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The Diversity of Singlehood Experiences in the United States and Portugal: A Latent Profile Approach

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ABSTRACT

Two cross-sectional studies with individuals who are single in the United States and Portugal explored how singlehood expectations and sexual health and well-being motives determined latent profiles, and whether profiles differed in personal beliefs and experiences. Participants with a *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood* profile were fearful of singlehood, endorsed more relationship pedestal beliefs, and reported more negative reasons for being single and more reasons for enacting condomless casual sex. Despite focusing on pleasure promotion in sex, they also reported lower sexual quality of life and well-being. Participants with a *pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood* profile were comfortable with singlehood while maintaining some relationship desire. They focused on personal enjoyment and pleasure promotion in sex, and reported higher sexual quality of life and well-being. Participants with a *cautious voluntary singlehood* profile were focused on disease prevention in sex. They were the most committed to singlehood and endorsed more positive reasons for being single, but also reported lower sexual satisfaction and well-being. These profiles were consistent across countries. Taken together, our findings illustrate the dynamic ways in which some individuals are more successful at navigating through singlehood, whereas others have worse experiences due in part to internalized and socialized norms and expectations attached to relationship status.

1 | Introduction

Singlehood (here defined as not having a significant intimate relationship) is an increasingly common experience in contemporary societies, with a growing number of individuals opting to remain single or experiencing extended periods of singlehood at different stages of life (Eurostat 2024; US Census Bureau 2023). These societal changes have heightened the value placed on choice, framing individuals as autonomous and capable of making independent decisions across various areas of life (Bear and Offer 2024). Unlike in pre-industrial contexts, the reliance of modern relationships on individual agency and social skills (e.g., such as flirting ability) could have also contributed to an increased number of individuals who are voluntarily or involuntarily single (Apostolou 2019; Trepanowski et al. 2022).

Despite its growing prevalence, the representation of singlehood in scientific literature remains overly simplistic. For many years, singlehood has been seen as a monolithic phenomenon (Beckmeyer and Jamison 2023), assuming that individuals' ultimate goal is to have a significant relationship but are temporarily or permanently unable to do so (i.e., involuntary singlehood; Stein 1978). This narrow framing, however, overlooks the diversity of singlehood experiences, namely, as a voluntary status, a personal choice, or a meaningful identity in its own right (Fitzpatrick 2023; Kislev 2024). Indeed, it can be perceived

as advantageous for various reasons (e.g., having more time to oneself, being able to focus on personal goals; Apostolou and Christoforou 2022), and beneficial for personal growth and well-being (Beckmeyer and Jamison 2024).

By shifting attention to the diverse motivations for being and remaining single, researchers can more accurately examine the nuances and complexities within this group of individuals. Crucially, this involves understanding singlehood not in comparison to other lifestyles, identities, or living arrangements but by identifying the factors that shape the varied experiences of individuals who are single. In this work, we examine how singlehood profiles are determined by psychosocial factors—singlehood expectations, as well as motives for sexual health and well-being in casual sex relationships. We then examine how singlehood profiles differ across several variables related to personal beliefs and experiences.

1.1 | Diverse Profiles of Singlehood

Considering the need to capture this complexity and address a broader scope of research questions, Park et al. (2024) proposed a within-group approach aimed at examining how individual differences shape response patterns, as well as mapping variations among individuals who are single considering several variables at once. The strength of this approach lies in its ability to capture the variability of experiences and explore the circumstances or personal characteristics that may lead individuals to either thrive or struggle in their singlehood (Girme et al. 2023). Related to this approach, Tessler (2023) proposed a theoretical framework to differentiate singlehood profiles by examining individuals' levels of openness to romantic relationships and their relationship desires. For example, some individuals may voluntarily remain single and have a low desire for a relationship, but remain open to that possibility should the right circumstances arise. In contrast, other individuals may experience involuntary singlehood, marked by a strong desire for partnership but limited openness due to situational or personal constraints. Aligned with this framework, Apostolou, Sullman, et al. (2024) found that individuals who are involuntarily single experienced the lowest life satisfaction and emotional well-being when compared to individuals who were single by choice or in between relationships (though see also Adamczyk 2017).

Only recently has research started to employ this approach to identify different profiles among individuals who are single, the nuances in their beliefs and behaviors, and how these profiles shape behaviors. For example, some individuals embrace singlehood as an opportunity to focus on self-enhancement (e.g., personal growth; Beckmeyer and Jamison 2024), and those who are more committed to singlehood are also more satisfied and invested in their lifestyle, and perceive alternative scenarios as less appealing (Beauparlant et al. 2024). In another study, Apostolou, Tekeş, and Kagialis (2024) found that individuals with higher self-esteem displayed less fear about the prospect of not having a romantic partner (i.e., lower fear of singlehood). In contrast, fear of singlehood can be a source of distress for some individuals and a motivation to settle for less fulfilling relationships (Spielmann et al. 2013).

This may be particularly salient for individuals with anxious attachment styles, to whom a strong desire for relationships tends to coexist with fears of abandonment and rejection, whereas individuals who are securely attached are less fearful of being single but remain open to future romantic opportunities (Pepping et al. 2025).

In their study, Park et al. (2023) identified three profiles of singlehood. Specifically, *independent singles* were satisfied with and motivated to maintain their singlehood status; *socially focused singles* had negative perceptions toward singlehood and desired a relationship the most; and *low safety focus singles* were satisfied with their lives but were at the same time ambivalent about singlehood. An important aspect of this study is the finding that individuals across singlehood profiles differed in their motives for health protection and partner pursuit. Specifically, independent singles scored the lowest on mate-seeking motives, low safety focus singles scored the lowest on health protection motives, and socially focused singles scored the highest on both motives. These results are aligned with other studies showing that individuals who are voluntarily single are also more satisfied with their sex life and report high sexual satisfaction and sexual functioning (Apostolou and Hadjikyriacou 2023; Fischer 2023; Park et al. 2021; Træen and Kvalem 2022), whereas individuals who are involuntarily single are more prone to riskier health behaviors and predisposed to casual partners (Spielmann et al. 2023). Although Park et al. (2023) used general social motives to determine singlehood profiles, their results are aligned with research framed by the Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins 2015). Broadly, this theory proposes that goal pursuit is driven by safety (i.e., seeking stability and avoiding negative outcomes) and nurturance motives (i.e., seeking gains and pursuing positive outcomes). Extending this framework to the experiences in casual sex of individuals who are single, Rodrigues et al. (2022, 2023, 2024) have shown that individuals more focused on disease prevention tend to prioritize their sexual health (e.g., use condoms more consistently), whereas individuals more focused on pleasure promotion tend to prioritize their sexual well-being (e.g., have condomless sex with more partners and report more sexual satisfaction). We argue that bridging both lines of research offers new opportunities to explore how singlehood profiles are shaped not only by singlehood expectations (e.g., fear of being single) but also by motives uniquely related to sexual health and well-being (i.e., sexual regulatory focus).

1.2 | Overview of the Studies

The recent focus on the variety of singlehood experiences has revealed that individuals navigate through singlehood differently (e.g., Girme et al. 2023; Park et al. 2021; Pepping et al. 2025). The current challenge for empirical research is thus to understand the nuances between singlehood experiences and their association with different singlehood trajectories. In two cross-sectional studies, we employed an exploratory person-centered approach (i.e., Latent Profile Analysis [LPA]; Bauer 2022) aimed at identifying latent profiles based on the overall response pattern to a broader set of variables (cf. Pepping et al. 2025), and examining similarities and differences between profiles (e.g., Park et al. 2023). We additionally compared two sociocultural contexts in Study 2—the United States and Portugal. To the

best of our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the singlehood phenomenon in Portugal, and we believe this is particularly relevant, considering that the casual sex panorama is changing (Alvarez et al. 2023). Hence, our studies seek to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances within singlehood experiences, explore motives related to singlehood, provide insights into its potential benefits and consequences for health and well-being, and gather evidence on the sociocultural generalizability of singlehood experiences.

