

brief author's abstract

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HAPPINESS IS BEING MARRIED (I AM HAPPIER THAN YOU)

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Abstract

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ABSTRACT

Until recently singles have not been perceived as a distinct social entity. This has led to a lack of study of this rapidly growing segment of the population and a resulting use of stereotypes to describe their feelings and often unperceived discrimination.

A random sample of 400 was drawn from one of the ten typical areas of the U.S. (George Gallup) in order to test what appears to be contrasting images of single life: they are happier because of their fewer obligations versus less happy because of their aloneness.

The findings reveal that more marrieds claim to be happy than singles but that a large majority of the singles also indicate that they **are** happy, that the unhappy image may be more applicable to the divorced rather than to singles in general, and that each category of the sample have different requirements for making them happy.

It was shown that both parts of the image may be correct but only in limited degree and so, like most stereotypes, this stereotype is an exaggeration of reality.

Despite marriage being the social norm, it is clear that singles have been growing as a percentage of the population in America. The figures reveal that since 1960, there has been a marked increase of single households with a resultant decline in the nuclear family. Between 1960 and 1970, the number of adults between the ages of 20 and 34 who have never been married increased by 50 percent while in the same period, the divorce rate doubled. This increase continued throughout the Seventies. In that decade alone, the number of unmarried persons increased by 157 percent and the number divorced by 65 percent (U.S. News and World Report, June 16, 1980:48). The large increase in divorce is emphasized when it is noted that 39 percent of first marriages now end in divorce within 10 years and 59 percent of second marriages end so within five years. In addition, the time interval between divorce and remarriage has increased and so the number of those divorced but not remarried has also doubled. In sum, there has been a slowdown of marriage and remarriage versus a speedup in the rate of divorce. The result is that there are now 53 million single adults aged 18 or over. Singles now make up one out of every three households in the United States. (U.S. News and World Report, 31 Jan., 1977:59).

This is not to imply that singlehood is replacing marriage, only that there is considerable reason to believe that the Fifties represent an anomalous period in the century. As Skolnick and Skolnick note, the depression and World War II interrupted various trends in regards to women's rights, sex roles, sexuality, and in the relations between the individual, the family and society and produced a period with emphasis on family togetherness, the baby boom, and the increased domesticity of women (1977:8). Thus, it would appear that the norm of that period was a direct result of a special set of economic and historical circumstances.

However, the changes from that period are what we currently perceive. Since there is a natural lag between the gradual development of awareness, to the formation of hypotheses about that awareness, to the-testing of these hypotheses, **it** is not surprising that social scientists have really begun to focus on the issues of singles only in the Seventies. In the Sixties, family sociologists "either ignored singles or relegated them to boring, out-of-date discussions of dating" (Libby, 1978:164). Even in the Seventies "they seemed to deny that change was possible in family structure, the relations between the sexes, and parenthood" (Skolnick and Skolnick. 1977:3).

In any event, until recently singles have not been perceived as a distinct social entity "that has its own characteristics, dynamics and unique features . . ." (Adams, 1976:10). **It** is only toward the end of the Seventies that studies are found that test whether singles are undesirable, lonely or unfulfilled. Where such studies do begin to measure attributes of singles, they still do not have control categories of marrieds with which to compare. So even **if it** is found that singles do have fun or are not lonely, **it** is not known whether they have more fun or are less lonely than marrieds. Similar studies of marrieds also do not usually make use of control categories of singles.

→ With serious study of singles only beginning, the negative stereotypes remain dominant. Their consequences result in serious and often unperceived discrimination toward singles. In so far as singles are perceived to require less income, they pay a higher share of our nation's taxes. In so far as singles are perceived to be immature, they have more difficulty obtaining mortgages to obtain a home. In so far as singles are perceived to be unstable or odd, they lose out to marrieds in seeking organizational promotion. So the stereotypes need to be

investigated. In this particular case we wanted to know whether singles were happier with their fewer obligations or less happy because of their aloneness and what were their needs in regards to happiness. Although some stereotypes tend to have some grains of truth, it is believed that overall singles encounter similar problems as marrieds and, therefore, the differences between them would not be significant.

HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

In order to answer these questions, a probability proportionate to size sample of 400 households was drawn from the Dayton Metropolitan area. After determining the total number of households in the sample area, the number was divided by 80 in order to determine the interval number. Selecting a random number between one and the interval number allowed for a random starting point. Using 1970 census data allowed for the selection of a block area in a census tract utilizing the above random starting number and adding the interval number until all eighty blocks were selected. Starting with another randomly selected number, five households were interviewed in each block. Based on previously determined randomized order, an adult male or female was interviewed. In this manner, the desired total of 400 interviews were conducted. The breakdown reveals that 55% of the sample was married once (207), 11% were remarried (44), 29% were never-married (15) and 9% were divorced (37).

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In order to overcome interviewer bias, the questionnaire was designed to be self-administered by the respondents and so consisted mostly of close-ended items. However, interviewers were utilized to answer question, and as a means of dealing with the biases of a mailed questionnaire. Finally, interviewing was conducted in the evenings or week-ends in order to ensure that all desired segments of the sample would be included.

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The study takes on added significance since the Dayton area is considered to be one of the ten typical areas in the nation by George Gallup. He referred to this area as a "barometer for the nation" and stated that trends in Dayton "would have implications beyond the area." (Dayton Journal-Herald June 22, 1970:1).

Once the sample data had been collected, it was useful to make some subdivisions of the major categories, for it was not believed that all singles, or, for that matter, all marrieds would be similar in their outlooks. That is, the never married may have little in common with the divorced other than both categories being unmarried. The situation may be similar for those in a first marriage and the remarried. Chi square was utilized as a means of noting whether such differences that were found were significant.

FINDINGS

This paper on happiness deals with the realization that there is no single answer to the question, are you happy? Questions in this regard often bring replies such as, "What is happiness?" Sometimes yes and sometimes no." It was these types of answers which led to our examination of various segments of the happiness condition. First, what factors are important to your happiness and how happy have you been with these factors over the past six months? Second, how happy do you think you are and is this belief related to the first series of questions on happiness factors?

The most important ~~single~~ factor for happiness for all **marital** segments of the sample was health (see Table 1). Over three-fourths of the respondents (78%) stated that health was very important to their happiness and only two percent said it was not **important**. Somewhat more of the marrieds than singles rated health as very important (83% vs 70%)

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but this may be due to the fact that the **singles**, especially the **never-marrieds** were a younger overall segment.

The next group of factors indicated as important for happiness are those which reveal the distinct **difference** between happiness for marrieds versus singles. For the marrieds, **it** was their marriage which **was** the second most chosen factor for their happiness (71%) whereas for the singles, friends and personal growth (56%) were tied for second place importance. To put **it** another way, only one fourth (23%) (of the **singles** felt marriage would be very important to their happiness -- a ninth place ranking in overall choice whereas only a third (35%) of the marrieds felt that way about friends (an eighth place overall **selection**) while half (47%) thought personal growth was important (**fifth** place). Thus, **it** would appear that marriage replaces friends in the **priorities** toward happiness when one gets married, even though in another part of the study, getting together with friends was chosen as the second most popular social activity by the marrieds.

This distinction is **also** seen in the next group of factors chosen for making one happy. For the marrieds, **it** was love (63%) and children (62%) whereas the next overall **sélection** was also love (43%) for the singles, but **it** was sex that was their next overall choice (43%). This could imply that sex replaces children in the happiness priorities of singles except that an equal percentage of marrieds (42%) as singles (43%) chose sex; **it** just wasn't as high a priority as compared to other items for the married. The fact that less than half of the singles (43%) chose love as important to their happiness may be seen as a confirmation of their low ranking of marriage or that the term has become an overused hackneyed expression which does not convey their need for a "meaningful **relationship.**" 7

