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12:13 PM

TITLE: I Am Enough: Challenging the Stigma of Singleness

I came across an article one morning discussing "single shaming." I had never felt so strongly about a term I've never heard before, but I felt a great many of you could relate as I did about what it said. This article has given me the push to finally say what I've been needing to say for a long time to a lot of different people in my life. Maybe you will relate as well being on the receiving end of "single shaming" or maybe realize you've unwittingly been a perpetrator.

Single Shaming: What Is It?

I have been the recipient of what this article calls "single shaming." It's usually been committed by well meaning people in my life who care about me but don't listen to, or relate to my feelings on the subject of my singleness. Society in its many forms through media has been portraying singles, especially single women, as flawed, incomplete, desperate, lonely, needy, and insecure. The push for relationship starts very early in life and the relationship status always seems to be on the forefront of everyone's minds. How often have we heard someone ask a young child if their friend or classmate is their "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" before the child even understands what that means? Or have you, like I have, dreaded social gatherings with family because you know the topic of your lack of romantic relationships will often be the first thing discussed and often followed by awkward comments or unwarranted advice?

The article from BBC describes single shaming as "...negative biases about people who are not partnered..." assuming that "...they must be sad and lonely for not having a partner; they're actively looking for one, but haven't found a match yet; and there must be something wrong with them that's causing to them to wind up alone." Nowadays, people often say things like, "they're my missing piece" or "still looking for my other half." This implies someone is incomplete, damaged, or not whole without a romantic partner, which is wholly untrue. If you've ever been on the receiving end of this unfair stereotype, you're not alone. BBC's worklife data states that "52% of 1000 UK adults had experienced single shaming since the start of the pandemic." And Bella DePaulo, author of *Singled Out: How Singles are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After*, comments that "Singlehood was once considered a transitional period, when people marked time until they were married or re-married." Now she says that "Americans spend more years of their adult lives single than married." She points out that in 1970, citing US census data, "40% of US households consisted of married couples and their children, while 17% lived alone as singles. By 2012, 27% of US households consisted of singles, and just 20% were parents and children." If singleness is becoming more and more prevalent, why isn't there a change in our behavior and stigma towards it?

My Stand

After reading the article and finally putting a name to the feelings of frustration and inadequacy I had experienced all these years and where it was coming from, I felt validated but indignant. I was constantly battling the negative singleness stereotype. I would dodge questions and comments about my lack of partner, let alone, lack of interest or aptitude to ask about any other aspect of my life, feelings, or growth.

I know so many people in my life that unintentionally made me feel so lacking or uninteresting. They never meant to hurt me; however, because of it, it pushed and idealized narratives that they were taught. They believed that singleness equals loneliness or flaws, and marriage equals happiness and completeness. Because of this, I want to take a stand right now and I hope you can too by saying:

“I am enough and more than okay being single right now.”

I've told people this in the past, but I fear that they thought I was putting on a "brave face" and didn't truly believe me. It may seem weird in this society for a woman to be okay and happy with herself and not feel like she NEEDS to be in a romantic relationship right now, but that fact being seemingly unique is another societal problem entirely. Please understand that I'm not against marriage or romantic relationships at all. Romance and marriage is beautiful when done right. It's the over glamorized, glossed over, societal portrayal I have a problem with. Marriage is hard work and sacrifice. The issue is that our world has wrapped romantic relationships and marriage up in a shiny box with a big pink bow and marketed it to us as the thing we NEED to be anyone worthwhile. And I for one will not fall for the hype. I will know full well what I'm getting into if I do in fact meet someone in the future. I refuse to rush into it or grab at whatever I can because I'll be viewed as lonely or unwanted if I'm not in a relationship.

The Frustration

There's a serious problem when people we talk to can't seem to have a conversation without asking about someone's relationship status or giving unwarranted sympathy and pitying comments. I've received some of these comments saying, "You'll find someone someday" or "It'll be your turn too." They try to set us up with random people when they were never asked for help. Every. Wedding. Ever. These comments and actions implies and assumes that being single means I'm flawed, incomplete, sad, lonely, or pining without a relationship. It's like saying that every other aspect of what makes me who I am or what I do not enough to inquire or care about. Sometimes, it even makes me furious. Not whether I've met someone yet or why, but that people in my life are unintentionally communicating that I need someone else and the other things about me are not as important as that. It needs to stop.

Now look, I don't know if you can say the same, but I know that the people in my life that have unintentionally single shamed me have not done so to make me feel bad. I'm sure they have made comments out of their own care for my well being; however, I really felt I finally needed to be clear to my friends and family how this has all been making me feel over the years and how I ACTUALLY feel about not being in a relationship with anyone right now.

Why I'm Okay

Society and media has pushed ideas of what's supposed to make us happy and complete. They pushed how being single any further than a young adult implies there's something wrong with you. That has already been shoved at me left and right since I was young. I'm sure any of you can remember feeling the pressure growing up as well. The heavily implied rush to find a romantic relationship and the shame that comes with it if you haven't found someone by the time your a young adult is a real issue. The big difference is, with time, I learned to be confident enough in myself and my relationship with God to know that I'm not working within the world's timing, but His. Over the years, I learned that my faith in God is what defines me. He made me for more than just a romantic relationship. He wants a personal relationship

with me, the person he created for a unique purpose and calling. (Ephesians 1:11-14, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Jeremiah 29:11 NIV) Because of that knowledge and faith, I have been able to fend off the push of shame at my current relationship status and focus on my growth in character and relationship with the creator of the universe. Not just that, but also focus on a healthy relationship with my family and friends. I have a caring family, great friends, and a job that I love where I can work with adorable toddlers. If and when any of that changes, I'm still me; someone God created and loves with or without a partner.

