

Romantic Relationships and Happiness

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Introduction

Relationships are part of our daily lives, for that they are central for human existence.

The question we are going to answer is: are people happier when they are in a romantic relationship or when they are single? There are two possible answers to this question. First, previous research provides a number of reasons to argue that people in romantic relationships are happier than single people. For example, being in a romantic relationship a couple enjoys two incomes and higher standards of living. Furthermore, they receive emotional support from their partner; couples are more likely to have better mental and physical health which leads to a longer life to live. Being single in today's world can be very challenging in a number of ways. On material level, it's difficult to be solely responsible for your existence, and to find the time to keep up with everything in your life. On any given day, we may have more electronic contacts than human ones. And while email, voice mail and telephones are wonderful tools, they don't address the heart's deeper yearning for authentic human connection.

In contrast to the evidence summarized above, there are also a number of studies supporting the idea single people are happier rather than being in a romantic relationship. Being single allows a person to have complete freedom and solitude. They have more time to work, become financially stable, and develop general life skills. Divorce rates climb higher with each passing year and the power balance between two partners in some cases tips too far causing abusive relationships in all shapes and sizes. There is so much stress, responsibility and work involved in relationships, and yet a successful relationship is what the majority of people in the world strive for. Being in a romantic relationship can create a strain on time and often any other type of relationship including friends and family. Sharing a romantic relationship with someone can even diminish one's effectiveness in all other areas of their lives, yet people continue to will or wish that stress onto them.

Our debate over if happiness is based on being in a romantic relationship or being single, we used the hedonic treadmill model and the set-point theory. According to Diener, Lucas, and Scollon in their article *Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill*; good and bad events temporarily affect happiness, but people quickly adapt back to neutrality. They have found that individual's set points are not hedonically neutral; everyone has different set points, which depend on their behavior. They found that a person could have multiple happiness set points; they also found that well-being set points can change under some conditions. An example is a person can experience a death in the family and be sad for a period of time but will adapt and come back to their set point of neutrality. We will argue if being in a romantic relationship heightens their level of happiness and if they stay at that level or return back to neutrality and if being single heightens a person's happiness. Are people happier in a romantic relationship or being single?

The Debate:
Having A Partner

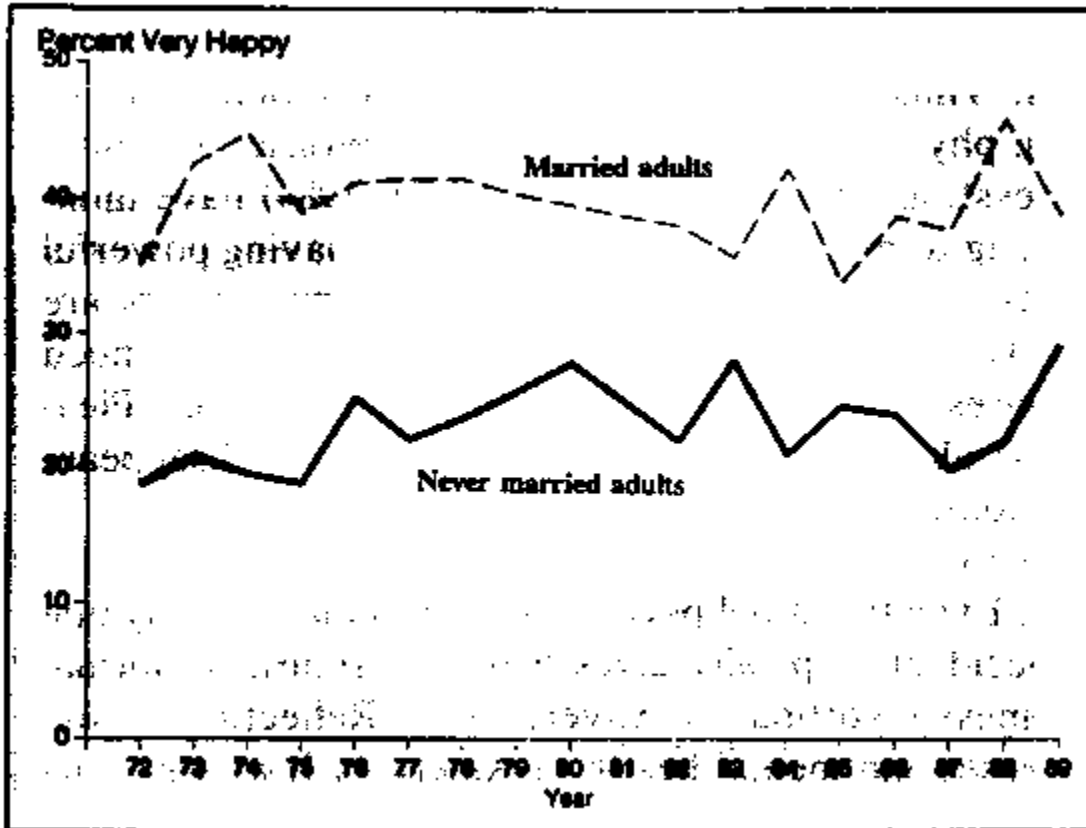
First we will argue that relationships are crucial to our well-being. Indicators of well-being including happiness or subjective well-being are financial status, mental health, physical health, emotional support and mortality. Subjective well-being is a person's evaluation of his or her life. This evaluation can be in terms of cognitive states such as satisfaction with one's marriage, life, affect or the presence of positive emotions and moods. A romantic relationship can be characterized by a feeling of dependence, where the lover relies, to a certain degree, on the beloved in order to function. Individuals seek companionship, help, affection, intimacy and emotional security (Demir, 2007). As an adolescent, no one is focused on finding the person they're going to spend the rest of their life with because they have other aspirations, but when they become an emerging adult their happiness ultimately comes from being in an intimate relationship. Emerging adults are searching for a lifelong partner. In a study, subjects mentioned

