

The Birth of MySingleSpace

The likelihood of being single for a significant portion of one's adult life has dramatically increased over the past twenty five years. This is not just the result of fewer people choosing to marry or people choosing to marry later than they used to. The increased divorce rate and increased life span also mean that there are many people living single after being married. In fact, the percentage of unmarried men and women in the 40-44 year old age bracket more than doubled between 1970-2002. Twenty-seven percent of American households in 2006 consisted of persons living alone. Some urban populations are comprised of sixty percent single people. If such trends continue, some demographers have predicted that by 2010 households headed by single adults will outnumber those headed by married persons.

Yet, despite their significant numbers, people who are single can view themselves as in the margins, and often encounter stigma and stereotypes. In the cultural imagination, they lack "the relationship" that makes adult life complete and full. This assumption is apparent in the frequent question that a single adult encounters: "You're so attractive, intelligent and such a great person, why aren't you married?"

Single adults also have few rituals to celebrate progress on their life's journey. How often do single people attend and buy gifts for bridal showers and the bar mitzvahs of their friends' children, but would feel embarrassed to throw a party (requesting gifts) for their new home?

In fact, how often do we think about singleness as a place to be celebrated? How often do we consider being single an exciting space of possibilities and adventure or a place to forge deep commitments? How often is SingleSpace seen as a valid place to be in itself, whether or not one will move (or move again) into a committed relationship.

SingleSpace began with several workshops conducted for therapists who worked with single adults and then members of several churches. It became apparent that once the conversation opened, there was plenty to say and share about being single, whether from the vantage point of the generation X-ers, who are exploring who they are, what they want, and how to get there, or a never married or divorced baby-boomer, who thinks about letting go of outdated "lifemaps" and is concerned about the tasks of building and maintaining friendship and support networks.

During these conversations, there was recognition and pleasure in recounting many of the joys and opportunities associated with being single (e.g. confidence building, adventure, solitude, and freedom to make one's own choices); and relief in voicing some of the irritations (e.g. single travel supplements, being seen as the person who can always "work late") or challenges (e.g. managing times of "loneliness;" tired of always having to make plans in order to be with someone).

Maybe the basic problems of being single are the same as the basic problems of being human, only without some distractions and ready-made societal solutions. In a series of

focus interviews with single people, we found a basic question kept coming through – “How can I live a life that fully reflects who I am?” Some of the uniquely single twists on these questions included these themes:

- Feeling successful despite societal definitions
- Managing change and transitions in life
- Handling the fluctuations of dating relationships
- Finding enough social contact and connection
- Exploring avenues for contribution to a broader community

At the same time, our discussions with single people revealed a real excitement in **sharing the single experience**. There are huge opportunities in being single, such as having one’s own space and freedom; knowing oneself; and directing one’s own life. Being single can provide simplicity and room in a world that can often feel overwhelmingly complex.

In addition, being successfully single is a prerequisite for relationships, single or otherwise. People who have learned to rely on themselves come to relationships without the expectations that another person is necessary to feel whole. Exploring being a single adult in this world can be an incredibly valuable experience.

So MySingleSpace was born, a space where people who are single can explore their possibilities as well as share their successes, concerns, knowledge and wisdom.

We acknowledge that “being single” can become a catchall for many unique perspectives, shaped by one’s age, cultural background, sex and sexual orientation, unique history, and values and goals in life. In recognition of this, we want to avoid the idea that “being single” is a definition of self but only an aspect of one’s experience.

Towards this end, we plan to feature a topic and an article every month that reflects a facet of single experience. We will ask a question and encourage visitors to the website to weigh in with their own experiences, thoughts and questions about the topic. Our first topic is going to be: “What does it mean to be ‘successfully single?’ When do you feel you are? Who do you think is?”