Pushing Relationship Beliefs Off Their Pedestal: Priming Relationship Pedestal Belief in Single People

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Abstract

Singles people's well-being may depend partly on their relationship pedestal belief (RPB) – the belief that people must be in a relationship to be happy. Across three experimental studies (total *N* = 709 singles), I explored (1) whether it is possible to prime RPB, and (2) whether priming RPB impacts singles' outcomes. In Studies 1 and 2, the high RPB condition was associated with greater endorsement of RPB compared to the moderate RPB condition, which provided some evidence for reduced well-being and increased relationship desirability. Exploring indirect effects revealed the high RPB condition as compared to the moderate condition was associated with greater RPB, which undermined well-being and exacerbated relationship desirability outcomes. In Study 3, I added a low RPB condition, but there were no significant differences across any condition. Nonetheless, this research provides promising evidence that it is possible to reduce single peoples' RPB, which might maximize singles' well-being.

Keywords: Singlehood; Well-being; Relationship pedestal belief

Dedication

This is dedicated to my father: Robert E. Dennett.

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Introduction

In Canada, there are currently more unmarried people than married (Statistics Canada, 2016), and around the world, adults are delaying marriage (UN Women, 2019). Yet, researchers often take a deficit perspective when examining singlehood, presenting singlehood as an inherently less desirable state than being in a romantic relationship – a perspective that places relationships on a pedestal (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Research conducted on single people and their well-being outcomes provides mixed evidence. On the one hand, there is a robust association between relationship status and well-being, suggesting that single people tend to report lower well-being compared to people in relationships (Haring-Hidore et al., 1985; Lee et al., 1991). This association has been widely replicated, including cross-culturally across 42 nations (Diener et al., 2000; Stack & Eshleman, 1998). On the other hand, emerging research suggests that this well-being gap is not that large (Purol et al., 2020) and there is considerable variation among single people. Single people report greater belief in happiness without marriage when they can meet their sexual needs or report high quality friendships (Park et al., 2021). Single people also report being just as happy as coupled people if they are motivated to avoid the conflicts and disagreements that inevitability occur in intimate relationships (Girme et al., 2016; see also Holt-Lunstad et al., 2008). Taken together, these mixed findings suggest that single peoples' well-being might not be driven simply by their relationship status; rather, single peoples' well-being might depend on important individual characteristics or contextual factors.

One individual characteristic that may shape single peoples' well-being is their relationship pedestal belief (RPB) – the belief that people need to be in a romantic relationship to be truly happy (Dennett & Girme, in preparation). People's belief about romantic relationships (e.g., beliefs about relationship destiny or growth) are important and have consequences for their relationship choices and behavior (Knee & Petty, 2013). Similarly, peoples' belief about what role romantic relationships should play in their life may be equally important and impactful during singlehood. For example, recent evidence suggests that single people who self-report their endorsement of RPB experience greater fears and worries about their single status (Dennett & Girme, in preparation), which can undermine well-being and dating outcomes (Dennett & Girme, in preparation; Spielmann et al., 2013; 2016). In this thesis, I extend on these correlational

findings to test whether peoples' RPB can be manipulated. If RPB can be manipulated, this may open up avenues for interventions focusing on increasing the well-being of single people via decreasing endorsement of single people's RPB. Thus, explore whether priming single people with different levels of RPB (1) can influence single people's endorsement of RPB, and (2) impacted single people's well-being or desire to enter romantic relationships. I tested these hypotheses in three studies experimental studies.

The Costs and Benefits Associated with Singlehood

A large body of research demonstrates that single people tend to report lower well-being compared to people in relationships (Diener et al., 2000; Haring-Hidore et al., 1985; Lee et al., 1991; Stack & Eshleman, 1998). One reason that single people might experience costs is because single people miss out on the companionship of a romantic partner and thus experience greater romantic loneliness compared to people in relationships (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2015). Feeling a sense of belonging and connection with close others is an important aspect of well-being (see Ryan & Deci, 2017). Although single people can and do meet these needs through non-romantic relationships, romantic partnerships are cited as the most important attachment figures in adulthood (Doherty & Feeney, 2004; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997) and tend to be an important source of relatedness needs (La Guardia et al., 2000). Thus, if single people feel as if they are not getting their relatedness needs met – especially by a romantic partner – it may negatively impact their well-being. Indeed, Adamczyk and Segrin (2015) found that single participants rated themselves less socially lonely but more romantically lonely compared to their coupled counterparts. Similarly, single people report more loneliness compared to those in romantic partnerships (Greitemeyer, 2009; Schachner et al., 2008) and others perceive single people to be lonelier than those in a romantic relationship (Slonim et al., 2015).

Qualitative research also provides support for the idea that being romantically lonely may be an important consideration for some single people. One theme found and explored in Band-Winterstein and Manchik-Rimon (2014)'s study of participants aged 60 and older was the range of participants' responses between feeling alone to feeling lonely. Some participants did not feel lonely because of their ties to their family and friends, *"[f]irst of all, I have my brother. I e-mail or phone him or meet him, and he is*

always with me whenever I want, and gives the best advice…I am alone but I don't feel lonely" (p. 389). Other participants did not share this opinion, "*I've been feeling lonely lately, even though I am surrounded by friends…It disturbs me*" (Band-Winterstein & Manchik-Rimon, 2014, p.389). Thus, older singles may get their social needs met via friends and family; however, for some participants, these avenues may not be enough to prevent loneliness. This may be because feeling lonely may be more than just about having one's social needs met. In a qualitative study of single women, the lack of touch and feeling special to someone else were both raised as costs of being single (Lewis & Moon, 1997). Feelings of loneliness was also a theme in a non-Western sample of single women over aged 30 ("leftover women") from Beijing and Guangzhou (Wang & Abbott, 2013). One participant said, *"Sometimes I feel some loneliness, and when I need to turn to someone but I don't know whom to turn to. I face many, many, difficulties. I face the dark night by myself and the ordeal of killing the time"* (Wang & Abbott, 2013, p. 225).

Another reason single people may experience lower well-being and why they may experience pressure to find a romantic partner, may be the stigma surrounding singlehood. "Singlism" reflects the stigma surrounding singlehood status and the unfair treatment of single people compared to their partnered peers (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Singlism can manifest as single people being left out of partnered social events, being perceived as a potential romantic threat, and pressures to date and find a partner (DePaulo, 2006). Empirical evidence demonstrates that people hold many negative views about single people, including that they are less secure, happy, and warm (Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981; Hertel et al., 2007), lower on agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientious, higher on neuroticism (Greitemeyer, 2009), and even more likely to have sexually transmitted diseases than those in romantic relationships (Conley & Collins, 2002). These perceptions exist despite research demonstrating no differences between single and coupled people's self-reported and objective ratings on measures of openness to new experiences, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, physical attractiveness, life satisfaction, or self-esteem (Greitemeyer, 2009). Although single people are viewed as a group, they are viewed as less of a group than other groups based on nationality or sexual orientation, and people think that prejudice against single people is more justifiable than prejudice based on either nationality or sexual orientation (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). Thus, single people may feel there is a

societal cost associated with their single status (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020; Girme et al., 2021).

Despite the costs associated with singlehood, a growing body of work is starting to highlight the benefits of being single. For example, being more satisfied with one's relationship status (whether single or in a romantic relationship) is associated with higher life satisfaction (Lehmann et al., 2015). Moreover, contrary to belief that place relationships on a pedestal, being single may be preferable for one's well-being over being in a relationship. Single people experience better health outcomes and psychological well-being compared to people who are unhappily married (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2008). Similarly, single people who are high in social avoidance goals and wish to avoid conflicts and disagreements—which are inevitable in romantic relationships—report being just as happy across time compared to people in romantic relationships (Girme et al., 2016). Single people have also reported unique singlehood benefits such as greater autonomy, financial freedom, and independence (Wang & Abbott, 2013) that may not be as easily achieved in romantic relationships. Researchers posits that along with relatedness, competence and autonomy are important components of personal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Therefore, the autonomy and competence that may come with having more choice in how to spend one's time and money may bring single people a greater sense of well-being. Single people, compared to those who are married, also tend to interact more with their social network and to be more involved in giving and receiving help from their family and friends (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). Moreover, single people who have higher sexual satisfaction are more satisfied being single and less interested in marriage (Park et al., 2021). This suggests that if people can meet their sexual needs outside of a romantic relationship, they may be less interested in dating and happier with their single status. These findings suggest that there are benefits to being single and that people who are single can live fulfilling lives.

