

**“Cat Ladies” and “Mama’s Boys”: A Mixed-Methods
Analysis of the Gendered Discrimination and
Stereotypes of Single Women and Single Men**

by
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Abstract

Do single women and single men differ in their experiences of “singlism”? This research examines whether single women and single men report differences in the amount and content of singlehood-based discrimination. Study 1 ($N=140$) evaluated the amount of discrimination single male and single female participants reported against single women, single men, and themselves for being single. Additionally, participants were asked to provide stereotypic trait words to describe singles of their own gender. Study 2 had single male and single female participants ($N=146$) report 10 stereotypes for *both* single women and single men and rate the valence of those stereotypes. As hypothesized, in both Studies 1 and 2, single male and single female participants did not differ in their reported personal discrimination, but female participants did perceive single women as experiencing more discrimination than single men. Furthermore, while single male and single female participants agreed on overlapping stereotypes of single men and single women (e.g., “lonely”, “independent”), they also reported distinct gendered stereotypes for single men (e.g., “immature”, “reliable”) and single women (e.g., “frigid”, “lucky”). However, contrary to hypotheses, single men were rated more harshly on the valence of stereotype words than single women, although this was partly driven by single female participants rating single women’s stereotypes more positively (Study 2). This research helps reconcile inconsistencies in the literature by illustrating that while single women and single men may experience similar amounts of discrimination, they may nonetheless have distinct discrimination experiences that are shaped by gendered stereotypes of single men versus single women.

Keywords: Singlehood; Gender; Close Relationships; Discrimination; Stereotyping; Singlism; Mixed-Methods

*To my mother, Kathy Dupuis,
whose sacrifices, support, and insights as a self-proclaimed “single cat lady” have gotten
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1. Introduction

Singlehood – the state of being without a romantic relationship – is on the rise. In Canada, the proportion of adults who are single has grown from 41 percent in 1996 to 52 percent in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016). This trend has also been observed in the United States, where almost half of the adult population is now single (US Census Bureau, 2021). Despite singlehood becoming increasingly common, single people tend to report lower life satisfaction than coupled people (see meta-analytic evidence by Diener et al., 2000; Haring-Hidore et al., 1985). One reason that this wellbeing gap between those who are coupled and those who are single may exist is “singlism”. Singlism refers to the negative stereotyping and discrimination single people endure (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Single people experience negative stereotyping and discrimination for violating social norms that endorse romantic coupling as essential for a meaningful life (Budgeon, 2008; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020; Girme et al., 2021; Kaiser & Kashy, 2005; Pickens & Braun, 2018). Furthermore, single people are aware of the negative attitudes and discrimination singles face as a group (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). This awareness indicates that single people hold “meta-stereotypes” of singles; they have beliefs about how their group is perceived and judged by other groups (Morris et al., 2007; Vorauer et al., 2000). Overall, quantitative research suggests that single people are perceived negatively, and singles are aware of these stereotypes (e.g., Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020).

Despite evidence that single people are negatively stereotyped, there is some debate about whether single women experience singlism differently than single men. For example, dozens of qualitative reports from single women demonstrate that single women feel they are judged more harshly than single men (e.g., Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Gui, 2020; Moore & Radke, 2015; Pickens & Braun, 2018). Contrary to this, quantitative research does not find compelling differences between single women and single men in the amount of personal singlehood-based discrimination they experience (Conley & Collins, 2002; Greitemeyer, 2009; Morris et al., 2007). Of course, it is likely that the *content* of gendered stereotypes about single women and single men differ, just as they

differ for women and men in general (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2004; Eckes, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002). This can be seen in the portrayal of singles in popular American movies and TV shows, in which single women are often depicted as desperate to find a romantic partner (e.g., Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and The City*) whereas single men are often portrayed as emotionally immature and promiscuous (e.g., Barney Stinson in *How I Met Your Mother*). These portrayals highlight that while both single women and single men are negatively stereotyped and endure discrimination, the stereotypes may be qualitatively different and may hold implications for how women and men experience singlism.

To reconcile differences in singlism among single women and single men, I endeavored to establish a more accurate representation of single people by, (1) examining the amount of discrimination single female and male participants (a) personally experience and believe is directed toward (b) single women, and (c) towards single men. Additionally, I evaluated (2) similarities and differences in the content of stereotypes about single women *and* single men, and (3) differences in the valence of stereotypes about single women and single men. I tested these research questions across two studies of single women and single men (Study 1, $N=140$; Study 2, $N=146$).

Notably, while the current research focuses on men and women, I am not suggesting that gender identity exists as a binary. It is hoped that this research provides an initial test of how identities of women and men and single status might intersect. The hope is that this work will provide a steppingstone for future research that captures the range and diversity of gender identities among singles.

1.1. Singlehood Stereotypes and Discrimination

Single people experience stereotyping and discrimination for violating social norms that endorse romantic coupling as paramount (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). *Stereotypes* are defined as the beliefs people hold about a group's thoughts, behaviours, or traits (Vorauer et al., 2000), while *discrimination* refers to the unfair treatment toward a group or its members (Crocker & Major, 1989). Stereotypes about a social group can be evaluated as positive or negative (Czopp et al., 2015). However, even positive stereotypes

can lead to discriminatory behaviours toward members of a group (Czopp et al., 2015). For example, the stereotype that single people are independent may be subjectively positive but only in certain contexts. Independence could be a positive quality for a new employee but a negative quality for a new neighbour. If stereotypes about this single neighbour leads them to be excluded from neighborhood events, then they are experiencing singlehood discrimination.

Instances of discrimination toward single people often go unquestioned and unacknowledged because of the pervasive notion that romantic bonds are integral for a meaningful, mature adulthood (DePaulo, 2006). Violating this norm leads to enduring singlism at the interpersonal and societal levels. For example, married life comes with many privileges such as access to health and insurance benefits, tax breaks, and cheaper travel and living options that afford couples luxuries that single people do not have access to (DePaulo, 2006). Workplaces may expect single people to work late more often than coupled people, because of assumptions that single people have the time since they do not have a partner to get home to (DePaulo, 2006). Discrimination against singles tends to be justified and overlooked because singlehood is seen as something people have control over; singles can exit the single status category/identity by simply finding a partner (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Fisher & Sakaluk, 2021). Indeed, research demonstrates that when group members are seen to have more control over the culturally devalued characteristics they possess (e.g., single relationship status, weight), negative attitudes and discrimination toward them is seen as more acceptable than negative attitudes toward those who are discriminated against for things beyond their control (e.g., race, disability; Crandall et al., 2002; Fisher & Sakaluk, 2021). Thus, single people are considered personally responsible for their single status for not trying hard enough to partner (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). This could explain why discrimination toward singles is not considered overly problematic compared to those with unchangeable group identities (Morris et al., 2007).

Furthermore, single people are aware that they are treated badly due to their single status and corroborate this with self-reported instances of discrimination. For example, single people report equally high amounts of discrimination against their group as those

from other systemically marginalized groups, such as members of the LGBTQ+ community (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). Singles also report lower wellbeing which may be tied to experiencing more discrimination during day-to-day experiences compared to coupled people (Byrne & Carr, 2005; Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020; Girme et al., 2021). For example, single people are more likely to report various types of discriminatory behavior, such as having someone tell them what is best for them, exclude them from social events, treat them with pity, unfairness (Girme et al., 2021), or less respect, and provide them with poorer service in restaurants (Byrne & Carr, 2005). Thus, beyond institutionalized forms of singlism, single people also report interpersonal discrimination they face because they do not have a romantic partner.

In addition to singlehood-based discrimination, single people tend to be stereotyped more negatively than those in a romantic relationship. For example, single people are consistently rated as more miserable, lonelier, less trustworthy, and colder than coupled people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hertel et al., 2007). Singles tend to be perceived by others as promiscuous (Hertel et al., 2007; Uğurlu et al., 2021) and irresponsible, leading to assumptions that they are more likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection than those with a romantic partner (Conley & Collins, 2002). Similarly, rental agents rate single tenants as more likely to pay rent late, destroy the rental property, and break their leases than married tenants (Morris et al., 2007). Overall, singles are seen to possess less desirable personality traits, to be less physically attractive, and to be less satisfied with their lives compared to those in a romantic relationship (Greitemeyer, 2009). These beliefs about singles reflect the stereotype that they are single because there is something wrong with them (e.g., possessing an undesirable personality) that undermines their partnering potential (Moore & Radke, 2015). These stereotypical assumptions persist despite evidence that single and coupled people do not differ in personality traits or physical appearance (Greitemeyer, 2009). Moreover, even when singles are described as living with a best friend, they were still rated worse than someone described as living with a partner, indicating that singles are not just being rated worse because they are seen to lack a close personal bond, but rather because they lack a *romantic* bond (Conley & Collins, 2002).

