

Who's really single and happy, anyway?

I wish there were more people in the world who are happy with being alone. Maybe I should start a club. But maybe I'd be the only member. I've been single all my life and I still have no desire to be in a relationship. I know, that's weird. I'm definitely in the minority. But on the flip side, I find it weird that people are willing to do whatever it takes to be in a relationship, even putting up with bad relationships that make them completely unhappy and repressed. All to avoid being single.

Sometimes I encounter people who just can't understand why I would choose being single for so long. What's wrong with me? Was I abused as a child? Am I gay? Are my standards too high? Low self esteem? What I don't get is, why in the world does something have to be wrong with me based on the sole fact that I'm single? I'm obviously happy. I've got a life. I'm surrounded by a great group of friends and I have never complained about being alone. Why can't people accept that aloneness doesn't automatically make people weird or sad? Alone and Lonely are two completely different things. I'm not at all lonely. But I love being alone.

I love the freedom of being alone. I don't have to ask permission. I don't have to compromise. I don't have to share. None of these are bad of course, but it's nice to have a certain amount of freedom and individuality. I recently took a road trip, driving from Colorado to Southern California. Alone. I filled my MP3 player with music. Checked the NPR stations along the route. Packed too many snacks that I didn't eat. I left at 4 a.m. and I only stopped when I needed to stop. I drove for 17 straight hours. Without having to make conversation or sit through awkward silences, fight with someone about what music to play or fulfill someone else's desire to stop and pee. Sure, there were certain things that would have been better with a partner, like letting them drive half the way, but ultimately I liked having so much quiet time. And having things in my brain that weren't put there by someone else. And the freedom to make the decision to drive straight through. It's amazing how much that trip revitalized me. I think everyone would benefit from knowing how to be happy when alone.

It seems that too many people, when they're not in a relationship, are so consumed with the next relationship, that they completely miss the spectacular experience of being alone. Being single is a fantastic time to become reacquainted with friends.....and with one's self. Imagine

how freeing it is to not spend so much time trying to be what others want you to be. Or rather, what you think others want you to be. The whole process of looking for somebody to love you can make a person brutally self-conscious, and personally, the less I experience that, the better. I think of myself as fairly confident, but a few years ago, when I was experimenting with a "boyfriend," (I didn't want to commit to the possibility that I was in a relationship!) I realized how much I had to be conscious of myself because it was so easy for me to slip into the neurosis that made me question everything about myself. Was I really counting the days between phone calls? Was I really getting out of bed early in the morning so I could go to the bathroom and make myself look presentable and then climb back into bed so that when he woke up he wouldn't see me looking like I just woke up? Was this so-called relationship making me bonkers??

Really? I so wasn't that girl. It makes me cringe knowing that it might just be inevitable that we turn into "That Girl" the minute we get into a relationship. Maybe the more we know ourselves and the more confidence we gain, the less we'll lose ourselves in the process of a relationship. And that makes me even more happy to be alone, knowing that I can spend quality time gaining more self-assurance and calmness. I can see myself venturing into a relationship someday without losing sight of who I am...but for now it's great to be able to improve my self esteem and confidence levels without constant fear of rejection.

Now I'm not knocking relationships. I know many couples who have wonderfully healthy relationships and where the two people involved continue to grow and explore the depths of their individual potentials and passions both within and outside of their relationship. But I do strive to inspire a more mainstream acceptance of single people. There's just too much focus on getting those single people hitched and not enough admiration for those who are happy and single, in my opinion. I would love to see more messages supporting singleness and helping create a culture where both single people and non-single people can exist in the same world. Where it's not automatically assumed that single people are out to steal your mates. Where single people don't need dates to attend functions. Where they don't have to hide or feel like outcasts on Valentine's Day. Where they can spend a holiday on a drive to the mountains or at a movie alone without catching sympathetic glances from others. As a single person, I take pleasure in all the things I can do alone instead of dwelling on the things that I'm not doing with a partner. I can sleep diagonally on my bed. I can put a face mask on and watch the evening news in my

jammies. I don't have to share my thoughts all the time. I can be cranky without someone else thinking that they've done something to make me mad. I can change my plans at the last minute. And I can most certainly be proud of all the things I've accomplished on my own.

I have no idea if I'll spend the rest of my life alone. But it's not a question that bothers me. Who knows where I'll end up. I may stumble upon the most perfect relationship, which I will certainly welcome. But if not, I'm fine on my own. And thankful for the courage, strength and self-knowledge that my aloneness has brought me. It would be great if others can appreciate that about me too.

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