

**Howard University**

---

**From the Selected Works of Linda Berg-Cross**

---

June, 2004

# Single Professional Women: A Global Phenomenon Challenges and Opportunities

Dr. Linda Berg-Cross, *Howard University*

Anne-Marie Scholz

JoAnne Long

Ewa Grzeszyk

Anjali Roy



Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/linda-berg-cross/6/>

## Single Professional Women: A Global Phenomenon Challenges and Opportunities

By Linda Berg-Cross<sup>i</sup>, Anne-Marie Scholz, JoAnne Long, Ewa Grzeszyk, Anjali Roy

### Abstract

This paper presents the globalization of elite single professional women (SPW) as the first new global sociological phenomenon of the twenty-first century. We trace the economic roots of the phenomenon and how female empowerment interacts with the psychological prerequisites for mating. We then trace how the phenomenon is being expressed outside of the United States, in India, Poland, and Germany. We conclude by putting these observations into a historical perspective and briefly listing possible strategies for responding, adapting, and maximizing one's options.

*Key Words:* single professionals, globalization, single women

### PART I:

*For the most part, the study of women and economics has focused on the overwhelming economic disparities between the sexes. Gender-driven economic research has focused on three types of jobs: paid labor in the formal sector; paid labor in the informal sector (e.g. piece work done at home for a male relative contracting with a large multinational); or unpaid housework. While nearly all women engage in unpaid housework for most of their adult lives, more and more women, worldwide, are finding themselves involved in paid informal work, with no benefits, protections, or advancement possible (Ward and Pyle, 1995). This article focuses on a very tiny group of women who have successfully entered positions of economic, political, and social power with paid work in the formal sector. The contributions of these women, as trailblazers and role models, while worthy of analysis, are not our focus. Instead, we are examining the personal and social costs and opportunities facing these women.*

### The Nature of the Problem

Pop culture quiz: What do the following women have in common? Allison Janney (C. J. Cregg), Janel Moloney (Donna Moss), Mary-Louise Parker (Amy Gardner), and Kathleen York (Andrea Wyatt)?

Answer: They were all on the hit TV series, *The West Wing*<sup>1</sup>.

Globally relevant answer: They were all *single* professional women. Indeed, all the principal professional women on *The West Wing* were single, save for the first lady (who lost her medical license in the first season standing by her man).

However, the *West Wing* is not alone in reflecting a cultural stereotype of today's professional women. *Ally McBeal*<sup>2</sup>, a recently canceled "dramedy," popular in the late

---

<sup>2</sup> This show focuses on the personal trials and tribulations of a single female lawyer surrounded by eccentric colleagues and a now-married-to-someone-else childhood sweetheart.

90s, exposed contemporary complications for modern career women. *Judging Amy*<sup>3</sup>, a popular series on CBS, has a divorced Amy as the star. The number one hit on HBO, *Sex and the City*<sup>4</sup>, is devoted to highlighting the social and sexual labyrinths of single professional women. Yet, today's television women have come a long way since goofy, lovable Mary Tyler Moore was depicted working at the lowest-rated TV show in 1970 Minneapolis. These modern gals are in very serious dramatic roles and/or have powerful, highly successful careers. Yet, screenwriters still have them share Mary's single status when they leave the office.

While pop culture has branded and perhaps exploited the lifestyles of unpartnered successful women, social scientists have been exploring the causes, extent and nature of the phenomena. While we will be referring primarily to the rising number of "unmarried" females, we are focused on the much broader phenomena of unpartnered, heterosexual females (those without long term monogamous partners term). Serial monogamy used to be the predicted future: men and women seeking out a variety of different mates for different phases of their lives (Haley, 2000). Now, around the world, for a significant segment of the female intellectual community, the future is "sologamy".

In this paper, we attempt to document the breadth, causes, and expressions of this phenomenon. Andrew Sum (2003) refers to the rise of single professional women (SPW) as creating a "marriage squeeze" effect, indicating the felt pressure to marry a man of equal or better social and economic status and the fewer options available to older SPW. The "marriage squeeze" is a feminine descriptor and stands in stark contrast to the general acceptance of single professional men as bachelors or husbands to less educated and/or economically empowered women. We prefer conceptualizing the phenomena in terms of "parity expectations" because of its more neutral tone and to stress the role of expectations about class and economics in reducing the pool of partners available to SPW. This term also encompasses the desire and planning of young elite women to have developmental parity with men, including a long period in which to continue their education and focus on their own development before committing to marriage or a permanent relationship. Essentially, what is creating the SPW phenomena are three globalization trends:

a) The globalization of the American brand of "individualism" is a well documented phenomena (Berkovitch & Bradley, 1999; Genov, 1997) and has raised the bar on the qualities needed in an acceptable mate. More than any other export, the idea that one need be responsible, accountable, and focused on one's self, rather than on a community of others, has created a world-wide paradigm shift in how people mate. The Americanized woman with an "individualistic" orientation chooses a mate who meets her needs for intimacy, gives her joy, brings her resources she couldn't otherwise obtain and with whom she is "in love." When societies were more collectivist, the emotional experience of "love" had less intensity because intimate and important bonds were shared in a much broader social network. People did have a village, a small tribe, or a larger family who met this need for intimacy, as well as bringing joy and resources. In the

---

<sup>3</sup> A divorced mother who works as a judge tries to live a meaningful life, professionally and personally, without a committed relationship to a man.

<sup>4</sup> A group of single professional women in New York City have weekly encounters with a range of idiosyncratic men in a variety of complicated circumstances. After being aired for six years, happiness and commitment became plausible in the very last show.

Americanization of individualism, one's partner is often perceived as the single source of these goods.

In addition, individuality fosters a consumer mentality among today's elite men and women, who have trouble committing to any one person because they haven't sampled all the selections available. They know the choice is up to them and they are used to delaying important decisions until all the data is in. Unlike most life style decisions, where skimming the internet quickly lets one understand the range of options, mate selection increasingly paralyzes both genders. It is as though there are too many options and choices to confidently judge if one is making the "right" decision (Beebe, 2004).

b) The globalization of the economic empowerment of women has been fueled by the spread of individualism and has again increased female expectations and requirements for an acceptable mate. The economic empowerment of women has been coupled with a relative lowering of male educational attainments and economic empowerment (See Tables I and II). This is happening even though 60% of the more than one billion illiterate adults are women and females make up the majority of children who have not had access to primary schooling (UNESCO, 1995). Apparently, among the elite groups getting more than a primary school education, women are continuing their studies further than men. Perhaps this is because men feel more pressure to enter the work world and are able to bring in a higher income from their work. In the upper social statuses, though, this leads to more women having more status in a variety of domains than men. However, the sociological/psychological desire to marry is not facilitated by women having the alpha status in the relationship. Buss (2003), using data on over 10,000 people from 37 cultures around the world, found that when women are more successful than their husbands, they're twice as likely to leave them if they're unhappy. In addition, he found most women, worldwide, want men who can contribute at least as much to the family budget as they do, and powerful women place even more emphasis on selecting a man with superior earning power. This pressure is not uni-directional. Buss (2003) also reported that while men may be attracted to women with brains, professional status, and sexual sophistication, they feel great pressure to measure up to her standards, if not exceed them.

Female economic empowerment compounded with relatively lower male educational attainment has had profound effects on the psychological and social aspects of dating and mating. As more and more women are not economically dependent upon a man, their desire to have someone offer them what they cannot give themselves (e.g. psychologically, economically, and socially) raises the bar on acceptability. Anthropologists and biologists have long ago concluded that male mating is driven by the need for a sexual partner who can provide offspring and care for them (sic: young, attractive, and healthy); female mating is motivated by the desire or need for security and reliability (wealthy, ambitious, industrious, and having status) (Sternberg, 1988).

c) The globalization of "love" as the primary stimulus for mate selection is an outgrowth of individualism and the increased economic empowerment of women. Women who need not marry for economic survival have other factors become more prominent. In the 1960s, 24% of women and 65% of men would not marry without love, while in 1994, eighty to ninety percent of both genders indicated that they would not marry without love (these statistics are based on U. S. samples). While the exact meaning

of “love” was not operationalized, central to the question was a romantic, erotic attraction (Sprecher et. al., 1994).