1.2. The Intersection of Gender and Singlehood

Experiences of singlism may vary depending on the other social identities single people hold – such as their gender. Gender has received the most attention in the qualitative singlehood literature because cisgender single women consistently report discrimination due to their single status (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Lewis & Moon, 1997; Moore & Radke, 2015; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Timonen & Doyle, 2014). For example, single (cisgender) women feel the need to assert that they are not desperate, explain their single identity, and believe they experience discrimination because they are seen as undesirable or defective in some way (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Moore & Radke, 2015; Pickens & Braun, 2018; Sandfield & Percy, 2003). One single woman recounted being excluded from a dinner party because a co-worker was concerned that she would try to steal the married women’s husbands (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Single women describe society’s perception that they are lonely or personally defective as the most salient source for their unhappiness (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Gui, 2020; Pickens & Braun, 2018; Sandfield & Percy, 2003; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Younger single women speak of their sexuality being policed and criticized by others – too much is deemed promiscuous and too little is deemed as prudish (Pickens & Braun, 2018). This is reflected in the narratives of single women who are criticized for being too fussy about potential partners and pressured to lower their standards (Lahad, 2013; Pickens & Braun, 2018). Single women approaching middle age are assumed to be married with children and encounter shock and pity when they correct these assumptions (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Often, single women mention the struggles they face are unique to their gender as they believe that single men are not burdened with the same discrimination because the very notion of womanhood is synonymous with tending to a home and childrearing (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Gui, 2020; Pickens & Braun, 2018; Sandfield & Percy, 2003; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). While childless single women violate gender norms for not having a family to care for, gender norms for men dictate that they should be agentic and career driven (Kawano & Orporett, 2014). Men who remain single to pursue career-related goals are not violating gender norms as overtly as women who remain single to do the same (Kawano & Orporett, 2014).

While no qualitative research has been conducted exclusively on cisgender, heterosexual single men (see Suen, 2015 for a qualitative study on older gay single men), the quantitative literature suggests that both single women and single men experience instances of singlehood-based discrimination albeit, with gendered nuances. For example, both single women and single men were rated as more likely to destroy the rental property, pay rent late, (Morris et al., 2007), and engage in sexually risky behaviours compared to coupled people (Conley & Collins, 2002). Further, single women and single men were rated as more likely to have undesirable personality traits (e.g., less extraverted, disagreeable) and be less physically attractive compared to coupled people (Greitemeyer, 2009). However, some gender differences did emerge. For example, Byrne and Carr (2005) found that while both single women and single men reported discrimination (e.g., being harassed, threatened and treated with little respect) compared to married women and men, single men reported that others acted as if they were afraid of them and were treated as if they were untrustworthy, while single women reported receiving poor service at restaurants and being called names. Morris and colleagues (2007) found that single men are rated as worse potential renters than single women because they are perceived as more irresponsible than single women or married people. Similarly, single men are rated as more likely than single women and married men to contract a sexually transmitted infection due to stereotypes about their promiscuity (Conley & Collins, 2002). Generally, it appears single men are seen as promiscuous and irresponsible compared to single women who are seen as fragile and pure (Uğurlu et al., 2021). However, in the studies that have explored gender difference, the differences between single women and single men tend to be small compared to the differences between single people and coupled people. Thus, it may be that both single women and single men experience discrimination, but the stereotype content that drives this discrimination is gendered. However, to date, no known empirical research has examined the stereotype content or valence of singles.

1.3. The Current Research

Extant literature provides inconsistent evidence about whether single women and single men differ in their experiences of singlism. The goal of this research is to utilize a

mixed-methods approach to (1) *quantitatively* examine the amount of discrimination single female¹ and single male participants (a) personally experience and (b) perceive to be aimed toward single women, and (c) toward single men (Studies 1 and 2); and (2) *qualitatively* examine the content of stereotypes about single women *and* single men (Studies 1 and 2), and (3) test differences in the valence of reported stereotypes to determine if single women are judged more harshly than single men (Study 2).

Pre-registered hypotheses are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) for Study 1 (<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/9FEG2>) and Study 2 (<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/XY8UG>).

I hypothesized that:

- H1: Single female participants and single male participants will not differ in the amount of discrimination they report personally experiencing.
- H2: Single male participants will report no differences in amount of discrimination they believe single women as a group and single men as a group experience.
- H3: Single female participants will report that they believe single women as a group experience more discrimination than single men as a group.
- H4: Valence ratings will show that on average the stereotypes attributed to single women will be rated more negative than the stereotypes attributed to single men (Study 2 only).

¹ Note that “female participants” is used to describe participants who self-identified as “women” and “male participants” is used to describe participants who self-identified as men. These terms are used for clarity when describing study procedures and results; no information was obtained on participants’ sex assigned at birth.

2. Method

2.1. Studies 1 & 2

Study 1 aimed to assess whether there were differences in the amount of discrimination single female and single male participants reported and whether single female and single male participants reported distinct stereotype content toward singles of their own gender. Study 2 aimed to replicate these analyses and extend Study 1 by asking single female and single male participants to report stereotypic traits and rate the valence of these stereotypic traits for *both* single women and single men. The procedures used in both studies are identical, and therefore presented jointly.

2.1.1. Power Analyses

A priori power analyses using G*Power (3.1) software (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that to reach 95% power for a linear regression analysis with 3-predictors, 119 participants were sufficient to detect a medium effect ($f=0.15$). However, because Prolific dropout rates can range from 0% to 50%, we increased our sample size by 25%. Thus, a total sample size of 150 was needed to ensure we reached data saturation and had adequate power to detect differences between groups. Data were collected in August 2022 (Study 1) and November 2022 (Study 2).

2.1.2. Participants

For Study 1, participants were 71 single women and 69 single men ($N=140$)² with an average age of 50.31 years ($SD=11.09$; age range 36 to 81). Participants selected all ethnic/racial identities that applied, resulting in 82.9% White, 5.7% Black, 5.7% East Asian, 2.1% East Indian, 2.1% Indigenous, 2.1% Latin American, and 2.1% Middle Eastern identities. Most participants identified as heterosexual (85%), although 7.1%

² Participants who indicated they were in a romantic relationship (3 cases), failed two or more of the attention check questions (1 case), and had empty surveys (6 cases) were removed from the analyses, leaving the final sample of 140 participants reported here.

identified as bisexual, 4.3% as gay or lesbian, and 3.6% asexual. Most participants were not parents (62.1%), with the remaining 37.9% having 1 or more children. Participants reported being single for 11.39 years on average ($SD=12.74$). The vast majority (91.4%) of participants identified as single and not dating while the remaining 8.6% were single and dating casually. Additionally, 44.5% of our participants were never married, 24% were divorced once, 11% were divorced more than once, 15.8% had never been in a serious romantic relationship, and 4.8% were widowed.

For Study 2, participants were 70 single women and 76 single men ($N=146$)³ with an average age of 49.77 years ($SD=11.48$; age range 36 to 83). Participants selected all ethnic/racial identities that applied, resulting in 80.8% White, 7.5% Black, 4.1% East Asian, 3.4% Latin American, 2.7% East Indian, and 1.4% Indigenous identities. Most participants identified as heterosexual (85.6%), although 5.5% identified as gay or lesbian, 4.1% as bisexual, 3.4% asexual, and 1.4% identified as pansexual. Most participants were not parents (64.4%), with the remaining 35.6% having 1 or more children. Participants reported being single for 13.75 years on average ($SD=14.57$). As in Study 1, the vast majority (89.7%) of participants identified as single and not dating while the remaining 10.3% were single and dating casually. Lastly, 38.6% of the sample were never married, 30.7% were divorced once, 12.1% were divorced more than once, 14.3% had never been in a serious romantic relationship, and 4.3% were widowed.

2.1.3. Procedure

Prolific workers who were registered as single (e.g., single, divorced, widowed, or never married), identified as women or men, over the age of 36, and residents of the United States or Canada were invited to participate in an online study about the experiences of single women and single men. Prolific is a UK-based crowd-sourcing platform that enables researchers to find participants all over the world for online research. Participants were paid £4.00 (approximately \$6.24 CAD) for completing the 20-

³ Participants who indicated they were in a romantic relationship (2 cases) and failed two or more of the attention check questions (2 cases) were removed from the analyses, leaving the final sample of 146 participants reported here.

minute questionnaires. Participants were told that the researchers were interested in learning about the experiences of single women and single men and were invited to complete an online questionnaire that assessed their demographic information and their perceptions of single-based discrimination and stereotypes, among other measures not germane to the current study.