In breaking these factors down, some interesting differences between the subcategories of each marital segment are also noted. Not surprisingly, the divorced, who are **more** likely to have children, also **value** them far more for happiness (44%) - fifth place in overall choice - than do the never marrieds (22%) - a last place selection for their importance to happiness. Perhaps this explains the declining birth rate or **it** may be a reflection of the question asked since never marrieds do not usually have children and may have been dealing with current factors **in** their lives. A similar explanation could be the reason for the rather low ranking of marriage among the singles. As some single-respondents noted, substituting the term "a meaningful relationship" for the term "marriage" would have brought about a higher importance ranking. Another reason for thinking this is that 90% of the **singles** saw marriage in their future in another part of the study.

The response to the factor of sex does produce a surprise for **it** is the divorced who had more of their numbers (51%) selecting sex as very important to their happiness (fourth place) than any other aggregate, even the younger overall never **marrieds**, of whom 41 percent claimed this factor as very important to their happiness (fifth place). **It** is this factor which adds another facet to the examination of sexual activity made in another part of the study. There, **it** was noted that more of the divorced had more sexual partners than any other category of marrieds or singles and also that more of them were more active in their sexual behavior. **This** high activity is now explained by the high priority that the divorced place on sex in regard to their happiness. **It** would also appear that **it** is this high priority that may lead to the fact that more of the divorced were very **dissatisfied** with their sexual life than any other category.

Another surprise comes in examining the factors which few of the sample considered as very Important to their happiness. Thus the least important factors on this basis would be contributions to society (26%), religion (30%), and success (31%). On these items, only religion shows a significant difference between the two marital segments. Whereas one third (37%) of the married felt that religion was very important to their happiness, a fifth (21%) of the singles had the same feeling. In fact, religion was chosen as important to happiness less than any other item by the singles. This low rating of religion as important to happiness may be a reflection of the growing secularism of American society or that religion is important for other reasons than happiness. The other two low overall rated items were surprising since Americans supposedly place high value on attaining success and in attaining personal recognition. It would appear then that these factors may be highly desired but are not considered important to happiness.

Various other questions imply that, for the most part, our sample is a fairly happy population with some slight but significant differences between the various marital segments of the sample. Thus a majority and sometimes an overwhelming majority were very or moderately happy over the past six months with those items considered very important to their happiness. For example, health was considered by most to be very important to their happiness and the vast majority (87%) of the sample were very or moderately happy with their health over the past six months. Similarly, three-fourths were very or moderately happy with the way their friendship were in the past six months.

Change the label ?

An interesting clue suggesting how people chose items as important to happiness is provided by the question on happiness over the past six months since those items with which people were least happy over the

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past six months were also those items considered to be least **important** to their happiness. What may be seen here is a form of rationalization which makes certain items less important to happiness if they have not been happy with that item in the past six months. For example, less than one-fifth of the sample were very happy with **their** contribution to society and success during the past six months and these two items were among those considered least important to happiness. This situation holds for all items except for the divorced and sex. As noted, sex was chosen by a large percentage of the divorced as important to their happiness but also more of them **had** indicated a dissatisfaction with their sex life, despite more of them having more sexual partners. Thus, the divorced **confirm** a need for sex for happiness but that swinging may not be a means for fulfilling this need.

Nevertheless, the original statement stands that the sample overall appears to be very or moderately happy. Thus, a majority (81%) claim that they are very (24%) or moderately (57%) happy most of the time (See Table II) and that they get a lot of fun out of life (80%) (See Table III). In sum, they are very (28%) or moderately happy (50%) with the kind of **person** they are (See Table IV). Despite this fact, more respondents of all categories, except the once-married, feel that their single friends are happier than their married friends as compared to themselves (See Table V and VI). Subtracting the percentage of those who see their single or married acquaintances as happier **from** those that see them as unhappier, it is seen that more of the once married believe that their single (+16%) and **married** friends (+8%) are unhappier as compared to their own marital bliss. Whereas, more of the remarried see their single **friends** as happier than

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themselves and more see their **MARRIED** friends AS less happy than

themselves.' There is a similar distinction for both the single categories. More of the never married see their **married** friends as being unhappier in their marital state than they are within their own single lifestyle (+3%) but also a few more see their single friends as happier than they are (+5%). More of the divorced also saw their married friends as less happy than **themselves** (+14%) while a very few also saw their single friends as happier (+2%). In sum, those who have never been married or experienced unhappy marriage believe their present situation is happier than marriage, although statistics indicate that the majority of them will marry or remarry - an event -confirmed by the fact that an overwhelming majority see themselves as married in a 1985 prediction (90%). This is, apparently, contrary to the situation noted earlier that both single categories ranked **marriage** as low in importance to their happiness. Thus seemingly a contradiction exists between overall desires and needs. This may be due to the social pressures to be married in our society. It is marriage which is seen as the social norm and those not conforming to this norm are labeled with various stereotypes (Deegan, 1969:13; Libby, 1978:105) as well as facing various discriminations. In sum, those who are in their first marriage seem the most sure that their present situation is **happier** or unhappier than the situation they themselves had experienced previously. "Only" 13% of once-married see their **single** friends as happier than themselves, the lowest percent of any of the four categories and 20% of once-married see their single friends as unhappier than themselves, the highest of any of the percent four categories. The remarried present a questioning picture since more also see their single friends as happier than themselves and more see their married friends as less happy *and so the question arises as to why they REMARRIED and it also*

may be **why** so many remarriages fail.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this discussion on **happiness**, **more** of the **marrieds** than the singles have consistently indicated that they are happier with those items considered important to happiness, have more indicating that they are very or moderately happy most of the time. have more indicating they get a **lot** of fun out of life. These findings tie in with other studies (Glenn and Weaver, 1975; **Bradburn** and Caplovitz, 1970) that more married persons report being happy than any category of unmarried persons and yet the marrieds seemingly go along with the "swinging image" of singles and that such is happiness since more of them saw their single friends happier than their married friends as compared to themselves. Thus 12% of the marrieds saw their single friends as happier as compared to 7% seeing their married friends as happier (See Table **V**). It would seem then, that the conclusion reached by **Bradburn** and Caplovitz in their study of **happiness** may also be a factor here. They note that a person's subjective assessment of "well-being **is** a function of the relative strengths of the forces which contribute to the experience of positive and **negative** feelings." This does not necessarily mean that experiences producing negative **feelings** will diminish positive feelings or vice versa. Thus, **it** is "possible for a person to report being 'very depressed' and still describe the self as 'very happy'" since the negative feeling may be offset by the positive (1970:18-20). Thus, **it** is quite possible for the marrieds to subjectively rate their own happiness as **very** high and still believe something -- as presented by the single lifestyle -- is missing. /

This **examination** of happiness **reveals** some very distinct differences between singles and marrieds as to what is important to their happiness and what appears to be a contradiction in the responses of the singles. As indicated both single categories had ranked marriage as low in importance in regards to **their** happiness. This may be due, as noted, to the fact that they are not married and so only dealt with factors that are currently part of their milieu in this ranking of factors important to their happiness or that a more appropriate term in line with their single status was not utilized, such as, "a meaningful relationship." Credence is lent to this belief since in another part of the study, the **majority** did not see singleness as a **permanent** status for **themselves** (68%) and saw themselves as married in the future (90%). Thus, marriage is still the social norm in this society despite what appears to be a hugh growth in singleness as a lifestyle - a growth due more to the high population boom of the 50's and 60's than any other factor. This idea is added to when **it** is seen that the most **common** word associated with the term "marriage" by the sample was companionship whereas for the term "single", **it** was lonely.