For women, love is triggered by the illusion that they have found someone who embodies the masculine ideals of strength, protectiveness, clear thinking, and problem solving. When a woman sees a man who is going to be economically dependent on her (or not an equal contributor), unable to improve her social status, and unable to master the environment with confidence, she is not inclined to “fall in love.” Thus, the male traits that provoke “love” include protection, dependability, competence, and malleability.

Men “fall in love” (eros) with women who are young, beautiful and healthy. Most cultures support and reinforce men for choosing women who are dependent, nurturing and willing to sacrifice for male defined goals (Barkow, 2000). When a man has to be economically dependent upon a woman, defer to her greater social status, problem solving skills and life competency, he is not inclined to “fall in love.” This is not to deny that marriages and coupling occurs for many reasons other than “falling in love.” It is to point out that the primary mechanism valued by young people to couple is compromised for single professional women.

Psychological schemas of what is attractive are all important to understand the experience of the SPW. When people marry at an early age there is the fantasy of “what my husband is” as well as the dream of “what my husband will become.” These projective transferences are sticky and tricky phenomena that cause disillusionment in most marriages over time (Scarf, 1987). Yet, young people continue to project their dreams onto their mates, however unrealistically. While this has led to a 50% divorce rate in the United States, with the first marriage being a practice marriage for many, it does lead to marriage. By contrast, when people are looking for a mate in their early thirties, they are far more likely to critically judge “what the person has become”.

Of course after the fires of erotic love have been extinguished (and sometimes before), pragmatic love (“pragma”) and/or friendship based love (“storgic”) develops. These are the love types found in a well functioning unit (Lee, 1988). Working out problems together, developing meaningful rituals, finding support for one’s own development, are all part of this companionate love. Pragmatic love, though, is also affected by female economic empowerment and male sub-achievement in academia. Problem solving is easier when one has been trained in the intellectual methods of problem solving and has access to the financial resources to solve problems. As for shared leisure, both men and women choose to spend significant amounts of time in gender stereotyped rituals, even when their free time is minimized. Work life leaves little time for any rituals – much less shared gender rituals. As will be noted in our global analysis of SPW, many young women faced with an either/or choice, would rather have their leisurely baths or write in their diaries than go out to look for a mate. Similarly men with limited free time are more likely to want to play sports or watch TV than take a walk holding hands. In any strong intimate relationship, erotic and pragmatic love must exist and both can be seriously compromised by female economic empowerment. Interestingly, there are a number of culture specific factors across the globe that are adding fuel to this movement.

All of this is to say that economics shapes psychology in powerful ways. When women see their survival as dependent upon a man, they have lower self- esteem (they

feel they have less agency and competency). And indeed, when women have lower self-esteem they have been shown to have higher esteem for their partners, stronger love for them and express fonder feelings. Women with high self-esteem are more individualistic and stress the personal satisfactions they expect to receive from intimate relationships (Dion and Dion, 1985).

Please note that prior to the 1990s there existed a simple negative cross-country correlation coefficient between the total fertility rate in a country and female employment (countries with many women working had lower fertility rates than countries with fewer women working). As countries have made societal changes in child-care availability, employment protection during maternity leave, and shifted attitudes towards working women, the incompatibility between childrearing and many types of female employment is disappearing. Indeed across many countries there is now either no correlation or a positive correlation between nationwide fertility rates and increased female employment (countries with more working women have greater fertility rates) (Englehardt, Kogel, and Prskawetz, 2001). This paper does not question these demographic analyses. Instead, we are focused on an elite group of highly educated women who are finding careers incompatible with finding a male partner. In many countries and cultures this will also limit their ability to have children. But our focus, primarily, is to discuss how female employment, at the professional level, affects young women seeking a male partner.

### **The Scope of the Problem: From America to Japan**

In the United States, scholars have written most frequently about the dearth of ethnic partners for professional African American females. African American women are much more educated compared to African American men (Yeakey and Bennett, 1990). They make more money than the men and a disproportionate number of African American men in their 20s are or have been incarcerated (Dixon, 1998). This combination of less education, lowered income potential (King, 1999), reduced life expectancy (65 for Black males, 72 for White males) (Blake and Darling, 1994), substance abuse and history of incarceration has limited the pool of available men to the extent that 72% of African American women 20-29 are unmarried (Glick, 1988) and 35% of African American women 30-34 are unmarried (up from 10% in 1960). Twenty five percent of African American women may never marry (Dickson, 1993).

There has been less written about how other highly educated American women have fared in finding a partner. Yet, the overall picture appears remarkably similar across racial and ethnic groups with rates of the unmarried professional women inching ever upward. Gone, however, are the spinster schoolteachers of the fifties. (Indeed, schoolteachers are the only professionals in America that almost invariably do get married. Their dedication to children, lower salaries, early job stability, or commitment to traditional family roles may all play a role in this exception.) Today, the single professional women are professors and scientists, business leaders and business owners. The National Marriage Project at Rutgers University has found that, overall, the marriage rate has declined 43% between 1960 and 1996; from 87.5 per thousand to 49.7 per thousand (Popenoe and Whitehead, 2001). While this decline is due, in large part, to the rise of co-habiting couples, it may also reflect the increasing rates of un-partnered women in the United States.

In many countries, women are getting more education than men (see Table 1). In the United States, the number of women outnumbered the number of men in college as early as 1978 and the disparity has continued to rise (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). As more and more men are relatively less educated, less economically stable, and yet, equally focused on their life plans, they are rejected by women who either want to improve themselves via marriage or do not want additional impediments as they strive towards self-improvement or self-fulfillment. Men, on the other hand, are little motivated to change their ways. They are biologically drawn to the pool of younger women, who luckily for them tend to be less educated and less demanding. There is no problem for men, as societies around the world endorse older men partnering with younger women.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the challenge of finding a mate once one has a profession is not confined to America. *If you are "too accomplished" and female, chances are higher, on a global scale, that you will remain single than if you are less accomplished in the workplace. This is true in Poland and in Germany, in American and in Japan, and in virtually every other country where there are increasing ranks of professional women.*

Worldwide, educated women are finding it more and more difficult to find a mate of the opposite sex. The reasons vary from country to country but include a) the desire and need (psychological and economic) of women to have a long period as a single adult, free of the constraints of a committed relationship, b) the increased status and threat of highly educated women; making it preferable for men to mate with less educated women c) increased status and threat of women who earn as much or more than a man; making it preferable to mate a less educated woman d) demand for more equitable relationships among educated women; e) emigration of large numbers of men who need to find work in a foreign country, reducing the pool of available men; f) death of a large number of young men due to drugs, wars and AIDS; g) male preference for younger women (who then do not go on to higher education due to marital constraints); and h) increased acceptance of lesbian relationships and single-parent lifestyles.

Some single professional women seem satisfied or even ecstatic with their freedom; Bronzaft (1991), studying professional women in the United States, found that 7% of Black women, 2% of White women, and 0% of Hispanic want a career and do not want to get married. Most others yearn for a partner. Depression, existential loneliness, and confusion over society's values now bond women, across the continents, much like motherhood and traditional marriages have in the past. Yet, there is diversity within cultures and across cultures as to the acceptability of being a single professional woman. As discussed further in the paper, in some urban areas, like the metropolitan areas within India, the single status is not as uniformly stinging as in other cultures, like Poland.

The globalization of single professional women is also accompanied by a decreased likelihood of procreating. On the extreme end of the educational curve, the elite women of every country - those most capable of caring for and rearing children, as well as passing on robust genetics - are failing to procreate, primarily because they remain unmarried and choose not to become single parents (Lewis, 2001).

There are hints that the SPW is confronted with two distinct developmental phases. In the first phase (around 18 to 28 years old), there is the excitement of initiative, industry, and freedom. In the second, bifurcated phase (around 28 to 38), there is either panic, re-evaluation, and regret, as women realize their biological clocks are ticking

towards the end of fertility; or for a smaller group, the blossoming of the single female lifestyle potential.