2.1.4. Measures

Perceived Singlehood Discrimination

Based on Taylor et al. (1990), participants were asked three questions regarding their perceptions of discrimination: “To what extent have you personally experienced discrimination for being single?”, “To what extent do you think women who are single experience discrimination?”, and “To what extent do you think men who are single experience discrimination?”. The last two questions were balanced so that participants were presented with the question pertaining to the group they belong to (single women or single men) first. Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*).

Perceived Singlehood Stereotypes

In Study 1, participants were asked two open-ended questions about the positive and negative stereotypes of single women and single men. Single female participants were asked to provide stereotypes about single women, and single male participants were asked to provide stereotypes about single men. Participants were asked to consider the characteristics other people think single women/men possess, and were presented with the following open-ended questions:

- Q1. What **negative** characteristics do you believe people think **single women/men** possess? In other words, if you were to ask a random person to describe the **negative, bad** traits of a single woman/man, what words might they come up with? Please list as many as you can think of.
- Q2. What **positive** characteristics do you believe people think **single women/men** possess? In other words, if you were to ask a random person to describe the **positive, good** traits of a single woman/man,

what words might they come up with? Please list as many as you can think of.

In the qualitative codes from Study 1, participants provided an average of 5 positive and 5 negative stereotype words, but some participants wrote “independent” as both a negative and positive word for single women. Thus, in Study 2, participants were asked to provide up to ten trait words to describe stereotypes of single women and up to ten trait words to describe stereotypes of single men. They were also asked to rate the valence of each word from -5 to +5 to determine how positively stereotypes toward single women or single men were perceived to be by others holding the stereotype. Thus, in Study 2, participants were presented with the following open-ended questions:

What **characteristics** do you believe people think **SINGLE WOMEN/MEN** possess? In other words, if you were to ask a random person to describe the traits of a single woman/man, what words (positive, neutral, or negative) might they come up with? **Please list as many words as you can in the boxes below.**

Then, **using the slide bar rate** to what extent you believe people think **each characteristic is viewed as negative versus positive**. Rate from -5 = extremely negative to +5 = extremely positive.

3. Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Discrimination (Studies 1 and 2)

	Female Participants	Male Participants
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Study 1		
Personal Discrimination	3.31 (1.36)	2.93 (1.38)
Discrimination Against Single Men	3.14 (1.21)	3.64 (1.33)
Discrimination Against Single Women	4.75 (1.20)	3.78 (1.53)
Study 2		
Personal Discrimination	3.17 (1.56)	2.72 (1.54)
Discrimination Against Single Men	3.31 (1.07)	3.82 (1.42)
Discrimination Against Single Women	4.67 (1.05)	3.78 (1.27)
Valence Ratings of Single Women	0.36 (2.09)	-0.26 (2.13)
Valence Ratings of Single Men	-0.49 (1.75)	-0.54 (2.20)

3.1.1. Do single men and single women differ in their perceived personal discrimination?

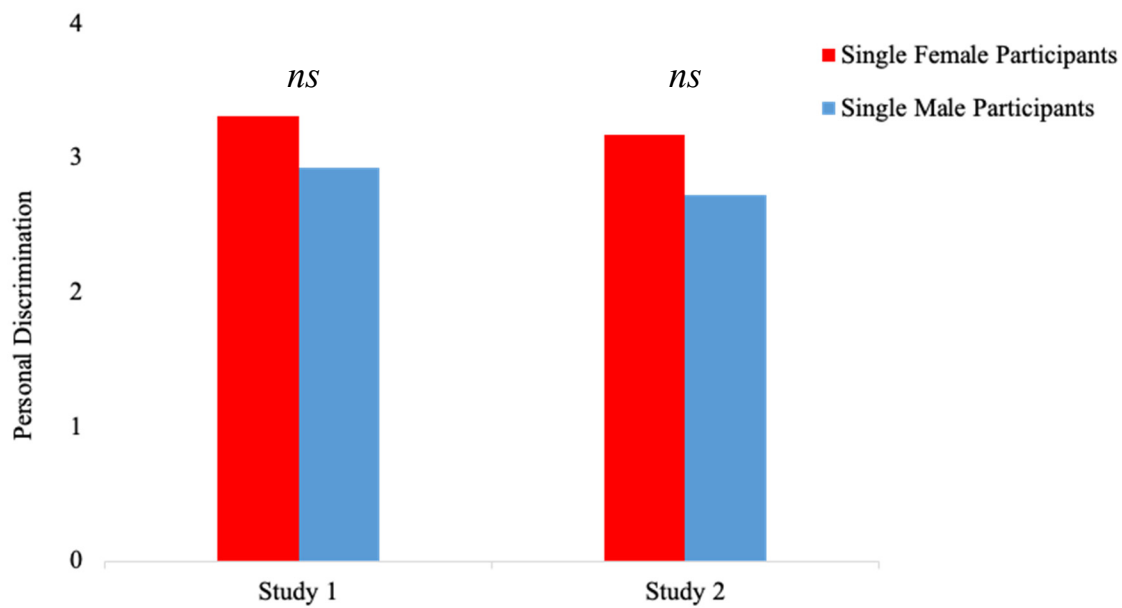
To test whether single female and single male participants differed in amounts of perceived personal discrimination, a regression analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 27. Specifically, perceived discrimination measures were regressed on participants' gender (0 = women, 1 = men). Results are presented in Table 2 and Figure 1. As predicted, in both Studies 1 and 2, there were no significant differences between single female and single male participants in the amount of personal discrimination they reported experiencing.

Table 2. Regression Analyses Illustrating Participant Gender Predicting Reported Personal Discrimination (Studies 1 and 2)

	Study 1						Study 2							
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>		<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>		<i>r</i>
					<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>						<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	
Participant Gender	-0.38	0.23	-1.66	.10	-0.84	-0.75	.14	-0.45	0.26	-1.75	.08	-0.96	0.59	.14

Note. Gender is coded 0 = women, 1 = men. Rosenthal and Rosnow's (2007) formula: $r = \sqrt{(t^2 / t^2 + df)}$.

Figure 1. Results of Regression Analyses Predicting Differences in Reported Personal Discrimination for Single Female and Single Male Participants (Studies 1 and 2)



Note. *ns* denotes non-significant differences

3.1.2. Do single men report differences in discrimination faced by single men versus single women?

Next, to test whether single male participants reported different amounts of discrimination toward single women as a group and single men as a group, a paired samples t-test was conducted. Results are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2. As predicted, in Studies 1 and 2, single male participants reported similar amounts of discrimination directed toward single women as a group that did not differ significantly from the amount of discrimination directed towards single men as a group.

3.1.3. Do single women report differences in the discrimination faced by single men versus women?

Finally, to test whether female participants reported different amounts of discrimination toward single women as a group and single men as a group, a paired samples t-test was conducted. Results are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2. As predicted, in both Studies 1 and 2, female participants reported significantly higher

amounts of discrimination directed toward single women as a group compared to single men as a group.⁴

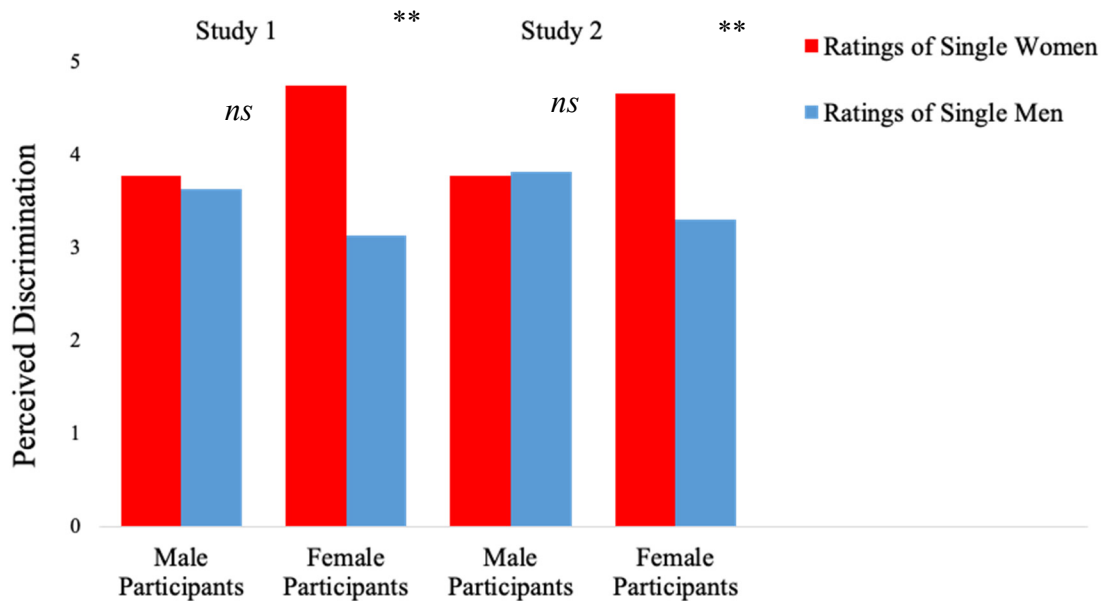
⁴ As part of secondary analyses, gender differences in participants' perceived discrimination toward single people as a group were evaluated. Results found single female participants (vs. single male participants) reported higher amounts of discrimination experienced by single people as a group. Detailed results can be found in Appendix A.

