

SINGLEHOOD AMONG YOUNG AND MIDDLE AGE WOMEN IN POLAND – STEREOTYPES IN THE MASS MEDIA VS. SINGLE WOMEN’S OPINIONS

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Resumo

O texto apresenta as mulheres residentes nas grandes cidades da Polônia vivendo sozinhas. A autora se refere à sua própria pesquisa empírica. Em primeiro lugar, ela apresenta uma análise do conteúdo de artigos sobre morar sozinha publicados nos últimos 16 anos em duas revistas semanais polonesas populares, que descrevem a imagem de uma mulher solteira criada pela mídia. A segunda parte apresenta as opiniões das mulheres pesquisadas sobre suas atitudes em relação ao estereótipo criado pela mídia sobre a mulher que vive sozinha e os motivos por viverem sós. As principais circunstâncias sociais apresentadas neste artigo são as altas expectativas em relação a possíveis parceiros e relacionamentos, a idéia de um "amor ideal" e a importância de ter uma carreira profissional. O artigo apresenta as semelhanças e diferenças entre a imagem de uma “mulher solteira” apresentada nos artigos de jornal e as respostas de mulheres solteiras das grandes cidades. A pesquisa foi realizada na Polônia, que é um exemplo de país em transformação econômica, cultural e social, com dois sistemas de valores: tradicional (coletivista) e moderno (individualismo).

Palavras-chave: mulheres solteiras, solteirice, vida só, solteiras de grandes cidades.

Abstract

The text presents the women residents of large cities in Poland living solo. The author refers to her own empirical research. First of all, she presents an analysis of the content of articles on living alone published over the last 16 years in two popular Polish weekly magazines, which describe the image of a single woman created by the media. The second part presents the opinions of the surveyed women on their attitudes regarding the stereotype of a woman living alone created by the media, and the reasons for they live alone. The main social circumstances presented in this article are the high expectations towards potential partners and relationships, the idea of an “ideal love”, and the importance of having a professional career. The article presents the similarities and differences between the image of the “single lady” presented in newspaper articles and the responses of single women living in large cities. The research was conducted in Poland, which is an example of a country undergoing economic, cultural and social transformation, with two systems of values: traditional (collectivist) and modern (individualism).

Keywords: single women, singlehood, living solo, large city singles.

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The social context of singlehood

The changes that have been taking place for several decades in contemporary Western societies have contributed to significant transformations in the sphere of family, marriage, and relationships between women and men (BECK-GERNSHEIM, 1998; BECK, 2004; GIDDENS, 2006; ŻUREK, 2008). Many scientific studies point to the fact that in highly developed countries such as the United States, Canada as well as those belonging to the European Union, alternative forms of lifestyle are becoming more and more prevalent, i.e., families of choice, e.g., a group of friends living in one household, a couple living apart, couples choosing not to have children, or people living alone (also as a choice). Sociological and demographical studies in Western countries show that alternative life scenarios are increasingly attractive to various categories of people (SLANY, 2002). Contemporary researchers' attention is drawn to the fact that 'living alone' is gradually becoming more common among the younger generation and middle-aged people as a lifestyle (BECK-GERNSHEIM, 1998).

The 1990s in Poland brought a huge change in politics. From then on it has been based on democratic ideas and an economy opening up to the free market. The largest Polish cities dynamically transformed by and became focuses of these economic, cultural and social changes. The mass media started to promote new patterns and ways of thinking, strongly preferring individualistic values and new lifestyles connected with personal realization, professional career and greater consumption (SLANY, 2002). They seemed very attractive to Poles, as they were based on freedom of choice and one's own accomplishments (ZIÓŁKOWSKI, 1998). Polish reality changed into a reality of Western European countries (INGLEHART, 1997). Young people in particular focused mostly on their professional careers and postponed their decisions about having a relationship or a family.

Transformations in the way people think have led to a confrontation of the norms and values previously considered traditional in Poland with individualistic

values transmitted from 'the West' (INGLEHART, 1997). Surveys conducted in Poland present the changes taking place in the area of life values of Poles, from the family, which usually ranked first, to a significant increase in the importance of professional self-fulfillment and economic independence as well as an increase in the importance of education. A shift can be noticed from collectivist values to those of an individualistic nature along with a move from values related to a traditional society to values promoted in modern or post-modern societies (CZERNECKA, 2014).

To define individualism, we usually list such values as the emotional independence of the individual, personal initiative, privacy, high self-awareness, spending free time by oneself, self-confidence, professional realization, economic independence, making individual decisions and managing one's faith, and no responsibility for other people. It is also believed that the social relationships of individualists are based on exchanges which take into account the benefits and drawbacks, deciding what is good or wrong for them (BOKSZAŃSKI, 2007). They make independent choices and live the life they want to, where their needs come first, before the needs of other people (BECK, 2004). Hofstede believes that in individualistic cultures, people's own desires, interests and professional plans become a challenge for someone who is committed to the family. Personal relationships need to be in line with one's goals. Free time is evaluated, the value of work is noticed and assessed, together with satisfaction or the freedom of choosing a work style (HOFSTEDE, 2000, in: BOKSZAŃSKI, 2007). The values of an individualistic culture are centered on self-realization, searching for identity and skills development.

Individualism as an attitude and type of life strategy is now typical mostly for large cities. It has become essential for the mechanisms of a capitalistic society, especially the labor market, which changes and grows most rapidly nowhere else but in large cities. It is capitalism that requires individuals to be enterprising and efficient, and constantly verifies their usefulness for the system. People are hired, promoted and

rewarded for their skills, qualifications and time they devote to their company, but people are also dismissed if they become inefficient or useless for the corporation (DOMAŃSKI, DUKACZEWSKA, 1994). In large agglomerations, life norms associated with having a professional career are promoted, together with gaining economic independence, improving work capacity, constant education and gaining new qualifications, all of which are connected with certain lifestyles.