Where the culture severely restrains women from entering the *professional* world, as in Japan, the global female desire for a period of single adult development is still apparent. In 2001, 50% of Japanese women aged 30 were still unmarried, compared to 37% in the United States. In Japan, the grueling 14 hour days with torturous commutes make two professional households very rare. In addition, when two people marry in Japan, the union is between two *ies* (a Japanese term that encompasses a signature idea of how each family harmoniously and uniquely combines households and ways of living) as well as between two individuals. The expectation to create *ie* leaves no time for career. Hence, young Japanese women are choosing to become *wagamama*, or “single parasites.” That is, when they graduate school they take a small, non-taxing job and live at home. They are selfish and willful, while enjoying a life of partying, shopping and travel. Some “parasite singles” vow never to get married. Some plan to continue their studies and become professionals. Others find themselves propelled into professional jobs due to their competency. Marriage and/or children are not on the agenda of many of these young women. Japanese advertisers knowingly and noticeably avoid using babies to hawk products, as the parasite singles are the largest single consumer segment (making about \$27,000 a year with no expenses) (Orenstein, 2001).

The questions raised by this trend are profound with both promising and troubling possibilities. Is the twenty-first century going to be characterized by a planet of ever-increasing single elite women? Will single parenthood increase among the very educated, on a global scale? Will there be a backlash in future generations as young women see “the future” and pick a road that is more likely to assure companionship? Does it matter that intellectually elite men will contribute to the future gene pools to a much greater extent than intellectually elite women?

## **PART II:**

*What follows are reports on the status of and attitudes toward today’s single professional women in Germany, Poland, and India. The reports vary in their modes of presentation, from analyses of statistical data, to discussions of media presentations of women, to interviews with women and men about expectations about work and marriage. In many ways this is a montage of impressions backed by disparate sources of data: what is striking is that each report shows that single professional women are an emerging class, and that there is a great deal of ambivalence about what this means, for both men and women. It is hoped that these reports together will demonstrate the need for further analysis of this global phenomena*

### **Single Professional Women in Germany (By Anne-Marie Sholz)**

There is a deep ambivalence about the single professional woman in Germany. On the one hand, such single professional women are viewed as deeply lonely and unhappy, wishing they could figure out why they have been singled out (no pun intended) for this peculiar fate. On the other hand, they are seen as deeply threatening to men, taking over the positions that were once the exclusive terrain of men. Both images are exploited by the media in order to reinforce the larger society's general unease regarding

the striking increase in single households. This is perhaps the clearest signal that the postmodern global economy is anything but compatible with the conventional nuclear family that assumes a male breadwinner, a female housewife and children cared for by the wife.

What kinds of statistics do exist regarding single professional women? Firstly, European statistics generally have focused their interest upon the "one person household", a vague category that fails to differentiate, for example, between unattached singles and singles that live alone but nonetheless live in stable relationships. Furthermore, the specific history of Germany and the post- WWII female majority affect the statistics disproportionately as well. Therefore, the actual majority of single households (1989--58%) include older pensioned women and widows, who outlive their spouses by an average of 8 years. Single female households actually outnumber single male households in the general statistics (Schmitz-Koester, 1993).

Among the group of singles in child-bearing age, roughly ages 25-45, the proportion is reversed. Here, 62% of singles are male and 38% are female, which indeed raises the question of why most studies and the popular media focus upon single women instead of asking about the "loneliness" of single men. What is continually emphasized is that the group of single females in child-bearing age is *increasing*.

Dorothee Schmidt-Koester (1993), a Bremer journalist, whose study relies upon qualitative interviews rather than diffuse statistics, divides single women generally into five categories:

- 1) Young women living alone for the first time.
- 2) Experienced women in their "best years", job oriented, often raising children and/or divorced, who have no time for a relationship with a man.
- 3) Older women, post-divorce, who are thinking of themselves for the first time and taking a break from relationships
- 4) Widow with a pension who no longer requires a male provider
- 5) Women who are lesbians or prefer alternative lifestyles.

Single professional women would more or less fit into the first, second and fifth group of women and here the statistics become more interesting. If among married men and women the employment rate is higher for men, for singles the rates of employment are roughly equivalent: 83% men and 77% women. Moreover, for singles, the levels of education as well as employment qualifications are higher for women than they are for men. Single women are more likely to be members of unions than married women, and more interested in politics. They are more likely to live in cities with populations of 500,000 or more. And finally, single women are quite likely to have larger than average apartments, indicating that their home space is particularly important to them (Schmitz-Koester, 1993; Die Lebenssituation Alleinstehender Frauen, 1991; Loew, 1994)

Among career-oriented women (I will say more about the problematic nature of the concept of "career" in the German context later), about 1/3 are single and living alone. The rate of marriage among career-oriented men in Germany is 89%, whereas that same rate among women is 58%. That the majority of career oriented women are married is a statistic that must also be addressed; nonetheless, what is clear is that many more career-oriented males are married than career oriented females, over 30% more. These statistics are part of a study entitled *Women between Might and Men: Men on the Defensive: Higher Management in Times of Change* (original title is in German), which in itself

suggests the confrontational state of affairs. Among my own circle of friends and acquaintances, about 75% are single professional women while 20% are married without children and 5% married with children. This is surely disproportionate but nonetheless telling. Indeed, one study found that women in the upper professions were more than three times as likely to be without children as men in the same position. The gender discrepancy for parenthood is huge with research on West Germans finding that among married career women 62% were without children, compared to a rate of 18% of married career men (Gassen and Rochelle, 1997).

Let me return to the concept of "career" among German women and its problematic connotations. Schmitz-Koester in her fine 1993 study entitled *Women Solo: A Self-Confident Lifestyle* (title translated from the German) discusses a telling contradiction among her career-oriented interviewees. For the most part, these women vehemently rejected the label of "career woman" ("Karrierefrau") associating it above all with a hard, cold masculine manner that compromised their sense of female identity. This image of the "career woman", which circulated in the nineties in popular German culture under the rubric of "Superweib" (which in direct translation means "Superwoman", but connotes a more sexual type that actually translates more accurately as something like "Superbroad") is not unfamiliar in U.S. popular culture. Nonetheless, it was never offset by the U.S. feminist movement's more self-confident and unambivalent image of the ambitious woman, legally entitled to gender equality and gaining access to male dominated institutions. And indeed, there are more professional women in U. S. institutions of higher learning, business, law, etc., than there are in similar institutions in Germany. For example, in German universities, the rate of tenured (associate level) female faculty averages about 10 percent (Frauen in Deutschland, 2002). Overall, German culture has had very little experience with the concept of the single professional woman, and this affects both men's and women's perception of their status.

Moreover, Germany is still primarily a middle-class welfare system, with the assumption that women will raise children and take primary responsibility for the family. Women, when they decide to have children, often find themselves literally phased out of the job market. While employed women, after an extended child care leave, may have a right to return to their jobs, during this time many women find themselves unable to keep up with the developments in their area of employment, and thus unable to take advantage of their official "rights".

All these factors contribute to a negative self-perception of single working women. These women link their hesitancy over the label "career woman" with a desire to avoid criticism from family and co-workers as well as an unwillingness to play by the rules of male power. "Money and power" are still not appropriate goals for women in the work place. Instead, creativity and self-fulfillment are considered more appropriate roles in these single women's definitions of themselves as "career women". Indeed, most women said they did not want to devote their entire lives to a "career"; they would prefer to have time for other things.<sup>ii</sup> Schmitz-Koester cites in her study that she did not talk to a single career-oriented woman who actively and unambiguously expressed a desire to pursue a career (Schmitz-Koester, 1993).

The German language contributes to this negative framework, for there is no linguistic equivalent for the category "single *professional* woman." In the German language, "professional" functions as an adjective, describing a specific style, rather than

a public status, and it is rarely used as a noun, thus the term "career" ("Karriere") remains, as distinguished from "Beruf" or occupation. Yet in Germany, the term "career" has overtones of ruthlessness and drive less likely to burden the U.S. use of the term, and is generally not linked to the word "professional" at all. The American idealization of professional status is linked to its connotations of competency in the knowledge sector, not to the specific occupational behaviors of the individuals involved. Even for men, "Karriere machen" (to "make" a career, rather than to "have" a career) has negative overtones, namely that the success of the venture will be based upon the (ruthless) and inhumane drive of a particular individual. All the same, I wonder whether this phrase "Karriere machen" with its implicitly negative connotations hasn't been put into circulation to more or less draw attention to (deviant) female behavior and thus to emphasize its "unfeminine" nature.

