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You're Not Alone: Being single in the 21st century

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You're Not Alone: Being Single in the 21st Century

The New York Times, January 16, 2007 revealed that as of 2005, 51% of all American women are living without a spouse. True, the number of women who are married and have a spouse living at home fell from 65 to 49% since 1950, but the Times considers an unmarried woman living with a long-term partner to be single. Likewise, a woman who is married to someone who lives elsewhere, such as the wife of a soldier fighting abroad, is labeled single, no matter how temporarily. In actuality 25% of women and 31% of men over the age of 15 have never married, and assuming straight marriages, this discrepancy makes sense since there are more women than men.

(Note to Sheri: I would leave this link out since one has to pay to view, but here it is anyway.

<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F50B11F83B540C758DDDA80894DF404482>)

Who Counts? The Census Bureau

The United States Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov/>

periodically publishes special reports designed to commemorate holidays or observances that push information to the forefront. Though many of us are familiar with *Black History Month*, or *Women's History Month*, fewer may know that there is an *Unmarried and Single Americans Week*. Originally founded by the Buckeye Singles Council in Ohio, *National Singles Week* was meant to "celebrate single life and recognize singles and their contributions to society."

The Odds are Good, but the Goods are Odd

These commemorative reports, called Facts for Features, cut straight to the chase. Each line is a statistic with very little narrative and the figures are taken from other census reports or press releases. The press release that triggered the *New York Times* article entitled Unmarried and Single Americans Week

<http://www.census.gov/Press->

[Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/002265.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/002265.html)

is full of interesting numbers. New York, for example has the most singles with half of all their adults being unmarried. Further, there are only 86 unmarried men for every 100 unmarried women nationwide, unless you happen to live in Alaska.

Freedom to eat popcorn for dinner

When the *New York Times* interviewed women to understand why many intentionally opt to live alone, they found that financial independence, educational attainment, and freedom rose to the top. Finally, women are simply living longer than they have in the past.

Yahoo! Finance, in their section on personal finance, has a crew of columnists who feature special topics. Laura Rowley covered home buying and the single woman.

<http://finance.yahoo.com/expert/article/moneyhappy/17039>

Rowley mentions that the National Association of Realtors reported that the number of single women purchasing homes rose 14 percent in the last decade. Though this accounts for only 22 percent of the entire market, the percent of single men purchasing homes stayed at a flat 9 percent. Apparently men are waiting to find the right woman before purchasing a home. The original report is available for a fee from the Realtor.org store and one must be a member of the NAR to even get into their site, so Yahoo! offers a nice free service of reporting these numbers second-hand.

I do. I don't.

Another place to get digested statistics on alternatives to marriage is from the Alternatives to Marriage Project

<http://www.unmarried.org/>

AtMP has a small, but significant statistics section. From their home page click on Facts and Fun, and then Statistics. According to AtMP, more than one quarter of households consist of an adult living alone, which is greater than the percentage of households with a married couple and a child. The AtMP is not so much out there to promote the single life as it is to debunk traditional marriage as an ideal. The statistic that 33% of children are born to unwed mothers at first glance appears to be a burden, but less so when you realize that an academic study found that "41% of first births to unmarried women are actually babies born to cohabiting couples, not "single" women." ¹

At the bottom of each report is a paragraph entitled How We Get Our Numbers. Here you will find mention of the Census Bureau's decennial census and their Current Population Surveys, but many of their statistics also come from the National Center for Health Statistics, scholarly journals, and AtMP's own calculations. Remarkably AtMP commented on the Census Bureau's finding on singles three full months before the *New York Times* article saw light. These statistics bear importance as single adults are glaringly absent from political speeches. Though there is at least a debate about partnership benefits, there is absolutely no safety net for singles for whom there is no spouse to rely on for health insurance.

¹ Bumpass, Larry and Lu, Hsien-Hen(2000). "Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children's Family Contexts in the United States." *Population Studies*, 54: 29-41.