

## **INDEPENDENT, NEVER MARRIED PEOPLE IN THEIR THIRTIES: REMAINING SINGLE**

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### **INDIVIDUALISATION AND THE SPREAD OF SINGLE LIFESTYLE**

In the majority of countries with a high level of development, demographic statistical data show that the age at which people make their first marry is becoming increasingly delayed. One of the likely determining reasons for this is that societies living in relative prosperity are going through an increasing degree of individualisation, the period of education is extending in young people's lives, and an increasing number of people are going on to higher education, after which women enter the job market with equal opportunities to men. Another important consideration is that in welfare societies individual legislation ensures a minimum subsistence as a basic right. For many people this gives rise to the illusion that, come what may, they are able to survive alone, without the security of a family and without a permanent partner and this illusion tends to continue into the future.

Social and economic changes have transformed community expectations and conventions, together with opinions regarding the family and partner relationships. Neighbours, relatives and friends accept the cohabitation of unmarried partners as quite natural so there is no need for formalising the relationship. By postponing or omitting marriage altogether the social environment necessarily accepts childbirth outside marriage, even though only a few decades earlier this was heavily censured.

Despite the formal pluralisation of partner relationships and increased tolerance toward different forms of cohabitation the value of the family is not decreasing. The institution itself, as well as the nature of the cohabitation of permanent partners has gone through equally serious changes, but value preference surveys show that the family is still at the head of the preference list. This might be the explanation as to why partner relationships in which the parties retain independence (or its illusion) turn surprisingly frequently into a permanent relationship which leads to starting a family, usually in the form of marriage.

Thus, while welfare societies exhibit an increasing variation of partner relationships, the cohabitation of permanent or married partners still enjoys priority, even though the family is becoming ever more 'nuclear', the number of

family members is decreasing and, simultaneously, the proportion of single people is increasing.

#### THE APPEARANCE OF THE CATEGORY 'SINGLE' IN SOCIOLOGY

Naturally, the phenomenon has attracted the attention of specialists in the field appearing as a new direction for research. As early as the 1970's, statistical data inspired sociologists and demographers to pay more detailed attention to the lifestyle of single people as a dominant phenomenon indicating the nuclearisation of families. Laslett (1972) in his typology of households does not mention separately the variety which emerges through individualisation – he only has a summary category for 'single person households.' One decade later, however, the theory indicating the emergence of post-modern family types (Lüscher et al. 1988) becomes widely known. This theory clearly indicates that it has become necessary to reckon with a new variety of households which emerges among the remarkably increasing number of single people mainly appearing amid the younger generation. The form which is the subject of our study, however, does not appear among basic types describing forms of pluralisation, while other family types which appear among a far smaller portion of the population are mentioned. The main reason for this is that while looking to identify chief family types, theorists have focused (in addition to the nuclear family as the basic form) on the new types which emerge through a change in the partner relationship. One of these, according to them, is 'quasi-married cohabitation' in two subvarieties depending on whether there are children in the family or not. Another group is formed by types of family, becoming ever more common, which are formed as a consequence of re-marriage after divorce on a mass scale and include children from previous marriages as well as those born into the new marriage (Vaskovics 1994). Although the proportion of these has certainly grown, it remains true that a similarly weighty layer of single people has not been recognised as a dominant tendency resulting from pluralisation.

At the same time, examining human life-cycles, researchers noticed that the phases of the life cycle which used to follow in each other's wake more or less regularly, now more and more frequently diverged from the recognised 'model' in other words the regular arch leading from marriage to widowhood has broken. In its place a single lifestyle has become wedged in the periods after divorce and before re-marriage or has occurred before the first marriage or between the pre-divorce and post-divorce forms of cohabitation (Vaskovics 1994).

A number of experts have nevertheless refused to acknowledge the remarkable changes which indicate the pluralisation of family types and a social scientific warfare has emerged concerning the future of the family (Berger and Ber-

ger 1984; Fukuyama 2000). The latest developments are seen by some as merely transitional phenomena (Easterlin 1980, 228), while others see it as a logical outcome. The latter group of authors argue that as since women have appeared on the job market on a mass scale, the income they have generated and the social benefits of welfare societies have eased the pressure to get married (Becker 1981).

