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1. What first drew you to relationship science?

When I was in my undergraduate personality course, I watched Robert Waldinger's TED talk on the Harvard Study of Adult Development. He discussed how the strongest predictor of well-being was not income, nor fame, or even your cholesterol levels, but it was the quality of your close relationships. Like many people who often get caught up in the hustle and bustle of daily life, I found it deeply moving to learn that close relationships may be the ultimate key to a happy life.

2. What's a project you're especially proud of right now, and why?

We've just resubmitted a project looking at how married and unmarried individuals' well-being differs around the globe. Using Gallup World Poll data spanning 168 countries (N = 2.5 million), we find that unmarried people are just as, if not happier, in most parts of the world (especially in lower GDP countries)! This runs counter to the decade-long conclusion that marriage = happiness, which has been founded mostly on Western data.

3. What do you find most exciting or rewarding about studying relationships?

I love talking to family, friends, and strangers about my work and being able to level it with their real lived experiences. Unlike studying some obscure chemical compound, research on singlehood and relationships invites personal experiences and (often strong) opinions. This makes for interesting conversations and extra data points for the anecdotal lab constantly running in my brain.

4. What's something about relationships that people often misunderstand—or that your work has changed your mind about?

As a Sex and the City fan, I've always thought singles were living a wild, social life, full of dating and casual hookups. However, my research actually found that when comparing the personalities of those who have been single or partnered for at least 6 months, singles were significantly more introverted than partnered people. We have further preliminary evidence that happy singles engage in reading and hobbies. So it appears Carrie Bradshaw's extraverted lifestyle is not representative of the average singles' experience.

5. What are you working on next, or what question are you most excited to pursue?

The Gallup project found that married people are happier in higher GDP countries, suggesting that material and economic resources may play a role in allowing relationships to truly thrive. Drawing on the revised Kenrick's Hierarchy of Needs, I'm hoping to further explore how basic needs (e.g., income, shelter) are associated with relationship formation and quality.

6. What advice would you give to students or early-career scholars interested in relationship science?

I think relationship science can be one of the hardest areas of social psychology because the constructs we study are so nuanced and difficult to both measure and model well. For that reason, my main advice to younger students is to invest heavily in methods and statistics early on–for example, pushing yourself to do everything in R. Strong methodological training allows you to be more thoughtful about measurement and about your analytic choices. When those foundations aren't solid, everything else can crumble.