The “individualization spiral” – as described by Beck (2004) – has worked its way not only into the labor market, but also private lives. The transformation of marriage and intimate relationships was also caused by the changes in the 1960s in developed capitalistic countries, which turned into a fight for, e.g., a fight for women’s rights, for example. Women no longer wanted to be wives and mothers only, they also wanted to be a part of public life. One of these areas was professional work – the number of women hired at the time increased dramatically, especially in large cities (FISHER, 2004). The process of the modernization of society made female expansion in the labor market irreversible. This was not only a result of economic and demographic changes, but also an advance that leads to introspection and a higher social awareness of women (MALINOWSKA, 2003). Women, now better educated, started to appreciate economic independence, and also the realization of their own needs, life goals, their autonomy and their freedom. “The opposition to ‘family/private life – work/public life’ no longer existed. Higher professional ambitions and the need for self-realization – not only through motherhood – resulted in choices ‘to the advantage’ of public life” (MALINOWSKA, 2003, p. 100). It seems that this individualistic philosophy has become crucial to understand both the changes which are still taking place in family life and the decisions made about intimate relationships. Beck states that in the process of actual equality for women, the foundations of family, marriage, sexuality and parenthood are questioned. The demands of the labor market make partners confront contradictory requirements: time dedicated to professional life and education, and time for a partner, keeping the house and taking care of children. Contradictions in the situation of men and

women become visible, and the rising conflicts between the sexes influence their private life. So, when one has the possibility of choice – professional realization vs. having a family – there are differences in opinions and tensions associated with them. This is why, according to Beck, decisions in our private life are partially personal, partially institutional. The lack of institutional solutions multiplies private conflicts and internal dilemmas of individuals (BECK, 2004).

At the same time, paradoxically, in a postmodern society the quality of marriage, relationships and family life have become one of the most important indicators of the quality of life. It has resulted in higher expectations towards the partner and the relationship, which are supposed to provide, among other things, sexual satisfaction and a sense of a close emotional bond. These high expectations refer to the fact that people most often look for someone who would be an ideal soul-mate, i.e., someone who is emotionally close, gives a sense of unity, and someone with whom we could share our love, happiness and sadness. At least on an ideological level, finding the “other half” has replaced all the previous reasons for getting married or being in long-term relationships (PAPRZYCKA, 2008; TRIMBERGER, 2008). The ideal of a soul-mate somehow legitimates single life, as searching for “the one” disqualifies the belief that you cannot live a satisfying life without a partner and that it is better to live with someone even if they are not ideal (TRIMBERGER, 2008; in: DEPAULO; MORRIS, 2005).

In the context of the deliberations of Giddens and Beck about the life of single women can be interpreted as the result of the implementation of the rules and principles of the capitalist labor market, which requires individuals to constantly improve their skills in order to ensure a sufficiently high standard of living. Moreover, in the culture of individualism, the choice of a partner is also motivated by a particular lifestyle: profession, career model, hobbies. A single woman may not want to be in a relationship with a man who is not suitable for her, because the risk of not having a good, long-term relationship is too high (LOWENSTEIN & OTHERS, 1981; CHANDLER, 1991; DALTON, 1992).

The theoretical and methodological assumptions of the research

Considerations about single women should commence with a definition of the term. From a formal perspective, single women are unmarried women. Such a category includes never-married women, women after divorce, widows, or women living in separation (LEWIS, MOON, 1997; KAISER, KASHY, 2005; KOROPECKYJ-COX, 2005). Yet, a single woman is one who does not live alone as a result of a coincidence or low attractiveness (GORDON, 1994; CARGAN, 1981). The changes in the system of values have significantly influenced the transformation of terms describing people living alone from an 'old maid' to those who live alone by choice, are active in the professional and social field and are satisfied with their lives as singles. However, contemporary singles are a very diverse category which is difficult to define unambiguously (CHASTEEN, 1994). One of the pioneers of research into life alone, the American researcher Peter Stein, described singles as people who are not married or who do not have a permanent, informal homosexual or heterosexual relationship (STEIN, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1981). My definition will be presented later in the article.

The aim of the article is to answer the question of what image of a single woman is created by the media and, moreover, whether this image is confirmed by empirical research conducted among women living alone. The basis for this analysis was the gender perspective, in which biological sex is not treated as the foundation of gender and gender identity. In sociology, gender is defined as the process of creating socio-cultural models of masculinity and femininity and is primarily considered in the context of its corresponding patterns of social roles and expectations. Sociological analyses usually focus on the relationship between the macro-social level, in which specific models of femininity function, and the micro-social level, which is based on one's own experience forming the foundations for specific models of femininity and

models of women's performance of specific social roles (MALINOWSKA, 2004).

In reference to the adopted perspective, the analysis was conducted by comparing a stereotype of a single woman presented by the Polish media with the accounts of single women themselves in relation to their life experiences. A single woman living alone does not assume the role of a mother/wife. Therefore, such a lifestyle is often considered socially undesirable, and people who choose not to be in a relationship or have children are perceived in a specific, stereotypical way (MALINOWSKA, 2003). Family theories and theories related to the life cycle of the individual present explanations that, for an individual, especially a woman, getting married and having children is socially expected. This is due to the fact that in most cultures family formation is treated as a synonym for adulthood and emotional maturity, whereas life alone is a state that precedes entering into marriage and parental roles. Although social conditions seem to contribute to the fact that being single is not as stigmatized today as it used to be, we still live in a world in which social expectations are still associated with creating a lasting, heterosexual relationship and having children. Research by Bella DePaulo and Wendy Morris shows that single women are still seen as lonely, unhappy, egocentric and selfish, independent, and emotionally and socially immature. These researchers believe that one of the most important implications of the ideology of marriage and family is the perception of singles, which is firmly rooted in social consciousness (DEPAULO; MORRIS, 2005).

Therefore, it was assumed that women living alone, when constructing their role, may refer to commonly available patterns, i.e., to examples from popular culture and information about the life of other singles presented, for example, in journalism. Consequently, this text is an attempt to answer the following questions: What is the image of a single woman created by the media? Does the image created by the mass media coincide with the one emerging from empirical research on women living alone who, because of their socio-demographic features, are included in the media stereotype of a single woman?

In this article, a meta-analysis has been attempted both of earlier studies on stereotyping the life of singles and press articles not previously analyzed. The articles on the subject of single women published in two opinion-forming weeklies – *Wprost* and *Polityka* – were the object of the re-examination described in the text. These publications date back to the years 2000-2016. Despite the fact that two different world-view magazines were chosen (*Wprost* center-right policy / *Polityka* center-left policy), it appears the image of singles presented in their pages was very similar; therefore, this analysis does not distinguish between the magazines from this perspective. It is worth noting that despite the passage of nearly two decades, the media image of a single women has not changed significantly.

The analysis carried out here is not a full analysis of the content. For the sake of the analysis, the articles selected were on the subject of the life of singles. Sporadic publications of articles on the topic limited the research material at my disposal. This led me to adopt a qualitative approach to the content analysis, which allows the use of informal categories.

