



# **Functioning of Young Adults in a Changing World**

Edited by Katarzyna Adamczyk and Monika Wysota

## CHAPTER 6

---

# Being Single as a Result of Experience from Their Family of Origin

Julita Czernecka

### INTRODUCTION

“Who are these singles really? What does their life look like? Do they have anything in common with their image in the media?” These questions were present in many discussions which I followed on academic debates at many universities and on Internet forums (Czernecka, 2008). That is why the study which I conducted was aimed at gaining in-depth knowledge into singles living in big cities. I wanted to identify the reasons for them being alone, which the respondents were aware of. I was interested in which reasons they would state themselves. This article focuses on negative experiences to parents’ relationships, as well as those of close family members, which the respondents might have observed and which were important in their decision to remain single. Furthermore it describes other aspects of singlehood associated with family life such as overly strong bonds with parents, ideal relationship between parents, the consequences of being only-children, and involvement in helping relatives.

### PROBLEMS WITH THE DEFINITION “SINGLE”

*In our everyday life we often use the word “single”, which we to some extent understand automatically. But when we have to precisely define the term we find it quite difficult. Formally, singles are unmarried people. This group consists of people who have never married, as well as those who are divorced, widowed and separated. In a dictionary we can find: *single*: one in number; solitary*

or sole; lone; unmarried; pertaining to the unmarried state. In English and American literature, single is a very big category of people with no distinction of their formal situation, marriage or social status. Additionally “single” is used interchangeably with such terms as singlehood and singleness, not married, unmarried, and bachelor, all of which describe marital status. By contrast, terms such as lonely and loneliness are usually used to describe mental loneliness, or the state of being abandoned.

For some researchers terms such as feeling lonely, loneliness and living alone mean pretty much the same, and yet there are quite significant differences in their definitions. According to Gordon loneliness cannot be proved based on objective measuring scales of number and frequency of social interactions, it needs to be considered together with factors which determine the quality of social interactions and living alone as a preference, the choice of such a lifestyle (Gordon, 2003). Studies on loneliness refer to lots of different aspects, including emotional loneliness or emotional alienation due to an unfulfilled need to be close to someone who will return our love. The results of the studies show that this type of loneliness might lead to depression, tension, sleeping disorders, somatic problems, and feeling empty and meaningless (Cockrum & White, 1985). Another type of loneliness refers to the social dimension, i.e., when someone has no friends, relatives or people to spend their time with and share information (*social isolation*). This type of isolation results in feeling excluded, bored with life and discontent (Cockrum & White, 1985).

Unmarried people were usually called “spinsters” or “bachelors”, and their loneliness was associated with their helplessness, beauty defects or mean character. Changes in the system of values had an impact on the transformation of terms which describe living alone and at the same time their perception in society. The category of being single out of choice was born. As emphasized by Gajda, living alone no longer means being “strange” or “worse” (Gajda, 1988). Although the traditional perception of singles as passive and lonely people is nowadays replaced by the “active” type, there are still a lot of stereotypes about these people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). The concept of spinsters and bachelors is still present and has negative connotations of people who are lonely, isolated and passive.

One of the pioneers of studies on singles, Peter Stein, described them as people who are not married and are not in a steady, informal homo- or heterosexual relationship (Stein, 1976). This definition, however, does not solve the problem of whether we can call someone single if the person has been alone for a long or a short time. We should clearly define here time categories – can we use the



term single with those who have not been in a relationship "only" for a couple of weeks or months? Or maybe only those who have been living alone for years.

Another problem with the term is whether we can only refer to people living in single person households as single, or maybe those who live with their family or friends, too. If we assume that single means living in a single person household, this does not mean that they cannot be in a steady relationship with someone who does not live with them. We also need to define what a "stable" or "serious" relationship means, and what we call a "casual" relationship, "passing acquaintance" or "sexual escapade". Another important issue concerns having children – can single people raise children or is it a term reserved for people with no children only. As Żurek rightly points out, the definition of a single person does not include the stage of personal development at which a certain person is. "The term single does not evaluate whether it was a success or not. This does not mean tagging people, but the fact is that we use the word for a person who has chosen such a lifestyle as well as for somebody who finds himself alone and without a partner, something he finds traumatic and a result of unfortunate coincidences" (Żurek, 2008, p. 24).