As women have become economically less reliant on men and under far less financial pressure, the role of emotions accompanying partner relationships has also come to be viewed differently. A bond which had previously often lasted (had to last) a lifetime, was replaced by forms which were better suited to satisfy individual desires and needs at the given time. These forms were devised for a shorter period of time because of the instability of emotions and required less self-sacrifice and less mutual reliance (Roussel–Festy 1979). Material and emotional points of view assumed a new relation. As the priority of romantic emotions and love was accepted, it became a common conviction that marriage can rarely last till the end of life since couples usually get disenchanted with each other well before then (Giddens 1992). Research has shown that *earlier family forms* exercised pressures which acted to moderate individual desires and ensured the emotional balance of the individuals on a societal scale. Customary law clearly outlined the limits of the emotional freedom of the married partners, thus they restricted self-fulfilment but catered for the stability of the marriage. Under the influence of individualisation, community norms transformed, new conventions of the social environment permitted divorce and co-habitation, and today even law does not contain any restrictions in this area. Bonds dictated by the social environment are loosening, the freedom of choice is expanding; all this brings about the pluralisation of family types (Berger and Berger 1984).

#### THE MAIN TYPES OF THE SINGLE PEOPLE, THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND THEORETICAL ASPECTS

##### *Singe parents, single mothers*

Different types of family forms only began to receive the attention of the social sciences only after debates addressed changes in the role and structure of the family as part of attempts to identify the causes of these changes. Researchers were interested in the situation and lifestyle of children growing up in broken families as a result of divorce, and in the situation of the parents bringing up these children inspiring research projects that looked into the life of single parent families and particularly of single mothers. Some came to the conclusion

that the rising number of mothers bringing up their children alone can be attributed to liberal welfare policies offering them support. Others had the same opinion about mothers who gave birth to their children outside of marriage, arguing that the benefits received by these women are higher than the sum received by those who live in a marriage (Miller-Garfinkel 1999).

The interest of the social sciences in this field was particularly provoked by the fact that in the majority of developed countries the number of children born outside marriage has been rising over the last few decades. The new status of single mothers is a natural consequence of this process. Researchers have identified two types for this status. One group (1) consists of single women who gave birth to their child without a husband or a partner because, for lack of information, they did not know how to avoid pregnancy or because they had made a conscious decision to have a child, usually because of their increasing age. The other group (2) consists of mothers who chose cohabitation in a quasi-married form, in an unmarried long-term partnership. In terms of their lifestyle, the women in the latter group are not without a partner as they have a long term relationship or their relationship actually leads to a formalised marriage, usually after the birth of their child (Giddens 1992; Pongrácz and S. Molnár 1997).

#### *Being single as the new lifestyle of affluent young people*

It was only after interpreting the phenomenon of the single parent family that researchers began to notice that in most developed countries there was a noticeable increase in the number of people, usually in their thirties or forties, who lived alone. Those following this specific lifestyle were usually persons who had finished their studies, had acquired a home of their own or were able to rent a flat independently. They lived separately from their parental home, had furnished their new home comfortably and in most cases centred their life around work and career-building, while engaging in various free-time activities such as travelling, sport, social and cultural commitments.

One researcher of the topic, using the experiences of the head of a German psychological clinic, Jaegglin, summarised it in eight main points:

1. for the single person the home is an exceptionally important sphere of life, offering safety and comfort;
2. cooking, particularly in the case of men, is seen as creativity, an art form;
3. the person lays great stress on filling up empty evenings or week-ends and thus gains great expertise in the versatile organisation of spare time;
4. the person considers friendships more important and shapes them more consciously than married people;
5. professional work, which gives meaning to life, is crucial, the person seeks for interesting and exciting elements in their work;

6. relatives are necessary evils;
7. sexual relations are of less concern than they are for married people.  
His/her partners are not always single;
8. taking a longer holiday is usually a failure, an unsuccessful experience  
(Börggrefe 1997).

Scientific research concentrated chiefly on the differences in lifestyle when compared to those living in a marriage. One survey interviewed sixty people between 25 and 45 years of age and classified the positive and attractive features of the single lifestyle and its disadvantages (Stein 1980). The positive features identified by the scholars were that the single lifestyle (1) promotes the person's career as single people can devote all their time and energy to their work, (2) they are also more free and independent in every respect; (3) they can enjoy more varied sexual experiences. Negatives mainly consist in the fact that these people have fewer relationships and these are more loose and weak, and as a consequence of this (1) they are alone and (2) they feel lonely. The lack of relationships mainly comes from the fact that other people of a similar age are mostly married, they have different aims and commitments, different interests and activities. A single person often ends up lonely and therefore becomes more reliant on emotional help from friends (Carbery and Buhrmeister 1998).