Despite the huge statistical gap between men and women, most professional, career-oriented women nonetheless marry (58%). Schmitz-Koester even goes so far as to suggest that the single, career-oriented thirtysomething females are a figment of the pop media's imagination. She suggests that in German society, a woman cannot really be successful in a career unless she can demonstrate her femininity by way of a "man on her side." Moreover, she concludes provocatively:

The Solo-existence is by no means the lifestyle choice of thirtysomething women, women who have decided solely upon a career instead of family. This lifestyle is primarily chosen by women, who are in search of something, who are experimenting with life's possibilities. And these women tend to be either the very young or the women of post-childbearing age, women who have finally found the strength to make themselves the center of attention. If it didn't more or less reinforce the conservative pro-family ideology, one could almost say that the single lifestyle is the lifestyle of women in the pre and post family phase (Schmitz-Koester, 1993).

What strikes me about this conclusion is that it very much draws attention to the conventional conflicts women face regarding having to "choose" between family and career, and it reminds me of a quote from Gloria Steinem I once read attached to an herbal tea bag in the U.S.: "I have yet to meet a man who is struggling over the choice of whether to have family or a career." Single women are, in a sense, pursuing careers in ways men have not traditionally been asked to do so, namely alone, or else caring for small children. Women are indeed on the cutting edge of social experimentation, and this is no easy position to be in. Even the most conservative sociologists emphasize again and again that single men have not had to make the radical adjustments in their conventional sense of identity both in the work place and the home that women have had to make (Schmitz-Koester, 1993).

Nonetheless, what is missing in the current German discussion is the sense of potential and hope this lifestyle once held and could still potentially hold for women. Instead, the focus in popular culture is on "loneliness", perhaps unsurprising in the context of an increasingly harsh market-driven economy indifferent to the emotional needs of its workers, higher rates of unemployment among all segments of the population, not least among professional women themselves, not to mention an ever

greater distance from the social movements for the civil rights of women, children and peoples of other cultures that shaped the ideological struggles of an earlier generation. In the German context, the tone of explicit male resentment is also difficult to miss.

Moreover, those studies that do discuss SPW tend to emphasize *private* coping strategies, such as, for example, the way single women are developing new notions of personal space based upon their inhabiting apartments of their own (Loew, 1994). While these studies shed light on the personal preferences of women, they simultaneously highlight the glaring absence of social networks of public women, not to mention the general absence of single professional women as role models for younger women. Younger women today are increasingly feeling isolated and do not seem to have role models to look to. This historical stigma associated with being single, especially for women, could well be linked to the redefinition of "single" from primarily a statistical to essentially a marketing concept. With the ever increasing market for "single" events and single products, as well as dating services, etc., the status of single comes to be linked more and more with feelings of inadequacy and incompleteness at an ever younger age (phone interview, Schmitz-Koester, 2002).

Countering the "loneliness" thesis, Schmitz-Koester (1993) discovered in her interviews with single German women that it was fear of repeating the relationship mistakes of the past that often motivated these women either to approximate a single lifestyle within a relationship or else to remain single altogether. In order not to fall back into traditional patterns of domination and subordination, several women felt the ideal solution was a relationship at a distance and the maintenance of "a room of one's own". Older women have developed very specific strategies of emotional control that *often inhibit the onset of a relationship*. In contrast, younger women tend to develop strategies of emotional withdrawal *within relationships*, not unlike those conventionally associated with men. Most such strategies required high amounts of energy and considerable resolve, yet are, in their basic nature, passive strategies. The few women who took active steps in the sexual sphere or in finding a partner were often rebuffed; such behavior was not seen as appropriate for women.

Television programs such as *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal* are regularly dubbed and broadcast on German TV, and commentators in the German print media have taken note of the dramatic shift in the depiction of single women, from the "Superweib" of the nineties to such needy types as "Bridget Jones" (Freund, 2000); indeed, whereas a program like *Sex and the City* pretty much embodies the stereotype of the high-powered career woman who practices male-defined forms of sexuality, shows like *Ally McBeal* depict the sweet and ever suffering single woman, on the career track in body but not in spirit. These types, rather than being undermined by contemporary social science research, are reinforced in many cases, particularly in Germany, disregarding the complex and experimental nature of single professional women's lives. Yet experimentation-- with new forms of personal identity, career options, to say nothing of social activism--is risky as single professional women in Germany are fast joining the ranks of the white collar unemployed during times of economic crisis. Little wonder, then, that single women in Germany, professional and otherwise, place such an emphasis upon creating hospitable spaces for themselves in the form of roomy and comfortable apartments, a private zone within which one can create for one's self an illusion of equality.

### **The Experience in Poland** (By Erva Grzeszczyk)

Single professional women became a visible phenomenon in Poland after 1989. In the times of "real socialism" the everyday struggle for economic survival made it more necessary for men and women to find a partner, especially since "wife and mother" were the sole occupations open. Couples married young and were usually forced to stay with their parents for an extended period, often until their own children were school age, as an apartment in a block of flats was a dream to be realized only after years of waiting.

With the advent of democracy and free market economy, things changed dramatically. New job opportunities appeared. Educated young people who decided to devote themselves to career could achieve considerable material benefits. Many young people moved to Warsaw, the place which was believed to have 0% unemployment level. Instead of starting a family during the last years of study, as in the 1970s and 1980s, in the 1990s, many focused exclusively on their professional careers during these years. Towards the end of the 1990s, the job market was shrinking, largely due to the economic recession and the baby-boom generation becoming a significant part of the work force. Many women who started their careers in the beginning of the 1990s have realized that they sacrificed their personal life; and as a result they are still single. Yet, many of the women who are to enter the job market now are aware that in order to be competitive they should postpone starting a family. So it looks like single professional women are starting to grow in number.

. For this paper, I have used in-depth interviews, collected when preparing my Ph.D. dissertation, *American Models of Success in Poland of the Nineties*<sup>5</sup>, interviewed an additional twenty-one young women and eight men; reviewed women's magazines from the last two years; monitored a Catholic internet site discussing this topic; and reviewed recent statistics and research. Taken together, the observations suggest that the process of transformation towards democracy and free markets along with an accompanying increase in acceptance for the cultural models characteristic of America and Western Europe have brought unexpected burdens and gender crises. The Polish tradition of strong women has made us especially vulnerable to increased demands to become "corporate" in our personal lives.

Demographic data shows that, theoretically, there should not be many single professional women in Poland. We are not in a state of war, no significant number of male Poles is incarcerated or works illegally abroad and education is equally valued by both sexes. In 2001 there were 106 women per 100 men.<sup>6</sup> Looking more closely at the tables one can easily see that these "extra" 6 women must be already retired; in the age group 20-29 there are only slightly more women than men and in the group 30-39, there are even more men than women.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> This work has been recently published in a form of a book; see: E. Grzeszczyk, *Sukces: amerykańskie wzory – polskie realia*, /*Success: American Models – Polish Reality*/ (IFiS PAN: Warsaw, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> All the statistical data quoted in this chapter comes from the *Demographic Yearbook of Poland 2002*, published by the Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 2002.

<sup>7</sup> In 2000 the statistics looked the following:

age group 20-24:	1021,2 women per 1011,9 men
age group 25-29:	865,7 women per 861,4 men
age group 30-34:	725,8 women per 741,7 men
age group 35-39:	785,7 women per 830,9 men

While Poland exhibits the disparities in education seen elsewhere, the differences are smaller than in many places. In 2001, 10.1% of Polish women had higher education, as compared to 9.4% men. Taking into consideration secondary education, we can see significant but not terribly disparate differences (35% of women and 25.6% of men).

