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COMMENTARIES

Caught in the Cultural Lag: The Stigma of Singlehood

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The United States is unquestionably a promarriage society. The observation that marriage is a more desirable status than singlehood has been trumpeted in recent popular books including *The Case for Marriage* (Waite & Gallagher, 2000), *Creating a Life* (Hewlett, 2002), and *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us* (Crittenden, 2000) and has guided the implementation of promarriage social policies, including "covenant marriage," and economic and tax policies that favor married couples (e.g., Nock, Wright, & Sanchez, 2002). Popular "reality" television shows, situation comedies, and films owe a posthumous screenwriter's credit to Jane Austen, as their final scenes often fade to a dreamily enamored heterosexual couple at (or on their way to) the altar (Wetzstein, 2001).

Few observers would question that cultural images, public policies, and personal attitudes elevate the status and value of heterosexual marriage relative to single life in the United States today. DePaulo and Morris (this issue) take this observation one important leap further. They argue that pervasive and largely uncontested support for the Ideology of Marriage and Family has quietly generated a more pernicious yet barely acknowledged phenomenon called "singlism," or prejudice and discrimination targeted against the unmarried. The persistence of singlism, they argue, is evident in multiple studies documenting negative attitudes toward unmarried persons (e.g., Morris, DePaulo, Hertel, & Ritter, 2004). Of even greater concern to DePaulo and Morris is that uncontested beliefs about the supremacy of marriage as a cultural ideal are perpetuated (unintentionally) by the social scientific community. Social science research often begins with the unacknowledged and uncontested assumption that a comparison between "married" versus "unmarried" persons is a meaningful and important contrast. Similarities between the two groups are often ignored, and differences (particularly those differences where the single fare worse than the married) are attributed to the less desirable aspects of singlehood or, worse yet, to personal deficiencies of the single persons themselves.

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) provide a timely, compelling, and exciting springboard for further investigating the ways that civil (marital) status shapes human experience. Rather than critiquing their argument, we hope to push it in new directions by evaluating more rigorously the claim that single persons are the target of stigmatization. To do so, we first revisit classic and contemporary conceptualizations of stigma and evaluate the extent to which singles both meet and depart from the criteria set forth by Goffman (1963) and others. Second, we challenge the notion that prejudicial beliefs toward single persons are sufficient evidence that single persons are stigmatized. Rather, we propose that single persons themselves must perceive that they are the targets of mistreatment (regardless of their attribution for it) to demonstrate stigmatization. Third, we conduct empirical analyses, based on the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) study, to evaluate whether unmarried persons differ from married persons in their perceptions that they have been the target of interpersonal and institutional discrimination. Fourth, we explore possible explanations for our empirical finding that single people report interpersonal mistreatment but not institutional discrimination. We propose that singles are caught in a "cultural lag" (Ogburn, 1922) between macrosocial changes that encourage and sustain singlehood as a desirable option and slow-to-change cultural ideals that still elevate marriage as the ideal state. Promarriage ideology (and consequently, single stigma) will persist until scholars and laypersons (a) recognize and question the privileges afforded to married persons, (b) acknowledge that problematic aspects of marriage and family life are

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indicative of "public issues" rather than "private troubles" (Mills, 1959), and (c) investigate more fully the adaptive and creative ways that unmarried persons construct their own unique sets of "family" relationships. Finally, we propose that the development of "singleness studies" as a field of academic inquiry may be an important step in chipping away at singlism both in science and society.

Is Singlehood a Stigmatized Identity?

Are singles stigmatized in the United States today? If early conceptualizations of stigma are used as the criteria, then the answer is a resounding "yes." Goffman (1963, p. 3) defined stigma as any personal attribute that is "discrediting" to its possessors and that reduces such a person "from a whole and usual person to a tainted and discounted one." Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) elaborate that stigma refers to "a social identity that is devalued in a particular context." As DePaulo and Morris argue persuasively, research conducted over the past 20 years shows that unmarried persons are viewed as less likeable (Krueger, Heckhausen, & Hundertmark, 1995) and more physically unattractive, lonely, and shy than their married peers (Morris et al., 2004). Single people are particularly likely to be denigrated if they are deemed "responsible" for their solitary civil status. Unmarried persons often are viewed as responsible for their single status due to some characterological flaw or "blemish," such as promiscuity, immaturity, self-centeredness, or a lack of personal discipline (e.g., Davis & Strong, 1977; Morris et al. 2004). The extent to which singlehood is stigmatized is closely tied to context (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998); young unmarried college students are considered perfectly acceptable, whereas 40-something unmarried persons are viewed as pitiful, past their prime, and hopeless in their quest for a lasting love (Kruger et al., 1995; Morris et al., 2004).

Whereas Goffman defined stigma in terms of social desirability and acceptance, more recent definitions characterize stigma as the violation of widely accepted norms. For instance, Stafford and Scott (1986, p. 80) describe stigma as "a characteristic … that is contrary to a norm of a social unit," where "norm" refers to a "shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time." According to this definition, too, singles are clearly stigmatized. Both behavioral and attitudinal data underscore that marriage is "normative": More than 90% of all Americans will marry at some point in their lives (Connidis, 1991), and survey data consistently show most Americans believe it is better to be married than to go through life single (e.g., Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001).

However, one innovative reconceptualization of the stigma process suggests that single people may *not* necessarily constitute a "stigmatized" group. Link and Phelan (2001) suggest that evidence of antisingle attitudes alone does not necessarily support the claim that single persons are a stigmatized group. Rather, Link and Phelan argued that stigma exists when four interrelated components converge: labeling, stereotyping, separation, and status loss/discrimination. Specifically, they proposed that the first step of the stigmatization process is the creation and labeling of oversimplified groups believed to be different from one another, where some groups are viewed as superior to the others. Although there may be tremendous variability within such groupings, this variability is often ignored. Single persons fit into the first steps of the stigmatization process. Both in public rhetoric and scholarly work, as DePaulo and Morris observe, "singles" are often viewed as a monolithic group. Although unmarried persons are a highly diverse population, comprising the always single, the formerly married, singles who hope to be married someday, gay singles who are not allowed to marry, and so on, they are typically treated as a very broad analytic category in social scientific research. Married persons, too, are typically treated analytically as a monolithic category; only on rare occasions do scholars stratify the broad "married" category according to the duration, order (e.g., 1st, 2nd) or quality of one's marriage.

Link and Phelan (2001) further proposed that a core component of the stigma process is that the labeled person experiences discrimination and status loss, which in turn may have harmful consequences for their life chances, including their psychological, economic, and physical well-being. According to this criteria, it is unclear whether singles are stigmatized. We know of no studies that have evaluated directly whether unmarried persons are more likely than married persons to experience discrimination, either in their interactions with major social institutions (e.g., employers or realtors) or on a daily, interpersonal basis. Rather, most studies document prejudicial attitudes toward fictitious or abstract "single people" using quasi-experimental designs, and presume that these attitudes will necessarily lead to discriminatory treatment (e.g., Conley & Collins, 2002; Morris et al., 2004).[1]

The assumption that antisingle attitudes will be translated into discriminatory behaviors is questionable, however, given the powerful evidence that attitudes are only weakly related to actual behavior (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, for review). Moreover, few studies directly evaluate whether members of purport-

[1]Prejudice refers to negative attitudes and beliefs about members of a particular group, whereas discrimination refers to overt negative and unequal treatment of members of a given social group solely because of their membership in that group (Allport, 1954).

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edly stigmatized groups suffer from disadvantaged life chances due explicitly to discrimination. Rather, "discrimination" is invoked as a post-hoc explanation when members of a socially devalued group show a disadvantage in an important life domain, such as economic or emotional well-being. For example, numerous studies document that unmarried persons (especially men) have lower earnings and occupational status than married persons. This disadvantage typically is attributed post hoc to "bias" or "discrimination" even when no direct measures of such experiences are obtained (e.g., Antonovics & Town, 2004: Bellas, 1992; Toutkoushian, 1998).

We believe it is important to explore individuals' *own perceptions* that they have been treated in a discriminatory manner, *regardless of their attribution for that treatment*. We agree with DePaulo and Morris' assertion that singlism is so subtle and uncontested that even single persons themselves may not perceive that they are treated in an inappropriate or unkind way due to their civil status. However, we do believe that documenting whether single persons' perceptions of experiencing interpersonal or institutional mistreatment (regardless of their attribution) is an important line of inquiry that may reveal the specific ways that singlism is manifested and experienced.

The Subtle Stigma of Singlehood: Empirical Evidence

To investigate whether single persons differ from married persons in their reports of experiencing interpersonal and institutional discrimination, we examined data from the Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) survey, a random sample survey of more than 3,000 men and women ages 25 to 74 in 1995. The MIDUS is the only nationally representative survey we know of that asks Americans whether they have ever been the target of a wide array of interpersonal and institutional discrimination experiences. We conducted logistic regression analyses to evaluate the likelihood that a never married person, currently cohabiting person, and formerly married person (i.e., separated, divorced, or widowed) reports having experienced each of nine forms of interpersonal discrimination and 11 types of major institutional discrimination. Currently married persons are the reference group. Specifically, respondents are asked the following two questions: "How many times in your life have you been discriminated against in each of the following ways because of such things as your race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or other characteristics?" and "How often on a day-to-day basis do you experience each of the following types of discrimination?" The response to each question is coded "yes" if a respondent indicates any such experiences. The complete list of discriminatory experiences is displayed in Table 1.

We evaluated gross effects models, which reveal the unadjusted likelihood that a single person reports discrimination. We also evaluated net effect models, so that we can control for possible confounding factors. Past studies have revealed that never married persons tend to be less well-educated and younger than their married peers. African Americans, overweight persons, persons with poor physical health, and persons with depressive symptoms are also less likely than Whites, thinner persons, and persons with high levels of positive physical and mental health to be married (e.g., Mastekaasa, 1992; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Because personal characteristics, such as race, sexual orientation, or health status, may also affect one's experiences of interpersonal and institutional discrimination, we control for such characteristics in our analysis. In doing so, we can better pinpoint the effect of marital status on perceptions of discriminatory treatment. We estimated models for men and women separately, given that singlehood is experienced very differently by men and women (Bernard, 1972; DePaulo & Morris, this issue). The results of our analysis are presented in Table 1; we present results for never-married persons only.

We found that never married persons are much more likely than their married peers to report discriminatory treatment, yet this treatment occurred largely in informal, interpersonal exchanges (net of possible social selection and confounding factors). Single men are more likely than married men to say they have been treated rudely, as if they are not smart, as if others are afraid, and as if they are dishonest. They are also more likely to say they have been threatened or harassed. However, single men were no more likely to report having experienced *any* of the 11 possible forms of institutional discrimination, and were less likely than married men to report having been denied a bank loan. Generally similar patterns are documented for women. Compared to married women, never married women are more likely to report that they've been treated with less respect than others, received poorer service at restaurants, were called names, or were threatened or harassed. Single women were not significantly different from married women in their reports of having experienced 10 of the 11 forms of institutional discrimination, although they were more likely to say that they had ever been hassled by the police.

We also explored whether cohabiting unmarried persons and formerly married (i.e., divorced, separated, or widowed) persons were more likely to report experiences of discrimination, compared to married persons. (Complete results are available from second author.) Cohabiting men are no more likely than married men to report any form of interpersonal or institutional discrimination, although cohabiting women did

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Table 1. *Summary of Logistic Regression Models Predicting the Effect of Singlehood Status (Versus Currently Married Status) on the Likelihood That One Reports Having Ever Experienced Interpersonal and Institutional Discrimination*

	Men		Women	
	Gross Effects	**Net Effect**	**Gross Effect**	**Net Effect**
Interpersonal Discrimination				
Treated with less courtesy than others.	1.89***	1.43*	2.10***	1.38
Treated with less respect than others.	1.78**	1.29	2.42***	1.58*
Receive poorer service than other people in restaurants.	1.65**	1.30	2.51***	1.63**
People act as if they are afraid of you.	1.98***	1.53*	2.05***	1.37
People act as if they think you are dishonest.	2.03***	1.58**	1.98***	1.18
People act as if they think you are not as good as they are.	1.85***	1.37	1.96***	1.18
You are called names or insulted.	1.69**	1.19	2.75**	1.88*
You are threatened or harassed.	2.04***	1.47*	2.27***	1.56*
Institutional Discrimination				
Discouraged by a teacher from seeking higher education.	1.65	1.27	1.75*	.98
Denied a scholarship.	1.93	.88	1.06	.44
Not hired for a job.	1.36	.94	1.72**	1.06
Not given a job promotion.	1.16	.92	1.95**	1.23
Were fired.	1.84*	1.17	1.591	.12
Prevented from renting or buying a home in the neighborhood you wanted.	1.94	1.21	1.14	.59
Were prevented from remaining in the neighborhood because neighbors made life so uncomfortable.	2.97*	2.14	1.91	2.05
Were hassled by the police.	2.67***	1.29	4.90***	2.67**
Were denied a bank loan.	.55	.42*	1.65	1.08
Were denied or provided inferior medical care.	2.11	.99	.91	.67
Were denied or provided inferior service by a plumber, car mechanic, or other service provider.	1.27	.88	2.07**	1.41

Notes. Gross effect models reveal whether "never married" persons are significantly different from "currently married" persons in their reports of having ever experienced discrimination, before any other characteristics are controlled. Net effect models reveal whether "never married" persons are significantly different from "currently married" persons in their reports of perceived discrimination, after age, race, cohabiting status, formerly married status, education, income, sexual orientation, body mass index (BMI), self-rated physical health, and depressive symptoms are controlled.

Exponentiated betas or (odds ratios) are presented.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

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report elevated levels of mistreatment by the police and of being made to feel uncomfortable in their own neighborhood. Our analysis demonstrates that the stigma of singlism persists, but in a very specific way, and for never-married unpartnered persons moreso than for formerly married persons, or for unmarried cohabitants. Importantly, singles are more likely than married persons to report experiences of interpersonal mistreatment but not institutional discrimination.

We believe these findings underscore an important observation of Link and Phelan (2001): "stigma is a matter of degree … some groups are more stigmatized than others." Cohabiting and formerly married singles may be less subject to stigmatization then never married unpartnered singles, who, in turn may not be as highly stigmatized as other frequently "discredited" subgroups, such as mentally ill persons, substance abusers, and members of ethnic and racial minorities. Still, the fact that single people *do* report interpersonal mistreatment calls for an investigation of the question "Why?" Why are single persons more likely than marrieds to experience mistreatment at the hands of friends, acquaintances, and waitstaff at restaurants yet *not* more likely to report obstacles in getting or keeping a job, renting or buying the home of their dreams, and securing the bank loan to buy that dream home? We believe that singles are caught in a normative and cultural lag; although demographic patterns and other major social changes are creating an historical and social context where singles may lead lives that are as rich and fulfilling as married persons, cultural values and attitudes still blithely endorse and perpetuate the Ideology of Marriage and Family.

Why Does Interpersonal Discrimination Persist? Cultural Lag

Rapid social change may produce a cultural lag, where one element of a culture or society changes more quickly than another (Ogburn, 1922). Singles may be caught in such a "lag" or the delay between the point in time when social conditions change, and the time that cultural adjustments are made. DePaulo and Morris (this issue) marshall extensive empirical evidence to document that social conditions have indeed changed over the past three decades. Demographic data reveal not only that fewer Americans are marrying and staying married today but also that the proportion of adults remaining single until their 30s, 40s, and even 50s is higher than ever before (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Reproductive technologies enable

unpartnered women (and gay partners) to have a biological child outside of the traditional heterosexual relationship. Practices such as surrogate mothering, in vitro fertilization, and new biotechnologies, such as gene splicing, cloning, and genetic engineering, mean that reproduction is no longer linked inextricably to biological (and married) parents (Rifkin, 1998).

The functional bases for traditional marriage also have started to erode over the past four decades. A gradual blurring of gender-typed social roles in the home and workplace today means that men and women no longer need to find a partner to fulfill the expressive and instrumental marital roles (respectively) that traditionally were performed by a member of the opposite sex (Becker, 1981). Women's educational and occupational opportunities have expanded drastically over the past four decades, thus women's economic need to find a spouse have declined considerably (Carr, 2002). Likewise, as each consecutive cohort of men becomes increasingly willing to engage in homemaking and childcare tasks, men's need to find a homemaker, child care provider, and helpmate have diminished (Coltrane, 1996).

If the functional bases for traditional marriage are eroding, then why do promarriage (or antisingle) cultural beliefs remain so intransigent? Why is marriage still held up us the most cherished of all relationships, and as *the* most important relationship for fulfilling an individual's needs for intimacy, love, and nurturance (e.g., Barrett & McIntosh, 1982; Bourdieu, 1996; Jamieson, 1999)? Accordingly, why are all other emotional relationships—with siblings, friends, coworkers, and uncommitted romantic partners—viewed as "second-class" arrangements, or as relationships that will be placed promptly on the backburner when one marries? Most importantly, why are unmarried persons—even persons who maintain healthy nonmarital relationships—still viewed as less desirable, moral, respected, and happy than their married peers?

We propose three reasons why the Ideology of Marriage and Family is so slow to change. First, marriage (and the nuclear family, more generally) is so taken for granted as the "norm" that few actively recognize or contest the fact that *marriage is an institution of privilege*. Conformity to the Ideology of Marriage and Family is rewarded with "economic, cultural, and symbolic privilege" (Bourdieu, 1996). The state confers social, financial, and legal benefits on married persons, while withholding such benefits from unmarried persons (Wise & Stanley 2004). We argue further that marriage is an institution *for the privileged*. Persons who can and do marry often have more rights and resources than those who do not. For example, most gay Americans face legal obstacles and cannot marry, even if they are positively disposed to the idea. Economically disadvantaged persons and persons who are not yet financially stable may sidestep marriage for cohabitation (or may be encouraged to postpone such a union all together) until they achieve a position of financial stability (Smock, 2004). Others, still, may face more subtle obstacles to marrying, if the partner of their choice is deemed unacceptable or inappropriate by family members.

Systems of privilege, whether based on civil (marital) status, gender, race, social class, or sexual orientation are resistant to change because prevailing ideologies "present existing social relations as natural and inevitable, [while] interests [of the privileged group] … come to appear as universal and neutral" (Purvis & Hunt, 1993, p. 478). We believe that the privilege afforded to married persons is the most pervasive and least contested of all privileges because nearly all persons have first-hand experience with the nuclear family. Profamily attitudes are not only internalized by children and young adults but also are reified on a daily basis through language and practice. As Bourdieu (1996) observed, the dichotomies of married versus not married and family versus individual underlie "the common principle of vision and division that we all have in our heads" (p. 25).

Second, promarriage cultural beliefs persist because most Americans (both laypersons and scholars) ignore, discount, or reinterpret "data" that reveals problematic aspects of the traditional marital relationship. In doing so, the belief is perpetuated that the public institution of marriage is unproblematic. Rather, those persons who have troubled marriages, who divorce, or who choose ultimately to avoid marriage, are viewed as pathological or "flawed" individuals (Goffman, 1963). Any critique of the institution of marriage—in either word or deed (e.g., the decision either to avoid or dissolve a marriage)—is viewed as indicative of a "personal problem" of the unmarried or unhappily married, rather than as an indication of a larger "public issue" (Mills, 1959). This tendency to view "public issues" as "personal problems" has a very important consequence: the institution of marriage is allowed to persist as is, and problems such as marital strain, abuse, divorce, and the like are attributed to personal failings of specific individuals rather than to a flawed institution (Feldberg & Kohen, 1976, p. 158).

Some scholars counter that personal efforts to tackle individual-level problems can lead to institutional change. For instance, Giddens (1992) proposed that the transformation of intimacy at the level of personal relationships may have consequences for wider social transformation. However, other scholars maintain that structural inequalities cannot be eliminated by personal efforts at transformation. Indeed, such an emphasis on the personal deflects attention away from the political. For example, many married women recognize inequality in their intimate relations and invest much of their time and energy into "relationship-saving strategies" to sustain marital intimacy. Such efforts deflect personal (and societal) attention and efforts

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away from transforming gender-based inequalities deeply embedded in the institution of marriage (Jamieson, 1999).

Third, because marriage is viewed as the ideal and most highly desired form of human relationships, most unmarried persons are viewed as victims who have defaulted to singlehood, rather than as powerful agents who have established and maintained personal relationships that fulfill their own preferences and desires. We urge members of the scientific community to conduct in-depth qualitative studies of unmarried persons themselves, in an effort to uncover the distinctive ways that unmarried persons defy social norms promoting marriage, and instead forge relationships that best meet their personal needs and preferences. Analyses focusing on agency *and* structural contexts may reveal the specific ways that pervasive ideologies perpetuate the single stigma.

We know, for example, that single individuals engage in a variety of practices to mitigate and deflect the harmful effects of negative evaluations by and interactions with nonsingles (Byrne, 2000). However these strategies are relatively ineffective in the face of a persistent profamily ideology that casts single persons as "antifamily." Studies that reveal the ways that unmarried persons creatively maintain familial and interpersonal relationships may help to refute the faulty assumption that unmarried persons are "antifamily." For instance, recent research confirms that single women are often responsible for providing emotional and practical help to others. What distinguishes single women from their married peers is their ability to negotiate and choose whom to care for and under what conditions (Byrne, 1999; Byrne, 2003). However, single women are still constrained by the Ideology of Marriage and Family; single women are more likely than their married peers to be "expected" to provide care to aging parents, because they do not have husbands and children who also require care (Allen, 1989; Byrne, 2003).

Implications and Future Directions

Taken together, our analysis and the writings of DePaulo and Morris provide powerful evidence demonstrating the subtle ways that the Ideology of Marriage and Family and singlism conspire to compromise the quality of life experienced by single persons in the United States. A first step toward combating singlism involves the recognition on the part of social scientists and policymakers that they may be contributing unintentionally to the perpetuation of singlism. For example, social scientists often attribute single persons' disadvantages, such as higher levels of depressed affect, to personal traits, while federal programs prescribe marriage as the panacea for most of the social, economic, and psychological ills experienced by unmarried persons.

Our analysis suggests that attention must also be paid to the practices of "those who do the discriminating" (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 366). Interpersonal discrimination, in part, may account for the lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depressed affect evidenced by unmarried persons in multiple studies (e.g., Simon, 2002; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The self-concept develops through interactions with others, and it reflects one's perceptions of significant others' appraisals (Cooley, 1956). Members of stigmatized groups, such as single persons who experience interpersonal mistreatment, are likely to perceive that they are regarded negatively and may incorporate those negative attitudes into their self-evaluations (Cooley, 1956). The perceptions of significant others are neither idiosyncratic nor based solely on observable traits of single persons, however. Rather, such appraisals reflect "the patterning of [pro-family] ideology rather than the supposed dysfunction of single" individuals (Reynolds & Wetherall, 2003).

