

LOVE, LIFE AND THE UNMARRIED WOMAN:

Single and looking beats empty marriage

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Is it better to be alone without a spouse, or to have a spouse . . . and still be alone? I never thought I'd find myself "50, never married, no kids." But then again, most of the people I know who are married, despite appearances, wish they weren't. I'm often told how "lucky" I am to be single and free. The grass is always greener.

I'm not a pessimist. I have always believed in marriage and still do: Finding your soulmate and living happily ever after, until death do you part? Utopia. I believe in traditional roles. My professional career notwithstanding, I'll gladly have my man's dinner cooked, and bath water drawn when he comes home from work. I'm a proponent of mutual spoiling.

But today I know only four couples who say they would marry each other again. The other men and women say they stay for the kids, their social image, the spouse's corporate image and/or money—it's simply cheaper to keep her. So, many remain, mostly sexless (or cheating); unhappy; feeling stuck, disconnected and alone—even when their spouse is in the same room or bed.

Two examples I'll share. A husband recently moved out of his palatial home, stating, at the age of 60, he wants to be happy for his last years. He would no longer keep up the front.

Of their 39 marital years, the wife said that "12 were happy; the rest, just a performance."

Afraid of what others might say, and that God will punish him if he gets another divorce, another man remains married to his "trophy" wife, though the novelty has worn off and he merrily lives his life on the road. She's present for social or corporate events, when "the wife is required attire." Despite the emotional void, she gets to shop at will and he gets to say he's been married for "x" years. Is that maintaining a marriage, or the image of marriage?

I must be true to myself; I can't—won't—play that game.

Yes, I've been proposed to, and I could marry today, if I'd just say yes. But I'm not the type to get married just to check that off my "to do" list. I've always followed my gut and the tremendous spirit of discernment God gave me. With that guidance, I haven't made any really dumb decisions in my life and I certainly won't start now with something as important as marriage. I still believe in the dream; the soulmate, that sho'nuff love. But I'm smart enough to know that the love butterflies and mind-blowing sex don't last forever, making communication, laughter and companionship crucial.

Many ask, "You've never married? But you're so pretty, brilliant, funny, sexy; a great cook. You've a good heart, generous spirit," etc. I've identified the reasons: I never learned "the game"; "Daddy" wasn't there to teach me. (Note: I recently "met" him for the first time in 35 years, hoping to see who he is and what role his absence played in my life.)

For many of my early, marriageable years, I was involved with an older, prominent man, but marriage was not an option. And the one lad who broke my heart (and later married a woman he picked in my image) has since told me, "Mel, I [expletive] up; I married the wrong girl." [Life is sweet, ain't it? Insert Holy Ghost shout here.]

I practiced medicine with all my heart and soul; I didn't have, or take, time to pursue marriage prospects. I gained weight—an occasional place to hide—and I didn't always know my hourglass curves were a good thing. Perhaps I spent too much time in church and not enough time socializing. I now say God gave us life; get out there and live it. Pray and play. Balance your life.

I'd also found an easy comfort in being able to travel when I wanted, to date whom I wanted, and to go out or come back as I please. There are tremendous spiritual wonders in freedom and solitude, to a point.

The recent New York Times article provided stories of many women who were happy "living single." Many were divorcees vowing never to marry again, while others were like me.

While there is some comfort in knowing I'm not alone, I am tired of having to think about every darn

thing. And when the house creaks at 3 AM, I rest easier knowing someone's there who's got my back—figuratively and literally.

Despite the report's dismal finding that only 30 percent of Black women are married, I haven't sworn off the possibility, nor desire, to marry one day. (My father's genetics suggest that I have 50 more years to find and enjoy Mr. Right.)

Last, there is an alternative to my opening question: I can be without a spouse without being alone.

According to married male friends who love me and told me I was taking the Bible's "whosoever findeth a wife" line too literally—"he's not just going to show up on your doorstep"—I needed to get more proactive socially. I hesitantly joined an Internet dating site and, mostly, it's been a great experience. There really are good, available, totally straight men out here. Touch. Love. Laugh. Dance. Cuddle and Play—that's my plan.

I am blessed. My life is rather comfortable and drama-free. And as I told my father, at this point I don't need any man in my life who's not going to be a positive. I'm patient enough to find the smooth fit.

As always, I enjoy the conversation, romance, protection, warmth, comfort, laughter and steady companionship of a good man; and right now, I'm presently, thoroughly, enjoying the renewed ride. I wish the same for those of you who are married.

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