agreed-upon and expected teleological journey, the less her social surroundings support her.

By the same token, her status transition is tolerable as long as it is understood as a temporary phase. When the temporary threatens to become permanent, the fragile social order is de-stabilized. As she comments, we all liked breaks in school; indeed, we long for breaks from work or other mundane routines. But taking a break from relationships for too long and at a certain age is far too risky, and therefore inexcusable. Timeout, taking a break, getting away, or taking one's time: these are all encouraged and considered to be legitimate in certain settings and at certain times. The realm of personal relationships has no explicit, institutionalized norms determining the right length of the break (unlike a vacation or any other fixed time period away from work, for example). Even so, at a certain tentative, yet socially agreed upon point in time, the bells all ring out vigorously, urging the single woman to return to class before she is thrown out.

Dana Sa'ar frames her timeout as legitimate: "one or two years, before I become too old." However, both writers are accused of not adhering to heteronormative social schedules of time, of ignoring time and not attending to its norms and requirements. Their quest for a break is a claim for a different temporality and rhythm. In this way, they defy dominant themes of time-use, normative rhythms and schedules.

In this we might consider their quest for a break as a form of *queering time*. Scholars like Tom Boellstorff (2007) and Judith Halberstam (2005) reformulate such linear teleological trajectories by suggesting temporal modes which do not conform to heteronormative and kinship paradigms. A timeout without clear and rigid bounds could be seen to fit such a temporal mode, one which conveys a non-purposeful and a non-progressive movement: dropping out of time in Y'ian's (2004) terms. In so doing, they

emphasize that their timeout is a temporary one, a pause for recuperation before rejoining the dating race. As Dana Davidovitz exclaims, “I am out, I will be back soon” (Davidovitz 2010); standing outside dominant linear narratives can never be anything other than temporary.

Thus customary familial reproductive schedules can only be temporarily suspended. Otherwise, their timeout will soon become a dropout. While Yĭan has examined, in relation to employment, how one’s class membership marks one as a timeout and the other as a dropout, in the case of single women, the axes of age and gender are important parameters which can lead them to a futureless life track. This becomes particularly evident when marriage comes to represent progress, civility, and futurity (Boellstorff 2007; Warner 1999).

A different example of how an overly extended timeout transgresses socially prescribed boundaries is articulated by Esta Brodsky-Kauffman, *nrg*’s dating advisor, when she writes about the increasing number of single persons:

The result is ... people come to me at the age of forty and want to marry or are looking for a substantial or a meaningful relationship, but according to what experience? ... If you’ve had a break of a few years since your last relationship, there is a serious gap which you have to overcome ... You’re a little bit bitter, perhaps a bit frustrated ... for the young there are fewer criteria ... they are not accustomed to being on their own. (Brodsky-Kauffman 2006b)

The dating coach’s complaint alludes to the unjustified timeouts taken by forty-year-old singles. She grasps the break as a “serious gap,” one which will yield severe repercussions, as it seriously damages the single person’s ability to engage in a long-term relationship. However, her understanding of this break is filtered through pervasive cultural beliefs of time. Young single women are privileged with the possibility of being able to take timeout: they still have time and can control time. In this account, one’s age, gender, and relationship status are crucial parameters for evaluation.

Time on hold

The word *timeout* represents a double temporal motion: that the single woman’s time is on hold on the one hand, while her peer group is “advancing” forward to marriage and familial life. The idea of a timeout within this formulation can convey the message that one’s life cannot begin and is devoid of meaning, as shown in the next passage written by Shirli Malachy, a single woman:

I am missing out on my life. I’m pretty, clever, self-aware and a laid back kind of woman ... But despite it all I am missing out on my life. I’m living my life waiting for something to happen. I have put my life on hold and I wait, wait, and wait. I am waiting because in addition to all the above-mentioned qualities, I am a single 34-year-old woman. I’m living my life, and feel [that it can begin] “only when this [finding a boyfriend] happens.” I’m just letting my life go by, counting the days until the right partner arrives ... My life at the moment is devoid of any meaning ... My ex-boyfriend wrote to me that now that he has gotten married he feels he can live his life. (Malachy 2010)

Shirli feels she is missing out and not living the life she ought to be living. She explains that she is waiting, counting the days until her real life can begin. She attributes the reason that her life is on hold to the fact there is no man in her life. As opposed to her ex-boyfriend, who claims that his real life began once he got married, she is “missing out on her life.” She also adds that she experiences her life as devoid of meaning, and as a result she has nothing to look forward to or anything worth living for.

