

*Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies invites abstract submissions for a special issue scheduled for publication in September 2025.*

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## TOWARDS INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST SINGLEHOOD STUDIES

Alongside the growing share of single people globally (Kislev, 2019; Adamczyk & Trepanowski, 2023), the need for scholarly attention to singlehood as an identity, an experience, and a socio-cultural phenomenon is increasingly recognized. Historically, research has tended to take singlehood as a byproduct of coupledness, implying that single lives are viewed as empty, meaningless and marked by failure (Cobb, 2012; Lahad, 2017; Pickens & Braun, 2018). Moreover, scientific accounts of singlehood often simplistically draw associations with wellbeing and happiness, assuming that coupled individuals are better off on both variables (see critiques of these approaches, e.g. DePaulo, 2023a; Lahad, 2023). In response, leading singlehood scholar Bella DePaulo (2017, 2023a) argues that research must take singlehood as an object of study in its own right. This means that we need to approach *singlehood as a process of subjectivation and*, rather than uncritically reproducing assumptions and stereotypes about single people as (only) lonely and miserable, we must openly *explore the multiplex configurations of singlehood and singles' varied life experiences*.

By mobilizing their activist traditions of questioning mainstream knowledge-production paradigms as well as social hegemonies and injustices, gender studies and related critical fields (such as queer studies, critical disability (or crip) studies, and critical race studies) are ideally positioned to take on the study of singlehood. These fields of study are already undertaking research on singles, with scholars from various (other) fields also engaging with feminist and other critical epistemologies in their studies of singlehood. This special issue therefore constitutes a concerted effort to bring together such fairly scattered research, with the ambition of showing, echoing Kinneret Lahad<sup>1</sup>, how intersectional feminist and related epistemologies are central to advancing the field of singlehood studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Kinneret Lahad raised this point in her keynote address at the *International Conference on Singlehood* on December 15th 2023.

### *Mobilizing intersectional feminist epistemologies*

Scholars have explored gendered (Davies, 2003) and sexuality-related (Hostetler & Cohler, 1997; Kolehmainen, Lahti & Kinnunen, 2023) aspects of singlehood. Specifically, feminist and queer studies have made significant contributions to singlehood studies through their critique of the institution of marriage and of studies centering the adverse consequence of (heterosexual) couplenormativity for those who (for various reasons) do or cannot live up to it (Roseneil et al., 2020; Lavender-Scott, 2023; Tessler, 2023). From a gender studies perspective, straying from couplenormativity can imply unintelligible gender performances because of entrenched socio-cultural understandings that, for women, femininity equals motherhood precisely in the context of heterosexual committed relationships or marriage (Cobb, 2012; Gilchrist, 2023; Lai, Lim & Higgins, 2015; Roseneil et al., 2020). However, singlehood may also give women the opportunity to invest in their careers, to gain autonomy and invest in their social lives (Pudrovska et al., 2006; Rosenfeld, 2007; Van den Berg & Verbakel, 2024).

With the increasing awareness of intersectionality, gendered and sexuality-related aspects of singlehood further vary across other axes of difference (Kislev & Marsh, 2023). Some studies, for instance, emphasize the importance of the intersections between singlehood and age (Ermer & Keenoy, 2023; Timonen & Doyle, 2013; van den Berg & Verbakel, 2022), singlehood and race (e.g., Moorman, 2020; Council & Marsh, 2023), singlehood and masculinity (Hostetler, 2009; Eck, 2014; Mrozowicz-Wrońska et al., 2023), less commonly singlehood and class (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016; Marsh, 2023), as well as the varied ways that singlehood comes to matter across different social, organizational and institutional setting, such as work and leisure (see below).

Finally, with the seminal concept of ‘singlism’, DePaulo (2007) articulated the power dynamics inherent in single subjectivity. The use of the singlism concepts this way enables the showcasing of the injustices that singles face (e.g., in relation to access to housing, Bhargava & Chilana, 2020). While unveiling social and structural injustices through scientific work is a first step to resisting such injustices, research so far has engaged little with how singles – in (small) everyday actions or through advocacy – challenge stigma and advocate for change (for notable exceptions see Lahad & Kravel-Tovi, 2019; Kravel-Tovi & Lahad, 2021). Therefore, for us, approaching singlehood studies from an intersectional-feminist and/or related critical starting point does not simply imply the *use* of a set of specific methodologies and theories, but rather a recognition of the politics of identity and knowledge creation. We therefore invite prospective contributors to this special issue to embrace and embody activist scholarship for positive change for singles.