that romantic involvement led to self-growth and understanding. Subjects also mentioned that involvement led to feeling better about the self (Montgomery, 2005). Developing personal skills in a relationship can be more beneficial than when alone. People grow more with someone else because they also learn from their experiences. Finding a significant other will ultimately lead to happiness in their life because it's something they keep looking for and it's the means for human existence. Woods, Rhodes, and Whelan (1989) conducted a meta analysis of 22 studies relating marital status to reports of life satisfaction and happiness. They found that on average, married couples were happier and more satisfied with their lives than non-married persons. There is also research that suggests that unmarried men over the age of 20 were more likely to commit suicide. Furthermore, there is evidence that being married is associated with fewer sick days, less use of hospital facilities, and less likelihood of having chronic health conditions.

Being in a romantic relationship it can create a safety net. Couples who share a household generally gain from economics. "With two incomes couples enjoy higher standard of living" (Stack and Eshleman, 1998). They can afford better housing, food, and other services. Couples offer security, being cared and valued; this tends to lower depression and other forms of ill mental health. Adult mental health and well-being is a result from having a high quality intimate relationship. This finding suggests that across the developmental period, young people are increasingly adapted to value and seek closeness, a necessary precondition for the capacity to embrace the intense emotions and common involvements entailed in mutual relational intimacy (Montgomery, 2005). Young people get prepared for intimate relationships from primary relationships with caregivers during childhood to primary relationships with peers during adolescence, then reaching adulthood with the capacity for a long-term intimate relationship of trust and mutuality (Adams & Archer, 1994). They also have increased likelihood of early

detection of symptoms, encouraging each other to seek medical treatment, discouraging risky behaviors such as drinking and smoking, encouraging each other to follow a healthy diet. All of the above help increase happiness, better form of living which in turn will give a person a longer life to live, mortality. “As with other close social bonds, broken marital relationships are a source of much self-reported unhappiness, whereas a supportive, intimate relationship is among life’s greatest joys (Glenn, 1990).” The quality of your relationship is also a determinant of how happy you and your partner will be.