What is more, the data about contracted marriages looks optimistic in that there is a shift toward later marriage. In 2001, there were more marriages in the 30-34 cohort than in previous years. Additionally, while in the 1980s and 1990s men married mostly in the 20-24 age group, in 2001 for the first time, the largest group of men contracting for marriages was 25-29. However, as we look at the statistics for women, we see that the overall trend toward later marriage does not favor older women; men tend to marry women younger than themselves: the largest group of women getting married is as it was in the 1980s and 1990s: 20-24 years old (Demographic Yearbook of Poland, 2002). Once a woman is older than 24, it is increasingly difficult for her to find a husband belonging to her own age group.<sup>8</sup>

This data supports the common observation that the single woman over 24 is an ever-increasing group in Poland. The popular media has taken up this topic, often with a negative emphasis. Women magazines and widely read weeklies such as *Polityka* or *Wprost*, convey a troubling message that meeting a prospective partner is difficult and the singles market can be a dangerous place. Relationships initiated at work or while clubbing are usually mainly sexual and of a short-term character. Internet dating is risky as men tend to lie. Matrimonial agencies and speed-dating are usually disappointing.

But is this picture a fiction of the media? Only two of the twenty-nine people interviewed said the Single Professional Woman (SPW) was a media generated phenomena. Most admitted that they have friends, acquaintances or colleagues belonging to this group. In my interviews, individual women focused on different types of difficulties within the SPW class. While some do see being single as a matter of personal choice, other successful women treat the fact that they are still single as a personal failure. One woman said, "I do not know if I have no husband because I work so much, or I work so much because I have no husband." Many do not focus on the difficulties of dating, but rather on what they are missing in their personal lives. One of these women, extremely attractive and extremely busy, said she was concentrating on earning money; money, for her, meant safety. She felt that ideally this safety should be provided by a man, but as she had not found such a man, money was a substitute. Other women, when asked whether they had achieved success in life, answered negatively, saying they were missing creating a nuclear family and that they needed such a family to feel their success was complete.

### **You can't have it all**

In my interviews I asked what explained the Single Professional Women (SPW) phenomenon. Among the women respondents, the most commonly voiced answer was the following: nowadays, when we have free market economy, it is possible to realize oneself professionally but it needs a lot of investment. Young women want to complete their higher education, achieve a professional position and only then set up a family. Why not earlier? The most common answer is the sheer lack of time. One cannot study or/and

---

<sup>8</sup> In 2001 there were 56421 brides aged 20-24, 32362 aged 25-29 and only 6739 aged 30-34.

work full time (often these two activities are combined) and still have time for socializing. Plus, in the times of recession and growing unemployment, the requirements of the employers are extremely high. Many women are aware that bosses do not look favorably on mothers with little children, and Polish husbands generally will not stay in a marriage in which the wife has simply no time for them. Many of the female respondents were quite certain that successful career and successful marriage just cannot be combined.

If "you can't have it all", as one of the female respondents said, there arises the question of priorities. Looking at the answers collected from both men and women, it appears that a lot of young Polish women have chosen career as their main goal, at least for some years after graduation. The reasons for this choice are various. Many of the women interviewed talk about the unstable economic situation and strong competition at the job market. Another reason mentioned was the fact that often women discover that they cope well in the professional sphere and this gives them satisfaction and boosts self-esteem. As one of the young women wrote, "the cost of lost opportunities" would be too big to resign from investing in oneself and start devoting that time to family life. Moreover, as some women noted, young people in Poland have learned to accept the artificial, hectic rhythm of life dominated by work. They do not have the time to slow down and think about the entire range of needs and priorities. They just brush them aside.

### **Marriage can wait.**

Why has marriage stopped being a priority? Trying to answer this question many of my respondents mention the fundamental change in cultural models. Marriage is no longer the first thing which defines a woman's prestige. What is also very important, the social pressure on young women to marry has lessened considerably during last ten years. The general acceptance for co-habitation has grown and as one of the respondents said, nowadays "if you have a man, you don't need a husband". Becoming a "Polish Mother", the traditional type, sacrificing herself entirely for the good of the family, is not a choice and/or option for many educated young. They can take care of themselves, financially and they hope, emotionally. One of the young respondents observed that there even appeared institutions overtaking the emotional function of a marriage: for example, psychoanalysis.

### **Looking for Mr. Right**

Apart from sincere engagement in professional life and resulting lack of time, the second most often mentioned reason for there being more and more SPW is the lack of appropriate men. Many single female respondents state there are simply no right men, and if there are, no-one knows where to find them. Both married and unmarried women agree that SPW have much higher expectations towards their prospective husbands than their mothers had. Contemporary Mr. Right should be educated, responsible, loyal, manly and at the same time tender and understanding. Most of all, he should be a partner in a marriage. And if he does not fulfill the majority of these requirements, most probably he is not our half of the apple. . As one of the interviewees said, the young successful woman won't have a man who is only 50% acceptable. They even won't have a man who is 80% acceptable. They prefer to stay single than to suffer with a wrong guy.

Many women stress the need for radical change in traditional gender roles. What is of crucial importance here is the often mentioned observation, that although many Polish women managed to adjust to the new model of a woman--accomplished, professional and largely self-sufficient, Polish men stayed traditional. They want to dominate, they want to impress.

### **Insecure in the big town**

The vast majority of my male respondents agree about one thing: men are afraid of women who are more intelligent and more professionally successful than they are. Only one of my respondents said he liked learning from people wiser than himself, no matter whether they were women or men; most of the men admitted they fear being dominated in a relationship. A woman who is attractive, accomplished, bright and successful requires a man who is always up to the highest standards. Men admit they are afraid that they will not always be able to live up to the expectations. They feel their role is to take care of and to impress a woman. Both are extremely difficult with an attractive and accomplished woman. Moreover, if such a woman is dissatisfied with a partner, she can either criticize him or even walk away with someone else.

According to the majority of male respondents, professional women consciously chose not to marry because they do not need a marriage; for them being in a formalized relationship would be more burdensome than satisfying. Short-term relationships suit them better because they mean pleasure without obligation.

Many male respondents admitted that men tend to chose younger women. Apart from the reasons which were not mentioned, but can be easily deduced (young women stay young and good-looking longer and they have better chances for delivering healthy babies), some of my male interviewees stressed that younger girls can be impressed and taught to fulfill men's wishes with much less effort than it usually happens with older and more demanding women. With younger girls men simply feel more manly. This is especially important in countries where the vast majority of men are accustomed to the traditional model of the family. One male respondent admitted that nowadays the patriarchal model is falling apart and men are not able (or refuse) to adjust.

### **Why men do not want to marry**

Most of the men taking part in this research expressed a similar opinion: a contemporary educated professional male Pole living in a big city is far from jumping into a marriage just because "the time is right". The possible reasons for this situation are numerous. Many respondents blame the influence of feminism and the change of gender roles. One interviewee noted that even if guys meet a perfect girl they marry her only when they are afraid that another man can win her over. He himself has been in a relationship with his girlfriend for years, they even built a house together, but he does not think about marriage. "Marriage is an engagement. And I do not know whether I can keep this engagement. I treat it honestly. I love my girlfriend dearly, I want only her good. But if I stop loving her, I will go away. That is only fair".

One of the interviewees suggested that the main reason why single professional men are reluctant to marry single professional women is that both parties bring home the values and modes of behavior they learnt at work, the most important being the spirit of competition. This competition is the rule even in matters such as decorating the house or

even in sex which in time can make a relationship pretty intolerable. The line between work and personal life is blurred. If this is true, it is yet another piece of evidence for my thesis that it is the sphere of work that has largely dominated the life of contemporary young Poles.

### **So, why single?**

The possible causes for the increase in SPW mentioned by the respondents were connected with broader, societal changes: the growth of individualism and the change in gender roles. Many were related to the transformation towards a market economy which the Central-European countries have been undergoing for last twelve years. The resulting primacy of work in the hierarchy of values is one of them most significant factors. The current recession is also an influence. People postpone marriage until their material position is more or less stabilized. Another category of possible reasons focused on the fact that women in this country have been traditionally thought to be strong and enduring – otherwise not only their families would not survive but also the concept of Poland as an independent country could be endangered<sup>9</sup>. However, in the present circumstances, this ideal of the Polish Mother is losing both its attractiveness and urgency in the eyes of many young females. Women's expectations towards marriage have changed, but also the men's: apart from the fact that the majority of young, professional Polish men opt for the traditional model, at the same time many of them admit they do not find it very appealing to earn for the needs of the wife. They also do not want their wives to be dull and uninformed; they want to be with someone they could also "be able to talk to".