Table 3. Results of Paired Samples T-Tests Predicting Differences in Reported Discrimination Toward Single Women and Single Men

	<i>Study 1</i>					<i>Study 2</i>						
	<i>M Diff (W – M)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>		<i>d</i>	<i>M Diff (W – M)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>		<i>d</i>
				<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>					<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	
Male Participants	0.14	0.78	.44	-0.22	0.52	-0.94	-0.04	-0.28	.78	-0.32	0.24	-0.32
Female Participants	1.61	8.76	.001	1.24	1.97	1.04	1.36	8.83	.001	1.05	1.66	1.06

Note. *W* denotes discrimination against single women, *M* denotes discrimination against single men.

Figure 2. Results of Paired Samples T-Tests Predicting Differences in Reported Discrimination Toward Single Women vs Single Men (Studies 1 and 2)



Note. ns denotes non-significant differences. ** $p < .01$.

3.1.4. Control Analyses

Given that single people may be more likely to experience discrimination if they are parents (e.g., Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015), lower socioeconomic status (SES; e.g., Byrne & Carr, 2005), or are older (e.g., Kaiser & Kashy, 2005), control analyses were conducted to see whether the results held when controlling for parental status, SES, and age. Descriptive statistics for analyses are reported in Table 4. Regression analyses from Table 2 were re-run controlling for either parental status, SES, and age. Results of the primary analyses remained unchanged after controlling for SES, highlighting that there were no significant differences between single male and single female participants personal discrimination (Study 1: $t = -1.60, p = .113$; Study 2: $t = -1.82, p = .07$). Controlling for age also did not alter the effect of gender on personal discrimination in Study 1 ($t = -1.87, p = .064$), but did reveal a significant gender effect in Study 2, suggesting that single female participants reported greater personal discrimination than single male participants ($t = -2.57, p = .011$). Additionally, after controlling for parental status in both Studies 1 and 2, the association between gender and personal

discrimination became significant, suggesting that single female participants reported experiencing greater personal discrimination compared to single male participants (Study 1: $t = -2.40, p = .018$; Study 2: $t = -2.02, p = .045$).

Given that parental status consistently altered the focal effects, interaction analyses were conducted to explore the interaction between parental status and gender. The main effect of gender reverted to the original non-significant effect in Study 1 ($t = -1.27, p = .21$), but remained significant in Study 2 ($t = -2.10, p = .04$). However, the interaction between gender and parental status was not significant in either study (Study 1: $t = -1.10, p = .27$; Study 2: $t = .66, p = .51$), suggesting that there were no unique effects for single mothers. Overall, our focal results appear to be largely driven by similarities in reports of personal discrimination for single female and single male participants.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Control Analyses (Studies 1 and 2)

	Female Participants	Male Participants
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Study 1		
SES	4.77 (1.64)	4.48 (1.94)
Age	52.76 (10.76)	47.78 (10.93)
Number of Children	1.14 (1.40)	0.57 (1.17)
Study 2		
SES	4.59 (1.60)	4.38 (1.82)
Age	54.24 (12.18)	45.64 (9.08)
Number of Children	1.24 (1.42)	0.33 (0.76)

3.1.5. Do single people report gendered stereotypes about single men and single women?

The open-ended responses in both Studies 1 and 2 were examined by conducting a qualitative coding analysis (adapted from methodology outlined by Creswell & Poth, 2016). For Study 1, four research assistants blind to all research aims were recruited to

code the qualitative responses. The coders were divided into pairs. Two coders read through and coded the *negative* stereotype responses from single female and single male participants. The other two coders read through and coded the *positive* stereotype responses from single female and single male participants. For Study 2, two coders coded all the data. For both studies, coders used an excel sheet with the open-ended responses to tally the trait words provided and organize them into synonymous “codes”. For example, if three participants wrote “lonely” and one wrote “lonesome”, that would be four tallies under the code “lonely”. After coding, the pairs of coders compared their frequency and resolved any inconsistencies.

The stereotypic traits that emerged are illustrated in Figure 3 (Study 1), Figure 4, and Figure 5 (Study 2). These figures show word clouds with the size of the words depicting the frequency of the stereotype (larger words were mentioned by more participants than smaller words), black words showing common stereotypes, red words showing words unique to single women, and blue words showing stereotypes unique to single men. Tables providing the full list of traits and frequencies can be found in Appendix B.

The qualitative coding analyses, in Studies 1 and 2, yielded some common stereotypes for single men and single women, that can be understood as *gender-neutral* stereotypes. For example, participants reported that both single women and single men have positive traits, such as being “independent”, “kind”, “smart”, and “free”. Negative gender-neutral stereotypes included being “promiscuous”, “lonely”, “unattractive”, and “selfish”⁵.

Nonetheless, in line with previous research (e.g., Uğurlu et al., 2021), qualitative coding analyses also yielded distinct stereotypes for single women and single men. Single female participants reported that single women are positively stereotyped as “fulfilled”, “resilient” (Study 1), and “lucky” (Study 2) but negatively stereotyped as “high maintenance”, “frigid”, and “bitter” (Studies 1 and 2). In Study 2, single male

⁵ The stereotype “selfish” was the most mentioned negative trait word for both single women and single men in Study 1. However, in Study 2 “selfish” was not used by single female participants to describe stereotypes of single women but was used by them for stereotypes of single men. Single male participants used “selfish” as a stereotype for both single women and single men.

participants reported unique positive stereotypes of single women as “social”, “fun”, and “content”, and negative stereotypes as, “picky”, “overweight”, and “difficult”.

In Studies 1 and 2, single male participants reported that single men are positively stereotyped as “attractive”, “reliable”, and “light-hearted” (Study 2 only), while negative stereotypes included “sloppy”, “immature”, and “stressed” (Study 2 only). Single female participants in Study 2 reported that single men are positively stereotyped as “financially stable” and “carefree” and negatively stereotyped as “players”, “untrustworthy”, and “unfaithful”.

Interestingly, the qualitative analyses also revealed some particularly negative traits about single men and single women. In Study 2, single male participants described a negative stereotype of single men being “misogynistic” and “incels” (i.e., “involuntarily celibate”: a group of misogynistic men who harass and commit hate crimes against women). While this stereotype was not reported by single female participants, they reported the stereotype “Mama’s Boys” (i.e., a group of men who remain overly attached to their mothers in adulthood, signalling immaturity and a child-like overreliance on their mothers). In both Studies 1 and 2, single women were described as “Cat Ladies” (i.e., a single woman who has many cats which she obsesses over).

Figure 3. Shared and Unique Stereotypes of Single Women and Single Men (Study 1)



Note. Study 1 had participants report stereotypes for singles of their own gender only. Black words were used by single participants to describe both single women and single men; red words were provided by single female participants to describe single women; blue words were provided by single male participants to describe single men.

Figure 4. Stereotypes of Single Women and Single Men Provided by Single Female Participants (Study 2)



Note. Study 2 had participants report stereotypes for singles of their own gender and singles of the other gender. Black words were used by single female participants to describe both single women and single men; red words were unique stereotypes of single women; blue words were unique stereotypes of single men.

Taken together, the qualitative coding analysis demonstrated both gender-neutral and gendered stereotypes about single men and single women. By reflecting on the overarching themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016), four distinct archetypes of stereotypical single people were identified, with some gendered nuance. For example, the list of positive stereotypes indicated that people tend to think of single people as “independent”, “ambitious”, and “hard-working”. This might be described as, the *Professional* archetype, but with *Professional* single women uniquely stereotyped as “successful” and “capable”, and *Professional* single men uniquely stereotyped as “reliable” and “career-driven”. Another group of positive stereotypes included “grounded,” “free,” “kind,” and “fun”. This might represent, the *Free-Spirited* archetype, but with *Free-Spirited* single women uniquely stereotyped as “creative” and “open-minded”, and *Free-Spirited* single men uniquely stereotyped as “flexible” and “having free time”. In the list of negative stereotypes, single people were described as “selfish”, “promiscuous”, and “noncommittal”. This might be described as the *Heartless* archetype, with *Heartless* single women uniquely stereotyped as “bitchy” and “high maintenance”, and *Heartless* single men uniquely stereotyped as “detached” and “untrustworthy”. Lastly, another group of negative stereotypes included “lonely”, “unattractive”, and “antisocial”. This could reflect the *Loner* archetype, with *Loner* single women uniquely stereotyped as “frigid” and “bitter”, and *Loner* single men uniquely stereotyped as “sloppy” and “immature”.

