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## ***WHY ARE YOU SINGLE, BABY?* REASONS FOR BEING SINGLE BASED ON A BRAZILIAN RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract.** Single people are often asked about the reasons for non-marriage, in a context where, despite several changes in the field of intimacy, adults are still expected to marry. Based on a thesis study on the subject of singleness in Brazil, in the city of Salvador, Bahia, this text presents the main reasons for singleness, declared by single middle-class adults who live alone in this city. The study used a feminist perspective, with the category gender as the basis for data analysis, in an intersectional way with social class, race, generation, sexuality and territoriality. It used mixed methods with a combination of instruments: questionnaire, focus groups, biographical interviews, and field observations. The findings collaborate to observe gender differences and closeness in reasons for singleness: relational reasons prevailing for women and being single as a choice for men.

**Keywords:** singleness, gender relations, reasons for being single.

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## 1. Introduction

Family party. A woman in her 30's arrives unaccompanied. She is an independent professional, lives alone and has just arrived from an international trip.

- *Hi dear, long time no see you! How are you? How's life going? Are you dating somebody?*
- *Life is fine. I just arrived from a congress in Argentina. And I'm single.*
- *You are so beautiful, smart, and successful... Why are you single?*

For men, the questions could be: – *Hey, what's up! How's the family bachelor doing? Are you enjoying it a lot? Or: Are you still in this single life? When are you going to settle down?*

Commonly, women and men are often questioned about their singleness status, even if in different ways. Seeking to answer the social question, “Why are adult women and men single in a culture that expects them to be married at this stage of life?” This text will present the main motivations for being single declared by adult single women and men who live alone in Salvador, the capital of the state of Bahia in Brazil, who participated in the thesis study on the theme (Andrade 2012).

The study starts from the understanding that this social questioning is loaded with constructed expectations based on a patriarchal, cisheteronormative<sup>2</sup> and sexist system, and it is interesting to observe which practices and meanings are managed by single adults in this culture, seeking to (re)construct the notion of singleness from these, in a Bahia way, in a Brazilian context. It also considers discussions that place singleness as an existing condition with greater visibility in a scenario of transformations in the field of intimacy, with the possibility to exist within the (cis)heteronorms.

The notion of singleness (or singlehood and other terms used in English) is considered as a social and discursive construction that composes identities and social practices of women and also of men who, under this condition, build ways of living in a (cis)heteronormative society that despite many changes, still considers conjugal union as a precept to be followed (Budgeon 2008; Reynolds 2008; Simpson 2009; Trimberger 2005).

The social construction of singleness is based on the idea of marriage as its semantic opposite. Its main definition is the person's situation in relation to marital status: not being in a marital relationship. This definition demarcates the position of people in a classificatory structure and subtly hierarchizes the values of common

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<sup>2</sup> Heteronormativity is the “normative basis created from a heterosexual standard under which sexuality, gender and gender identity are imposed, creating a model of socially accepted behavior and marginalizing other groups that escape this ideal” (Alves et al. 2018: 14). Considering that the norms also include cisgenerativity, leaving transexual people at the margin, the term is here extended to “cisheteronormativity”, as defended by the transexual researcher, Viviane Vergueiro (2015). Anglo-Saxon studies on singleness use the term heteronormativity more.

sense, distinguishing people in different denominations such as married, divorced, separated, and widowed. It is from the occupation of these different places that behaviors are commonly organized, which, for a long time, have privileged those who occupied the married position.

Jill Reynolds and Margareth Wetherell (2003), when studying the topic of single women in a British context, drew attention to the fact that women married or engaged in long-term relationships with men were rarely asked to explain about their condition, unlike when they were single. Married couples were not asked, for example, “Why did you get married?” On the contrary, single women are still expected to explain their (singleness) situation today, preferably a story that talks about “circumstances” and “missed opportunities” or explanations for guilt, for being “unable to hold a man”, as well as problematized these studies and those of Kinnert Lahad (2017), researcher from Israel, and in the field of mental health and gender, as Valeska Zanello (2018) has been dialoguing in Brazil.

In the same critical direction, Shelly Budgeon also considers that those who are not married or with a partner, are generally not included in studies that focus on the way care and intimacy are practiced. But this bias also reinforces the tendency to place the different forms of relationship in a hierarchical way, “with the sexual partnership at the top followed by families of origin, families formed by friends and so on” (Budgeon 2008: 303).

