
HOW TO BE SINGLE AND HAPPY (WITHOUT LOOKING FOR A PARTNER)

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

How to be Single and Happy (Without Looking for a Partner) is a one-credit seminar that was designed for Hampton University's Honors College; it could also function as an elective for Sociology or Psychology majors or as a Continuing Education course. The second part of the title refers to the societal narrative that one needs a partner to be happy, a narrative that many singles buy into when they sign up for dating apps, sites, and even workshops geared toward them that teach them how to date or find a partner. This course, alternatively, shows singles how to be happy without needing to date.

The class is based on much of my research into the rhetoric that is used to inadvertently promote coupling over singlehood and argument for the idea that the narrative mentioned above can be damaging to singles and couples alike. Rates of marriage throughout the world have been declining steadily in the past sixty years and are predicted to continue in that direction. In 1980, five percent of adults in the United States between the ages of forty-five and fifty-four had never married. In 2014, Pew Research Center data, indicated that by 2030, that number will increase to [twenty-five percent](#). In 2021, the United States Census found that the number of adults who never married increase during the period of 2006 to 2016 (2021).

Yet, much of our thinking has not caught up with these trends. Noted scholar Bella DePaulo pioneered the field of Singles Studies because she enjoyed being single as an adult and was interested in the inferior treatment singles receive in our society (American Psychological Association, 2017). As part of her work, she coined two important terms: 1) *singlism*, which is the stigma and stereotyping given to single people (2005); and 2) *matrimania*, the societal obsession with weddings and marriage (2006).

Both phenomena exist in our daily interactions, as well as in media and public discourse. DePaulo also advocated for the need for Singles Studies as a discipline in order to educate students about the legitimacy of singlehood as a lifestyle (2017). She advocates for this area of study because of the rise of single people and the need to educate them on the legitimacy of their lifestyle, whether by choice, by circumstance, or some combination of both. This course can also help to further the legitimacy of Singles Studies as an academic field of study.

HISTORY & OBJECTIVES

When the course debuted, it was advertised through Hampton University's Honors program. The course was open to any student who is interested in living their best lives at singles, whether it be temporary or permanent. Some students take the course because they might define themselves as "single at heart" even if they're not explicitly aware of the term, as coined by scholar Bella DePaulo. Others take it as a university-wide course to fulfill a requirement, and the title "sounds interesting." The class met once a week for 50 minutes, although an instructor could easily adjust it to fit the time requirements of a three-

credit course. I organize the course so that students spend an equal amount of time learning about the state of singlehood in the world and developing practical strategies on living single.

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- 1) Recognize instances of singlism and matrimania in their daily lives;
- 2) implement strategies on how they can live their best single lives, including "flying solo" in a public place;
- 3) examine discourse for singlist and matrimaniacal messages;
- 4) argue for a change to a policy or procedure so singles can benefit; and
- 5) understand how singlehood is viewed and treated on a global scale.

The first two objectives have the potential to align with various university mission statements that promote the development of the student as a "whole person." For example, one of the values of Carnegie Mellon University is that of "improving the human condition and on the personal development of members of our community" (2021). This course can help students work toward this objective in that it can help them to develop enough confidence in their singlehood in that while finding a partner can be desirable, it doesn't have to be an essential need, which can help them avoid relationships that may be unfulfilling, toxic, or even dangerous.

The last three objectives help students develop their critical thinking skills, a skill valued by many universities in their mission statements, as they pertain to how marriage and singlehood are viewed in our society. For example, the University of Central Arkansas values "...student success and in preparing students to engage complex issues and express informed opinion through critical thinking, writing, and speech" (2011). In this case, students are thinking critically about how marriage is viewed through the lenses of media, the law, and everyday interactions.

Since my background is in Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS), I understand the need for writing across disciplines, so I integrate writing into the course, particularly low-stakes writing exercises that are designed to help students internalize the course concepts. During the first session, students are given the following writing prompts: 1) How would you describe a never-married 50-year old woman? 2) How would you describe a never-married 50-year-old man? Students then share their descriptions, which form the basis for a discussion around stereotypes of singlehood. Students then transition into learning about singlism and matrimania as it exists in the world, on both micro- and macro-levels. It is important for students to learn about these concepts so that those who have negative feelings around being single or unpartnered can recognize the societal forces that may be causing them to feel this way, and be empowered to change their perspectives around being single. From there, we progress into our units of study for the course.

