Women Who Worship Alone: The Relationship Between Marital Status and Loneliness in the Church

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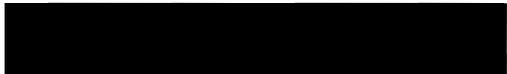
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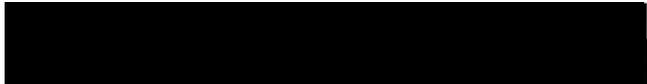
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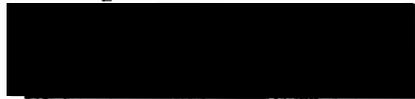
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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Judith Ann Schwanz for the
Master of Science in Psychology presented August 10, 1994.

Title: Women Who Worship Alone: The Relationship Between
           Marital Status and Loneliness in the Church.

This study investigated the relationship between
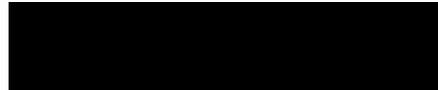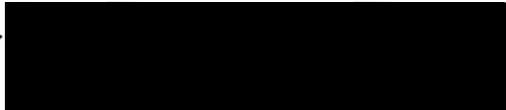marital status, network density, and loneliness for women
in the church. Participants were 144 women from several
churches of the same Protestant denomination. They
responded to a questionnaire which included the Revised
UCLA Loneliness Scale and measures of the importance of the
church as a social support to the individual. A one-way
analysis of variance revealed that the married women who
worship alone reported significantly higher levels of
loneliness than did single women ($p < .05$). Multiple
regression analysis showed a significant interaction
between loneliness and importance ($p < .05$). Both groups
of married women reported lower levels of loneliness as the
importance of the church increased. The results are
congruent with the argument that married women worshipping
alone are marginal women, caught between their
relationships with their husbands and their involvement in
their churches.

Women Who Worship Alone:

The Relationship Between Marital Status

and Loneliness in the Church

by

Judith Ann Schwanz

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the

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in
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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between marital status, network density, and loneliness for women in the church. Participants were 144 women from several churches of the same Protestant denomination. They responded to a questionnaire which included the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale and measures of the importance of the church as a social support to the individual. A one-way analysis of variance revealed that the married women who worship alone reported significantly higher levels of loneliness than did single women ($p < .05$). Multiple regression analysis showed a significant interaction between loneliness and importance ($p < .05$). Both groups of married women reported lower levels of loneliness as the importance of the church increased. The results are congruent with the argument that married women worshipping alone are marginal women, caught between their relationships with their husbands and their involvement in their churches.

Women Who Worship Alone:

The Relationship Between Marital Status

and Loneliness in the Church

Human beings are born social creatures;
relationships with others lie at the core of human
experience. Yet, loneliness appears to be widespread
in our society. One national survey (Bradburn, 1969)
showed that 26% of Americans had felt "very lonely or
remote from other people" during the past few weeks.
Thomas Wolfe, a famous twentieth-century American
author, declared "the whole conviction of my life now
rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a
rare and curious phenomenon . . . is the central and
inevitable fact of human existence" (quoted in Evans,
1968, p. 400).

In recent years the field of loneliness research
has grown and developed. Paloutzian and Janigian
(1989) describe three phases of what they see as
maturation in this field. In the 1970s, attention
focused on defining loneliness and delineating its
parameters. In the 1980s, research shifted to the
design and refinement of assessment tools with
accompanying conceptual models and hypothesis testing.
Currently loneliness research faces the third phase,

that of assimilating and accommodating empirical
findings into refined theories. (See reviews by Weiss,
1989; Perlman, 1989; Jones, 1989.)

To date, little attention has been given to the
application of loneliness research to religious
organizations. This study investigated current
loneliness theory as it relates to the experience of
women in the church.

Loneliness Defined

Loneliness has been defined as an absence of
satisfying social relationships, or a dissatisfaction
with current relationships (Hancock, 1986). This
feeling goes beyond the level of alone-ness and
solitude to a sense of isolation and deprivation. In
the words of Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun working with
the poor in India, "Loneliness and the feeling of being
unwanted is the most terrible poverty" (Time, 1975, p.
49). Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) describe loneliness
as "a healthy hunger for intimacy and community--a
natural sign that we are lacking companionship,
closeness, and a meaningful place in the world" (p. 3).

Researchers differ in their conceptual approaches
to defining and measuring loneliness. Those who take a
unidimensional approach view loneliness as a single

phenomenon which varies in its experienced intensity (Russell, 1982). They argue that regardless of the particular cause of loneliness, common themes can be found in all experienced loneliness. These researchers promote unidimensional, global measures.