Relationship Pedestal Belief and The Impact on Fear of Being Single, Well-being, and Relationship Desirability

Unfortunately, by focusing predominately on the negative aspects of being single and the positive aspects of being in a relationship, single people may overlook unique single benefits and thus be more likely to endorse greater RPB than single people who focus on the benefits of singlehood. Single people who believe that people need to be in

a relationship to be truly happy and fulfilled, in tandem with a lack of being in a relationship, may experience greater fears and anxieties about their single status. Single people who endorse greater RPB reported greater fear of being single, which undermined single peoples' life satisfaction during daily life (Dennett & Girme, in preparation). Single people with higher fear of being single were more willing to enter into a relationship with a lower quality partner (Spielmann et al., 2013), and to seek out an ex-partner, regardless of who initiated the relationship termination (Spielmann et al., 2016). Indeed, when people place romantic relationships on a pedestal, this places all relationships, regardless of quality, as preferable to being single. Given that RPB exacerbates single peoples' fears of being single (Dennett & Girme, in preparation) and that fears of being single are associated with poorer dating decisions (Spielmann et al., 2013), it follows that single people with higher RPB may also be particularly motivated to desire and enter a romantic relationship. Thus, participants who view relationships as a way to 'fix' their singlehood woes may have lower well-being outcomes and higher desire to enter into a relationship than people who believe that a relationship is not essential for their happiness.

The Current Research

Emerging research suggests that single people who endorse RPB report worse well-being outcomes (Dennett & Girme, in preparation). The current research extends these findings to explore whether it is possible to experimentally manipulate and reduce single peoples' RPB in order to foster better well-being outcomes. I explored this by testing (1) if it is possible to prime RPB, and (2) whether priming RPB can impact single peoples' well-being and desire for relationships. In Studies 1 and 2, participants were randomly presented with one of two bogus Psychology Today articles (see Appendix A) that primed either high levels of RPB (i.e., singles are less happy than those in romantic relationships) or moderate levels of RPB (i.e., singles can be just as happy as those in romantic relationships). I hypothesized that participants allocated to the high RPB condition (singles are less happy than those in romantic relationships) would report greater endorsement of RPB than participants who were allocated to the moderate RPB condition (singles can be just as happy as those in romantic relationships). Furthermore, I hypothesized that participants in the high RPB condition would also report more fears about being single, worse well-being outcomes (i.e., lower life satisfaction and

psychological need satisfaction, and higher negative mood), and greater motivations to enter into romantic relationships (i.e., higher commitment desirability and commitment readiness) than participants in the moderate RPB condition. In Studies 1 and 2, I expand on the results by running exploratory analyses to test if the priming condition that participants receive impacts their endorsement of RPB and if that in turns impact their well-being and relationship desire outcomes (i.e., an indirect effect of the priming condition). Furthermore, in both Studies 1 and 2, I control for single length and participant age, and run moderation analyses to test whether any of the reported effects differ based on single length and participant age.

In Study 3, I extended on Studies 1 and 2 to include a condition that focused explicitly on the unique benefits of being single. Participants were randomly presented with one of three bogus Psychology Today articles (see Appendix B). Participants in Study 3 were allocated to either a high RPB or moderate RPB conditions described in Study 1 and 2, or a new low RPB condition (i.e., singles are happier than those in romantic relationships). I predicted that in Study 3, participants in the high RPB condition would endorse greater RPB than participants in the moderate or low RPB conditions. I predicted that participants in the low RPB condition would report the lowest RPB. Moreover, I predicted that participants in the high RPB condition would report higher fears about being single, worse well-being outcomes (i.e., lower life satisfaction and psychological need satisfaction, and higher negative mood), and greater motivations to enter into romantic relationships (i.e., higher commitment desirability and commitment readiness).

Studies 1 & 2

Methods

Pre-Registration and Power Analyses

For Studies 1 and 2, a priori power analyses were conducted using G-Power (3.1) software (Faul et al., 2007). Power analyses suggested that 176 participants (88 participants per condition) were required for a *t*-test with a moderate effect size (.50) with 95% power. The hypotheses for Studies 1 and 2 were pre-registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF) and can be found by following these links: OSF link Study 1: https://osf.io/zdpax/ ; OSF link Study 2: https://osf.io/4vzdb/.

Participants

Study 1. One-hundred and seventy-one single undergraduate participants (gender identity: male = 38; female = 130; 3 did not report their gender); from a Canadian university took part in a lab study and received research course credit for their participation. The mean age was 19.67 years (*SD* = 1.73), and participants had been single between 0.04 – 24.25 years. To be eligible, participants needed to consider themselves single. Of the participants, 98.2% defined their single status category as 'single' (as opposed to separated/divorced, or widowed) and 1.8% did confirm that they were single, but not specify a single category. There were no participants who defined themselves as separated/divorced or widowed. Participants identified their ethnicity as Asian (43.9%), White (29.2%), Indian (21.6%), Bi/Multi-ethnicities (5.3%), Middle Eastern (3.5%), Black (1.8%), Hispanic/LatinX (0.6%), and other (1.8 %).

Forty-four participants, about 20% of the original sample was dropped from analyses because of guessing that they were being primed (*n* = 28), incomplete data (*n* = 11), failed the relationship status check where participants were asked to confirm that they were single (*n* = 3), or failed the attention check where participants were asked to recall basic information about article that they had just read (*n* = 2). After dropping these forty-three participants, this resulted in the remaining one hundred and seventy-one participants described above.

Study 2. One-hundred and eighty-four Prolific workers (gender identity: male = 105, female = 76, non-binary = 3) were recruited to participate in an online study. Prolific is a UK-based website for collecting survey data, and participants received £4 (approximately $7.00 CAD) for their participation. Participants were prescreened to closely match the demographics of Study 1: thus, participants were screened to be single and either Canadian or from the United States of America; while Study 1 was conducted at Canadian university, the prescreening of Study 2 also accepted participants from the United States of America because of the difficulty collecting enough participants using only single Canadian participants. Participants averaged 30.0 years of age (*SD* = 9.84) and had been single between 0.04 – 62.75 years. Self-defined single participants defined their relationship status as single (96.2%), separated or divorced (2.2%), or widowed (1.6%). Participants stated their ethnicity as White (71.2%), Black (14.1%), Bi/Multi-ethnicities (13%), Hispanic/LatinX (11.4%), Asian (11.4%), First Nations/Indigenous (2.7%), Middle Eastern (2.2%), Indian (1.6%) and other (0.5%). Participants also identified themselves as heterosexual (69.6%), bisexual (14.7%), gay/lesbian (7.1%), asexual (5.4%), pansexual (2.2%), prefer not to say (0.5%) or specified another sexual orientation (0.5%).

Seventy-three participants, about 28% of the original sample was dropped from analyses due to reasons that included participants guessing that they were being primed (*n* = 49), failed the relationship status check where participants were asked to confirm that they were single (*n* = 18), failed the attention check where participants were asked to recall basic information about article that they had just read (*n* = 3) or wished their data be withdrawn (*n* = 3), resulting in the one-hundred and eighty-four participants described above.

Procedure and Materials

In Study 1 and 2, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: a high RPB condition or a moderate RPB condition (see Appendix A). In both conditions, participants saw a bogus Psychology Today article written by the fictitious John Morrison, PhD, dated April 06, 2018. Moreover, in both conditions, participants saw an image with the source of Shuttershock written underneath, and references at the bottom of the article to a fictitious journal article. Each bogus article stated that singlehood is under-researched, but there had been a recent study that had examined single people's

well-being outcomes. Each article presented the prime as the findings of this fictitious study. In the moderate condition, the article was titled “Single and Happy: Here is Your Happily Ever After!” The text under the title read “[n]ew research shows the benefits of being single,” and featured a picture of a woman with her arms outstretched with the fictitious findings presented in the moderate RPB condition read as follows (bold text included here only for emphasis):

“The researchers found that single people **were just as happy** as those in a relationship. They also found that single people scored **the same as** people in a relationship on a range of important personal outcomes, including the ability to focus on personal goals and aspirations, achieve personal goals, and find enjoyment in hobbies, travel and life.

This is likely the case because people **do not need** the support and love of a romantic partner to cope with life stress and achieve important goals. Instead, this study found that being single **can improve** peoples’ ability to lead fulfilling and happy lives, and that singles **do not have to** prioritize romantic relationships.

This is exciting new research that gives us insight about *why* single people may lead **happy** lives”

The title of the high RPB article was “Single and Unhappy: Where is Your Happily Ever After?” The text under the title read “[n]ew research shows the drawbacks of being single.” The fictitious findings presented in the high RPB condition featured an image of a woman sitting in the foreground as a couple embrace in the background and the fictitious findings read as follows (bold text included here only for emphasis):

The researchers found that single people **are less happy** as those in a relationship. They also found that single people scored **lower than** people in a relationship on a range of important personal outcomes, including the ability to focus on personal goals and aspirations, achieve personal goals, and find enjoyment in hobbies, travel and life.

This is likely the case because people **need** the support and love of a romantic partner to cope with life stress and achieve important goals. Instead, this study found that being single **can undermine** peoples' ability to lead fulfilling and happy lives, and that singles **may want to** prioritize romantic relationships.

This is exciting new research that gives us insight about *why* single people may lead **unhappy** lives.

After reading one of the two bogus Psychology Today articles, participants completed an attention check to ensure that they had read the article carefully and then they responded to the survey questions described below.