TABLE I: VERY IMPORTANT TO HAPPINESS FACTORS

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	NEVER MARRIED		DIVORCED		MARRIED ONCE		REARRIED		SINGLES		MARRIEDS		x ² <
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	
Health	70	79	75	27	83	169	81	33	70	106	83	202	.0596
Marriage	22	24	23	8	69	140	78	32	23	32	71	172	.0000
Children	23	24	44	16	64	130	54	22	26	40	62	152	.0000
Friends	54	61	60	21	36	73	32	13	56	82	35	86	.0352
Love	43	48	43	15	63	128	63	26	43	63	63	154	.0000
Sex	38	43	51	18	42	85	42	17	43	61	42	102	.0133
Personal Growth	61	58	57	20	49	99	40	16	56	78	47	115	.2084
Success	31	35	42	15	29	59	35	14	36	50	30	73	.2082
Religion	26	29	9	3	37	76	32	13	21	32	37	89	.0000
Contribution to Society	24	27	21	7	28	57	22	9	24	34	28	68	.3423

TABLE II: HOW HAPPY ARE YOU MOST OF THE TIME

	VERY HAPPY				MODERATELY HAPPY				NEITHER HAPPY OR UNHAPPY				MODERATELY UNHAPPY				VERY UNHAPPY				
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#			
Never Married	17	20			56	64			20	23			6	7			1	1			
Divorced	24	9			46	17			19	7			3	1			8	3			
Singles Total			21	29			56	79			17	24			4	5			2	3	
Married Once	28	57			60	124			9	18			2	5			1	3			
Remarried	25	11			55	24			7	3			9	4			5	2			
Marrieds Total			27	68			59	148			8	21			4	9			2	5	
TOTALS	24	97			57	229			13	51			4	17			2	9			
Chi square <																					.0061

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TABLE III: GET A LOT OF FUN OUT OF LIFE

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	YES				NO			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Never Married	76	87			24	27		
Divorced	70	26			30	11		
Singles Total			75	107			25	32
Married Once	85	171			15	31		
Remarried	74	32			26	11		
Marrieds Total			83	209			17	42
TOTALS	80	316			20	80		

Chi square < .0730

TABLE IV: HAPPY WITH THE KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE

valid?

	VERY HAPPY				HAPPY				NEUTRAL				UNHAPPY				VERY UNHAPPY			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Never Married	30	35			48	55			17	19			5	5			1	1		
Divorced	27	10			38	14			22	8			8	3			5	2		
Singles Total			30	42			46	64			17	24			5	7			2	3
Married Once	27	55			54	112			16	33			3	7			0	0		
Remarried	30	13			50	22			11	5			9	4			0	0		
Marrieds Total			27	68			53	134			15	38			4	11			0	0
TOTALS	28	113			50	203			16	65			5	19			1	3		

Chi square < .0701

TABLE V. HOW HAPPY ARE SINGLE FRIENDS IN COMPARISON

	MUCH HAPPIER				SOMEWHAT HAPPIER				ABOUT SAME				SOMEWHAT UNHAPPIER				MUCH UNHAPPIER			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Never Married	4	4			23	26			57	65			15	17			3	3		
Divorced	5	2			24	9			43	16			22	8			5	2		
Singles Total			4	5			22	31			54	75			18	25			3	4
Married Once	3	6			10	20			58	114			26	52			3	6		
Remarried	7	3			23	10			49	21			19	8			2	1		
Marrieds Total			4	9			12	30			56	135			25	60			3	7
TOTALS	4	15			17	65			55	216			22	85			3	12		

Chi square < .0947

TABLE VI: HOW HAPPY ARE MARRIED FRIENDS IN COMPARISON

	MUCH HAPPIER				SOMEWHAT HAPPIER				ABOUT SAME				SOMEWHAT UNHAPPIER				MUCH UNHAPPIER			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Never Married	8	9			23	26			41	47			20	23			8	9		
Divorced	5	2			19	7			38	14			27	10			11	4		
Singles Total			6	9			21	7			40	55			24	33			9	13
Married Once	2	5			6	13			76	156			15	31			1	1		
Remarried	5	2			11	5			61	27			21	9			2	1		
Marrieds Total			3	7			7	18			73	183			16	40			1	2
TOTALS	5	18			13	51			61	244			18	73			4	15		

Chi square < .0000

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