Research has also shed light on the circumstance that the above advantages and disadvantages may also depend on the gender of the person concerned. On the one hand, when comparing married and single men, researchers concluded that they have the same chances of building up a successful career, they have the same chances of occupying positions of high status and income. This is so despite the fact that married men devote far more time to their family than single men. At the same time in terms of mental and physical life courses married men are better off than single men – they live a longer and happier life than those without a partner. It is possible, of course, that men who are healthy and possess more positive psychological and physical traits are more likely to get married than those who 'remain bachelor'. This hypothesis has been discarded by the relevant research and it was found that the benefits were to be attributed to marriage itself (Bernard 1982). This was not so in the case of women. Married women were found to be far more unhappy and frustrated than married men and the *comparison of married women as against single women* also showed that the former suffer from depression and psychological problems more often than the latter, whose state of health was also significantly better.

Another survey, which was conducted among mothers aged 33, came to a different conclusion when it compared the psychological state of members of the two groups (Hope et al. 1999). According to the results, single mothers are far more often characterised by negative stress than married mothers. On the analogy of this finding it is possible to suppose that the existence or lack of

children influences significantly the psychological status of the women in question.

The comparison of *single women and single men* has led to the conclusion that the latter are troubled by more psychological problems even though their financial situation, their income and occupational status are more favourable.

Another element of the subject was examined by Hradil (1995) who in an earlier work recorded milieus which characterise various life conditions and lifestyles. Examining the lifestyle of single people, he found that in this group the per capita income of the household was higher, thus the lifestyle more favourable and the freedom of choice wider than of those living in a different formation. As a result of this, single people stood a better chance of finding their way into the milieu groups which offer the greatest advantages – into that of the ‘hedonists’ who concentrate on enjoying life and into that of the ‘alternatives’ who concentrate on individual preferences (Hradil 1995).

Research has also established that a single lifestyle is not always the result of personal will or choice. Young people living in relative affluence and engaging in versatile activities have different motivations from others for postponing long-term partner relationships. At the same time, in terms of the different motivations, hardly any of the existing typologies can be called useful. Perhaps the most successful typology was set up by one of the most widely known experts of the field and allows a two-dimensional classification (Stein 1980, p. 11).

One of the dimensions of Stein’s typology is the degree to which lifestyle is the result of a conscious choice, in other words the extent to which the situation ‘just worked out like this’ or whether it was chosen by the person in question. The other differentiating factor is the temporal structure, the permanence of the situation. A single lifestyle can be ‘stable’, it can be one that became stabilised and permanent in the later course of things or it can be ‘temporary’, in which case it is planned to last for only a limited amount of time.

	Chosen	Not chosen
Temporary	People who have not yet got married are putting off marriage. They are not looking for a partner but are not opposed to marriage	a) People who have looked for a partner actively for at least a period of time but have not found one yet, b) People who had not planned to get married earlier but are now looking actively for a partner
Stable, stabilised	a) People who have made a definite choice in favour of the single lifestyle b) Those who are opposed to marriage for a variety of reasons c) Those who forego marriage in compliance with the rules of their religion	People who would like to get married but cannot find a partner and thus accept with resignation that they will have to live alone for the rest of their lives

## IN SEARCH OF 'SINGLES' IN HUNGARY

In referring to this unique lifestyle which is spreading among young people we often use the phrase 'single without a permanent partner relationship' or 'independent,' but in Hungarian we have not found a better label than 'single person' ('szingli').

*The rate of 'official' single persons 'without a permanent partner' within the population*

We believe that being single is probably the dominant lifestyle of young people in their thirties or possibly early forties in Hungary just as it is in the majority of welfare societies. Its spread occurs irrespective of the changes affecting the whole of society, more precisely of the national trend of single people. In Hungary the number of persons officially considered single has grown very dramatically over the last few decades.

Table 1  
*Distribution of the population over the age of 15 according to marital status  
(1986 – N=9186; 2000 – N=10549) (%)*

Marital state	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	2000–1986
Married	71.6	64.0	67.7	60.0	48.5	53.8	-13.9
Unmarried	23.0	15.9	19.3	27.4	18.7	22.7	+3.4
Widowed	1.8	14.0	8.2	4.9	21.6	13.9	+5.7
Divorced/separated	3.6	6.0	4.8	7.7	11.2	9.6	+4.8
Single total	28.4	35.9	32.3	40.0	51.5	46.2	+13.9

Sources: Életmód, 1986 (4), 2000 (4) Budapest: KSH.