In *Marital Status and Happiness* by Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman they conducted a national study consisting of seventeen nations. With seventeen nations and eighteen thousand adults participating they extended the analysis to a set of industrialized nations with diverse social and institutional frameworks. “Controlling for socio-demographic variables, we found that married persons have a significantly higher level of happiness than persons who are not married.” The advantage of the married over those who are not married appears to hold true for specific indicator of well-being and global happiness. Being single only increases the odds of isolation, which may lead a person to be more vulnerable to loneliness and unhappiness.



Single In Solitude

In the single life there is a negative cloud that surrounds you. Society will see the single person as one that is unhappy, lonely, and self centered, and etc. In the article “Whats Wrong With Being Single” by Bella M DePaulo she explains different ways in which this single discrimination occurs in everyday life. In both the workplace and the in business, there are discrimination's. It is shown that realtors rather rents housing to people that are married rather than their single counterparts. In many studies and surveys people are asked to rate their happiness. Bella found one study that proves the stereotype isn't as true as people believe. The study Bella found was done by Walter R. Gove and Hee-Choon Shin published in 1989; the numbers are the average happiness ratings of 2,200 Americans in four groups rating happiness between 1 and 4. The four groups were married, divorced, single and widowed. The results came out as the avg. current married person rated as 3.3 and single rated 3.2, a very close second. Then

widowed and divorced both came in at 2.9. So in all actuality single people are generally happy. Single people (perhaps especially single women) are likely to have whole networks of important people in their lives. They often have friendships that have outlasted many marriages. Those relationships are what keep them happy. Even if single people want to get married for the sole reason of starting a family, technology has advanced so much to the point that women don't need to have sex to reproduce. Different and new factors of today's society seem to make the single life more attractive, and if someone wants to be single for life, it should not be frowned upon.

In similar article titled, "College Sex & Love: How Singleness Prepares You for Marriage" by Cherley Pajela, more standards and stereotypes are expressed. A big reason single people are sad and feel lonely is because they seem to think that this perfect person is going to come and make them the happiest they ever been. That is why even some people who are married are dissatisfied. They had such high standards of marriage and ran into it so quickly they didn't take the time to develop themselves enough. Not to mention the high expectations of the other person in the relationship to make them happy. The dependence on the other person to make you happy is not good, because you have to know how to make yourself content and happy before you make someone else happy. Single time in life is a good time for you and no one else, focusing on the self is important to happiness, relationship will come and go and if you are destined to be married then you will be so you can't dwell upon that day.

Let's try not to confuse marriage with the general idea of a romantic relationship. It is understandable that people involved in marital relationships are happier than those not because divorce is more socially acceptable. Instead of simply existing in an unhappy marriage couples generally get a divorce after which they are unhappy but not married. Vedantam reports that a 15 year study in Germany of more than 24,000 yields results that couples are indeed happier in

relationships but researchers continue to question whether relationships make people happier or happier people are simply more likely to form relationships. Richard Lucas, a professor at Michigan State, found that people in relationship are in fact no happier than they were before the relationship started. The conclusion of Lucas' study directly relates to the hedonic treadmill model, each person has a pre-determined happiness "set point" that they revert to following every and any major life event; including marriage and gaining a partner. There is the odd case where the happiness of a person does go up and stay up but that is generally always counteracted by those whose happiness levels go down in relationships due to self esteem issues, an imbalance of power or abusive relationships. The conclusion to be drawn from Lucas' study is that people, on average, don't become happier or unhappier due to an acquisition of a romantic partner. Those in romantic relationship do tend to report a higher level of happiness than single individuals but the primary reason for that is that happier people are more likely to form romantic relationships than those that are unhappy.

The book Positive Psychology has multiple chapters regarding happiness in romantic relationships. We can see from figure 1.4 that the largest percentage of very happy people falls into the "married category" but that does not mean that all married people are happy. "From figure 1.4 it may be seen that married people are happier than unmarried people, be they divorced separated or never married (Myers, 2000). However, the least happy of all are people trapped in unhappy marriages," (Carr, 2004) The same goes for relationships in general, the happiest people seem to be in relationships but some people are very unhappy in their relationships.

