

Description for the general public

The scientific goal of the project

The current project proposal employs the view of singlehood as an ambiguous loss, i.e., a situation in which a single individual experiences a psychological presence, but a physical absence of a partner/spouse. Such a situation is related to the lack of clear information whether a single individual will or will not meet a potential partner/spouse, and whether the meeting of this potential partner/spouse may occur in the very short or in the very long-term periods of time. Therefore, singlehood as an ambiguous loss represents an invisible loss since this loss pertains to the loss of non-materialized, anticipated life-time partner/spouse.

Regarding that ambiguous loss of singlehood may involve the negative health outcomes, the major aims of the current project proposal are as follows: 1) the determination of conditions under which single status as an ambiguous loss may lead to the boundary ambiguity, i.e., a perception of the loss which appears when thoughts, feelings, or actions of a person become affected by the lack of clarity concerning the presence or absence of a partner/spouse; 2) the determination of the direct and indirect effects of singlehood ambiguous loss on mental health; 3) the identification of what coping strategies and how these strategies play a buffering role in the link between singlehood ambiguous loss, boundary ambiguity and mental health. In other simple words, we are interested to determine when single status as an ambiguous loss may lead to boundary ambiguity, how single ambiguous loss may lead directly and indirectly (through boundary ambiguity and fear of being single) to negative mental health outcomes, and finally how these negative effects of ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity may be mitigated by the employment of several coping strategies by single individuals.

The description of research

The current project proposal involves a mix-method research. In other words, it means that in the project we will perform both qualitative and quantitative research. In the first stage of the investigation, we will perform the qualitative research by the employment of the narrative interviews. In these interviews we intend to recognize the history of long-term single adults (i.e., adults who are single from at least three years) in regard to the ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity, and in regard to the coping with singlehood ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity. In the second stage of the investigation, we will perform the preliminary validation study which will allow us to develop and validate three new tools to measure our three variables, i.e., ambiguous loss, boundary ambiguity, and coping strategies with ambiguous loss, boundary ambiguity among single adults. In the last third stage of the investigation, we will perform the substantial quantitative research with three assessments with 1-year intervals. This research will enable us to verify our research hypotheses.

The reasons for attempting a particular research topic

We are encouraged to undertake the research problem of long-termed adult singlehood as an ambiguous loss by 1) the notion of the rising number of single adults observed in Poland as well in other European and non-European countries in connection with the recognized in the literature crucial role of intimate relationships for human mental and physical health; 2) the intention to complete a gap in the research field of psychology since we still lack a comprehensive model or theory to describe and explain singlehood, and to predict its health outcomes in a long-term perspective involving both qualitative and quantitative aspects; 3) the need to focus solely on single individuals, i.e., this project is a response to the repeatedly expressed demand for research focusing exclusively on single people, and not comparing single individuals with partnered individuals what leads to the presentation of single people in a negative light.

The substantial expected results

The current project proposal is the first research project introducing a perspective of positive psychology into the research on singlehood. In other words, this project offers for the first time the shift from the prior researchers' focus on negative outcomes of singlehood to the focus on the question how single adults mitigate the negative outcomes of singlehood as ambiguous loss through employment of various coping strategies. The current project proposal is expected to provide a wide range data and results of qualitative and longitudinal quantitative nature. Among them, the most important findings will demonstrate the specificity of coping strategies with singlehood which are assumed to play a buffering role in the link between singlehood ambiguous loss and mental health measured in terms of positive indicators of mental health (well-being) and negative indicators of mental health (anxiety, depression, stress, substance use). The qualitative and longitudinal quantitative nature of the project's findings will also allow us to combine the subjective and objective perspectives of singlehood, and to identify the process of coping with singlehood ambiguous loss and ambiguity boundary by the employment of various coping strategies with ambiguous loss and ambiguity boundary by single individuals.