Some researchers define this term precisely. For instance Muller (Żurek, 2008) classifies all those who do not live with their parents or partner as being single. For others, they are individuals who live in single person households and occasionally have sex with someone (Żurek, 2008). These definitions do not solve the issue of experiences and current motivations of single people, which can be very different. Another definition is given by an American sociologist, Timberger (2008), who states that single people are both those who live in single person households and those who live with their relatives or friends; those who are unmarried or divorced; with or without children; in a relationship ("romantic" relationship), and also those who have never been in a relationship.

Yet another definition refers to singles as young adults who do not have steady partners and live with their families (Masahiro, 1999). Masahiro uses the term "spoiled singles", as according to him these are grown up people who work and are quite independent financially, but still live with their parents. They do not want to live by themselves nor be in a relationship. Parents provide for them and do not "interfere" with the way they live. Thanks to that they have "board and lodging," and treat their parents as maids and their home as a hotel. The result is that they can save a lot and spend their savings on luxurious goods, which they would not be able to afford if they lived on their own (Motohiro, 2000).

*In her book on single women, Paprzycka (2008) notices that the Western definitions of single life take into consideration a few basic criteria of this*

social category: (1) being unmarried and not in a hetero- or homosexual relationship (excluding cohabitation), (2) living alone or running a single person household, (3) not missing having a partner and (4) accepting such a choice of lifestyle.

The definition of “a single” in Polish literature is also not very accurate. Grzeszczyk (2005), when writing about *single professional women*, defines them as heterosexual, unmarried or without a steady partner, professionals with secondary or higher education, living in big cities. Paprzycka (2008) defines “new single women” as educated, financially independent and not in a stable relationship. On the other hand, Slany indicates that singles chose such a lifestyle without a steady partner, but at the same time loneliness is not a final decision for them. They actively consume cultural and material goods which are created especially for them in big cities. Singles often live with people in a similar situation (Slany, 2002). Another definition of the term was created by Żurek who believes that singles are “people who have not yet made a decision about changing their family status, those who, due to some circumstances, have been made to live alone, and those who chose such a lifestyle... The age structure of singles includes very young people, who often study, and those who are in the stage of late adulthood and the elderly” (Żurek, 2005, p.77).

The results of the studies presented here will also concern different social categories, but they are mostly associated with singles living in big cities, young, well-educated people who are financially independent and unmarried.

## THE CURRENT RESEARCH

Due to the ambiguous concept of “singlehood” I decided to define singles as people who live in cities (of 500,000 citizens and more), who are not in stable relationships, do not have children and do not live alone due to an unexpected event (e.g. death of a spouse, disability). The selection of participants for the study was purposive. They were heterosexual people aged 25–40, because this is the age when people usually decide whether or not to set up home. This is also when they decide to pursue personal development, education and a professional career. The youngest respondents were 27 years old, the oldest was 41. There were 60 participants – 10 women and 10 men in each age category: 25–30, 31–35 years old, and older than 36. The average age of those studied was 32.8 for women and 32.7 for men. At the time of the interviews the respondents had not been in a relationship for at least two years (a stable



relationship defined as being considered "serious" and "exclusive" by those involved), had never been married and had no children (but were not too old to potentially have them).

The respondents were university or college graduates and were financially independent. The singles who participated in the study were of different professions and held different positions: manager in a corporation (12), sole trader (7), journalist (6), teacher (6), administration worker (4), sales representative (4), manager in a small company (3), lawyer (3), specialist in public sector (3), academic teacher (2), IT specialist (2), policeman (1), stockbroker (1), veterinarian (1), accountant (1), photographer (1), financial advisor (1), nurse (1), psychologist (1).