If we compare data for 1986 and 2000, we find a sharp increase in the number of single people. The one-and-a-half fold increase (from 32.8% to 46.2%) which has taken place over the last decade and a half indicates strong changes in social and economic conditions and their intensive influence on human relationships, social integration and family ties. The growing rate of single people can be traced back to increased individualisation brought along by social and economic changes, to the transformation of value preferences and family forms, to the high mortality rates of Hungarian men and to the increased pluralisation of forms of partner relationships.

The above quoted record , however, only represents the ‘official’ marital state, while it does not give information on the genuine directions of partner relationships. Thus we do not know what proportion of the population actually lives without a permanent relationship, truly alone. According to a representative survey made in 2001 (ISSP/2001, N=1524), 41.0% of the over-18 population belongs to the above mentioned category in terms of marital status. Their lifestyle can differ widely, however, depending on whether they have a permanent partner relationship or not. In view of the pluralisation of marital and partner relationships described above, it is important to know this if we wish to study the lifestyle of single young people. The survey considered those people single and without a permanent partner who are neither married, nor live in quasi-married cohabitation, nor have a permanent partner.

According to Table 2, one third of the sample (32.2%) are single without a permanent partner, in other words, the number of people without a permanent partner is almost 10% lower than that of officially single people. At the same time, a difference according to gender is remarkable: the proportion of women (40%) is almost twice as high as that of men (22%) among single people without a permanent partner.

Table 2  
*Adult (over 18) population by forms of partnership (2001)*  
*(N=1524) (%)*

Form of partnership	Percentage
Single, without a permanent partner	32.2%
Single, with a permanent partner	9.1%
Lives with married or quasi-married partner	58.7%
Total	100.0%

Source: ISSP/2001.

Different groups of officially single people contain different proportions of single people without a permanent partner. The proportions of single persons without permanent partners are the following in the various groups:

Table 3  
*Single persons without permanent partners by marital status  
(2001) (%)*

Marital status	Percentage
Never married	55.9%
Married but separated	83.3%
Divorced	78.4%
Widowed	97.6%.

Source: ISSP/2001.

On the basis of the above it is to be expected that Hungarian followers of the single lifestyle will include, besides young unmarried people, a considerable number of young divorced and separated persons.

*Single people in their thirties in terms of 'official' marital status*

Looking at the number of people in their thirties who are still unmarried, we find their numbers continually increasing. However, 'putting off marriage' is more widely characteristic of men than of women. Some of the reasons for this are rooted in cultural tradition, others stem from economic factors:

- Women have more restricted resources and a lower income for creating a single lifestyle than men, thus a greater number of them try to secure financial stability through marriage;
- Although the time of getting married has been generally deferred, putting off marriage is more characteristic of men, as women still follow the traditions in wanting to find themselves safely married at the age when they can still appear at the marriage market looking attractive, so as to avoid being 'left on the shelf'.

Although more than a quarter of women (29%) and of men (27%) in their thirties had themselves recorded as officially single, as women and men follow different marriage traditions, the categories of single persons assume different structures for the two sexes (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
*Composition of persons in their thirties according to marital status and gender (1986 – N=1896; 2000 – N=1728) (%)*

Marital state	1986			2000			Change 2000–1986
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Married	87.0	76.0	81.3	71.0	73.0	72.0	-9.3%
Unmarried	9.3	9.6	9.4	21.6	11.1	16.0	+6.6%
Divorced/separated	3.1	7.2	5.2	7.2	14.3	11.0	+5.8%
Widowed	0.6	7.2	4.1	0.2	1.6	1.0	-3.1%
Single total	13.0	24.0	19.7	29.0	27.0	28.0	+8.3%

Sources: Életmód, 1986 (2), 2000 (4) Budapest: KSH.

According to these proportions there are twice as many unmarried men (21.6%) as there are unmarried women (11.1%) and half as many divorced men (7.2%) as there are divorced women (14.3%).

**Table 5**  
*Composition of persons in their thirties by household roles (2000 – N=1728) (%)*

Household roles	Men	Women
Husband/Wife	70.0	73.6
Long-term partner	5.5	5.5
Mother/father living together with their child	0.5	12.1
Child	16.4	4.2
Relative	1.3	0.3
Single	6.3	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Életmód, 2000 (4) Budapest: KSH.