Manipulation Check. To check if the primes worked as intended, participants filled out the Relationship Pedestal Belief Scale (Dennett & Girme, in preparation). Participants completed six items such as, "It is important to be in a relationship if people want to feel fulfilled," (1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*), and reversed scored items such as "You can achieve everything you want in life even if you are single." All items were scored on a 1 to 7 scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The scale was reliable (Cronbach's Alpha [α] = .82; Study 2: α = .86) and the items were averaged and combined into a score to capture participants endorsement of RPB where higher scores indicated greater endorsement of RPB.

Fear of Being Single. Participants completed the Fear of Being Single Scale (Spielmann et al., 2013) with items such as "It scares me to think that there might not be anyone out there for me," and "I feel anxious when I think about being single forever" (1 = *not at all true*, 5 = *very true*). The items were averaged, and higher scores indicated greater fears and anxieties about singlehood (Study 1: α = .78; Study 2: α = .86).

Life satisfaction*.* The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) was used to assess participants' life satisfaction with five items such as, "In most ways my life is close to ideal," and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Items were averaged and higher scores indicated more satisfaction with life (Study 1: α = .86; Study 2: α = .91)

Psychological Need Satisfaction. Participants reported their autonomy, competence, and relatedness need satisfaction on a nine-item scale (adapted from La Guardia, et al., 2000).[1] Specifically, I assessed more need satisfaction by asking participants how they felt about themselves in regards to their autonomy ("I feel free to be who I want to be;" 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), competence ("I feel very capable and effective;" 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and relatedness ("I feel loved and cared about by those around me;" 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness were aggregated into an overall need satisfaction score where higher scores indicate more psychological need satisfaction (Study 1: α = .88; Study 2: α = .90).

Negative Mood (Study 2 only). Participants rated how they felt right now on each of the following moods: hopeless, worried, anxious, sad, annoyed, frustrated (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very*). This measure assessed temporal negative mood that may be brought on by reading the priming article to assess potential short-term negative outcomes. These items were averaged and aggregated into one negative mood measure (α = .90).

Commitment Desirability. I assessed if participants were interested in a committed romantic relationship by using the Commitment Desirability Scale (Tan et al., 2020). In order to keep the questionnaire as concise as possible, the original five-item scale was dropped to three items, including "The idea of a long-term committed romantic relationship appeals to me" and "I prefer not to be in a committed relationship" (reverse-scored), and "Maintaining a committed romantic relationship is important to me". Scores (0 = *completely disagree*, 8 = *completely agree*) were averaged to create the commitment desirability scale (Study 1: α = .86; Study 2: α = .88). Higher scores indicate more desire for a committed relationship.

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[1] In the La Guardia (et al., 2000) study, the researchers examined need satisfaction with attachment figures: mother, father, romantic partner, friend/best friend, roommate, other significant adults such as employer or teacher. These attachment figures filled in the item stem that began every item with "When I am with my [attachment figure] e.g., "When I am with my mother, I feel free to be who I am." In my study, I was interested in capturing more general psychological need satisfaction, thus participants read the instructions "These questions ask how YOU FEEL about yourself" and did not ask participants to reflect on any attachment figure: e.g., "I feel free to be who I am."

Commitment Readiness. To assess if single participants felt that they were ready for a committed romantic relationship, I used the commitment readiness measure (Agnew et al., 2019). In order to keep the questionnaire as concise as possible, the original 8-item scale was dropped to four items, including "I feel ready to be involved in a committed relationship," "I do not feel particularly receptive right now to pursuing a committed romantic relationship," (reverse-scored), "I am not ready to be in a committed relationship at this time." (reverse-scored) and "Considering all of the factors in my life right now, I am receptive to being in a committed romantic relationship." (0 = *completely disagree*, 8 = *completely agree*). The items were averaged to create the commitment readiness score where higher scores indicate more readiness for a committed relationship (Study 1: α = .89; Study 2: α = .93).

Results

Study 1

Correlations for self-report measures appear in Table 1. I conducted an independent samples *t*-test using SPSS 25 to test if there were differences in outcome variables between participants who were randomly allocated to the moderate versus high RPB condition. The results are in Table 2 (see left hand side column) and in Figure 1. First, the prime was successful: participants who received the moderate RPB prime (*n* = 81; i.e., participants who read the article that single people can be just as happy as those in relationships) had significantly lower RPB compared to those who received the high RPB prime (*n* = 90; i.e., participants who read the article that people should be in a relationship to be happy). Next, to test if the conditions resulted in differences in the remaining outcome variables, I ran a series of independent samples *t*-test. As predicted, participants in the moderate RPB condition reported higher psychological need satisfaction and lower relationship desirability than those in the high RPB condition. I found no significant differences between conditions for fear of being single, life satisfaction, or commitment readiness.

Control Analyses

In Study 1, length of time participants were single was clustered in a bimodal distribution where there were peaks at around twenty years (due to participants age, this

likely captures those singles who have always been single), and participants who had only been single around a year (likely capturing singles who are newly single). Given that peoples' singlehood history might impact how they responded to the experimental prime, I re-ran the focal analyses as a regression controlling for singlehood length. However, given the bimodal distribution of the single length, I did not run single length as a continuous variable, but rather I dummy-coded single length into 0 = always single, and 1 = had a previous relationship. The significant results reported in Table 2 were still significant after controlling for single length. As it is possible that older single people may be viewed as more negative than younger singles (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), I accounted for participant age. I re-ran the focal analyses as a regression to control for participants' age, and the significant results reported in Table 2 were still significant after controlling for age.

Exploratory Moderation Effects

To test for exploratory (not pre-registered) moderation effects, I used PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) in SPSS 25 and tested if (1) single length or (2) participant age moderated the significant associations found in Study 1. Thus, I tested if single length or age moderated primed RPB condition (1) psychological need satisfaction, or (2) commitment readiness. However, I did not find any moderation of single length (t = 2.32, p = .022) or age (t = 2.09, p = .038) on psychological need satisfaction. I did not find any moderation of single length (t = -2.57, p = .011) or age (t = -2.33, p = .021) on commitment readiness. Thus, the group differences in Table 2 were not moderated by single length or age.

Exploratory Indirect Effects

Single peoples who report greater endorsement of RPB is associated with greater fears of being single and lower life satisfaction (Dennett & Girme, in preparation). Thus, it may be that RPB conditions indirectly impacted the well-being or relationship desirability outcomes via participants' endorsement of RPB. Thus, I conducted exploratory indirect effect analyses (these exploratory analyses were not pre-registered) to assess the indirect effect of priming condition on outcomes, mediated by participants' endorsement of RPB (see Figure 2). In other words, based on condition, did participants who received the high RPB prime report significantly increases in their endorsement of RPB (compared to the participants in the moderate RPB condition) (Path A) and therein

also report a significant decrease in well-being outcomes and increase in relationship desirability outcomes (Path B).

I ran a series of models using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) in SPSS 25, in which I regressed all well-being and relationship desirability outcomes on (1) condition (0 = high RPB condition, 1 = moderate RPB condition), and (2) participants self-reported endorsement of RPB as the meditator. I conducted the indirect effects with a percentile bootstrap confidence interval of 5000 iterations (see Biesanz et al., 2010). First, participants who received the high RPB condition reported significantly higher endorsement of RPB (t = 2.97, p = .003) than participants who received the moderate RPB condition (Path A; df = 169). Next, participants' endorsement of RPB belief was significantly associated with all outcomes (Path B; df = 168) including higher fears of being single (t = 5.68, p < .001; indirect effect 0.16; SE = 0.06), lower reported life satisfaction (t = -5.70, p < .001; indirect effect -0.22; SE = 0.08), lower psychological needs satisfaction (t = -5.32, p < .001; indirect effect -0.18; SE = 0.07), higher commitment desirability (t = 2.53, p =.012; indirect effect 0.14; SE = 0.07), and higher commitment readiness (t = 2.74, p = .006; 0.18; SE = 0.10). Finally, the 95% bootstrapped confident intervals of the indirect effects did not overlap with zero when predicting any of the outcomes including fears of being single (95% CI = [0.0540, 0.30]), life satisfaction (95% CI = [-0.39, -0.700]), psychological needs satisfaction (95% CI = [-0.33, -0.52]), commitment desirability (95% CI = [0.260, 0.29]) and commitment readiness (95% CI = [0.03, 0.43]).

These exploratory analyses suggest that participants in the high RPB condition were more likely to endorse greater RPB than participants in the moderate RPB condition, and their higher endorsement of RPB was associated with greater fears of being single, lower well-being, and greater desire for a romantic relationship.

Study 2

Correlations for self-report measures appear in Table 1. Procedures in Study 2 were identical to those in Study 1. The results for Study 2 are in Table 2 (see right hand side column) and Figure 3. In Study 2, the prime was again successful; participants in the moderate RPB condition (n = 94; i.e., participants who received the prime that single people can be just as happy as those in romantic relationships) reported significantly

lower RPB compared to participants who were in the high RPB condition (n = 90; i.e., participants who received the prime that one needs to be in a relationship to be happy). Furthermore, participants who received the moderate RPB condition had a significantly lower negative mood than participants who received the high RPB prime. In Study 2, there were no significant differences between conditions for fear of being single, life satisfaction, psychological need satisfaction, commitment desirability or commitment readiness.