The participants of the study live in Poland, in cities of 500,000 people or more. The reason for choosing residents from big cities was that currently cities are the scene of many social and cultural changes, and because it was in big cities in the West that the biggest growth in the number of singles was noted. Studies conducted by van Hoorn show that the percentage of people who live alone is highest among people in metropolises, where they are generally well educated, with high incomes, and considered "achievers" (Hoorn, 2000).

The respondents were chosen based on the snowball method. This is a technique which is applied in studies on specific social categories, and singles can be counted as such. The snowball method is based on collecting information about some members of a particular group which the author was in or managed to access. Later, these people were asked to name other potential participants of the study who met the above criteria. "The term snowball refers to the process of accumulation because every found person names the following ones" (Babbie 2009, p. 206). The analyzed material comes from 60 free-form interviews, oriented and conducted with 30 women and 30 men. Each interview lasted 40–90 minutes.

The issue required qualitative research. It was decided that the conducted study would be within a mainstream lifestyle study, with the qualitative approach allowing for complete analysis of the collected data. From the very beginning it was assumed that the study would not be statistically representative. It was supposed to help gather vast, precise and detailed information on the reasons for being single and the characteristics of chosen aspects of the lives of Polish singles.

In this article the quotations from respondents are signed with their name and age (e.g. Ewa, 30 – which means the respondent is 30 years old). I use also *other symbols* denote the experience the respondents have had in relationships:

S – serious relationships, C – casual relationships, SC – serious and casual relationships, N – no experience in relationships.

### PARENTS' UNSUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

The results of the studies presented on the following pages show that the family of origin, especially the quality of the parents' relationship, strongly influences the attitude of young people towards their own marriage or being in a relationship. The respondents admitted that a negative image of father-mother relationships is an important reason for them being single. Firstly, they indicated the formality of the marriage of their parents, who actually lived not together but "next to each other." During their early youth and childhood they often witnessed their parents fighting in a disrespectful manner and with no will to compromise. The singles observed that the relationships of their parents lasted, although more in a virtual sense, as each of the parents had their own life, and only lived together for the sake of the children. The current life situation of the single is a consequence of the careful selection of partners. They are motivated to constantly reject potential candidates due to a very negative image of the relationship of their parents. Some of the respondents cannot imagine living in relationships or marriages similar to those of their parents, and therefore they prefer to be single than to live with the wrong partner: "My parents have been married for 34 years and I think that they are not happy, as they have different views, plans, or priorities, and little in common. And I think it's very important in marriage. I wouldn't like to repeat their mistakes" (Patrick, 35, C); "My parents have been married for over 30 years and their relationship is an absolute disaster. They are so different – their personalities, attitude, opinions... They live together because they learned how to tolerate each other and they got used to being together. I prefer to be alone" (Robert, 38, C).

Another explanation of the single life and not having confidence in happy relationships is the fact that parents were formally married but lived separately. One of the respondents admitted that it made her realize that in order to have a happy relationship the good will of two people who love each other is not enough. There are other factors which influence the success of a marriage, for instance harmony, communication and compromise: "My parents... are not separated or anything, but some time ago they simply decided that they did not want to live together anymore because they would kill each other. In fact, they are individualists and they each need a lot of space" (Nina, 31, SC). This made the respondent have negative connotations of living as a couple. Singles



admit that each partner at the beginning may seem perfect, but over the passage of time the image changes: we see a completely different person from the one who we fell in love with. The participants of the study were convinced that getting to know the partner well, and not being able to accept differences in the way they see the world or accept their different visions of the future result in the break-up of a relationship.

Other factor which influences their decisions on being single is their mother or father being together and having affairs at the same time. Watching parents cheating and hearing mutual accusations which resulted in numerous conflicts also impact the image of a relationship children have. One of the respondents said that, had it not been for the unsuccessful marriage of his parents, he probably would be able to trust a woman and build a stable relationship: "I started noticing and considering things when I was very young. The marriage of my parents had its ups and downs. I tried to memorize it, such a lesson for the future, to choose well, to think twice and to take care of everything...Both of my parents had steady lovers, they both knew about it. I even knew my father's lover. He was with the same woman for a few years. I think that if I had got a positive image from my parents, then later in life, my verification (of creating relationships – J.C.) would be completely different" (Adam, 33, SC). Unfortunately, as he admitted himself, based on his considerations, he created his own theory of a "perfect relationship" which he cannot make come true due to his anxiety of being in an intimate relationship with a woman.