2 | Study 1

In a sample of individuals in the United States, we explored whether singlehood profiles could be determined based on individuals' fear of singlehood, willingness to settle for less in relationships, and sexual regulatory focus. We then explored whether singlehood profiles differed in the endorsement of motives to have sex with casual partners. We decided to use an exploratory approach to examine emerging singlehood profiles and, therefore, did not advance any a priori hypotheses.

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in August 2022 as part of a project approved by the Ethics Council at Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Ref.: 70/2021). Prospective participants were recruited through the Clickworker platform (https://www.clickworker.com). Users registered in the United States who were over the age of 18 were invited to participate in a study aimed at examining personal attitudes and beliefs about interpersonal and sexual relationships. Given our goal to establish profiles of singlehood taking into account singlehood expectations and sexual motives, participants were required to be single (i.e., without a significant intimate relationship) and have engaged in sexual activity in the past. These criteria were assessed with pre-screening questions after the participation consent was secured. Individuals who failed to meet all inclusion criteria were automatically redirected to the end of the survey and thanked for their interest. Eligible participants proceeded to the survey, which included two attention check items ("Please select the response '3'. This is not a trick question"). At the end, participants were asked, "How much attention did you pay to this questionnaire while you were completing it?" (1 = *No attention*, 2 = *Very little attention*, 3 = *Moderate amount of attention*, 4 = *Very close attention*) and to select one of the options: 1 = *I wish to keep my responses for analysis* or 2 = *I wish to remove my responses and prevent them from being analyzed*. Participants who completed the survey received $2 on their user account.

Of the 618 eligible participants, we excluded those who failed to complete the survey ($n = 82$), failed at least one of the attention check items ($n = 13$), reported no attention or very little attention during survey completion ($n = 7$), and wished to have their responses removed from the survey ($n = 4$). The final sample included 499 participants from the United States, with ages ranging between 18 and 65 years. The demographic characteristics of the sample are detailed in Table 1.

2.1.2 | Measures

This study was part of a larger project examining the role of individual motives on behavioral intentions across different experimental scenarios. Apart from using the regulatory focus on sexuality measures for categorization purposes (see Rodrigues 2023), no other measures were examined or reported elsewhere. We computed confirmatory factor analyses using the open-source JASP program (JASP Team 2024) to determine the internal reliability of our measures (McDonald's ω; Hayes and Coutts 2020).

2.1.2.1 | Profile Indicators

2.1.2.1.1 | Fear of Singlehood.
We used the Fear of Being Single Scale developed by Spielmann et al. (2013) to assess concerns and distress experiences related to current and anticipated singlehood (six items; e.g., "I feel anxious when I think about being single forever"; responses from 1 = *Not at all true* to 5 = *Very true*). In their study, the scale was found to have internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$) and convergent validity with measures of related constructs (e.g., anxious attachment; $\beta s \geq 0.24$). We also found evidence of internal reliability in our study ($\omega = 0.86$), and responses were averaged into a single score.

2.1.2.1.2 | Willingness to Settle for Less in Relationships.
We used the eight items proposed by Spielmann and Cantarella (2020) to assess motives to prioritize the initiation of a relationship regardless of its potential quality (e.g., "No matter what, being in a relationship is better than being single"). Responses are given on a 7-point rating scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). The authors found evidence of internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.77$) and convergent validity with measures of related constructs (e.g., fear of being single; $r s \geq 0.25$). The scale was also found to have internal reliability in our study ($\omega = 0.71$), and responses were averaged into a single score.

2.1.2.1.3 | Sexual Regulatory Focus.
We used the Regulatory Focus in Sexuality Scale (Rodrigues 2022; Rodrigues et al. 2019) to assess motives for disease prevention (three items; e.g., "Not being careful enough in my sex life has gotten me into trouble at times") and pleasure promotion (five items; e.g., "I am typically striving to fulfill my desires with my sex life") in casual sex. Responses are given using a 7-point rating scale (1 = *Not at all true of me* to 7 = *Very true of me*). In the validation studies, both subscales were found to have internal reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.73$) and convergent validity with measures of related constructs (e.g., the ability for sexual restraint; $r s = [-0.24; 0.49]$). We also found evidence of internal reliability for each subscale (Prevention: $\omega = 0.72$; Promotion: $\omega = 0.86$) and computed scores by averaging responses. Following the procedure described in the original study (Rodrigues et al. 2019), we also computed a difference score, such that more positive (vs. negative) scores indicate a greater focus on pleasure promotion (vs. disease prevention) in sex.

2.1.2.2 | Distal Outcomes

2.1.2.2.1 | Motives to Have Condomless Casual Sex.
We used an adapted version of the Revised Sexual Motivations Scale developed by Patrick et al. (2011) to

TABLE 1 | Demographic characteristics of study 1 (*N* = 499) and Study 2 (*N* = 495).

	Study 1	Study 2	
	United States (*N* = 499)	United States (*n* = 274)	Portugal (*n* = 221)
	M (SD) or *n* (%)	M (SD) or *n* (%)	
Age	35.73 (9.85)	36.80 (9.19)	33.60 (9.64)
Gender			
Man	139 (27.9)	90 (32.8)	104 (47.1)
Non-binary/Gender fluid	7 (1.4)	2 (0.7)	2 (0.9)
Woman	351 (70.3)	182 (66.4)	115 (52.0)
Prefer not to answer	2 (0.4)	—	—
Sexual identity			
Asexual	5 (1.0)	4 (1.5)	1 (0.5)
Bisexual	89 (17.8)	49 (17.9)	17 (7.7)
Heterosexual	354 (70.9)	210 (76.7)	189 (85.5)
Lesbian/Gay	23 (4.6)	8 (2.9)	11 (5.0)
Pansexual	16 (3.2)	—	2 (0.9)
Queer	10 (2.0)	1 (0.4)	1 (0.5)
Prefer not to answer	2 (0.4)	2 (0.7)	—
Ethnic background			
Asian	13 (2.6)	11 (4.0)	11 (5.0)
Black/African descent	73 (14.7)	68 (24.8)	2 (0.9)
Hispanic/Latinx	47 (9.4)	18 (6.6)	30 (13.6)
Middle Eastern	—	1 (0.4)	—
Mixed race	37 (7.4)	16 (5.8)	21 (9.5)
Native American	1 (0.2)	—	—
Pacific Islander	1 (0.2)	—	—
White	320 (64.3)	160 (58.4)	157 (71.0)
Prefer not to answer	6 (1.2)	—	—
Missing response	1 (0.2)	—	—
Completed education			
Primary or secondary school	10 (2.0)	2 (0.7)	9 (4.1)
High school graduate	253 (50.7)	119 (43.4)	83 (37.5)
Associate's/Bachelor's degree	181 (16.2)	38 (13.9)	17 (7.7)
University graduate	112 (22.4)	89 (32.5)	75 (34.0)
Post-graduate (Master; Ph.D.)	43 (8.6)	26 (9.5)	37 (16.7)
Prefer not to answer	—	—	
Occupation			
Retired	10 (2.0)	3 (1.1)	—
Stay-at-home parent	30 (6.0)	10 (3.6)	4 (1.8)
Student (part or full-time)	28 (5.6)	26 (9.5)	25 (11.3)