I'm not saying I'm perfect and love every aspect of myself because there's still a lot of things I feel I still need to work on. Everybody has those. There are things I can and probably should work on without a partner. So if I do end up finding someone, I don't want certain negative aspects of my current character to end up creating possible problems in the future, or worse, losing my sense of self within the needs and wants of my partner. I also refuse to believe that a relationship will suddenly "fix" those problems and "complete" me. They will still be there and end up being my partner's problem too.

Through this growing realization in my singleness, I can see others happy in a relationship and support them whole-heartedly without thinking "why not me?" I can make big decisions for myself without having to check in with anyone else but God. I've learned to love and be even more familiar with who God has grown in me. Learn to use my spiritual giftings and learn what things are NOT my forté. I can prioritize and balance other important relationships in my life within my friends and family and support others. I'm not saying we can't learn things or grow while in a relationship, because growing and adapting is part of a healthy relationship too. I'm only saying that I hope you agree it's not the only aspect of our lives or personal growth our family or friends should care about. It shouldn't be an area of our lives we need to obsess over.

How You Can Combat The Stereotype

So you've made it this far and you say, "Yes! I agree! This is so frustrating. Why do I need to feel like less just because I'm not in a relationship?! But what now? I still get the comments and I still feel like crud." You now know your enemy. You know the lie and where it typically comes from. Now, in the words of unapologetically single Edna Mode from the Incredibles, "Go! Confront the problem. Fight! Win!"

1. Start within. If you still believe the lies of what singleness is, how can you correct others?
2. Get to know yourself and what you want AND need.
3. Forgive and let go of the ideal. Leslie Kaz's article: How to Deal with Single Shaming says, "The first step to forgiving is understanding. It seems that everything around us points to being in a relationship, having a partner, walking down the street hand-in-hand. It's because everything around us points to the ideal, not the real." The notion of "being happy means being in a relationship" has been idealized and shoved down our throats all our lives. People shaming our singleness and perpetuating that notion they were taught often makes them an unwitting victim in all this as well. Don't hold on to pain caused by ignorance, but educate and correct.
4. Correction. When you do encounter those comments, your responses could range from confident, to snarky, to serious, depending on the situation and who you are talking to. Keep in mind, most people are not trying to belittle you in their comments on your singleness, but repeat offenders

should be discreetly talked to about how their comments inadvertently make you feel. If you're going the confident route, responding with how you're focusing on yourself, your goals, or dreams, currently could be enough to silence questioners. If you're going snarky, comments on the dating pool, how picky you are, or how much you "DON'T want all the drama that comes with dating just anybody right now," are good for a laugh and hard to argue with. The serious response should not be done with a group of people as when confronted and corrected in front of other people may immediately put people on the defensive. It is a much needed heart to heart for repeat offenders though, especially family members or close friends. Explaining to others how those comments make you feel, despite their best intentions, is usually the best way to get the comments to stop altogether or even help the offender understand and curb the behavior as well as realize their own hand in perpetuating the stereotype.

For my own personal struggle with single shaming, after multiple snarky and confident responses to my family and friends over the years, I myself ended up posting on my Facebook feed a general commentary on the comments I was receiving. I labeled and defined single shaming, with the help of the article from BBC, and reminded people in my life (without naming or pointing fingers) that I know their intentions were good, but the outcome hurt and frustrated me. With this general education and correction from my post, most of my family have laid off on the comments. I believe they were finally able to understand a bit where I was coming from.

Conclusion

Thanks for coming along to my long winded rant! I hope that in reading this, a lot of you can relate to my experience, frustration, and need to take a stand and educate against single shaming in today's society. By learning about the stereotype of singleness and relating to me in the injustice of it all, I hope this helps you to feel brave enough to take a stand yourself. If you have also felt the sting of rejection, the feeling of being unwanted, the insinuation that you are broken or incomplete without a partner, please remember that no matter your relationship status or how many people you've dated or been with, God loves you and YOU are enough. ❤️

Klein, Jessica. "Single shaming: Why people jump to judge the un-partnered." April 6, 2022. ['Single shaming': Why people jump to judge the un-partnered.](#)

Kaz, Leslie. "Being Happy With Your Single Self." <https://www.lesliekaz.com/being-happy-with-your-single-self/>.

Kaz, Leslie. "How to Deal with Single Shaming" <https://www.lesliekaz.com/how-to-deal-with-single-shaming/>.

YouVersion Bible. 1 John 4:15-16, 19 NIV[15] If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God

lives in them and they in God. [16] And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. [19] We love because he first loved us. <https://bible.com/bible/111/jn.4.15-19.NIV>.

YouVersion Bible. John 3:16-17 NIV [16] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <https://bible.com/bible/111/jhn.3.16-17.NIV>.

YouVersion Bible. Psalms 139:13, 15-16 NIV [13] For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. [15] My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. [16] Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. <https://bible.com/bible/111/psa.139.13-16.NIV>.