Control Analyses

As in Study 1, in Study 2, I controlled for single length and age. While Study 2 had a greater variation of single length to keep Study 2 consistent with Study 1, similarly dummy-coded the single length (0 = always single; 1 = had a previous relationship). Using the same methods as in Study 1, the effects in Study 2 (see Table 2) held while controlling for single length and age.

Exploratory Moderation Effects

In Study 2, I followed similar procedures as Study 1. I tested for exploratory moderation effects of single length or age. I did not find any moderation effects that the association between RPB condition and negative mood was moderated by single length (t = -2.79, p = .006) or age (t = -2.89, p = .004).

Exploratory Indirect Effects

I tested for indirect effects using the same procedures as Study 1 and the same conceptual understanding of the pathways of interest (see Figure 2). First, participants who received the high RPB condition reported significantly higher endorsement of RPB (t = 2.75, p = .007) than participants in the moderate RPB condition (Path A; df = 182). Next, participants' endorsement of RPB was significantly associated with all of the outcomes (Path B; df =181) including higher fears of being single (t = 7.69, p < .001; indirect effect 0.22; SE = 0.08), lower life satisfaction (t = -3.19, p = .002; indirect effect -0.14; SE = 0.06), greater negative mood (t = 3.66, p < .001; indirect effect 0.16; SE = 0.07) lower psychological needs satisfaction (t = -3.41, p < .001; indirect effect -0.12; SE = 0.05), higher commitment desirability (t = 5.07, p < .001; indirect effect 0.30; SE = 0.12) , and higher commitment readiness (t = 4.78, p < .001; indirect effect 0.30; SE = 0.12). Finally, the 95% bootstrapped confident intervals of the indirect effects did not

overlap with zero when predicting any of the significant outcomes including fears of being single (95% CI = [0.06, 0.38]), life satisfaction (95% CI = [-0.27, -0.03]), negative mood (95% CI = [0.04, 0.31]), psychological needs satisfaction (95% CI = [-0.24, -0.03]), commitment desirability (95% CI = [0.08, 0.55]), and commitment readiness (95% CI = [0.08, 0.56]).

As in Study 1, Study 2 provides evidence that participants in the high RPB condition were more likely to endorse higher RPB than participants in the moderate RPB condition. Moreover, similarly to Study1, in Study 2 I found that higher RPB were associated with higher fears of being single, higher desire for a romantic relationship, and lower well-being.

Study 3

Methods

Pre-Registration and Power Analyses

In Study 3, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G-Power (3.1) software (Faul et al., 2007). Power analyses suggested that three-hundred and twenty-one participants (*n* = 107 participants per condition) were required for an ANOVA test with a moderate effect size of (.20) and 90% power. However, the previous two studies had an attrition rate of approximately 30%. Thus, I aimed to recruit three-hundred and fifty participants. The hypotheses for Study 3 were preregistered to Open Science Framework after data collection, but before any data analyses were conducted and can be found by following this link: OSF link: https://osf.io/sr9h3/.

Participants

Participants were three-hundred and fifty-four single individuals (gender identity: male = 70; female = 284) from a Canadian university. The participants were recruited either via a research participation system for which they received course credit, the university Reddit page (r/simonfraser), or a newsletter sent to psychology undergraduate students. Participants could choose whether to receive course credit or to enter a lottery for a $50 Amazon gift card for their participation. Participants mean age was 19.47 years (*SD* = 2.16). All participants reported their single status as “single” instead of the other single options such as separated/divorced or widowed. Participants had been single on

average for 10.10 years (*SD* = 8.94). Participants had been single for 0 – 34.25 years – this includes single people who had been single for less than a month but who considered themselves to be single. Participants reported their ethnicity as Southeast Asian (38.1%), South Asian (28.5%), White (28.2%), Middle Eastern (4.2%), other (2.5%), Black (1.7%), Hispanic/LatinX (1.1%), First Nations/Indigenous (0.6%). Participants identified themselves as heterosexual (79.7%), bisexual (11.0%), prefer not to say (3.4%), asexual (1.7%), pansexual (0.8%), gay/lesbian (0.8%), or specified another response (2% e.g., questioning).

Sixty participants were dropped from analyses for various reasons including failing the attention check (*n* = 15), failing the relationship status check by answering that they were actually in a relationship (*n* = 14), due to technical difficulties participants had already taken part in this study before (*n* = 13), had incomplete data (*n* = 8), guessed that they were being primed (*n* = 7), and did not fill out the manipulation check (*n* = 3) resulting in the three-hundred and fifty-four participants described above.

Procedures and Materials

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three priming conditions: a high RPB condition, a moderate RPB condition and a low RPB condition (see Appendix B). In all three conditions, participants saw a bogus Psychology Today article that began by stating that singlehood is under-researched and that a current study was interested in examining single peoples' well-being. The findings of the fictitious study in each article were the primes. The fictitious findings presented in the moderate and high RPB conditions were similar to those in Studies 1 and 2 (also see Appendix B) with updates to the images for the moderate prime and updating the publication dates of the all the fictitious articles so that participants would believe the claim that this was 'new' research. Moreover, the title in the moderate condition was changed to "Single and Just As Happy: Here is Your Happily Ever After!" The text under the title reading "[n]ew research shows the benefits of being single and coupled." The image in the new low RPB prime was the same as the updated picture of the moderate RPB prime with a woman smiling as she talks to two people who look to be a couple. The title of the low RPB article reads as "Single and Happy: Here is Your Happily Ever After!" The text below the title reading: "[n]ew research shows the benefits of being single." The fictitious findings presented in the low RPB condition read as follows (bold text included here only for emphasis):

"The researchers found that single people are **happier** than those in relationship. They also found that single people **scored higher** than people in a relationship on a range of important personal outcomes, including the ability to focus on personal goals and aspirations, achieve personal goals, and find enjoyment in hobbies, travel, and life. This is likely the case because **singlehood offers unique benefits**, **such as the time and ability to focus on oneself.**

Taken together, this study provides initial evidence that **people who are single and people who are in a relationship have different outcomes**. Single people may be more likely to lead fulfilling and happy lives **if they prioritize being single**. By demonstrating the **benefits of singlehood**, this exciting new research opens up a new avenue of research in order to understand how to maximize peoples' happiness and health."

After reading one of the three articles, participants completed attention checks to ensure that they had carefully read the prime. Next, participants completed a manipulation check to see if the randomly assigned prime condition showed significant differences in the endorsement of RPB using the Relationship Pedestal Belief Scale from Studies 1 and 2 (α = .74). Next, participants filled out identical measures from Studies 1 and 2 that assessed fear of being single (α = .80), satisfaction with life (α = .85), psychological need satisfaction (α = .84), negative mood (α = .87), commitment desirability (α = .83) and commitment readiness (α = .87).

Results

Correlations for self-report measures appear in Table 3. To assess if there were differences between the three RPB conditions (low RPB *n* = 123; moderate RPB *n* = 114; high RPB *n* = 117) I conducted an ANOVA using SPSS 25. The results of the ANOVA and descriptive means for Study 3 are in Table 4 and Figure 4. Unlike in Studies 1 and 2, the prime was not successful in manipulating participants' endorsement of RPB, the reasons for which I discuss in more detail in the general discussion. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between conditions and participants' fear of being single, negative mood, life satisfaction, commitment desirability and commitment readiness. There was a significant difference in psychological well-being; those who

received the low RPB prime (i.e., single people are happier than those in relationships) reported significantly higher psychological need satisfaction than those who received the moderate RPB (i.e., single people are just as happy as those in relationships). However, because the prime was not successful in shifting participants' RPB, it is unclear whether any subsequent differences in well-being outcomes are due to a spurious result or potentially another variable not assessed in this analysis. Furthermore, given that the priming condition did not impact participants' RPB, I was unable to explore any controls, moderation, or indirect effects as in Studies 1 and 2.

General Discussion

Whether single individuals experience better or worse well-being might depend on their relationship pedestal belief (RPB)– the belief that people must be in a relationship to be happy and fulfilled. I examined two research questions: (1) is it possible to manipulate RPB by prime RPB and if so, (2) what impact does priming RPB have on single people's well-being and relational desires. The results of two out of the three experimental studies provided evidence that RPB can be manipulated by being primed; individuals who were in the high RPB condition reported greater endorsement of RPB (Studies 1 and 2, but not Study 3). Furthermore, successful priming of RPB was associated with lower well-being and higher relational desire outcomes, although results were somewhat inconsistent across studies and outcomes. I discuss these results and important implications in more detail below.