In her study of people living with HIV-positive diagnoses, Michele Davies (1997) contends that time is a platform for how and from where we live our lives. In this regard, one’s orientation towards time is crucial to one’s actions and behavior, and as such it is significant to one’s understanding of human existence (*ibid.*, 562). Drawing on Blaise Pascal, Davies argues that our dominant temporal orientation is that which predominantly projects us into the future, as we care little for the present. Quoting Pascal’s book from 1889:

Man cares nothing for the present, anticipating the future, finding it too slow in coming, as if one could make it come faster. Or calls back the past, to stop its rapid flight ... so frivolous are we that we dream of the days which are not, and pass by without reflection those which alone exist ... The present generally gives us pain; one conceals it from one’s sight because it afflicts one, or if it is pleasant there is regret to see it vanishing away. The present is never our end; the past and the future are our means, the future alone is our end. Thus, we never live, but hope to live. (Quoted in Michele Davies 1997, 562)

Such a view of the present and future is evidenced in many of the texts analyzed, in which the present is construed as empty and devoid of meaning. In the column mentioned above, Shirli reflects upon what she terms as her life being on hold:

Above everything else, I sense that there is a huge sign: my life is on hold until the right guy arrives. ... Yes it’s true, I do have friends and family but at the end of the day each and every one of them leads their own lives ... What can you do? (Malachy 2010)

It is worth noting that Shirli comments that it is impossible for her to enjoy the present as everything seems meaningless without a male partner. Her account illustrates once again the power of heteronormative and familial temporality. In his discussion of the contemporary construction of family life today, Brian Heaphy (2011) claims that the family is a powerful story that cultures tell about the relationships that matter most. Thus, it gives priority to the family form over other relationships such as friendships, community, partnerships and so on. According to Heaphy, “Family is so ‘naturalised’ and taken for granted that its discursive and fictive nature very easily slips away from view. Its effectiveness as a form of relational governance is evidenced in how difficult it is for relational practices and displays to escape being viewed through the family frame: as family or not” (*ibid.*, 34).

The effectiveness of this form of governance is present in most of the reflections written about female singlehood. As such, other relationships are perceived as secondary, viewed, as Heaphy so aptly claims, through the normative family and couple-oriented frame.

Frozen time

In her study of women's experiences of infertility, Becker describes the temporal experiences of some of her interviewees as a "culturally propelled sense of motion through time [which] had stopped" (Becker 1994, 396). Below, I quote from one of Becker's interviews:

I have had my life on hold for so many years not thinking that I'll be pregnant ... Intellectually it is almost inconceivable to me how you can contain or put your life on hold like that for so long and not go bananas but I've done it. I've lived it for over five years. It is probably the most frustrating aspect of infertility in my mind. It's horrible living in limbo. I think it affects your every waking moment, thinking about what you should be doing, what you could be doing, and what you want to do and yet you can't. (ibid., 397)

This sense of time, which has either stopped or sped up while one's life is on hold is also manifested in common representations of single women as "stuck," "not moving ahead," or "waiting for the one." Merav Resnik, a single woman and a columnist, has described this experience by using the metaphor of the "dating carousel," within which she describes herself as feeling as though she is moving again and again in a circular, purposeless motion. In her column she refers to this as a "rebound period," which she explains further:

I am beginning to understand that this time period is characterized by a horrifying impotence. You want to be in this place called "onward"; you see it, you sense it, smell it, you can touch it on the tip of your fingers, but somehow you wake up in the same dammed spot. (Resnik 2006)

The same experiences are unfolded by Orit Gal:

The holidays are a terrible time for the lonely. I know that pretty soon, people will call to wish me a Happy New Year, people whom I have not spoken to for several months. And then, eventually, the question about my singlehood will pop up. And again, I will have to explain that this year, again, I don't have a partner and that nothing has changed since last year. (Gal 2007)

As will be elaborated upon further in the next chapters, Valentine's Day, New Year's Eve, holidays, and weekends are often perceived as moments of crisis, partially because they function as symbolic time markers accentuating the interplay of personal stasis and the continued flow of time. In this manner, nothing is happening; one is *still* single and without anyone to kiss on Valentine's Day or New Year's Eve.