The rest of the material comes from my own empirical research, which is a part of a broader study focusing on the reasons why singles live alone and on their lifestyle (CZERNECKA, 2014). The selection of the sample was purposeful; it involved using the snowball method in the selection of respondents. Heterosexual women aged between 25 and 40 took part in the research, as most often people of that age bracket decide to form a permanent relationship and start a family, and at the same time, they aspire to personal development, education and professional career development. The study involved people who, at the time of conducting the research, had not been in a permanent relationship for at least two years (a permanent relationship is considered to be one that is perceived by the respondents as “serious” and “exclusive”), had not been married before and had no children (however, they are at an age at which they may potentially have them). The participants of the survey were residents of cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants (Lodz and Warsaw) in Poland. The material analyzed here comes from 30 free interviews with the women. In the study,

free, targeted (structured) interviews were used. Although these surveys were not conducted on a representative sample, they provide a basis for identifying certain types of behavior characteristics of a similar category of people to those who took part in the survey and whom I call singles.

The image of single women in the weekly magazines

In the analyzed articles, singles share certain socio-demographic and status features. Although the analyzed material covers 16 years, this stereotype is rarely broken. They are most often described as young women who live in a metropolitan environment, function alone, and are well-educated and wealthy; they like having a social life and are successful in the professional sphere. It is also emphasized that they live “solo” by choice. As far as demographic and social characteristics are concerned, in most articles there is a similar definition, which states that “the truly metropolitan singles” (P/22/07/2006)¹ are defined as young or middle-aged people living alone in large cities without a stable partner, and with a high income; moreover, “the single woman is well educated with training abroad” (P/03/06/2000). Most often, singles are described as members of independent professions – artists, journalists, public relations specialists, employees of human resources departments, or owners of companies (P/21/10/2006). As far as physical characteristics are concerned, they are credited with high physical attractiveness and great care for their appearance: “attractive in appearance, well dressed” (P/21/10/2006); “singles have (...) a well-kept appearance” (P/21/09/2002); “a 40-year-old single woman is a sparkle – neat, elegant and wise” (P/03/06/2000).

On the one hand, single women are credited with positive qualities: “Singles have a wide range of interests. “Intelligent, cheerful, sociable - they contradict the stereotypes of loneliness and hopelessness of the old propaganda” (P/21/09/2002). Selected excerpts illustrate this issue best: “The single woman is well-educated, with internships abroad, and

¹ P/22/07/2006: P – *Polityka* magazine, published 22 July 2006; W/08/12/2013: W – *Wprost* magazine, published 8 December 2013

has several short, intermittent relationships. She is fussy and picks and chooses guys (...), they are the noblest part of Polish society, earning as much as a man, much more than a married woman, and even more so than a bachelor” (P/03/06/2000); “after all, there are many wonderful, wise, brave single women” (P/03/06/2000); “women in their thirties: educated, with good jobs and position in life” (P/29/05/2005);

every single woman entering adult life knows that, first of all, she has to learn a lot, take care of her own body and broaden her mental horizons. She should have the best possible start; it wouldn't hurt to have a black judo belt, and a sum put aside for a rainy day would also be useful (P/29/05/2005).

The research shows that single women are really different from those who would like to have a life with a partner. They are more independent, more confident and devote more time to themselves. Thus, they fit perfectly the picture of singles that we know from the media (W/08/12/2013).

On the other hand, the magazines suggest that singles have narcissistic personalities, are self-centered, selfish, and immature, are willing to give up their families for a career, are burdened with the “Miss Peter Pan” syndrome (P/22/07/2006), and value freedom, independence, and self-determination above all else. Such a set of features of singles is represented by selected fragments:

perfectionists with sadistically high requirements towards themselves, expecting appropriate admiration for their perfection (...), focused on themselves (...), suffer from the same syndrome of immaturity, involving (...) escaping from maturity, seeking pleasure, rejecting thoughts about tomorrow (P/21/10/2006);

they do not form a family because they can no longer form interpersonal ties. (...) Eternal children, hidden from adulthood behind a pile of gadgets (...) They are a generation valuing easiness, speed, and enjoyability (P/22/07/2006);

selfish singles have no intention of giving up their habits (P/21/09/2002).

It should be noted that the analyzed articles develop and emphasize above all those threads in which the authors focus on the negative features of singles and the presentation of their life in a negative light. Here are some quotations on this subject:

[They] doubt whether they can love because they are possessed by independence (...), over the years they love alone because it is safe, and they are afraid of strangers, afraid of their other opinions,

judgments, comments, and answers to their needs and expectations (P/21/10/2006);

in solitude they go wild (...), and their intellect is as deep as the ocean (solitude mostly goes hand in hand with spiritual or intellectual emptiness) (P/21/10/2006).

The behavior of singles is judged by the authors negatively – although not always directly. The behavior most often described by the authors of the analyzed articles is the instrumental treatment of men. Singles solely like sex without obligation; their priority is orgasm and not the partner with whom they have had sex (W/23/02/2004). If they have a lover, it's just to be able to call him in difficult moments when they are sad or when they are down in the dumps, but they certainly don't want to take responsibility for the other person. They do not need to have a “guy” at home, because they value freedom the most (P/03/07/2004). A similar purport can be found in two subsequent articles:

a new, free woman (...) the next day after a loving night leaves the lover a note on the pillow with the words: you could be better. She jumps into a taxi, rushes to the airport and lands in time to chair an expert meeting. The new free woman says: we choose loneliness because we have great expectations. We demand love from the 1960s, sex from the 1970s, and professional success as it is now understood (P/03/06/2000).

Also, “I am waiting for the other person. However, I would like him not to be too absorbing, because I need moments of solitude. I work a lot, so I have to rest, too” (P/22/07/2006).

It seems that something peculiar happened to Polish women in the emancipatory relay. That contraception, promotion, and psychological transformation have followed their own paths. And most of all – a new deal with men. (...) They lapse into the conviction that a man is someone hopeless by nature, from the very psychological construction, with whom it is not worth having children (P/07/02/2014). These negative behaviors of women are mainly explained by the increase in their independence and self-reliance.