In this sense, it seems to operate an “ideology of marriage and family” (Budgeon 2008) or “familism” (Gonçalves 2007) in terms of practices of intimacy. The same happens in studies in Psychology about the life course, commonly seen as linear, with family and conjugal relationships being the hallmarks of adult life, giving little space to the experiences of single adults (Andrade 2016).

This type of ideology was based on a society that placed the conjugal family as the center, as historian Cláudia Maia states, when referring in a specific way to the construction of the “spinster” in the 19th century in Brazil: “in a society in which the conjugal family has become the central model. From here, celibate women could only get out of the gloom and emerge as a marginal figure” (Maia 2011: 25). Studies on singleness have referred to the history of women, families and marriage to explain the places that single people, especially women, occupied in Western societies.

With important social changes in the 19th and early 20th centuries, in the family field, highlighting the fragility of marriage as an institution, the massive entry of women into the labor market (We mean bourgeois and white women, considering that poor and black women were already working inside and outside home), among others, created the view that singleness reflects the “family crisis”, in a society that is now selfish, hedonistic, and amoral, according to Rosário Mauritti (2011). On the other hand, this phenomenon also begins to be seen in a positive way, as human relations start to be configured in a different way and tend to be more horizontal, in a context of individualization and democratization

of societies from the second half of the 20th century (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1990; Giddens 1992 and other authors).

Feminist analyzes of changes in families are aimed at questioning the traditional model, seen as a model that is sustained by patriarchal social structures that have not been overcome despite the existence of new arrangements and more plural identities. In this sense, they consider that the way in which sexuality and relationships are organized in society still bears the (cis)heterosexuality norm, feeding a culture of couples, a type of ideology that is imposed, in a subtle way, through speeches and standards that naturalize sexuality exercised in heterosexual relationships within a (nuclear) family structure and a traditional marriage (Hita 2014;<sup>3</sup> Hita 2005; Wittig 1992). Thus, those who are out of marriage try to manage the experience of singleness in a culture where being in a marital relationship is still what is expected (Amador, Kiersky 2003; Budgeon 2008; Lai et al. 2015 and other authors).

Although the ideology of family is very present in our culture, especially for adults, there are significant changes that have opened up new ways of life and relationships, also inside and outside marriage. And being or choosing to be single can be one of these changes: an option that has been seen not only as a transition to marriage or as a denial of it, but as a new lifestyle and a new form of family organization. It is from this perspective that we use the term singleness with reference to the way of being single.

Singleness here is seen combined with living alone or solo living. This combination has been configured as a new lifestyle in a context where more positive notions have been built around those who are not in a marital relationship or sharing house. This is because the image of unhappiness that society attributed to the single person and who lives alone has changed (Smart 2007).

More positive notions about singleness, especially about single women, began to appear in the 1970s, with the whole movement of permissiveness, freedom of expression of sexuality, influenced by the ideals of equality defended by the feminist movement. In Brazil, Eliane Gonçalves (2007) shows how the new notions of “single women” have been built in the country and how singles living alone has been considered a new way of living in an urban context, which incorporates the ideals of freedom, autonomy, and independence disseminated by Feminism.

According to Eliane Gonçalves (2007), lifestyle has to do with a way of being in the world, of making choices and living life; it is a way of life, adopted by those who want to “live alone” without, however, that this implies in the negativity of loneliness, but yes, in a life with autonomy and independence. This notion dialogues with that of Pierre Bourdieu (2003), adopted in our study: lifestyle is a unitary set of distinctive preferences that express the same expressive intention, speaks of personal taste and way of living that reflects elements of a contemporary urban culture.

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<sup>3</sup> Maria Gabriela Hita (2014; 2005) notes the centrality of the presence of elements such as marital instability (associated with single motherhood/fatherhood in male and female relationships) as being one of the main characteristics of the type of intimate relationships and sexuality between men and women in matriarchal family arrangements headed by women in Brazil.

The lifestyle builds in large urban centers, in a context of democratization and individualization of Western societies, brings the possibility of (individual) choice as a brand. This is seen here since the discussion of the relational dynamics of Personal Life (Smart 2007) that encompasses families by choice (Weeks et al. 2001): relationship arrangements that are outside the conventional molds of the nuclear family and aggregate other networks of relationships that go beyond those of kinship and marriage, including friendship and the search for other forms of more horizontal relationships. Thus, living alone and being single is seen as one among several arrangements with these characteristics.