One more reason for being single mentioned by the participants of the study was their memories of the divorce of their parents. For one of the respondents, the divorce of her parents was a very bad experience as she witnessed a bitter fight over her custody when she was still a little girl. She said that due to these experience she is "petrified" at the very thought of marriage and admitted that she lived without a partner also because of the memories of how difficult it was for her mother to get a divorce from her father (Julia, 38, SC). Another respondent emphasized that a strong need to be in a "true, deep and stable relationship" often cannot be fulfilled due to memories of parents breaking up. His strong desire to have a partner is suppressed and blocked by the fear of very negative emotions which he felt during his parents' divorce, and which are still vivid in his imagination: "My parents are divorced, but they were in a bad relationship for a long time. I was still a teenager when they got divorced. I wanted to punish them and kept running away from home and we lost touch. They live separately now, they are single. My father is an alcoholic and lives with his mother. My mother could be with someone but I think a relationship



with my father was too much for her and she does not want to have anything in common with him. She prefers to be alone" (Karl, 33, N). Arguments supporting their status, which are repeated by many of the singles interviewed for this study, are the various traumas from childhood, a mark left by the their parents' break-up and fear of being in a relationship. One of the respondents, for example, had psychological problems after his parents divorced – high anxiety that any relationship could fall apart regardless of how much effort we make to build it (Dominic, 27, SC).

Another reason for being single listed by the participants of the study was lack of faith in the stability of relationships. The singles talked about their parents trying to find new partners after the divorce and building new relationships. Unfortunately, these friendships did not turn into anything serious. One of the respondents revealed: "When I was a student, my mom was with one guy for a few years, but then they split up. And my dad... got divorced from his second wife a year ago and now has a fiancée who is four years younger than I am. But he told me that he won't remarry because it doesn't make any sense, so I don't have such a model (of a relationship – J.C.) at all" (Julia, 38, SC).

Singles from one-parent families gave one more reason for their lifestyle. They said that the parent who brought them up did not decide to have another relationship; therefore they do not have patterns of living as a couple. Those respondents were, consciously and subconsciously, not open to stable relationships as they did not know how to build happy ones. The respondents who had lost their mother or father in childhood admitted that they did not remember what the relationships of their parents looked like (widowed parents did not get involved with somebody else in any of the cases). One of the respondents, who was raised by her father, said that as she had had no opportunity to observe the relationships of her parents, she does not know much about how to behave in a relationship (Maya, 29, SC). The respondents from broken families, whose mothers did not decide to have a new relationship, admitted that these experience had had a real impact on their lack of skills associated with dealing with the opposite sex and playing the proper roles in a relationship.

The results of the studies show that experience of unsuccessful, unhappy marriages of parents caused various difficulties in adulthood: high emotional tensions, inhibitions, a passive attitude and the tendency to withdraw from social situations (Dąbrowska, 2001). "For the first time in our lives we observe a marriage as it is, role-played by our mothers and fathers, under the parental roof" (Przybył, 2001, p. 112), so people from single-parent and unsuccessful families can have a deeply rooted negative image of living as a couple, or have

no such image at all. Their numerous fears, together with only a little knowledge of the positive aspects of living together, can result in not being willing to be in a relationship, or difficulties getting on with potential partners.