Another area analyzed was the way in which the authors of the articles explained the popularity of life on their own. The emancipation of women – in addition to the emergence of a consumer society, which I will write about below – is the factor most frequently mentioned by the authors, through which the emergence of the phenomenon of singles in modern societies is explained. The issue of women's

emancipation is presented in a contradictory way. In the same reports or columns, on the one hand, a positive dimension is attributed to features of singles such as gaining financial independence, having a very good education, the eagerness to achieve self-fulfillment in the professional field, high resourcefulness or life independence. On the other hand, these features of singles, as a consequence of women's emancipation processes, are the reasons for the increase in the number of singles around the world and in Poland. Then the authors write about "too much" independence and the self-sufficiency of women, which even hinders or prevents women from finding a partner (because men prefer more submissive women). Here are some interesting quotations:

The explosion of loneliness was caused primarily by women. A new model has emerged – an independent, educated, resourceful woman (...); what do the new women do after 12 hours of work, shoulder to shoulder with men, compared to whom they are increasingly better educated? Take care of themselves. They are worth it. (...) They do not neglect it, because they know that they cannot count on anyone's forbearance. The body supports them. They preserve it like an empty house. In fact, they would need a wife who would cook, repair a dripping tap and take care of their children (P/03/06/2000).

Paradoxically, women doomed to live alone and bring up their children owe much of this to the gender equality campaign, as some women have become so concerned about equality that they have forgotten about family and motherhood. It was feminists who persuaded women that marriage and motherhood were true slavery. (...) In recent decades, progressive women have not only freed themselves from sexual limitations – many of them have also freed themselves from the sacramental snares of monogamous marriage. One could say that we reap the unwanted harvest of the sexual revolution and feminism. First, liberated women recognized that a family is a woman with a child (...), and recently, even a person living alone (W/18/02/2001).

From the article, we learn that rural women have also started to make this "strategic mistake" by going to university, because they are joining the group of educated urban intelligentsia for whom it is most difficult to find a husband today. They devote too much time to study and work, so they are no longer able to make use of 'traditional' skills that have been valued for centuries and could prove to be an asset today. Cooking, baking, cleaning, home atmosphere? They don't have the time, strength or willingness to do so (P/21/10/2006).

In the analyzed material, the world of independent and liberated women-singles is opposed to the world of men, attached to the patriarchal division of roles and

traditional values, who do not want to be associated with "such emancipants": "A new phenomenon can be seen – single women, financially independent and emancipated. But everything has a price! Desperate and threatened by emancipation, single men reach for their fiancée from the catalog" (P/21/09/2002). "Men are unable to accept an emancipated, self-reliant woman" (P/22/07/2006). "Is it surprising that more and more men, when they meet women with such views, prefer either to delay forming a family or not to marry at all?" (W/18/02/2001). It also turns out that women do not want to be associated with 'lesser' candidates either. In particular, they expect a high level of IQ, personal charm, a sense of humor, refinement, and fidelity, while "the demand for male resourcefulness, sense of responsibility and diligence has fallen" (P/03/06/2000). The authors emphasize that single women are doomed to loneliness because they devote themselves completely to science and their career, no longer having time for a social life. Moreover, there are no suitable men around them; they are either insufficiently educated or addicted to their mothers – "half of the 30-year-old guys live with their mother" (P/22/07/2006). Women are seen as very picky; they will not be satisfied with "whomsoever," and they consider men generally either boring or in need of support: "guys are not very eloquent, they are reluctant to further their intellectual development, and they do not understand women" (P/03/06/2000).

As far as the reasons for living "solo" are concerned – with reference to the quoted statements of singles – here the authors consistently take the view that the main reasons for living alone are primarily the negative features of a single person. They write about their egocentrism, egoism, their economic approach to relationships, their reluctance to share wealth and freedom, and their reluctance to make compromises with another person:

They do not intend to give up their habits unless a potential partner gives them a guarantee of a higher standard of living. The balance of profits and losses must show that it was worthwhile taking a risk (P/21/09/2002);

many of them say it is simply more convenient. They are rich enough to pay the cost of living alone and mentally independent enough to choose it. They don't have to explain to anybody why they get home late, they don't have to negotiate the choice of the

tiles, a destination for weekend trips, or what there will be for lunch with anybody. They have time for hobbies, sports and socializing (W/18/02/2001).

There is also the issue of the lack of time to find a partner. This is explained by the fact that singles devote a lot of time to further training and, above all, to professional work, which requires to be fully available: They are “involved in corporate mechanisms, employed in important positions and responsible for their own companies and find it difficult to find time to cultivate close and intimate contacts” (P/21/10/2006). Among the other reasons for living alone, there were: the very high expectations of singles towards themselves, which is related not only to the “cold calculation” of profits and losses of entering into a relationship but also to the pursuit of crazy, ideal love. Although for singles it is very “difficult to find the right person: interesting, fascinating, affectionate. A search for the suitable match at any price does not make sense, in any case, they will not subordinate life to this goal” (P/21/10/2006). Many singles are actually fleeing into working life. They know they are good. Like Klaudia. She is in the group of those two and a half million singles who like their situation.

I sympathize with the girls whose life is determined by the search for a partner. When I go out with friends, it's to have fun, not to hunt for someone. It's desperation on the verge of ridicule and madness. I am alone because I choose such a life. Because that's why I'm not dependent on anyone. I don't have to accept compromises or concessions. Sometimes I feel lonely because I rarely go home. Friends more and more often have their own plans, and it is difficult to go out or go somewhere together spontaneously, but I realize that this is the price of my choices. Probably if I lived with someone, sometimes I would miss solitude. I want to be single because I feel good about it,” she says. “Forever?” I ask. “Definitely now, for the moment,” she admits. (W/08/12/2013).

Another noteworthy theme appeared in the analyzed material, namely the tendency to see many negative consequences of life alone for women. Life alone is seen as a cause of ill health or mental disorders. Authors write, for example, that “solo” life is accompanied by irregular and accidental sex or no sex at all, which causes emotional chaos in singles and the search for a substitute in extreme sports, parties, gyms, etc. There are comments from specialists – most often psychologists – that a long life alone is something

unnatural, contradicting the need for closeness and reinforcing fears about a potential partner: “it is not true that we are self-sufficient in terms of feelings. Even introverted people cannot eliminate the need for closeness (...) The prolongation of this state can be dangerous” (W/18/02/2001). The authors quote statistics showing the negative consequences of being single, such as susceptibility to diseases, depression, addiction, the use of therapists and psychiatrists, and ultimately suicides. Living alone is even seen as “dangerous” for the life and health of the individual and, as one of the authors writes, “it may be worthwhile tiring yourself out in a common nest, at least for health reasons” (W/18/02/2001).