Successfully Priming Relationship Pedestal Belief in Singles

The results of Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that it was possible to effectively prime RPB. Participants in Studies 1 and 2 in the high RPB prime condition (i.e., participants who received the prime that singles are less happy than those in romantic relationships) had significantly higher RPB than those participants in the moderate RPB prime condition (i.e., participants who received the prime that singles can be just as happy as those in romantic relationships). This is the first study to attempt to prime RPB, and the findings from Studies 1 and 2 provide novel evidence that RPB are malleable and can be shifted. Thus, RPB may not be static and stable, but might be responsive and reactive to the world and external stimuli. Because RPB are not static, it may suggest that RPB are, in part, learned. RPB could come from previous experiences where relationships were either placed or not placed on a pedestal. Moreover, this learning of RPB may not be directly explicit, but may be taught to people indirectly via social modelling (see Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2007). For example, if peoples' dating and relationship status is an important topic of conversation (rather than singlehood experiences), then it may feel as if one's focus of interest should be on entering romantic relationships and being in a romantic relationship. The current findings of this research also align with other prior research on priming relationship beliefs: It is possible to prime relationship growth (work it out) and destiny (soulmate) beliefs (see Franiuk et al., 2004;

Knee & Petty, 2013), and by extension sexual destiny and sexual growth beliefs (Maxwell et al., 2017). Spielmann and Cantarella (2020) similarly found that it was possible to prime fears of being single, and that priming fears of being single impacted single people's dating preferences; participants preferred availability over quality in potential partners. Thus, in prior studies there is evidence that it is possible to prime relationship-related beliefs and shifting these relationship beliefs are shown to have meaningful outcomes. Therefore, aligning with the research on priming relationship beliefs, the novel finding of this research suggests that there is variability and mutability in RPB. Thus, it may be possible that a viable way to increase single people's well-being and impact single people's relationship desire may be to change single people's RPB.

Although I found evidence that it is possible to prime RPB in Studies 1 and 2, the results of Study 3 did not provide evidence that RPB could be primed. In Study 3 the mean rates of RPB were comparable to Studies 1 and 2, but there were no mean group differences in RPB across the high (i.e., participants who received the prime that singles are less happy than those in romantic relationships), moderate (i.e., participants who received the prime that single people are just as happy as those in romantic relationships), and low (i.e., participants who received the prime that single people are more happy than those in romantic relationships) RPB conditions. The mixed findings across studies suggest that it may be difficult to consistently prime RPB. There are numerous factors that may explain why in Study 3 the RPB prime was ineffective, some factors of which were unique to Study 3.

One unique factor of Study 3 differed from Studies 1 and 2 is that Study 3 was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic as the data was collected September 2020 – December 2020. Whereas Study 1 data was collected in May - November 2018 and in Study 2 data was collected in September 2019. During this time, it is likely that many of the single participants of Study 3 were following local physical distancing regulations and quarantine practices that prohibited interactions with people outside of individuals' immediate household. Quarantining due COVID-19 may have placed a multitude of pressures on people including psychological strain (Goodwin et al., 2020). Although there may have been variability for singlehood experiences during quarantine practices based on their living situation (data on participant living conditions was not collected), it may be possible some single people during lock-down may have felt isolated from their typical sources of support. Moreover, some single people may have felt that having a

romantic partner to quarantining with may have been beneficial for support during these tough times. Therefore, while reading the RPB prime conditions, single people may have entered into the study with a higher view of the benefits of being in a romantic relationship than they might have without the global pandemic. Although, theoretical perspectives on romantic relationships suggest that how couples are impacted by COVID-19 may be more nuanced and complicated (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2021). Singlehood during COVID-19 may have also been a complicated experience; it is possible that single people felt less singlism because of the decreases in social activities and less pressure to try to date since it was increasingly difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while single people may have possibly experienced decreased singlism, long-term consequences of COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions as it may have had increased costs of being separated from friends, family, and other social connections given that single people have greater social ties than their married counterparts (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). Moreover, during a time of emergency, single people may have perceived the benefits presented in the low RPB prime of autonomy and freedom as not as important as the relational and social benefits of having a partner to rely on in times of need. If single people did not recognize the benefits of being single, then in Study 3 it may have been more difficult to prime low and moderate RPB relative to high RPB, and this may be one potential reason in Study 3 the prime was not effective.

Another reason it may have been difficult to consistently prime RPB is that participants are part of a society where higher levels of RPB may already being tacitly reinforced by society. Participants may therefore already endorse higher RPB to the extent to which there is societal support for commitment relationship ideology (Day et al., 2011; 2016) an ideology that supports that romantic relationships as the most important relationships with others, and that everyone is (or should be) working towards a romantic relationship. Commitment relational ideology coupled with singlism (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) may enforce the message that people need to be in a relationship to be happy, making it difficult to prime participants with alternative narratives that singlehood is associated with similar benefits to romantic relationships (the moderate RPB condition) or more benefits than romantic relationships (the low RPB condition) as it may not fit in with participants' worldview. Therefore, in future studies it may be important to consider single participants' worldviews and perspective on singlehood. A future direction of

singlehood research may be to present single people with positive accounts and perspectives of actual single people. This may allow single people to recognize and believe in positive single narratives and positive single experiences.

If single people are being bombarded with messages in their day-to-day lives that place relationships on a pedestal and disparage singlehood (see commitment relationship ideology; Day et al., 2011; Singlism; DePaulo & Morris, 2005), single people may adopt cognitive strategies to protect themselves. This aligns with Social Identity Theory, that posits that people who are part of disadvantaged groups may try to either leave or distant themselves from this group to protect their well-being (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, single participants might attempt to distance themselves from the in-group 'single people.' This may be possible because singlehood as a group has lower entity scores than groups of sexuality and nationality (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020), thus it may be possible for single people to more easily distance themselves from the singlehood group than for members of other disadvantaged groups. For example, participants may choose to perceive themselves as 'in between romantic relationships' instead of being part of the 'single' group, especially when singlehood might have negative outcomes and connotations attached to it. This might have been particularly prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic, where people could attribute being single because of the pandemic, rather than as a personal choice or status. Thus, it may be that the RPB prime used in this research in all studies was inconsistent, and in Study 3 may have been particularly ineffective because single people did not identify themselves with the 'single people' presented in the high RPB prime that describes single people at the most disadvantaged state and therein, did not internalize the primed RPB message.

To reduce the chances of people disengaging from RPB primes and increase the internalization of RPB primes, researchers conducting future studies might consider individualized primes for single participants. As recent work by Spielmann and Cantarella (2020) illustrates, it is possible to successfully prime fear of being single by having participants writing down projections of their own singlehood experiences. Thus, it may be worth considering adapting the RPB primes so that the primes incorporate single participants own thoughts and feelings about RPB. One possible strategy, use by Schwarz and colleagues (1991), may be to prime participants using the number of items of items participants can recall. Thus to prime low RPB, researchers could ask participants to recall twelve instances of a time in their life when they felt that being in a

relationship would make them happy. Schwarz (et al., 1991) found in a preliminary study that it is difficult for participants to recall more than ten instances of a single event, thus the researchers used participants misattributed their difficulty in recall as an indicator that the event is rare to prime participants. Therefore, a possible way to prime participants with low RPB could be to ask participants to recall twelve instances of a time in their own lives when being in a relationship would have made them happy. Given the high number of items to recall, this should be a difficult task. Thus, this may prime lower endorsement of RPB if they attribute the difficult nature of the task to the belief that rarely in their own lives does being in a relationship make them happy. Similarly, in the high RPB prime task, participants could be asked to name five instances where they felt being in a relationship would make them happy because this should be much easier to recall participants should not display the misattribution and should be able to find times in their lives when they felt being in a relationship would make them happy. Furthermore, to focus on the positive aspects of being single the prime wording could focus on singlehood – asking participants to name five instances of positive single experiences would likely also prime lower endorsement of RPB; whereas, asking participants to name twelve instances where being single was positive would likely to prime high endorsement of RPB. Priming participants with their own thoughts and experiences may offer a more personalized approach that makes it more difficult for participants to distant themselves from the prime, which may ultimately result in more consistent priming effects across studies.

Priming Relationship Pedestal Belief and Well-being and Relationship Desire

Another central question of this research is whether primed RPB were successful in influencing participants' well-being and relationship desires. In Studies 1 and 2, there is a pattern that participants in the high RPB condition had more negative well-being outcomes than those who received the moderate RPB condition. Participants in the high RPB condition had lower psychological need satisfaction (Study 1, but not Study 2), and higher negative mood (assessed in Study 2, but not Study 1). Moreover, participants in the high RPB condition had more desire to enter into a committed romantic relationship than participants who received the moderate RPB prime (Study 1, but not Study 2). Thus, these results suggested that high RPB may undermine single participants' well-

being and increase their desire to enter into a romantic relationship, replicating cross-sectional work illustrating that single peoples' endorsement of RPB can exacerbate fears of being single and thus undermine daily life satisfaction (Dennett & Girme, in preparation). These effects are likely to occur because higher RPB illuminates the discrepancy between one's desired state and one's current state. Single participants' single status may be more salient to those who are exposed to the belief that one needs to be a relationship to be happy (high RPB). Given that, by definition, those who are single are not involved in a relationship, single participants lower well-being may be because they believe that they need a romantic partner to be happy but lack a romantic partnership. Furthermore, this might then increase their desire for a romantic partner to fulfill the perceived requirements needed to be happy.