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

	Study 1	Study 2	
	United States (*N* = 499)	United States (*n* = 274)	Portugal (*n* = 221)
	M (SD) or *n* (%)	M (SD) or *n* (%)	
Unemployed	88 (17.6)	38 (13.9)	25 (11.3)
Working (part or full-time)	333 (66.7)	193 (70.4)	161 (72.9)
Prefer not to answer	10 (2.0)	4 (1.5)	6 (2.7)
Residence			
Metropolitan/Urban area	159 (31.9)	100 (36.5)	140 (63.3)
Suburban area	231 (46.3)	113 (41.2)	51 (23.1)
Rural area	101 (20.2)	57 (20.8)	27 (12.2)
Prefer not to answer	8 (1.6)	4 (1.5)	3 (1.4)
Finances			
Struggling with the current income	260 (52.1)	115 (42.0)	89 (40.3)
Managing with the current income	157 (31.5)	106 (38.7)	70 (31.7)
Living comfortably with the current income	66 (13.2)	47 (17.2)	51 (23.1)
Prefer not to answer	16 (3.2)	6 (2.2)	11 (5.0)
Relationship status			
Without any type of relationship	322 (64.5)	199 (72.6)	142 (64.3)
Casually dating one partner (no significant relationship)	101 (20.2)	39 (14.2)	50 (22.6)
Casually dating multiple partners (no significant relationships)	76 (15.2)	36 (13.1)	29 (13.1)

assess the importance of enhancement (five items; e.g., "Just for the excitement of it"), intimacy (five items; e.g., "Become closer to casual sex partner"), and coping reasons (five items; e.g., "Help deal with disappointment") to have condomless sex with casual partners. Responses are given on a 5-point rating scale (1 = *Not at all important* to 5 = *Very important*). In their study, this scale was found to have internal reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.88$) and convergent validity with sexual behaviors (e.g., oral sex; Bs = [−0.58; 0.71]). We also found evidence of internal reliability for each subscale (Enhancement: $\omega = 0.90$; Intimacy: $\omega = 0.96$; Coping: $\omega = 0.93$) and computed scores by averaging responses.

2.1.3 | Analytic Plan

We started by computing descriptive statistics and overall correlations between measures. Then, standardized scores from fear of being single, willingness to settle for less in relationships, and sexual regulatory focus—our profile indicators—were used to compute an LPA in RStudio (Posit Team 2020). We used the tidyLPA package (Rosenberg et al. 2019) and MplusAutomation (Hallquist and Wiley 2018). This allowed us to account for individual differences and identify groups of participants with similar response patterns (Bauer 2022). We tested models with up to five latent profiles and selected the most adjusted model based on Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian information

criterion (BIC), sample size–adjusted BIC (SABIC), and bootstrapped likelihood ratio test (BLRT) significance test, as well as entropy values (> 0.80) and the size of the smallest group (for details, see Ferguson et al. 2020; Spurk et al. 2020). We then examined differences between profiles on our profile indicators using ANOVAs and post-hoc comparisons with Holm correction when significant differences emerged. These analyses were used to ensure that profiles were valid and meaningfully distinct. For our distal outcomes, we used the Bolck–Croon–Hagenaars (BCH) procedure (Bakk et al. 2013; Bakk and Vermunt 2016) in Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 2012) to determine weights that reflect classification uncertainty in profile membership. These weights were used to determine the BCH-adjusted estimates of distal outcomes for each profile, which allowed us to compute pairwise comparisons between profiles. A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al. 2007) indicated that we had 95% power to detect small effect sizes ($f = 0.176$). Anonymized data and analyses are available (https://osf.io/9nbzr/).

2.2 | Results

2.2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics and overall correlations between our measures. For example, individuals who were more fearful of singlehood were also more willing

TABLE 2 | Descriptive statistics and correlations (Study 1).

	M (SE)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Fear of being single	2.74 (0.05)	—				
2. Willingness to settle for less	2.54 (0.04)	0.35***	—			
3. Sexual regulatory focus	−0.27 (0.11)	0.21***	0.15***	—		
4. Enhancement motives	3.04 (0.05)	0.09*	0.22***	0.26***	—	
5. Intimacy motives	2.78 (0.06)	0.08	0.12**	0.09*	0.29***	—
6. Coping motives	2.21 (0.05)	0.27***	0.38***	0.29***	0.56***	0.20***

Note: Higher scores in regulatory focus in sexuality indicate a greater focus on pleasure promotion (vs. disease prevention) in sex. ***$p \leq 0.001$, **$p \leq 0.010$, *$p \leq 0.050$.

to settle for less in relationships, $p < 0.001$, endorsed more enhancement and coping reasons to have condomless casual sex, $p \leq 0.036$, and were more focused on pleasure promotion in sex, $p < 0.001$.

2.2.2 | Profile Enumeration

As shown in Table 3, all models showed good fit, with AIC, BIC, and SABIC values decreasing as the number of profiles increased, indicating improved model fit. Entropy values remained high, suggesting low classification uncertainty. A closer inspection of model fit indices revealed that the model with three (vs. two) profiles showed a sharper decline in AIC, BIC, and SABIC values, indicating a substantial improvement in model fit. Although the models with four and five profiles showed some improvements, the smallest profile sizes approached 10%, which suggested potential instability. As such, we selected the model with three profiles as the most suitable for our data.

2.2.3 | Profile Differences

Marginal means for each profile and results of the post-hoc comparisons are summarized in Table 4, and standardized scores are depicted in Figure 1.

2.2.3.1 | Profile Indicators. Results showed that Profile 3 ($n = 196$) was characterized by the highest fear of singlehood, the most willingness to settle for less in relationships, and the strongest focus on pleasure promotion in sex. This profile was labeled as *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood*. Profile 2 ($n = 176$) was characterized by the lowest fear of singlehood and the least willingness to settle for less in relationships (similar to Profile 1), and a moderate focus on pleasure promotion in sex (but less than Profile 3). This profile was labeled as *pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood*. Lastly, Profile 1 ($n = 127$) was characterized by a low fear of singlehood (but higher than Profile 2), the least willingness to settle for less in relationships (similar to Profile 2), and the strongest focus on disease prevention in sex. This profile was labeled as *cautious voluntary singlehood*.

2.2.3.2 | Distal Outcomes. Results showed that *cautious voluntary single* participants (Profile 1) endorsed

enhancement and intimacy reasons for condomless casual sex the least, whereas no differences emerged between *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants (Profile 3) and *pleasure-driven voluntary single* participants (Profile 2). In contrast, *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants endorsed coping reasons for condomless casual sex the most, whereas no differences emerged between *pleasure-driven voluntary single* participants and *cautious voluntary single* participants.

2.3 | Discussion

Our results showed that *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants were the most fearful of singlehood, were the most willing to settle for less, and placed the most emphasis on pleasure-related and coping-related motives in casual sex. In contrast, *pleasure-driven voluntary single* participants were the most comfortable with their singlehood and prioritized pleasure-related motives in casual sex without being driven by coping reasons. *Cautious voluntary single* participants were also comfortable with singlehood, but instead had a more safety-driven approach to casual sex. These findings offer novel insights into how singlehood expectations and motives for sexual health and well-being interplay to shape decision-making processes in casual sex. But the question remains as to whether these profiles are only relevant in the context of singlehood and casual sex in the United States, or if they also emerge across different sociocultural contexts while considering a broader set of outcomes.

3 | Study 2

We explored which singlehood profiles emerged in a sample of individuals in the United States and Portugal, based on their fear of singlehood and sexual regulatory focus. Unlike the previous study, however, we also used individuals' desire for a relationship to determine the profiles, thus directly assessing relationship expectations. We then explored whether singlehood profiles differed in the endorsement of relationship beliefs, commitment to singlehood, reasons for being single, sexual quality of life, and overall well-being. Again, we used an exploratory approach and decided not to advance a priori hypotheses.

TABLE 3 | Latent profile analyses (Studies 1 and 2) and cross-country similarity (Study 2).