Other researchers adopt a multidimensional approach, differentiating between two or more hypothesized types or manifestations of loneliness. For example, Weiss (1982) contended that "there are actually two affective states likely to be characterized as 'loneliness' by those experiencing them . . . emotional isolation and social isolation" (p. 74). Weiss also acknowledged that these states were not entirely distinct and that others might exist as well. Other researchers have considered psychological and sociological components of loneliness, or have differentiated between loneliness in differing types of relationships: romantic/sexual, friendship, family, and community. (See Russell, 1982 for more complete discussion.)

For purposes of this study, a unidimensional model of loneliness was assumed. This study was designed to measure the global phenomenon of loneliness in the church.

<u>Factors Affecting Loneliness</u>

The level and frequency of loneliness has been shown to be associated with marital status and quality. De Jong-Gierveld & van Tilburg (1987) found loneliness to be negatively related to the presence of a partner and support received from a partner. Page and Cole (1991) reported that the strongest predictor of loneliness was marital status. In their study, subjects were further classified as divorced, never married, widowed, maritally separated, or married. Page and Cole asked subjects to indicate how often they had felt lonely over the past year (very often, fairly often, often, sometimes, almost never, or never). Those who responded with "fairly often" or "very often" were classified as lonely. Those who were maritally separated showed a higher frequency of loneliness (29.6%) than those who were divorced (20.5%), widowed (20.6%), never married (14.6%), or married (4.7%). Perhaps those who are separated experience an ambivalence regarding whether or not to remain married and this ambivalence prevents them from other emotional engagements which might ease their loneliness. Schmidt and Sermat (1983) found that married men and women scored lower on their Differential Loneliness Scale

than their unmarried counterparts.

Research also suggests a link between gender and loneliness levels. Schmidt and Sermat (1983) devised an assessment tool to measure loneliness as an experienced deficit in four types of relationships: romantic-sexual relationships, friendships, relationships with family, and relationships with larger groups or the community. Male subjects received significantly higher scores on this measure than did females, for all types of relationships. Schmidt and Sermat did not suggest an explanation for this difference. They defined loneliness as "a perception of relational deficit" and their measurement scale explored loneliness throughout the person's lifetime, rather than current feelings.

In contrast, Page and Cole (1991) found men to be less likely to admit to feelings of loneliness. They cited other research which supports this finding and suggest that men are culturally discouraged from revealing loneliness. Men may elicit more negative response to admission of loneliness and may therefore be reluctant to risk admitting to non-stereotypic emotions.

Several studies (Page & Cole, 1991; Rubenstein &

Shaver, 1982a; Schmidt & Sermat, 1983) have
demonstrated that late adolescents and young adults
report higher levels of loneliness than do older
subjects. For example, Mullins and Dugan (1990)
reported findings that loneliness scores among subjects
in senior citizens' housing generally fell into the
rarely or sometimes lonely categories -- contrary to
the popular image of the older person as a lonely
individual. Some evidence suggests, however, that
lonely feelings increase again for the "older elderly"
(after age 65). Researchers suggest this may be due to
poverty and poor health (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982a).

The social cognition field has contributed to the
study of loneliness in the investigation of the impact
of self-schemas and negative self-information on
loneliness. Frankel and Prentice-Dunn (1990) found
that high-lonely subjects attended to and recalled
negative self-information more accurately than
low-lonely subjects while low-lonely subjects recalled
positive self-information more accurately. This
supports the concept of a self-schema which elicits
selective attention to either negative or positive
self-information which, in turn, validates and
strengthens the original self-view, whether negative or

positive. Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) also suggested two aspects of social cognition which influence the perception of loneliness: the temporary or permanent nature of the situation in which one is lonely, and the attribution of loneliness to <u>in me</u> or <u>in the situation</u> sources. (See Hancock, 1986, for extensive review of social causes and perspectives on loneliness.)

<u>The Church</u>

Church participation is a common means of social integration in our culture. Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka (1981) contended that church attendance is an indicator of integration and identification with a particular social group even more than it reflects strength of religious commitment. With this social integration come the benefits of social support. This support might be found in a friend with whom to talk through a problem. It also might extend to the provision for physical needs (e.g. food, finances, shelter, or childcare) in time of need. Griffith (1985) found that the church was one of the primary institutions in which people met and built relationships with social support providers. Thompson and Ensminger (1989) discovered that for single mothers of school age children, frequent church attendance was related to less

distress.

This social integration function is consistent with the way churches, as institutions, tend to view themselves. For example, many Christian religious leaders believe that the Bible is a tool used by God to call people to relationships, and specifically to a "Family of God." One theologian described the church as a "closely knit inward connection of a system, which is organically united . . . the exercise of active love, of care for others (Troeltsch, 1981, p. 77). The word church is derived from the Greek word ekklesia, meaning community or "the universal fellowship of believers who met visibly in local assemblies" (Getz, 1975, p. 14). Many Christians believe that the connections among members of a given church are not merely affiliative, but deeper in an essential way that pertains to their world views. This is exemplified in the work of Paul, the early Christian, who wrote to his fellow believers, ". . . you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). Thus, from a typical Christian perspective, loneliness is incompatible with the concept of the church as a community.