3.1.6. Do single people perceive stereotypes about single women more negatively than stereotypes about single men?

Single women and single men were described with many identical stereotypical traits (as well as some gender specific traits). However, single women may nonetheless be perceived more negatively than single men even when described with the same stereotype. For example, although both single women and single men were seen as promiscuous, it is possible that being promiscuous is much worse if you are a woman because of gender norms around expressing sexuality. In Study 2, paired samples t-tests were conducted to assess whether single female and single male participants reported lower average valence ratings for the set of stereotypes provided for single women as a

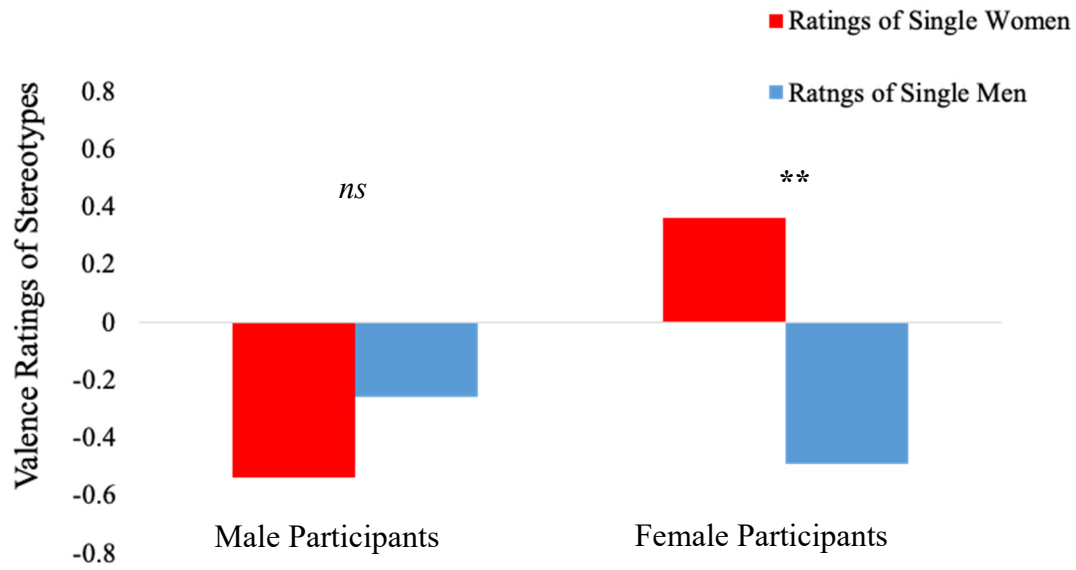
group than for the set of stereotypes provided for single men as a group. Results are shown in Table 4 and Figure 6. Ratings above the line reflect positive valence, and ratings below the line reflect negative valence. Contrary to hypotheses, single male participants did not report statistically significant differences in the stereotypic traits for single women and single men. Furthermore, single female participants rated the stereotypic traits for single women to be significantly more *positive* than the stereotypic traits for single men. Thus, it appears that single men and single women may be perceived equally negatively, except that single women may hold especially positive images of other single women.

Table 5. Results of Paired Samples T-Tests predicting differences in valence of stereotypical traits of Single Women vs Single Men (Study 2)

	<i>M Diff (W – M)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>		<i>d</i>
				<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	
Male Participants	0.28	1.31	.20	-0.15	0.71	0.13
Female Participants	0.85	3.30	.002	0.34	1.37	0.44

Note. *W* denotes valence of single women and *M* denotes valence of single men.

Figure 6. Results of Paired Samples T-Tests predicting differences in reported Valence Ratings of Stereotypes for Single Women vs Single Men (Study 2)



Note. *ns* denotes non-significant differences. ****** $p < .01$.

4. General Discussion

Single people report experiencing discrimination due to their single status, which may be especially acute for single women. My thesis aimed to explore whether single women and single men experience different amounts of discrimination and stereotype content. Across two studies, two important themes emerged. On the one hand, single male and single female participants did *not* differ in the amount of personal discrimination they report experiencing (consistent with the extant quantitative literature). Reports from single male participants were consistent with the idea that single men and single women do not experience differences in singlism; they reported that single men and single women as a group experience similar amounts of discrimination and perceived stereotypic traits associated with single men and single women as having similarly negative valences. In line with this, participants reported similar stereotypic traits for single women *and* single men, which can be understood as four main archetypes: *Professional* (e.g., “independent”, “hard-working”), *Free-Spirited* (e.g., “free”, “fun”), *Heartless* (e.g., “selfish”, “promiscuous”), and *Loner* (e.g., “lonely”, “antisocial”).

On the other hand, despite single female participants reporting similar amounts of personal discrimination as single male participants, single female participants believed that single women as a group experience significantly more discrimination than single men as a group (consistent with the extant qualitative literature). Yet, single female participants also reported that they believe the stereotypes of single women are *positively* valenced compared to the stereotypes of single men. Indeed, although the qualitative results suggested overlapping stereotypes about single men and single women, single female participants also noted distinct stereotypes for single women (e.g., “resilient”, “self-aware”, etc.) that were not as strongly reflected in the stereotypes they provided for single men.

4.1.1. Single Men and Single Women Experience Similar Personal Discrimination

Past research has shown that both single women and single men report experiencing instances of discrimination, such as being harassed, threatened, disrespected (Byrne & Carr, 2005), given unsolicited advice, and left out of social activities (Girme et al., 2022). Furthermore, research that compares perceptions of single and coupled people demonstrate a similar pattern. Both single women and single men are rated as less agreeable, less attractive, and more neurotic than coupled women and men (Greitmeyer, 2009). They are rated as less desirable rental tenants (Morris et al., 2007) and more likely to be sexually risky (Conley & Collins, 2002). Researchers have posited that because single women violate gender norms for not having a romantic partner and children to care for, they may experience more discrimination than single men (Budegon, 2016; Gui, 2020; Lahad, 2013). Yet, in quantitative studies comparing single women and single men's discrimination, only small gender differences emerge compared to the differences between single and coupled people. For example, single women were rated as less promiscuous (e.g., Conley & Collins, 2002) and more responsible than single men (e.g., Morris et al., 2007) but still more promiscuous (Conley & Collins, 2002) and less responsible than married women (Morris et al., 2007). It may be that in some contexts single men experience more discrimination than single women (e.g., the rental market), but in other contexts (e.g., being childless in your 30's) women experience more discrimination. Because of this, although single female and single male participants reported experiencing similar amounts of personal discrimination in both of the current studies, it may be that single women and single men report similar amounts of discrimination when assessing general (versus context-specific) discrimination.

My qualitative analyses may provide further insight about why single men and single women may have reported experiencing similar amounts of discrimination: several overlapping stereotypes emerged for single women and single men that suggest that overall, they are stereotyped in similar ways. For example, participants described both with stereotypes consistent with a *Professional* archetype, using words such as “independent”, “hard-working”, and “financially stable”. Additionally, both were

stereotyped with words such as, “free”, “grounded”, and “fun”, consistent with a *Free-spirited* archetype. Two common negative archetypes also emerged: *Heartless*, including stereotypes such as, “noncommittal”, “promiscuous”, and “selfish”, and *Loner*, with stereotypes such as “antisocial”, “unattractive”, and “lonely”. Even when unique words were used to reflect more gender-typical descriptions (e.g., male “player” vs. female “slut”), they tended to convey the same underlying stereotypes (e.g., someone who is deemed overly sexually active). Similarly, there were some words that only emerged for single women (e.g., “anxious”, “Cat Lady”) versus single men (e.g., “nerdy”, “Mama’s Boys”) that still fit into the four archetypes identified by the more common stereotypes. Thus, gender norms may shape expectations of what makes someone a “*Loner*”; “*Cat Ladies*” may be considered *Loners* because they are antisocial, unattractive, and older (or if they are young, they act “older” by foregoing socializing and adventure) while “*Mama’s Boys*” may be considered *Loners* because they are immature, sensitive, and rely on their mothers’ to meet their needs in adulthood.