	Log likelihood	AIC	BIC	SABIC	Entropy	BLRT (p)	Smallest profile %
Study 1: Profile enumeration							
One profile	−16273.65	32639.29	32833.07	32687.07	—	—	—
Two profiles	−15546.20	31232.40	31527.29	31305.10	0.90	< 0.001	49.10
Three profiles	−15258.15	30704.29	31100.28	30801.92	0.88	< 0.001	25.5
Four profiles	−14983.41	30202.82	30699.91	30325.37	0.90	< 0.001	16.2
Five profiles	−14774.12	29832.24	30430.43	29979.71	0.91	< 0.001	10.0
Study 2: Profile enumeration (United States)							
One profile	−6212.61	12489.22	12604.84	12503.38	—	—	—
Two profiles	−5887.08	11872.16	12049.21	11893.84	0.88	< 0.001	37.2
Three profiles	−5718.90	11569.80	11808.26	11598.99	0.88	< 0.001	24.8
Four profiles	−5585.26	11336.52	11636.41	11373.23	0.88	< 0.001	17.2
Five profiles	−5526.84	11253.69	11615.00	11297.92	0.88	< 0.001	13.1
Study 2: Profile enumeration (Portugal)							
One profile	−5009.35	10082.70	10191.44	10090.03	—	—	—
Two profiles	−4786.95	9671.90	9838.41	9683.13	0.88	< 0.001	37.6
Three profiles	−4655.04	9442.08	9666.36	9457.20	0.87	< 0.001	24.4
Four profiles	−4573.77	9313.54	9595.59	9332.56	0.90	< 0.001	10.4
Five profiles	−4518.63	9237.26	9577.07	9260.17	0.91	< 0.001	9.10
Study 2: Country similarity							
Configural	−14551.34	29496.68	30324.98	29699.70	0.96	—	9.4
Structural (means)	−14834.84	29839.67	30197.06	29927.27	0.93	—	6.1
Dispersion (means and variance)	−14849.46	29836.92	30127.04	29908.03	0.93	—	6.0
Distributional (means, variances, and probabilities)	−14866.04	29866.08	30147.79	29935.13	0.93	—	9.5

Note: The BLRT compares the current model to a model with k to 1 profiles. Entropy values ≥ 0.80 indicate higher classification certainty.
Abbreviations: AIC, Akaike's Information Criterion; BIC, Bayesian Information Criterion; BLRT, Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test; SABIC, Sample-Adjusted BIC.

3.1 | Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in May and June 2024 in accordance with the guidelines of the Ethics Council at Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. We used the same procedure from Study 1, with the exception that Clickworker users had to be registered in the United States or Portugal. Of the 571 eligible participants, we excluded those who failed to complete the survey ($n = 40$), failed at least one of the attention check items ($n = 28$), reported no attention or very little attention during survey completion ($n = 3$), and wished to have their responses removed from the survey ($n = 5$). The final sample included 495 participants from the United States ($n = 274$) and Portugal ($n = 221$), with ages ranging between 18 and 60 years. The demographic characteristics of each subsample are detailed in Table 1.

3.2 | Measures

Measures that were not available in Portuguese were first translated, revised, and adapted for clarity, and then back-translated (Colina et al. 2017). We computed multigroup confirmatory factor analyses using the JASP program to determine the internal reliability of our measures (i.e., ω) on each subsample.

TABLE 4 | Comparisons between profiles (Studies 1 and 2).

	Profile 1: Cautious voluntary singlehood	Profile 2: Pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood	Profile 3: relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood	Comparisons
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	
Study 1: Profile Indicators[a]				
Fear of being single	2.50 (0.07)	1.77 (0.06)	3.77 (0.05)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Willingness to settle for less	2.30 (0.08)	2.17 (0.06)	3.02 (0.06)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.193$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Sexual regulatory focus	−2.55 (0.17)	0.18 (0.15)	0.80 (0.14)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p = 0.002$
Study 1: Distal Outcomes[b]				
Enhancement motives	2.53 (0.11)	3.12 (0.10)	3.29 (0.08)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p = 0.180$
Intimacy motives	2.47 (0.13)	2.86 (0.12)	2.91 (0.11)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.026$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p = 0.009$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p = 0.748$
Coping motives	1.78 (0.09)	2.01 (0.09)	2.68 (0.09)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.071$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Study 2: Profile Indicators[a]				
Fear of being single	2.09 (0.06)	1.87 (0.05)	3.63 (0.04)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.006$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Relationship desire	3.09 (0.14)	4.17 (0.11)	5.27 (0.09)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Sexual regulatory focus	−3.17 (0.20)	0.49 (0.16)	0.08 (0.13)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p = 0.046$

(Continues)

TABLE 4 | (Continued)

	Profile 1: Cautious voluntary singlehood	Profile 2: Pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood	Profile 3: relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood	Comparisons
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	
Study 2: Distal Outcomes[b]				
Relationship pedestal beliefs	2.33 (0.12)	2.64 (0.10)	3.30 (0.07)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.048$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Satisfaction	4.88 (0.14)	4.41 (0.09)	3.74 (0.09)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.007$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Investments	3.99 (0.15)	3.47 (0.12)	3.59 (0.10)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.008$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p = 0.027$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p = 0.450$
Commitment	4.14 (0.18)	3.38 (0.12)	3.07 (0.10)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p = 0.058$
Self-enhancing reasons	3.49 (0.11)	3.11 (0.10)	2.84 (0.08)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.013$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p = 0.044$
Self-defeating reasons	2.84 (0.10)	2.66 (0.08)	3.61 (0.07)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.196$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Negative psychosexual feelings	1.89 (0.09)	1.91 (0.08)	3.27 (0.08)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.833$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Sexual satisfaction	3.13 (0.12)	4.05 (0.09)	3.36 (0.08)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p = 0.115$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Self-worthlessness	1.80 (0.09)	1.77 (0.08)	3.01 (0.09)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.802$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$

(Continues)

TABLE 4 | (Continued)

	Profile 1: Cautious voluntary singlehood	Profile 2: Pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood	Profile 3: relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood	Comparisons
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	
Sexual repression	2.45 (0.11)	1.80 (0.08)	2.82 (0.09)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p = 0.009$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Physical well-being	3.97 (0.12)	4.52 (0.09)	4.01 (0.07)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p = 0.819$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Social well-being	4.69 (0.13)	5.10 (0.07)	4.45 (0.08)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p = 0.005$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p = 0.113$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$
Hedonic well-being	4.44 (0.13)	5.11 (0.07)	4.27 (0.08)	Profile 1 vs. 2: $p < 0.001$ Profile 1 vs. 3: $p = 0.244$ Profile 2 vs. 3: $p < 0.001$