Women Who Worship Alone

This study investigated loneliness as it relates to marital status among women in the church. Of particular interest were those women who are married but come to church without their spouses. Several loneliness theories as well as this researcher's anecdotal experience with women who fit this description led to the expectation of higher levels of loneliness for this group than for other groups of women.

Stokes (1985) studied the relation of social network to loneliness. He based his research on the findings of Jones (1982) that college students who described themselves as lonely had as many social contacts as did nonlonely students, but that the interactions involved a greater variety of people. Stokes identified four important dimensions of the social network: size, the number of people in the network to whom one feels close, the percentage of relatives in the network, and density. Of these variables, density related the most strongly to loneliness. Density refers to the degree to which members of an individual's social network are themselves interconnected and important in one

another's lives. Dense networks may indicate that the individual is part of a community of relationships; density is negatively correlated with loneliness (Stokes). The "married woman who worships alone" finds herself in a network that is not interconnected, at least insofar as church and her husband are parts of that network. The work of Stokes is related conceptually to that of Stonequist (1937) and Park (1950) on marginal identity. These men described marginal people as participating in two or more different worlds, but not completely belonging in either.

Bell (1991) also addressed the issue of network density as it relates to loneliness. In a study of adult state employees, Bell found that the relationship of density to loneliness was unaffected by the marital status or gender of the subjects. He found significant negative correlations between loneliness and network density (and closeness within networks), but he found "no evidence that density becomes a less significant contributor to loneliness when one enters into a relational commitment" (p. 52). Although people may experience connectedness in marriage, this connectedness does not ameliorate the effects of low

network density on levels of loneliness. These findings suggest that married women who worship alone might experience higher levels of loneliness in the church than other women. They may experience connectedness in their marriages, but their family and church worlds are distant, resulting in low network density.

De Jong-Gierveld and van Tilburg (1987) asked 412 adult men and women from two Dutch cities to whom they would go with a problem or a secret. Those who described their partner (spouse or live-in) as their first confidant had significantly lower loneliness scores than subjects who described a non-partner as their first confidant. The married woman who worships alone may see her husband as a first confidant in all areas of her life except spiritual, but feel hindered from intimacy in that area of her life. This may result in heightened loneliness.

This study assessed the level of loneliness among women within their local congregations. Two hypotheses were tested: 1) it was expected that married women who worship alone (MWA) would report higher levels of loneliness in the church setting than those who attend church with their husbands (MWH); 2) it was also

expected that those married women who worship alone would express a higher level of loneliness within the context of the church than did single women (SWA). These expectations were based on the research involving marital status and loneliness and the lowered density of the social network for married women who worship alone.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were women who attended "Springtime Spectacular," an annual women's conference sponsored by the Oregon-Pacific District of the Church of the Nazarene. The Church of the Nazarene most closely fits what Veroff and colleagues (1981) described as a Fundamentalist Protestant denomination. (Note: Although they most closely fit this category of Veroff's work, the Church of the Nazarene is theologically distinct from the denominations commonly labelled Fundamentalist. The Church of the Nazarene grew out of the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, which is largely ignored in the sociological literature.) Veroff characterized Fundamentalist churches as oriented toward primitive expressiveness and personal voluntarism in church participation, professing an

evangelical personal relationship to religion (p. 438)
and this characterization is true of the Church of the
Nazarene. This denomination was first established in
Oregon in the first decade of the twentieth century.
The Oregon Pacific District presently consists of 88
congregations with a total membership of 15,357.

All women in attendance at the conference were
asked to participate in the study. The response rate
was 108 out of 124 attendees, or 87%. In addition,
three women volunteered to take copies of the survey to
their Sunday School classes the next day where they
asked the women in those classes to participate and
returned the surveys to this researcher by mail. A
total of 153 women completed the survey, but 9 could
not be used because of incomplete data or misuse of the
rating scale. This resulted in 144 valid cases.

Of the valid cases, 96 were married women whose
husbands attended church with them (MWH), 20 were
married women whose husbands did not attend church with
them (MWA), and 28 were single (SWA; 17 never married,
7 divorced, and 4 widowed). Ages of the participants
ranged from 21 to 80. The mean age for all groups
together was 44.2 ($\underline{SD}$ = 13.6). The mean ages for the
SWA, MWA, and MWH were 35.9 ($\underline{SD}$ = 12.3), 45.0 ($\underline{SD}$ =

10.4), and 46.4 ($\underline{SD}$ = 13.6), respectively. One MWH

participant chose to omit her age from the survey.

(Note: the SWA mean age for **all women present** would

have been higher, but three of the unusable surveys

were completed by widows in their seventies.)

Measures

The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULS) measures

loneliness as a one-dimensional construct characterized

by an absence of satisfying social relationships and a

lack of intimacy. The RULS was selected for use in

this study because it has demonstrated validity and

reliability (Russell, 1982) and widespread acceptance

in the field of loneliness research (Russell, Peplau, &

Cutrona, 1980). As a global measure of loneliness, the

RULS has demonstrated a high level of internal

consistency with a coefficient alpha of .94 (Russell).

Construct validity was demonstrated by correlations

with the Bradley loneliness measure ($\underline{r}$ = .74) and the

Abbreviated Loneliness Scale ($\underline{r}$ = .72). RULS scores

were highly correlated to constructs related to

loneliness, such as depression (Beck Inventory, $\underline{r}$ =

.62), and not as highly correlated to non-related

constructs, such as anxiety (Costello-Comrey Scale, $\underline{r}$ =

.32) (Russell, et al.). This supports the discriminant

validity of the RULS. (See Schmidt & Sermat, 1983;
Vincenzi & Grabosky, 1987, for reviews of loneliness
assessment tools.)

The RULS consists of 20 statements designed to
measure loneliness. Ten are worded positively (e.g.
"There are people who really understand me") and ten
are worded negatively (e.g. "There is no one I can turn
to") to prevent response bias for either high or low
scores. The 20 statements of the RULS were preceded by
the following instructions: "With your church in mind,
indicate how often you have felt the way described in
each statement." Subjects in this study were asked to
respond to each statement on a scale of 1-4, with 1
indicating "I have never felt this way at church" and 4
indicating "I have felt this way often at church." The
addition of the words "at church" was the only
adaptation made to the RULS portion of the survey.
After responses to the reversed statements were
recoded, the responses to the 20 statements were
summed, so the lowest possible score on the RULS was 20
and the highest was 80.

The first part of question 8 utilized a 5-point
scale with 1 indicating "My church is not important to
me" and 5 indicating "My church means everything to

me." The second part of question 8 (which was later reverse coded) also utilized a 5-point scale with 1 indicating "I depend totally on the emotional support of my church family" and 5 indicating "I have many people to whom I turn for support apart from my church."

Each subject was also asked to indicate her age, marital status (never married, married, married but separated, divorced, or widowed), and the number of years she has attended the church she presently attends. Additional questions addressed whether the husband (if applicable) attended church, and two final questions assessed the importance of the church as a support system to the subject. A copy of the instrument can be found in Appendix A.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed at the conclusion of the morning session of the conference. As a group, the subjects were asked to participate in a study of social interactions in the Church, and assured that their responses would remain anonymous. They were told that no one but this researcher would ever see individual response sheets, although the overall results of the study would be made available to anyone

who desired them. Subjects were asked to complete the questionnaires and return them to a box in the back of the room to ensure anonymity. In the three Sunday School classes, questionnaires were distributed at the conclusion of the class time and subjects were asked to return them to a large envelope in the back of the room. These were then sealed and mailed to this researcher. All procedures had been approved by Portland State University's Human Subjects Research Review Committee and met the American Psychological Association's criteria for treatment of human research participants.

Interviews were also conducted with Senior Pastors of two large churches (membership over 150) and an Associate Pastor of a large church currently without a Senior Pastor which are all part of the Oregon Pacific District of the Church of the Nazarene. These interviews focused on four main questions: (1) How many women who worship alone attend your church? (2) What do you suppose to be the special needs of these women? (3) What do you currently do to meet those needs? (4) In what ways, if any, does the church reach out to these women's unchurched husbands and children? The results of these interviews were compared with the

actual data to assess church leaders' awareness of women who worship alone. The primary purpose in gathering the interview data was to enhance the future application of the statistical results of this study.

Results

Importance. The scores on the two parts of question 8 were summed to provide a composite importance score, with a possible value ranging between 2 and 10. Mean importance scores for SWA, MWA, and MWH were 7.64 ($\underline{SD}$ = 1.37), 7.20 ($\underline{SD}$ = 1.28), and 7.67 ($\underline{SD}$ = 1.42), respectively.

Attendance. For the entire sample, years of attendance at the present church ranged from 1 to 60. Of these, 45.9% reported 5 years or less of attendance in their present church. Mean years of attendance for SWA, MWA, and MWH were 6.36 ($\underline{SD}$ = 6.94), 8.74 ($\underline{SD}$ = 8.52), and 14.83 ($\underline{SD}$ = 14.51), respectively. The number of years a woman had attended her church was positively correlated to the composite importance score ($\underline{r}$ = .2179, $\underline{p}$ = .01). The difference in mean age for the three groups should be taken into account when comparing years of attendance between groups.

The number of times respondents reported attending church per month ranged from 2 to 20. By far the most

frequent response (29.3% of the sample) was 12 times per month. This would include Sunday morning and evening services plus midweek Bible studies or group meetings. Mean times attended per month for SWA, MWA, and MWH were 9.18 ($\underline{SD}$ = 4.83), 8.75 ($\underline{SD}$ = 3.86), and 11.09 ($\underline{SD}$ = 4.27), respectively.

The number of times participants reported that husbands attended church per month ranged from 0 to 23. As with the women, 12 times per month was the attendance mode for the men (22.9% of the sample).

<u>Reliability of loneliness items.</u> Inter-item correlations were derived for each of the 20 items of the RULS. Items 7f, 7g, 7j, 7k, 7m, 7o, 7p, 7q, 7r, 7s, and 7t correlated significantly ($\underline{p}$ < .01 or $\underline{p}$ < .001) with all items except 7d. Item 7a, 7b, 7c, 7e, 7l, and 7n correlated significantly with 17 other items, none with 7d. Item 7h correlated significantly with 16 other items and item 7i had significant correlations with 13 other items. Item 7d only correlated significantly with one other, with most of the correlations below 0.1. Item 7d stated "I do not feel alone." The scoring options were: "I have felt this way often (sometimes, rarely, or never) at church." The double negative required in responding to

this item may cloud the answers.

Reliability for the 20 RULS items was analyzed and Cronbach's alpha is .9231. The analysis revealed that deleting item 7d would increase alpha to .9321. Deletion of any other RULS item would lower alpha.

Because the alpha including this item was still high, and for the sake of comparability with the other literature using this scale, this item was retained. All 20 items in the adapted RULS were summed into possible loneliness scores ranging from 20 to 80.

Loneliness items. Mean scores for each of the individual items from the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Appendix A, items 7a through 7t) were analyzed for the three groups. For all twenty items, the MWA group mean was either close to the other group means, or indicated greater loneliness. For no item did the MWA group report that they were "less lonely" than the other groups. This item-by-item overview suggested that the differences might be significant. Summed loneliness scores for this sample are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Summed Loneliness Scores by Groups

Group	N	Mean Score	SD
SWA	28	33.00	8.55
MWA	20	41.65	7.13
MWH	96	36.66	11.85
All subjects	144	36.64	10.95

Correlations. For the entire sample, RULS loneliness scores correlated significantly with years of attendance at the present church (r = -.26, p = .01) and with the importance of the church as a support system (r = -.35, p = .001). ANOVA. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated, with the loneliness scores as the dependent variable and the three marital/worship status groups as the independent variable. Between group differences were found to be significant, F(2, 141) = 3.7791, p = .0252. Student-Newman-Keuls post hoc procedures showed that only the difference between SWA and MWA was statistically significant (p < .05), with MWA reporting higher levels

of loneliness than SWA. Although no other differences were found to be significant, a regression analysis was conducted. This was based on per item observations previously mentioned and the overall differences in mean loneliness scores reported in Table 1.

Regression. Marital/worship status and importance were the independent variables and loneliness was the dependent variable. The three groups were dummy coded. The first coded vector (X1) compared SWA and MWA. The second vector (X2) compared MWA and MWH. The responses to the final two questions on the importance of the church as a support system were summed to create an "importance" variable. Using hierarchical regression, the interaction of importance and marital/worship status was tested.

The whole model, with marital/worship status, importance variables, and their interactions was significant, $F(5, 139) = 6.79$, $p = .0000$. A second multiple regression was calculated, omitting the interaction variables. The interaction between marital/worship status and importance was significant, Fchange$(2, 138) = 3.43$, $p < .05$. R^2 and adjusted R^2 for both regressions are reported in Table 2. Regression coefficients for the model including the

interactions are reported in Table 3.

Table 2

R² and adjusted R² for Regression Analysis

	R^2	adjusted R^2
Regression		
with interactions	.19842	.16937
without interactions	.16121	.14324
R^2 change	.03721	

Table 3

Regression Analysis Results

Variable	B	ß	t	p
Vector X1	-13.70	-.50	-.81	.42
Vector X2	18.44	.80	1.30	.20
Importance	-.60	-.08	-.33	.74
Interaction1	.70	.20	.30	.76
Interaction2	-3.02	-1.05	-1.57	.12
Constant	45.94			

Three equations can be derived from the multiple
regression analysis, one for each marital/worship
status group. With y denoting loneliness, the
equations for the three groups are:

$$y(SWA) = .0991(Importance) + 32.2422$$

$$y(MWA) = -.5962(Importance) + 45.9423$$

$$y(MWH) = -3.6167(Importance) + 64.3845$$

A graph of the equations appears in Figure 1.

_____

Insert Figure 1 about here

_____

For SWA, the importance of the church as a social
support had minimal impact on loneliness levels. For
MWA, the importance had a negative relation to reported
loneliness levels. On the graph, MWH had the highest
level of loneliness for low levels of importance and
the lowest level of loneliness for high levels of
importance. The lines intersect, supporting the
presence of an interaction between marital/worship
status and importance in the reported levels of
loneliness.

Interviews. The first interviewee estimated that
about 20 women worshipped alone in his congregation
weekly: 10 older widows, 4 never-marrieds, and 6

married women alone. With an average attendance of
180, he estimated about 11% were women worshipping
alone. The second pastor responded to the question
"How many women who worship alone attend your church?"
with a gasp and the words "I've never even thought
about it." After some thought, he guessed about 50
single women and 30 married women who worship alone.
This comprised 11% of his average Sunday morning
attendance of 700. The third interviewee estimated 50
single women and 10 married women worshipping alone out
of 900 average attendance: less than 7%.

All of these estimates fell below the percentages
found in the actual research sample. Of 144 subjects,
14% were MWA and 19.4% were SWA, for a total of 33.4%
of the sample as women who worship alone. Based on
these percentages, even if one assumed that the average
congregation was 50% women and 50% men (church research
shows a higher percentage of women), one would expect
17.7% of a given congregation to be women worshipping
alone.

None of the three interviewees were able to
specify a special need that married women worshipping
alone might have. For single women, several
hypothesized needs and the churches' responses were

given. These included a support group for widows, child care for single moms one night a week, a women's finance class, and an annual Divorce Recovery workshop. None of the interviewees could point to something which was done specifically for married women worshipping alone or to reach out to non-attending husbands or children.

Discussion

According to a recent study done by the Barna Research Group (Barna, 1991), 36% of the women and 43% of the men who identified themselves as Christians reported attending church 4 or 5 Sundays a month. Of the same sample, 34% of the women and 22% of the men reported participating in a weekly Bible Study or growth group. This is comparable to the attendance means and modes for the current study sample with 12 times monthly suggesting Sunday morning and evening services plus a weekly small group meeting.

A social concept with powerful implications for married women who worship alone was identified by Robert E. Park (1950; see also, Stonequist, 1937.) Speaking of racial and cultural barriers, Stonequist described the marginal man who "is most clearly portrayed in those individuals who are unwittingly

initiated into two or more historic traditions, languages, political loyalties, moral codes, or religions" (p. 3). The marginal person is one who "lives in two worlds, but is not quite at home in either" (p. 51). The otherwise happily married woman whose husband does not share a faith which means much to her will certainly fit the definition of a marginal woman. She may experience her marriage as incomplete because of the lack of a shared faith. She may also feel that something is missing in her church/worship experience if her husband does not share it with her. She will experience the loneliness of the conflict between two worlds which do not intersect. This concept is related to that of social network density and may bring clearer understanding of this study.

The results of this study support the hypothesis that married women who worship alone experience greater loneliness in the church than single women do. The results do not significantly support the hypothesis that married women worshipping alone experience more loneliness than those worshipping with their husbands. However, when the importance of the church as a support system, and the interaction between group and importance were added, differences show up between the

two groups of married women.

The mean importance of the church as a social support was virtually the same for all three groups, but it appeared to affect each group differently. The data suggest that the church as a means of social integration signifies a different kind of experience for women worshipping alone than for those attending with their husbands.

When the importance of the church as a support system was low, married women who worshipped with their husbands reported the highest levels of loneliness in the church of all three groups. When the importance of the church was high, these women reported the lowest levels of loneliness of all groups.

Perhaps the married women who worship with their husbands who reported that the church was of low importance as a social support to them attended church at their husbands' request, or due to pressure from their husbands. In future studies, light could be shed on this issue if the husbands were asked to complete the questionnaire and responses were matched and compared with those of the wives.

Another explanation may be that because these women attend with their husbands, their social network

is denser and they place higher expectations for social support on that network. If they find the support they desire, they are less lonely, but if the church does not meet their expectations, they may be disappointed, decide they "can't depend on these people after all," and feel lonely. For a married couple, worshipping together may deepen their marital relationship. They have more to talk about, more shared content, and more shared intimacy through prayer and worship. In this study, married women who worship with their husbands appeared to benefit when the church became a source of social support to them. For these women, the inverse relationship between importance and loneliness was the strongest.

The married woman who worships alone might desire this shared relationship intensely and experience inner conflict as part of her overall church social integration experience. In fact, this inner conflict between her two worlds may increase as the church becomes more important in her life, thus minimizing the "loneliness lowering" power of the church as a source of social support.

According to the <u>Manual of the Church of the Nazarene</u> (1993), members are encouraged to "abide in

hearty fellowship with the church . . . actively involved in its continuing outreach" (p. 38). The Manual also states "the Christian family, knit together in a common bond through Jesus Christ, is a circle of love, fellowship, and worship to be earnestly cultivated" (p. 47). This may cause the married woman worshipping alone to feel that she has failed to live up to her church's expectations, and, ultimately, feel that she has disappointed the God whom she worships.

Conversely, the importance of the church as a social support may have less impact on loneliness because her "other world" provides her with more distant avenues of meeting social needs.

The single woman experiences this social integration in yet another way. She enters the church social network alone, but she does not have the "other world" force of a non-attending husband pulling her in another direction. She may enter the church context as completely as she desires.

The church needs to pay close attention to those who attend week after week without a spouse. The pastoral interviews lend support to the lack of network density for the married woman who worships alone. Pastors could identify single, divorced, or widowed

women, but had difficulty in recalling those married
women who came to church alone. These women were less
involved in the church than others, and seemed to have
established a smaller social network, which often did
not lead to contact with the pastor as the "head" of
the social system.

The interviews underscored the lack of deliberate
awareness of or attempts to meet the needs of women
worshipping alone. All three pastors gave responses
like, "If you're a couple, everyone comes to you,
invites you over. If you're a single person, there's a
reluctance," "I've never even thought about it," and
"If there's a crisis, we're there, otherwise they're
kind of forgotten." Those attempts that were made
appeared to be designed for single women (including
divorced or widowed). Apparently, those efforts have
been effective because single women reported the lowest
levels of loneliness in the church of all three groups
in this study. Unless deliberate, intentional plans
are put into place to provide support for **married** women
who worship alone, these responses suggest that this
segment of the worshipping congregation will be
forgotten.

Married women who worship alone have special needs

that may cause them to feel isolated within a church full of worshipping family units. The marginal nature of their identity as church attenders limits their ability to form bonds and build social networks. The church would be well advised to reach out to the non-attending husbands and build relationships, whether or not they ever become attenders. This would bring together her church world and her family world, decreasing marginality and increasing network density, and hopefully lessen the loneliness of her church experience.

This study only looked at one denomination in one geographic area. Other denominations may have differing expectations for attendance, or for actively sharing the content of one's beliefs with one's spouse. Studies in other faith groups or other geographic areas would provide a clearer picture of the generalizability of these results. This would also give information as to whether denominations differ in their appeal to (or acceptance of) women who worship alone. Further work along these lines is recommended.

A larger sample would hopefully provide larger numbers of women who worship alone, both single and married. This would allow for exploring potential

differences between divorced, never married, maritally separated, and widowed women. A larger sample might also increase the power of statistical tests between married women worshipping alone and those worshipping with husbands suggested in the item-by-item analysis and differences in mean loneliness scores.

Future analyses could improve on this study if age and years of attendance at the church were controlled for. Earlier studies have shown a relationship between age and reported loneliness. It is also possible that reported loneliness levels for individuals in all three groups were affected by the number of other women within their marital/worship status group in their own local church. Future studies might investigate this variable.

Another limitation of this study was that interviews were only done with pastors of large churches. Since the vast majority of churches in the United States average less than 100 in weekly attendance, further research should include interviews with pastors and lay leaders of smaller churches as well. Smaller congregations may have a higher awareness of married women who worship alone, or even a higher percentage of such worshippers.

The church may capitalize on its unique position as a facilitator of social integration. This study suggests that the most effective way to help a married woman who worships with her husband is to increase the social support value of the church in her life. This may be accomplished through traditional women's ministries opportunities. These may not be the most effective way to assist the married woman who worships alone. She would benefit more from ministries designed to integrate her home, work, and/or family worlds with her church world, to nurture a greater social network density.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Graph of regression equations.
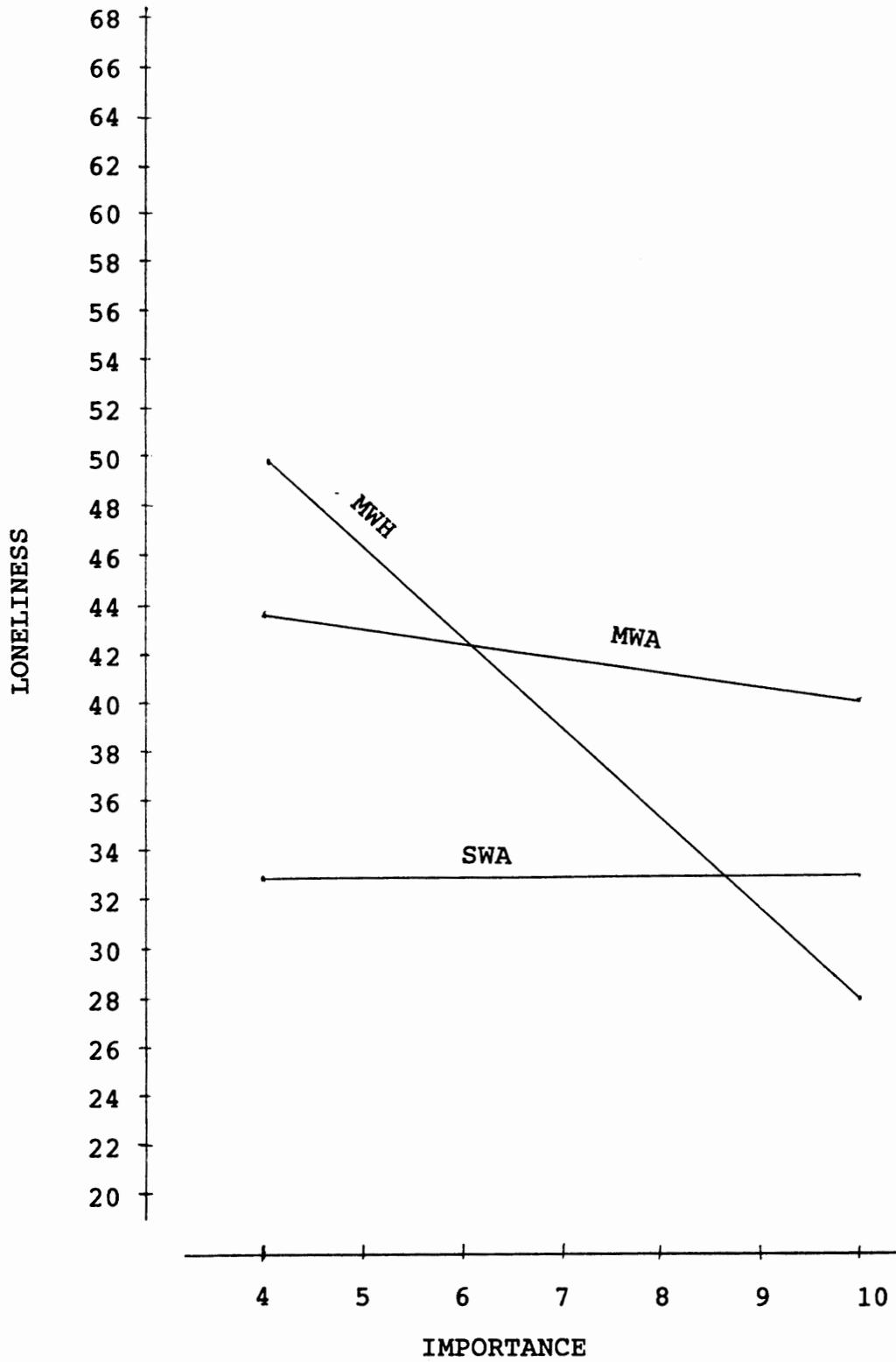
APPENDIX 1: SOCIAL INTERACTIONS SURVEY

Please complete the following survey, then return it to the box at the back of the Sanctuary. Respond to each statement or question; do not leave any box blank. Do not write your name on this page.

1. What is your age? _____

2. How many years have you attended the church you presently attend? _____

3. How many times do you attend church in a typical month? _____

4. What is your marital status? (check one)
   ☐ Never Married   ☐ Married
   ☐ Divorced   ☐ Married, but separated
   ☐ Widowed

5. If you are married, does your husband attend church regularly?
   ☐ Yes, with me   ☐ Yes, at another church   ☐ No

6. If you are married, how many times does your husband attend church in a typical month? _____

7. We would like you to answer some questions with your church in mind. Indicate how often you have felt the way described in each statement using the following scale:

   4 = "I have felt this way *often* at church."
   3 = "I have felt this way *sometimes* at church."
   2 = "I have felt this way *rarely* at church."
   1 = "I have *never* felt this way at church."

   _____   a. I feel in tune with the people around me.

   _____   b. I lack companionship.

   _____   c. There is no one I can turn to.

   _____   d. I do not feel alone.

   _____   e. I feel part of a group of friends.

   _____   f. I have a lot in common with the people around me.

   _____   g. I am no longer close to anyone.

With your church still in mind, indicate how often you have felt the way described in each statement using the following scale:

4 = "I have felt this way *often* at church."
3 = "I have felt this way *sometimes* at church."
2 = "I have felt this way *rarely* at church."
1 = "I have *never* felt this way at church."

_____   h.   My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me.

_____   i.   I am an outgoing person.

_____   j.   There are people I feel close to.

_____   k.   I feel left out.

_____   l.   My social relationships are superficial.

_____   m.   No one really knows me well.

_____   n.   I feel isolated from others.

_____   o.   I can find companionship when I want it.

_____   p.   There are people who really understand me.

_____   q.   I am unhappy being so withdrawn.

_____   r.   People are around me but not with me.

_____   s.   There are people I can talk to.

_____   t.   There are people I can turn to.

8. Circle the number on the line at the point that most accurately describes your feelings:

1	2	3	4	5
My church is not important to me			My church means everything to me	

1	2	3	4	5
I depend totally on the emotional support of my church family		I gain emotional support from my church family AND from other sources		I don't look for emotional support from my church family