Improving the quality of life for unmarried persons requires attacking the "fundamental cause" of single stigma. Practices and policies should be developed that "produce fundamental changes in attitudes and beliefs, or [that] change the power relations that underlie the ability of dominant groups to act on their attitudes and beliefs" (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 381). We acknowledge that changes in attitudes and power relations often occur at a glacial pace. Racism, sexism, and homophobia still persist in the United States today, despite the tremendous inroads made by the Women's and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. Yet the social scientific community has also made an important contribution to helping to chip away at such "isms." The establishment of academic subfields such as women's studies, race and ethnic studies, and gay studies has been instrumental in training a new generation of scholars to look beyond the dichotomous divide of male and female, black and white, and gay and straight and instead to search for important sources of within-category differences and between-category similarities. Such efforts have been instrumental in promoting a more theoretically sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the lived experience of stigmatized individuals.

As a first step, scholars in singleness studies should call for a move away from the simple contrast of married versus unmarried in social sciences research. More fine-grained categories of marital status are needed to characterize the diverse experiences of unmarried adults. Unmarried unpartnered persons, unmarried persons cohabiting with a romantic partner, widowed persons, and divorced persons each comprise a distinctive group of "unmarried" persons. The experiences of formerly married persons are not only

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molded by the absence of a legally sanctioned romantic union but also may reflect the stressors associated with the transition between the states of "married" and "formerly married." Further, there are multiple pathways to the "unpartnered, never-married status." Some are single by choice, others would like to be married someday but have not yet had the opportunity, others may face psychological or physical challenges that create obstacles to their ability to form a lasting romantic union. Only when scholars move away from taken-for-granted yet often meaningless demarcations such as "unmarried" versus "married" can they truly uncover the distinctive challenges and benefits experienced by the highly heterogeneous category of "unmarried" Americans (Link & Phelan, 2001).

We are optimistic that singlism "in society" also may erode in the coming years, as greater numbers of individuals achieve "wise person" status (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963, p. 28) has observed that some stigmatized individuals find support and encouragement from "wise persons" who are "privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it." As more adults postpone marriage, dissolve marriages, or choose not to marry all together, then they and their closest friends and supporters will achieve "wise person" status. As more Americans are "privy" to the distinctive experiences of the unmarried they may start to scrutinize and challenge the Ideology of Marriage and Family and in the process transform singlehood from a second-class status to one that is recognized as just as desirable and valuable as traditional marriage.

Notes

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Singles, Society, and Science: Sociological Perspectives

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DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) provocative target article argues that negative attitudes toward single adults are widespread and generally unquestioned by the public and social scientists. They present new data on pervasive negative attitudes toward singles, particularly the never married, that persist across a variety of circumstances. These biases are not recognized as problematic, even among those who are single themselves or when they represent potentially illegal forms of discrimination, as in the case of rental applications. Their comprehensive review of the social psychological literature identifies both conceptual and methodological biases in the study of single adults—from the standard marital status categories that define the married state as the norm to comparisons between marital status groups that obscure important areas of within-group heterogeneity. For example, never-married adults are often combined with the divorced and widowed, and nonmarital cohabitation, sexual orientation, and other significant relationships are ignored. Similarly, marriage is treated as a distinct, unitary status, ignoring differences such as whether it is a first marriage or remarriage, its duration, prior history, or marital quality. In their most serious charge, the authors argue that a pervasive ideology of marriage and family is reflected in both public attitudes and social science research.

Their most important contribution is in opening a dialogue about assumptions, theories, and terminology that implicitly (though sometimes quite openly) disparage the men and women who live outside of the traditional married state. These stereotypes and prejudices are widespread at a time when, ironically, the total numbers and proportions of single adults in the United States are increasing and other forms of bias based on race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation are less tolerated. The authors challenge us to examine and question our assumptions, to attend to the social messages reflected in them, and to be skeptical of the "common knowledge" of often-repeated claims that support the ideology of marriage and family.

This commentary brings in sociological perspectives, including findings from opinion surveys, demography, and social history, to elaborate the place of single adults in society and science. I begin with evidence on the existence and extent of "singlism" in American society, placing concerns about bias in a larger historical context. I discuss some recent perspectives on changes in marriage that have paradoxically resulted in both greater acceptance of singlehood and increased significance of marriage. I then focus on several important areas of diversity among single adults—gender, racial or ethnic group, sexual orientation, and life course—that caution against placing these populations under a large, "single" umbrella. I conclude by returning to an intriguing question raised by the authors: whether attitudes about singlehood are growing more negative even as the experience of being single is more prevalent.

Singlism in the United States: How Real? How Prevalent?

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) report findings from experiments, many focusing on college-age populations, which document the existence and strength of negative attitudes about single adults. To what extent do these studies reflect opinions in the general population? Various social surveys have measured attitudes about marriage and those who remain single in the United States. Though specific questions vary across surveys, the cumulative findings from nearly 5 decades show that marriage is still valued more highly than single life. However, attitudes about singlehood are significantly more accepting now than at midcentury.

Comparisons of attitudes over time document a significant shift in public attitudes between the 1950s and 1970s. The proportion of Americans reporting negative attitudes toward remaining single declined from 53% in 1957 to 34% in 1976 (Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). During this period, marriage was increasingly regarded as optional (see Bumpass, 1990), and people were more willing to acknowledge the negative aspects of marriage and parenthood. In the 1980s and 1990s, attitudes had stabilized but still favored marriage over being single (Thornton, 1989; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Surveys of adolescents and young adults further showed that despite greater acceptance of singlehood and cohabitation, the vast majority expected to marry eventually, although at older ages than their parents (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001; Martin, Specter, Martin, & Martin, 2003).

Surveys have found greater acceptance of singlehood among women compared to men. In 1988, about 55% of men and 41% of women agreed that it was better to be married than to remain single (Trent & South, 1992). This gender difference was consistent across a number of studies (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Greater acceptance was also related to higher levels of education and having a more educated mother (Trent & South, 1992).

Most surveys have measured attitudes about marriage or singlehood using general questions, but the second wave of the National Survey of Families and Households asked separate questions regarding perceptions of single men and single women (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). Among adults aged 25 and older, only about 38% agreed "a man can have a fully satisfying life without getting married," but over 53% agreed that a woman can. Positive perceptions of single women were more common among women compared to men, though there were no gender differences in perceptions of single men (author's analyses).

Though DePaulo and Morris (this issue) discuss the role of gender in mediating the link between singlehood and well-being, a more fundamental question may be whether singlism itself is defined and experienced differently by men and women. The current prominence of successful single women in our society, including Condoleeza Rice, Oprah Winfrey, Janet Reno, and many others, suggests that career success and independence mitigate the negative stigma of single women. Indeed, the 2004 presidential election identified and targeted single women as an important voting block (Abcarian, 2004; Page, 2004). Whether and how the experience of stigma varies for single men and women calls for further investigation and testing.

Historical Perspectives: Changing Prevalence and Meanings of Singlehood

At the beginning of the 20th century, the United States was characterized by comparatively late entry into marriage and substantial proportions remaining single. In 1900, the median age at marriage was about 26 for men and 21 for women, compared to 27 and 25 for men and women, respectively, in 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004a). The proportions of never-married adults (among those aged 15 and older) has generally been greater for men than for women, at 40% and 31% for men and women in 1900, dropping to 30% and 24% for men and women in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004b). Adding in those who have become single again due to divorce and widowhood, the total proportions of unmarried adults in 2000 were about 41% for men and 45% for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004b). Singlehood has fluctuated, however, with the lowest prevalence occurring in the mid-century baby boom era.

Attitudes about singlehood have also varied historically and across cultural and national groups. In Europe, a tradition of celibacy among the clergy and those in religious vocations represented a significant alternative to marriage and family life. Watkins (1984) argued that for women, remaining single allowed access to opportunities and valued roles not available to married women and mothers, including work as nurses, social workers, writers, and teachers. During the Victorian era, the social and economic separation of men's and women's spheres may have helped to reduce the practical implications of being single; social lives at the time encouraged friendship and community within the sexes, thus providing strong social ties beyond the marital bond (Cott, 1977; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). Further, coresidence with extended kin and boarding arrangements kept many single adults integrated within larger households (e.g., Chudacoff & Hareven, 1978).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, delaying marriage or remaining single was regarded as a necessary and appropriate social response to harsh economic circumstances, and single adults were valued as important contributors to their families. In Ireland, for exam-

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ple, where economic insecurity contributed to significant delay in marriage, extended family households were common; single adult children remained in their parents' homes, and single siblings often lived together throughout adulthood to pool their resources (Guinnane, 1991). In industrial cities and among immigrants in the United States, economic stresses made marriage difficult but increased the value of single adults (especially women) as sources of economic and instrumental support for their parents (Hareven, 1982, pp. 154–188). Similar patterns were observed during the Great Depression.

Attitudes and conditions favoring marriage reached their peek during the economic prosperity and optimism that followed the Great Depression and World War II. Between 1945 and 1964, more people entered into marriage and at younger ages than ever before (see Rindfuss, Morgan, & Swicegood, 1988). Social historian Elaine Tyler May (1988) argued that these demographic behaviors were reinforced by an ideology of domesticity and social conformity. At the height of the Cold War, marriage and family were regarded as the main pathway to personal happiness, with strong moral and patriotic overtones. In this context, single and childless adults (as well as gay men and lesbians) were regarded with suspicion or pity (see also May, 1995).

In the early 20th century, marriage was transformed "from an institution to a companionship" (Burgess & Locke, 1945), in which friendship, sex, companionship, and childbearing defined the central place of marriage (see Cherlin, 2004). The importance of partnering and sex was reinforced by the popularity of Freudian psychology and its influence on social science. Alfred Kinsey's research on sex emphasized coupling and sexual expression as central ingredients for a normal, healthy life. Erikson's (1963) framework of adult development identified intimacy and generativity (investment in the next generation, e.g., through child-bearing) as crucial stages of development in adulthood. Erikson acknowledged that both intimacy and generativity could be achieved through nonsexual affiliations and nonprocreative accomplishments, but these alternatives were regarded as incomplete substitutes (Erikson, 1963, pp. 264–267; Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Within this ideological milieu, single persons were defined as problematic or deviant. Remaining single suggested that a person was not suitable or chosen for the married state, or that the single status itself had rendered the person incomplete and not fully developed.

Singlehood Is OK, But Marriage Is Better?

Since the 1960s, major social changes in demographic behavior and attitudes have transformed marriage into a more individualized relationship, with greater emphasis on self-development and flexibility (Cherlin, 2004; Cancian, 1987). Expanded educational and economic opportunities have made it more feasible for women to support themselves economically, decreasing the economic and social necessity of marriage. The past 4 decades have seen an increased diversity of relationships and lifestyles, including high divorce rates, increased childbearing outside of marriage, and the emergence of nonmarital cohabitation (see Bumpass, 1990; Cherlin, 2004; Walker, 2004).

Greater acceptance of delayed marriage, cohabitation, and singlehood has not translated into a rejection of marriage, however, as about 9 out of 10 adults marry at some point in their lives (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001). Further, the current movement to recognize same-sex marriage has underscored the continued symbolic significance of marriage and the significant social and economic rewards that it confers. Marriage is regarded as a valued accomplishment, but one that is entered into cautiously and only if personal, economic, and relationship standards are met. Even the wedding has been redefined as a "status symbol"—a public sign that the couple has finally fulfilled its prerequisites for marriage. Cherlin (2004) has summarized this apparent paradox in the following way: "[Marriage] has evolved from a marker of conformity to a marker of prestige. It used to be the foundation of adult personal life; now it is sometimes the capstone" (p. 855).

Within this context, singlehood has become an increasingly common life path, but one that is socially and symbolically "second best" compared to the valued status achieved through marriage. Being single may be regarded as an appropriate response to circumstances that are unfavorable for marriage, such as not having found the right person or not being personally and economically "ready" for marriage. On the other hand, the single status raises questions about why a person has not attained (or is no longer in) the valued state of marriage.

Diverse Populations and Experiences: No "Single" Umbrella

As DePaulo and Morris (this issue) point out, the population of single adults includes a very diverse population whose major common feature is their civil or marital status. The authors note the variety of actual marital and relationship histories among the unmarried population—whether one is never married, divorced, or widowed, and whether one is currently in an intimate or cohabiting relationship. Among people who are single, this diversity means that there is little self-identification with a general single population, which may also help to explain why single adults do not see themselves as part of a larger, stigmatized group. In qualitative interviews with lifelong single

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adults in middle and old age, I have found that definitions of "singlehood" varied, and many felt that the label did not fit them (Koropeckyj-Cox, Bluck, & Pendell, 2004). Among these never-married and long-term formerly married adults, some noted that the term "single" implied an active search for a romantic partner (as in "singles bar" or "singles club"). Those who were involved in romantic or intimate relationships, whether heterosexual or same-sex, regarded themselves as unmarried but not "single." For adults in same-sex partnerships, the issue of labels was further complicated by whether their sexual orientation was known to others; a public persona of being single provided a cover in situations where they felt they could not be open about their orientation and relationships (Koropeckyj-Cox, Bluck, & Pendell, 2004).

The last example also highlights the fact that the single status may be less important to identity and social experience than other aspects of one's life. More dominant characteristics include gender, racial or ethnic group, social class, and sexual orientation, which represent "master statuses" in the United States—the statuses that play a major role in defining one's opportunities and social interactions in society. Within this context, negative biases related to being single may be overshadowed by the more dominant implications of gender, racial minority status, or sexual orientation. Other factors, such as civil or marital status, parental status, and cohabitation or partnership status, may be important but in ways that are conditioned by the master statuses.

The powerful influence of gender is reflected in its near-universal consideration within the social science literature. As DePaulo and Morris (this issue) note, studies of well-being have documented significant gender differences in the effects of marital status. However, less is known about how perceptions and biases regarding singlehood are conditioned by gender. Studies of childlessness have focused particularly on women and have emphasized the strong pressures that women experience with regard to getting married and having children (e.g., May, 1995). Images of single women include both positive and negative evaluations. Negative images include the "old maid" (and fears of becoming one), and perceptions of single women as neurotic and unfulfilled or sexually uncontrolled and dangerous (see Faludi, 1991). More positive images reflect the valued social roles and accomplishments of single women historically and today: the independent career woman (like the television characters of Murphy Brown and C. J. Craig on The West Wing); the favorite aunt and godmother or caregiver for older parents; and the devoted professionals, including teachers and nurses.

There has been less discussion of images of single men, yet compared to single women, their relative well-being is generally worse, their disadvantages in health and mortality are more pronounced, and the link between singlehood and various forms of dangerous or deviant behaviors is well-documented (see Waite & Gallagher, 2001). Positive or benign images of single men include the single-minded professional (too busy and absorbed in work to consider marriage) and the cowboy (too independent to be tied down to a domestic life). Less complimentary are the images of the playboy, the self-centered and immature bachelor, the eccentric or marginal bachelor, and the "mama's boy" (like Cliff Claven on Cheers). As noted earlier in this commentary, singlehood may be seen as more problematic for men than for women. More research is needed to better understand the gendered perceptions and experiences of singlehood.

Rates of marriage, divorce, widowhood, and cohabitation vary greatly by racial and ethnic group. The meanings and perceptions of singlehood vary as well. For example, African Americans have lower rates of marriage and are less likely to be married compared to white men and women. Research on marriage in the African American community has focused on features of the marriage market, with economic disadvantage and insecurity among men translating into a limited pool of potential mates. However, Edin (2000; Edin, Kefalas, & Reed, 2004) pointed out that marriage is still highly regarded even among poor women, for whom marriage is a valued if not attainable goal. Other research has noted the particularly high rates of singlehood among college-educated African American women, for whom marriage is valued but not necessarily compatible with their expectations and aspirations. Declining marriage rates are also evident among Hispanic (Oropesa & Landale, 2004) and Asian Americans (see Ferguson, 2000), despite strong cultures of familism. Efforts to understand the experiences of single adults and potential stigma must consider the role of race and ethnicity and the intersections of race with gender and social class in conditioning the meanings and implications of singlehood.

Among the variations that distinguish among single persons, parental status has the greatest practical and policy implications. Differences in economic and social status are pronounced when comparing the circumstances of single parents who have had children outside of marriage, divorced single parents, and those who are single and childless. Each of these groups faces some negative biases, but the challenges and stigma are particularly harsh for single mothers, especially those with nonmarital births. Even among single mothers, Bock (2000) reported that middle-class women who are single mothers by choice may minimize their own stigma by defining themselves as "good mothers" in opposition to younger or more disadvantaged single mothers. Further, because of the differences between single parents and childless adults, it is unclear whether they would perceive each other as part

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of larger "single" group with shared interests or concerns. Finally, the links between single status and sexual orientation have important consequences for the well-being of single adults as well as the potential for experiencing stigma. Among adults in the 1995 Study of Midlife in the United States (age 25 to 74), approximately 14% of men and 7% to 9% of women who were never married or cohabiting identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, along with 2% of formerly married men and women (Carr, 2003). For these single adults, the experience of antigay bias would compound the stigma of being single, and their sexual orientation would by definition exclude them from the possibility of marriage or legal recognition of their relationships in most states. In qualitative interviews with middle-age and older single adults, both heterosexual and gay men and women indicated that questions about their single status were often linked with assumptions and biases about sexual orientation (Koropeckyj-Cox, Bluck, & Pendell, 2004). The current emphasis on enduring partnerships and same-sex marriage raises questions about whether unpartnered lesbian, gay, or bisexual adults will be doubly stigmatized.

The Contributions of Life Course and Aging Research

The life course perspective brings in additional key dimensions of diversity related to age or cohort and various aspects of life experience. Examining individual lives within their social and historical contexts, the life course perspective provides a framework for considering the effects of larger social forces on defining the implications of single status for different birth cohorts and for people at different ages (Elder, 1985; Hagestad, 1990; Settersten, 1999). For example, studies of single adults in midlife and old age have reported significant changes over time in respondents' concerns and in the social perceptions of others; pressures to marry are strongest in the 20s and 30s, but concerns decrease as men and women adjust to singlehood in middle age (Koropeckyj-Cox, Bluck, & Pendell, 2004; see also Schwartzberg, Berliner, & Jacob, 1995). The reasons and pathways that have led to singlehood, including past relationship history, combine with current perceptions of the single status to define its salience for social and psychological well-being (see Dykstra, 2004). Current perceptions, particularly whether singlehood is seen as temporary or stable and voluntary or involuntary, point to the important role of internal, cognitive assessments in defining the single status (Stein, 1976). More research is needed to better understand how contextual, interpersonal, and internal factors interact to shape attitudes and experiences of singlehood at different ages and for different birth cohorts.

Research on aging has a long history of examining the single status and has generally contributed a less stigmatized view of singlehood. Driven by concerns about identifying potentially vulnerable populations, gerontological research has generated a vast literature on the relative well-being of single adults. Attention to unmarried older adults also stems from the high prevalence of singlehood in old age, particularly for women, and the relatively high proportions of never-married adults among earlier cohorts. Never-married adults, especially women, have been described as a uniquely resilient and resourceful group (Allen, 1989; Rubinstein, Alexander, Goodman, & Luborsky, 1991; Simon, 1987). Gender, marital history, and social supports, including friendships, siblings, and primary relationships, play an important role in mediating the effects of marital status on well-being (Connidis & Campbell, 1995; Dykstra, 1990). Recent research has also examined the influence of sexual orientation (Herdt & DeVries, 2004) and recent changes in relationships that will increase the heterogeneity among older adults in the future (Cooney & Dunne, 2001). Life course and aging research, therefore, may provide more positive and nuanced approaches to understanding the single status.

Life course perspectives may also provide a context for interpreting differences in attitudes among different age groups and cohorts. For example, young adults' current negative perceptions of singlehood, as reported by DePaulo and Morris (this issue), may reflect strong expectations and pressures to marry in their own lives. These attitudes will likely change over time as these adults experience and observe the decisions, life paths, and unexpected contingencies connected with singlehood. As Gerson (1985) noted, attitudes about marriage and childbearing change over the life course in response to positive and negative changes in personal circumstances, such as employment and relationship experiences. For example, positive employment opportunities may shift orientations away from familial goals, even among those who expected to marry when they were younger. Frustrations or obstacles in employment or relationships may also prompt a rethinking of individual expectations (Gerson, 1985). These findings suggest that studies of attitudes need to examine differences between age groups and cohorts as well as changes in attitudes over time.

Conclusion: Singlism as Backlash?

This commentary has placed the question of singlism in science and society within a larger context of demographic trends and changes in social attitudes over time. Though some negative bias against

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singlehood exists, the proportions who are single in the United States have increased along with acceptance of the single status and other nonmarital arrangements and lifestyles. Marriage has gradually become less mandatory, and social rules about marriage have weakened since the 1950s (Cherlin, 2004). At the same time, several social forces are combining to reinforce the continued emphasis on marriage and negative appraisals of those who remain single.

First, increased numbers and awareness of the declining significance of marriage have stimulated efforts to protect and promote marriage as a uniquely valued status. Social change may provoke stronger ideological responses and a backlash against those who are seen as disrupting or subverting traditional marriage (see Faludi, 1991). Further, change may underscore the tension between the realities we live with and the idyllic images of family that we hold onto (Gillis, 1996, 2004). As Gillis noted, "although fewer and fewer people live *in* conventional marital relationships, more and more people live *by* a conjugal ideal that is instilled from childhood." (2004, p. 989). Finally, as Luker (1984) argued, those with strong personal and social investments in marriage and family may interpret alternative lifestyles as undermining the value of marriage as a social institution; they may see their own stake in marriage as devalued by greater acceptance of single, cohabiting, single-parent, and same-sex alternatives.

Second, the redefinition of marriage as an accomplishment has made it more acceptable to delay marriage, to approach coupling through the intermediate step of cohabitation, or to leave a problematic marriage. Yet, the notion of marriage as a valued status redefines singlehood as the default position for those who cannot enter into or stay in a marriage. In turn, the transformed, image of marriage as an egalitarian partnership, attuned to individual desires for self-development, has likely reduced the positive incentives and reasons for choosing to stay single.

In conclusion, the recognition of singlism as a persistent social stigma echoes similar calls for reflexivity among social scientists about issues of gender bias and antigay bias (see, e.g., Allen, 2000) as well as age biases (Fingerman & Hay, 2002). Bringing attention to negative attitudes may help to stimulate greater discussion and to challenge ideologically based assumptions that call for closer empirical testing. These conversations, in turn, would benefit from exploring and incorporating insights across disciplines to better understand the context and nature of social biases. Social psychology is in a unique position to elucidate the mechanisms through which these attitudes are formed and maintained as well as the mediating role that they play in shaping the well-being and social integration of single adults.

Notes

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The Evolution of Coupling

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A "cult," as the term is commonly used, denotes a set of unorthodox or spurious beliefs and the people who adhere to them. DePaulo and Morris (this issue) propose that *the cult of the couple* leads members of society in general and social scientists in particular to view the conjugal pair as the single most important social relationship, encompassing the roles of sexual partner, best friend, primary social partner, fundamental kin relation, and economic partner. One outcome of this cultish view is s*inglism*: singles are cast a suspicious gaze and they experience discrimination ranging from social ostracism to economic taxation in a world of 2-for-1 specials and family-size portions. Why is being coupled so crucial, seeming to outweigh other markers of social value?

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) place some of the blame on scientific theories, stating, "The evolutionary perspective, attachment theory, and the cult of the couple all seem to share the assumption that the best outcomes occur when the most important roles or functions are all invested in just one person." We were puzzled by this claim about evolutionary psychology. As we explain later, it is certainly true that sex and mating are central in the evolution of species like humans, but we see nothing in evolutionary theory leading to the prediction that the reproductive pairbond is the only relationship of importance, or even the primary one.