Note: Higher scores in regulatory focus in sexuality indicate a greater focus on pleasure promotion (vs. disease prevention) in sex.
[a]Means, standard errors, and post hoc comparisons with Holm correction for the profile indicators were computed using ANOVAs.
[b]Adjusted means, standard errors, and pairwise comparisons for the distal outcomes were computed using weights determined by the Bolck–Croon–Hagenaars (BCH) procedure (Bakk et al. 2013; Bakk and Vermunt 2016), which account for classification uncertainty.
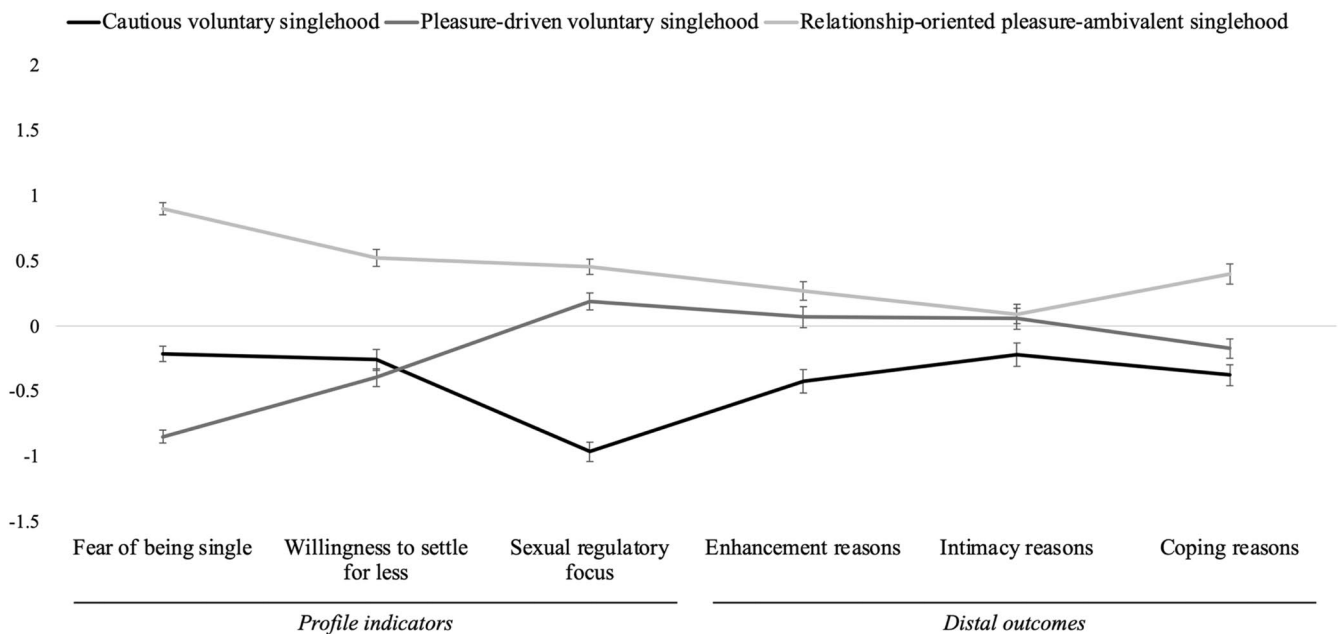
FIGURE 1 | Profile differences (Study 1). Standardized scores are depicted to facilitate profile comparisons. Higher scores in regulatory focus in sexuality indicate a greater focus on pleasure promotion (vs. disease prevention) in sex. Error bars indicate standard errors.

3.2.1 | Profile Indicators

3.2.1.1 | Fear of Singlehood.
As in Study 1, we used the Fear of Being Single Scale (Spielmann et al. 2013). Scores were averaged into a single score ($\omega_{US} = 0.83$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.83$).

3.2.1.2 | Relationship Desire.
Using a single item, we asked participants "To what extent do you want to be in a romantic relationship?" (Pepping et al. 2025). Responses were given on a 7-point rating scale (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much*).

3.2.1.3 | Sexual Regulatory Focus.
As in Study 1, we used the Regulatory Focus in Sexuality Scale (Rodrigues et al. 2019; Rodrigues 2022). We averaged scores for each subscale (Prevention: $\omega_{US} = 0.78$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.78$; Promotion: $\omega_{US} = 0.87$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.84$) and computed an index, such that higher scores indicate a predominant focus on pleasure promotion (vs. disease prevention) motives.

3.2.2 | Distal Outcomes

3.2.2.1 | Relationship Beliefs.
We used the Relationship Pedestal Beliefs Scale developed by Dennett and Girme (2024) to assess beliefs that relationships are crucial for happiness (six items; e.g., "Everyone needs a romantic partner that will be there for them"; responses from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). In their study, the scale was found to have internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$) and convergent validity with fear of being single ($\beta = 0.34$). The scale was found to have internal reliability in our study ($\omega_{US} = 0.82$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.76$), and responses were averaged into a single score.

3.2.2.2 | Commitment to Singlehood.
We used the Investment Model Scale for Singles developed by Beauparlant et al. (2024) to assess satisfaction (e.g., "Being single is close to ideal"), investment (e.g., "I have put a great deal into

my single lifestyle that I would lose if I were to start a relationship"), and commitment to singlehood (e.g., "I am committed to being single"), and perceived quality of alternative scenarios (e.g., "The people I might become involved with are very appealing"). Responses are given on a 7-point rating scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). The authors found evidence of internal reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.60$) and convergent validity with prospective plans for the future ($rs = [-0.32; 0.62]$). We found three of the subscales to have internal reliability (Satisfaction: $\omega_{US} = 0.76$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.76$; Investments: $\omega_{US} = 0.75$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.81$; Commitment: $\omega_{US} = 0.91$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.88$) and computed scores by averaging responses. However, the quality of the alternatives subscale was dropped from the analyses due to unacceptable reliability ($\omega_{US} = 0.58$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.40$).

3.2.2.3 | Reasons for Singlehood Maintenance.
We used the Reasons for Being Single Scale developed by Beckmeyer and Jamison (2024) to assess self-enhancing (four items; e.g., "I prefer being single to being in a romantic relationship") and self-defeating reasons to remain single (four items; e.g., "People I am romantically attracted to are not attracted to me"), as well as lack of interest in relationships (two items; e.g., "My past relationship experiences have been bad, so I am not interested in being in a relationship now"). Responses are given on a 6-point rating scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 6 = *Strongly agree*). The authors found this scale to have internal reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.62$) and convergent validity with life satisfaction ($\beta s = [-0.31; 0.27]$). We found two of the subscales to have internal reliability (Self-enhancing: $\omega_{US} = 0.71$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.72$; Self-defeating: $\omega_{US} = 0.70$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.70$) and computed scores by averaging responses. The lack of interest subscale was dropped from the analyses due to unacceptable reliability in the Portuguese sample ($\omega_{US} = 0.75$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.61$).

3.2.2.4 | Sexual Quality of Life.
We adapted the items of the Sexual Quality of Life Scale developed by Symonds et al. (2005) and Abraham et al. (2008) to be gender inclusive

and applicable to individuals who are single. This scale was used to assess negative psychosexual feelings related to sexuality and sexual activities (seven items; "When I think about my sexual life, I feel frustrated"), sexual satisfaction (five items; e.g., "When I think about my sexual life, I feel good about myself"), feelings of sexual self-worthlessness (three items; e.g., "I have lost confidence in myself as a sexual partner"), and sexual repression (three items; e.g., "I try to avoid sexual activity"). Responses are given on a 6-point rating scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 6 = *Strongly agree*). In the development studies, the scale was found to have internal reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.82$), test–retest reliability ($r \geq 0.85$, two-week interval), and convergent validity with measures of related constructs (e.g., sexual desire; rs ≥ 0.31). We also found evidence of internal reliability for each subscale (Psychosexual feelings: $\omega_{US} = 0.88$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.88$; Sexual satisfaction: $\omega_{US} = 0.75$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.75$; Self-worthlessness: $\omega_{US} = 0.75$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.71$; Sexual repression: $\omega_{US} = 0.70$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.72$) and computed scores by averaging responses.

3.2.2.5 | Subjective Well-Being.

We used three subscales of the Well-Being Scale developed by Lui and Fernando (2018) to assess physical (six items; e.g., "I am physically healthy"), social (four items; e.g., "I have someone who knows me well to talk to when I have problems"), and hedonic well-being (three items; e.g., "I try to do things that make me happy"). Responses are given on a 6-point rating scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 6 = *Strongly agree*). The authors found evidence of internal reliability for these subscales ($\alpha \geq 0.79$) and convergent validity with measures of related constructs (e.g., satisfaction with life; rs = [−0.51; 0.67]). We also found these subscales to have internal reliability (Physical: $\omega_{US} = 0.84$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.87$; Social: $\omega_{US} = 0.83$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.80$; Hedonic: $\omega_{US} = 0.87$; $\omega_{PT} = 0.84$) and computed scores by averaging responses.