There are only a few texts recently which show the multidimensionality of the life of singles in Poland, and none so far using quotes from the heroines of the articles (usually they were articles based on the knowledge and opinions of the journalist):

“Being single is a situation between choice and coercion. When there are no suitable partners, women either choose to live alone or are forced to lower their requirements. In addition, women who admit that they are alone must convince others that their lives can still be successful” (W/08/12/2013).

If I were to blame someone for not being one hundred percent happy, I would blame the media. In recent years they have fed us with stories about how great it is to be a single woman. First there was ‘Ally McBeal’ and then ‘Sex and the City.’ I grew up with such models. And now, suddenly, I have to face the fact that being single is not as cool as it was presented. It's disappointing. Moreover, we function in a reality in which one does not care about relationships, where relationships are easily broken off on principle: You don't like it? OK. I'll move out and look for a flat to rent. We have nothing in common (W/08/12/2013).

The text on ‘The Miss Era’ by Gustaw (P/14/02/2017) is fully based on my book ‘Wielkomięscy single.’ (2014). Subsequent articles explore not so much the phenomenon of being single as ways to find love, mainly by referring to dating sites (P/07/02/2014; P/20/10/2015; P/09/02/2016; P/08/09/2016). Because of the subject of this publication, I will omit this topic in the material under consideration.

The present research shows that the image of the single person in the Polish press is full of contrasts. On the one hand, they are described as resourceful and go-getting, for whom nothing is impossible, and on the other – they are unprepared for life, lost, without moral signposts, thrown into reality without barriers, flooded

with information, overpowered with excess opportunities, lost in today's world. What is contradictory is the image of singles who are described as a social elite – independent, creative, and proud of their freedom; but one can also read that they constantly fight the passing of time, the ticking of the biological clock, and they take part in a “mad dash” for the last free men.

The attitude of single women to their image in the media

The respondents were asked about whether they read press articles about singles and, if so, what they thought about the problems and image of single people. The single women who spoke about the image of singles in the media said that the image of singlehood was not similar to their real life. In their opinion, singles are presented in a very stereotypical way in the media: as young, beautiful, and rich, with a fascinating life, full of travel and taking part in interesting events. In some opinions there was a thesis that the so-called fashion for singles is artificially created in the media:

I think that in recent times the media have presented the lives of singles with particular ease, although I think that this has little to do with real life, in fact. Besides, it has become quite a fashionable topic in the media (Camille, 32)²,

I have read several articles, or rather interviews with singles; after all, a person who is alone and a person who is in a relationship are actually the same person, they do not differ in any way, so I do not see it as a problem, and it seems to me that the media should not make use of the problem (Hanna, 37).

The main aspect which drew the attention of the respondents who spoke about the subject of singles discussed in opinion magazines and women's magazines is the fact that, in their opinion, the image of the single presented there is extremely biased. They often stressed that in many articles on this subject, or in interviews with people from the so-called high life, i.e., well-known actors, models, TV presenters, etc., who live alone, the sole aspect of their professional work is presented as the sense and source of all life

satisfaction. Other important spheres of life are overlooked:

I think that the media present a little bit of such a false image of life on your own, because, at least I have the impression, that they present people who are only engaged in work, are satisfied with it and it constitutes their whole life. They don't seem to need anyone in this life, and they do everything well on their own, always smiling, satisfied; for me, it's a bit like a utopian image (Ashley, 30).

There is no question of the pros and cons of living alone. The dilemmas that are associated with such a life. They say nothing about the fact that these people want to start a family, have someone close to them; there is only talk about work, work and money, money and nothing else (Caroline, 33).

The women also talked about press articles, pointing out that usually all the articles they had read presented only a positive image of life on its own. They admitted that the life of the single that is described as full of adventures, where something interesting happens all the time, and the protagonists, in addition to fascinating work, have exciting and original hobbies such as belly dancing, alpine climbing, paragliding, or distant and exotic travels, etc. According to the respondents, the portrait of the single in the press is strengthened by the conviction that their life is somehow a fulfillment of their dreams. Some respondents admitted that the press usually writes only about the advantages of living alone and ignores the disadvantages:

It's a bit like reading all these articles about singles; there are young, independent people with a lot of money, who work in top positions, in some corporations or freelance jobs, who can afford to travel, and their lives are like a fairy tale. Only, nobody writes about the disadvantages – like an empty house to which you return, because these people do not work or party non-stop, because one day you have to return to an empty bed and the media do not write about it anymore (Ewa, 30).

When it comes to the fact that this person does not need another person to live or does not want to, it seems to me that this is already created by the media, but it is not true that man has to live alone and man is not created to live in solitude, one must have the other person, therefore (...) I do not really identify myself with this image in the media (Ashley, 30)

Only two women among the survey participants admitted that the content of journalistic articles about singles agrees with reality, because it raises real issues of living alone:

² Camille, 32 – name of respondent, 32 years old

It seems to me that the press does not condemn these lonely people – neither the broadcast media nor the press. At the moment it is rather in general; it seems to me that the media describe people who live alone because of their choice. They work a lot, they devote themselves to their careers, they want to achieve something in their lives (Emily, 32).

Only one woman drew attention to the fact that she had met both a positive and negative image of the life of the single in the Polish press. In her opinion, this is due to the fact that traditional values, including having a family, are still the most important for Poles:

When I encounter an article about this particular subject, about living alone, I read it willingly. It does not always present the advantages of such a life (note J.Cz.), because Poland is a Catholic country, and the model of the life of every Pole is married life, with a husband and children. However, not everyone manages to do it, and not everyone likes it (...). When a person is still young, in his or her prime, loneliness does not afflict them so much, but it is more difficult to live for an elderly person, who is completely lonely. I have not noticed any negative campaign against lonely people in the media. What they talk and write about, I know it very well. We are an increasingly tolerant country, and I like it very much (Joanna, 38).

Comparing the results of the content analysis with the statements of the respondents, it is particularly surprising that the respondents are convinced that in the press we usually encounter a positive image of singles, and in the case of the popular series discussed here, it is surprising how negatively the main characters are perceived by the respondents. Singles are very critical of these series and films, which, by the way, does not prevent them from watching them because, as they admit, they treat these films only in terms of entertainment.

The social circumstances of singlehood in the opinion of single women

The image of women living alone, which is presented above, incorporates some problems which were talked about during interviews with research participants. Among them, there are strong involvement in professional work, idealization of love and the related expectation of specific features and behaviors of the partner and change of expectations towards the model of the union. However, many social determinants of a phenomenon of single women in big cities were ignored by the media.

