

## **I'm Unmarried, But I'm not an Old Spade**

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It all starts with Disney. From an early age, young children are introduced to a fantasy world in which dreams come true – and where every princess finds love in her very own prince charming. Ask any 5-year-old girl, and they can probably describe to you their ideal wedding, even though the thought of kissing someone they are not related to may be revolting. As a society, we have come to accept the idea that someone is not complete until they find a partner to share their life with. A recent study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research highlighted that married couples are happier and more satisfied with their lives than those who remain single (Grover & Helliwell, 2014). But what happens if we never meet, or even choose not to look for that “special someone?”

### **In Life, Plans Often Go Awry**

If I could enter a time warp where my current self and my 21-year-old self were to meet, my younger version would probably ask what went wrong. Back then I had just graduated from college and been accepted to graduate school, and was in a relatively new but steady relationship, so I thought my life was headed on track towards a positive future for my career and a family. Fast forward over ten years later, and I have completely changed career paths, moved several times and still find myself single when many of my friends are now happily married and beginning families of their own.

Some of the choices I have made were intentional. When I switched careers, I actively decided to put my personal life on hold so I could focus on my degree and getting a job in my new profession. As my career progressed, that original choice just became more of a rationale for other decisions regarding work and personal life balance, until one day I realized I didn't really have any activities or friends outside of that environment. Now, as I am completing my coursework for yet another degree, I find it is more important than ever to start building those relationships outside of work and higher education. Too often as a profession, we allow our work to define who we are, until it becomes all that we are. We need to take more time to step back, reflect, and make time for other opportunities bringing balance to us as individuals and providing new perspectives on how to view the world.

### **From Change comes Growth**

While I feel more adapted to a solitary lifestyle, I still have friends and family who often encourage me to try and find someone that in their mind will “make me happy.” They remind me while I am still in my early 30s, it is not too late to find someone and begin the family I may have once envisioned for myself. I try to help them understand I am happy, and have found significant connections in my friends, classmates, and colleagues who help me make my life feel complete without the need for a significant other. Each achievement has been a give and take of sorts, but an intentional one that was not made without weighing the potential sacrifices of other hopes or aspirations along the way.

These transitional experiences have also helped me along my path to become a better support for my students, because as I have navigated my own choices in life I have gained both an appreciation for those students who see a clear path for their future as I once did, as well as for those who have yet to determine where their true passion lies. That perspective helps me to listen, and help each individual find their own clarity through our conversations rather than seek to provide only answers to their questions. As they learn and grow through their experiences, I do as well. With each new incoming class, there is another opportunity to build relationships and share a connection that extends beyond affiliation, school, and familial lines. I have been honored to be a part of these students' experiences, and can only hope to do so for years to come.

## References

Grover, S., Helliwell, J.F. (December 2014). *How's life at home? New evidence on marriage and the set point for happiness*. Working Paper 20794. National Bureau of Economic Research