3.3 | Analytic Plan

We followed the same analytic plan described in Study 1 with three differences: (a) the preliminary analyses included country comparisons using *t*-tests; (b) relationship desire was used instead of willingness to settle for less to determine profiles; and (c) LPAs were computed for each country separately and the total sample. To examine whether the latent profiles were structurally similar across the United States and Portugal, we followed the procedure described by Morin et al. (2016) and computed multiple group analyses using Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 2012). First, we computed the baseline configural similarity model in which parameters were freely estimated. Second, we computed a structural similarity model by constraining the means to be equal across countries. Third, we computed a dispersion similarity model by additionally constraining variances to be equal across countries. Fourth, we computed a distributional similarity model by additionally constraining the probability of profile membership sizes being equal across countries. Model fit indices were compared to the previously estimated model to determine country-level similarity. A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al. 2007) indicated that we had 95% power to detect small effect sizes ($f = 0.177$). Anonymized data and analyses are available (https://osf.io/9nbzr/).

3.4 | Results

3.4.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Table 5 summarizes the descriptive statistics and overall correlations between our measures. For example, individuals who were more fearful of singlehood also endorsed more relationship pedestal beliefs, $p < 0.001$, reported a stronger desire to be in a relationship, $p < 0.001$, were less satisfied and committed to singlehood, both $p < 0.001$, endorsed less self-enhancing and more self-defeating reasons related to singlehood maintenance, both $p < 0.001$, reported more negative sexual quality of life across indicators, all $p < 0.001$, but were also more focused on pleasure promotion in sex, $p = 0.003$, and reported less well-being across indicators, all $p \leq 0.012$. Country comparisons showed differences in seven of our measures. Specifically, participants in the United States reported more fear of singlehood, $p = 0.008$, but were also more satisfied with singlehood, $p = 0.008$, were more sexually repressed, $p < 0.001$, and were more focused on disease prevention in sex, $p < 0.001$. In contrast, participants in Portugal endorsed more relationship pedestal beliefs, $p = 0.039$, were more sexually satisfied, $p < 0.001$, were more focused on pleasure promotion in sex, $p < 0.001$, and reported more social well-being, $p = 0.038$.

3.4.2 | Profile Enumeration and Model Similarity Across Countries

As shown in Table 3, the model with two profiles (vs. one profile) showed better fit across the analyses, as indicated by reductions in AIC, BIC, and SABIC values, as well as significant BLRT. Adding a third profile further improved model fit, with sharper decreases in fit indices and stable entropy values. The solutions with four and five profiles showed slightly better fit indices, but with the smallest profile sizes approaching or dropping below 10%, thus suggesting potential instability and making interpretation less reliable. Based on these findings and consistent with Study 1, the models with three profiles were retained for further analysis and cross-national comparisons.

The configural model showed good fit indices, supporting the existence of three comparable latent profiles across countries. Compared to the configural model, introducing structural similarity (i.e., constraining means) resulted in a slight increase in AIC and SABIC but a decrease in BIC, suggesting an improvement in model parsimony and supporting the structural similarity of our profiles across countries. Constraining dispersion similarity (i.e., means and variances) further improved model fit, as evidenced by lower AIC, BIC, and SABIC values compared to the structural similarity model, indicating that variability within each profile was similar in both countries. However, imposing distributional similarity (i.e., constraining profile membership probabilities) worsened model fit, suggesting that the proportion of participants in each profile differed between both countries. Thus, while the underlying structure, means, and variances of the profiles were similar, the prevalence of each profile varied across countries. Based on these findings, we retained the dispersion similarity model for interpretation, allowing profile membership probabilities to vary between countries.

TABLE 5 | Descriptive statistics, country comparisons, and overall correlations (Study 2).

| | Country comparisons | | | | Correlations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
	Overall M (SE)	United States M (SE)	Portugal M (SE)	p (d)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Fear of being single	2.75 (0.05)	2.86 (0.06)	2.61 (0.07)	0.008 (0.24)	—															
2. Relationship desire	4.46 (0.07)	4.59 (0.10)	4.31 (0.10)	0.058 (0.17)	0.49***	—														
3. Sexual regulatory focus	−0.47 (0.11)	−0.95 (0.15)	0.12 (0.15)	<0.001 (0.45)	0.13**	0.18***	—													
4. Relationship pedestal beliefs	2.89 (0.05)	2.79 (0.07)	3.01 (0.08)	0.039 (0.19)	0.32***	0.36***	0.17***	—												
5. Satisfaction	4.19 (0.06)	4.33 (0.08)	4.02 (0.09)	0.008 (0.24)	−0.36***	−0.57***	0.01	−0.32***	—											
6. Investments	3.64 (0.06)	3.70 (0.08)	3.56 (0.10)	0.306 (0.09)	−0.06	−0.31***	0.07	−0.05	0.48***	—										
7. Commitment	3.39 (0.07)	3.44 (0.10)	3.33 (0.10)	0.440 (0.07)	−0.21***	−0.52***	−0.01	−0.10*	0.65***	0.63***	—									
8. Self-enhancing reasons	3.06 (0.05)	3.00 (0.07)	3.14 (0.08)	0.190 (0.12)	−0.18***	−0.50***	0.07	−0.14***	0.56***	0.59***	0.68***	—								
9. Self-defeating reasons	3.14 (0.05)	3.11 (0.07)	3.18 (0.07)	0.459 (0.07)	0.49***	0.17***	0.04	0.13**	−0.11*	0.15***	0.13**	0.16***	—							

(Continues)

TABLE 5 | (Continued)

	Country comparisons				Correlations															
	Overall	United States	Portugal	p (d)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)																	
10. Negative psycho-sexual feelings	2.54 (0.05)	2.57 (0.08)	2.50 (0.08)	0.517 (0.06)	0.50***	0.25***	0.19***	0.27***	−0.16***	0.13**	0.06	−0.01	0.50***	—						
11. Sexual satisfaction	3.53 (0.05)	3.37 (0.07)	3.73 (0.07)	<0.001 (0.32)	−0.16***	0.07	0.33***	0.06	0.12**	0.04	0.01	0.07	−0.31***	−0.39***	—					
12. Self-worthless-ness	2.38 (0.06)	2.35 (0.08)	2.42 (0.08)	0.551 (0.05)	0.46***	0.20***	0.16***	0.27***	−0.11*	0.16***	0.10*	0.03	0.48***	0.83***	−0.33***	—				
13. Sexual repression	2.42 (0.06)	2.62 (0.08)	2.17 (0.08)	<0.001 (0.38)	0.27***	−0.01	−0.01	0.05	0.08	0.26***	0.26***	0.19***	0.40***	0.57***	−0.39***	0.59***	—			
14. Physical well-being	4.17 (0.05)	4.11 (0.07)	4.24 (0.08)	0.210 (0.11)	−0.11*	0.02	0.06	0.08	0.10*	0.05	0.05	0.04	−0.27***	−0.20***	0.27***	−0.17***	−0.26***	—		
15. Social well-being	4.71 (0.05)	4.61 (0.07)	4.82 (0.07)	0.038 (0.19)	−0.21***	−0.04	0.03	−0.19***	0.08	−0.10*	−0.09	−0.06	−0.26***	−0.29***	0.24***	−0.25***	−0.29***	0.36***	—	
16. Hedonic well-being	4.57 (0.05)	4.52 (0.07)	4.63 (0.07)	0.273 (0.10)	−0.29***	−0.01	0.13**	−0.03	0.13**	−0.01	0.02	0.02	−0.32***	0.34***	0.33***	−0.30***	−0.30***	0.53***	0.50***	—