### *Feminist perspectives in singlehood studies across different fields and disciplines*

While singlehood studies remains an emergent field of study, the topic has been taken up across multiple thematic fields and disciplines. We mention here a non-exhaustive list of these fields. In the field of work and organizations, singlehood research has mostly focused on work/life conflicts around expectations of singles’ unlimited availability (Utoft, Vertelyte & Gao, 2023), and work/life balance policies that do not cater to singles’ needs (Utoft, 2020), for many (and in these cases specifically), given the absence of childcare obligations. In the realm of singles’ private lives, singles’ dating practices have been studied (e.g. Adamczyk, Janowicz & Mrozowicz-Wronska, 2022; McKeown, 2017; Shevtsova, 2023),

friendships (McKeown, 2021), and leisure activities such as solo dining (Lahad & May, 2017; McKeown & Miller, 2019) or traveling (Heimtun, 2012). Marketing and consumptions research has also engaged with singlehood (Lai, Lim & Higgins, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2023), as has research on television and film on representations of singlehood across different gendered positions (Cobb, 2012; Gilchrist, 2023; Taylor, 2011; Yodovich & Lahad, 2018). We believe it is time to bring insights from such different fields together to show what feminist and related critical epistemologies specifically can offer to the study of singlehood.

### *Focus of special issue*

Building on the above emerging scholarly legacy, with this special issue, we want to invite intersectional-feminist scholars across different fields, disciplines and national contexts to take up the research topic of singlehood. Our ambition is to show the centrality of intersectional feminist and related critical epistemologies in moving the field of singlehood studies forward. In particular, we hope to see contributions that challenge hitherto dominant epistemological paradigms and widely unquestioned assumptions to show what gender and feminist studies (broadly defined) specifically has to offer singlehood studies. We hope to receive contributions that embrace complexity, nuance, ambivalence, and contradictions in their methodologies and empirical narratives, as well as in conceptual pieces, and we expect that intersectionality will play a key role herein. We welcome papers that, using a variety of methodologies, will address the following or related themes:

### *Gendered singlehood and relationships, such as:*

- Single parenthood
- Variations in (most) important relationships in adult singles' lives (incl. friendships)
- Singles' relationships with children in their lives (e.g. being aunts, uncles or other significant adults)
- Singles' dating lives
- Singlehood and humanimal relationships (e.g. singles' relationships with their pets)

### *Intersectional analyses of gendered singlehood, such as:*

- Different kinds of singlehood: 'single at heart'(DePaulo 2023b), widow(er)s, divorcees, serially monogamous singles, long-term singles or lifelong (involuntary) singles
- Singlehood and class
- Singlehood and fatness
- Singlehood and disability
- Singlehood and ethnicity
- Singlehood across different sexualities (incl. asexuality or aromanticism)

### *Gendered singlehood across different domains, such as:*

- Singles' experiences at work beyond work/life conflicts
- Singlehood and (alternative) housing (e.g. communal living)
- Singlehood and mobility (incl. for work or leisure)
- Singlehood in popular culture, media and marketing
- Singlehood and social media

### *Political singlehood:*

- Structural 'singlisms' (e.g. singles' experiences of discrimination in the health care system)
- Cultural 'singlisms' (e.g. micro-aggressions and everyday social exclusions)
- Singles' resistance, activism and advocacy (incl., everyday (micro-)resistances and the emergence of, e.g., podcasts on 'reclaiming' singlehood and singles' empowerment<sup>2</sup>)

## Preparing your submission

We welcome two types of submissions: articles and essays. Both may take a scholarly or non-traditional form, and be theoretical, commentary, empirical, poetic and/or artistic. All methodologies are welcomed. Full-length articles contain a maximum of 6500 words and essays 2500 words (both incl. bibliography). **Please note that these maximum word counts apply before and after the peer review process.**

Please submit an abstract of 500 words for research papers or 200 words for essays by the **10<sup>th</sup> of August 2024**. Abstracts (and manuscripts) can be written in English or Dutch, and may be empirically situated in any national context. Note that the initial acceptance of an abstract does not guarantee publication as that the manuscripts will undergo a double-blinded review process. All accepted contributions will be published fully open access.

We strive for diversity among our contributors in terms of career stage, disciplines, self-identification, national location, and scholarly or activist affiliation. We are happy to accommodate different accessibility needs or diverse styles of communication. Please get in touch with (one of) the editors for any of these issues.

Please email your abstract proposal as a Word file to all of the guest editors:

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<sup>2</sup> Such as Dr Peter McGraw's 'Solo – The single person's guide to a remarkable life' and Lucy Meggeson's 'Spinsterhood reimaged'.

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### Timeline of publication process:

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