This experience of being stuck also draws on another temporal expression of becoming frozen, detached from one's past and future. Moriah Shalom, for example, describes the common features of a "frozen single person" when she writes about the man she is currently dating:

When he emptied his frozen refrigerator and then defrosted it after it hadn't been touched for months ... I understood that he is exactly like me; a frozen single person that once, a long time ago, had a life. But somehow, from one unsuccessful date to another, between love affairs that lasted a month or two, this kind of life was lost. (Shalom 2006)

In another text, “You Freeze in Fear and Then You Miss the Train,” Merav also describes the experience of the frozen position in relation to the experience of singlehood:

Totally frozen, we move neither to the right nor to the left ... we are just stuck in place out of fear. We don’t talk, we don’t disclose, we are just silent. Everything is bubbling inside us and we stand in our place ... [We] will leave decisions in the hands of fate ... We’re afraid to take responsibility for our actions, wills, feelings, desires; afraid to take chances and gamble. (Resnik 2007a)

Frozenness is congruent with passivity, lack of initiative, being bound by one’s fears and bad habits. The single woman is represented as trapped within a repetitive temporal routine of stasis and inactivity. Kathy Charmaz (1997) has interestingly described this temporal phenomenon as a *slowed down present*—a perception of time which moves slowly while one seems to stand in place, resigned to one’s fate.

In this sense, the image of a refrigerator in need of defrosting is reminiscent of the slow and gradual process by which a slowed-down present turns into a time on hold, or frozen time. The single woman, in this sense, is configured as a figure of stillness, left behind because she “failed” to catch the train in time. According to this social temporal imagery, the single woman has to be worked upon and put back into the right linear trajectory.

It is interesting to note that the technological innovations of freezing women’s eggs today provides many women with the ability to claim their *temporal agency* and postpone giving birth to a later stage in life. In 2011, the Israeli Ministry of Health announced that women between the ages of 31 and 40 who wished to freeze their eggs for non-medical reasons could do so, thus allowing them the chance of giving birth later in life (Levi 2011). This decision led to an impassioned public debate, opponents of the use of this technology claiming that such innovations could promote the dangerous illusion that women could have children at any age.³ It is beyond the scope of this discussion to explore the medical, ethical, and sociological aspects of assisted fertility technology in detail, but it is worth noting that this technology is being taken into consideration by society, and I presume its diverse effects will have some effect on how temporal schedules are, and will be, imagined in the future.⁴

Immobile subjects

Speed is a dominant aspect of contemporary culture, seeping from the domain of work into other aspects of life like family life and leisure patterns of sociation. Speed is associated with decisiveness, time management, and punctuality, and is perceived to be a celebration of human power. Living in the “meantime,” by way of contrast, denotes stasis, indecisiveness, and passivity, all of which are considered to be reprehensible qualities in our speed-driven culture.

Charmaz (1997) writes that one of the predominant temporal experiences of people suffering from chronic illness is one of being held in abeyance. Time on hold is portrayed by Charmaz as an experience characterized by agonized waiting, the present and future unsettled and undetermined but might yet lead one towards a

disastrous finale. In this respect, as Charmaz observes, the self becomes temporary, as it experiences that the future cannot begin. As one of her interviewees comments, for example: “It suddenly dawned on me [that] I really don’t have any goals ... nothing concrete. And I have been putting myself on hold ... I’d feel like my life is aimless” (ibid., 191).

In another interview, the interviewee describes “time like a rope around me—when I feel optimistic I let it out, the time just unfolds. When I’m feeling pessimistic the rope is tight” (ibid., 190–191). Or, “The dreaded future engulfs the present self. Likely, someone puts his or herself on hold. The self-experienced now, be it the grumpy, fearful, martyred, apathetic, or withdrawn self, becomes a temporary self” (ibid., 33).

Similar themes surface in Reith’s (1999) work on the temporal experiences of ex-drug addicts. Her analysis notes that many of them describe their past as lifeless and static. As we have seen, these experiences of non-movement and of standing still, the sense that one’s life has stopped and that the future is blocked, are shared by the single women quoted in this chapter. Reith defines this experience as an arrested flow of time, through which the addict is marginalized from society’s temporal order. This temporal experience, according to Reith, is one in which the addicts are no longer involved in the social process of becoming (ibid.).

Many single women reflect upon their lives in a similar fashion. They sense that their future is blocked, the present emptied of meaning. As Shirli, quoted previously (Malachy 2010), exclaims, she misses out on her life while waiting for something to happen. In this manner, her life is devoid of any meanings and she can no longer be involved in the process of becoming.