In this perspective, the vision of loneliness for those who live alone is also reconfigured. The term loneliness associated with the state or condition of being single and living alone has been part of sociological reflections that treat the phenomenon as “social isolation” or situations of “anomie” in specific social segments as prevailed in analyzes of the mid-last century. In demography in Brazil, for example, there was the use of the expression “pyramid of loneliness”, with reference to the low probability of marriage for single women due to increasing age (Berquó 1986). Reports on the theme portrayed the “loneliness of women” as the one written by Marcelo Neri (2005), named “Solitude is a lady”, that discusses the increase in the number of single, divorced, and widowed women in the early 2000s in Brazil.

Studies on the topic seek to deconstruct this notion and indicate that, as a social experience, the “loneliness” of single women who live alone, although at first glance it seems contradictory, is linked to a life dissociated from isolation, when the networks are verified, sociability is possible from this condition (Andrade 2007; Andrade 2012; Jamieson et al. 2009; Martins 2010; Mauritti 2011, among others).

We are aware of the fact that the most positive views on singleness have been studied to a great extent from the experiences of middle and upper class adults (young and mature), from large Western urban centers, and in this sense, it is important to look at singleness in a situated and intersectional way. Among the positive views, attention is drawn to the use of other terms by internationally known actresses, who seek to break stigma around non-marriage, as Emma Watson did in a report to British Vogue magazine in 2019 (Vogue 2019). When asked about satisfaction with her life, with almost thirty years old, she claims to be a happy single person, what she calls “self-partnered”: “I’m very happy [being single]. I call it being self-partnered”. The actress Gwyneth Paltrow, in 2014, used the term “conscious uncoupling” to describe her single status after a divorce (Page 2019). The terms bring the idea of feeling complete as an individual without necessarily needing a loving partner as the path to this completeness and happiness.

In the thesis study we conducted on the theme (Andrade 2012), we discussed the (re)construction of the concept of singleness, its meanings and practices based on its dimensions. The results indicated the following dimensions:

*marital status*, and all the discussion that involves singleness as opposed to marriage and its transitory characteristic (when someone says, for example, “I am single until I find the one to get marriage”); *lifestyle*, which reflects the achievement of independence, autonomy and freedom, adopted or experienced by those who feel that they are single (by choice); *loneliness* as a dimension that reflects both a subjective experience due to the absence of the other, and provides personal growth. *Freedom* was the most important meaning of singleness, and it was presented in the narratives about all other dimensions. Combined with the condition of living alone, it is related to the possibilities of making one’s own choices, of managing daily life.

The condition of living alone for those who are single brought the meaning of achieving economic independence and privacy. In practice, people can express their way of being, their quirks, and have intimate encounters in this space. In their narratives, freedom was provided by this living style. In this sense, the study unveiled the possibilities and meanings surrounding a life outside marriage, which expresses ways of living in a large urban center. In this text, part of this research will be brought in relation to the reasons for being single, discussing the extent to which these reasons are related to the dimensions of the singleness reconstructed in the study, also observing how and if the charges for marriage are present.

## 2. Theoretical background

Salvador is a city that carries culture and ways of living with the new and old, modern and archaic, in a diverse country that is Brazil. In this country, there are many achievements around social rights, especially for women, but still many of them are living with gender inequality in several areas, such as in the labor market, and reflected in the reality of violence against women.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the country presents diversity in ways of living.<sup>5</sup>

The capital of Bahia was known in 2010 as the capital with the largest number of single people, with about 45% of the population over 18 years old being single (IBGE 2010). In a more recent report by the “Correio da Bahia” newspaper (Marinho 2018), in 2018, about living alone in Salvador, it says that in 2017 there was an increase of 7.7% in the number of women living alone compared to men, with a general percentage of people who lived alone in 2017 totaling 832 thousand, of which 54% are men, and 46% are women. According to PNAD data cited in the news, in Brazil, women are the majority living alone, “reaching

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<sup>4</sup> Brazil is the 5th country in number of femicides in the world, according to the map of violence, in 2015 (Waiselfisz 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Demographics have pointed out how Brazilian homes have become more diverse, with a greater presence of people living alone, single-parent families, also couples without children, in addition to the increase in the number of divorces and separations, since the 1970s.

51.4% of the total of 10.485 million people who lived alone at the time of the research” (in 2017).

In Salvador, the focus of the study was the middle class, considering that the urban middle-class culture absorbs and expresses the individualistic values of contemporary times, where different ways of living have been adopted, and which are also the focus of many studies on singleness (mainly about single women) (Gonçalves 2007; Martins 2010; Tavares 2008).