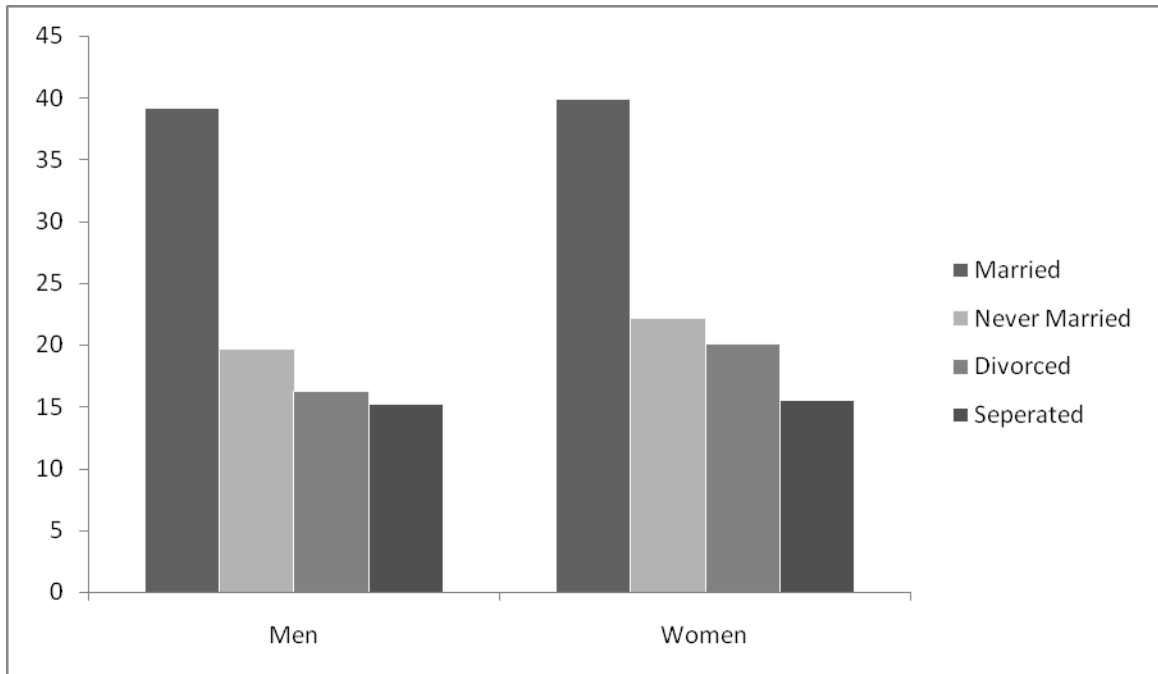


Figure 1.4 Marital Status and Happiness

Source: Adapted from Myers, E. (2000): 63, based on data from 35,024 cases in General Social Survey, National Opinion Research Center, USA, 1972-1996.

The book states that there are two likely reasons for the results of the graph. The first is that relationships do indeed make a person happier through a wide range of benefits, emotional and physical intimacy and the possibility of marriage in the future leading to a family and social security. The other reason is that people that are already happy make better candidates for a relationship because they are more attractive as partners. The second explanation makes more sense due to the set point theory.

Conclusion:

There are sufficient studies to thoroughly argue both sides of the question; are people happier when they are in a romantic relationship or when they are single? In this paper we have discussed what aspects of a relationship might make a person happier. We decided that the health of a person in a romantic relationship is often better than the health of a person who is not.

We've also decided that a person who is in a romantic relationship has better self esteem. On the contrary we found that being single allows one more time to devote to work, other relationships and improving life skills. Being single can also help a person become more independent.

However, we can come to the conclusion that people in relationships are indeed happier than single people, but not for the reasons that most people might think. Using the set point theory as a basis, as well as survey studies that show that happiness levels are higher in a romantic relationship (or in marriage) We find that the most likely conclusion is that people in relationships are happier simply because they are actually happier people in general. It is their personality that dictates how happy they might be in a romantic relationship. The same goes for health and self-esteem. Someone with poor health will have other problems to focus on that might be more important than pursuing a romantic relationship. Whereas someone with higher self esteem might be a more attractive partner. All evidence points to one simple conclusion; people are no happier in a romantic relationship than they were before it began.

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