#### THE PERFECT RELATIONSHIP OF PARENTS AS AN UNREALISTIC STANDARD

Another reason for being single was the perfect image of their parents' marriage, which was found to be impossible to achieve or repeat. The singles admitted that it was hard to find a partner with whom they could be as happy as their parents were: "My parents have a good and happy marriage, they are on the same page, and there are no serious conflicts between them. Since I moved out, they have had more time for each other, that's obvious. So when I call them, they are either in town, getting ready for a party, or going to the cinema or shopping. They are simply young again. It would be great to live like that when I'm their age" (Eve, 30, C). This participant is afraid that she will not meet the right man who will make her as happy as her mother is with her father. She said that there are very few relationships as well matched and happy as her parents'. She believes that only one in ten couples is happy, live in harmony and feel they have found their "other half". Another respondent described his parents as being of the same mind and having a good marriage, adding that they never argued or fought. They like spending time together, discussing various social issues or international politics. He is convinced that you cannot build such a relationship overnight, but you work on it for many years as people get to know and become comfortable with each other (Matthew, 30, S).

The studied singles believe that their parents, who live happily together, have a lot of time for each other and can spend it together, which makes their relationship stronger. One of the men who participated in the study said that his parents spent almost all their free time together, and although they had been married for so many years they were still emotionally involved: "My parents have been together for over twenty five years, but they can talk from dusk till dawn, sipping cocktails. They still seem to be in love with each other" (Michael, 28, S). Another man thought that it would be difficult to build a relationship as good and lasting as his parents': "My parents have a good marriage. I can't remember any serious crisis or anything. It would be nice to have the same" (Martin, 33, C). He also said that they are still happy after so many years because they always had time for each other, talked a lot and thanks to that their relationship is built on strong foundations.



It turns out that some singles treat their parents as ideal role-models and would like to follow their example. They do not want chance relationships. They want true love. They claim that they are single because they cannot meet the right partner who they could have a perfect relationship with. It seems, however, that some of them do not notice that each of the described marriages has lasted for over 30 years. During this period, their parents had time to get to know each other and learned how to live together, compromise and please each other. It seems that their adult single children are not aware that happy and strong relationships are not built quickly or with no effort.

### STRONG BONDS WITH THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN

When a family of origin fulfills all the emotional needs of single people and gives them a sense of closeness, they sometimes become very, even symbiotically, attached to their parents or siblings. Some of them indicate that close relationships with family members are the main reasons for them being single.

Occasionally, when a single lives with his parents for too long, they may, according to some respondents, get emotionally addicted to their mother and/or father. Those respondents do not feel like having other close or intimate relationships with a partner. Some admit that they are still single because they cannot cut the cord: "I may be slightly too close to my family and they are still the most important people in my life. I have always come back home from my boyfriend's, even for the night or early in the morning, and I did not treat my relationships 100% seriously. My parents and my sister were always most important for me" (Eve, 30, C). This woman believes that she could only truly love her family members, not "a stranger". She also believes that her family is always there for her, helps her whenever she needs it and fully accepts her. She thinks that a man could always walk away, because the relationships between men and women are not as inseparable as the bonds with parents and siblings. Another woman who lived with her single mother till she was 31 claims that her mother meant everything to her. She believes that this makes a relationship with a man unnecessary for her. She did not even think of finding a partner before she moved out from her mother's house a year ago (Iris, 32, N). Another single also believes that she would have had a husband and children by now if she had moved out from her parents before she turned 32: "I am just beginning to be a woman; so far I have been a little girl, always with her parents, always safe" (Agatha, 35, N).

The respondents often mention that their parents are overprotective, therefore they cannot move out from their house. Their parents often make them feel like



they would not manage without help in everyday life. Some respondents get the impression that even though they are adults, their parents still treat them like little children who need help with everything. One of the respondents said that he was single due to his overprotective mother. He was asthmatic as a child and he thinks this made his mother take care of his health and his life. She thinks that no one can replace her. Whenever he brought a new girlfriend home and presented her to his parents, his mother was very critical and had high expectations of the potential candidate. The respondent admitted that he adopted her way of thinking and he has too high expectations towards women. On the one hand, his mother tells him to get married while on the other she makes it impossible, as she claims no one will take care of him 'the way she should'" (Conrad, 33, N).