In this article, we review the evolutionary psychology of coupling and discuss why we should expect mateship status to be important to the self and why people seem to have an obsessive interest in the mateship status of others. Our perspective suggests that these social foci spring from universal human motivations with a deep evolutionary history, and therefore it is misleading to think of them as elements of a modern ideology as the *cult* view suggests.

Is Coupling Important?

Natural selection has been erroneously associated with the phrase "survival of the fittest" (a phrase Darwin himself did not coin), leading many people to think of differences in abilities to survive as the central component in evolution. However, survival has an evolutionary impact only inasmuch as it leads to reproduction. Adaptations may serve the proximate function of increasing survival, such as a particular beak morphology that allows some finches to obtain more food than others or a tendency for some gazelles to startle more easily than others, giving them a head start when there is a predator afoot. But without adaptations that promote successful mating, such as the basic desire to find a mate and have sex, even the finch with the most perfect beak for her environment or the fastest and most alert gazelle of his herd will meet an evolutionary dead end. From the perspective of the gene, reproduction is quite literally the meaning of life, and for sexually reproducing species, the mateship is indeed critical.

Dependent Offspring and the Importance of Fathers' Investment

The evolutionary path leading to human intelligence and bipedal locomotion has produced a suite of reproductive challenges unique to humans, requiring unique solutions. Human offspring, compared to those of other primates, are born weak and dependent and require an extended period of juvenile development (Martin, 2003). Chimpanzee offspring, who gambol and climb with playmates at an age when human infants are only able to roll over for the first time, are capable of providing nearly their entire nutritional needs by the time they are weaned at 5 years of age (Lancaster, Kaplan, Hill, & Hurtado, 2000; Silk, 1978). Children in modern hunter–gatherer populations do not begin to produce as much food as they consume until they are around 15 years old (Hill & Kaplan, 1999). During this time, children are incapable of caring for themselves and are fully dependent on the care of adult kin to provide food, protection, and opportunities for learning.

Despite the slow growth and lengthy juvenile dependency of human children, we wean our offspring much earlier than do chimpanzees (modern hunter–gatherers wean their children at about 2.5 years) and consequently have much shorter interbirth intervals (Lancaster et al., 2000). In chimps and most other primates, the interbirth interval is slightly longer than the time it takes to raise a single offspring to independence—about 5.5 years for chimpanzees—and mothers rarely need to care for more than one dependent offspring at a time. In rare cases in which there are multiple dependents, such as in the birth of twins, only one will usually survive (Dixson, 1999). Yet the interbirth interval among modern hunter–gatherers ranges from only 3 to 5 years, approximately 10 years less than the time required to raise a single child to possible independence (Lancaster et al., 2000). Thus, humans not only have

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atypically helpless infants but also regularly care for multiple dependent offspring simultaneously.

One solution to the challenge of raising dependent, slowly developing children is biparental care. Studies of modern hunter–gatherers demonstrate that paternal care can be critical to child survival (Hill & Hurtado, 1996; Hurtado & Hill, 1992; Marlowe, 2003). For example, Aché children between 1 and 5 years of age are 2.6 times more likely to die if their fathers are dead than if their fathers are living, and 2.9 times more likely to die if their parents are divorced than if they are together (Hurtado & Hill, 1992). The resources provided by paternal investment in offspring are many: fathers provide nutritional resources, protection against predators or unfriendly conspecifics, models for learning, and social resources (Marlowe, 1999a, 1999b, 2001).

When paternity certainty is low, however, as it is in chimpanzees, males have little incentive to invest in offspring. In mating systems in which only one male mates with several females, as in gorillas, paternity certainty is close to 100%, but any investment the male might provide will be divided among many offspring. Socially monogamous mating systems, in contrast, serve to increase a male's paternity certainty, even when there is some level of sexual infidelity, while concentrating his parental efforts on fewer offspring (Birkhead, 1998; Daly & Wilson, 1983). In sum, the formation of pairbonds may be an adaptation for caring for offspring who require large amounts of investment over a long period of time, while also allowing for a higher rate of reproduction by shortening the interbirth interval.

Extended Sexual Cohabitation and Pregnancy Success

The physiological challenge of internal gestation is another reproductive obstacle. A woman's immune system is designed to attack anything it determines is "nonself;" this includes fetal tissue that shares only 50% of its genetic material with the mother. One result of this immunological attack is preeclampsia. Preeclampsia is a severe form of gestational hypertension, occurring in about 10% of all human pregnancies, that may lead to epileptic seizures (eclampsia) and possibly result in the death of the fetus (Martin, 2003). Increasing evidence suggests that extended sexual partnerships may enhance pregnancy outcomes both in terms of avoiding these specific complications and in terms of general fetal health indicators such as fetal and placental weight. Because the risk declines substantially with subsequent pregnancies, preeclampsia was long thought of as a disease of first pregnancies. However, recent data indicate that when a woman conceives additional children with a *new partner*, her risk of preeclampsia is as high as for her first pregnancy (Robillard, Dekker, & Hulsey, 1998, 1999). For first pregnancies, a longer period of sexual cohabitation with the father is associated with reduced risk of preeclampsia (from a 40% chance if conception occurs within the first four months of sexual cohabitation to less than a 5% chance after a year of sexual cohabitation) and increased fetal weight relative to placental weight (Robillard et al., 1994). Thus, the body appears to learn over time not to reject the genetic material of a long-term partner. This suggests an additional selective benefit accruing to those who coupled.

Is Coupling Universal?

Romantic Love, Characterized by the Exclusivity of Feeling, Is Everywhere

The practice of marriage is a central component of almost all human cultures (Brown, 1991; Daly & Wilson, 1983). Though marriage traditions on the surface appear widely variable, they are all reflections of a species-typical pattern in which individuals generally seek long-term cooperative reproductive relationships, augmented to a greater or lesser degree by nonexclusive, short-term sexual relationships (see, e.g., Buss, 2003; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Symons, 1979, for reviews).

Two independent surveys of the ethnographic record suggest that people in all places and in all times have experienced romantic love. Harris (1995) defined a set of seven core characteristics of romantic love derived from the individual definitions of 17 different theorists (including Averill, 1985; Hatfield & Walster, 1978; Lee, 1988; Murstein, 1970; Peele, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Sternberg, 1986; Tennov, 1979). Using this definition, she reviewed the primary ethnographic literature and found positive evidence of the existence of romantic love in each of over 100 cultures from every region of the world. Among the characteristics described by Harris are the "desire for union or merger, both sexual and emotional," the "exclusivity of the emotion for one particular person," and a "reordering of motivational hierarchies of life priorities." In an even broader survey, Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) used data from the Human Relations Area File (HRAF) and found evidence for romantic love in 89% of all cultures documented. They found no positive evidence of any culture in which romantic love did not exist.

Importantly, romantic love, as it is characterized in these studies, is not defined by its relation to the cultural practice of marriage. The cultures surveyed by Harris and Jankowiak and Fischer include societies that reflect the full range of variation in marriage ideology and practice, including arranged marriages, polygyny, collectivist societies that deemphasize the role of the conjugal unit, societies that demand chastity

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before marriage and sexual fidelity within it, and those that accept and encourage short-term sexual relationships both before and after marriage. In all of these societies, the desire to find a unique other and to obtain an exclusive, if impermanent, emotional bond with that person is characteristic of people's personal feelings.

Valued Qualities in a Long-Term Partner Are the Same Across Cultures

In a study of mate preferences conducted in 33 countries, David Buss and colleagues found that men and women everywhere rate mutual attraction and love above all other traits in a potential mate, followed by personal attributes such as dependability, emotional stability and maturity, and a pleasing disposition (Buss, Abbott, Angleitner, Asherian, et al., 1990). If coupling were a culture-specific practice, we would expect that the important qualities in a mate would vary with the mating system, but as with the ethnographic surveys, the researchers instead found substantial similarities in cultures exhibiting a wide variety of marriage practices.

The Desire to Form Couples Is Resistant to Ideologies to the Contrary

Polygyny—one husband with several wives—is the ideologically preferred marriage system in over 83% of the world's cultures (Marlowe, 2000; Murdock, 1967). In most of these societies, however, only a very few of the wealthiest men are able to support a household of even two or three wives, leaving most individuals to form couples. This includes serial monogamy, in which individuals have several primary partners over time, but no more than one concurrently. This fact has led some individuals to suggest that humans, and particularly human males, lack adaptations for long-term pairbonding. In a long-term study of polygynous American Mormons, however, Jankowiak and colleagues found that even within this environment of strong ideological opposition to pairing there is evidence of the desire to form couples (Jankowiak & Allen, 1995; Jankowiak & Diderich, 2000). Despite the avowed primacy of community and extended family, wives compete jealously for the attention of their husbands and men find it difficult to perform their duties of attending to each of their wives equally when they find themselves forming a strong attachment to one of the wives over the others.

There are almost no societies that eschew the custom of marriage. However, the Na of China are held by many to be the exception to the rule. Hua has described the relationship ideology of the Na as one of "visits" (Hua, 2001). Men and women both remain in their natal homes their entire lives, with sisters tending the garden and cooking for their brothers, and brothers caring for the herds, maintaining the house, and providing protection for their sisters and their sisters' children. Women may take several casual lovers throughout their lives; these men may "visit" but they never form a household with their lovers. Hua's ethnography, along with the autobiography of a Na woman (Namu & Mathieu, 2003), comprise most of what we know of the Na. Despite their explicit assertions to the contrary, both of these sources provide evidence that men and women do form emotional bonds and many remain in exclusive relationships for extended periods of time. For example, whereas both sources explicitly claim that individuals neither know nor are concerned with the identity of their biological fathers, the first-person accounts indicate most people *do* know who their fathers are. Men and women frequently maintain long-term, semi-exclusive relationships, and lovers may fulfill many of the obligations that brothers are expected to perform, such as completing repairs around the house and bringing gifts of food and manufactured goods. There is a strict ideology prohibiting jealousy—sexual relationships are not considered something to be proprietary over—and yet there are ample personal accounts of jealousy and the desire for exclusivity in these texts. Lulu Li (personal communication, October 5, 2004), an ethnographer currently working among the Na, confirms that even among the older generation, individuals describe long-term stable relationships as the norm. In sum, even the most extreme "exception" to the rule suggests that men and women are more likely to form lasting, semi-exclusive pairs than to pursue a lifelong strategy of casual, fluid relationships.

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Is the Couple the Most Important Social Unit?

Evolutionary approaches suggest that humans will possess a strong desire to form conjugal pairs, but nowhere in evolutionary theory do we see the prediction that one's romantic partner will serve all social functions. As DePaulo and Morris (this issue) themselves point out, much of the research in evolutionary psychology is devoted to studying kinships, friendships, rivalries, and coalitional alliances. A central assumption in most evolutionary approaches is that psychological mechanisms evolve in response to specific adaptive problems (Buss, 1991; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). Thus, the mechanisms designed to find an appropriate mate are unlikely to be the same as those designed to choose friends or coalition partners, and both of these should be distinct, at least in part, from mechanisms designed to recognize and interact with kin—*a jack of all trades is master of none*. Likewise, no relationship can serve all functions equally well. There is, therefore, nothing from an evolutionary perspective that would suggest that all relationship roles can be

collapsed into a single partner. Each type of relationship serves its own unique set of purposes, guided by specialized adaptations.

Social Implications of Adaptations for Coupling

Comparative, physiological, and cross-cultural evidence supports the hypothesis that humans have a suite of adaptations for forming conjugal pairs. There are several real implications of this hypothesis for understanding how singles and couples are viewed by others, some of which may fall within the bounds of *singlism*, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) describe it. There are also implications that people might be tempted to draw that we believe would be erroneous.

Fallacies and Misunderstandings

First, and perhaps most importantly, the fact that humans have adaptations for coupling does not imply the moral superiority of coupled individuals. Causal theories are descriptive, not prescriptive, and thus people must decide based on personal ethics and values whether coupling is desirable. The evolutionary perspective on coupling also does not suggest that coupling will result in a healthier or more satisfying life for any particular individual. Evolution appears to make use of positive and negative affect in steering people toward calorie-rich food sources, fertile mates, and esteem in the eyes of peers, but ultimately the criterion for selection is reproductive success, not well-being. Evolution produces offspring who in turn produce more offspring, regardless of whether this increases their happiness over the long run.

In the modern world, coupling also does not guarantee an on-average fitness benefit to couple members or their children. The psychological adaptations underlying coupling evolved in an environment that differed in many ways from the one in which we live now—one that included harsh and unbuffered environmental conditions and greater resource scarcity (Diamond & Bellwood, 2003; Kingdon, 1993). Furthermore, because what matters in evolution is the cumulative effect of selection aggregated across vast amounts of time, fitness effects may be modest or undetectable in any given generation, even if the environment is relatively unchanged (Symons, 1992).

Our argument also does not preclude the existence of evolved motivations for short-term sexual relationships (see, e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Symons, 1979), infidelity (Buss, 2000), or marital strife (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Nor does it mean that the desire to form a couple will always trump other evolved motivations, such as the desire to pursue alternative reproductive strategies, care for kin, or strive for status. Our argument is simply that the motivation to form couples emerges from adaptations with deep evolutionary roots, and thus assumes a central motivational status for most humans.

Real Implications

Social judgments. If coupling is as central as we have argued, one might also expect people to have a keen interest in whether others are coupled, if they are to whom, and if they are not to wonder why. DePaulo and Morris (this issue) present evidence that people perceive singles differently from those who are in relationships. Singles—especially people who have always been single and especially women—are viewed as less attractive, less well-adjusted, less mature, less sociable, less stable, and less happy than coupled individuals. We suggest that this bias exists because relationship status conveys information with reproductive relevance, and hence the bias is not arbitrary or new as the *cult* view might suggest.

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) lament the fact that we feel compelled to distinguish between different "types" of singles—always single, divorced, or widowed—when we do not create such distinctions between coupled individuals. However, in the mating market, whether someone has always been single reveals information about past, current, and future availability, and therefore his or her mate quality, whereas one's civil status alone (currently mated vs. currently single) does not.

In the ancestral past, reliable inferences could be made about the mate value of individuals who had either never formed a mateship or were unable to maintain one. In an environment in which unpartnered females are a distinctive anomaly—as they are among all sexually reproducing species, including, until very recently, humans (Symons, 1979)—finding an unpartnered woman of reproductive age probably indicated that she was of exceptionally low mate value. This is true to a lesser extent for men, who may be left unpartnered more often than women because high-status competitors are able to amass reproductive resources via polygyny or serial re-mating with progressively younger women (Lockard & Adams, 1981; Mulder & Caro, 1983). The fact that women's reproductive value is strongly linked with age also helps to explain why the coupling clock ticks faster for women than for men.

The information value of mateship status may be greatly distorted in modern society. In the modern West there are many exogenous reasons why a person might remain single. Attractive, intelligent, kind, and otherwise desirable individuals may be single because they are pursuing other challenges, such as the pursuit of prestige, resources, education, or other forms of personal fulfillment. Humans possess adaptations for pur-

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suing many types of goals, but only a finite amount of time and energy, and thus people will make tradeoffs in time allocation. The sheer number of alternative courses of action available to modern humans, the advent of reliable contraception, and social norms promoting the pursuit of a career are likely causes of the rising tide of singles and the decision by many to remain single their entire lives. Even though the amount of information conveyed by single status may be decreasing, our evolved psychology still responds to these cues because of their value in the ancestral past.

Scientific relevance. It is also useful for scientists to differentiate between people who are currently single and those who have always been single to make sense of changing relationship practices and values. For example, DePaulo and Morris (this issue) cite recent demographic shifts in the numbers of singles as evidence that coupling is declining in importance. However, the data they cite has collapsed all individuals, age 18 and older. The fact that the number of always-single individuals in this group has increased dramatically over the past several decades is not really surprising, as the age at first marriage has also steadily increased. If one looks at both the incidence of marriage and of cohabitation, rather than marriage alone, there appears to be little decrease in the rate of coupling overall (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Thus, DePaulo and Morris's desire to erase the distinctions between always single and currently single actually blurs the fact that despite demographic shifts in such factors as age of marriage, rate of divorce, and preference for cohabitation, there is little evidence that the underlying desire to form couples has markedly changed.

Ostracism of singles. DePaulo and Morris (this issue) make the point that couples appear to shun singles in social interactions, claiming, "it is the couples who become the power brokers, deciding whether their single friends are to be included, and if so, under what conditions." We are not entirely convinced. The tendency of couples to socialize with other couples, and singles with singles, could result from mutual self-selection. Singles may be interested in finding a partner and they may prefer to spend time with others who share this interest and seek social situations in which it is satisfied. Couples might prefer to socialize with other couples, because couple members are already spoken for and thus pose less relationship threat. Single women may be seen as sexual threats to coupled women, potentially luring away their partners and their investments. Likewise, single men may pose a cuckoldry threat to coupled men. Although coupled individuals may also pose threats, singles of both sexes pose a double threat because they are more likely to be pursuing mating opportunities and because they are not under the watchful eye of their own partner. These threats may be larger in the West, where mixed-sex socializing is the norm, than in other societies in which social groups are more likely to be segregated by sex than by mateship status (see, e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1986; Buechler & Buechler, 1996; Descola, 1993; Namu & Mathieu, 2003; Shostak, 1981).

Lingering Curiosities

We have addressed only a few of the issues raised by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) and left much to be explained. We agree, for example, that there is something peculiar about the venerated status of the couple in today's American society. One of DePaulo and Morris's most striking observations is that in American society, we appear to have merged several social roles into a single relationship. As our evolutionary anthropologist colleague Dan Fessler has pointed out (personal communication, February 7, 2005), in most cultures around the globe, your spouse is not your best friend, or even your primary social partner (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1986; Buechler & Buechler, 1996; Descola, 1993; Errington & Gewertz, 1987; Namu & Mathieu, 2003; Rosenbaum, 1993; Shostak, 1981).

We also find it curious that singles are levied heavy economic taxes, and that the unquestioned social value of marriage for solving a multitude of social problems has led to billion dollar policies intended to promote it. A fruitful approach for exploring these institutionalized biases in favor of couples may come from examining the ways in which historically recent economic processes have affected the economic, social, and political role of the couple (see, e.g., Coontz, 1988; Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982; Wolf, 1997; Zaretsky, 1976). DePaulo and Morris's article (this issue) will bring welcome debate on these issues.

Conclusion

Coupling is so pervasive, and thinking differently about singles so natural, that *singlism* has virtually escaped notice until now. DePaulo and Morris's provocative article (this issue) contains many observations that push us, both as social scientists and as casual social perceivers, to examine our assumptions. Singles are indeed treated differently and many features of the world seem designed more for the benefit of couples than for singles. This article will lead readers to contemplate why this is the case. DePaulo and Morris have also helped scientists to shift figure and ground by bringing singles—whose number is ever growing—into sharper focus.

Given their insights, one of the remarkable features of DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) analysis is that it is virtually devoid of theory that can unify their discover-

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ies and ultimately explain them. We have argued that an evolutionary perspective can help. There is ample evidence from the comparative, physiological, and cross-cultural studies supporting the hypothesis that humans have forceful evolved motives for forming reproductive bonds. In the mating market, mateship status is not a mere curiosity; it reveals reproductively relevant information about the availability and desirability of others. In seeking to explain scientists' failure to appreciate or understand *singlism,* DePaulo and Morris placed part of the blame on scientific perspectives like evolutionary psychology. We have challenged this, and thus we also suggest a shift in figure and ground in which the insights from evolutionary psychology do not obscure but illuminate.

Note

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Marital Status as Stimulus Variable and Subject Variable

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I have long been interested in the "psychology of being a victim of prejudice and discrimination" as well as the topic of interpersonal relationships. Given these twin interests, I welcomed the opportunity to comment on the article by DePaulo and Morris (this issue). DePaulo and Morris make an eloquent and passionate argument that (a) single people in U.S. society are stigmatized and discriminated against; and (b) reports of married people being happier and healthier than their unmarried counterparts, especially single people, is a "myth" reflecting a cultural ideal that unfairly favors marriage over nonmarried relationships between adults. My commentary is organized around the two themes: marital status viewed as a "stimulus" variable (e.g., Are single people perceived more negatively than married people?) and also as a "subject" variable (e.g., Are married people happier than single people or not?).

Are Single People Stigmatized?

According to the social science and psychological literatures, stigma is defined as having a spoiled identity, being perceived negatively by others, and being an object of discrimination owing to inferior outcomes such as less pay. If these consequences are indeed associated with single marital status in our society, we would indeed have cause for concern.

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) summarize their own research on the stigma of being single, arguing that single people are perceived negatively. It consists primarily of person perception studies in which research participants are asked to rate "stimulus persons" from brief descriptions of hypothetical people that mention several characteristics and vary the stimulus person's alleged marital status and age, along with other "filler" features (e.g., hometown, profession) or descriptions of rental discrimination situations in which someone's application for an apartment rental is declined and the stimulus person's characteristics such as race or marital status are varied.

Unfortunately, since these studies are as yet unpublished, it is difficult to evaluate the research. However, some months before this article was submitted to *Psychological Inquiry*, I asked for and received a prepublication version from DePaulo of the article by Morris, DePaulo, Hertel, and Ritter (2004) in which they present four studies of perceptions of people who are single, three of which are person perception experiments with two samples of University of Virginia students and a convenience sample of community residents from an Oxnard, California, shopping mall serving as participants. Two experi-

ments used similar descriptions of the stimulus persons (e.g., "Dave is a 40-year-old artist living in Portland, Maine. He enjoys hiking and is married" and "Kristen is a 25-year-old teacher living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She enjoys basketball and is single") and experimentally varied the stimulus persons' sex (female vs. male), marital status (single vs. married), and age (25 vs. 40 years old) as within-subject, repeated measures variables, and sex of participant as a between-subjects variable. A third experiment varied the stimulus person's sex, current relationship status, and past relationship status as within-subject variables. Of course, repeated measures designs are more powerful statistically and likely to be more sensitive to revealing marital status differences than between-subjects designs. However, they are also more susceptible to demand characteristics suggesting the hypotheses of interest, since participants are exposed to all the different experimental variations.

The dependent measures were identical across the three experiments, consisting of 18 traits organized into five factors: well adjusted (e.g., happy, secure, fond of children), socially immature (e.g., lonely, shy, immature), exciting (e.g., interesting, adventurous), self-centered/envious (these two traits), and independent/career-oriented (again, those two traits)—responded to on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*very low endorsement of trait*) to 9 (*high endorsement of trait*). The neutral or midpoint on this scale is a score of 5.