Certainly, for many singles, the most important values were being free and independent, the development of a professional career and a satisfying job, as well as finding the right partner and romantic love. For some respondents, it is most important to continue their education and improve their skills. Half of the respondents wanted to have a happy family in the future, their own house and children. They think that everybody should achieve emotional stability, create happy relationships and find their “other half.” Half of the respondents also said that economic stability, improving their financial status and having financial success are most important in their life. Among other values mentioned by women were satisfaction, which they understood as being content with life, the realization of goals and dreams, living at peace with oneself, maturity and being faithful to one’s ideals.

Women found the following important: good relationships with people, being trustworthy and helping friends and family, having many friends, being yourself, being respectful, and living in harmony with other people. Other values mentioned by them were associated with possibilities of traveling, a sense of security, a successful sex life, good health and staying in shape, living with passion and being a good person. It is symptomatic that the women indicated individualistic values and traditional values as the same level of importance. There is an “internal struggle” between two different systems of values. Most women who took part in the research admitted that they cannot solve this “war.” Improving professional skills, having a satisfying job, developing a career and achieving a high financial status are very important to them, but so are finding a partner and setting up home.

The results of the study presented above show that single ladies, especially the 30-year-olds, believe that the development of their career, finding a satisfying job and learning new skills and qualifications are some of the most important values in life (when they are getting older, they pay attention also to have a family life). As they try to stabilize their professional position, they do not have time to look for a partner and build a stable relationship. Focusing on their professional career is one of the main reasons why singles do not

have time to date. Another promotion and more responsibilities at work became the main challenge for singles who are not at the beginning of their career but at its “turning point.” For one of the interviewed women, who works for an international corporation, professional success and becoming a manager meant much more than finding a partner or setting up home. Work gives her a lot of satisfaction, which she believes she would not feel because of having a husband or children. She is mostly interested in having power and does not think about family much. This respondent wants to develop her career within the next few years in a branch outside Poland, because: “I feel that my opportunities here are running out; there is no proper work for me here” (Maya, 29).

Heavy involvement in work is also a reason why previous relationships of the respondents did not last. Those interviewed often said that as they worked a lot, they did not have enough time for their partners, and this made the relationship disintegrate over time. Some of the respondents said they had been left by a partner who was busy making a career. A story of one of the women could be a good example. Her relationship ended because her partner signed a contract with an international company and left for London. Their relationship was very good when they both lived in Poland. Then he kept on signing contracts, without consulting her, to make his stay abroad longer:

He came here, I went there, I even decided to go to London to look for work. And I went there, but I could not find an interesting job. He was in a ‘high life’ circle, so I would feel awkward saying that I work as a waitress. I couldn’t take it anymore, so I came back to Poland. We talked about the future. I wanted to get married. He was not very willing to do that. Then we started to fight about him being there and me being here, about him not wanting to come back to Poland at all. He always said that he would stay there until he finished the project. But there came another one and then another, then another. And once we had such a terrible fight that I said, ‘Enough of this!’ and we split up. It couldn’t go on, as it was no longer a relationship (Joanna, 38).

Although it happened eight years ago, she cannot bring her personal life together. This happened in many cases which the singles spoke about.

Twenty and thirty-year-olds women think that “someday” they will set up home. Once they succeed, which means getting a prestigious and well-paid job,

they will think about looking for a partner. Singles in their late thirties admit that they had “worked through” the right moment to set up home, but work was always most important to them. To sum up this part, it is best to quote one of the interviewees: “If you are with no one, you work more, and if you work more you do not meet new people, you remain single and get used to it. Then it is hard to give up on yourself” (Ashley, 30).

The inability to find the right person, someone they would like to share the rest of their lives with is another reason for women to be single. They admit that currently they are not “proactively” looking for someone. They are waiting for the “one true love” to come:

I think that you meet the right person when you are not looking for him, when you are walking down the street and you say, ‘Oh, you! You will be my partner!’ It has to be love. You cannot predict such things. If it comes, it comes, and I’ll know about it, but I am not going to intentionally look for a partner. No, rather not (Anna, 29).

The single women also believe that the more people you meet, the bigger the opportunity to finally meet the right person. “I always wonder if this is the right person or not. And I always conclude that he isn’t. This is why nothing comes of these meetings, because I’m waiting for “the one”. How will I recognize him? I still don’t know” (Ewa, 30). The participants of the study had a very clear view of their potential partner. They mentioned similar education and intellectual level, views, attitude, and knowledge so that they could have interesting and inspiring discussions.

Single women also keep their expectations high. Their ideal partner mostly has to be well off and have a good job. The participants of the study, of high social status themselves, openly said that there were no potential candidates for partners or husbands who could be equal to them, not only when it comes to education, but also initiative and resourcefulness. One of them admitted frankly that she was attracted to men in high positions – CEOs, directors, etc. – especially in big corporations. As a partner or a mistress of such a man, she could, for instance, learn how to manage a company and how to climb to the top:

I have this image of a man in my head, and I think that he should drive a new model of BMW, throw around his money and offer me a trip to the US. If a man wants to be cool, he has to be attractive as

a man, have this ‘something’, he cannot be a loser, or scream and yell when something goes wrong, or cry that he has no money, but he has to be smart, independent and intelligent (Emily, 32).

She is not interested in men of a lower social status, who do not earn much, are at the beginning of their career or are blue-collar workers:

I would never go out with a student; I would reject him straight away, as he is a poor student who has to get money from his mother. (...) I would look at him and think, ‘He’s an asshole.’ My first question would be to ask him what he does, and if he says he is a plumber, then goodbye (Emily, 32).

The respondent is aware that she may “reject” good people, because not everybody “wants to be a CEO.” Yet she does not give up looking for her ideal partner. Another respondent, who also is of high social status, requires her partner to be of a certain level:

I am not saying that I would reject someone who is cool, and material goods are cool, because they make other things easier (...) My views are not as radical as if some of my single friends, who know that they invest in themselves, develop and they want the other person to be on their level (Hanna, 37).

However, she added that she “would not be with a poor guy.” Single women are not interested in men of lower social and economic status, but as they admit themselves, they “have no one to choose from.”