Interestingly, these archetypes may map onto Fiske and colleagues (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM) and provide nuanced perspectives about single men and single women. According to the SCM, stereotypic attitudes vary on dimensions of warmth (e.g., how affectionate, caring, loyal members of a group are) and competence (e.g., how capable, confident, skillful members of a group are;). Previous research has found that women are stereotyped as warmer, but less competent than men (Eckes, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002; Cuddy et al., 2004). However, these gender stereotypes also depend on the roles women and men occupy, such that housewives are rated as highly warm but incompetent while female feminists are rated as highly competent but cold (Eckes, 2002). Similarly, career men are rated as highly competent but cold, while “hippy men” are rated as highly warm but incompetent (Eckes, 2002). Examining how the four archetypes of single people are perceived on warmth and competence dimensions, and whether this shifts according to gender identity, is an important avenue for future research.

4.1.2. Single Male Participants Do Not Perceive Differences in Discrimination Among Single Women and Single Men

Dovetailing with the similarities in reported personal discrimination, single male participants also reported similar amounts of discrimination faced by single women as a group and single men as a group. There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, because of men's privileged status in society relative to women (Jost et al., 2005; Reuther, 1985), single men may be unaware of the relevance of gender identity in shaping single people's experiences, leading them to rate single women and single men similarly (i.e., under-reporting the discrimination faced by single women). Second, it is possible that due to common media portrayals, stereotypes, and language used to describe single women (e.g., Bridget Jones, "spinster") and their own personal experiences, single men are aware of the discrimination that single men face for being single as well as the discrimination faced by single women (i.e., accurately reporting that single women and single men experience similar amounts of discrimination). Both explanations can account for single male participants' similar ratings of the discrimination experienced by single women and single men and, thus, both are worth exploring in future research.

Similarly, single male participants reported no significant differences in the valence of stereotypical traits of single women and single men. More specifically, they reported equally negatively valenced stereotypes for both single women and single men. Single male participants may not have rated single men (i.e., their own group) more positively than single women because masculine norms assert that men should be self-sufficient, aggressive, and agentic (Eagly, 1994; Reuther, 1989; Vandello et al., 2008). Single men, who are unable to obtain a romantic partner, may be seen to lack the desired masculine traits that "women desire", leading to harsher evaluations. Additionally, some subgroups of single men are considered dangerous or hostile towards others. In Study 2, the words "incels", "misogynists", and "perverted" were used to describe single men. As these subgroups of men are violent extremists and inflict harm on women and children, this should clearly result in very low ratings on these stereotypes. Single women did not have any equally nefarious stereotypes. However, single women were likely rated similarly negatively by single male participants because social norms for women dictate

that “controlling”, “desperate” or “bossy” women receive backlash from others. In the same vein, seemingly positive traits such as “successful”, “hard-working”, and “independent” may be rated more negatively for women than for men as they are in line with masculine gender ideals. Single male participants’ stereotype words for single women did not contain many references to feminine ideals for women that could have been rated higher in desirability (e.g., caring, selfless, nurturing, etc.). This may be because these traits are associated with mothering and people often assume single women do not have the capacity to be in loving relationships or have children (Golombok et al., 2016). Taken together, single male participants reported perceiving similar amounts of discrimination and similarly negatively valenced stereotypes for single women and single men.

4.1.3. Single Female Participants Perceive Single Women as Experiencing More Discrimination Than Single Men

Although single female and single male participants reported similar amounts of *personal* discrimination, results across both studies demonstrated that single female participants reported that single women as a group experience more discrimination than single men as a group. This is in line with several qualitative studies in which single women express that they experience a breadth of negative outcome because of their unique experiences as single women (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Gui, 2020; Moore & Radke, 2015; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). For example, single women may experience more discrimination regarding their sexuality or reproductive choices than single men, as gender expectations for women require a “correct” amount of sexuality, with too little being “prudish” and too much being “promiscuous” (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). These themes also emerged from the qualitative analysis of the current data, with contradictory stereotypes such as “frigid” and “promiscuous” illustrating the policing of women’s sexuality.

This pattern of reporting lower personal discrimination but higher group discrimination is a long-observed phenomenon for people with marginalized identities (e.g., Bourguignon et al., 2006; Lindsay et al., 2015; Magallares et al., 2016; Taylor et al.,

1990). For example, people of colour more readily identify racism directed at their racial group compared to racism that they personally encounter (e.g., Bourguignon et al., 2006). Similarly, women more readily identify sexism directed at other women compared to themselves (e.g., Lindsay et al., 2015). Thus, single female participants may have also been under-reporting their personal discrimination, but projecting the discrimination they experience onto single women as a group. This discrepancy may serve as a protective mechanism. For example, there is meta-analytic evidence that perceiving oneself to be the subject of discrimination is associated with worse psychological and physical wellbeing, including greater depression and anxiety, and consuming alcohol or smoking (Pascoe & Richmond, 2009; also see Schmitt et al., 2016). In contrast, Bourguignon and colleagues (2006) found that across two studies, (with African immigrants and replicated among women), reporting lower personal discrimination and higher discrimination toward one's group were both associated with higher levels of self-esteem. This may be because under-reporting personal discrimination reduces feelings of personal responsibility for negative experiences, while recognizing the discrimination one's group experiences fosters feelings of connection with their group (Bourguignon et al., 2006; Crocker & Major, 1989). Thus, by downplaying instances of personal discrimination, single female participants may be protecting themselves from the consequences of singlism, whilst simultaneously fostering connection and solidarity with other single women experiencing structural discrimination.

Indeed, there was preliminary evidence of this “coping” effect when examining female participants' valence of stereotypical traits. Single female participants rated other single women positively (uplifting other single women) but rated single men negatively (denigrating single men). Other research on single women's friendships corroborates these effects. Single women have rich and meaningful friendships with other single women (e.g., Pickens & Braun, 2018; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Female same-sex friendships are more supportive and have more ongoing interaction than male friendships (Fehr, 2004; Oswald et al., 2005), which may contribute to findings that single women are happier than single men (Stronge et al., 2019). Research has demonstrated that women respond to stress by being more affiliative in their behaviours; in other words, women are motivated to “tend and befriend” rather than the colloquially known stress

response, “fight or flight” (Nickels et al., 2017; Taylor, 2006; Turton & Campbell, 2005). Stronger social connection between women serves as a buffer against stress (Bedrov & Gable, 2022; see Holt-Lundstad for a meta-analysis on social connection and mortality risk), offers tangible support, such as help with childrearing for low income or single mothers (e.g., Starkweather et al., 2021; Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020A; Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020B), and can have implications for social and political movements as women form cooperative groups, such as the #MeToo movement. Single women’s perceptions of their own and other single women’s experiences with singlism might be part of the coping process and should be explored in future research.

4.1.4. Reconciling Differences Between Single Women and Single Men

When I began this research, I thought this mixed-methods project would shed light on the discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative findings in the extant singlehood literature. However, the results highlight that, rather than discrepancies being driven by methodological differences, both the quantitative and qualitative results highlight a disconnect between the perceptions that single men versus single women have about gendered singlism. How can we reconcile these differences?

Reference Points When Reporting on Discrimination May Differ.

Research on discrimination rarely asks people to report on personal or group discrimination with a reference point in mind, which can make it difficult to know what people are comparing their discrimination too. For example, when asked about *personal discrimination*, the reference point that single male and single female participants implicitly employ may be members of groups who experience hostile discrimination for possessing a particular identity (e.g., people of colour, transgender people, etc.). This is plausible because “discrimination” is a loaded word that may activate thoughts of hostile behaviors, such as physical violence, rather than more subtle (but also problematic) biases against a group. This is bolstered by research that finds that discrimination against single people is seen as more justifiable (including by single people) than other forms of racial and sexist discrimination (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020; Morris et al., 2007). Thus, single men and single women may not have been considering their gender when asked

about the personal discrimination they experience for being single, and thus reflecting perceptions that as a single person they experience low amounts of discrimination compared to other marginalized and minoritized groups.

Furthermore, single female participants when asked to rate “single women” as a group may have used “single men” as a reference point because women and men are often viewed as “opposite genders” (e.g., Prentice & Miller, 2006). This may have led single female participants to increase ratings of the discrimination single women experience based on this comparison. Single female participants may be more familiar with women as a group experiencing discrimination (e.g., the wage gap, sexual violence, etc.), personally aware of stereotypes (e.g., desperate, frigid) and negative treatment of single women (e.g., Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) and less familiar with discrimination that single men endure. This would explain why single women (despite reporting similar amounts of personal discrimination than single men), reported that single women as a group experience greater discrimination compared to single men. That is, single female participants may have been using different reference points when reporting on their personal discrimination (e.g., racial groups) versus single women as a group (e.g., single men). Future research may help reconcile these findings by providing participants with reference points (e.g., “compared to coupled people/people of colour/LGBTQ+ people/single wo(men), how much discrimination do you personally experience?”).