Reith notes that the common experience of the addict is that life is wasting away, where each day seems like any other day. Accordingly, “nothing is happening”; their daily rhythms are defined by inactivity, repetition, and stasis (Reith 1999). Years of addiction are often termed as lost, barren, and unproductive, and “major” life events, which are normatively viewed as formative, leave no imprint on the addict. Reith beautifully conveys this as a *breakdown in the articulation of time* (emphasis mine) in which “time ceases to be sequential and forward moving; it loses its telos” (ibid., 102).

The findings of Charmaz and Reith reiterate some of the temporal experiences of single women who, as this chapter has shown, sense that their life is on hold and accordingly understand their life as a biographical disruption. The ruptures in the expected gendered life course, during which a woman should marry and have children at a certain time, can also be interpreted as a breakdown in the articulation of time.

The perceptions of single women as immobile subjects can also take insight from Bauman’s (1998) critique of globalization. Bauman excoriates the growing gap between mobile and immobile worlds, and the ensuing hierarchy established between consumer-tourists of the first world and the vagabonds of the second. Bauman makes the following claim:

The inhabitants of the first world, i.e., the global elite, live in a perpetual present, going through a succession of episodes hygienically insulated from their past as well as their future. These people are constantly busy and perpetually “short of time” since each

moment of time is not extensive. People marooned in the opposite world are crushed under the abundant, redundant and useless time they have nothing to fill with. (ibid., 88)

Bauman elaborates that while the inhabitants of the first world are moving on, going beyond the constraints of time and place, the inhabitants of the second world live in a time in which “nothing ever happens.” Although Bauman writes about the different types of temporalities created by the growing global gaps between the rich and the poor, his analysis can shed light on the temporal hierarchy differentiating between mobility and immobility.

This interesting corpus of societal temporal inquiries highlights the extent to which we have become subjects through being embedded in certain kinds of temporality. Employing this analytical perspective, we can discern the various expressions in the breakdown in the articulation of time to temporal identity formation. Thus, the perception of single women as immobile subjects is connected to their location in time and their possibility of becoming subjects and having a future. These possibilities are evidently gendered and heteronormative, depicting a blocked future presently characterized by numbness.

Their experiences of immobility become more perceptible when it seems that others are moving ahead in a linear progressive fashion. The view of single women as immobile subjects also alludes to the hierarchy formed between what can be seen as two temporal discernible positions. If we draw from Bauman’s rich formulation, when one is coupled, one can control and transgress time by having the ability to move forward. When one occupies this position, time can be perceived as a resource through which one can live in a dynamic present, and can move ahead towards the future. Couplehood and family life open possibilities to the future. On the other hand, it appears that many single women lose their grip on time and are perceived thus, and as a result are trapped in an extended numbness and immobility.

In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned Halberstam’s observation that queer time highlights “the potentiality of a life unscripted by the convention of family, inheritance and child rearing” (Halberstam 2005, 2). In the works on time mentioned earlier in this chapter and in the course of this book, the presuppositions of what can be considered as normative time are constantly negotiated and challenged. These works emphasize that the hegemonic conventions of time are not absolute but open to change.

Halberstam’s work, for example, can prompt us to rethink the dictation of what are perceived as normative rhythms and what is considered to be an a-synchronized temporal experience. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the experience of single women taking a break is read primarily through what is considered the normative life course dictating a linear, developmental telos. Accordingly, the various accounts unfold the effects of these prescribed temporal templates and tempos. Moreover, single women recognize their a-synchronized social standing yet insist on taking a break. Although some of them obey the temporal heteronormative framework at large (by defining their break as temporary), they nevertheless challenge conventional sequential rhythms and temporal idioms.

Stimulated by this rich critical literature, I propose to envisage singlehood temporality not merely as a non-synchronized timeout or as time on hold, but as a position from which we can pursue alternative articulations to heteronormative rhythms and life schedules. In that way, it can offer a much needed counter-logic to heteronormative temporality. Such a temporality affords long, unlimited breaks and delays, as well as experiences such as being stuck and frozen, which are an inseparable part of our everyday temporal experiences.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Karen Stein's (2012) temporal analysis of the vacation.
- 2 See Lahad (2013, 2014).
- 3 On the recent debate concerning the offer by multinational corporations Facebook and Apple to cover the costs of egg freezing for their employees, which prompted heated public debate and criticism, see Kuchler and Jacobs (2014).
- 4 For an excellent discussion of this topic see Hidas (2015).