Despite the significant findings on psychological need satisfaction, negative mood, and relationship desire outcomes, none of the studies illustrated group differences in life satisfaction, fear of being single, or commitment readiness based on RPB condition. It might be that it is more difficult to see changes in these outcomes via RPB primes. For example, although individuals may believe that people need a relationship to be happy, that belief may not be enough to undermine their own life satisfaction, to create fears of being single that did not previous exist or make single people feel as if they are more ready for a committed relationship than they were previously. Given that life satisfaction is a relatively stable trait (Lucas & Donnellan, 2007; Ehrhardt et al., 2000), it may be difficult to see differences in the outcome based on the RPB prime. However, there is some mutability in life satisfaction (Lucas & Donnellan, 2007; Ehrhardt et al., 2000), thus future researchers examining RPB may wish to replicate these results using a stronger RPB prime as described previously. Furthermore, by directly priming RPB, it may be difficult to see movement on fear of being single. This may be because while the high RPB supports the message that one needs to be in a relationship to be happy, it may not create fear and anxieties in all single people about their single status because the primes did not focus on negative aspects of being single that may be captured in the fear of being single scale items such as "if I end up alone in life, I will probably feel like there is something wrong with me" (Spielmann et al., 2013). Moreover, it may be possible that some participants may endorse that one needs to be in a relationship to be happy, but not have accompanying fears about being single. It may be possible to view this as a person who endorses the

belief that to be truly happy they will one day need to have a romantic partner, but for now they are content with their single status and when they consider their potential future being single, they are not concerned as they feel they have a lot of time to enter a romantic relationship. Moreover, as two of the studies within this research used undergraduate students, this may be a particularly young population, who may see being single as not as detrimental at the moment because they may believe there is plenty of time to enter a relationship, even if participants endorse that to be truly happy one needs to be in a relationship. Thus, this may be a possible explanation of why overall, directly priming RPB does not affect participants' fears of being single, but that exploratory indirect analysis suggests that fears of being single shows changes mediated through one's own endorsement of RPB belief based on condition: if participants are primed with high endorsement of RPB and as their beliefs that one needs to be a relationship to be happy increases, participants may begin to question if actually they should be focusing harder on securing a romantic partner and this may in turn increase their fear of being single. Thus, outcomes of fears of being single may be impacted by participants own insecurities about single status, which some participants may be more susceptible to than others. Lastly, commitment readiness is defined as "feeling ready to be in a longer term committed relationship" (Agnew et al., 2019, p. 1046). Because consistent high level of commitment readiness is associated with having a partner in mind that one with whom they would like to pursue a relationship (Hadden et al., 2018), it may be that single participants in these studies had no partner in mind and did not feel they were ready to go from being single to being in a long term committed relationship without knowing the person or the context of that relationship.

Nonetheless, the exploratory indirect effects of Studies 1 and 2 suggest that the RPB priming conditions was associated with life satisfaction (Study1 and 2), fear of being single (Study 1 and 2), and commitment readiness (Study 1 and 2) via participants' own endorsement of RPB. Therefore, it may be that life satisfaction, fear of being single, and commitment readiness may be more difficult to shift directly via RPB primes, but internalized endorsement of RPB may be more effective in predicting single peoples' well-being and desired relational outcomes. This interpretation would align with Dennett and Girme (in preparation) who found that self-reported greater endorsement of RPB was associated with increases in fear of being single, which in turn undermined life satisfaction. This may suggest that to the extent that people endorse RPB it may

negatively impact their well-being. Therefore, results from these studies provides evidence that one way to increase single people's well-being may be to decrease endorsement of RPB, which might be particularly important when living in a society that endorses high RPB.

Practical Implications

These results have important practical implications. Single people in society may be tacitly receiving the message that one needs to be in a relationship to be happy. This may be done through a tandem of commitment ideology belief (Day et al., 2011) and exposure to singlism (Depaulo & Morris, 2005). However, as long as the message to single people is that you need a romantic partner if you want to be happy, then it may be difficult for a single person to consistently support low endorsement of RPB to bolster their own well-being in a society that implicitly supports high RPB. Therefore, one practical implication of this work is to argue for societal-level changes that do not place relationships on a pedestal or support narratives that reinforce that people need to be in a romantic relationship to be happy. For example, DePaulo (2006) has argued that benefit systems should reconsider and expand 'spousal' benefits in ways that allow single people to draw on a close family or friend to also care for them (and vice versa) during times of need. Similarly, it might be important to be more inclusive of different types of important close relationships, such as friendship (see Park et al., 2021; see Kislev, 2019). For example, rather than focusing solely on romantic love on Valentine's Day, it might be beneficial on Valentines Day to focusing on celebrating all types of loving relationships with family, friendships, and partners. As researchers, DePaulo and Morris (2005) lay out recommendations for social scientist on how to better focus on single people and coupled people: such as for researchers to be mindful if one is writing from the point of view that unfairly assumes that it is better to be in a romantic relationship than to be single. Thus, it is important to consider single people's perspectives and that as a society there should be a change towards supporting lower levels of RPB to increase the well-being of single individuals.

Strengths, Caveats, and Future Directions

There are many strengths of this research. I conducted three high-powered, pre-registered studies. I have presented novel findings that were experimental – specifically, this research provides the first test of whether RPB can be manipulated in single people, which has important implications for interventions that may help reduce societal pressures on singles and facilitate greater well-being. Moreover, these studies had a mix of undergraduate students (Study 1 and 3) and community members (Study 2), which allowed for a greater range of ages and singlehood experiences. Furthermore, this research focused on well-being and desired relational outcomes, which speaks to single people's well-being and their desires for romantic relationships.

Despite these strengths, several important caveats should be considered. Although I recruited a mix of student and community participants, most of the participants were younger, never-married participants. Across all three studies, there were only four separated/divorced participants and three widowed participants (all from Study 2). Given the overall number of participants in all three studies (total $N = 712$) this suggests that those who are divorced or widowed ($n = 7$) contributed little to the overall effects. Thus, the findings may not generalize to people who are single via divorce or widowhood and limits our understanding of diverse singlehood experiences (see DePaulo, 2014). Moreover, there is research to suggest that not all single categories are rated the same: while not rated as highly as the married category, widows were rated more positively on a host of characteristics than people who were divorced or who were never married (Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981). Moreover, it may be that divorced singles are viewed as choosing to be single, a choice that may be viewed negatively by others (Morris & Osburn, 2016; Slonim et al., 2015). The experiences of divorced or widowed participants may be particularly useful in understanding RPB because these single people have experienced what it is like to be in a long-term committed relationship and what is like to be single, and thus might recognize the difference in treatment from when they were in a relationship to now in their singlehood.

The experiences of older singles may be different than their younger counterparts. Older singles may experience more stigma and discrimination (Morris et al., 2008) and may have fears that younger singles may not have such as becoming fragile as they age without a caretaker (Band-Winterstein & Manchik-Rimon, 2014).

However, older singles who have lived a happy life may also be less likely to endorse RPB because they may have life experience that one can be happy and be single. Of course, there could potentially be a curvilinear pattern where younger singles may be more concerned about their future of being single, but once they have begun to experience life events as a single person, RPB may decrease because they are happy and single. However, towards the end of life, this happiness may dwindle as single people may begin to fear the end as they wonder who will take care of them if they become too weak to take care of themselves (see Band-Winterstein & Manchik-Rimon, 2014). Therefore, to test potential curvilinear patterns, future research on RPB should focus on recruiting an equal distribution of participants from across the lifespan. Furthermore, by collecting data from older single people, it could allow for single length to be run as a continuous variable to better control for single length given that in this research controlling for single length was difficult as many participants had never been in a romantic relationship beforehand. Moreover, collecting data that may allow for better controls, it will help future research tease apart and isolate effects that may be impact single people. Therefore, by focusing on recruiting singles throughout their life span in future studies would allow for researchers to capture potential variance in variables such as single length that may be important single people's experiences.

Another caveat in this research recruited participants based in Canada or the U.S.A. In other cultures, single people may be viewed differently. For example, in Japan single people may be viewed more harshly than in Canadian society using terms such as "parasite singles" coined in a popular book by Masahiro to describe single people who still lived with and 'off' their parents (Nakano, 2014). Moreover, in China there are similar terms such as 'leftover' women to describe unmarried women in their mid-to-late twenties onwards (Fincher, 2016). Furthermore, found in China are advertisements that explicitly support the marriage of 'leftover women,' and in Shanghai one needs to be married to buy property if they are not part of the Shanghai registration system (Fincher, 2016). Thus, it may be that different societies have different average levels of RPB and acceptance of being single as a lifestyle. as one Chinese person interviewed said, "[w]hy must a woman who chooses to be single be vilified by all of society?;" however, this quote continues to say "Boycott! Marriage is over! …public opinion is very powerful, but don't let it brainwash you…Don't be afraid to be single." (Fincher, 2016 p.72-3). This quote potentially captures the societal experience of a single person, but also that there

may be variance in how individual people perceive their singlehood status across cultural contexts. Future research would benefit from examining RPB in a wide array of cultures.