Note: Higher scores in regulatory focus in sexuality indicate a greater focus on pleasure promotion (vs. disease prevention) in sex. ***$p \leq 0.001$, **$p \leq 0.010$, *$p \leq 0.050$.
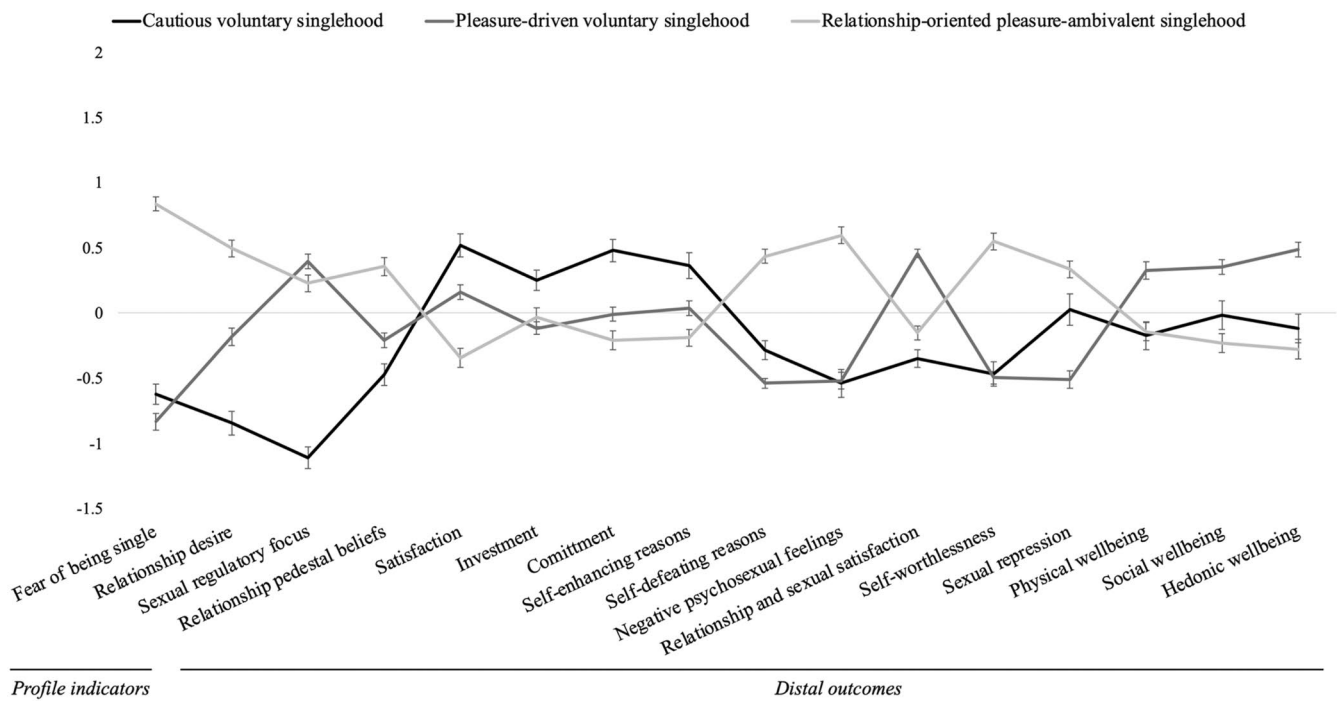
FIGURE 2 | Profile differences (Study 2). Standardized scores are depicted to facilitate profile comparisons. Higher scores in regulatory focus in sexuality indicate a greater focus on pleasure promotion (vs. disease prevention) in sex. Error bars indicate standard errors.

3.4.3 | Profile Differences

Marginal means for each profile and results of the post hoc comparisons are summarized in Table 4, and standardized scores are depicted in Figure 2.

3.4.3.1 | Profile Indicators. Results are summarized in Table 4. As can be seen, Profile 3 ($n = 234$) was characterized by the highest fear of singlehood, the strongest relationship desire, and a strong focus on pleasure promotion in sex (but less than Profile 2). This profile was labeled as *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood*. Profile 2 ($n = 157$) was characterized by the lowest fear of singlehood, moderate relationship desire, and the strongest focus on pleasure promotion in sex. This profile was labeled as *pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood*. Profile 1 ($n = 104$) was characterized by a low fear of singlehood (but more than Profile 2), the lowest relationship desire, and the most focus on disease prevention in sex. This profile was labeled as *cautious voluntary singlehood*. The distribution of participants across profiles differed by country, $\chi^2(2) = 33.26$, $p < 0.001$, $V = 0.26$, such that more participants in the United States were classified in Profile 3 (*relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood*; $n_{US} = 144$, $n_{PT} = 90$) and Profile 1 (*cautious voluntary singlehood*; $n_{US} = 72$, $n_{PT} = 32$), whereas more participants in Portugal were classified in Profile 2 (*pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood*; $n_{US} = 58$, $n_{PT} = 99$).

3.4.3.2 | Distal Outcomes. As shown in Table 4, *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants (Profile 3) were the most likely to endorse relationship pedestal beliefs, were the least satisfied and committed to singlehood (with commitment similar to that reported by *pleasure-driven voluntary single* participants [Profile 2]), and reported fewer self-enhancing reasons but the most self-defeating reasons for being single. They also reported the lowest sexual quality of life across all indicators (but relationship and sexual satisfaction was similar to that reported by *cautious voluntary single* participants [Profile 1]) and the lowest subjective well-being (but similar to that reported by *cautious voluntary single* participants). *Pleasure-driven voluntary single* participants moderately endorsed relationship pedestal beliefs, were moderately satisfied with singlehood, and reported moderate levels of self-enhancing reasons for being single. They were also the least likely to endorse self-defeating reasons for being single (but similar to that reported by *cautious voluntary single* participants), reported the highest relationship and sexual satisfaction, the lowest sexual repression, and the highest subjective well-being across all indicators. Lastly, *cautious voluntary single* participants were also the least likely to endorse relationship pedestal beliefs, were the most satisfied, invested, and committed to singlehood, and reported the most self-enhancing reasons and the least self-defeating reasons for being single (the latter similar to those reported by *pleasure-driven voluntary single* participants). However, they also reported the lowest relationship and sexual satisfaction (similar to that reported by *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants), moderate sexual repression, and the lowest subjective well-being (similar to that reported by *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants).

3.5 | Discussion

Extending the results from our previous study, we found that *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants were the most fearful of singlehood, had the highest relationship

desire, and were the least comfortable with singlehood, which was reflected in poorer sexual quality of life and subjective well-being. In contrast, *pleasure-driven voluntary single* participants were comfortable with singlehood while maintaining some relationship desire, prioritized pleasure-related motives in sex, and experienced higher sexual quality of life and subjective well-being. *Cautious voluntary single* participants were the most comfortable and committed to singlehood and had the lowest relationship desire, but their safety-driven approach to sex was linked to lower sexual satisfaction and subjective well-being. These singlehood profiles were consistent across the United States and Portugal despite differences in their prevalence between countries.

4 | General Discussion

Emerging approaches to the study of singlehood have emphasized the importance of addressing the variability and diversity inherent to singlehood experiences (Park et al. 2024). In light of this call, we conducted two cross-sectional studies with individuals in the United States (Studies 1 and 2) and Portugal (Study 2) aimed at capturing the nuances and diversity of singlehood perceptions and experiences. Using a person-centered approach (i.e., LPA; Bauer 2022), our results revealed three distinct singlehood profiles, defined by a combination of singlehood expectations and sexual regulatory focus.

We found that *cautious voluntary single* participants were comfortable being single but, at the same time, had a sexual health protection approach to the detriment of their sexual well-being. These individuals were the least willing to settle for less, desired a relationship the least, and endorsed relationship norms the least (Dennett and Girme 2024; Spielmann and Cantarella 2020). Their positive perspective on singlehood was reflected in their endorsement of self-enhancing reasons to remain single (Beckmeyer and Jamison 2024) and their strong commitment, satisfaction, and investment in singlehood (Beauparlant et al. 2024). These individuals were also the least likely to endorse any motive to enact condomless sex, which is aligned with their predisposition to avoid risk-taking with casual partners (Spielmann et al. 2023) and protect their sexual health (Rodrigues et al. 2022, 2023). Their approach to sexuality, however, was detrimental to their sexual quality of life (Rodrigues et al. 2024) and extended to overall well-being. In other words, individuals with this profile tended to be more comfortable with their current singlehood status, motivated to remain single, and cautious with their sexual health, even if at the cost of their well-being. Arguably, these individuals voluntarily choose to be single, perceive singlehood as a personal choice (i.e., voluntary single; Apostolou, Sullman, et al. 2024; Tessler 2023), value their individuality, and view being single as an opportunity to pursue non-romantic and non-sexual goals (Beckmeyer and Jamison 2024; Park et al. 2023), and have more fearful or avoidant attachment styles (Pepping et al. 2025).

Pleasure-driven voluntary single participants had a sexual pleasure promotion approach with benefits for their well-being, but at the same time, they were open to establishing (but not settling for) a relationship. These individuals were the least fearful of singlehood and the least willing to settle for less but, at the same time, expressed a moderate desire to establish a relationship

(Dennett and Girme 2024; Spielmann and Cantarella 2020). Individuals with this profile also endorsed enhancement and intimacy motives to enact condomless sex (but not coping motives), which is aligned with their predisposition to pursue sexual pleasure (Rodrigues et al. 2022, 2023, 2024) and reflected in their highest sexual quality of life and subjective well-being. Even though individuals with this profile indicated a somewhat positive perspective on their status, reflected in their satisfaction with singlehood (Beauparlant et al. 2024), they were also the least likely to endorse self-defeating reasons for being single (Beckmeyer and Jamison 2024). Arguably, these individuals have more secure or avoidant attachment styles (Pepping et al. 2025) and higher self-esteem (Apostolou, Tekeş, and Kagialis 2024), and despite voluntarily choosing to be single, perceive singlehood as a transient phase by remaining open to establishing a relationship if the opportunity arises (i.e., in between relationships; Apostolou, Sullman, et al. 2024; Tessler 2023). At the same time, they seem to have an ambiguity toward this period that varies between being socially focused and having low safety motives (Park et al. 2023), allowing them to prioritize their sexual well-being (Rodrigues et al. 2024) and being rewarded with more positive sexual and well-being outcomes.

In sharp contrast, *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent single* participants were the most fearful of singlehood and strongly desired a relationship (and were open to settling for one), but despite their pleasure promotion approach to sex, they experienced worse sexual and personal well-being. These individuals were the most likely to endorse maladaptive relationship pursuit strategies (Spielmann and Cantarella 2020) and beliefs that relationships are indispensable for happiness and fulfillment (Dennett and Girme 2024). They also endorsed self-defeating motives for remaining single the most, perceiving themselves as unattractive to others or unable to find romantic partners (Beckmeyer and Jamison 2024). These individuals were also the most likely to endorse enhancement and coping reasons to have condomless casual sex, which is aligned with their predisposition to pursue sexual pleasure and take more risks in casual sex (Rodrigues et al. 2022, 2023, 2024). And yet, these individuals reported the worst sexual quality of life and the worst well-being. This underscores the complexities and intricacies between singlehood and sexuality, such that being focused on sexual pleasure with casual partners does not equate to having the most positive outcomes. In other words, individuals with this profile are driven by relationship goals, but are also prone to making riskier health decisions in sex, and experience negative outcomes in sexual quality of life and overall well-being. Arguably, then, these individuals perceive singlehood as a circumstance outside their control (i.e., involuntarily single; Apostolou, Sullman, et al. 2024; Tessler 2023), have more anxious or fearful attachment styles (Pepping et al. 2025), place more emphasis on mating strategies (Apostolou, Tekeş, and Kagialis 2024), and are more focused on social connections (Park et al. 2023).

Apart from offering new insights into how individuals who are single perceive, experience, and navigate through their lives, we also innovated by comparing profiles across sociocultural contexts and exploring differences and similarities in singlehood experiences. Some a priori psychosocial differences emerged between samples. Individuals in the United States were more fearful of being single, scored higher on sexual repression, and

were more focused on disease prevention, but at the same time were more satisfied with their singlehood. This duality between perceptions and experiences suggests that even though the fear of being unable to find a romantic partner is heightened in this sociocultural context (e.g., conveyed by romantic normativity), individuals may be more aware and motivated to search for information about singlehood (e.g., through social exposure to exemplars), countering the stigma and having more positive singlehood experiences. In contrast, norms emphasizing the centrality of romantic relationships were endorsed to a greater extent by individuals in Portugal, possibly reflecting the pervasiveness of Catholic norms and conservative values and less hedonistic ones in this society (Lottes and Alkula 2011; Saroglou et al. 2004). Interestingly, however, this was juxtaposed with individuals in Portugal reporting more sexual satisfaction, higher motives to pursue sexual pleasure, and higher social well-being. The generalized lack of research comparing individuals in both countries on these particular variables prevents us from speculating why these differences emerged in our study but opens new and interesting avenues for future research. These differences notwithstanding, the singlehood profiles emerging from our data were not only consistent across studies but also across both sociocultural contexts (differing only in the proportion of participants comprising each profile). This suggests that even though differences emerging from the social context may contribute to shaping the lived experiences of individuals who are single, the bigger picture suggests more similarities than differences in the lived experiences among individuals in the United States and Portugal.

4.1 | Strengths, Limitations, and Future Studies

The approach used in our studies has several strengths, and the results from both studies offer relevant insights to academics, professionals, and the society. We innovated by including a broad set of outcomes that extended beyond normative perceptions and behaviors in relationships, to offer more insights into the motivations toward sexual risk-taking, as well as different facets of sexual quality of life and subjective well-being. The finding that some individuals navigate through singlehood successfully clearly shows that singlehood experiences are complex and full of nuances that must be taken into consideration when conducting research and developing theoretical frameworks. Our findings also have the potential to inform the development of awareness campaigns designed to counteract the stigma experienced by many individuals who are single, change the negative narrative attached to singlehood (Byrne and Carr 2005; Kislev 2024), and improve the quality of life of these individuals. Nonetheless, we must also acknowledge two main limitations and provide suggestions for the future. First, we cannot establish causality between our variables, given the cross-sectional nature of our data. Future research could consider using an LPA approach in longitudinal designs to further understand whether having a given singlehood profile has temporal effects on personal, relational, and health outcomes. Second, and despite the efforts to collect data with a diverse sample of individuals in the United States and Portugal, our samples were still mostly WEIRD (i.e., western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) and identified as heterosexual. To address generalizability concerns, future studies could

seek to collect larger sets of data (ideally with diverse and representative samples) across multiple countries and include contextual and cultural variables (e.g., religiosity and social values) to explore the extent to which singlehood profiles are individually determined or socially shaped.

5 | Conclusion

Our studies provide a deeper understanding of the constellation of characteristics most common among individuals who are thriving or struggling with singlehood. Across two studies, we identified three profiles based on singlehood expectations and sexual regulatory focus: *relationship-oriented pleasure-ambivalent singlehood*; *pleasure-driven voluntary singlehood*; and *cautious voluntary singlehood*. These profiles were also found to differ in several measures related to personal experiences (e.g., sexual quality of life), thus offering critical insights into the unique and complex interplay of attitudes, goals, and behaviors related to singlehood and relationships. Finally, our methodological approach extends prior research on individual variables associated with positive and negative singlehood experiences by offering a novel understanding of the broader psycho-social context in which these variables are situated.

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