Women Likely Still Experience Worse Consequences Than Single Men.

This research only focused on stereotypes and discrimination related to gender and singlehood status. While single men and single women may be stereotyped in similar ways and report similar amounts of discrimination, ultimately women face worse *consequences* for their behaviour than men. There is good evidence for this; female professors are evaluated more negatively in high status departments compared to low status departments, indicating that women experience backlash for occupying higher status roles in society (Fisher et al., 2019). Similarly, women in politics are less favored by voters (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010) and women in the military are seen as less skilled (Boldry et al., 2001). These biases are concerning because they are indicative that it may be more difficult for women to receive tenure (Deo, 2015; Wilson, 2008), become

political leaders (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman et al., 2012), earn the same wage as men (OECD, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2022), or gain status in other realms that are historically “male-dominated”. However, it is not only high-status women who experience negative bias. One study found that in a fake hiring task, women who took longer maternity leaves were rated as less desirable employees (Hideg, 2018). Moreover, women are burdened with the vast majority of free domestic labour and childcare (Chesney & Flood, 2017; Schneider, 2009). Although these examples focus on women’s gender identity, intersectional identities (e.g., race, social class, etc.) have been shown to further exacerbate the discriminatory consequences for women (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Chaney et al., 2020; Remedios & Snyder, 2018). Thus, trying to reconcile the disconnect between single men and single women’s experiences with singlism involves considering whether single women may experience worse consequences despite having similar traits as single men. To explore this possibility, future research may aim to test whether an “independent” single woman is perceived less positively than an “independent” single man.

4.2. Implications, Limitations & Future Directions

The current research had several strengths. By taking a mixed-methods approach, this research helped to reconcile some contradictory findings about gendered experiences of single women and single men between previous qualitative and quantitative studies. Additionally, this research provided a first look at the meta-stereotype content of single women and single men in a Western-North American context (see Uğurlu et al., 2021 for stereotype content in a Turkish sample). Further, the current samples were very diverse in term of age (36 to 83 years) and singlehood histories, (e.g., being divorced, widowed, never married late into life, single parents, etc.), which provided more relevant data than the University student-based samples commonly used in psychology research. To date, while several studies have examined the experiences single women have with singlehood-based discrimination and stereotyping using qualitative methods, no known studies have examined this in (cisgender, heterosexual) single men. By including an equal number of self-identified men, this research offers novel insights on the stereotypes that single men believe other singles face.

Despite these strengths, this research also has important caveats. My samples were limited to Prolific users, and they may not be representative of the larger community population. Similarly, our sample was mostly White, heterosexual, and low to middle socio-economic status. Prolific data tends to be higher quality data (e.g., participants pass more attention checks, give better open-ended responses, have unique locations, and take time to read and remember information) compared to other online data collections tools such as MTurk, Qualtrics, or SONA (Douglas et al., 2023). Nonetheless, those who take surveys on Prolific are likely not representative of the wider population. Thus, results may have been different with a non-Western population (e.g., Uğurlu et al., 2021), queer (e.g., Tung, 2015), younger (e.g., Beckmeyer & Jamison, 2023) or older (Timonen & Doyle, 2015) singles. Of note, while the current research found no significant differences between single female and single male participants in the amount of personal discrimination they reported, control analyses suggested that single mothers reported *lower* amounts of personal discrimination than single fathers, indicating that whether a single person is a parent may influence singlehood outcomes. An important avenue of future research is exploring singles with various intersectional identities such as parental status, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc., to determine how these identities influence experiences of singlism.

Moreover, results may have differed in another cultural context, as the samples used in this study were from North America and primarily White. For example, in China, where marriage and family ideology tend to be stronger, single women have been called “leftover women” and face many social disadvantages relative to single men, such as pressures to put aside their career aspirations to prioritize finding a husband to support his career by caring for him and his children (Gui, 2020). In some Asian countries it is normative to overtly ask about someone’s age or marital status, and to openly blame someone’s character as the reason they are single, indicating that direct discrimination against singles may be more normative in some Asian cultures (Himawan et al., 2018). Additionally, single women in a Turkish sample were stereotyped as “pure” and “fragile”, indicating that other cultures may see single women as in need of protection and pity (Uğurlu et al., 2021). However, stereotypes of single women in the current research did not strongly reflect “purity” which may be due to cultural differences in

gender norms between Turkish and US/Canadian participants. Instead, stereotypes of single women in the current literature reflected both negative (e.g., “frigid”; “bitter”) and positive “self-aware”; “resilient”) elements of singlehood similar to research conducted using samples from Australia (e.g., Addie & Brownlow, 2014) and New Zealand (e.g., Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) indicating that cultural context may be influential in shaping singlehood experiences. Thus, while single people experience singlism cross-culturally, culture may provide nuance to the amount and forms of discrimination and the content of stereotypes.

Finally, my research only examined the experiences of self-identifying men and women. While this provided a preliminary examination of discrimination at the intersection of gender and singlehood identities, it does not address the diversity in gender identities. Indeed, gender is largely socialized; it is because of our socialization into roles that women and men may behave, dress, and think differently (Prentice & Miller, 2006). It is this socialization that shapes experiences of discrimination, which are likely far worse for transgender single people because they signal a rejection of the “natural” gender binary and those with multiple systemically oppressed identities often experience worse discrimination (Remedios & Snyder, 2018). However, there is a significant gap in the literature on the experiences of transgender people (see Girme et al., 2022 for a review of the intersectional identities and contexts shaping singlehood outcomes). Future research should evaluate whether transgender singles experience similar instances of singlism as cisgender singles, and how this impacts their wellbeing.

Like other research exploring gender “differences”, this research found more meaningful similarities: single women and single men reported the same amount of discrimination and may be perceived through similar archetypal stereotypes. Nonetheless, gender is still an identity marker that people are judged and evaluated on in society, which may hold downstream consequences for single women as a group that should be explored in future work. Furthermore, there remains a significant gap in the qualitative literature on single men. Researchers should aim to fill this gap as qualitative research offers rich participant-driven insights that provide nuanced understandings of peoples’

lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This research provides a steppingstone to understanding intersectional identities among single people.

4.3. Conclusion

Single women and single men both experience discrimination and stereotyping, but with gendered nuance in perceptions of discrimination and some stereotype content. Across two mixed-methods studies employing quantitative and qualitative methods, the results demonstrated that single men and single women report similar amounts of personal discrimination and are perceived as having mostly similar stereotypical content. Nonetheless, single female participants reported that single women as a group experience more discrimination than single men as a group and rate the stereotypes of single women more positively compared to those of single men.

This research broadens current understandings of single people by illustrating both similarities and discrepancies between single women and single men's ratings of discrimination and qualitative insights about the overlapping and unique stereotype content of single women and single men. These findings suggest that single people, regardless of their gender, face stereotyping and discrimination for being single, and provides a steppingstone for future work to further examine the shared and distinct experiences of single women and single men.

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Appendix A. Secondary Analyses

Secondary Hypothesis: Study 1

H1: Single women and single men will not differ in the amount of discrimination they perceive toward singles as a group.

Secondary Hypotheses: Study 2

H1: Single female participants will report more discrimination toward single people as a group than single male participants.

H2: Single female participants will report more discrimination toward single women as a group than single male participants.

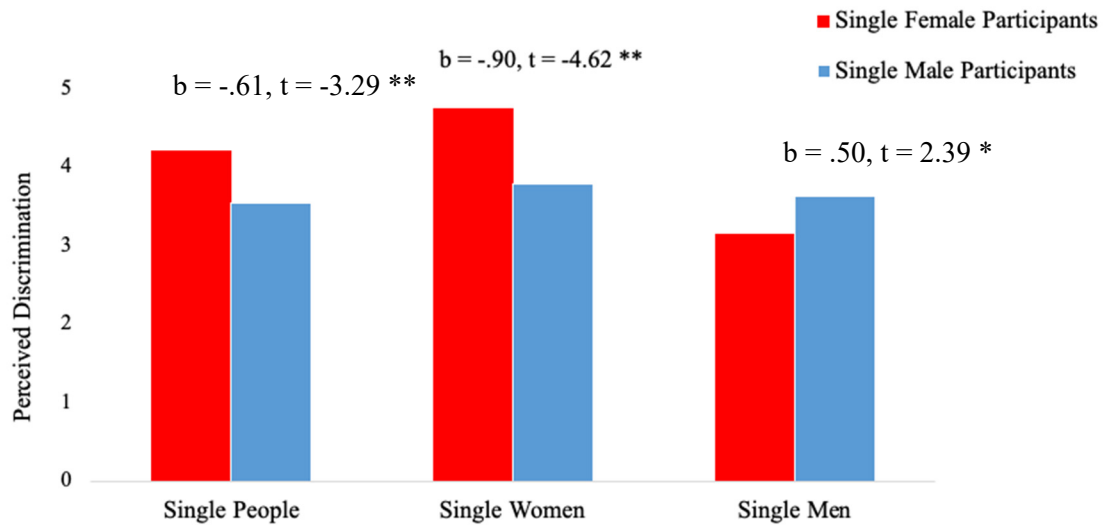
H3: Single male participants will report more discrimination toward single men as a group than single female participants.

