

Report on Discrimination Against Singles

You made an omission in your article claiming "bias against unmarrieds" (Part A, March 20). You quoted singles' rights proponents and never mentioned the marriage penalty that the tax laws inflict on all marriage partners. At this time of year, especially, married people are reminded most painfully how Congress and the state Legislature have punished them merely because they are married.

An unmarried person gets a \$3,100 standard deduction against taxable income, a married person only \$2,600. At the higher end it gets worse: Each single person gets a \$30,000 tax deduction against income in the alternative minimum tax, each spouse gets only \$20,000. And so it goes throughout the entire tax code.

ALBERT J. FORN
Santa Monica

Discrimination against singles? Wait a minute! Let's look at this from another point of view.

The strength and stability of our society comes from our families. As a society we have very good reasons for encouraging people to marry and stay married. Is this necessarily discrimination against singles?

The insurance companies, quoted in your article, have given a good reason for giving rate preference to married people; married people on the average have better driving records. Insurance companies are not going to simply lower the rates for single people, they will raise the rates for married people to compensate for the higher claims made by singles. Is this fair?

Let's look at the statistics given, unmarried-55%, married-45%. According to the article, these figures were based on the Census Bureau's definition of "marrying age" as 15 years or older. Just how many 15 year olds do you know who are married? I would imagine that if this figure were adjusted to age 20 (which is still young for marriage considering the trend toward later marriages), the percentage would drop considerably. A more realistic percentage of unmarried is probably less than 50%.

In conclusion, let's stop and think sensibly about this issue from both the married and the single point of view. Do we have good reasons for giving preference in certain situations to married people? I think we do. Is this necessarily discrimination?

LEILA LANGSTON
Villa Park

I agree with many of the people quoted in the article that single people in this country suffer discrimination that is widespread. Last October a friend of mine died in Chicago. He was an only child, and his mother and stepfather had died the previous year. He had no close relatives, except for two cousins, one who lives somewhere in California, and the other who lives somewhere in the Chicago area. No one knew for sure where.

My friend's best friend was with him when he died. He attempted to claim the body, knowing that the cousins would be unaware of the death. He stated he was my friend's lover, to no avail. The hospital stated that only a relative could claim the body. Of course, there were no relatives available. The hospital staff said that, come Christmas (only three months away) perhaps the cousins would send a card, and they could be traced; and then they could dispose of the body. Fortunately, that happened. The cousin in the Chicago area was contacted in late January, and my friend was finally cremated in early February of this year. He laid in the morgue for four months, simply because the hospital would not recognize a non-married relationship. His friends around the country were deeply saddened by this turn of events.

Elsewhere in the article, Beverly Sheldon makes several mean-spirited and self-righteous comments about, among other things, single people having more diseases. I'm single, and I don't have any diseases. Surely Mrs. Sheldon wasn't born married; did her marriage miraculously cure her of the diseases she had been carrying? I think the Centers for Disease Control should be informed about this wondrous cure.

SAM A. LOLLAR
Pomona

So you report "Widespread Bias Against Unmarrieds." A better headline would have been "Remnants of Support for the Institution of Marriage Not Yet Totally Stamped Out." So 55% of Angelenos are unmarried. This fact bespeaks some benign trends, but mostly some very tragic ones—like a nasty divorce rate, casual unions, with widespread illegitimacy—most often on the part of irresponsible teen-agers—resulting in unsupervised young males running rampant in death-dealing gangs.

The stable heterosexual union (preferably legally sanctioned in humans) was not thought up yesterday. It is the center piece of much mammalian, and certainly most human biology and culture—praised in romance, song and story and solemnized by religion. With all its faults, it is still the most salutary unit in society's mosaic, the best milieu in which to raise children, and for most adults to grow old in. I and I am sure the vast majority of Americans are not prepared to see it disappear, to be replaced by who knows what.

In our time marriage has had many, often unrealistic, demands placed upon it. Now it must accomplish the self-fulfillment of both partners. It needs all the support it can get. It can do without the trivialization by gays who equate it with their affairs, or demographers who predict its total demise. Even though threatened at present, it will be here long after its detractors have gone. Although I'm a single—recently widowed—I'm all for any preferential treatment that can be provided to married couples and families. Let's not kick the institution when it's down. Let's give it all the help we can.