Tables

Table 1. ***Correlations Across Self-Report Measures in Studies 1 and 2.***

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Relationship Pedestal Beliefs (RPB)	–	.40**	-.41**	-.40**		.22**	.20*
2. Fear of Being Single	.51**	–	-.32**	-.34**		.40**	.29**
3. Life Satisfaction	-.25**	-.35**	–	.69**		-.16*	-.09
4. Psychological Need Satisfaction	-.25**	-.36**	.71**	–		-.05	-.07
5. Negative Mood (Study 2 Only)	.29**	.48**	-.47**	.55**	–	-	
6. Commitment Desirability	.36**	.46**	-.03	.05	.13	––	.42**
7. Commitment Readiness	.32**	.39**	.11	.12	.01	.67**	–

Note. **p* <.05. ***p* <.01. Correlations for Study 1 appear above the diagonal line. Correlations for Study 2 appear below the diagonal line.

Table 2. ***Independent Samples T-test Between Moderate and High RPB Conditions on Outcomes (Studies 1 and 2).***

	Study 1				Study 2			
	Moderate RPB Condition	High RPB Condition			Moderate RPB Condition	High RPB Condition		
Outcome Variables	***M (SD)***	***M (SD)***	***t***	***p***	***M (SD)***	***M (SD)***	***t***	***p***
Relationship Pedestal Belief	**2.38 (1.08)**	**2.91 (1.23)**	**2.97**	**.003**	**2.19 (1.07)**	**2.66 (1.26)**	**2.75**	**.007**
Fear of Being Single	2.87 (.945)	2.91 (.838)	.313	.754	2.51 (1.02)	2.78 (1.14)	1.69	.093
Negative Mood	-	-	-	-	**2**.67 **(1**.39**)**	**3.30 (1.5**9**)**	**2**.89	**.004**
Life Satisfaction	5.13 (1.20)	4.89 (1.18)	-1.27	.205	3.53 (1.54)	3.20 (1.46)	-1.50	.134
Psychological Need Satisfaction	**5.28 (.974)**	**4.95 (1.08)**	**-2.07**	**.039**	4.82 (1.26)	4.69 (1.20)	-.692	.490
Commitment Desirability	**6.91 (1.59)**	**7.48 (1.58)**	**2.34**	**.020**	5.78 (2.20)	6.21 (2.03)	1.37	.173
Commitment Readiness	5.18 (1.83)	5.07 (2.05)	-.347	.729	5.36 (2.15)	5.17 (2.27)	-.582	.561

Note. RPB = Relationship Pedestal Belief. Significant group differences appear in bold.

Table 3. ***Correlations Across Self-Report Measures in Study 3.***

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Relationship Pedestal Beliefs (RPB)	–	.33**	-.13*	-.21**	.18**	.22**	.20**
2. Fear of Being Single		–	-.20**	-.33**	.39**	.38**	.28**
3. Life Satisfaction			–	.53**	-.34**	.06	.06
4. Psychological Need Satisfaction				–	-.51**	.03	.11
5. Negative Mood					–	.04	-.05
6. Commitment Desirability						–	.42**
7. Commitment Readiness							–

Note. *p <.05. **p <.01.

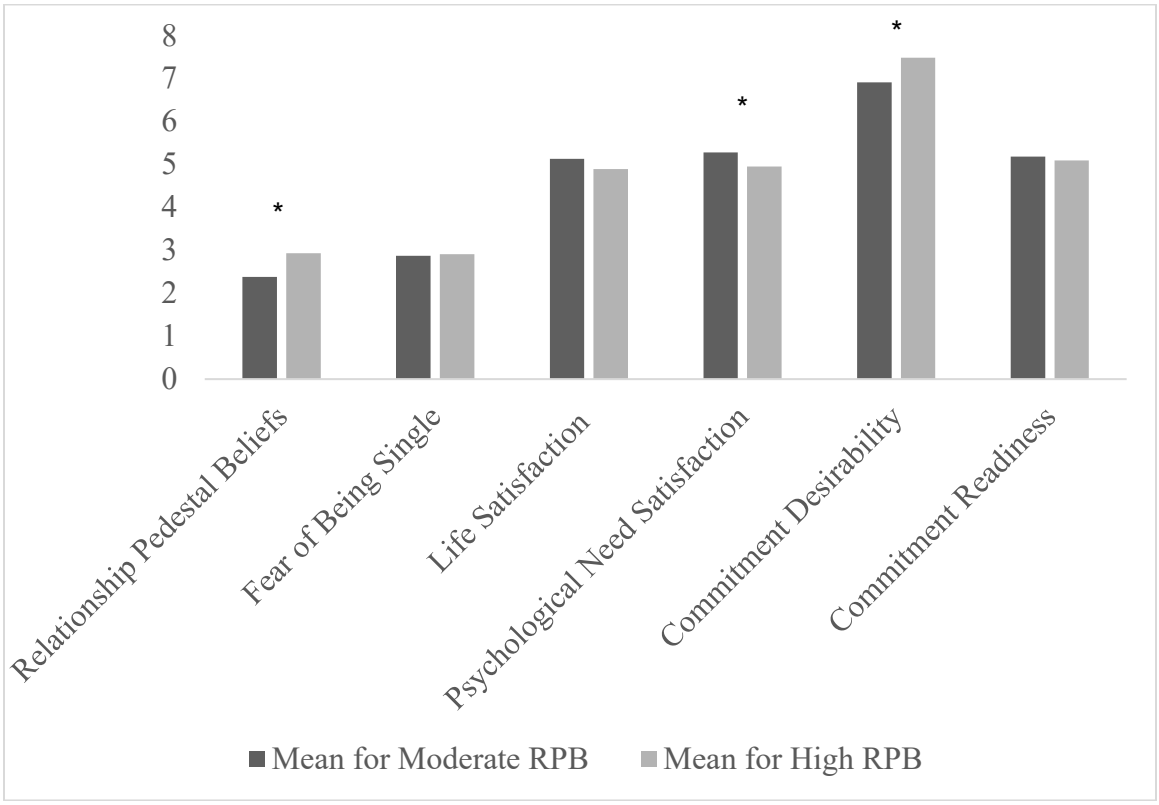
Table 4. ***Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results across Study 3.***

	Low RPB Condition	Moderate Condition	High Condition		
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*p*	*f (df 353)*
Outcome Variables					
Relationship Pedestal Belief	2.52 (1.11)	2.48 (1.15)	2.47 (0.94)	.932	.070
Fear of Being Single	2.99 (0.88)	2.88 (1.02)	2.93 (0.98)	.703	.352
Negative Mood	3.34 (1.42)	3.20 (1.35)	3.30 (1.43)	.758	.277
Life Satisfaction	4.33 (1.31)	4.00 (1.46)	4.04 (1.30)	.120	2.13
Psychological Need Satisfaction	**5.07 (1.01)**	**4.75 (1.04)**	4.97 (1.00)	**.048**	3.07
Commitment Desirability	7.11 (1.70)	6.98 (1.79)	7.40 (1.33)	.125	2.10
Commitment Readiness	5.18 (2.14)	5.30 (1.85)	5.37 (2.04)	.762	.272

Note. RPB = Relationship Pedestal Belief. Significant group differences appear in bold (Post-Hoc Tukey HSD). RPB has *df* of 352

Figures

Figure 1. **Group Mean Differences Between Moderate and High Relationship Pedestal Belief (RPB) Conditions (Study 1).**



Note. *p < .05.

Figure 2 **Theoretical Mediation Model of the Indirect Effects of Studies 1 and 2.**