Some of the male participants of the study said that they were not in a relationship because their mother did everything for them. One of them admitted that he still lived with his parents mostly because it was convenient, as he did not have to worry about meals, laundry or cleaning the house. His parents did that for him (Patrick, 35, SC). Others, although no longer living with their parents, admitted that they see no reason to build a relationship with a woman because their mothers did most of the housework for them. They admitted that if it was not done, they probably would look for a partner who would take care of the house.

By contrast, when the studied women described their reasons for being single, they talked about being too involved with helping other family members. As they feel so close to their family, they cannot say no to them. They think they devote too much time to family issues and neglect their own life: "I often have to do something for my parents, so they call me and treat my time as if it was theirs. I'm slightly fed up with it, because they do not ask whether I could do it for them, they just inform me that it needs to be done" (Ashley, 30, C). Another example of excessive involvement in family issues was mentioned by a respondent who had to take care of her disabled grandmother who she lived with. She also often had to help her sister with her baby. No wonder she said in her interview: "I think that I am a good-natured person, I help my sister a lot, my parents, too and I take care of my granny. Sometimes I even don't have enough time for myself" (Anna, 29, C). Giving emotional support to family members is similar to the above mentioned examples. One of the respondents admitted that if her friend hadn't told her how much time she devoted to family and their problems, instead of taking care of her own live, she would not have noticed it: "I was always worried about everybody and was so busy with my parents and sisters' life that I had no time left for myself" (Agatha, 35, N).

The interviewees also said that they lived on their own because their families of origin gave them the opportunity to spend time together. Frequent phone calls (sometimes even a few times a day) or daily visits allow singles to spend time with their parents and siblings. One of the participants talked to her parents on the phone several times a day for any reason, e.g. asking them for advice, how their day was, plans when they would meet. She left home a while ago, but every Friday after work she goes there and spends entire weekends with them. She comes back home Sunday evening or Monday after work. Her mom often visits her during the week. Thanks to all of this, she does not feel lonely, and as she has someone to spend time with, she is currently not looking for a partner (Dorothy, 37, N). It seems that by spending time together, the parents of singles mostly give their children a sense of security and make them not feel lonely.

Many singles, when they talked about their relationships with their parents, stressed that they could always count on their parents' help and support in difficult times, and also in everyday life. Often this sense of proximity, bonds and family background, strengthened by living together for many, many years, had become so deep and strong that some of them do not feel lonely and do not feel the need to be with someone else. Their family gives them all the emotions and helps them to satisfy their needs. The examples described above show that for some singles bonds with their family are more important than having a relationship.

### LIVING ALONE AS A HABIT OF ONLY-CHILDREN

The results of the study show that when it comes to singles who are only-children, their lifestyle may be a result of the habit of being the only child in the family, who gets all the attention; a result of an egocentric or even egotistic attitude. It is worth mentioning here that only men spoke about it even though the group also consisted of women who were only-children.

Some men stated that as only-children they did not have an opportunity to learn how to live with siblings, and that is why they are now not very good at building relationships with other people. They find it difficult to compromise and share things. They are used to being the center of attention and taking care of their own needs only. One of the respondents said: "I am very fond of myself and sometimes I can turn into a narcissist and show off with my opinion about myself... I don't know, maybe this is because I am an only-child, I never had to share anything, compromise, I was the master of my own fate and I still am" (Paul, 30, C). The respondent admitted that it is hard for him to be in a stable relationship with a woman, because he and his needs always come first. Another said that his



parents always did what he asked them to, he was spoiled and his opinion was always most important: "I think this is natural that when you are an only-child your parents are fixed on you. This is not good, because it twists and creates barriers when trying to socialize. Those who have brothers and sisters know that they have to share; their opinion is not always the most important. Not all only-children are like that, but there are also special cases like myself" (Luke, 33, SC).

Another said that he was single because he had got used to such a lifestyle. He has always had his own room, which he locked himself in whenever he wanted to be alone. Today he also appreciates his loneliness and the peace in his life: "I am an only-child and I have always had this little room of mine, I didn't mind it, I locked myself in there when I wanted to, always alone. Sometimes I called someone or went out. I was always alone and had no problem with it, like some people do – they cannot imagine living on their own, like I do now, but I've simply got used to it" (Matthew, 30, S).