Morris and her colleagues (2004) claim that single stimulus people were perceived more negatively than "coupled" people in each of the three experiments (e.g., more maladjusted, more socially immature, and more self-centered/envious). Although they do not describe exactly how the indexes were calculated in the version of their article I had available, it appears the index factors were means across items comprising the factors for each respondent. If so, the single stimulus people were not actually perceived negatively. The 16 means for single stimulus persons reported in their Table 2 are at, nearly at, or above the neutral point of the response scale, indicating neither high nor low trait endorsement. Participants are more confident that (a) coupled people are well adjusted and exciting than they are in the case of single people, and that (b) single people are more independent and career-oriented than coupled people. They were also less confident (means consistently below the neutral point on the scale) that coupled stimulus people were socially immature and self-centered/envious than was the case for single stimulus people (whose means again huddled closely around the neutral point). Most differences in means between single and coupled stimulus people were less than one unit on the response scale, even for the older stimulus persons where the marital status differences were greatest. To summarize, in the Morris et al. (2004) studies, single stimulus people may not actually be perceived negatively. Rather, they appear to have been viewed less positively than their "coupled" counterparts and close to the rating scale's mid or neutral point.

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) are certainly not first to explore marital status as a stimulus variable in person perception studies. Claire Etaugh and her colleagues conducted and reported at least 10 studies from 1981 to 1995 that systematically explored the effect of varying several marital statuses, with U.S. college students as participants. For example, Etaugh and Malstrom (1981) varied whether a 41-year-old man or woman was never married, divorced, widowed, or married in a between-subjects design. Participants rated one of these stimulus persons on 20 bipolar traits (see their Table 2, p. 802). While married people were evaluated more positively than unmarried people in general, means for all the different marital statuses were almost always on the positive end of the rating scale for the bipolar adjectives. On items relating to achievement and work involvement (e.g., successful in job, professionally competent), single people were rated more positively than married people.

Nor is it always the case that person perception studies will find a marital status stereotype. In exploring the Ms. stereotype (i.e., the perception of women with preferences for different titles of address) in several studies with Canadian university students as participants with experimental variations of marital status (married vs. unmarried), a marital status stereotype was not evident, perhaps because the stimulus persons were described as young (in their 20s) rather than middle age (Dion, 1987; Dion & Schuller, 1991). Studies of stereotyping (e.g., gender stereotypes, the Ms. stereotype) often show a trade-off between a warmth–likability dimension and a task- or achievement-oriented dimension. This trade-off is also apparent in the stereotype of single people relative to married people. Single, never married people are seen as less happy and likable but more professionally competent and career-oriented than their married counterparts. The studies by Morris et al. (2004) and Etaugh and Malstrom (1981) both suggest this pattern.

Scenario studies with convenience samples, whether involving hypothetical stimulus persons or hypothetical cases of rental discrimination, are perhaps not ideal for demonstrating that single people are stigmatized and discriminated against. Person perception studies of marital status make a case that marital status is a "status characteristic" and that married status is more highly valued than nonmarried status in the United States. More compelling in making the case for stigma and discrimination, to me at least, are studies exploring and showing actual differences in treatment by landlords while seeking housing or actual differences in occupational income with control variables taken into account. Audit studies, in which paired test-

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ers varying only in the dimension of interest, seek rental accommodation, try to buy a house, or apply to get a mortgage are the "gold standard" for documenting actual discrimination in housing (see Dion, 2001). Likewise, Toutkoushian (1998) analyzed the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty in the United States for total and "unexplained" (by other control factors) wage gaps as a function of race and marital status and found "a significant return to marriage persists for men but not for women," after extensive controls were incorporated into the regression equation (p. 529). Since universities are apt to be careful to avoid discriminating on any basis, a marriage premium in employment income should be explored in other venues, such as business and corporations.

In conclusion, DePaulo and Morris (this issue) have made a weak case that single marital status is actually stigmatized and perceived negatively. They and others before them have demonstrated that marital status is a stereotype cue and a status characteristic. Regarding discrimination, some evidence suggests that marriage benefits men, but not women, in U.S. academia relative to their single counterparts. Further studies of a marriage premium in the business and corporate world are warranted, as are audit studies of housing and employment opportunities as a function of marital status.

Is Marital Bliss a Myth?

Another provocative thesis set forth by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) is to question the finding of greater happiness among married than unmarried people and its strength. In this connection, they also suggest that some psychologists have overemphasized the strength of the marital status–well-being link in response to the Ideology of Marriage that alleged permeates society and science.

There are several points made by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) that I strongly suspect most researchers exploring marital status and well-being would agree with and not find controversial. First, most social scientists more or less agree that relationships are important, if not vital, to physical and psychological health. We can debate as to which relationships are more satisfying, but most people need relationships with others, especially close ones, to satisfy their need for belonging and many other needs. At the end of one's life, the most memorable aspect of our lives is the personal relationships we've experienced along its path.

It therefore matters a great deal whether a link between marital status and well-being or health exists, and if so, what the strength of that link is and whether the relationship is causal and in what direction(s). If a causal link between marital status and well-being and health were clearly documented, such a demonstration would be a compelling argument in favor of same-sex marriage, for example. Would it be fair or constitutional to preclude a segment of the adult population from being able to marry if marriage increased people's happiness? (At this writing, same-sex marriage is legal in half of Canada's 10 provinces.)

There is some evidence to suggest that there is a selection effect: i.e., that happy people are more likely to marry (see Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, p. 290; White, 1992), although the selection effect is apparently quite small. The causal hypothesis of marriage begetting greater happiness and health remains to be conclusively demonstrated and will probably require a prospective longitudinal sequential design. If and when a causal link is demonstrated, there are many candidates of underlying variables and processes to explore as potential mediators.

Second, no one seriously doubts that the *quality* of a dyadic relationship, marital or otherwise, makes a huge difference. It almost goes without saying that a conflicted marriage will not be a happy one, nor would it imbue the partners with a sense of well-being or good health. Russell and Wells (1994) explored 17 potential predictors of happiness in a sample of 1,200 married couples in Britain. The strongest predictor for both women and men was quality of marriage. Quality of marriage was two to five times as important a predictor as any other dimension, with neuroticism a close second.

Third, a variety of relationships can satisfy the need for belongingness and impart happiness to those in them. A close relationship with someone else—a cohabitant, a parent, a sibling, a close friend or confidante, a deeply loved pet—can contribute to promoting happiness and a sense of well-being. Robert S. Weiss's (1973) classic distinction between emotional isolation (lack of an attachment relationship) and social isolation (lack of a social network) is highly pertinent in this connection. Weiss suggested that we need *both* one or more attachment relationships (see the definition of an attachment relationship that follows) as well as a social network of friends and acquaintances that share interests and activities to be happy and to avoid loneliness and a sense of isolation. Although Weiss spoke of parents, siblings, and nonmarital partners as potentially fulfilling the role of an attachment relationship, his writing relating to emotional loneliness generally focused on romantic and marital partners, according to Green, Richardson, Lago, and Schatten-Jones (2001). Green et al. noted that Weiss believed that those never married, divorced, and widowed would be most susceptible to emotional loneliness.

Whether persons other than a romantic or marital partner can fulfill an attachment function is presently unknown and worth pursuing empirically. There is some research that speaks to the question. Using social network measures with both a young college student group and an older adult community sample, Green

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and her colleagues found that emotional loneliness was negatively associated with the presence of a spouse or romantic partner but *not* the presence of a close other. Also, presence of a spouse or romantic partner better predicted emotional loneliness for the older adults than the younger ones. The first of these two findings implies, on the face of it, that there may be something unique and special about a romantic or marital relationship. Similarly, some years previously, Russell, Cutrona, Rose, and Yurko (1984) also supported Weiss's typology of social and emotional loneliness with college students and concluded that emotional loneliness in their sample resulted from a lack of a satisfying romantic relationship, while social loneliness was due to a lack of satisfying relationships with friends. Of course, further research exploring exactly what it is about a romantic or marital relationship that counters emotional loneliness in adults of various ages that is not available in a close relationship with another person is needed.

Other evidence also suggests romantic and family closeness are not identical in regard to emotional loneliness and that attachment may be a key differentiator. DiTomasso and Spinner (1993) developed the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA) and found, through factor analysis, that emotional loneliness was further differentiated into romantic and family components in college students. This distinction was further supported in their later research (DiTomasso & Spinner, 1997) where they found that lower levels of social provisions for attachment uniquely predicted greater romantic loneliness in a college student sample, whereas lower levels of social integration predicted higher social loneliness, and lower levels of guidance predicted greater family loneliness. This discussion begs the question: What is an attachment relationship? The best information at present is that a relationship in which a significant other elicits proximity maintenance and serves as both a "secure base" and a "safe haven" is an attachment relationship (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

A fourth and final area of likely agreement is the obvious need for a current meta-analysis of the literature on marital status and well-being. Haring-Hidore, Stock, Okun, and Witter (1985) reported a mean correlation of .14 between being married and subjective well-being from a literature of 58 sources and a total of 111 effect size estimates. Not only is this latter meta-analysis now dated but also its value is arguably limited because some important comparisons had relatively few effect size estimates (e.g., the mean correlation of .09 contrasting married vs. single was based on only eight effect size estimates). Moreover, since Haring-Hidore et al. (1985) did not provide a listing of their sources and their effect size estimates in each case, the meta-analysis of marital status and well-being needs to be redone.

Despite the apparent limitations of Haring-Hidore et al.'s (1985)) meta-analysis, it may turn out that their finding of a mean correlation in the "small effect" range is not far off. As Diener et al. (1999, p. 276) noted, demographic factors generally have "surprisingly" small effects on subjective well-being. Since happiness and health are likely to be multiply determined, a single factor like marital status is unlikely to account for a great deal of the variance. However, even very small effects can be important, both practically (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1983) and theoretically (Prentice & Miller, 1992). In addition, since genetic factors are believed to account for nearly half the variance in subjective well-being (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), socioenvironmental influences are perhaps constrained.

In other regards, the claims by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) are perhaps more contentious. While social scientists very often argue a point of view and advocate a particular position on a social issue, the notion that respected colleagues such as David Myers, Ed Diener, and Martin Seligman are distorting findings in the literature to promote the ideology of marriage, wittingly or unwittingly, struck me as unfair and unlikely. Most research exploring the issue of association between marital status and well-being has arisen because marital status is a standard demographic item that is invariably asked of respondents to surveys, and a series of studies have found a link between marriage and well-being dating from at least the mid-1960s. For example, Wilson (1967) claimed one of the factors associated with "avowed happiness" was being married. Similarly, Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) suggested that marriage and family were the most important of 15 different domains they explored for predicting global well-being. Such results have since made marital status a key demographic correlate for those interested in subjective well-being.

My own impression is that Myers, Diener, and Seligman reflect the consensus in the literature. In the following paragraphs, I summarize secondary analyses of my own, as well as some recent studies not mentioned by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) involving large national and international datasets that deserve consideration by the interested reader. The evidence suggests, to me at least, that the link between marital status and well-being is alive and well.

Analyses With the U.S. General Social Survey

I explored the issue of the relationship between marital status and well-being with the U.S. General Social Survey (GSS; Davis & Smith, 1992), in the tradition of Glenn and Weaver (1988). The GSS is a high quality probability survey of face-to-face interviews of English-speaking adults in U.S. households that has been conducted by the respected National Opinion Research

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Center almost every year from 1972 to the present and is available in the public domain, including the Internet. As of 2002, the cumulative sample size exceeded 40,000 respondents. Though not perfect (e.g., it very likely underrepresents Hispanic people in the United States who are not fluent English speakers and resident college students), the GSS nevertheless constitutes an authoritative source of data to examine the relationship of marital status to well-being in the United States over the last 30 years or so. In particular, not only are these data cumulative, they also include quite recent information concerning the relationship between marital status and happiness in the U.S. population.

The GSS dataset available to me extended from 1972 to 2002. The dependent measure for my analyses was the item entitled "General Happiness." The question asks: "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" Thus the general happiness item incorporates a 3-point rating scale from 1 (*very happy*) to 2 (*pretty happy*) to 3 (*not too happy*), with lower scores indicating greater happiness. The main independent variable of marital status was represented by five categories. In the order given by the GSS, these are married, widowed, divorced, separated, and never married.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) yields a highly significant effect for marital status, $F(4, 41{,}969) = 585.33$, $p < .001$, partial $h^2 = .053$. The means were 1.68 for the married category, 1.95 for widowed, 1.99 for divorced, 2.12 for separated, and 1.92 for those never married. Since lower scores indicated greater happiness, the married respondents clearly scored as happier than any of the other categories of marital status, whether singly or in combination. In the latter case, for example, the contrast of means (assuming equal variances) was highly significant, $t(41{,}972) = -46.988$, $p = .001$.

The contrast between the married and never married categories, in particular, was also highly significant, $t(13{,}856) = -31.547$, $p < .01$ Translating this t value into an $r_{effect\ size}$ statistic, following Rosnow and Rosenthal's (2002) formula for converting two-sample *t*s to *r*, yields a value of .65, which qualifies as a "large" effect. This latter effect size estimate was calculated using a *t* for unequal variances since the Levene test was highly significant. Even using the equal variance *t* yields an effect size correlation of .55 for the married–never married comparison. In either case, the greater happiness of married over never-married respondents in the U.S. GSS sample over 30 years is a large and substantial effect.

Since the response options in the general happiness item are limited, one could argue that one should employ chi square analyses rather than ANOVA. Table 1 presents the frequency counts of the three happiness categories for each of the marital statuses, along with the percentage of each status category who reported being very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy. Standardized residuals (SRs) comparing obtained and expected cell frequencies are like *z* values, in that values greater than + or –2 reflects an observed cell frequency that is either greater (in the case of a positive value) or less than (in the case of a negative value) than would be expected by chance.

As shown in Table 1, the percentage of married respondents who reported being very happy (40.22%) is twice that of the divorced and separated and nearly twice that of the widowed and never married categories. Likewise, the percentage of married respondents (7.73%) who reported being "not too happy" is less than half the percentages for the widowed, divorced, and separated categories, and nearly half that for the never-married category. The standardized residuals likewise indicate that the frequency of married respondents who reported being "very happy" is much greater than would be expected by chance, while those indicating being "not too happy" is much less, *SR*s of 22.1 and –19.1, respectively. By contrast, the frequency of never-married respondents who reported being "very happy" is considerably less than would be expected by chance, while they are considerably more likely than chance to have reported being "not too happy," *SR*s of –15.4 and 6.4, respectively.

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Table 1. *General Happiness and Marital Status in the U.S. General Social Survey (1972–2002)*

	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Never Married
Very Happy					
Count	9481	1053	920	234	1772
%	40.22	24.53	19.58	15.92	22.31
SR	22.1	–8.7	–15.1	–10.90	–15.4
Pretty Happy					
Count	12268	2417	2927	828	5015
%	52.05	56.30	62.30	56.33	63.14
SR	–7.9	0.4	5.9	0.2	8.7
Not Too Happy					
Count	1821	823	851	408	1156
%	7.73	19.17	18.11	27.76	14.55
SR	–19.1	13.4	12.0	17.3	6.4
Total	23570	4293	4698	1470	7943

Note. SR = Standardized Residual.

Additional ANOVAs were performed incorporating other dimensions as independent variables. The addition of respondent's sex does not qualify or interact with the effect for marital status. Though respondent's race does interact significantly with marital status category, as also noted by DePaulo and Morris (this issue), there is a relationship between marital status and happiness for White respondents, $F(4,33851) = 405.94, p < .01$, partial $h^2 = .046$, as well as for Black respondents, $F(4,5515) = 44.36, p < .01$, partial $h^2 = .031$. The greater happiness of married than those never married, however, remains intact for both White and Black respondents, $r_{effect\ size} = .24$ and .18, respectively. In either case, the happiness increment for married respondents over their never married counterparts is approximately halfway between a small and medium effect size.

Since the U.S. GSS dataset extends over 30 years, temporal trends are certainly relevant to explore, especially since Glenn and Weaver (1988) reported the strength of the relationship between marriage and happiness had declined in two 5-year segments between 1972–1976 and 1982–1986, and others have made similar suggestions of a declining relationship (Haring-Hidore et al., 1985). I divided the 30 year dataset into three 10-year slices (viz., 1972–1982, 1983–1992, and 1993–2002), thus achieving a broader time frame than Glenn and Weaver. The decade variable did, in fact, interact significantly with marital status in its relationship to general happiness. Consistent with Glenn and Weaver, the relationship between marital status and happiness was indeed not quite as strong in the 1983–1992 decade, $F(4, 13622) = 158.92$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .045$, than it was in the 1972h1982 or 1993h2002 blocks of years, $F(4,13920) = 166.66$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .046$, and $F(4, 14402) = 240.47$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .063$. The effect size correlations for the married-never married comparisons were .29, .23, and .27 for the three successive decades, using unequal variance *t*s in the calculations owing to significant Levene tests. Across the three 10-year segments, the marriage increment of happiness is midway between a small and a medium effect size for the 1983–1992 decade and close to a medium effect for the 1972–1982 and 1993–2002 decades. In the most recent decade, the relationship between marital status and happiness has increased and apparently recovered from its weakening in the 1980s.

International Studies

Even if marriage is associated with happiness in the United States, one must be careful to explore the relationship in other countries. Since the United States has the highest divorce rate in the world, the link between marriage and happiness could be much smaller or nonexistent elsewhere because people are more apt to be locked in unhappy marriages. Stack and Eshleman (1998) addressed the international issue by examining nationally representative samples of adults from 17 countries who participated in the World Values Study Group between 1981 and 1983. In a sample of 18,000 participants, marital status emerged as the third best predictor, after satisfaction with household finances and health status. Controlling for other variables, marriage was associated with greater happiness for both sexes. Being married was related to happiness in 16 of 17 countries. Marriage was a better predictor of happiness than cohabitation, with the latter's regression coefficient a quarter of that for marriage.

Similarly, using World Values survey data collected between 1990 and 1993 in 43 societies, Diener, Gohm, Suh, and Oishi (2000) found that married individuals reported greater subjective well-being than never-married individuals, who in turn reported greater well-being than previously married individuals. Moreover, in the sample of nearly 60,000 respondents in 42 different nations, these relationships between marital status and subjective well-being were very similar around the world, with only small variations due to the country's individualistic or collectivistic values, and no differences due to gender.

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Marriage, Health, and Mortality

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) approvingly cite White's (1992) secondary analysis of the Canadian GSS for 1985 several times, since it claims to show that single individuals are healthier than married or cohabiting ones. This claim is based on only one of three health criteria—number of visits to physicians—which is ambiguous and questionable, in that *fewer* visits are taken as indicating *better* health. The allegedly superior health of singles occurred for only four of the 14 age groups: 15–19, 20–24, 65–69, and 75–79. White (1992) noted that results for the youngest (15–19) age group should be viewed cautiously owing to small cell sizes. For the two older age groups, one could easily argue that visiting or consulting one's physician is good rather than poor health practice. It may contribute to the established finding that mortality rates are lower for married than unmarried people (Gardner & Oswald, in press; Verbrugge, 1979).

Gardner and Oswald's (in press) study is especially notable, as it employed longitudinal data for individuals aged 40 and older from the British Household Panel Study. It was possible to control for health at the start of the period studied and to include a "rich set of health controls" in estimating probability of death over the course of a decade. Marriage was associated with considerably lower mortality rates: death was 7.2% less likely for married than unmarried men, and married women were 4.1% less likely to die than unmarried women who were otherwise similar. Gardner and Oswald (in press, p. 11) put these findings in sharp per-

spective for the British male, by noting: "The excess mortality of the unmarried is here similar to that of a smoker (5.0 percent)."

Why married people have lower mortality, at least in the United States and Britain, remains to be determined. Using reported stress as measured by the General Health Questionnaire, Gardner and Oswald (in press) argue that it is not reduction in stress levels that keeps British married folk alive. In the United States, Robles and Kiecolt-Glaser (2003) argued that the single most critical process mediating the link between marriage and mortality is social support and positive social interactions, which are believed to suppress hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) system activity.

In conclusion, in my view, the association of marriage to health and happiness is stronger than implied by DePaulo and Morris's review (this issue). To resolve the debate. a current and complete meta-analysis is needed to determine precisely the effect size for, and moderators of, the relationship. Since investigators seemed to be lined up on one side or the other of this issue, perhaps a meta-analytic team containing both advocates and opponents of the marriage–well-being relationship could be assembled (see Latham, 1992, for an example of opponents working together to resolve a scientific dispute). From my viewpoint, whether the link between marriage and well-being is causal and whether close relationships other than marital ones can satisfy an attachment function are the important and interesting questions.

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) are to be commended for bringing these important issues to our attention and drawing our attention to marital status as a stimulus and as a subject variable in psychological and social science research.

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The Myth of Marital Bliss?

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In their target article, DePaulo and Morris (this issue) suggest the ideology of marriage and family has affected the way social scientists interpret evidence about the links between marriage and happiness. They point out that although many respected psychologists have argued for such an effect, a careful examination of the research literature provides a much less clear picture. The association between marital status and happiness appears to be weak and inconsistent, especially when married and never-married individuals are compared.

It is always fascinating when a widely held belief turns out not to be supported by empirical evidence. When it is a layperson's belief that is challenged, it is easy to attribute the mistake to the limits of intuition. However, when scientists have empirical evidence available for review and they still misread the literature, it is necessary to carefully investigate the factors that are responsible for this mistake. In this commentary, we first revisit the evidence about the association between happiness and marital status. Next, we address some possible reasons why it has been so difficult to determine whether marital status is associated with happiness. Finally, we address the question of whether the ideology of marriage and family leads to an overestimation of the benefits of marriage.

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Are Married People Happier Than Singles?

As DePaulo and Morris point out in their target article, marital status is often held up as one of the strongest correlates of subjective well-being (e.g., Argyle, 2001; Myers, 1992; Seligman, 2002). Yet the existence of this association does not necessarily mean that marriage itself causes long-term changes in happiness. In addition to the problems that emerge when trying to infer causation from correlational data, it is also often unclear which groups drive this effect and why. For instance, a divorced person is not just someone who lacks the bond of marriage; he or she is also a person who has experienced the potentially painful event of ending a committed relationship. Similarly, widowed individuals have lived through the death of their spouse. Thus, the link between marital status and well-being may not be due to the beneficial effects of the marriage itself, but to additional hardships that emerge when marriages end.

To isolate the beneficial effects of marriage, researchers need to determine whether married people are happier than single people and whether single people get a lasting boost in happiness when they get married. As DePaulo and Morris (this issue) note, when these comparisons are made, effects are often very small. For instance, in a meta-analysis, Haring-Hidore, Stock, Okun, and Witter (1985) found just a .09 correlation between married and never-married status and well-being. In addition, Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener (2003) used a nationally representative German panel study to show that happiness levels do not change following marriage. Happiness increases in the years before marriage, reaches a peak in the year of marriage, and then quickly drops back to baseline levels within about 2 years. These studies provide support for DePaulo and Morris's contention that marriage, itself, provides little benefit.

Although these two studies used methodology that makes them particularly compelling, other methodologically strong studies lead to somewhat different conclusions. For instance, the World Values Survey (Inglehart, 2003) is a cross-national study designed to assess values and norms in many societies around the world. World Values Surveys have been administered three times, once from 1981 to 1984, once from 1990 to 1993, and once from 1995 to 1998. Almost 170,000 people from over 70 nations and regions around the world were sampled using random and quota sampling. As DePaulo and Morris (this issue) note, this dataset has often been used to address questions about marital status and well-being (e.g., Inglehart, 1990; Mastekaasa, 1994; Myers, 1992). However, the evidence from this study appears to have been mis-cited in many existing reviews. Furthermore, a complete analysis of this dataset has not been conducted. Because this dataset is available to researchers, we went to the source itself and calculated standardized mean differences (*d*) in life satisfaction between married individuals and never married individuals in all regions in all three waves (positive *d*s mean that married people are happier). We then meta-analytically combined these effects to determine the average effect and to determine whether this average effect varied across nations and over time.

Results of our meta-analysis showed that indeed, the average effect is quite small. The average *d* across all nations was just .13, which translates into a correlation of just .06. This is slightly smaller than the value reported in Haring-Hidore et al.'s (1985) 2-decades-old meta-analysis. However, heterogeneity tests showed that this effect varied significantly across nations. In other words, the differences across nations were not simply due to sampling error, and therefore, we cannot say that a *d* of .13 is the "true" effect. For instance, *d*s ranged from –.34 (*r* = –.15) in Latvia in 1995 to +.60 (*r* = +.25) in Sweden in 1981 even though the same questions were asked in all nations and in all years.

One possible moderator of this effect could be the year of the survey. Perhaps the effect of marriage has changed over time (Glenn & Weaver, 1988). An initial investigation appeared to support this possibility as the average *d* in 1981 was .25 (*r* = .11), compared to just .16 (*r* = .07) and .06 (*r* = .03) in 1990 and 1995. However, a more careful investigation revealed that these trends over time were due more to the change in nations sampled, rather than to time per se. When we restricted our analyses to the 13 nations that were assessed in both 1981 and 1995, the effect sizes were .24 (*r* = .10) in 1981 and .25 (*r* = .11) in 1995. Thus, between-nation differences seem to drive this effect.

Because effects vary across nations, it is necessary to look within nations to determine whether marriage matters for that nation. For instance, *d*s in the United States were .31 (*r* = .15), .30 (*r* = .12), and .47 (*r* = .19) in 1981, 1990, and 1995, respectively. These effects can then be compared to other nationally representative samples to determine whether consistent results emerge. The General Social Survey (GSS; Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2003) provides a second opportunity to compare the happiness of married versus single people in the United States. As with the World Values Survey, the GSS has been used by researchers to address the link between marital status and well-being (e.g., Myers, 1999; Glenn & Weaver, 1988). The GSS has been administered to national probability samples of Americans almost every year from 1972 on. Each year, respondents were asked a single question about their happiness. We again calculated the standardized mean difference between married individuals and never-married individuals for each year of the survey (up to 1998), and then we averaged across these effects. Consistent with the results reported here, effect sizes in the United States tended to be higher than the average from the World Values Survey. The average *d* in this sample was .41 (average *r* = .20), and the range was .21 (*r* = .10) to .62 (*r* = .30). In every year of this study, married people reported happiness scores that were at least one fifth of a standard deviation and up to six tenths of a standard deviation higher than never married individuals. Interestingly, even though this survey was conducted using the exact same question each year on samples from the same population, year-to-year variation in these effect sizes was significant (though contrary to Glenn and Weaver who used data from 1972 to 1986, we found no evidence of trends over time).

So what can we say about the link between marriage and well-being? Results from Haring-Hidore et al.'s (1985) meta-analysis, the World Values Survey, and the GSS show that, on average, married people have a slight edge in happiness over never-married people. However, these studies do not provide a resolution of the controversy over the size of this effect. Even though very similar methodologies were used in the latter two studies, each arrived at different estimates of the average effect. Furthermore, this effect varied significantly across nations and over time, even within the same study. There are many nations where the effect is very close to zero, or even negative (meaning that singles are happier than married people). Yet there are also many nations with effect sizes that are consistently moderate in size. Thus, until additional moderators are understood, researchers can only describe effects within specific contexts.

In the United States, we can safely say that when representative samples are assessed, the effect is small to medium in size. Both the World Values Survey and the GSS acquired very large, representative samples of Americans, and *d*s in these samples tended to average out around .40 (*r*s around .20). Effects of this size are some of the largest found when objective factors are used to predict subjective well-being (see Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, for a review). Thus, cross-sectional studies seem to suggest that marriage does matter. Longitudinal studies in the United States will be required to determine whether these differences result from changes in happiness following marriage.

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Why Is This Effect So Confusing?

Subjective well-being researchers have been investigating the correlates of happiness for decades (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999; Wilson, 1967). In addition, the datasets we analyzed (which provide relatively clear answers about the range of effects found in the United States) have been available for many years. Why then has it been so difficult to determine the effect of marriage? One explanation concerns the inconsistent use of effect sizes. Research on marital status and well-being has been conducted in a variety of fields ranging from psychology to sociology to epidemiology. Within each of these disciplines, researchers have relied on different statistics to examine this effect. For instance, psychologists may be used to thinking of well-being outcome measures as continuous variables that can be investigated using correlations and mean

differences across groups. Survey researchers, on the other hand may think of a four-point happiness scale as a categorical outcome. They may be more likely to investigate this outcome using frequency counts and cross-tabs.

When using the World Values Survey and the GSS, both Myers (1992) and Inglehart (1990) examined the percentage of respondents from each marital group who reported being "very happy." Although this statistic provides important information about the association between happiness and marital status, it provides different information than a correlation, a mean difference, or even a frequency count for other happiness categories would. For instance, in the 1995 World Values Survey, 55% of married individuals in the United States indicated that they were "very happy," whereas just 31% of never-married individuals used that category. Based on this comparison, married people look much happier than unmarried people. However, when we use whole distribution of scores and calculate the correlation between these two variables, this correlation is .18. Many researchers would find this correlation to be small. Finally, if we look at the low end of the happiness scale, we find even smaller effects. Only 4% of married individuals and 7% of never married individuals reported that they were either "not very" or "not at all" happy. Thus, conclusions about happiness levels for married and unmarried individuals would differ depending on which effect one chose to emphasize.

Each of these techniques for reporting results provides important information about the association between marital status and subjective well-being. No one effect size is the correct one to report. However, researchers need to realize that these different effect sizes provide different information, and these different pieces of information may lead to different conclusions. We believe that the standardized mean difference and correlations provide the most complete information about the nature of the effect, and selected cross-tabs and frequencies can provide supplemental information to aid in the interpretation of this effect.

Which Ideology Is at Work?

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) correctly note that discussions of the link between marital status and well-being have been incomplete, oversimplified, and sometimes just plain wrong. Although the empirical evidence from large, nationally representative studies does support a small to medium effect within the United States, this effect varies over time and across nations, and it appears to be nonexistent or even reversed in some nations. This complicated pattern is rarely discussed in the reviews that DePaulo and Morris cite.

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) go on to suggest that these incomplete reviews result from an ideology of marriage and family that leads to "the selective citing of studies compatible with the myth of marital bliss." Although this is certainly a possibility, we wonder whether there is a larger ideology at work. There are certain sets of variables that are very appealing as predictors of well-being and certain sets that are not. The effects of these appealing predictors tend to be emphasized, whereas the effects of the less appealing predictors get downplayed.

For instance, one often cited finding in the literature on subjective well-being is that income and wealth simply do not matter. Instead, we are told that social relationships provide our best chance of increasing happiness. Myers, for example, suggested that although "age, gender, and income … give little clue to someone's happiness, … better clues come from knowing … whether [people] enjoy a supportive network of close relationships" (2000, p. 65). Similarly, Argyle stated, "social relationships have a powerful effect on happiness and other aspects of well-being, and are perhaps its greatest single cause" (2001, p. 71). Even DePaulo and Morris (this issue) suggest that close relationships are particularly important predictors of well-being. They rejected the notion that "adults have a unique need for one particular kind of relationship—a sexual partnership" and instead suggested that humans have a much broader need for stable, positive relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They proposed that single people are not less happy than married people because single people are just as likely to have such relationships in their lives.

Yet a careful examination reveals that the effects of income are not as small as researchers make them out to be, and the effects of social relationships are not nearly as large as some have claimed. For instance, we recently reviewed the evidence for the positive effects of social relationships on well-being and then compared these effects to the associations between well-being and income (Lucas & Dyrenforth, in press). Evidence from two meta-analyses, a narrative review of cross-national results, and the GSS revealed that the average correlation between income and measures of happiness and life satisfaction is about .18. However, the associations between happiness and social relationships actually tend to be smaller! For instance, Okun, Stock, Haring, and Witter (1984) conducted a meta-analysis of these effects and found a correlation of only .16 between happiness and the characteristics of one's social network (including size of one's network and frequency of social contact). This figure dropped to only .13 when frequency measures were examined. A more recent meta-analysis of studies conducted among older adults (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000) replicated this result. The number of relationships a person has and the frequency of contact he or

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she experiences are only correlated .12 with life satisfaction and .17 with happiness.

We also turned to the GSS to estimate the association between happiness and the existence of social relationships (Lucas & Dyrenforth, in press). Over 6,000 participants were asked to report the number of friends they had. Consistent with the meta-analyses reported here, this variable only correlated .13 with general happiness. Additional variables indexing the frequency of contact with other people also showed fairly weak correlations with well-being. For instance, the frequency with which people spend a social evening with relatives, neighbors, friends, parents, and siblings, and the frequency with which people visited or spoke with their closest friend on the phone all correlated less than .06 with happiness. Perhaps more surprising, even when the amount of perceived support available is considered, the correlation was low. Specifically, the number of friends that respondents felt they could count on only correlated .05 with happiness. Despite these small effect sizes, the role of social relationships in well-being remains a central focus in well-being research and theory.

Although effect sizes for the association between social relationships and well-being are quite similar to the effect sizes for the association between income and well-being, these effects are often interpreted very differently. Relationships are reported to be the "single greatest cause" of well-being (Argyle, 2001, p. 71), whereas income is seen as an inconsequential factor. Although the tendency to overstate the benefits of marriage may result from an ideology of marriage, we wonder whether this may simply be part of a broader tendency to inflate the importance of relationships relative to less appealing factors such as wealth and income.

Does Anything Matter?

In comparing the effects of income, relationships, and marital status, we do not wish to suggest that nothing matters for well-being. On the contrary, we believe that all three of these factors have important implications for happiness and life satisfaction. However, when meta-analyses and large, nationally representative samples are used to estimate effect sizes, we find that correlations between these predictors and well-being all tend to fall between .10 and .30. The size of these effects provides a great deal of leeway in interpretation. If researchers choose to use standard cutoffs to interpret these effects (Cohen, 1988), they might dismiss them as being "small" because they only account for between 1% and 9% of the variance in well-being. In this way, the effect of income (with *r*s around .18) can be dismissed as unimportant. At the same time, similar sized effects in the domain of relationships can be heralded as the most important causes of well-being.

As many psychologists and methodologists have pointed out, effect sizes are difficult to interpret, and we may be better off comparing effect sizes within one domain to effect sizes in others rather than comparing these effects to somewhat arbitrary standards. For instance the effect sizes within the United States for income, social relationships, and marriage all tend to be at least as high as the effect of the nicotine patch on smoking cessation ($r = .18$), slightly higher than the effect of antihistamines on a runny nose ($r = .11$), and much higher than the effect of aspirin on the reduced risk of death by heart attack ($r = .02$; see Meyer et al., 2001, for a summary of effect sizes from many different fields). Although it is true that most effect sizes within the subjective well-being domain have been calculated using cross-sectional rather than experimental or longitudinal data, the size of these effects suggest that relationships, marriage, and even income have the potential to impact happiness in important ways.

Summary

Does marriage lead to a state of bliss? For most people, the answer is "probably not." However, the small to moderate association between marital status and well-being is not a myth. At least in the United States, married people tend to be happier than single people. This effect also generalizes to many, but certainly not all, other nations that have been investigated. At this point, researchers do not understand the moderators of this effect, and thus statements about the universal benefits of marriage should probably not be made. In addition, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) point out, very few longitudinal studies have investigated whether happiness levels change following marriage. It is very possible that happy people are more likely than unhappy people to marry (Lucas et al., 2003; Stutzer & Frey, 2003) and this effect may account for cross-sectional associations. However, the potential benefits of marriage should not be downplayed, just as benefits of relationships in general should not be overstated. Theoretical development relies on accurate statements about the associations among variables. DePaulo and Morris have done a great service by pointing out the inconsistencies in the way that researchers have interpreted evidence about the benefits of marriage. To get an accurate sense of the importance of these variables, effect sizes from meta-analyses and nationally representative samples need to be compared directly. We are optimistic that their target article will encourage researchers to investigate these effects more carefully, which will, in turn, lead to a greater understanding of the role of marriage—and relationships in general—in subjective well-being.

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The Purported Benefits of Marriage Viewed Through the Lens of Physical Health

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Prejudice toward single individuals derives in part from the widespread belief that they are less happy and less satisfied with their lives than are married individuals, according to DePaulo and Morris (this issue). Moreover, unique benefits afforded by marriage are believed to play a causal role in the greater psychological well-being of married individuals. From this perspective, their greater psychological well-being is not simply the result of selection processes that lead happier individuals to marry and less happy individuals to remain single. DePaulo and Morris undertake a thorough and probing analysis of the empirical evidence often invoked to support claims that married individuals enjoy greater psychological well-being than do single individuals. DePaulo and Morris conclude that these claims do not bear up under close scrutiny. They demonstrate that research cited as documenting the emotional health benefits of marriage often involves comparisons of only two groups, the married and the unmarried. Such comparisons overlook potential differences among the divorced, widowed, and single individuals who comprise the unmarried category. When the unmarried category is disaggregated, the evidence often reveals that single individuals do not differ from married individuals, and when differences do emerge, they tend to follow a gendered pattern: single men fare less well than do married men on some dimensions of emotional well-being, but single and married women do not differ. Thus, DePaulo and Morris make the case that evidence that married individuals enjoy greater psychological well-being than single individuals is highly conditional on gender.

The largest and most reliable marital status differences emerge when the married are compared with the divorced and the widowed. This work demonstrates with impressive consistency that divorced and widowed individuals report less happiness and greater psychological distress than do married individuals. Such findings suggest that it is stress associated with the deterioration or loss of the marital relationship that threatens well-being rather than benefits derived from the marital relationship that elevate well-being. From this perspective, it is the preservation of a chosen life path—whether as a married or a single person—that sustains subjective well-being; in contrast, it is the disruption of a chosen life path, as reflected in divorce or widowhood, that erodes well-being.

DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) exposure of the thin and widely misconstrued base of empirical evidence that underlies claims about the emotional health benefits of marriage is persuasive, and their cautions about the reification of these unsubstantiated claims certainly deserve to be heeded. Yet we believe that an evaluation of the purported benefits of marriage could be expanded to include aspects of health and functioning that DePaulo and Morris did not have an opportunity to consider in depth. Marriage is often described as contributing not only to greater happiness (a view refuted by DePaulo and Morris) but also to better health and greater longevity. These two different classes of benefits attributed to marriage—greater emotional health and greater physical health—are sometimes perceived to be causally intertwined because the happiness and life satisfaction produced by marriage are thought to bolster immune function, dampen cardiovascular reactivity, and contribute to other health-enhancing physiological processes (see reviews by Burman & Margolin, 1992; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003).

Our goal is to extend DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) analysis to include several important dimensions of physical health, such as health behavior, morbidity, self-rated health, recovery from or adaptation to illness, and mortality. Consideration of the implications of marriage for physical health provides an additional lens through which the often-cited benefits of marriage can be evaluated. Compared to single individuals, married individuals might be found to enjoy distinct advantages in terms of physical health but not in terms of emotional health. If so, it would become important to seek explanations for such differential effects in different domains of well-being, and it might become important, as well, to consider whether the health-related needs of unmarried individuals are adequately addressed by existing health policies and programs. Alternatively, a careful evaluation of the evidence might reveal that claims of the health-related benefits of marriage also lack a strong empirical foundation. If so, then DePaulo and Morris's conclusion regarding the absence of compelling evidence for the psychological benefits of marriage would be upheld and extended to additional domains of well-being.

A comprehensive review of relevant research is beyond the scope of this commentary, but we discuss illustrative studies as an initial exploration of the extent to which the conclusions reached by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) regarding emotional health generalize to physical health. We believe such an extension of

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their analysis is useful, as well, because it calls attention to stage in the life course as a context for evaluating the health implications of marital status. Declines in health and functioning are most common in later adulthood, and it is possible that the health benefits of marriage would be more evident in this life stage than in young or middle adulthood.

Does Marriage Benefit Physical Health?

Marriage has been hypothesized to benefit physical health for a number of reasons (Burman & Margolin, 1992; Williams & Umberson, 2004). As noted previously, the positive affect that marriage is believed to engender could contribute to health-sustaining physiological processes. In addition, marriage—and when offspring are present, parenting—entail day-to-day role obligations thought to foster internal restraints on risk-taking behavior, including risky health practices that could compromise the performance of role responsibilities. Complementing such internal mechanisms of restraint is the function of marital relationships as a source of external restraint. Spouses can monitor and attempt to regulate each other's health behavior, presumably intervening to discourage unsound health behaviors and to encourage sound health behaviors. Such social control, or regulatory, functions in marriage, therefore, have the potential to reduce the risk of illness onset and progression for conditions that have behavioral underpinnings (Umberson, 1992). Additionally, marriage is believed to provide ready access to social support during times of life stress, thus helping to reduce susceptibility to the health-eroding effects of acute or chronic stress (Burman & Margolin, 1992). Spousal support is considered to be important, as well, among people who are coping with illness or seeking to recover from surgery or other medical interventions (Kulik & Mahler, 1993). Finally, marriage provides an accepted social identity and source of status, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) observed, and such symbolic rewards might contribute to self-esteem and psychological well-being and, in turn, to better physical health.

People other than spouses plausibly could perform many of these health-sustaining functions, but spouses are believed to be uniquely qualified to do so because of their long-term commitment to and interdependence with their partners, their intimate knowledge of their partners' needs, and their ready availability and accessibility to their partners. Additionally, although many social relationships become relatively specialized in the functions they perform, the spousal relationship is believed to represent an exception in that it serves as a source of many different health-sustaining functions, including the provision of companionship, emotional support, and instrumental support (Weiss, 1974). Whether this is necessarily a superior arrangement for deriving important forms of companionship and support is a point to which we return later.

Health Behavior

We begin by considering whether married individuals exhibit better health behavior than do unmarried (and, specifically, single) individuals. Umberson (1992) examined this hypothesis in a longitudinal study of approximately 3,000 adults aged 24 and older. Her analyses of marital status differences at baseline revealed that divorced and widowed individuals exhibited more problem health behaviors (e.g., alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, low physical activity) than did married individuals. Comparisons involving single individuals revealed few disadvantages; relative to their married counterparts, single men were more likely to have a low body mass, and single women actually engaged in more, rather than less, physical activity.

An important feature of Umberson's longitudinal study was her examination of the implications of changes in marital status for health behavior. If marriage fosters better health behavior, then the shift from being unmarried to married should be accompanied by an improvement in health behavior. Umberson did not find this to be the case. Unmarried individuals who became married over the 3-year course of the study exhibited few gains in health behavior. Married individuals who became divorced or widowed, on the other hand, exhibited significant declines in health behavior. To determine whether this was due to the lack of someone to monitor their health behavior or to the stress of marital dissolution, Umberson compared individuals who were consistently unmarried versus newly unmarried over the course of the study and found that only the latter group evidenced deteriorating health behavior. These patterns emerged controlling for such factors as age, race, education, and income. Considered together, Umberson's results suggest that marital status differences in health behavior are due more to the adverse effects of divorce or widowhood than to the beneficial effects of marriage. This pattern thus mirrors the pattern noted by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) when marital status differences in emotional health are carefully disaggregated.

Morbidity

Verbrugge (1979) undertook an early evaluation of the association between marital status and morbidity, analyzing patterns in a number of national databases that included information on study participants' health. Heath status was evaluated in terms of health conditions, functional limitations, and disability. Controlling for age, Verbrugge found that married individ-

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uals enjoyed the best health, but never-married individuals had the next best health. Widowed adults were ranked third, and divorced/separated adults had the worst health status. Verbrugge explained this pattern in terms of the psychological distress caused by the loss of the marital relationship, a process that would have involved more conflict for divorced individuals than for widowed individuals, thereby accounting for the distinctly poor health of the divorced. The health-eroding effects of divorce have been noted by other researchers as well (Booth & Amato, 1991). Verbrugge also speculated, however, that the never-married may be worse off than the data suggest because seriously ill never-married individuals are more likely than other groups to receive care in institutional settings, perhaps causing them to be underrepresented in community surveys.

A more recent study conducted in the Netherlands (Joung et al., 1997) obtained somewhat similar results when examining the relationship between health and marital status among men versus women. Analyses of data from a large, representative sample revealed that among women, the divorced had higher morbidity rates than did the married, never-married, or widowed. Among men, the married had lower morbidity rates than all of the other groups (never-married, divorced, and widowed). The researchers' analyses included controls for such factors as age, education, and religion. They attributed the observed differences to worse material conditions (e.g., lower income) among divorced women and to lower levels of social support among all unmarried men.

Self-Rated Health

If marriage contributes to better physical health and greater personal fulfillment, as is often believed, then these advantages might be expected to be evident in more favorable self-rated health. Empirical evidence challenges this view, however. Drawing on data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Ren (1997) examined self-rated health as a function of marital status and found comparable levels of self-reported health among the married, the widowed, and the never-married. In contrast, divorced, separated, and cohabiting individuals reported significantly worse health. These differences remained even after controlling for age, gender, number of children, functional limitations, education, income, ethnicity, and perceived social support. Ren explained the disadvantage among the divorced, separated, and cohabitating individuals as due to their involvement in relationships of poor quality.

Williams and Umberson (2004) recently approached this issue with longitudinal data that allowed them to examine marital status transitions and ensuing changes in self-rated health. Their analyses examined gender and life-stage interactions with these marital status transitions and included controls for such factors as race, education, income, and employment status. The researchers found, first, that stably married and stably unmarried adults did not differ in their health perceptions, although men who were stably widowed over the course of the study exhibited some vulnerabilities not evident among the stably widowed women. When changes in marital status were examined, transitions out of marriage were found to be associated with more changes in self-rated health status than were transitions into marriage, and this was particularly true for men. It is noteworthy that Williams and Umberson found exits from stressful marriages to be associated with gains in self-rated health. This serves as a reminder that conflict-ridden marriages can contribute to illness and, in extreme cases, violence and injury (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000) and that exits from such troubled marriages can limit the toll on health.

The researchers concluded from their analyses that "marital status differences in health appear to reflect the strains of marital dissolution more than they reflect the benefits of marriage" (Williams & Umberson, 2004, p. 93). In addition, marital dissolution appeared to undermine the self-rated health of men but not women, and stage in the life course interacted with gender in determining the impact of marital status transitions. In a particularly powerful statement that echoes the conclusions presented in DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) analysis, Williams and Umberson commented, "Researchers should begin to question the assumptions that marriage is good for all individuals at all times and that all transitions out of marriage undermine health" (p. 95).

Recovery From or Adaptation to Illness

Married individuals, relative to unmarried individuals, are often believed to experience more rapid or complete recovery from illness or greater success in adapting to chronic illness, because the spouse can assist with the day-to-day management of treatment regimens and provide encouragement and emotional support when progress is painful or slow. Divorced and widowed individuals with children capable of providing care presumably could call on their children to provide support during periods of illness. It is less clear that the never-married, especially those without children, have sources of support to tap for extended assistance during the process of recovery from a serious illness or medical intervention. From this perspective, never-married individuals would be expected to recover from a serious illness less successfully than would currently or formerly married individuals. Some studies provide clues that this may be the case.

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In an analysis of over 40,000 patients at a midwestern medical center, Gordon and Rosenthal (1995) investigated martial status differences in medical and surgical outcomes. The researchers found that the unmarried, as compared to the married, had lengthier hospital stays, more hospital charges, and a higher risk of both nursing home discharge and in-hospital death (for surgical patients). These differences remained despite controls for severity of illness, age, gender, race, and diagnosis. Furthermore, these differences were greatest for the never-married, suggesting the absence of a spouse or children or both might have adversely affected their ability to recover from a serious illness or surgery.

Similarly, in a study of 263 rheumatoid arthritis patients, Leigh and Fries (1991) found the never-married individuals to have a higher risk of mortality as compared to individuals in other marital status categories. In this study, being divorced was positively associated with survival, but being never-married predicted mortality. Again, men had a greater mortality risk than women, regardless of marital status.

Later adulthood is a time when chronic illness becomes common, increasing the probability of developing functional limitations and a corresponding need for sustained assistance with the tasks of daily living. Family members, and particularly spouses, represent the sources of support most often preferred by older adults (Cantor & Little, 1985), raising questions about the extent to which never-married older adults might be disadvantaged in their efforts to cope with the pragmatic and emotional challenges of declining health. Relatively little research has specifically examined the support resources of married versus never-married older adults and the extent to which these support resources function effectively in preserving health and well-being. Research we are currently conducting in a representative sample of approximately 900 older adults (Zettel & Rook, 2004) has revealed that never-married older adults do have fewer support providers relative to married, widowed, and divorced older adults. In spite of their smaller social networks, however, the never-married in our elderly sample reported levels of support satisfaction equivalent to those of the currently married, after controlling for gender, age, parental status, network size, health status, and life events. Analyses in progress are examining the extent to which the support resources of the single older adults buffer the adverse effects of life stress and functional limitations.

Mortality

Social integration, as reflected in strong social network relationships and organizational memberships, has been linked to a reduced risk of mortality. Investigation of this association often includes marriage as a core aspect of social integration, although differences among unmarried groups are frequently ignored. Gove (1973) conducted one of the first investigations of mortality that disaggregated the unmarried category. He compared the mortality rates of never-married, widowed, and divorced men and women (age 25 and older) with the mortality rates of their married counterparts. The married were found to have lower mortality rates compared to each of the unmarried subgroups. The difference was most pronounced, however, for the divorced and least pronounced for the never-married. In all comparisons, women fared better than men. Gove interpreted these results as indicating that it is the loss of the spouse (through death or divorce) that contributes to the increased risk of mortality, particularly among men. This supports the notion that men derive more benefits from marriage than do women.

Evidence of an elevated risk of mortality among single men emerged in a recent study of a large, representative sample of middle-aged British men (Ebrahim, Wannamethee, McCallum, Walker, & Shaper, 1995). Although the risk of mortality due to cancer was unrelated to marital status, single men were at greater risk of death due to cardiovascular disease and other noncancer and noncardiovascular illnesses, after controlling for age, poor health, and other risk factors. Among men who lost a spouse by the time of an 11-year follow-up assessment, the divorced men, but not widowers, were at increased risk for cardiovascular- and noncardiovascular-related mortality. The results support the notion that marriage, through the provision of social support, exerts a health-protective effect for some men.

A different pattern emerged from a study that drew on data from the Longitudinal Study of Aging to investigate the relationship between marital status and health in people over the age of 70 (Goldman, Koreman, & Weinstein, 1995). In this older sample, when controlling for baseline health status, socioeconomic status, and social support, only the widowed (and especially widowers) had increased rates of disability and mortality; the divorced and never-married did not exhibit these adverse health outcomes. In fact, never-married women were found to have better health than married women. Thus, the association between mortality and marital status extends into later life, and these results confirm it is the loss of the marital relationship that is most consequential and that men are more vulnerable to this loss than are women.

Finally, as noted by DePaulo and Morris (this issue), analyses of data from the Terman Life-Cycle Study revealed that never-married individuals had mortality rates comparable to those of married individuals, whereas the separated, widowed, and divorced had significantly higher mortality rates (Tucker, Friedman, Wingard, & Schwartz, 1996). These results underscore the idea that it is not the lack of a spouse, but

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rather the loss of a spouse, that contributes to an elevated risk of mortality.

Conclusion

We have discussed a number of illustrative studies that have a bearing on the question of whether the purported benefits of marriage can be found when various dimensions of physical health are examined. This emphasis is intended to complement DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) primary focus on the implications of marriage for happiness and subjective well-being. Although we did not undertake a systematic or comprehensive review, we found that the studies we discussed generally converged in suggesting that many of the health-related advantages attributed to married individuals, relative to single individuals, do not bear up under close scrutiny. In the studies we considered, single individuals appeared to be at a disadvantage relative to married individuals only in terms of recovering from or adapting to illness; they differed minimally from married individuals in terms of health behavior, morbidity, and self-reported health. Studies examining the risk of mortality yielded inconsistent results, although some did suggest that single individuals, particularly single men, experience an increased risk of mortality compared to married individuals. The most robust marital status differences across the studies we examined involved comparisons of currently married individuals and formerly married (divorced or widowed) individuals; differences between stably married and stably single individuals were modest. The findings that emerged from these comparisons suggest that the stress associated with the dissolution or loss of a marriage is more consequential for physical health than is the protective effect of being married per se. A small number of longitudinal studies that permitted a comparison of transitions into and out of marriage demonstrated rather convincingly that it is the transition out of marriage that has the greatest impact on health. Moreover, the studies we discussed were fairly consistent in documenting that men were more vulnerable than women to the disruption or loss of a marriage.

Firm conclusions about the presence or absence of significant differences between single and married individuals in various dimensions of physical health must await a more comprehensive assessment of the literature. Also needed are greater efforts to extend the literature by disaggregating the unmarried group when sample sizes permit to allow more meaningful conclusions to be derived regarding the health implications of being single versus being married. Additional longitudinal studies are needed that examine the health-related implications of transitions into and out of marriage, making it easier to rule out explanations for group differences that reflect processes of selection or reverse causation (Williams & Umberson, 2004).

In the meantime, however, a preliminary excursion into this literature largely reinforces and extends a central conclusion presented by DePaulo and Morris (this issue). Married individuals do not appear to enjoy marked or enduring advantages over single individuals in terms of psychological or physical health. Rather, as DePaulo and Morris argue, single individuals appear to construct life paths that foster a level of well-being—not only emotional but also physical—that largely matches, and in some cases exceeds, that of married individuals.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the construction and implications of such life paths necessarily unfold across the life course, and different life stages present different adaptational challenges. Dramatic increases in both the proportion of older people in the population and the proportion of single people in the population are cross-cutting demographic trends. These trends, coupled with knowledge of the increased risks of chronic illness that accompany old age, lend a degree of urgency to efforts to understand whether single older adults have sources of social support that serve them well in times of sustained need. Theories of relationship specialization (e.g, Litwak & Szelinyi, 1969; Weiss, 1974) suggest not only that many social relationships become fairly specialized in the functions they perform but also that different categories of relationships have limited interchangeability should the normative or preferred relationship category be unavailable to perform a particular function (see review by Rook & Schuster, 1996). This means, for example, that friends may not be well-suited to assume the support-providing functions that kin typically perform, and vice-versa. Single adults almost inevitably will have fewer close family ties, such as spouses and adult children, to turn to for support in their old age. It is unclear how well siblings, friends, neighbors, or formal sources of support (e.g., home health aides) can provide the sustained emotional and instrumental assistance needed to meet the challenges created by declining health in later life.

This question can be investigated as part of a broader inquiry into the strategies that single individuals use to preserve their health and to obtain assistance with their health needs when they become ill. Such research might reveal that single individuals engage in effective forms of self-care or anticipatory planning for their health needs, should acute illnesses develop. Such research also might reveal that single individuals develop alternative sources of support that they can mobilize when severe or persistent health problems overwhelm their own self-care capacities. DePaulo and Morris (this issue) note, for example, siblings, extended kin, and close friends function as effective sources of companionship and emotional support, and it is possible that they also can function as sources of

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health-related instrumental support. Tests of the adequacy of such support resources will be possible when researchers have sufficiently large samples and longitudinal designs that allow them to examine how well single adults' support providers function over time when a health crisis develops. Until then, we concur with DePaulo and Morris that the preponderance of evidence to date disconfirms the view that single individuals are worse off than currently or previously married individuals. Given that persistent stigma can have corrosive effects on health (Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, & Hunter, 2002), and given the pernicious stigma attached to singlehood, as documented in DePaulo and Morris's sweeping review, the robust emotional and physical health of single people is a testament to their resourcefulness and resilience.

Notes

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The Contextual Nature and Function of Singlism

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We appreciate DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) efforts to initiate a dialogue about the psychology of singles. We agree with the authors' argument that by and large the topic of singles has been excluded from psychological literature and that research on singlehood has the potential to make important contributions. However, we do have a number of misgivings about placing the psychology of singles squarely in the domain of stigma. This is not an attempt to exclude the study of singles from mainstream research on stereotypes and prejudice, but rather an attempt to more fully consider the contexts in which singlehood is likely to be stigmatizing. We have two primary goals in this article. First, we attempt to contextualize the nature of singlehood and to draw inferences about for whom and under what circumstances singlehood will be stigmatizing. Second, we explore the function of singlism and offer suggestions for reducing this type of bias. We hope that this endeavor will help DePaulo and Morris, and others interested in singles, to further their research on this important and understudied topic.

Contextualizing Singlism: Situational and Individual Moderators

Stigmatized individuals possess or are perceived to possess an attribute or characteristic that conveys a devalued social identity within a social context (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Though all groups can be stigmatized in some situations (e.g., European Americans might be particularly aware of negative stereotypes about their ethnic group when participating in a diversity seminar at work), the psychological and social implications of stigma are most substantial for groups that are devalued across a wide range of contexts. If individuals can easily remove themselves from situations in which their social identity is devalued, then the stigma will have little impact on their daily life activities and future outcomes (Crocker et al., 1998; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). In this article, we argue that understanding whether singles are stigmatized requires examining the contextual nature of singlism. Following, we highlight several situational and personal moderating factors that may influence the extent to which singlehood will be stigmatizing. Our discussion is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather it is intended to offer a springboard for research in this area.

The Life Span as a Context

In their article, DePaulo and Morris (this issue) note that life begins as a single and that everyone is single, at least at some point in their life. Though singlehood is a universal life stage, it is interrupted for most individuals by marriage or serious coupling. Indeed, marriage is a normative social behavior in the United States, as at least 90% of singles will marry at some point in their life (Connidis, 2001). For our purposes, we define behavioral norms as dominant base rates for a given behavior (Blanton & Christie, 2003). Because marriage is a normative social behavior, it is useful to consider demographic information about the timing of marriage.

According to the 2003 United States census data, the average age of first marriage is 26.2 years (mean for men = 27.1; mean for women = 25.3). Because we were unable to locate the standard deviation for age at first marriage within the United States, we extrapolated from a data set of marriage timing in 2000 in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria that revealed an average first marriage age of 27.6 years and a standard deviation of 5.43 years (Winkler-Dworak & Engelhardt, 2000). Based on these European statistics, we conservatively estimated the standard deviation of age at first marriage for individuals in the United States' to be 5 years.

If one considers the age of first marriage within the context of normal distribution, then 95% of people who ultimately get married do so between the ages of 16.2 and 36.2 years of age. Thus, according to a normative understanding of marriage, individuals who break conventional behavioral patterns by choosing to remain single beyond age 36.2 can be considered non-normative.[1] In this article, we refer to singles older than 36.2 who have never been married as non-normative singles (versus normative singles who are unmarried prior to age 36.2). The term non-normative is not meant to be pejorative; it is used purely to describe behavior that differs from the typical trajectory.

[1]Because we are unaware of existing data charting the initiation of long-term coupling among gay men and lesbians, we will apply the same time frame to understanding these relationships. Thus, for our purposes here, gay men and women who are not engaged in serious coupling are considered non-normative singles after age 36.2. We recognize that this is potentially erroneous speculation and that it will be important for research to identify whether these coupling patterns are applicable to gay men and lesbians.

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Our rationale for separating singles into normative and non-normative categories stems from a desire to locate singlehood within cultural lifespan patterns. Singles younger than 36.2 years are unlikely to be viewed as members of the category single, but rather are likely to be viewed as potentially "marriable," "coupleable," or "temporarily single." In contrast, because non-normative singles have passed the time of normative coupling, they are more likely to be viewed as people who are unlikely to marry or become coupled. That is, they are viewed as probably "unmarriable," "uncoupleable," or "chronically single." In other words, non-normative singles will be perceived as belonging to a category of people who share something in common—an absence of a serious coupling.

Why might non-normative singles be especially likely to be perceived as belonging to the social category singles? A number of psychological perspectives argue that individuals are particularly attentive to non-normative and distinctive information when forming impressions of others and the self (Bem, 1972; Hamilton & Sherman, 1989; Jones & Davis, 1965; McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976). For example, attribution theory argues that non-normative behavior is especially likely to lead individuals to form dispositional attributions about others (e.g., Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1972). Additionally, research on the self-concept shows that individuals construct their personal self-concept by attending to their distinct attributes rather than their common attributes (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976; Turnbull, Miller, & McFarland, 1990). Finally, Deviance Regulation Theory (Blanton & Christie, 2003) argues that identities become meaningful to both the self and others when those identities stem from actions that differentiate the individual from others. Thus, according to these theoretical perspectives, non-normative behaviors are a particularly relevant source of information and this type of information is especially relevant when considering who is perceived as or who perceives themselves as a member of any given social category.

Before proceeding, we deem it important to note that by focusing our discussion on non-normative singles, we do not mean to imply that normative singles never experience unfair treatment because of their single status. Rather, we believe that discrimination against normative singles is likely to be particularly circumscribed and likely to have few implications for their place in society (e.g., the stigmatization faced by European Americans who find themselves in the unusual situation of a diversity seminar). We are reminded here of Heider's (1958, p. 253) distinction between the "total relevance" and "local relevance" of events (see also Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002 for an application of this idea to prejudice). Discriminatory events occurring to normative singles may have implications for the immediate situation (i.e., they are high in local relevance) but likely have few implications for their place in the larger world (i.e., they are low in total relevance). Heider noted that total relevance, rather than local relevance, is critical in understanding the psychological impact of life events. Because discriminatory events occurring to normative singles are unlikely to have a great deal of total relevance, isolated discriminatory experiences are not representative of the type of pervasive and chronic devaluation that DePaulo and Morris (this issue) refer to as singlism.

Situational Identity Salience

Even among non-normative singles, single status will not always be the most salient aspect of their social identity. Singlehood occurs within the context of multiple identities (e.g., race, gender, social status), and the salience of singlehood can differ as a function of these other identities (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). For example, a single woman who works in a predominately male field is likely to experience her gender as more salient than her singlehood. Thus, she will probably categorize herself along gender lines rather than marital status lines. Similarly, the colleagues of an African American single man in a predominately White workplace might be especially aware of his racial status rather than his less visible marital status. Recent social cognition work demonstrated that when individuals possess multiple social identities, other individuals and the targets themselves engage in cognitive processing whereby one aspect of the identity remains activated while the remaining aspects become inhibited (Hugenburg & Bodenhausen, 2004; Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995). Thus, if a single person belongs to multiple social categories, the singles identity may be inhibited when those other categories are particularly salient. In these situations singles-based categorization and subsequent negative treatment may be diminished and singles might be less likely to perceive unfair treatment stemming from their singles social identity.

Just as some settings are likely to result in inhibition of the singles identity, other situations might be particularly likely to increase the salience of singlehood and to decrease the salience of other competing identities. For example, in some social settings, such as weddings or formal parties, the singles identity might experience increased activation while other social identities are in turn inhibited. For example, at his friend's wedding, single Zach might be seated at a "potpourri table" comprised of a variety of singles, including Juli (the bride's cousin from Chicago) and Fred (the groom's childhood next-door neighbor), rather than with his existing married friends who also are attending the wedding. Likewise, at a family gathering, a single woman might feel particularly aware of her single status as her "well-meaning" relatives pry into her social life and ask

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whether she is dating anyone. Similarly, the single identity might be keenly activated in settings that focus on family values and couplehood, such as religious ceremonies and political contexts. In short, there are some settings where the singles social identity is particularly likely to be activated and these circumstances may be especially likely to promote singlism.

Chronic Identity Salience

Finally, just as some situations differ in their likelihood of activating the singles identity, single individuals will also differ in their level of chronic activation of this identity. Research on stigma demonstrates that individuals will differ in the importance they place on their social identity as well as in their chronic expectations about how their group is treated in society (see Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002 for a review of this literature). Because of differential personal and socialization experiences, some individuals might be particularly sensitive to signs that singles are devalued and others might be entirely oblivious to this possibility. Likewise, some individuals will view their singlehood as an important part of their self-concept and others will see it as a minor part of who they are. The more central the identity is to one's self-concept and the more one anticipates facing singlism, the more likely they will be to perceive singlism in ambiguous situations (Major et al., 2002).

Summary

Thus far, we argued that the predicament of singlism is most appropriate in describing the experiences of non-normative singles. Because non-normative singles are perceived as chronically single, negative treatment on the basis of their civil status is likely to have a high degree of total relevance. Additionally, we argued that the salience of competing social identities within a given context will be important in understanding when the singles social identity is activated and when it might serve as a basis of discrimination. Finally, we noted that individuals differ in their chronic level of activation of this identity and this level of activation will influence the extent to which they perceive themselves as the target of unfair treatment stemming from the single identity. Having provided some contextual basis for understanding singlism, we next turn toward examining the function of singlism.

The Function of Singlism

What is the purpose of singlism and why are non-normative singles particularly likely to face this form of social rejection? Non-normative singles convey something that at first glance threatens a fundamental human need—the need to belong and to feel loved (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that humans have a fundamental need to experience frequent pleasant interactions with a small number of stable relationship partners. Because marriage and serious coupling generally involve the expectation of long-term exclusive commitment, these types of relationships are well-suited to satisfying this need. Marriage and serious coupling are likely the most accessible adult relationships that are considered capable of satisfying this need (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). It is this belief that forms the basis of what DePaulo and Morris (this issue) refer to as "The Ideology of Marriage and Family."

The Ideology of Marriage and Family serves an important function for those who endorse it. It provides individuals with a sense of control over their potential to fulfill the need to belong and to feel loved. By endorsing this belief system, individuals come to believe that anyone is capable of getting married and that marriage is a panacea in fulfilling belongingness needs. Because being alone is one of the most pervasive human fears (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), individuals will be motivated to endorse the Ideology of Marriage and Family. In other words, the Ideology of Marriage and Family becomes an unquestioned component of North American culture because it protects individuals from feeling vulnerable to perceived capricious events, such as failing to find a long-term romantic partner and the dissolution of a serious coupling.

Belief systems such as those underlying the Ideology of Marriage and Family can be taken for granted only to the extent that they go unchallenged. When individuals encounter evidence that challenges important beliefs, they experience threat and face a decision about whether to modify their existing belief system or integrate the inconsistent evidence into the belief system (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Lerner, 1980). A great deal of research demonstrates that individuals tend to prefer the latter solution, and attempt to maintain their beliefs about the world by integrating inconsistent information into their belief systems (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lerner, 1980). When individuals encounter evidence that challenges important belief systems, they are often motivated to derogate the source of this threat so that their beliefs about the world can remain intact (Greenberg et al., 1997; Lerner, 1980). Drawing on this literature, Jones et al. (1984) argued that we often stigmatize others because they serve as a reminder of our deepest fears and thus threaten our well-being. Jones et al. (1984) described this predicament as "the peril of stigma" (p. 81) and noted that stigmatizing conditions "… stand as a stark reminder of the very things we devote so much of our individual and collective energies to shutting out, ignoring, and avoiding" (p. 86).

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Non-normative singles, by their very existence, should be threatening because they remind individuals of the potential that they too could experience an unfortunate twist of fate that could deprive them of a serious coupling, and by extension the fulfillment of the need to belong. To hold onto the Ideology of Marriage and Family, individuals may find it easier to stigmatize and derogate the character of individual singles rather than acknowledge that the ideology is inaccurate and that they too might face the possibility of a future without a serious coupling. In other words, stigmatizing non-normative singles functions to help individuals protect themselves from the terrifying possibility that they too might one day be alone.

Ironically, non-normative singles who appear satisfied with life might pose the strongest challenge to the Ideology of Marriage and Family. Happy singles challenge the notion that romantic love is essential for meeting belonging needs. In essence, individuals might feel more comfortable if non-normative singles were miserable, because this would provide evidence that the Ideology of Marriage and Family is correct and that their own romantic relationships play a unique part in their happiness. If individuals are unable to convince themselves that happy non-normative singles are miserable, then they may take an alternative route toward integrating these individuals into their worldview. One way individuals can accomplish this is by subtyping these singles as exceptions to the rule (Richards & Hewstone, 2001). By doing this, individuals are able to maintain their belief in the validity of the Ideology of Marriage and Family.

Reducing Singlism

Understanding why non-normative singles are stigmatized is an important step in developing strategies for reducing singlism. Our analysis of singlism suggests that simply showing that non-normative singles are happy and satisfied with life may not be sufficient in reducing negative attitudes toward them. Instead, evidence showing that non-normative singles *are not typically lonely* might be a more effective strategy. If researchers begin to demonstrate whether belongingness needs can be met with nonromantic, close, stable relationships, then evidence could be accumulated to understand what types of relationships effectively satisfy the need to belong. Indeed, we believe that the push toward studying the psychological consequences of nonromantic relationships is one of the most important lessons to be gleaned from DePaulo and Morris's article (this issue). If research finds that some nonromantic relationships are especially adept at meeting the need to belong, then non-normative singles may no longer activate the construct of loneliness and thus will no longer pose a strong threat to the need to belong. Furthermore, evidence that non-normative singles are not lonely may help to gradually change the Ideology of Marriage and Family. In sum, by studying how nonromantic relationships contribute to the need to belong, researchers can develop an important knowledge base that may be able to address the psychological experience of singlehood.

Conclusions

When we read DePaulo and Morris (this issue), we were somewhat uncomfortable with placing singlism alongside racism, sexism, and other stigmas that individuals oftentimes chronically struggle with in our culture. We were able to disentangle and address this discomfort, to some extent, by more precisely defining the context of singlehood that might engender substantial singlism. We suspect, however, that even with the more focused analysis placed on what we have called non-normative singles, research from a stigma perspective may not be the most fruitful avenue to pursue. Instead, we encourage researchers to probe this phenomenon from the close relationships angle. For example, very little is known about adult friendships, especially those friendships that support unmarried and uncoupled individuals. Although close relationships research often focuses on dating and marriage, as DePaulo and Morris point out, many of us spend more time single than coupled, and so understanding the experience of singlehood is indeed an important undertaking.

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Notes

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Obliviously Ostracizing Singles

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Bella DePaulo and Wendy Morris (this issue) present a cogent, engaging, and thought-provoking indictment of a largely unnoticed social stigma: being single. They nicely document the existence of negative stereotypes and economic and social discrimination toward singles—singlism—at least as they occur in North America. Implicit in their position seems to be the notion that singlism constrains our ability to recognize that "single" is used so broadly that it may not be a particularly informative characterization; furthermore, singlism places limitations on our thinking that lead to a number of undesirable consequences. DePaulo and Morris attempt to raise our consciousness about a grouping characteristic that has insidious effects, yet flies even under social scientists' collective radar.

In this commentary, we first present some sticky problems associated with this particular stigma. Then, having qualified our definition and accepted the proposition that at certain times and in certain circumstances people ignore and exclude those who are single, we argue, as do DePaulo and Morris (this issue), that neither are these exclusionary behaviors intended to be punitive, nor might the sources of exclusion realize they are doing it. We refer to this form of social exclusion as oblivious ostracism (Williams, 1997; 2001). Finally, we present an analysis of the initial reflexive and consequent reflective consequences of oblivious ostracism.

To Whom Are We Referring?

The target group here is a slippery one, and at times we found ourselves wondering whether DePaulo and Morris (this issue) might sometimes actually be using that slipperiness to their advantage when reporting the results of studies. Just what *is* the target group, and how does that definition relate to stereotypes, discrimination, self-construal, and social identity? We could construe it as "always single," but that confuses several potential other groups/categories (including, perhaps, gays and lesbians) with those who are *seriously single* (i.e., committed to singledom and desiring a rich network of friends, but with no inclination toward forming and maintaining a long-term sexual partnership). It might also include individuals who wish they were in a relationship but for whatever reasons fail to achieve this goal. Finally, where do we put serious singles who want or have children? Each of these types of singles is associated with its own set of stereotypes, many of which conflict with each other. Is "single" too broad a term to be useful to psychologists?

If, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) lament, we define singles as those who are not married, then we have even more problems defining our target group. These people could be between relationships, cohabiting, seriously coupled, divorced, or widowed. Comparisons are made throughout the article between singles and others, but the precise definition of singles and these others keeps changing, depending on the study (and possibly, the outcome or story the study tells—hence our suggestion that these authors might be taking advantage of the fuzziness of the definition of singles).

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Is Singledom Really Increasing?

It is difficult to tell for certain whether being single is really on the increase. Is it more salient than it used to be, thus making us believe that things have changed when they really haven't (Silka, 1989)? Maybe the frequency of marriage is decreasing, but that doesn't necessarily mean that those who are "seriously single" are increasing in number. People may still be in intense relationships and yet categorized by census information as singles. Again, this takes us back to the question of exactly who the target group really is.

Is It or Isn't It a Problem?

On the one hand, DePaulo and Morris (this issue) seem to be trying to convince us that singlism is a problem: Singles suffer as victims of stereotypes and discrimination. On the other hand, they tell us that it isn't a problem: Singles and those in couples don't notice it, and singles aren't more miserable. Someone inclined to treat this issue harshly might accuse DePaulo and Morris of having their cake and eating it, too.

Their writing, while really quite fluid and engaging, is at the same time characterized by a perfunctory dismissiveness of data inconsistent with their premise. We took note of phrases like "exceptions can be found here or there," and we were struck by instances in which the authors simply mention inconsistencies without comment. As a result, we found ourselves feel-

ing a bit uncomfortable with having to conclude that this possibly smacks just a little of the problem they complain about with respect to the ideologies that seep into the stories scientists tell.

Singlism as Oblivious Ostracism

When we refer to singles from this point forward, we will constrain the definition of our target group to mean individuals who are seriously single. That is, they are committed to a single lifestyle by choice. These individuals are probably not victims of economic discrimination any more than nonmarried individuals are; consequently, we will concentrate our analysis on the social psychological costs of being seriously single in a society of couples. Compared to their coupled counterparts, what must they endure, and how might it affect them?

Our analysis relies on a fast-growing literature in social psychology on the impact of being ostracized, socially excluded, and rejected (for a compilation of current research programs on this topic, see Williams, Forgas, & von Hippel, 2005). Although other articles are now attempting to distinguish the nuances among these phenomena, for the sake of simplicity and convenience we will lump them together … and for the sake of the first author's egocentric territoriality, we will use the term *ostracism*.

By ostracism, we mean being ignored and excluded. Ostracism does not have to be punitive or deliberate. It can be, using the terminology of Williams's model of ostracism (1997, 2001*), oblivious ostracism*. When a waiter approaches the table and fills glasses with water, no one acknowledges his existence. They are also not out to punish him. Is this a problem for the waiter? Maybe, but probably not too much of one. On the other hand, consider the case of an undergraduate who attends a party that consists predominantly of graduate students and faculty. She floats around the party as if she were invisible; no one pays any attention to her, even when she puts herself into the middle of an interacting group. Are they intentionally ignoring and excluding her? Probably not. Does it matter? Yes, it probably does matter—it makes her feel worthless and invisible, and like a nonentity. This is how singles feel on occasions when they are with couples, we imagine—especially when the couples are making couple plans, when they are talking about couple problems, etc. However, the same would go for adults without children. They also feel ignored and excluded when they are with others who are parents. They have to listen to endless stories about everyone's children, and they have nothing to offer in return. Is this a problem? It probably is, at least as much for them as for singles among couples.

Singlism as proposed by DePaulo and Morris (this issue) would seem to provide a striking example of what some social scientists call institutional discrimination (i.e., discriminatory practices that occur without the attendant dislike or even hatred that characterizes prejudice). The parallels between institutional discrimination and oblivious ostracism are obvious. DePaulo and Morris do not accuse anyone of consciously being prejudiced against singles or of purposely engaging in active discrimination, and they actually provide evidence suggesting that singles themselves are likely to be unaware that they are the targets of such discrimination. The danger, of course, lies in the sneaky way in which singlism operates … it has become part of a pervasive mindset, it tends to remain outside of our awareness, and as a consequence we are not likely to be in a position to object to it. It has become so ingrained within our culture, they maintain, that we simply take it for granted that people are supposed to be coupled, ideally. Despite the fact that the appropriateness of Native American mascots for sports teams (e.g., Indians, Braves, Seminoles) has been openly debated for well over a decade now, such nicknames persist; just a few days prior to this writing one of the authors heard a news report concerning an informal poll that had indicated that fewer than 10% of respondents found anything at all wrong with the Washington Redskins's nickname. And so it is, DePaulo and Morris maintain, with singlism—we simply take for granted the existing state of affairs.

What Effects Does Oblivious Ostracism Have on the Target?

There is now considerable evidence that being ostracized for as little as four minutes can cause pain and distress. The imputed reasons for the ostracism and being cognizant of who is doing the ostracism and why they are doing it are all of little consequence. Ostracism, as minimally as it can be stripped down, is painful. It activates blood flow in the same region of the brain (the anterior cingulate cortex) that is activated when individuals experience physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). This occurs even when people know that the others are not intentionally ostracizing them, but instead are simply unable to include them (Eisenberger, et al., 2003; *implicit rejection stage*). It is distressing even when the individual is ostracized by outgroup members (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000) or even by those they despise (Williams & Gonsalkorale, 2004). Although ostracism by others usually involves seeing or hearing the ostracizers interact with each other—and not necessarily even pleasantly (Williams et al., 2003)—we have found that individuals are distressed even when they have no direct knowledge that the other group mem-

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bers are actually interacting with each other (Smith & Williams, 2004). It even hurts when a computer does it (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004)!

This immediate reaction occurs in what Williams (2001) refers to as Stage 1 effects, which could also be called reflexive reactions. The pain of ostracism appears to be precognitive; that is, information that if incorporated would reduce or dismiss the impact of ostracism is not incorporated or is bypassed by what appears to be a hard-wired alarm reaction to the pain of ostracism. Why? Because evolutionarily speaking, detecting ostracism was as important (and maybe even more so) as detecting other physically painful or dangerous stimuli: if ostracized, the likely outcome was death (for a full discussion of this, see the compendium by Gruter & Masters, 1986).

But what happens after the pain is experienced? What do targets of ostracism feel and do once these mitigating factors are reflected on? Here is where a simple, straightforward answer is not forthcoming. It appears as though there are two general paths that ostracized individuals take to recuperate from the awareness that others are ignoring and excluding them. A large body of work indicates that these individuals become more socially receptive and aware (Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2000; Pickett & Gardner, in press; Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). Both consciously and unconsciously they do things to improve their social status. They mimic (Lakin & Chartrand, in press), work harder than (Ouwerkerk, Kerr, Gallucci, & Van Lange, in press; Williams & Sommer, 1997), and conform to others (Williams, Cheung & Choi, 2000), especially those they regard with affection or alliance.

On the other hand, they can become cognitively impaired (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003), anxious in their interpersonal relationships (Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister 2001), antisocial (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), and even aggressive and violent toward others who had nothing to do with the ostracism (Gaertner & Iuzzini, in press; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003).

How do we make sense of these two diametrically opposed patterns of responses? Part of the answer to this question seems to come from examining what has been most threatened by ostracism. Williams (1997, 2001; Williams & Zadro, 2001) proposed that ostracism has the unique capacity to thwart the acquisition of four fundamental needs: belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence. For example, compared to being verbally abused, individuals who are ostracized report lower levels of all four of these needs (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, in press). Ostracism divorces individuals from a sense of connection to others, it implies wrongdoing (usually in a vague manner that might promote ruminating over all possible wrongdoings) and thus lowers self-esteem, it makes moot the possibility for social exchange and interpersonal control, and it represents in a rather palpable way what life would be like if the target did not exist (Case & Williams, 2004).

Warburton and Williams (2003, 2004; see also Williams & Gerber, in press) proposed that if belonging or self-esteem is most highly threatened by ostracism, the targets will try to adjust their behavior and be more socially sensitive so as to be re-included, thus raising self-esteem. If, however, control or meaningful existence is most strongly threatened, then individuals may pursue actions intended to restore control and force recognition by others, even (or perhaps especially) if it involves antisocial and aggressive behaviors. For instance, Warburton, Williams, and Cairns (2004) (see also, Williams & Warburton, 2004) found that ostracized individuals who were allowed to exert control over the onset of a noxious noise were no more aggressive than included individuals. However, if ostracized individuals did not have control over the onset of the noxious noise, they were four times more aggressive than all of the others. Additionally, measures of implicit or disguised attitudes show increased prejudice following ostracism, but if the measures are highly transparent, no such antisocial response was observed (Williams, Case, & Govan, 2003; Williams & Govan, 2004).

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Effects of Oblivious Ostracism on Singles

So, what does this mean for singles who feel ostracized? After the initial pain of being ignored and excluded, single individuals could be expected to follow one of two paths.

The sycophantic single. One possibility is that they might try to fit in, be more socially sensitive, work harder with others, conform, mimic, and otherwise ingratiate themselves into the social awareness and acceptance of others. Of course, "others" might not include serious couplers, but might instead be like-minded singles. Social support, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) suggest, is not really lacking in singles, as they appear to have rich social networks. This is consistent with much research on individuals who feel ostracized and rejected.

The spiteful single. The other is path is for singles to strike back and to become an antisocial, perhaps even aggressive group that forces friends, employers, and the government to recognize and reckon with their existence. Leary et al. (2003) suggested that ostracism is one ingredient involved in triggering the spate of school shootings experienced recently in the United States. Whereas this is an extreme and unlikely outcome, if consciousness is raised among singles that

they are, indeed, singled out as objects of prejudice and discrimination, they may resort to this path.

In challenging the ideology on which singlism is based, DePaulo and Morris (this issue) hope to produce consciousness-raising as a result, and they hypothesize that a number of related benefits will ensue. By definition, this consciousness-raising cannot occur without awareness, and with awareness comes the potential to experience punitive ostracism. In any case, if DePaulo and Morris are successful in creating a widespread awareness of singlism, new arenas for the study of ostracism will almost certainly present themselves.

Summary

DePaulo and Morris (this issue), we think, have achieved their primary goal of bringing singlism to our awareness. They present a comprehensive array of indicators that singles suffer injustice, exclusion, and neglect by their friends and family, by coworkers and employers, and by governmental institutions. While we see some difficulties in tackling this issue, indeed even in defining what we mean by singles, we hope our commentary gives additional force to DePaulo's cry for more attention, and more research, on the plight of the single.

Note

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Do Relationship Researchers Neglect Singles? Can We Do Better?

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We have chosen to respond to the DePaulo and Morris article (this issue) from a particular perspective—that of researchers focused on the nature and functioning of adult close relationships. From this perspective, we asked ourselves three questions. First, have relationship researchers neglected singles? Our answer is yes in one sense, no in another. Second, will explicitly increasing our focus on issues of special relevance to singles lead us to learn more and different things about relationships? Our answer is yes. Third, does it make sense to identify research on singles as a specifically new and distinct area for relationship researchers? We answer no. Finally, we comment on the term "single" itself and the category of "singles." We think that the term and category may not be optimally useful for most scientific purposes.

Have Relationship Researchers Neglected Singles? Yes and No.

Psychology and other academic fields now include a large cadre of people who focus on understanding intrapersonal and interpersonal processes relevant to close relationships. Many of these researchers have chosen to examine these processes as they occur in intact, ongoing relationships. Very often, perhaps most often, the relationship of choice is one that is normatively sexually committed, such as a dating relationship (e.g., Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001; Simpson, Ickes, & Blackstone, 1995) or a marriage (e.g., Grote & Clark, 2001). By disproportionately choosing to study such relationships, relationship researchers implicitly convey that they believe these relationships are of great importance to people. We agree with this implicit judgment. These relationships *are* important to people. At the same time we doubt most relationship researchers presume that "a sexual partnership is the one truly important peer relationship" (DePaulo & Morris, this issue). Most would point to friendships and family relationships as other very important close relationships. Nonetheless it cannot be denied that when examining ongoing relationships, especially in cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys, we do tilt strongly toward studying dating relationships and marriages. As singles, by definition, do not have this relationship, this bias is the basis for the "yes" part of our answer regarding whether we have neglected singles in our research.

At the same time, we believe, it is very important to point out that many of the best researchers in the relationships field focus on examining and understanding interpersonal *processes* important in close relationships *generally.* Neither relationship researchers generally, nor we, believe that the vast majority of these processes are important to or apply only within dating relationships or marriages. Indeed, many of the very same relationship researchers who have focused much attention on ongoing, sexually committed relationships simultaneously conduct experimental tests and examinations of the same processes in laboratory settings, often using as participants single college students not currently in committed sexual relationships. Sometimes the interactions examined have the potential to evolve into sexually committed relationships but often they do not.

Over the years researchers have studied many such cross-cutting processes in *both* committed (or potentially committed) sexual relationships *and* in other types of close relationships. To use an example from our own laboratory, people who desire close, intimate relationships with others have been shown to react negatively to explicit attempts to repay benefits given not only in heterosexual interactions which might lead to a sexually committed relationship (Clark & Mills, 1979), but also in same-sex interactions more likely to lead to friendships (Clark & Mills, 1979). It's easy to think of examples from other relationship researchers' programs of research as well. Baldwin (1994), for example, has demonstrated that priming people with thoughts about significant others can influence self-evaluations not only when the other is someone with whom one potentially has a sexually committed relationship (Baldwin, 1994) but also in relationships that are not romantically or sexually committed (Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990). Tesser and his colleagues have demonstrated that reflection and social comparison processes occur and influence reactions to partners' performances and accomplishments not only within romantic relationships (Beach, Whitaker, Jones, & Tesser, 2001) but also within family relationships and friendships (Tesser, 1980; Tesser & Smith, 1980; Tesser & Campbell, 1982). In addition, although it is easy to find examples of relationships research, which, to date at least, have been primarily or exclusively examined within the context of committed sexual relationships (e.g., work on the presence and effects of positive illusions in close relationships; Murray & Holmes, 1997; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996), these processes likely occur in other types of close relationships. Moreover one can easily find examples of researchers who have demonstrated important relationship processes using close relationships other than sexually committed ones and have yet to specifically demonstrate their applicability to sexually committed relationships. For example, Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003) have shown that priming people with thoughts about close others moved their behavior toward self-goals associated with those particular close others. In their case the close other used to prime such goal-related thoughts were mothers and friends. They have yet to show such effects arising from thinking about sexually committed partners.

Many, many other important cross-cutting relationship processes have been proposed and studied, including but not limited to commitment processes (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996), styles of attribution (Fincham, 2001), self-fulfilling prophecy effects (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977), intimacy (Laurenceau, Pietromonaco, & Feldman Barrett, 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988), capitalization (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), the development and maintenance of trust (Holmes, 1991), relationship-protecting defensive processes (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma,1990), transactive memory (Wegner, Raymond, & Erber, 1991), and how the structure of interpersonal situations in which people find themselves drives the nature of their interactions (Kelley et al., 2003). None of these processes is assumed to apply exclusively in sexually committed relationships. Almost none has been studied exclusively within sexually committed relationships.

That said, it is true that there are also a few processes on which relationship researchers have focused that are assumed to lie either exclusively within the domain of sexually committed relationships or which might be primarily applicable to such relationships. Work by Buss (2003) on jealousy would seem to fit the former category; work on the nature of passionate love (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Dutton & Aron, 1974; White, Fishbein, & Rutstein, 1981) would seem to fit the latter category. Moreover, a sexually committed relationship is both voluntary and exclusive. However, many other voluntary relationships, such as friendships, tend not to be exclusive, and other exclusive relationships, such as that with one's mother, tend not to be voluntary. The voluntary and exclusive nature of sexually committed relationships may have an important impact on *some* of the processes relationship researchers have investigated. For instance, we suspect that how commitment influences the perceived attractiveness of alternatives (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Simpson et al., 1990) might well be somewhat different in exclusive, voluntary, sexually committed relationships than in other, nonexclusive or nonvoluntary close relationships. However, we still believe that *most* relationships processes examined by researchers do apply to the close relationships of singles and to those of people in sexually committed relationships alike.

Indeed, in connection with noting the applicability of most extant relationship research to singles and nonsingles alike, we note that the very term "single" seems odd to us as relationship researchers. As DePaulo and Morris (this issue) note themselves, most people with the label single are not uncoupled from other people in general. They, like most people, feel a need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They have close relationships with friends, siblings, parents, nieces, nephews, colleagues, and teammates. Many of these relationships are close, caring relationships in which the aforementioned processes apply. Thus, perhaps the very term single should be dropped for scientific purposes. We return to this issue later.

In sum, have close relationship researchers neglected singles? Yes, in the sense that when they choose to study ongoing intact relationships, they do tend to study dating relationships and marriages. No, however, in the very important sense that singles typically do have close relationships and researchers have been focused on identifying interpersonal processes,

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most of which cut across many types of close, caring, relationships. Moreover, they have often examined these processes in committed sexual relationships and other close relationships alike.

Of course, it hardly needs to be said that anytime discoveries are made within the context of one type of relationship it is useful to demonstrate their generalizablity to other types of relationships. Increased attention to sibling relationships, friendships, and to the relationships people have with, for example, aunts, uncles, and parents, would be welcome in this regard.

Would the Field of Relationship Research Benefit From an Increased Focus on Issues of Particular Concern to Singles? Yes.

DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) point that the category of "singles" *is* largely beneath our research radar whereas other groupings of individuals are not, caused us to ask whether focusing our attention explicitly on issues of particular relevance to singles would be useful to relationship researchers. Our answer is yes. Indeed, when we focused our own attention on this issue, it was easy to think of a number of neglected research topics that would be fascinating and potentially fruitful to pursue. We have already raised one such topic (i.e., how the exclusive and voluntary nature of relationships might influence reactions to alternatives).

To give another example of an interesting (and straightforward) question that thinking about singles causes us to ask, why do some people choose not to marry? It is striking that whereas many researchers have studied predictors of divorce, there is little or no research on predictors of choosing to remain unmarried or uncoupled, or of the circumstances that lead people to stay involuntarily unmarried. To some extent existing theories might help in this regard. For instance, attachment theorists might investigate whether avoidant people are more likely than others to choose not to pursue an exclusive dating relationship or marriage. However, thinking about this issue explicitly may give rise to interesting new theories. Might choosing not to form close sexual bonds have something to do with approaching a goal rather than (as attachment theory suggests) avoiding a relationship? What might such goals be? Might they be especially attracted to independence or especially desirous of devoting all energies to a career?

Another equally important question is, why are some people who would like to form a sexual bond with another person unable to do so? It is facile to suggest that they are not sufficiently attractive along any of a number of dimensions to members of the opposite sex. Surely, though, the answers will be far more complex. Might felt obligations in other close relationships play a role? Might fear of rejection be important?

For us, explicitly thinking about singles led us to begin speculating on some broader issues as well. For instance, we noted that relationship researchers have neglected the more general issue of the absence of a variety of specific common types of relationships in certain people's lives. DePaulo and Morris (this issue) highlight the absence of one such relationship type but what about the absence of other types? Although in common parlance being "single" refers to not having a sexual partner, that is "singlehood" in just one sense. Not having a child or children, not having a sibling or siblings, having a missing father or a missing mother are other important types of singlehood. Studying the antecedents and consequences of each of these types of singlehood would seem to be worthwhile.

DePaulo and Morris's comments (this issue) also make salient the fact that close relationships do not exist in a vacuum. Being single implies one does not have one particular type of relationship, but that is generally true in the context of having other close relationships. DePaulo and Morris's comments imply as much. For instance, when they said most people believe a sexual partnership is the one truly important peer relationship they imply that such a relationship is assumed to outrank (in some sense) other existing relationships. Further, they note that singles are often demoted when friends or siblings marry. The very term "demoted" suggests a hierarchy of close relationships. Both comments suggest that (a) one's relationships are hierarchically organized and (b) it is normative for committed sexual relationships to be at or very near the top of the hierarchy. We believe both of these to be true. The dimension running through the hierarchy, we believe, is the degree of responsiveness one feels to another's needs or, from the other perspective, the degree of responsiveness one believes partners feel toward one's own needs (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). In addition, we suspect that most people's hierarchies are triangular in shape with one or a very few communal relationships at the top (e.g., sexually committed relationships, relationships with offspring, and one's relationship with oneself). It may be precisely because relationship researchers disproportionately focus on a type of relationship that often ranks at the top of a person's hierarchy that they have often been able to ignore the larger relationship context. Obligations in such a relationship are likely to be relatively uninfluenced by the presence of other relationships.

Importantly, focusing on singles' lives and their close relationships (which may often rank lower in others' hierarchies than those others' sexual partners and children) will force us to attend to effects that one's

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larger communal network has on any given communal relationships. Singles being demoted when a friend or sibling marries *is* a question about how the nature of others' larger social network influences this particular relationship. Thinking in terms of the nature of people's relationship hierarchies, however, makes it clear that there are many related questions that could be asked. Do such demotions always occur? What are the implications for the single person? Is he or she likely to reciprocally reduce commitments to the married individual? Is he or she likely to seek new relationships in which he or she is at the top of the partner's hierarchy? Is he or she likely to react by feeling less secure? Are asymmetries in where people place one another in their respective relationship hierarchies well tolerated or not? These are all important research questions, which thinking about singles bring to the fore and which also have importance to understanding relationships more generally. For instance, the birth of a child may cause some husbands and friends to feel demoted in the new mothers' hierarchies, much as a person may feel demoted when a sibling marries.

Thinking more broadly about social networks may also suggest theoretically based answers to the origin of some of the negative stereotypes of singles to which DePaulo and Morris (this issue) refer in their article. They observe that singles are often considered selfish or immature. This does seem odd. *Why* should it be the case? Most singles do have close others about whom they care. We think the likely answer lies in the very existence of norms for the nature of most people's hierarchies of communal relationships combined with a dose of the "false consensus effect" with which social psychologists are well-acquainted. If most people do place sexual partners at the top of their communal hierarchies (perhaps along with their child or children), then they will provide the most noncontingent, unselfish caring to these people (Clark, Graham, & Grote, 2002; Mills et al., 2004). Simultaneously, for people who do have these sexually committed relationships and children, the needs of others (e.g., siblings, friends, nieces and nephews) are likely to be a lower priority. Now consider the false consensus effect—people assume that others' views are like their own (Krueger & Clement, 1994; Marks & Miller, 1987; Mullen & Goethals, 1990). Could it be because people in sexually coupled relationships engage in self-sacrifice primarily in relation to their children and spouses (and rarely in their other relationships, which for them are lower in their communal hierarchies), that they *assume* those without sexual partners do the same? If so they may believe that singles see no one's needs as equal to or more important than their own, whereas singles actually may have relationships with others to whose needs they are as responsive or even more responsive than their own. This seems possible, and it's certainly an empirical question. It is also a question we would not have asked without having read the DePaulo and Morris article.

In sum, we absolutely do believe that focusing clearly on relationship issues of importance to singles will lead us to do new and important research. Such research, we suspect, is likely not only to advance our understanding of the lives of singles but also to be more generally informative about relationship processes.

Does It Make Sense To Identify Research on Singles as a Specifically New and Distinct Area for Relationship Researchers? We Think Not.

Much of what we have said already implies that we do not think it will be terribly useful to think of research on singles as a new and distinct area of research. Indeed, we do not. When people begin to think of research on "singles" as a field (or, for that matter, research on sexually committed relationships, or friendships, or siblings as separate fields), what often happens is that researchers within the area begin to communicate primarily with one another. Simultaneously, researchers outside the field do not feel compelled to read materials falling within the field.

There is another, and we believe preferable, route to increasing our knowledge and understanding of issues of particular importance to singles. It is to address questions of particular relevance to singles within the context of broader psychological theories of intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning. We have tried to illustrate throughout this commentary how theories of relationship functioning can contribute to understanding singles, and reciprocally how thinking about singles can enhance theories of relationship functioning. However, this point extends beyond relationship research. In this regard, consider DePaulo and Morris's comments (this issue) about stereotyping of and prejudice against singles generally having fallen "under the cultural radar." This general phenomenon of a particular type of bias escaping notice is a fascinating one. It seems to us that stereotype and prejudice researchers might well be best equipped to address why one particular type of prejudice escapes notice whereas others do not. Might it be easier to not notice or to ignore stereotyping of and prejudice against a group that seems to have been joined voluntarily and from which one presumably can escape if one wishes? Does bias against singles escape notice because most people perceive singlehood to be voluntary? In explaining how and why stereotyping and prejudice can escape notice, stereotype researchers would simultaneously be addressing a very general issue regarding stereotyping

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and prejudice and a question fundamental to understanding bias against singles.

What About the Specific Term "Single"? Is It a Useful Term for Relationship Researchers? Not Very, We Think.

The term "single" is used in common language. It often means unmarried. Sometimes it refers to not being in a sexually committed relationship. Is categorizing people as singles or nonsingles useful for a relationship researcher? We think not.

First, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) make clear, the category of "singles" includes myriad types of people—those who never marry, those who marry and divorce, those who were married and lose a spouse to death, those who never formed a sexually committed relationship in the first place by choice, and those who never formed a sexually committed relationship due to lack of opportunity. As such, the category "single" seems too broad a term or category to be scientifically useful for studying the antecedents and consequences of these various sorts of singlehood which are, undoubtedly, extremely varied. So, too, is the experience of these sorts of singlehood likely to be extremely varied. Thus, in striving to do a better job to incorporate singles into relationship research, we think it will prove wise to divide "singles" into coherent categories, the nature of which (and labels for which) ought to be driven by the theoretical question at hand. This means that different researchers will categorize and label groups of "singles" in different ways and that there is no one correct way to do so. This is, in our view, the way it should be.

Second, as we have already noted, the very term "single" is an odd one. If taken literally, it implies a person's isolation from all close relationships—an isolation that does not characterize most singles. Perhaps the term has been adopted in common parlance because people not involved in a sexually committed relationship do not have the peer relationship people generally consider most important, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) note. However, for research purposes, we would prefer narrower, more specific terms including ones that refer to people who are single in the sense of lacking other types of common relationships as well—not only those without romantic partners but also those without children, siblings, best friends, and friends as well. In choosing such terms, we would agree with DePaulo and Morris that it is certainly wise to avoid ones that are pejorative and we believe that this can be accomplished.

Conclusions

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) have written a very broad article that touches on both political and scientific issues. They urge us as psychologists to think about issues of importance to singles. We have considered their article primarily from one particular perspective—that of researchers who study close relationships. From that perspective we acknowledge that, at least in conducting research on ongoing, intact close relationships, we have disproportionately focused on sexually coupled relationships. However, we firmly believe that our focus on theoretically important relationship processes likely to apply to all close relationships makes our research more applicable to the lives of singles than it appears on the surface. At the same time, we welcome DePaulo and Morris's push to think carefully about issues of particular import to singles. We believe doing so will bring some important relationship-relevant questions to the fore that might otherwise not be salient. Finally, whereas we believe relationship researchers and prejudice and stereotype researchers may benefit from considering some of the issues that DePaulo and Morris raise, we would urge those interested in singles not to consider that field to be one unto itself or to readily adopt the term and category "single" for scientific purposes. Rather, use of extant theory (and the development of new theory) aimed at understanding the experiences of singles within relationships (and networks of relationships), and categorizing and labeling singles in ways that fit with theory seems a wiser strategy.

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Notes

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How a Prejudice Is Recognized

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When we teach prejudice to graduate and undergraduate students, we use Gordon Allport's (1954) classic *The Nature of Prejudice*. This is probably the best single book ever written in social psychology, but it may be time for us to consider discarding it. While much of its content is marvelous, the scholarship and breadth of coverage is awe-inspiring, and the writing is enviably stylish, it begins to border on irrelevance. *The Nature of Prejudice* is just as remarkable for what it does *not* say, as what it does say. There is virtually nothing on sexism, there is no mention of homophobia, and antifat attitudes are entirely ignored. There is, however, content on prejudice toward Irish immigrants, and some well thought out examples about Armenians. Large portions of the book are slipping into the category of historical curiosity.

DePaulo and Morris (this issue) end their article where we begin ours. They ask "To what levels must prejudice and discrimination rise before they are taken seriously? And, who decides … when there are already so many put-upon groups vying for our attention and concern, do we really need another?"

DePaulo and Morris's (this issue) task begins with the need to demonstrate the existence of a bias against single people; this they do quite well. The more difficult job for them is to move this bias into the social category of "prejudice," the particular case that they label *singlism*. If such a bias exists (and we do not dispute the general argument), then why must DePaulo and Morris write a article to convince the professional community of its existence?

The Failure To Study Certain Prejudices Is a Failure of Definition of "Prejudice"

The prevailing definitions of prejudice in today's research still stem from Allport (1954), in which rational thought, reasonableness, and deviation from some normative values form the notion of prejudice. To show how Allport defines prejudice, we look closely at how Allport struggles with the question of definition. He writes in Chapter 1:

> … thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant. This crisp phrasing contains the two essential ingredients of all definitions—reference to unfounded judgment and to a feeling tone. (p. 6)

For Allport, to be a prejudice, there must be an incorrect, overgeneralized, or inflexible belief about a group that is associated with negative affect. The definition that Allport (1954) most vigorously endorses is:

> Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based on a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group. (p. 9)

Allport also struggles with the question of the normative acceptability of a prejudice. He considers American slavery and the Indian caste system, and reflects on theorists who suggest that social norms provide the boundaries of what is prejudice:

> They claim that attitudes are prejudice only if they violate some important norms or values accepted in a culture. They insist that prejudice is only that type of prejudgment that is ethically disapproved in a society. (pp. 9–10). Prejudice is the *moral evaluation* placed by a culture on some of its own practices. It is a designation of attitudes that are disapproved. (p. 11; emphasis in original)

These theorists suggested that a prejudice is defined only as deviation from normal cultural practice—a belief or attitude is only a prejudice if it violates some important norms or values in a culture. Prejudice becomes deviance from common practice. While we do not think that the definition of a prejudice should be based on normative attitudes or common practice, it is clear to us that the recognition of an attitude *as* a prejudice is closely linked to the normative status of that belief. Singlism is a good case of this failure to identify a prejudice.

In contrast to Allport (1954), we suggest that prejudice should be defined as "a negative evaluation of a social group, or a negative evaluation of an individual that is significantly based on the individual's group membership" (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003, p. 414). This differs from Allport in that a prejudice does not need to be irrational, unfounded, too extreme, or counternormative to be labeled a prejudice. All negative evaluations of groups and their members can be represented as prejudice, and the rationality (or justification) of that evaluation is a separate and subsequent psychological process independent from the emotional experience of prejudice itself (for a review of the process of justification, see Crandall & Eshleman, 2003).

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DePaulo and Morris (this issue) show that negative attitudes, practices, and policies toward singles do not draw attention. Being expected and common, they do not lead to a perception of attitudes—acting singlist draws no attention, no explanation, no inference. Attributions of motive are rare when the behavior is common, expected, and normal (Heider, 1958; Jones and Davis, 1965). The advantage of Crandall & Eshleman's (2003) definition is that whether or not the feeling and behavior toward a group is based on a sensible foundation is moved out of the definition of the phenomenon, and instead is conceived as a supporting and related process. Under this definition, an affective bias need not be shown to be irrational or incorrect, merely present. If the psychological processes that lead to prejudice are the same for prejudices that are normative (i.e., part of a dominant ideology) and those that are counternormative (e.g., a social psychologist) the dichotomy between "rational prejudice" and "irrational prejudice" is moot.

The important distinction between Crandall and Eshleman's (2003) definition and Allport's is in the treatment of justifications and social norms. Compared to Allport (1954), Crandall and Eshleman argued that no amount of justification for a negative evaluation of a group disqualifies that evaluation as prejudice. Despite the substantial justification enemy soldiers may have toward each other, based on realistic conflict and past history of aggression, their negative emotions would still be conceptualized as prejudice.

Ideology Is Norms

Singlism, as DePaulo and Morris (this issue) show us, is a comfortable part of the mainstream ideology. It is normative, and acting singlistic is in no way deviant from regular cultural practices. The kind of prejudice toward singles that they review is so smoothly integrated into the everyday ideology of Americans that most people will not notice their evaluations, their beliefs, their assumptions, and their preferences.

If a prejudice is entirely normative, it hardly requires further thought; justifications for prejudice are necessary only when we notice something (Duval, Silvia, & Lalwani, 2001). The ideology of singlism renders discrimination invisible; ideology in turn creates social norms, and it is counternormative behavior that we see as people and study as social psychologists (Heider, 1958).

Failure To Recognize Who Is a Target of Discrimination Is Function of Ideology

We agree with DePaulo and Morris (this issue) that the ease with which we accept singlism reflects mostly subconscious ideology. But accepted ideology should play little or no part in determining what constitutes a psychological process, what determines the boundaries of a phenomenon, and what is a psychological "unit." Whether or not being single is a bad thing or good thing should not determine whether attitudes toward singles is a legitimate area for study. Because the Crandall & Eshleman (2003) definition says less about what a prejudice *is*, it provides more opportunity to study phenomena that Allport (1954) would have ruled out. Attitudes toward social groups that are nearly universally treated as "bad" (e.g., rapists, genocidal soldiers, murderers, Chetniks) are worthy of study, as are attitudes toward groups that are universally seen as good (e.g., pediatric nurses, special education teachers, firefighters killed in the line of duty, social psychologists). Attitudes toward these groups are especially useful to compare with each other, and toward more usual prejudice targets. Crandall's (1994) research on antifat attitudes was conceived in part as a way to study racism, by comparing antifat and anti-Black attitudes and the differences in social acceptability and justification for the prejudices.

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Recognition of Prejudice and the "Normative Window"

Social psychologists and everyday Americans (and Allport) operate with a limited definition of prejudice, and this constricted description focuses on only a small part of the possible varieties of prejudice. We suggest that prejudices that people are concerned about, that are the topics of scientific study, that people actively seek to suppress, are prejudices that are in a narrow "normative window" of appropriateness, where the prevailing norms are neither entirely positive nor entirely negative toward the groups, but where there is a general social change toward greater acceptance of the group. This normative window encompasses most of prejudices based on race, religion, ethnicity, and physical handicap. Increasingly, "singles" may be moving into this normative window. The idea of the normative window of prejudice is based on the following four (and a half) propositions:

1. Prejudice Against Groups Runs the Entire Gamut of Social Acceptability, From Completely Unquestioning Acceptance, To Complete and Utter Unacceptability

While some definitions may rule many of these groups outside of theoretical interest, we suggest a definition that highlights the differences in normative acceptability. Although we have covered this argument previously, we do want to point out that today's accept-

able prejudice may be tomorrow's unacceptable prejudice. There has been substantial shift in the acceptability of racial and religious prejudice (e.g., Gibson & Duch, 1992). Allport (1954) is strangely silent on the matter of sexual orientation. Much of the problem is really based on a naïve definition of what prejudice is—it's something that's "bad." This value component is usually tacit in definitions, but there is a subtle connection the underlying "rationality" of the prejudice. This rationality needs to be established only when the attitudes conflict with the prevailing ideology; conformity is presumed to be rational among conformists.

2. The Social Acceptability of Prejudices Changes Over Time

This is obviously true—prejudice about sexual orientation was completely unstudied by social psychologists in the 1950s; it is now a staple of prejudice research. Despite the persistence of some racial prejudice, on many observable indicators racial prejudice and discrimination are diminishing (Case & Greeley, 1990). Allport (1954) discusses prejudice aimed at Catholics and Italians—there is virtually no focus on these prejudices today, and there is reason to believe they have been reduced in the United States. The amount of prejudice changes as a function of a variety of issues, particularly the threat posed by a group (Stangor & Crandall, 2000). Which group is immigrating and the target of job competition, status of international conflict and economic dispute, changes in sex roles, disputes over oil, etc., all affect which prejudices are acceptable (e.g., Allport, 1954).

2a. There is a general trend toward reduction in prejudice. We believe we are not overly optimistic, and we suggest that global and nearly universal trends are leading to less overall prejudice toward many of the most important social groups. Large economic, demographic, and technological changes have lead to pressures against many, many kinds of prejudice. These trends include (a) the globalization of information, which provides information about social groups, enables contact among them, and under good circumstances encourages understanding; (b) higher levels of education, especially among groups with little previous education, but also extending educational opportunities to women throughout the globe; and perhaps most importantly (c) mutual reliance and interaction based on shared, globalized economies (Bhagwati, 2004).

All of these pressure are likely to reduce a wide variety of prejudices, and we like to hope that these pressures will overcome the obviously powerful countervailing forces of war, economic competition for oil, and so on, which can serve to increase intergroup conflict and its attendant prejudices. And no person who reads the newspaper can be unaware that many of these global trends come with prejudice-enhancing and prejudice-reducing components. Still, a little over 100 years ago cross-national, cross-racial, and cross-religious friendships were nearly unthinkable; now they are common place in Western societies and becoming more frequent in many other societies (Archdeacon, 1983; Higginbotham & Kopytoff, 1989).

3. The Social Acceptability of Prejudices Is a Close Indicator of What Prejudices People Have

Social norms change, and this can be readily tracked in surveys and polls (e.g., Case & Greeley, 1990). But most importantly, the prevalence of prejudice is closely related to social norms about prejudice, and when norms change, so to do individual attitudes. Crandall, Eshleman, and O'Brien (2002) showed that people's reports of their prejudice was extremely closely related to what their group described as normative; individual attitudes correlated $r = .96$ with the prevailing social norms about prejudice.

Prejudices are acquired through our social lives—peers, family, neighborhoods, friendship, mass media, individual experience, and so on. The forces that determine which prejudices individuals report and experience are the very same forces that shape the social world and normative acceptability. What creates social norms also creates individual attitudes.

4. What Social Psychologists Study as Prejudice Is Closely Linked to the Window of Normative Acceptability. Prejudices in a Narrow Window of Shifting Normative Acceptability Are the Main Topic of Social Psychological Research

In general, social psychologists study prejudices that (a) they perceive to be wrong, (b) are at least somewhat common in the general population, and (c) are shifting from normative acceptability to normative unacceptability. We suggest that what determines the vast amount of attention to prejudice is that the targets are located within a normative window and are generally passing from an acceptable prejudice to an unacceptable prejudice. Prejudice on the basis of religion was common and mostly acceptable in the decades leading up to Allport (1954), but was clearly on the declining side of respectability—this made it an attractive target of research and social policy. On the other hand, prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation in the United States was perfectly normal in the 1950s, and is absent from Allport's attention. Heterosexism has

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substantially declined in the intervening 50 years, but because it has not disappeared it still plays an important role in policy and politics; we found 640 different articles or chapters on the matter in PsycInfo from 1998 onward.

Social psychologists (and sociologists, and the rest of us) study only a tiny fraction of the possible targets. We would not argue that the field is focusing on uninteresting, unimportant, or irrelevant research—quite the contrary. But the failure to focus on the widest possible swath of prejudices narrows our focus and leads us to miss a wide range of phenomena relevant to the process. To paraphrase the immortal words of Peggy Lee "we know a little bit about a lot of things," but we don't know enough about the broader phenomenon.

Figure 1 lays out the basic concept of the "window" of prejudice. First, the picture suggests that there is an entire range of acceptable and unacceptable prejudices. Second, it locates in the normative window those prejudices that social psychologists study. Third, it suggests that it may be possible that there is a general secular trend toward lowered prejudice over time. Certainly the claim about the general trend is the most controversial and most difficult to demonstrate. It is hard to test whether most prejudices are generally declining, or whether we simply study those prejudices that are normatively on their way down. But the main point of this figure is that whether or not a prejudice is (a) thought to exist and (b) appropriate for study is closely related to its normative status; prejudices in the normative window gain attention from social scientists.

Where Does Normative Change Come From?

This is the $64,000 question for social influence and normative approaches to social psychology, and the general tendency is to point to nonpsychological processes. We will adhere to that propensity here when describing norms about prejudice. Prejudice comes and goes with economic changes, war and conflict, demographic shifts, patterns of immigration, and so on. Some of these factors increase prejudices, others decrease them. But we will point to three general trends for reduced global prejudice.

Globalization

The primary reductive force toward prejudice is increasing globalization. Nothing reduces prejudice so much as interdependence (Fiske, 2000) and globalization has the effect of enhancing intergroup cooperation, particularly at the elite level where war, political relations, and media depictions can set the agenda (Bhagwati, 2004). Many advanced forms of communication can serve the function of social contact.

Technology

Significant technological advances can reduce prejudice. Because social disruptiveness and contagability contribute to social rejection in physical illness stigmatization, medical treatments that "normalize" can reduce fear and rejection of the afflicted (Crandall & Moriarty, 1995). In the case of singles, particularly sin-

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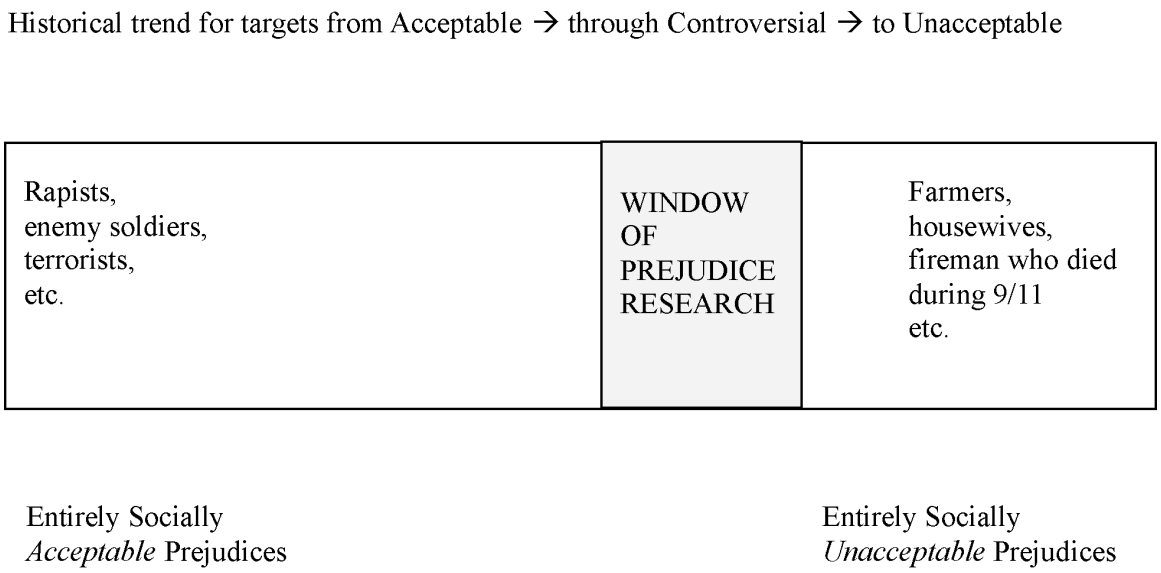


Figure 1. Defining the limits of acceptable targets of prejudice research.

gle women, the technology of contraception has played an important role in the reduction of sexism and related prejudices.

Trends Toward Liberal Democracy

Despite the deeply political and controversial nature of the claim, there is a general historical trend toward greater democracy in the world. This shift toward democracy has the effect—in the long run—of reducing tribalism and its attendant prejudices. While one would have to be a Pollyanna to suggest that a complete conversion to sunny democracy is on the short-term global agenda, there are trends toward liberal democracy (Fukayama, 1989). This can reduce racial and religious tensions within countries (see Diamond & Plattner, 1994, for a nuanced discussion of this hypothesis) and between countries (e.g., Cederman & Rao, 2001).

A Final Comment

Some readers of DePaulo and Morris (this issue) may mistake this contribution as a focused contribution on an applied topic. But the earliest sexism and gender research was treated as a specialized and marginalized applied issue. The early work on antifat attitudes was specifically labeled "applied" by editors and reviewers. The difference between research on a "narrow, applied" problem and the more vaunted and prestigious theoretical work is often a straightforward function of how long the question has been around. Gender prejudice has a distinguished history, with excellent theoretically important contributions. It is likely that prejudice based on marital status will follow this same path out of marginalization and into full attention by social researchers.

Note

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