The urban middle class is defined by subjective criteria such as lifestyle and personal interests that adapt to an urban culture that goes through the processes of individualization and “psychologization”, where intellectualized people are also included (Bourdieu 2003; Souza, Lamounier 2010; Velho 1989).

In Brazil, the number of homes made up of people belonging to the middle class has increased since 1994 and, in 2010, 53% of the population belonged to this social class (IBGE 2010). According to the aforementioned authors, the middle class is also defined in the country by objective criteria that includes income (who receives more than three minimum wages<sup>6</sup>), education (who has at least a graduate diploma), and occupation (more intellectualized occupations such as in the field of Science and Arts). This research also considered the criteria of neighborhoods with better infrastructure, where a population with higher incomes lives, identifying those who have this characteristic in Salvador (such as Barra, Graça, Pituba) (Garcia 2009).

The study adopted the feminist perspective as an epistemological basis (Haraway 1995; Harding 1996) and the gender category, which adds to the feminist critique of science and the construction of a feminist science, as a new paradigm for bringing a relational look to the sexual differences (Machado 1998). Gender is conceived here, in general, as a social, discursive, historical reading of sexual differences, perceived as a first way of expressing power relations (Scott 1988). It is also seen in its performativity, insofar as identities are fluid and constitute performance acts, according to Judith Butler (2003). This category is adopted here in interconnection with others, such as social class, territoriality, race, age/generation, sexualities/sexual orientation, considering that in the construction of social identities and in the analysis of systems of oppression, these do not operate separately, as Black feminists have been defending and systematizing from the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 2002).

The concept of intersectionality collaborates to look at the practices and construction of meanings managed by single men and women from the multifaceted contexts. From their situated speech, we wanted to observe how the experience of singleness can be diverse and when there is discrimination around the marital

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<sup>6</sup> At the time of construction of the study data, in 2011, the minimum wage was R\$ 545.00. The minimum value of three salaries was adopted considering a middle-class criteria by Marcelo Neri (2008) and income classification made in a study by Adriana Macedo et al. (2001) in Salvador, which defines income for the middle class in Salvador as between three and five minimum wages.

status. In this sense, we tried to look at racism and sexism, as well as how other systems of oppression operate, for example, ageism, maintaining coexistence with social discourses that still charge adults for marriage, with the valuation of single life, and the discussion of black women's loneliness (Pacheco 2013).

Considering that singleness is multifaceted and that the situated speech also brings social attributes of identity, the typology of singleness chosen for the study was that experienced by single women and men who lived alone and were not engaged in a marital cohabitation for at least five years, regardless of previous love experiences. Thus, the survey included separated, divorced, widowed and never married people; adults (aged between 30 and 60), who belonged to the middle class of Salvador. The race and sexual orientation criteria were random.

Considering that the social reality is multidimensional, looking at the practices and meanings around singleness was possible through the use of mixed methods (Mason 2006). Thus, focus groups, questionnaires, biographical interviews and field observations were made throughout the study. The data were analyzed under a more qualitative view, through content analysis based on the main objectives of the study.

### 3. Research methodology

The survey participants were accessed using the "snowball" method, between the years of 2010 and 2011. In the first stage of the research, we did three focus groups with the participation of three single man and four single women: age group 31–49 years; one man declared himself homosexual; two people were newly separated at the time. The data were base to create a questionnaire.

In the questionnaire application stage, 76 single people (53.9% women and 46.1% men) participated, the majority of whom had never been married (64.5%) and 35.5% were divorced or separated. The time of individual residence ranged from 1 to 30 years, most of them from two to five years (42.5%). The age varied between 30 and 60 years, with an average of 38.9 years of age. It included people of different sexual orientations (most of those, however, were heterosexual, 90%). 50% of the sample considered themselves white, and the other half, black, brown and indigenous.

All of them were graduated, with around 71% of the sample with postgraduate degrees (42.1% Specialist, 14.5% with Master's, 14.5% with PhD) and worked in more intellectual occupations (lecturers, dentist, lawyer, public servant and others). The sample claimed to receive from three to 30 minimum wages.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> The income as one of the objective criteria used to define social class was more flexible, considering the importance of the combination of other criteria, mainly subjective. So, the sample included people with three minimum wages (MW) and incomes prevailing above 5 MW, that is classified as upper class, by Adriana Macedo et al. (2001). In the sample, the average was 9 MW, 23.7% of the total

neighborhoods of residence were middle/upper class in Salvador, such as Pituba, Barra, Stella Maris, Rio Vermelho, among others.