Another respondent openly admitted that if he had had brothers or sisters – which had been his dream – it would be easier for him to socialize with other people and be more open to relationships with women (Conrad, 33, N). Another interviewee was at first not sure if his single life was associated with him having no siblings, but after giving it some consideration he admitted: "I've always felt better alone because I was an only-child. It had its good sides, but I don't think that I am this way now because I was brought up alone, although maybe..." (Patrick, 35, SC).

It is worth mentioning that these were statements of the men only. This could be explained by differences in the process of socialization of men and women: men are directed on themselves, whereas women focus on others. This means that women define themselves through values and interpersonal relationships. They are taught that taking care of other people should be most important. Men are more often educated to be independent individualists, to focus on their own goals (Czyżowska, 1993). This is why some only-sons who do not have partners believe that they are single because of their egocentric attitudes.

#### OTHER REASONS FOR BEING SINGLE ASSOCIATED WITH FAMILY CONDITIONS

When it comes to reasons for being single other than those described above, some women believe that they are single due to the way they were brought up and the values that were instilled. Their mothers put a lot of emphasis on teaching their daughters to be independent and to make independent decisions. One of the respondents said that she managed great with everything, could make dif-



ficult decisions and organizes her life, and even though she would like to have a partner in the future, she admitted that she hardly needed him (Iris, 32, N). Another woman said that her mother taught her to be smart and independent in life, and she admitted that she never really felt the need to share her life with someone, although she had been in a relationship which had lasted a few years (Julia, 38, SC). Another single woman knows that her current attitude towards men is a result of the way her mother treated her husband, the father of the respondent: "My parents are basically happy. My mother is a very strong woman, very strong. Dad cleans up, does the shopping, and simply takes care of the house, which mum has provided for most of her life. She makes the most important decisions. I kind of think that my sister and I sister looked up to her, and now, unfortunately, this has had an impact on our relationships with men. My sister is exactly the same. She imposes her opinions on her current boyfriend. We don't look for compromise; we are princesses who can put our foot down and do what we want, and the man can't say even one word. Who would take that?" (Eve, 30, C). This woman added that her mother often warned her to pick her future partner carefully, so that she wouldn't have to suffer with a wrong man. She has never managed to create a happy relationship because she was thoroughly convinced that a domineering woman is the right attitude to have, but on the other hand she knew that this was not the way to build a partnership. It seems that parents, with their behaviors, opinions and judgments, have shaped the image of marriage or family which their children later have. The advice they give may become instructions on interpersonal relationships, communication and behavior.

An extraordinary reason for singlehood mentioned by one man only was his low self-esteem. His parents' marriage was happy and successful, but he mentioned the negative impact their relation has had on his life. He blames them for feeling less important due to their close bonds with each other: "They were always most important for each other. I sometimes feel that I was just in the background, because their relationship was more important" (Michael, 28, S). At present, he is looking for reasons for the failure of his relationships in his lack of self-acceptance and low self-esteem, caused by his parents.

According to one of the single women her love failures and choosing "the wrong" partners to fall for is a result of the bad relationship she has with her father. He showed her no feelings – not when she was a child, nor now when she is an adult. He never told her he loved her, did not hug her and did not give her a shoulder to cry on at difficult times. He created a distance and a communication barrier which she could not overcome. She admitted that she often chose married men who had

their own families because she thought they would fulfill her need for “paternal love”, take care of her and understand her problems. She thought that as they were mature – and their family was supposed to be proof of that – they knew how to show their feelings. But after a few affairs with married men she realized that their positive features and behaviors were sort of a game, an illusion that she longed for: “Maybe subconsciously I chose men who already had something – a house, a wife, and children and are different, but they weren’t” (Hanna, 37, C).