One of the observations one can draw from the opinions of both men and women is that perhaps there is a significant lack of communication between the both sides. Most male interviewees said that the single professional women stay single mainly because this is their own choice. At the same time, talking to many single professional women, it was clear that they would like to find someone to share their life with and to set up a family. It is possible that these women, afraid to admit that they do not like staying single, subconsciously send the men a signal "I am not interested" or "I don't need you", diminishing their already small chances of finding "Mr. Right"..

The analysis also shows that the ranks of SPW will most probably grow in our country. It does not seem very likely that the Polish men will suddenly transform themselves to fit the feminist ideal or that the women will resign from educational and professional opportunities they have learnt to enjoy.

---

<sup>9</sup> Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk conducted an interesting analysis of the language in which the readers of the women's magazines in the communist times referred to their husbands when writing about them. The names used suggest that these men were perceived as babies: sometimes sweet but generally not very responsible. In the times of the transformation when there appeared possibilities of professional advancement, the media started presenting not only the image of a strong businesswoman but also a strong and capable businessman, whose role is to support the family. However, as my research has shown, young Polish women still tend to count mainly on themselves and not the men. (See M. Marody, A. Giza-Poleszczuk, "Być kobieta, być mężczyzną – czyli o przemianach tożsamości związanej z płcią we współczesnej Polsce" /To Be a Man, to Be a Woman – On the Transformation of the Gender-related Identity in Contemporary Poland"/ in M. Marody, ed., *Między rynkiem a etatem. Społeczne negocjowanie polskiej rzeczywistości / Between the Market and the Regular Post. Social Negotiation of the Polish Reality/* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", 2000)

## **Single Professional Women (SPW) in India** (By Anjali Roy)

“The fathers protect them in childhood, their husbands protect them in youth, and their sons protect them in age, a woman is never fit for independence.”

Sunny Singh, the author of *Single in the City*, documents the rise of the single professional women in India. She discusses two broad categories: those women who are single due to "circumstances" and the new growing sector that are single due to "choice." Single by circumstance describes a wide range of external barriers to marriage, such as the loss of a promised spouse during childhood, physical or mental limitations that make one non-competitive for a mate, or inability to find 'a suitable boy.' This category of single women has existed in India for many, many years. Also, many single women put their extended families before their personal fulfillment and decline proposals of marriage unless they find a supportive partner. Take Dhvani, 53. She is beautiful, intelligent and successful. Yet, she remains single because she could not find a partner who was willing to share the responsibility of looking after her elderly mother. Similarly, Rinku, 40, having lost her father in her childhood and having faced severe hardships, remained single to supplement her widowed mother's meager earnings by paying for her younger sister's education and wedding. Sacrifice, a haloed Indian value, gave these single professional women filial appreciation and societal respect. Are they lonely? Do they ever miss not having a partner or children? They don't have the time to ask themselves. Their families are too preoccupied with their own affairs to take the trouble to inquire. These questions are not directly asked in Indian families. By the time they remind their families that they too need their own space, they are dubbed frustrated or irritable.

The new breed of single professional women has much less ambivalence. They are not Bridget Jones and do not spend their life in constant pursuit of a male partner. Very few are hard core feminists. These are educated women who simply do not feel the need of a man, at this time in their life, with the accompanying social, cultural and legal constraints of matrimony.

The swinging singles are really a late twentieth-century, even a twenty-first century, trend in India. The proportion of single women to those who are married (the concept of relationships or a live-in partner is not too common in India) is small but growing.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note, though, that in India, the swinging singles status is often initiated with the intention of shifting roles and settling down to domesticity after having enjoyed freedom. The women who can enjoy this period of freedom offer a very different profile from the average Indian woman. They share the following characteristics: they have successful careers and high salaries; they live in metropolitan cities, and come from upper-class, or at least higher middle-class, backgrounds. For most of these women, single-hood is not for ever. Nor do single professional have it all that easy; there are extra burdens and stresses to "going it alone." When and if a woman tires of the single lifestyle, she may have passed the age where she can find a partner, and

---

<sup>1</sup> The Indian Institute of Technology with a faculty strength of about 400 has 22 female faculty. Out of the 22 female faculty roughly 10 are single. This sample is not really representative because women outnumber men in most university departments in India except in Schools of Engineering or Management. Most often women prefer underemployment in order to be able to accompany their spouses.

passes silently into the single by circumstance category. It is unknown how many SPW in their thirties are single by choice and how many have slipped into the circumstance category.

While most women interviewed in *The Week* defended their single status, Konkona, 40, is honest to acknowledge the problem: "Who sees singlehood as a problem? I do, we do, men do, clients do, bosses do, mothers do, fathers do, society does." Konkona's story highlights a very practical aspect of the problem.

I got married at 38, giving up a career where I had reached a senior position after willingly sacrificing weekday evenings and weekends for 14 years. I had to give up my career as I was moving abroad. It was impossible to find someone I could marry in India.

Why was it impossible to find someone she could marry in India? In a society where most males are married while they are still in their twenties, where they don't become available the second time through divorce (though with the divorce rate accelerating this might change fast) or separation and where traditionally the older female/younger male relationship is still rare, a woman deciding to get married after 30 is expected to make compromises--including emigrating to a new country).

The need for older women to look for novel solutions for a mate is the focus of a new TV sitcom that takes up the controversial theme of the older woman, younger male. Madonna might flaunt her younger companions but when Simran, the mid-thirtyish doctor wedded to her career falls in love with a young man a decade her junior in *Astitva: A Love Story*, she has to fight against several odds. While the male's parents can be expected to be disapproving given the set-up, the doctor is ostracized by her own father for committing what he thinks is an unpardonable crime. Simran's pleas about love conquering all appear to cut no ice with her own family, much less outsiders. In the latest episode, the show moves on to the more sensitive issue of the mismatch in the perspectives of two people at different stages in life (the man still in his footloose courtship mode, the woman preparing for motherhood).

Off screen, reality is mirrored by the mother of the celebrated actor Shabana Aazmi, who has publicly defended her daughter marrying a divorced man (another novel solution in India). She realistically puts forward the harsh choice before the single professional woman who delays marriage. "My daughter is 34. She would have to marry a man at least a few years her senior. Where would she find a single man of that age?"

A great number of single women continue to feel isolated or feel like the oddballs. Even the professional women glamorized in weekly magazines admit that they decided to remain single despite family pressure. Shalini, creative director at Lowe, Mumbai, has used humor to cope with the family pressures by stating publicly, "I have puzzled matchmakers by letting many a good catch slip out and, of course, have denied relatives the pleasure of complaining at my wedding about the food, the presents and the boy's family." I have heard a single professional coworker protest against this mindset with equal indignation. "When I was preparing to leave for Europe to pursue higher studies, I was shocked to find my grandmother blessing me with a gift of glass bangles praying that it was time I got married."

Raka, 49, a highly placed professional, is still single and appears to be happily so. Her life appears to be no more or less complete than partnered women except that she has no live-in partner. All classes of women admire her. Women are often heard remarking, "Who needs a man? Look at Raka Madam. She lives like a man, driving her own car, setting up her own house, doing her own repairs." At the same time, I have heard my single women friends mention being accosted by total strangers with the question, "You are okay to look at. You have a good job. Why didn't you get married?" In less provincial settings, political rightness prevents people from putting it so bluntly in the person's presence. But it is the first question that I have heard from even those with pretensions to sophistication whenever there is a mention of the single professional woman. "Why did your colleague/friend/acquaintance not get married?" If the woman happens to be physically unattractive, the reason appears to be obvious enough. But if she is not, it leads to a lot of speculation.

Yet, most single professionals in India today choose to remain so not because they couldn't find a partner but because they feel that a relationship, particularly marriage, might imply the loss of personal freedom or freedom to pursue their interests. For many it is not a problem. It's a celebration of single professional women finding themselves.