Single ladies appreciate their freedom and autonomy, which is why it is important to respect each other’s independence, and also the different views and decisions made by other people: “I give a lot of freedom and I expect the same. I don’t mind him going out. I won’t call him every five minutes to make sure he didn’t go out with Jenny next door, and I expect the same” (Ashley, 30). Women would also like their partners to have a stable personal situation – in other words, to have not been married, separated or be in the middle of a divorce. The participants admit that they live in a world of ideals and that it often ruins them as they are constantly looking for a perfect partner. They sometimes concentrate only on the faults and weak points of the people with whom they go out. Some say they try not to “reject” someone straight away, but this is very difficult as they still believe in love at first sight, but on the other hand, they know that having a stable relationship requires time and work to get used to the other person. One of the single women commented:

There is no Prince Charming (...) and actually I’m not sure that if there was actually a Prince available, whether he would still seem like a Prince to me. On the one hand, I live such a life because I have no one to choose from, but on the other hand, I don’t want to live alone (Caroline, 33).

The above statements show that single women deeply believe that there can only be one true love and that each of us has a chance to meet our other half, although at the same time they know that nobody is perfect.

The next important reason to be single among women is a new expectation of a relationship model. The modern labor market demands that men and women be highly involved in their professional life, career development, and improving their skills and abilities. This also makes young people change their expectations about the form of relationships between men and women will take. Single ladies also believe that this may be one of the most important reasons for their singlehood. There was a woman who took part in the study who said that nowadays, although both sexes work, women were still expected to take care of the house far more than men, who usually do not care about this issue. As it is impossible to build a relationship based on equal division of chores (assuming that both men and women spend as much time working) half of the female respondents of the study decided to remain single. They commented that if a relationship is to be successful, the partners should be equally involved in preparing meals, cleaning and shopping, etc. Neither side should feel more burdened with household activities. Single women cannot imagine being financially independent, working in high positions (often as managers), and having to act as “servants” to their own partners. They knew exactly how they expected men to participate in the housework:

I wouldn’t like him to spend his afternoons in front of the TV while I slave away in the kitchen and do the washing while the kids run around dirty. I want him to participate as well (...). A rational division of housework is necessary, as I am not someone to make lists: I wash the socks today, you wash them tomorrow. But on the other hand, I wouldn’t like to take care of everything by myself. I can’t see myself doing that. I wouldn’t like to leave work at 4 p.m., change my shoes on the way back and go back home to clean or cook dinner. I don’t like it. You need to find a golden mean, as I am not a traditionalist but am not ultra-emancipated either. Some sort of partnership, but not like: let’s do what we like doing, and

then you end up doing everything, and he spends his time in the garage busy with DIY (...). In life, we do things we like, but we also need to do the things we don't like, and unfortunately, I have to do them, and I expect my partner to do the same (Ashley, 30);

I expect initiative. You do not need to prepare his pants and socks for the next day. He will know what to wear. I myself am self-reliant, and I think that influences my expectations of the other person. I am not keen on being somebody's mother, quite the opposite (Caroline, 33).

The single women from the study were familiar with different types of families. One of the respondents admitted that her father was more involved in housework: he does the shopping every day, cleans up and prepares meals. On the other hand, her mother is very successful and has always devoted more time to work. Although she is looking for a much more go-getting partner than her father, she cannot imagine running the house by herself. She knows that it may be difficult to find such a partner, but she is used to the man doing some of the housework, and it is normal for her (Ewa, 30). On the one hand, the participants of the study would like to share the duties equally with men, but on the other, they do not want to be pampered – brought the papers in bed, cooked for and have the cleaning done. He would be less of a man to them then, and they would not like to have a hen-pecked husband.

According to the female respondents, exclusive women's magazines or female-oriented TV channels promote an egalitarian model of a relationship. They believe it is difficult to have a real partnership in real life, because, as they observe with their friends, women always do more at home. When women demand an equal division of housework, they end up with a "fixed" (not flexible, adjusted to their needs) division of responsibilities. Single women believe that men should get involved in the housework themselves, and this should be a result of their own will, not something imposed on them. All the female participants agreed that a partnership which is understood incorrectly makes you focus on yourself too much and count exactly what we do for each other and for the relationship. And when calculations about who does more and who does less for the relationship begin, so do the conflicts.

Twelve women agreed with the opinion that modern men are afraid of independent and strong women and

that is why so many well-educated and financially independent women are single. The women participating in the study know that by creating an image of an independent women – not only in an economic but also in a psychological manner – they communicate to the world that they do not need a man by their side as they can take care of everything by themselves:

It is hard for me to find a strong man, as I am strong myself, and moreover I am well-educated and attractive, so men are sometimes simply afraid of me. And if they are not afraid, the most courageous ones are either unattractive or weak, or something else is wrong with them. There are very few real men, and the ones my age are already taken (...). I think that generally, something is wrong with men these days. A crisis of manhood? (Ewa, 30).

Single women believe that men are afraid of women who speak their mind and know how to make a decision. According to them, men like to dominate their partners not only in their professional life but in their private life as well. The participants of these studies believed that men usually marry "dumb blondes" or "wallflowers," of lower social status, who are less educated, less intelligent, and usually much younger – which they can "manage":

I am too strong, as I am a terrific woman. I can be nice and tender, because that's who I am, but, as my boyfriend said when he was leaving me, I can also put my foot down. Then he found himself a girlfriend who was six years younger and absolutely besotted with him. I know that at first, I seem great, but then, once you get to know me, I am no longer so attractive because I am different to what they expected (...). Men are afraid, and these women may really be afraid, too. They say that they don't care that they invest in themselves, but deep down in their hearts, they feel very lonely. And men want women to be smart and intelligent, but frankly, they prefer them to obey. Perhaps men have become emasculated, and women have become more of a man, and it all vanished. But women who are top managers are alone, because if they have everything, they do not need a man, although I believe that a mature man would actually appreciate it, not run off (Hanna, 37).

Single women thought that modern young women who are financially independent do not need a partner to provide for them. In the past, many relationships lasted just because the women had no other choice; they were not self-reliant and depended financially on their husbands, fathers and brothers:

This is typical as we are more independent. You used to have to have a man, because someone had to be the breadwinner, because the woman did not work or earned very little. So you took anybody,

frankly speaking, but that is the truth, as the man provided for his wife (Ashley, 30).

The respondent added that a modern woman needs a man only to love her and be loved by her. For men, this is not enough to get involved with a strong and independent woman. Such a woman could stop loving them at any time and leave them for someone else or go and live by herself, and her previous partner would not be able to make her stay as he had nothing but love to offer.