A

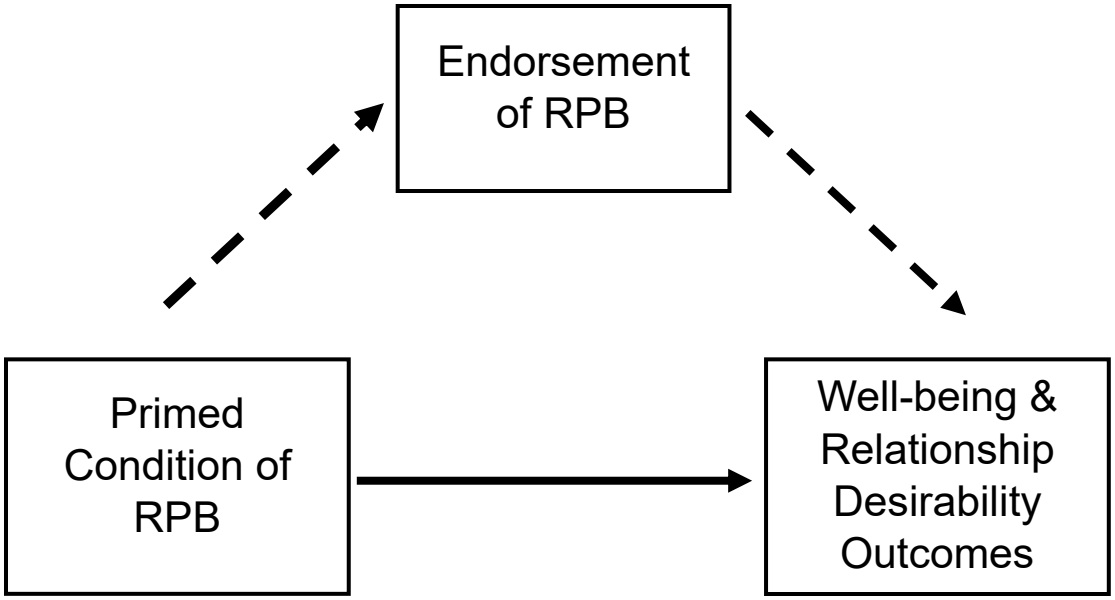
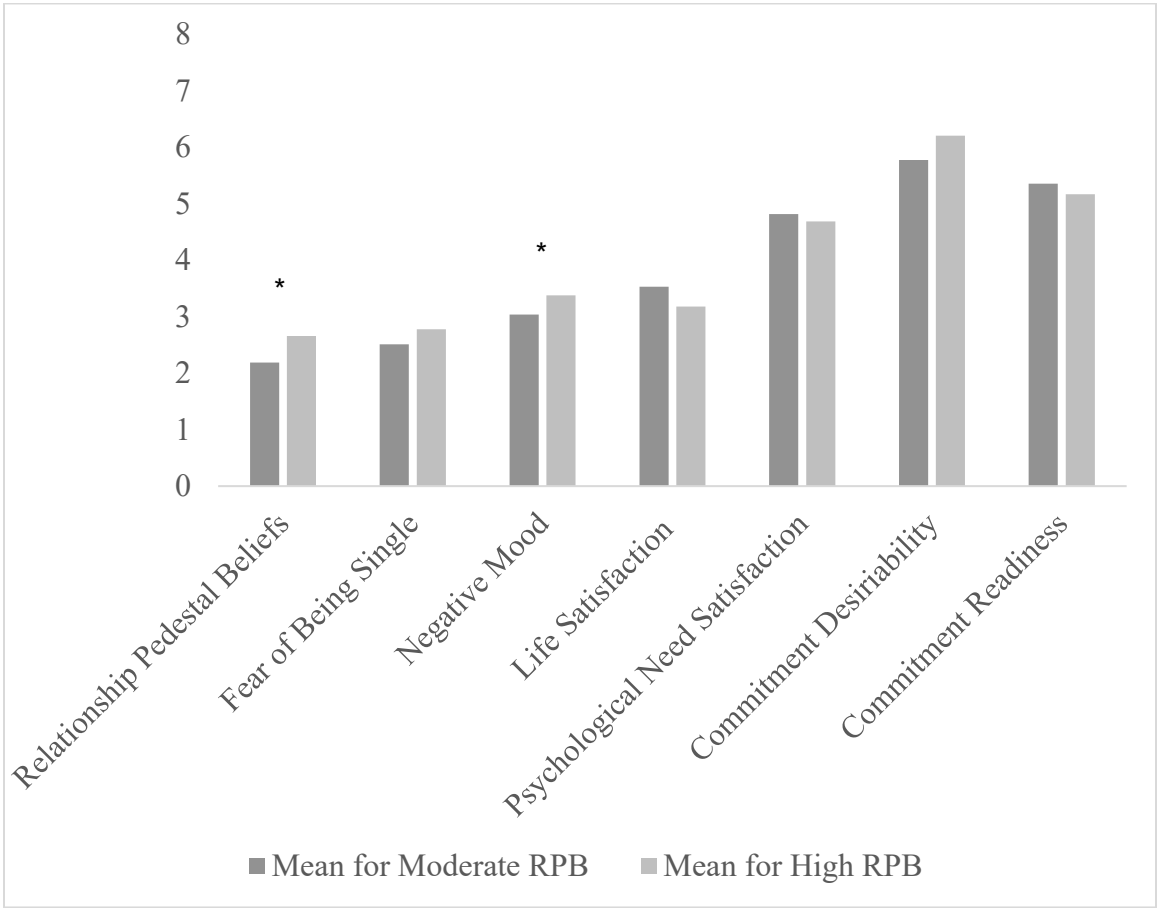
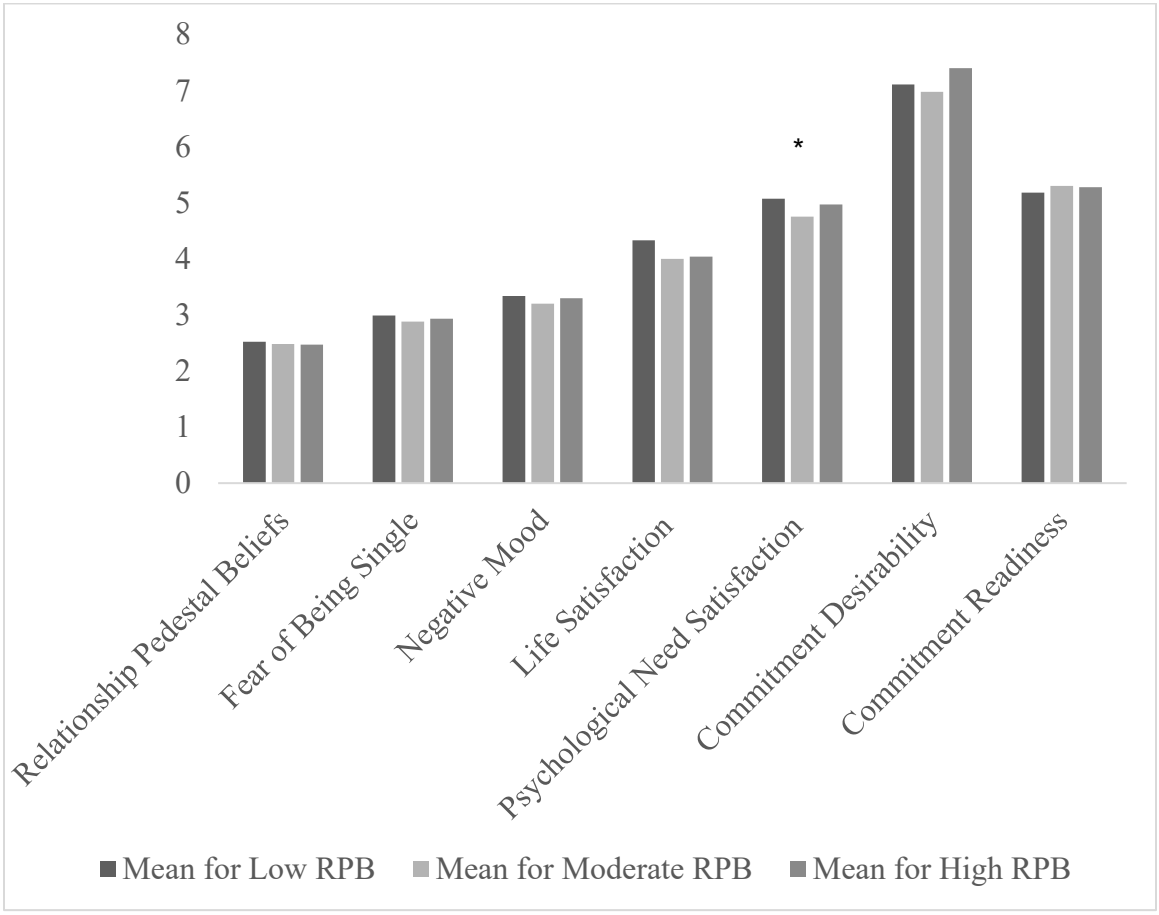


Figure 3. **Group Mean Differences Between Moderate and High Relationship Pedestal Belief (RPB) Conditions (Study 2).**



Note. *$p < .05$.

Figure 4. **Group Mean Differences between Low, Moderate, and High Relationship Pedestal Belief (RPB) Conditions (Study 3).**



Note. $^{*}p < .05$.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that it is (1) possible to shift relationship pedestal belief via priming relationship pedestal belief, and (2) that priming RPB does predict some group differences in personal well-being and desire for a relationship. This research is novel as it is the first attempt to prime RPB and expands singlehood research by highlighting how individual differences such as RPB might determine single peoples' well-being and relationship desire outcomes. This research will broaden the knowledge about single people. Moreover, this research provides evidence that single people's well-being may be improved by counteracting societal belief that place relationships on a pedestal. This work has the potential to inform future research and interventions that might challenge societal notions that one needs a relationship to be happy and to maximize single people's well-being.

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Appendix A.

High endorsement of RPB prime (Studies 1 and 2)

[Removed due to trademark]

Moderate endorsement of RPB prime (Studies 1 and 2)

[Removed due to trademark]

Appendix B.

High endorsement of RPB Prime (Study3)

[Removed due to trademark]

Moderate endorsement of RPB prime (Study 3)

[Removed due to trademark]

Low endorsement of RPB prime (Study 3)

[Removed due to trademark]