The situation in India is quite different from the Euro-American world. India is still in that transitional period where women have barely had the first glimpse of freedom. They are too busy basking in this new found freedom to worry about issues like partners or marriage. The need for a partner often takes a backseat to financial independence in the newly emancipated Indian woman. Rashmi puts it simply in Sunny's book: "My parents' generation got married because women couldn't work and there was no way of living on your own. I don't have to marry simply to get my bills paid." Economic independence and singlehood are often linked together. "It is just a behavioural change where women do not want to give up economic independence," says noted sexologist Girish Sanghavi. Anvita in *Single in the City* hits the nail on the head when she opines, "Why should I marry? I see my married classmates and they are constantly at the beck and call of their in-laws. They can't take a job that will displease the husband or his family. They can't go out late, or take assignments that involve late hours. A man isn't worth my freedom." Raka seconds her, "I don't need my husband's permission for an expensive indulgence."

In fact, by choosing to pursue a career, not a male, they see themselves as doing something out of the ordinary. Nilakshi Gupta said in *The Week*, "I thank my stars for not having made a blunder like getting married," says Nilakshi. "My growth would have got stunted both personally and professionally. I fell in and out of love and flirted and still flirt with men," she says. "As I started treading the professional field, I realized that I would rather go and open the lock of an empty home and switch on the lights myself instead of having to stay with people I do not relate to." Psychiatrist Anjali Chabbria believes that witnessing unhealthy marital relationships of parents makes children skeptical of the idea of marriage. "Women of today are much more confident," says Anjali. "They want to enter into the bond of matrimony only if they feel they will be happier for it."

Perhaps single professional women in India can be single without being lonely because of the strong Indian family network. Many single professional women, particularly those in their 50's or older, prefer to live with their families. "I never felt the

urge to marry," says Neelima Patke, who is in her mid-forties. "It sounds strange, but I am so content and satisfied with work and the company of my mother and sisters that the need for someone special in my life has never really arisen." The strong family presence partially takes care of the problem of loneliness. Companionship, though celebrated in ancient Indian texts, is rare even between married couples. The basic difference, I believe, lies in non-sexualized relationships being as important as sexualized relationships in traditional Indian settings.

### **PART III: Integrating the Findings**

Taken together, these findings suggest that single professional women are faced with societal prejudices around the world. Our case studies, while limited, lead to four general observations.

First, in today's world both men and elite professional women are increasingly disillusioned and self-limiting in their mating options. With both genders in the workplace, young adults are still guided by a traditional socio/psychohistorical model where men seek out younger, less educated women and women seek out security. Both male resistance to change and the female insistence upon a more educated mate than herself reflect that the old ideological model is at work, despite changing circumstances (that is, women can now conceive at much later ages than was previously considered acceptable and with increasing levels of female education and vocational success, there is an increasingly large group of male partners who are less accomplished and less secure than elite professional women).

At a deeper level, this resistance to new models suggests that women have not achieved meaningful social equality despite higher levels of education. Psychologically, many elite professional women stress the value of having a more successful mate and highlight their creative realization in the work sphere (as opposed to money and power), since this jibes better with the traditional model of femininity and allows them to feel "successful." If they succeed in traditionally male dominated areas and have power and authority in the larger world, they risk feeling like "a failure" if they aren't in a committed relationship. This is not to deny that many contemporary men are also facing the same quandary: they also may feel that despite professional success they are a failure if they cannot succeed in achieving long term intimacy with one partner.

Second, while elements of this scenario are ageless (sic: the attraction of older men to younger women), elite SPW appear to be creating an evolutionary shift in male-female relationships. In the beginning of industrialization, a middle class woman's whole existence resided in the home and in her "feminine" roles of homemaker and socializer of children. As middle-class household duties were reduced by technology and hired help, women became the administrators of home making and educational duties. However, women also got a reputation as consumers of luxury items and female leisure was often resented by men. In the late nineteenth century, significant numbers of women began to choose career over marriage, and paid work and careers became acceptable for single women. Very quickly, married women wanted to work outside the home sphere also, in order to gain psychological independence, as much as economic relief. Thus, much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was spent broadening the family model to include married women as workers (Long, 1984).

As contraception and delayed child bearing have become more widespread, education and career preparation have become a much longer journey, easily gobbling up one's twenties. We are now seeing women around the world looking for a mate *after* they are professionally employed and financially independent. This developmental shift in women's age and stage of marriage has raised the criteria for eliciting a romantic bond and made SPW less desirable, in many ways, as wives. Unlike the prior evolutionary patterns that merely stretched formal family structures, the current changes may portend a paradigm shift in family organization and functioning for a significant elite group of single, professional women. For elite SPW are increasingly faced with remaining childless or becoming single parents. For those elite SPW who do not desire children, they are faced with celibacy or a more casual sexuality. That these alternative lifestyles surrounding a woman's approach to childbearing, child rearing, and sexuality appear to be occurring on a global level and at a rapid pace makes them all the more significant and in need of empirical investigation.

Third, the increasing levels of education among women worldwide is coupled with a shifting global economic structure that is creating polarized categories of the very poor and the very wealthy and eliminating the middle class family. Women are increasingly being forced to compete if they want to survive economically (not be very poor). It is very difficult, across a number of affluent cultures, to rely on one breadwinner. Single professional women, best typified by the descriptions of life in Poland and India, feel dedication to a career is both an opportunity and an economic necessity if one wants to help one's family of origin and oneself.

Fourth, and apparent across almost all of the countries described, is the loud absence of feminist consciousness or activism among SPW that is undoubtedly a major reason for their feelings of depression and alienation. Women are isolated not only because they lack a partner but also because they experience little solidarity with each other. In some more traditional countries, like India, where social arrangements are less gender-integrated, traditional female ties seem to provide professional elite women with a support system that they lack in more modernized countries. Indeed, this is the largest significant cross-cultural difference that appeared among SPW in the various countries.

### **Systemic Interventions and re-shaping cultural norms**

What can be done to increase the likelihood of elite, young heterosexual women finding a partner if they want that type of companionship? How can cultures work to destigmatize the status of single professional women so those who decide to remain single are free of ridicule?

There appear to be eight possible cultural interventions that might reverse the negative effects associated with this trend.

1. In all of the countries where male education significantly lags behind female achievement levels, re-invigorate incentives for male education.
2. Develop economic policies in the public and private sector that encourage combining family and work roles for both men and women.
3. Create positive media imagery for single professional women whose lives are not focused on "finding a man."

4. Encourage alternate family forms, so as in parts of India, non-sexualized relationships can be as valued as sexualized relationships. Also, encourage female solidarity at the professional level.
5. Social/legal structures could open up and decrease the penalties for early marriage. This could include allowing married partners to share dorm rooms, starting tax incentives in the early years of marriage, de-stigmatizing young marrieds from being financially dependent upon parents, and supporting long distance marriages.
6. Encourage media to develop shows with professional women finding happiness and life with non-professional or younger men.
7. Media attention and glamorization of traditionally male jobs (e.g. construction, police work, firefighters, restaurant cooks, etc.) would over time, raise the status and acceptability of modern male contributions to society.
8. Encouraging acceptance of interracial, interethnic, and international marrying would allow couples to break old conventions and build a meaningful life with new definitions and freedoms.