As a result of the conducted studies, it turned out that families gave single people many reasons to live alone: the way they were brought up, the relationships between the parents, and between the parents and the children. In some cases, these factors had a strong impact on choosing this particular lifestyle.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up this part of the analysis of social reasons behind singlehood which are related directly to families of the single people, we can observe some factors – repeated in their statements – which influenced their attitude to relationships. They are as follows: the negative image of their parents’ relationship, emotional ties to family members which are too strong to build relationships with other people, parents’ perfect marriage as an unrealistic example, a model which is impossible to repeat, and the habit of living alone.

Negative memories of parents’ relationship have a big impact on the decisions whether to live with or without a partner. Single people are either inspired or warned not to repeat the same mistakes by their observations. The participants of the study have often considered how deep and true a feeling to another person has to be in order to be able to build a lasting relationship with them and include them and their goals in single’s life strategy. Some of the respondents chose the single life as the lesser of two evils or, according to them, a more efficient lifestyle.

On the other hand, an almost perfect marriage of the parents makes the single people feel obliged to build relationships which would be as perfect. In order to do that, one must meet the right partner who singles are looking for constantly, but in vain. It is typical for them not to understand and to have no patience to build a deep and lasting relationship of two people, based on many years spent together and a deep feeling based on mutual experience. One can judge from the statements of some of the singles that they expect and believe in the possibility of creating happy relationships “here and now.” With no suitable partners, nor the time to find them, they decided to live alone.



Among those people studied, we also found people who did not want to have their own relationship at all, as their family of origin satisfied their need for intimacy. Staying very close to their family, especially their parents, made it possible for them to live the single life with no danger of feeling lonely.

## REFERENCES

- Babbie, E. (2009). *The Practice of social research*. California: Wadsworth.
- Cockrum, J., & White, P. (1985). Influences on the life satisfaction of never-married men and women. *Family Relation*, 34(4), 551–556.
- Czernecka, J. (2008). Polski singiel: obraz w mediach a autowizerunek [Polish single: media image and self-appraisal]. In E. Malinowska (Ed.) *Stereotypy a rzeczywistość na przykładzie wybranych kategorii społecznych* [Stereotypes and reality of chosen social categories]. Łódź: Tercja.
- DePaulo, B. M., & Morris, W. L. (2005). Singles in society and in science. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16(2–3), 57–83. doi: 10.1080/1047840X.2005.9682918
- Gajda J., (1988). *Środki masowego przekazu w wychowaniu* [Mass media and education]. Lublin: UMCS.
- Gordon, P. A. (2003). The decision remain single: Implication for women across culture. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 1, 33–44.
- Grzeszczyk, E. (2005). Pojedyncze, profesjonalistki... „single professional women” w Polsce i na świecie [Single professional women in Poland and abroad]. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 2, 199–225.
- Hoorn, W.D. (2000). Alleen wonen: liever wel of liever niet, *Demos*, 16. Retrieved from <http://www.nidi.knaw.nl/web/html/public/demos/dm00031.html> (10.10.2008)
- Motohiro, K. (2000). Japan's dependent dingles. *Spotlight on Okinawa*, 3. Retrieved from <http://japanecho.co.jp/sum/2000/270313.html> 25.06.2009
- Paprzycka, E. (2008). *Kobiety żyjące w pojedynkę. Między wyborem a przymusem* [Single women. Between choice and must]. Warszawa: Wyd. Akademickie Żak.
- Slany, K. (2002). *Życie w samotności* [Lonely life]. Retrieved from <http://respublica.onet.pl/1102349,artykul.html> (17.05.2005)
- Stein, P. J. (1976). *Single*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Timberger, E. K. (2008). *Nowa singielka* [New Single Woman]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B.
- Żurek, A. (2005). Relacje łączące młodych singli z rodzicami [Relationships of young singles with families]. In: W. Wrzesień, A. Żurek, & I. Przybył (Eds.), *Rodzice i ich dzieci w tańcu pokoleń* [Parents and their children in generation dance], (2nd ed., pp. 71–122) Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM.
- Żurek, A. (2008). *Single – żyjąc w pojedynkę* [Single – living alone]. Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM.