

Psychologist reveals science behind a fulfilling single life

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Credit: Jeff Belmonte / Wikipedia

Dating shows, dating apps - they all strive to make sure none of us end up uncoupled forever. But it turns out many single people embrace their single lives, and are likely to experience more psychological growth and development than married people, according to a psychologist who presented at the American Psychological Association's 124th Annual

Convention.

"The preoccupation with the perils of loneliness can obscure the profound benefits of solitude," said Bella DePaulo, PhD, a scientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara. "It is time for a more accurate portrayal of single people and single life - one that recognizes the real strengths and resilience of people who are single, and what makes their lives so meaningful."

DePaulo cited longitudinal research that shows [single people value meaningful work](#) more than [married people](#), and another [study that shows single people](#) are also more connected to parents, siblings, friends, neighbors and coworkers. "When people marry, they become more insular," she said.

However, research on single people is lacking, DePaulo claimed. She searched for studies of participants who had never married and, of the 814 studies she found, most did not actually examine single people but used them as a comparison group to learn about married people and marriage in general.

The studies that did focus on single people revealed some telling findings, she said. For example, research comparing people who stayed single with those who stayed married showed that single people have a heightened sense of self-determination and they are more likely to experience "a sense of continued growth and development as a person," DePaulo said.

Another [study of lifelong single people](#) showed that self-sufficiency serves them well: The more self-sufficient they were, the less likely they were to experience negative emotions. For married people, the opposite was true, according to DePaulo.

There are more unmarried people than ever before in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 2014, there were 124.6 million unmarried Americans over age 16, meaning 50.2 percent of the nation's adult population identified as single, according to BLS. In contrast, only 37.4 percent of the population was unmarried in 1976.

Married people should be doing a lot better than single people in view of the number of laws that benefit them, DePaulo said, but in many ways, they aren't. "People who marry get access to more than 1,000 federal benefits and protections, many of them financial," she said.

"Considering all of the financial and cultural advantages people get just because they are married, it becomes even more striking that single people are doing as well as they are."

Despite the advantages of staying single, DePaulo doesn't claim one status is better than the other. "More than ever before, Americans can pursue the ways of living that work best for them. There is no one blueprint for the good life," she said. "What matters is not what everyone else is doing or what other people think we should be doing, but whether we can find the places, the spaces and the people that fit who we really are and allow us to live our best lives."

More information: Session 2124: "[What No One Ever Told You About People Who Are Single](#)," Plenary, Friday, Aug. 5, 2 - 2:50 p.m. MDT, Room 201, Level 2, Meeting Room Level, Colorado Convention Center, 700 14th Street, Denver.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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