JESSE H. HARVEY
Whittier

Thank you for the timely article on discrimination against single people. I grit my teeth every time I pay my income taxes (standard deduction only) and my car insurance premiums (spotless 28-year driving record), but the story pointed out several forms of anti-single bias that I wasn't even aware of. Congratulations to organizations such as Wells Fargo Bank and Greater Los Angeles Zoo Assn., who have taken positive steps to end this bias, and to Thomas F. Coleman (chairman of the Consumer Task Force on Marital Status Discrimination) for his succinct summary of the problem. We are indeed fortunate to have such an eloquent advocate.

The statements made by Beverly Sheldon were outrageous and a gratuitous insult to half of this country's population. Apparently, it wasn't enough for the Sheldons and their Traditional Values Coalition to declare that gays' lives have no validity; now all unmarried people are to be shunned for the same reasons: They lack stability, do not reproduce, and "carry more diseases." Mrs. Sheldon then has the gall to say that she opposes discrimination! Would she have

us believe that these assumed characteristics miraculously disappear when single people marry, or that married people are universally virtuous while singles, whether straight or gay, are of no value to society or to themselves? The fundamentalist tenet that a fertile marriage constitutes the only legitimate lifestyle is preposterous and deserves to be rejected out of hand.

There appear to be no limits to the intolerance and insensitivity of the Sheldons and others of their ilk. These people graphically illustrate the depths to which prejudice can reach and how much work remains to be done to eliminate it. Contrary to Mrs. Sheldon's belief, I do not wish to rescind the benefits that married people enjoy; I simply wish to share in those benefits and be allowed to live my life as a responsible single person without the social and financial penalties I presently bear. Coleman's task force has my wholehearted support.

DAVID SEARS
Playa del Rey

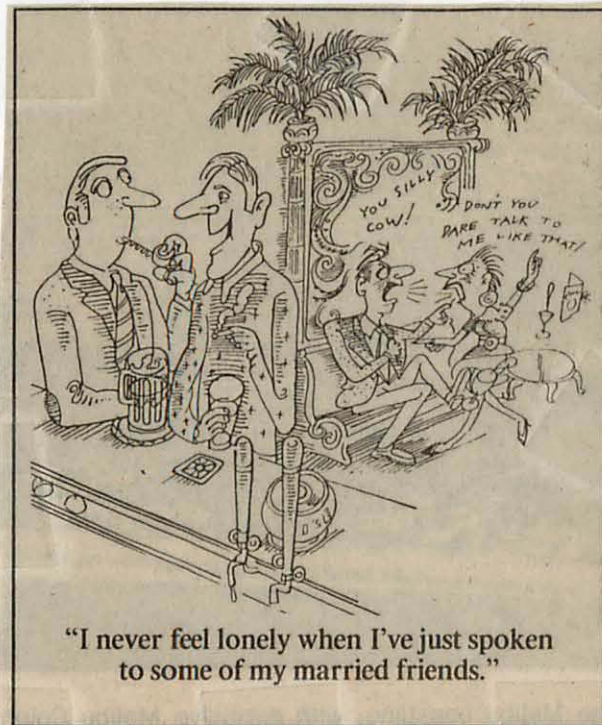
Beverly Sheldon, director of research for the Traditional Values Coalition in Irvine, is quoted, "Single people aren't providing the same stability to our country, they're not providing offspring, they carry more diseases." I hope Pope John Paul doesn't take it too personally. Sheldon's rhetoric reflects the tone of what her organization should be called, "Traditional Discrimination Coalition."

JEFFREY FLEMING
Laguna Beach

There is indeed rampant discrimination against singles in society today. Mrs. Sheldon chooses The Times as a forum in which to air her twin diseases, prejudice and ignorance.

Fortunately, both problems can be solved by massive doses of education.

HUGH M. FLYNN
Simi Valley



PUNCH