In the last stage, using biographical interviews, three women and three men that had collaborated in these first stages, were interviewed: aged between 31 and 50 years old; two of them declared to be homosexual and one woman declared to have bisexual practices. Two people were separated five years before, at the time. In this stage, people declared themselves to be white and brown, all of them resided in middle/upper class neighborhoods and exercised intellectualized professions (historian, lecturer, dentist, lawyer, public servant). We did content analysis to discuss the data in relation to the literature review.

## 4. Results and discussion

### Why are you single?

In order to discuss the reasons why women and men are single, in the study, we first turn to the questionnaire data on what it means to be single, which will indicate *freedom* and *lifestyle* as a brand. In the questionnaires, the categorization of the answers to the open question, *What is to be single for you?* (n = 58; 39 valid cases), indicated *freedom*, associated with independence and privacy (53.4% of the responses, and of these, 58% were female); *lifestyle* (22.4% of total responses, balanced between men and women, with male responses slightly more prevalent, with 53.9%); *marital status* (13.7% of the total answers, 87.5% of which were mentioned by women) and *loneliness* (10.5% of the answers, with the majority being women: 83.4%). Adding the categories freedom and lifestyle, we have about 75% of the total answers, showing a strong dialogue with the literature that presents the single portrait of the diversity of ways of living.

When asked about the motivations for being single in the questionnaires, the meaning of singleness as *freedom* and *lifestyle* was indicated as one of the motivations, along with reasons that we call *relational*, because they are linked to choices and experiences in the context of love and marital relationships. Thus, the answers (n = 183; 72 valid cases) were grouped for three reasons: a) *relational* (49.1% of the total answers, and when compared by gender, women refer to this in a percentage of 56.6%); b) *choice and freedom* (36.6% of total responses, with male responses prevailing with 58.6% when compared by sex); and c) *relational difficulty* (14.3%, with female responses prevailing when compared by sex: 69.2%).

In the first group of responses, the main reason that led the participants to singleness was the *relational* one, which was categorized based on the combination

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of the sample declared to receive from 3 to 5 MW, and 76.3%, above 5 MW. The inclusion of high-income people made it possible to visualize customs of the so-called (middle) A/B class, as classified by the Brazilian Criteria that analyzes social classes in this country (ABEP 2008).

of the following responses: “I did not find the right person” (for a relationship) and, still, the affirmation of the saying “better alone than in bad company”, in the reply “I prefer to be alone than to be with someone I don’t like”. When separated by sex, women mentioned the relational reasons more than men. In this sense, the reason for singleness would seem to be more circumstantial, as it refers to the search for an ideal person to be with.

This data dialogues with those ones of the question about representations of singleness, with an average concordance of responses to the phrase *single people look for an ideal person*, and *single people are demanding when it comes to choosing partners*,<sup>8</sup> which are also put together with the statements that *single people are independent* and that *single means freedom*, which can contribute to the possibilities of choice related to the affective field. The engagement in a relationship (that can include marriage or other relationships with more compromise) is expected by many single people, as some researches have shown (Andrade 2007; Andrade 2012; Budgeon 2008; Czernecka 2014; Jablonski 2009).

In a context of transformations in the field of intimacy, single people, especially women, have the possibility to choose who they want to have a relationship with, and what type of relationship they want. So, they are considered as more demanding, which would become the reason why they remain single. We think that the profile of the participants and the meaning of freedom that they give to singleness can also collaborate for this statement, mainly due to the level of education and financial independence, which can provide autonomy for choices related to love partnership.

For the participants, the search for an ideal person is related to paying attention to characteristics that speak of the person’s way of being, more than physical appearance. The type of relationship sought has been considered as one that allows the preservation of freedom (related autonomy and individuality) so loved in their single life. One type of relationship visualized, in this sense, is living apart together (LAT), for example: “I had a consumer dream of getting married, and the person lives in her house, and I live in mine” (Rafael, 47 years old, brown, heterosexual, businessman, born in Salvador, never married and was already engaged, participated in the Focal Group 3).

<sup>8</sup> In Question 48 of the questionnaire, it was asked that, among 11 statements, people evaluate the degree of agreement with the proposed phrases, from 0 to 4. The number 0 represents a null degree of agreement and 4, maximum agreement. The results show the average of the responses for each item. The responses (n = 76) pointed out that there is an average degree of agreement regarding to consider: a) that *single people tend to be independent* (2.82, with the average of female responses being 3.0, and male responses 2.56) and that *singleness means having freedom* (2.77, with an average of female responses 2.35 and male responses, 1.75); b) that *single people seek for an ideal person* (general average of 2.24, with close responses between men and women: female, 2.25; male, 2.24); c) that *single people are demanding when choosing partners* (general average of 2.22; average of female responses: 2.35 and male responses: 2.09); d) and *single people have a lot of sexual freedom* (general average of 2.02; average of male responses; and female, 1.7).

Another discussion points to the challenges faced in the context of relationships when “new women” are faced with “old men” who still consider that there are “women to marry” and “women to have sex without commitment” (Andrade 2007; Tavares 2008). Choosing to be single can also be paradoxical, and in the same way related to marriage, as suggested by the results of the study by Lewis and Moon (1997), which had the answer to the question “Are you single by choice?”. The “yes” and “no”, interestingly with the same explanation for the answers: “Yes, I am single by choice, because I have not met anyone I want to marry”; “No, I am not single by choice, because I have not met anyone I want to marry” (apud Reynolds 2008: 98), call for a closer look at the contradictions of these choices for single people and possible arrangements around also choosing an ideal person to marry.

The second group of responses has the reason related to choosing *lifestyle and freedom*. They grouped the responses: “I like the freedom that single life provides me”, (being single) “by choice”, and “I don’t want to get married/to experience a marital relationship”. When separated by sex, this reason was mentioned a little more by men than by women. In the interviews, Logan (35 years old, brown, homosexual, historian, teacher and artist, born in Salvador, was already married and lived together, participated in the biographical interview stage) and Natália (41 years old, brown, heterosexual, nutritionist, born in Salvador, never got married, participated in Focal Group 1) affirmed a conviction for choosing being single: “I want to remain happy as I am, single” (Natália). Logan even defends that he lives an “absolute singleness” as an existential need to be alone and to experience other ways of relationship (like the ones more sporadic, and without a commitment).

The motivation for being single by choice, for choosing not to get married and enjoying the freedom that it provides, is linked to this condition of reaffirming the dimension of singleness as a lifestyle. It is noteworthy that when a woman talks about choosing to be single, and denies marriage, this may sound strange, possibly because socially it is not so common that a “real woman” does not want to marry, especially in a Brazilian environment and a context from Bahia that also bring more conservative traits than more open-minded cultures. When Natália, in a focus group, in the presence of single men and women, affirmed the option for remaining single, she was questioned by men (two heterosexual men that were present in that group), who suggested that the more likely it would be that she deep inside wanted to get married: “Deep down... you would really like to get married”, they said.

At the end of the conversation in the group, she stated that she may even want to engage in a stable relationship in the future, as long as that relationship respects her individuality: “Okay, I wanted something stable, but so, with the preservation of my individuality”. Perhaps this answer was given just to satisfy those men at that moment, as they were insisting that she wouldn’t want to be single for life,

and she could recognize her desire to marry, or even as a result of negotiating the identity with which she wished to be seen in this group. The fact is that, with this answer, these two men seemed to feel contemplated.

Natália's posture reflects constructions of strategies used by single women to live in a society that, on some occasions and in certain social groups, still expects them to be married, especially for women. In the example given, there was an interpellation of heterosexual men over a woman who is also heterosexual, and not of other women, perhaps as a reflection of heteronorms and the culture of couples. In this sense, it seems more accepted for a woman to say that she is single because she has not found someone than to state that she has chosen a way of life in which marriage is not included.

We can analyze that this denial of marriage would, in a way, also deny "being a woman", since this "becoming a woman", as proposed by Simone de Beauvoir (1980), has cultural meanings that put the woman in the place of caregiver – of family, marriage and children. And outside this place, she can be considered as an "abject", as "the other", an "abject single" as Ai-Ling Lai, Ming Lim and Matthew Higgins (2015) argue from Butler's reading of singleness and data from British singles interviews about how they negotiate this position in a (still) heteronormative context.

In addition to what literature brings, social practices can show that many women break with the gender discourse regarding the naturalization that their destination and wish are to marry and have children, and elect being single by choice. It shows a flexibility and transgression on gender norms, also an approximation to what socially is ridden as men's behavior. For them, however, it seems to be more socially accepted to assume the option for a living style in which marriage is not present. It's because culturally what is expected is that men perform identities aimed at acting in the public sphere, investing in professional careers and adopting "freer", bohemian behaviors that socially represents single life.

The third group of responses was categorized as *relational difficulty* and includes the answers "I had previous romantic disappointments and I don't want to repeat them" and "I have some difficulty with relationships". The theme was also very present in the biographical interviews, with reports of episodes of amorous disappointments experienced throughout life trajectories, and some of these led to psychic illness, such as depression, especially for women. However, these do not seem to have been an impediment to involvement in other romantic relationships, nor to maintain an expectation related to marital union, but rather, they provided learning and maturation. All the interviewed participants mentioned having some kind of current relationship (lover, boyfriend or girlfriend, friends with benefits, and so on) and most of them want to have a marital relationship in the future. However, the data from the questionnaires in which women mentioned relational difficulty as a reason for being single is more striking than men, which we consider to reflect the subjective implications of gender constructions and the processes of illness.

Just as several authors discuss the identity constructions of women, which take place from relationships and learning from the exercise of care, Valeska Zanella points out, from a strategic binary perspective, how culture teaches women to love men mainly, with their identity operating in the loving device:

it presents itself as a privileged path of subjectification for women in our culture, it means to say that women subjectify themselves, in their relationship with themselves, mediated by the look of a man who 'chooses' them. That is, love, being chosen by a man, is an identity factor for them [...]. In our culture, men learn to love many things and women learn to love, above all, and especially, men (Zanella 2018: 84).

This perspective helps to think about single women mentioning, more than men, that they are single for relational reasons (including relational difficulties): they have not found someone ideal, want an ideal relationship, or have some difficulty in relating. These relational reasons can also be seen from the role of women in managing choices in the field of relationships, as brought up by the British Jill Reynolds (2008), and considering how women in the study in Salvador, it also plays a role in considering freedom, autonomy, etc., as elements present in their situation and condition of being single and living alone (Andrade 2012). In this sense, we can think about the challenges of overcoming barriers of more conventional gender behaviors for single women in a context of constant transformation. In addition, it can also show the centrality for women and their identity constructions, the search for a loving relationship, and the suffering that can be present in this area of life.

In the study by Jill Reynolds (2008) with single women in a British context, the interviewees reported that they move between choices and different possibilities around singleness, presenting the following speeches: waiting to be chosen, including the difficulty of relating; the affirmation of not wanting to get married, having had bad love experiences in the past or not having the desire to be in a marriage relationship; the discourse that there is a desire of being in a relationship, but they find it difficult to face the challenges of being independent and fear losing the freedom they have won; and finally, to choose the type of person and relationship that they consider ideal to engage with. These repertoires were analyzed by the author as bringing possibilities to deal with the dilemma of presenting themselves as having agency, power, and control over their choices, and are close to the studies that we are developing in Bahia.

Regarding to men, in the study, they affirmed that being single was chosen as a lifestyle (more than women did), and in the interviews, when they pointed out signs of difficulties related to the condition of singleness, they reported age being considered a limit for being single: for men in the age group of 40 years old, and for that reason, some of them affirmed the desire to get out of this condition. Also, they expressed the desire of living relationships that allow them to preserve individuality, such as LAT. For homosexuals, the difficulty presented was the experience of being single with limitations in the exercise of sexuality and sociability in public spaces due to the prejudice experienced in Salvador.

## 5. Final remarks

Given what has been presented, it seems that the dialogue at the beginning of the text could end up being reedited, with the following answers to the question “Why are you single?”. For women:

- *I am single because I value my autonomy and freedom from those I do not give up. And because I have not yet found the ideal person to have a stable relationship, which I still hope to find. While that person doesn't arrive, I will continue to enjoy my single life happily, living alone, and with nothing that threatens my freedom!*

And for men:

- *I have nothing against stable relationships and I may get married later. But I'm single now because I've chosen this lifestyle, and I'm fine for the moment!*

For some of the women, the answer could unfold as it did for the actress Emma Watson, who affirms her singleness regardless of the choice or waiting for being in a relationship: “I'm single and happy!”. However, it seems that women's most convincing option for singleness in Bahia (diverse, but still with familial traits) is still timid. It seems to be more socially accepted that single women are in this condition temporarily and that the women in Salvador are looking for a marital relationship, actively choosing with whom and how they want to be related to, and also in dealing with reflections of bad past relationships or difficulties in this area of life. The experience of this period as a single woman (who lives alone), however, provides more well-being than dissatisfaction, due to the freedom present in several aspects in the management of everyday life, placing them in a place of privilege.

The study data are situated as proposed by the feminist perspective for the construction of knowledge, and thus refer to a specific group of single women located in a middle-class context, in Salvador, mostly adult, heterosexual, with quantitative racially balanced, and who participated in the research in the first decade of this millennium (without *WhatsApp* or *dating apps*, accessible by cell phone). In the narratives and the quantitative responses, some nuances were brought up for a better understanding here of the reasons stated by the single people, and what calls attention are the gender crossings in the answers about these reasons.

The reasons for women and men to be single showed permanence in the gender norms, for the relational reasons said more by women, showing injunctions of the loving device, of the social expectation for marriage, which will make the woman feel “more like a woman”, leaving off her condition of “abjection”, or by the emotional scars in the scope of love relationships; and those of singleness as the focus itself as a choice (and the freedom provided by this condition, added to the lack of desire for marriage), prevailing among male responses. It dialogues with expectations

around the hegemonic constructions of masculinity, that is, they expect men to have a life dissociated from the private sphere, from home, and more focused on themselves, and outside the home. In this sense, the explanations around the reasons why they are single may not have as much weight, nor can men be so charged to get married as women are.

On the other hand, the study points to some transgressions on the part of women, bringing them closer to male behaviors, when they also choose singleness over marriage, also stating that they consider singleness as freedom and a lifestyle. We consider that this can certainly affect women's romantic choices: if they don't find people and relationships that match their expectations, they prefer to remain single. Perhaps the transgressions are made by some men, because they want a marital relationship, when they have "reached the age". There is the idea of them seeking to "settle down", which has a strong sexual connotation, since the image of the single man is that of the sexually active one; in this sense, singleness has an "expiration date" mediated by age/generation.

As for race and social class issues, we consider that the middle-class context in Salvador seems to have diminished the perception about the injunctions of race in the experiences of singleness in this study, due to the privileged place of whiteness, although there are Black people in the middle-class that perform ways of living a single life in this city. In the future, it is worthwhile to deepen the racial issue, and also to continue the discussion on age and generation. We suggest to better observe under which subgroups (of the young and mature adults) the charges for explanations about the current condition of single life are present and how the temporal or generational dimensions can lead to different types of behaviors regarding the desired lifestyle and chosen, and greater willingness to seek more stable relationships, especially in the case of men. Will women also benefit from the option of finding more stable relationships as age advances? Or as Elza Berquó (1986) puts it in this sense, is the pyramid of loneliness increasingly affecting more women and less men? What is the weight of class and race in these choices?

Looking at the reasons for being single for who is single and living alone, and what this condition provides, made it possible to dialogue with the paradoxes of a constantly changing context, within a still (cis)heteronormative culture, but from where some ruptures are possible. And being single and living alone seems to be one of them: while it shows signs of ruptures with prospects of marriage and family in the action of being single, it also contains ideals of a contemporary urban lifestyle: more individualistic, flexible, practical, and diverse, as brought by the literature and debates presented in this article.

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## **KOCHANIE, DLACZEGO JESTEŚ SINGLEM? POWODY POZOSTAWANIA W STANIE WOLNYM NA PODSTAWIE BADAŃ ZREALIZOWANYCH W BRAZYLII**

**Abstrakt.** Pomimo przemian w sferze życia małżeńsko-rodzinnego oraz intymnych relacji osoby samotne nadal często pytane są o powody pozostawania w stanie wolnym. Od dorosłej osoby wciąż oczekuje się, że wyjdzie za mąż/ożeni się. Niniejszy tekst przedstawia rezultaty brazylijskich badań poświęconych problematyce „singielstwa”. Autorki pracy skupiają się zwłaszcza na głównych powodach pozostawania w stanie wolnym przez osoby dorosłe z klasy średniej, zamieszkujące stan Bahia, miasto Salvador. Do analizy omawianego w tekście zjawiska zastosowano perspektywę feministyczną oraz kategorię gender. Zastosowano podejście interseksjonalne, biorąc pod uwagę zarówno klasę społeczną, rasę, pokolenie, seksualność, jak i miejsce zamieszkania respondentów-singli. Zastosowano metody mieszane z wykorzystaniem takich technik badawczych jak: kwestionariusz ankiety, zogniskowane wywiady grupowe (FGI), wywiady biograficzne oraz obserwacje terenowe. Wyniki badań pozwoliły na zaobserwowanie różnic i podobieństw w kwestii przyczyn pozostawania singlem między kategoriami płci. W przypadku kobiet główną przyczyną pozostawania w stanie wolnym są problemy w relacjach z innymi (partnerami), natomiast główną przyczyną bycia singlem w przypadku mężczyzn jest dobrowolny wybór takiego stanu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** singielstwo, relacje między płciami, powody bycia singlem.