Secondary Analyses: Results

For Study 1, contrary to predictions, single female participants reported significantly more perceived discrimination toward single people as a group ($t(139) = -3.44, p < .001$) compared to single male participants. Further, although no hypotheses were made, exploratory analyses found that single female participants reported significantly more perceived discrimination toward single women as a group ($t(139) = -4.15, p < .001$) compared to single male participants. Similarly, single male participants reported more perceived discrimination toward single men as a group ($t(139) = 2.31, p = .022$) than single female participants.

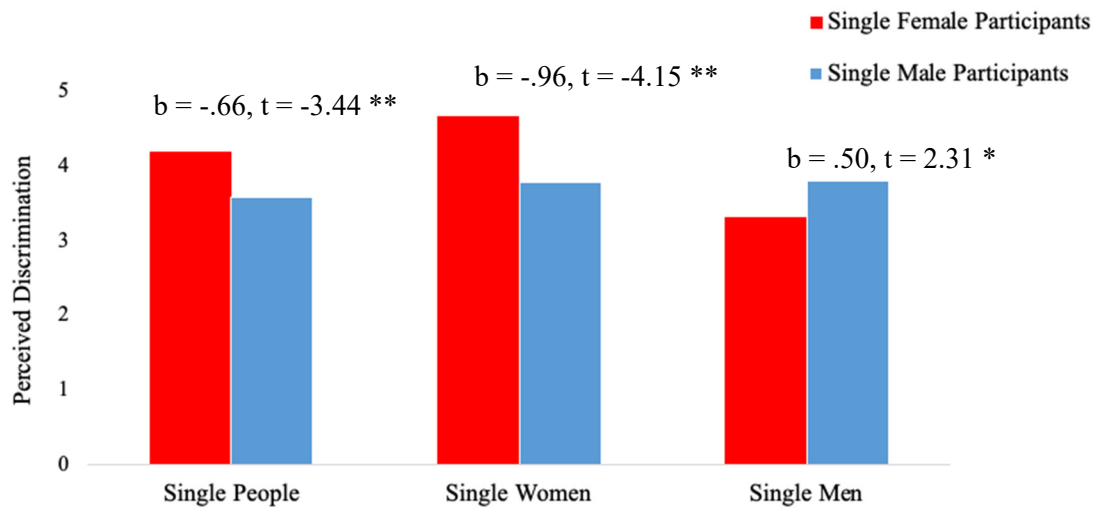
For Study 2, in line with hypotheses single female participants reported significantly more perceived discrimination toward single women as a group ($t(145) = -4.62, p < .001$) compared to single male participants. Similarly, single male participants reported more perceived discrimination toward single men as a group ($t(145) = 2.39, p = .018$) than single female participants. Contrary to predictions, single female participants reported significantly more perceived discrimination toward single people as a group ($t(145) = -3.29, p < .001$) compared to single male participants.

Figure A.1. Regression Analyses Illustrating Participant Gender Predicting Discrimination (Study 1)



Note. ** $p < .01$.

Figure A.2. Regression Analyses Illustrating Participant Gender Predicting Discrimination (Study 2)



Note. ** $p < .01$.

Appendix B. Qualitative Coding Words and Frequencies

Table B.1. Stereotypical traits of Single Women and Single Men (Study 1)

Positive Stereotypes				Negative Stereotypes			
Females' Stereotypes about Single Women	N	Males' Stereotypes about Single Men	N	Females' Stereotypes about Single Women	N	Males' Stereotypes about Single Men	N
Independent*	70	Independent	46	Selfish	41	Selfish	34
Strong	28	Strong	6	Lonely	31	Lonely	16
Smart	24	Smart	14	Difficult	17	Difficult	7
Free	17	Free	26	Promiscuous	16	Promiscuous	13
Hard-Working	15	Hard-Working	11	Unattractive	15	Unattractive	7
Confident	14	Confident	8	Noncommittal	5	Noncommittal	13
Grounded	13	Grounded	6	Mean	9	Mean	8
Kind	11	Kind	9	Anti-social	9	Anti-social	6
Financially Stable	8	Financially Stable	10	Controlling	24	Sloppy	13
Fun	7	Fun	6	Unhappy	17	Immature	10
Happy	19	Free Time	13	Desperate	15	Detached	9
Social	13	Attractive	6	Frigid	15	Untrustworthy	8
Fulfilled	11	Reliable	5	Bitter	15	Substance Abusing	8
Resilient	11	Career Driven	5	Unstable	12	Irresponsible	7
Capable	9	Flexible	4	High-Maintenance	12	Poor	6
Self-aware	9			Nitpicky	8	Angry	6
Adventurous	7			Stubborn	8	Defective	5
Courageous	6			Boring	7	Socially Awkward	5
Creative	6			Untrusting	5	Weird	4
Trustworthy	6			Cruel	5	Nerdy	4
Successful	5			Cat Lady	5	Clingy	4
Open-Minded	4			Fragile	4		
				Independent*	4		
	313		175		299		193

Table B.2. Stereotypical traits of Single Women and Single Men (Study 2)

Females' Stereotypes				Males' Stereotypes			
Single Women	N	Single Men	N	Single Women	N	Single Men	N
Lonely	43	Lonely	32	Lonely	29	Lonely	47
Independent	60	Independent	32	Independent	24	Independent	23
Smart	20	Smart	8	Smart	6	Smart	10
Kind	11	Kind	8	Kind	10	Kind	4
Poor	10	Poor	6	Poor	5	Poor	6
Ambitious	9	Ambitious	17	Ambitious	8	Ambitious	13
Unattractive	9	Unattractive	10	Unattractive	16	Unattractive	9
Attractive	8	Attractive	5	Attractive	6	Attractive	5
Promiscuous	7	Promiscuous	26	Promiscuous	5	Promiscuous	19
Aggressive	4	Aggressive	8	Aggressive	5	Aggressive	10
Shy	4	Shy	8	Shy	11	Shy	20
Strong	21	Selfish	28	Free	18	Sad	26
Happy	19	Work-focused	14	Picky	14	Free	26
Sad	19	Untrustworthy	13	Sad	14	Happy	16
Free	18	Noncommittal	12	Social	13	Selfish	15
Damaged	15	Detached	11	Difficult	11	Weird	14
Picky	14	Confident	10	Selfish	11	Sloppy	13
Confident	13	Immature	9	Fun	10	Light-hearted	13
Desperate	13	Financially Stable	9	Strong	10	Defective	12
Work-focused	12	Happy	9	Anxious	8	Untrustworthy	11
Spinster	11	Picky	8	Flirty	8	Adventurous	10
Difficult	10	Sloppy	8	Bossy	8	Lazy	10
Hard-working	9	Fun	8	Available	7	Irresponsible	10
Stubborn	8	Social	7	Defective	7	Financially Stable	9
Confident	7	Carefree	6	Weird	6	Available	9
Cat Ladies	7	Insecure	5	Bitchy	6	Work-focused	9
Fun	7	Mama's Boys	5	Work-focused	6	Desperate	8
Bitter	6	Desperate	5	Cold	6	Boring	8
Frigid	6	Unfaithful	4	High maintenance	5	Stressed	7
Bitchy	5	Stupid	4	Overweight	5	Incels	7
Interesting	5	Indecisive	4	Adventurous	5	Wild	7
Lucky	5	Defective	4	Frigid	4	Noncommittal	7
Weird	5	Interesting	4	Cat Ladies	4	Weak	6
Competent	4	Searching	4	Content	4	Outgoing	6
Untrusting	4	Awkward	4			Awkward	6
Cold	4	Busy	4			Immature	6

Females' Stereotypes				Males' Stereotypes			
Single Women	N	Single Men	N	Single Women	N	Single Men	N
Calm	4					Confident	6
Anxious	4					Perverted	5
Social	4					Strong	5
High maintenance	4					Calm	5
Lazy	4					Mean	4
Crazy	4					Reliable	4
Antisocial	4					Active	4
	454		366		315		473