UNIT ONE – LIVING YOUR BEST SINGLE LIFE (WEEKS 1 – 5)

Here, students read Chapter 1 of DePaulo's *Singled Out: How Singles Are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After*, which discusses the societal problems of singlism, matrimania, and *amatormativity*, the idea that a romantic union should take priority over other types of relationships (Brake, 2012). They also read the opening chapter from Elyakim Kislev's *Happy Singlehood: The Rising Acceptance and Celebration of Solo Living*, which includes examples singlism the author has witnessed and experienced in his own life. Traditional college-age students may have limited experience from which to draw, but they can be drawn out into conversation by being asked to share examples of comments they may have heard about singles from friends, family, or the media, including stereotypes, such as being lonely, friendliness, and selfish. Students also read an Internet article, "[10 Tips on Being](#)

[Single and Happy.](#)" They're asked to share about a tip from that article that resonated with them; from there, they explain why it resonated.

As the culmination for this unit, students write *A Singles Manifesto*, which allows students the opportunity to visualize how they will live their best single lives. As part of this unit, they complete a variety of readings on living single, including excerpts from my book, *How to be a Happy Bachelor*. They apply ideas from these readings toward class discussion and to their *Singles Manifesto*. They also complete two low-stakes writing exercises, one in which they reflect on their experience dining alone, and another in which they see a movie in a theater by themselves, activities which I feel are necessary for students to engage in if they are to exercise their personal development by being truly happy single.

Students engage in another peer review, another best practice in RWS. Peer review involves students reviewing and critiquing each other's writing for the purpose of helping each other develop as writers. Students engage in this exercise for the *Singles Manifesto*, as well as all of the other major assignments in the course.

UNIT TWO – SINGLEHOOD AND DISCOURSE (WEEKS 6 – 8)

In this unit, students have the opportunity to engage in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the language that inadvertently privileges coupling over singlehood (Huckin, Andrus & Clary-Lemon, 2012). Students learn about the function of CDA, which is to analyze language for unintended meanings that perpetuate social inequities. They read a series of critical discourse analyses of popular culture items so they can see what writers examine when they conduct CDA. Students learn the practical applications of critically analyzing popular culture documents

Students engage in low-stakes writing here, in which they write a CDA of an advertisement that predominantly features a couple or nuclear family one week. The following week, they write a CDA of a romance-related film. For their larger assignment, they compare the messages in the advertisement and the film and synthesize them into an analysis of singlist messages in our media.

UNIT THREE – SINGLISM IN PUBLIC LIFE (WEEKS 9 – 11)

The next unit revolves around Singlism in Public Life, during which students learn about singlism and matrimania as they pertain to public policy. Through a series of readings, students learn about the legal benefits that come with being married, such as how when one marries, that person pays less in taxes because the couple can find jointly, as well as the ability to leave Social Security benefits to one's spouse or child but not a sibling. Such policies are reflective of the government's adulation of marriage as an idea. Included in this material is an article from Joan DeFattore, which highlights how, as a single woman, she was offered less aggressive treatment for cancer because she did not have a spouse or children.

However, students need to understand that the number of people choosing not to marry rises, their prospects in many areas of life will increase. One area is that of housing: solo housing communities, such as in cohousing communities, communities of singles who live together as roommates (DePaulo, 2015). Students learn about this phenomenon by reading an excerpt from Bella DePaulo's *How We Live Now: Redefining Home and Family in the 21st Century*. As the assessment product for this unit, students will write a letter to a business or governmental organization in which they advocate for a change to a policy so that said policy is more inclusive of singles.

UNIT FOUR – SINGLEHOOD AROUND THE WORLD (WEEKS 12 – 15)

Finally, we discuss singlehood on a global scale for the remaining four weeks of the semester. Through readings, students learn about how singlehood is experienced in Western and Eastern countries. In pairs, they research singlehood in a country of their choice and discuss: 1) how singles experience daily life, and whether gender impacts that experience; and 2) the laws and policies governing life for singles, such as benefits for married people. During the last class session, they present their findings to their classmates.

CONCLUSION

This low-stakes, interactive course allows students the opportunity to understand singlehood. Many may have been raised with the expectation that they would follow what Amy Gahran (2017) would call the "relationship escalator," which is the societally accepted series of steps one follows in a romance: dating, mating, exclusivity, marriage, children, etc. However, as more people are opting for alternatives to this traditional way of navigating relationships, it's going to be more important that our younger generations understand singlehood as a valid way of life; this course will introduce that idea, which can hopefully become accepted in our world.