**TABLE I Educational disparities by Gender and Country**

	Male	Female
Argentina	13.6	15.1
Barbados	11.8	13.1
Canada	14.4	15.3
Czech Republic	10.5	11.1
Denmark	15.2	16.0
Estonia	13.6	14.5
Finland	16.2	17.2
Iceland	15.1	16.5
Kuwait	8.4	9.2
Luxembourg	12.9	13.4
Sweden	15.1	17.0
Slovenia	13.6	14.6
Poland	14.0	14.7
South Africa	13.6	14.6
United States	14.8	15.7
Germany	15.5	15.2
Qatar	12.3	14.0

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's 1995 statistics

**TABLE II: Crude Marriage Rates for Selected Countries  
(per 1,000 population)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1990</b>
Australia	6.0	—	5.8	6.9
Austria	4.8	4.8	5.1	5.8
Belgium	4.3	4.4	4.7	6.6
Bulgaria	4.2	4.3	4.1	6.7
Czech Republic	5.2	5.4	5.6	8.4
Denmark	6.6	6.5	6.4	6.1
Finland	4.7	4.5	4.6	4.8
France	—	4.8	4.8	5.1
Germany <sup>2</sup>	5.2	5.1	5.2	6.5
Greece	6.4	5.5	5.7	5.8
Hungary	4.5	4.5	4.6	6.4
Ireland	4.9	—	4.3	5.0
Israel	5.9	—	5.6	7.0
Italy	—	—	4.7	5.4
Japan	6.3	6.3	6.2	5.8
Luxembourg	4.9	—	4.8	6.2
Netherlands	5.6	—	5.5	6.4
New Zealand	5.3	—	5.3	7.0
Norway	5.3	—	—	5.2
Poland	5.7	5.4	5.3	6.7
Portugal	6.8	6.7	6.5	7.3
Romania	6.5	6.4	6.5	8.3
Russia	5.8	5.8	6.3	8.9
Sweden	4.0	3.5	3.7	4.7
Switzerland	4.9	—	5.3	6.9
United Kingdom	5.1	—	—	6.8
United States	8.3	—	8.9	9.8
Yugoslavia <sup>3</sup>	5.0	5.0	5.3	6.2

1. Data prior to 1993 pertain to the former Czechoslovakia.
  2. All data pertaining to Germany prior to 1990 are for West Germany.
  3. Beginning Jan. 1992, data refer to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Prior to that date, data refer to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
- Source: United Nations, Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, April 2001.*

### **Bibliography**

Beebe, J. (2004). Personal communication.

- Berkovitch, N., & Bradley, K. (1999). The globalization of women's status: Consensus/dissensus in the world polity. *Sociological Perspectives*, 42(3), 481-499.
- Blake, W. M., & Darling, C. A. (1994). The dilemmas of the African American male. *Journal of Black Studies*, 24(4), 402-415.
- Bischoff, S. (1990). Frauen zwischen Macht und Mann. Maenner in der Defensive. Fuehrungskraefte in Zeiten des Umbruchs. *Reinbeck bei Hamburg*. Cited in Schmitz-Koester, D. 1993. *Frauensolo: Eine Selbstbewusste Lebensform* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, GmbH), 196, 73-78.
- Buss, D. (2003). *Evolution of desire: Strategies of human mating*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Chu, G. (1985). The changing concept of self in contemporary China. In A. J. Marsella, G. DeVos, & F. L. K. Hsu (Eds.), *Culture and self: Asian and Western perspectives* (pp. 252-277). London, England: Tavistock.
- Die Lebenssituation alleinstehender Frauen. *Band 1. Hg.von der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Riedmuller/Glatzer – Infratest. Schriftenreihe des Bundesministeriums fuer Frau und Jugend*. 1991. Stuttgart, Berlin, Koeln.
- Dion, K. (1985). Personality, gender, and the phenomenology of romantic love. In P. R. Shaver (Vol. Ed.), *Self, situations, and behavior: Vol. 6. Review of personality and social psychology* (pp. 209-239). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Dion, K., & Dion, K. (1988). Romantic love: Individual and cultural perspectives. In R. Sternberg and M. Barnes (Eds.), *The psychology of love*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dixon, P. (1998). Employment factors in conflict in African American heterosexual relationships: Some perceptions of women. *Journal of Black Studies*, 28(4), 491-505.
- Engelhardt, H., Kogel, T., & Prskawetz, A. (2001). *Fertility and female employment reconsidered: a macro level time series analysis*. Rostock, Germany: Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.
- Frauen in Deutschland: Von der Frauen zur Gleichstellungspolitik* (Berlin: Bundesministerium fuer Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2002), 67-70.
- Freund, W. (2000). Shoppen, fischen, jagen. Welt am Sonntag. 2 September Retrieved from <http://www.welt.de/daten/2000/09/02/09021w188734.htm>
- Gassen, D., & Rochell, K. (photos) 1997. Einsame Spitze: Frauen ueber ihre Strategien auf dem Weg nach oben. *Stern* 23(28 May): 36-46.
- Genov, N. (1997). Four global trends: Rise and limitation. *International Sociology*, 12(4), 409-428.
- Glick, P. C., & Lin, S. (1986). More young adults are living with their parents. Who are they? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 43, 161-168.
- Ghosh, D. (2003, January 5). Single 'n' swinging. *The Week*. <http://the-week.com/23jan05/life6.htm>.
- Haley, S. (2000). The Future of the family in North America. *Futures*, 32(8), 777-782.
- Kaufmann, J. (2002). *Singlefrau und Maerchenprinz: Ueber die Einsamkeit moderner Frauen*. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mBH.
- King, A. E. (1999). African American females' attitudes toward marriage: An exploratory study. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29(3), 416-437.

- Lewis, K. G. (2001). *With or without a man: Single women taking control of their lives*. Palo Alto, CA: Bull Publishing Co.
- Loew, M. (1994). *Raum Ergreifen: Alleinwohnende Frauen Zwischen Arbeit, sozialen Beziehungen und der Kultur des Selbst*. Bielefeld: Kleine Verlag, 128-140.
- Long, J. (1984). *Work and Marriage in George Elliot's Late Novels..* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, New Jersey.
- Moeller, R. (1993). *Protecting motherhood: Women and the family in the politics of postwar West Germany*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Orenstein, P. (2001, July 1). Parasites in Pret-a-porter are threatening Japan's economy [Sunday Magazine]. *New York Times*,
- Popenoe, D., & Whitehead, B. (2001). The state of our Unions: The social health of marriage in America. New Jersey: Rutgers University, National Marriage Project.
- Rotenberg, M. (1977). Alienating individualism and reciprocal individualism: A cross cultural conceptualization. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 17, 3-17.
- Sampson, E. (1985). The decentralization of identity: Toward a revised concept of personal and social order. *American Psychologist*, 40, 1203-1211.
- Scarf, M. (1987). *Intimate partners: Patterns in love and marriage*. New York: Random House.
- Scholz, A. (1997). The politics of importing postmodernity: Teaching gender studies in Germany. In C. Giorcelli and R. Kroes, (Eds.), *Living with America, 1946-1996: Vol. 38. European contributions to American studies* (pp. 259-266). Amsterdam: VU University Press.
- Schmitz-Koester, D. (1993). Frauensolo: Eine Selbstbewusste Lebensform. *Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, GmbH, 196, 73-78*.
- Singh, S. (2001). *Single in the City* [Preface]. Delhi, India: Penguin.
- Sternberg, R., & Barnes, M. (1988). *The psychology of love*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sprecher, S., Aron, A., Hatfield, E., Cortese, A., Potapova, E., & Levitskaya, A. (1994). Love American style, Russian style and Japanese style. *Personal Relationships*, 1, 349-369.
- Triandis, H.C. (1990). Collectivism vs. individualism: A reconceptualization of a basic concept in cross-cultural social psychology. In C. Bagley and G.K. Verma (Eds.), *Personality, cognition and values: Cross cultural perspectives of childhood and adolescence*. London, England: MacMillan.
- Ward, K. B., & Larson-Pyle, J. (1995). Gender, industrialization, transnational corporations and development: An overview of trends and patterns. In C. E. Bose and E. Acosta-Belen (Eds.), *Women in the Latin American development process*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- UNESCO. (1995). *Toward a Gender-inclusive culture through education..* (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in co-operation with UNESCO). Fourth World Conference on Women. Beijing, China.
- U. S. Department of Education, NCES. (2002). 1969-1986 Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS): Fall enrollment in colleges and universities & 1987-2000 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System: Fall enrollment survey (IPEDS-EF:87-00).

- Winstead, B.A., Derlage, V. J., & Rose, S. (1997). *Gender and close relationships*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Yeakey, C. C., & Bennett, C. T. (1990). Race, schooling and class in American society. *Journal of Negro Education*, 59, 10-15.

---

<sup>i</sup>Linda Berg-Cross, Howard University; Anne-Marie Scholz, University of Bremen; JoAnne Long, Vassar College; Ewa Grzeszczyk, Warsaw University; Anjali Roy, India Institute of Technology.

<sup>ii</sup>.Schmitz-Köster, 119-126.