The researched single women admitted that “the weaker sex is no longer weaker” and that it is hard to find a strong man these days, one who would be equal to women in many areas, not only in terms of the level of education or initiative: “Men are no longer go-getters. I can’t imagine a man being weaker than I am, although I am not the strongest, but I don’t want to be his mommy. No, thank you, I’ll get a cat” (Ashley, 30). The female respondents thought that men should impress women with their financial status, professional position, ambitions, hobbies and interests as well as their maturity and self-control in difficult situations. However, they claim that the majority of men are emotionally immature:

I don’t believe that I will get on a tram and meet the man of my life. This is not possible. Today they are either Peter Pans, who do not want to make a commitment, or they want to be with younger girls... or there simply is something wrong with them (Camille, 32)..

The women also think that there are no proper candidates for their partners because they, the men, pay too much attention to their looks and become narcissistic and focused only on their own image, and they also have unreal expectations of the looks of their partners. The respondents described it as the emasculation of men: “You can see a lot of poseurs now. They buy themselves nice t-shirts but their head is empty, or they are losers” (Emily, 32).

Single women believe that today women are more active than men in flirting and “wooing” men. They suggest going on dates, as the men are usually passive and lazy: “A man should try to get a woman, not the opposite, and nowadays it is the opposite” (Agatha, 35, N).

One of the single women admitted that generally, it was hard to find “someone decent” on the matrimonial market. If you manage to, they are usually “recycled”:

I think that those men who get divorced either remarry or are taken in a very short time. I think so. I cannot resist this idea that women are turning into harpies today, and a man who is single and worth any attention is taken immediately (Camille, 32).

The female participants of the study were convinced that in big cities there are many more single, attractive, well-educated and independent women than similar men. Single women also claimed that they were very attractive to men who were a few or even several years older. Yet they were not interested in younger “boys.” They preferred mature men who, in their opinion, were more responsible and of a higher social status than the 20-year-olds. According to the single women, the problem is that there are very few such men on the Polish matrimonial market: “I’m not saying that there are no strong men, because when I travel abroad I meet many of them, but this also is a result of a different language, different looks, they talk to you and bam! – it’s easier to have a crush on someone who is different” (Ewa, 30). The women admit that this is a vicious circle, because they sometimes have to convince themselves that they are independent enough not to need a man.

The results of the study here presented show that some of the single women want to be in a relationship which is only based on an equal division of housework, and do not want to do somebody’s laundry, washing or cook for someone. At the same time, they think that it is difficult to create such a model of relationship, as the majority of men do not agree to do any housework as they think women should do it. The studied single women believe that the “crisis of manhood” means that modern men are afraid of strong and independent women and they do not want to be in relationships with them. Additionally, some of the single women blame men for not being able to charm them, and admit that they have to be active and “hunt” for men like “harpies”.

The image of a single woman that emerges from the research shows them not only as women who seek to change their situation. Some of them are satisfied with being single because they focus on career

development, their own passions, or they “rest” after unsuccessful relationships and do not want to build a new relationship with a man at the moment. Many of the women surveyed also stressed that they consider their lives on their own to be happy and will do everything to make their lives full and happy, even if they do not manage to build a lasting relationship one day.

Summary

The transformation which has taken place in Poland within the last two decades has made individualistic values very popular, especially in metropolitan areas, which have become the places of the most dynamic economic, social and cultural changes. The postmodern trends, present at the macrosocial level – and also in the media – are visible in the decisions which singles make and in their everyday life. However, the image of a single woman presented in the analyzed magazines is certainly simplified, stereotyped and incomplete.

The analysis of the weeklies shows that the image of single women in the media is full of contrasts and, what is worth noting, has not changed significantly over the last two decades. The articles from different periods do not differ significantly in the way they present the characteristics of singles and the reasons why they are single. The latest articles focus more attention on the holistic approach to the issue of loneliness among women, but they are also not free from many stereotypes. It should be noted that the main reasons for women being single presented in the magazines included: the emancipation of women in modern societies, gaining financial independence, being well educated, and wanting to devote their time to professional career; men’s attachment to patriarchal role assignment in the family and the fear of being in relationships with emancipated women; the negative personality traits of singles: egocentrism, egoism, and no willingness to compromise; the lack of time to find a partner because of their preoccupation with their career; very high expectations of a partner; the instrumental treatment of being in a close relationship, calculating the pros and cons; waiting for the ideal love and partner.

The interviews with the singles show that there are a number of reasons as to why they live alone. Some of them are surely similar to the ones indicated in magazines. The affirmation of individualistic values, such as gaining new skills and knowledge, and being free and independent, are some of the reasons for being a single woman. Preoccupation with work has become a direct cause for having no time to build a close relationship. Therefore, it seems that single women put professional realization first and are stuck in a vicious circle, with no way out – they are single because they work too much, and they work too much because they are single. Moreover, for the women participating in the research, egalitarian relationships are very important. They believe that women and men should share the housework. They appreciate independence and the possibility of realizing their professional aspirations, although they believe that modern men are afraid of independent women. Single women still dream about “the Prince” – a so-called real man – but they do not expect their partners to be 100% machos. Contemporary Polish single women are stuck in the trap between individualistic and traditional values. They are also lost in the expectations concerning the model of relationship and partner, wanting certain features to come from the traditional model and a part of the modern one.

Certainly, the media focus on presenting the causes of life alone among women in a macrosocial and mezo social context. However, they ignore the whole spectrum of social determinants of the phenomenon of singlehood among women in a microsocioal context. There are, for example, observations of their parents’ unsuccessful marriage and the negative image of friends’ formal and informal relationships, and the reluctance to live in an unhappy relationship. It is also a desire to be in a perfect relationship like that of some women’s parents’ relationship. Too strong bonds with the family of origin may influence their life choices. Being single can also be as a result of failures in building a nest: unequal involvement in building a relationship, infidelity and abandonment, unfulfilled love, not being ready to set up one’s own home, or a rest after living together as a couple.

It seems that Poland is a good example of a society undergoing deep transformations in which opposing systems of values – individualistic, originating from the world of the “West” – clash with the traditional ones, strongly rooted in their mentality for generations. Large cities, in turn, are the places where the coexistence of these two systems takes place most readily, where the most dynamic changes of life at the mezzo social level take place. And here, in turn, we are dealing with the transmission of these values and translating them from the macro scale, through mezzo into the micro-dimension. The life dilemmas of contemporary singles (I am sure that this is happening in many countries with a similar direction of development) are an example of getting lost in value systems, being trapped between traditional, modern and postmodern society. Contradictory expectations towards themselves and others make them live on their own, perceiving this as their own choice, but it is also the situation that forces them to do so through a set of circumstances – the requirements of the labor market, education, and models of masculinity and femininity. The life of singles is a mirror image of contemporary social change in many areas of life.

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