COURSE SYLLABUS HOW TO BE SINGLE AND HAPPY (WITHOUT LOOKING FOR A PARTNER)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide an opportunity for students to learn about singlehood as a valid lifestyle choice. They will learn about the stereotypes that pervade singles throughout the world as well as how to overcome them. Students will also learn strategies for how to live as happy singles. **DISCLAIMER: This course will not teach you how to date or how to "get a partner." It will also not show you how to be in a romantic relationship. If you are looking for that, this is not the course for you.**

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- 1) Recognize instances of singlism and matrimania in their daily lives.
- 2) Examine discourse for singlist and matrimaniacal messages.
- 3) Implement strategies on how they can live their best single lives, including "flying solo" in a public place.
- 4) Argue for a change to a policy or procedure so singles can benefit.
- 5) Understand how singlehood is viewed and treated on a global scale.

REQUIRED READING

Various Hyperlinks and PDFs

Save a few dollars for activities that will enhance your course experience.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment #1 - Singlehood Manifesto 15%

Assignment #2 - Pop Culture Critique 15%

Assignment #3 - Policy Change Letter 15%

Assignment #4 – Singlehood Throughout the World Paper/Presentation 20%

Weekly Reading/Writing Assignments 20%

Class Participation 15%

CLASS SCHEDULE (PLEASE NOTE THAT READINGS AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS MAY BE MODIFIED AS THE SEMESTER PROGRESSES.)

WEEK 1

INTRODUCTION TO COURSE AND STUDENT INTRODUCTIONS; SINGLISM AND MATRIMANIA DEFINED

READING: "THE AGE OF SINGLEHOOD" (EXCERPTED FROM *HAPPY SINGLEHOOD; THE RISING ACCEPTANCE AND CELEBRATION OF SOLO LIVING*)

WRITING: WHY ARE YOU TAKING THIS COURSE? WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO LEARN?

UNIT 1 – EVERYDAY SINGLE LIFE

WEEK 2

UNPACKING SINGLISM, MATRIMANIA, AND AMATONORMATIVITY

READINGS: *HOW TO BE A HAPPY BACHELOR* CHAPTER 2, *SINGLED OUT*, CHAPTER 1 (PDF), [10 TIPS ON BEING SINGLE AND HAPPY](#)

WRITING: WHY DO YOU BELIEVE OUR SOCIETY HAS SUCH A STRONG BELIEF IN "COUPLEHOOD?"

INTRO TO ASSIGNMENT #1 – SINGLEHOOD MANIFESTO

WEEK 3

SINGLEHOOD STRATEGIES

READINGS: *HOW TO BE A HAPPY BACHELOR* CHAPTER 3, "RUMINATING WILL RUIN YOUR LIFE, IF IT HASN'T ALREADY", "SETTLE DOWN, QUICK!" "SINGLE IS NOW THE NORM" "CHURCH – OR WHY IS EVERYONE ELSE MARRIED?", [HOW TO EAT ALONE – AND LIKE IT](#)

WRITING: SOLO DINING EXERCISE

WEEK 4

SINGLEHOOD STRATEGIES (CON'T)

READINGS: *HOW TO BE A HAPPY BACHELOR* CHAPTER 4, "[MOVIES ALONE](#)"

WRITING: SOLO CINEMA EXERCISE, FIRST DRAFT OF SINGLEHOOD MANIFESTO

WEEK 5

PEER REVIEW OF SINGLEHOOD MANIFESTO

READINGS: NONE

WRITINGS: FINAL DRAFT OF SINGLEHOOD MANIFESTO – DUE AT THE END OF WEEK 5

UNIT 2 – SINGLISM IN DISCOURSE

WEEK 6

READINGS: "MAKING ACTIVE CHOICES: LANGUAGE AS A SET OF RESOURCES" "REPRESENTATIONS OF MIDDLE AGE IN COMEDY FILM: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS"

WRITING: ADVERTISING CRITIQUE

INTRO TO ASSIGNMENT #2: POPULAR CULTURE ANALYSIS

WEEK 7

READINGS: "THERE IS NO WRONG ROMANCE CAN'T RIGHT", "SINGLEHOOD AMONG YOUNG AND MIDDLE AGE WOMEN IN POLAND – STEREOTYPES IN THE MASS MEDIA"

