Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of single elderly women’s intimate relationships after they became widows or got divorced. By exploring their self-experience, we can understand the way they interpret their intimate relationships and their feelings within these relationships. In this study, we view things from three dimensions—“the nature, the development, and the factor”—to inspect their life experience in these intimate relationships.

The methodology applied in this study was based on quantitative method, and data were collected by semi-structured in-depth interviews. Total 8 valid samples aged between 62 to 87 years old were gathered, among which there are 5 living in Taipei as well as 3 in Taoyuan, Taichung, and Miaoli separately.

Research results show as below:

1. Interviewers’ points of view on element, expression, and perception of their intimate relationship showed the nature of single elderly women’s intimate relationship: (1) “Careness, commonality, and appreciation” are the major elements that compose single elderly women’s intimate relationship. (2) “Being alone and lonely” as well as “being coupled and accompanied” are two reasons that why single elderly women would like to have a company again. Moreover, the ways to express their intimate relationships can be divided into actions of daily life and speech or behavior that imply love and sex. (3) “The romance of falling in love” and “the reality of getting on a life” as well as “the gratitude and loyalty of being friends” consist of the main sensation in single elderly women’s intimate relationship.

2. The process of interviewers’ relationships with their boyfriends, such as how it started, in what context it developed, and why to continue, showed that: (1) “Being motivated by others” and “the right opportunity” are the reasons to start the relationships. (2) “Autonomy” and “liberty” are the paths these relationships follow, according to which the boundaries can be placed so that the dilemma of being intimate or being independent can be coordinated. (3) “They worth it” and “looking on the bright side” are the basis to keep the relationship going; the former is the motivation to care and the latter is the wisdom to live in the present in their late in life.
3. Interviewers’ interpretations of self-experience in these relationships revealed that there are 5 factors that affect the development of those relationships: (1) “Conditions of both sides” affect these relationships through commonality and autonomy. (2) “Bad memory from previous marriage” does not necessarily make them not willing to have a relationship again, rather it causes them realize what preparation should they make for it and find out new definition of intimate relationship. (3) “The attitude of children” may affect how the relationship will be but can not decide whether the relationship will continue; the final call is held in the elderly women’s hands. (4) “The power of belief” can influence their recognition during their hard times and make them change their point of views on these relationships so as to keep these relationships on. (5) “The standpoint of the public” set single elderly women in certain conventional frames. Although these women recognize these frames, they have courage and toughness to gain self-interpretation to feel free from worry in these relationships.

Keywords: elderly women, single, intimate relationship, autonomy