WRITING: FILM CRITIQUE, FIRST DRAFT OF POPULAR CULTURE ANALYSIS

WEEK 8

PEER REVIEW OF POPULAR CULTURE ANALYSIS

READINGS: NONE

WRITINGS: FINAL DRAFT OF POPULAR CULTURE ANALYSIS, DUE AT THE END OF WEEK

UNIT 3- SINGLISM IN PUBLIC LIFE

WEEK 9

LEGAL AND HEALTH BENEFITS OF BEING MARRIED

READINGS: [LEGAL BENEFITS OF BEING MARRIED](#); [DISCRIMINATION IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM](#);

WRITING: INTERVIEW WITH A SINGLE PERSON

INTRO TO ASSIGNMENT #3: Policy/Practice Change Letter

WEEK 10

ETHICAL(?) BUSINESS PRACTICES, STEPS IN A PROGRESSIVE DIRECTION

READINGS: [DEATH BY STEREOTYPE](#), ["THE HIGH PRICE OF BEING SINGLE IN AMERICA"](#) ["LIVING IN A COMMUNITY" \(EXCERPTED FROM BELLA DEPAULO'S HOW WE LIVE NOW: REDEFINING HOME AND FAMILY IN THE 21ST CENTURY\)](#)

WRITING: LEGAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

WEEK 11

PEER REVIEW – POLICY/PRACTICE CHANGE LETTER

READINGS: "SINGLE WOMEN IN IRELAND," "HISTORY, MODERNIZATION AND NEVER MARRIED WOMEN IN ROMANIA"

WRITING: READER-RESPONSE JOURNAL, FINAL DRAFT OF POLICY/PRACTICE CHANGE LETTER, DUE AT THE END OF WEEK 11

UNIT 4 – SINGLEHOOD AROUND THE WORLD

WEEK 12

SINGLEHOOD IN WESTERN CULTURES

READINGS: VIEW *BACHELOR GIRLS*, "ULTRASOUND CHECKS AND IMBALANCES" "SIMPLY SINGLE"

WRITING: READER-RESPONSE JOURNAL

ASSIGNMENT #4 – SINGLEHOOD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD REPORT & PRESENTATION

WEEK 13

SINGLEHOOD IN EASTERN CULTURES

READINGS: NONE

WRITING: NONE

WEEK 14

INDEPENDENT WORK WEEK – WORK ON YOUR PAPERS IN YOUR PAIRS.

WEEK 15

SINGLEHOOD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD PRESENTATIONS

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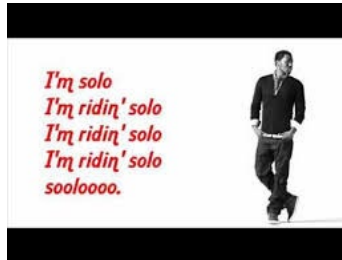
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SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

SOLO CINEMA



For this week's assignment, you're going to go to a movie by yourself. Write about your experience. Note your actions and feelings. Consider the following questions:

- What do you do to occupy the time before the movie starts?
- How are you interacting with the movie?
- For example, if it's a comedy, do you still laugh loudly even when you're solo?
- Does your solo outing impact your choice of film?
- Do you feel self-conscious at all?

Tip: Avoid romance-related movies. They can be triggering if you're not totally comfortable with your singlehood.

If you're concerned about safety, you may enter the movie with a "buddy" and have your buddy seated in a different row, but you must "ride solo" to the movie. There is no page length.

SOLO DINING



For this week's assignment, you're going to go to a restaurant (on-campus or off-campus) by yourself. Write about your experience. Note your actions and feelings. What do you do to occupy the time before you're served? Do you engage in conversation with the waiter/waitress? Do you feel self-conscious at all?

If you're concerned about safety, you may enter the restaurant with a "buddy" and have your buddy seated at a different table, but you must "ride solo" at your table.

WRITING A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

- 1) Choose your text.
- 2) What is the general attitude of this text (advertisement/article/film) toward the subject?

Look for "tone words" that will help you figure out what the author is trying to convey. For example, if a text describes a single person as a "spinster" or "lonelyheart," the attitude is critical of singlehood. If a text describes a single person as a "happy, liberated person," then it's respectful or reverential. If a text describes a single person as a "single person," then it's neutral. What tone words are being used?

- 3) Look at assumptions the text is making. For example, "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family" assumes that marriage is superior to all other relationships. Does the text make any assumptions?

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