If we compare data for 1986 and 2000, we find that the rate of single people among persons in their thirties has grown by almost ten percent (8.3%) in the last decade and a half. This rise is particularly remarkable among men (+16%) while it is slightly more moderate among women (+3%).

In harmony with the structural differences according to gender there are differences in the household structure, family position and role of the persons concerned and thus obviously in their lifestyle within the family as well (Table 5).

The rate of single parents is particularly high among women in their thirties which is partly a consequence of childbirth outside marriage but even more of

marriages made at a earlier age than the age of men and of increased divorce rates coming from individualisation. If a relationship breaks up in which the partners have cared for a child together, the separation causes a serious change in lifestyle. One possible variety is *the single parent family*. Naturally, the most widespread is the category of '*single mother*' since young divorced women stand a much smaller chance of re-marrying than divorced men. We may conclude this from the fact that the rate of divorced men is still half that of divorced women in the over-40 age group.

*Single persons in their thirties and forties without a permanent partner*

Data quoted with reference to the family structure of single people in their thirties and the position they occupy within the family and household fail to give us a precise answer as to the precise rate of single people within the age groups in question. This is because we do not know what proportion of people within the 'officially' single category actually live alone without a permanent relationship. In fact, these are the people we need to identify if we want to research the characteristics of the lifestyle of young people who are single and independent.

We sought information on the 'unofficial' permanent relationships of persons in their 30's and 40's in a research project on social networks carried out in 2001 (ISSP/Kapcsolatok/2001 N=1524 N= persons in their 30's and 40's= 474). We found that one in five members of this age group were single, living alone without a permanent partner. It is true that not all of them can be considered 'single' in our sense as they are not all 'marketable', and they do not live in relative affluence. At the same time, we can assume that we can gain information about the composition of this group by analysing this sub-sample.

In order to acquire hypothetical information and some data about the population which can supposedly be labelled as 'single,' we isolated those people in the 30–49 age group who do not have a permanent relationship. On the basis of these calculations, one fifth of people in their 30's and 40's (19.6%) can be included in this category.

The relatively small size of the sample allows us to draft hypotheses with only the utmost caution. The two main types of the 'single sample', i.e. the never married men and women (42%) and the divorced men and women (48%) assume more or less the same proportions among persons in their 30's and 40's without a permanent partner. Examining the data according to gender, we find that two thirds of the men, but only one quarter of the women in this age group are unmarried. The distribution of divorced persons is precisely the reverse: two thirds of single women are divorced while among men the rate of the divorced is only one third.

Two thirds of these single people have children. This high proportion indicates that Hungarian followers of the single lifestyle in all probability include twice as many single parents (mainly mothers) bringing up their child alone without a permanent partner than unmarried men or women who are following an alternative lifestyle and are putting off marriage.

As far as composition according to the place of residence is concerned, almost half of unmarried men without a permanent partner live in villages while only a quarter or such women can be found in villages. At the other extreme of the residential hierarchy, in Budapest, we only find 7% of single men while 30% of single women live in the capital.

After a systematic survey of the data we can summarise our findings by saying that it is probable that the majority of single men without a permanent partner come from the ranks of a less educated and not very ‘marketable’ strata of the population while among women the situation is the reverse – the most individualised and highly qualified women who are also most successful at the job market are the women we find in highest proportions among those choosing a single lifestyle.

#### *The history of the single lifestyle and its spread in today’s Hungary*

It is questionable whether we would be justified in considering the phenomenon of the single person new in Hungary. As far as we know, even in the first third of the twentieth century, particularly in the middle classes, many men only started a family in their thirties, since society expected them to support their wives. The wife was not supposed to be earning a living, what is more, the husband’s income had to be sufficient to employ at least one household employee (Buday 1916; Szabó 1938). Men were usually unable to create the financial background for a middle-class living standard until they had moved higher up in the professional hierarchy in the course of their thirties.

Thus, middle and lower middle class men of the past who were forced to put off marriage under financial pressure partly organised their life in a similar fashion to today’s single people. The composition of the latter, however, is still radically different, primarily because they are not hindered by financial difficulties and also as expansion of education has lead to an increase in the number of single women. Career-building, work-oriented emancipated women who are often in higher education until the end of their twenties often acquire special qualifications, and stabilise their position in the job market with an ever increasing capital of knowledge. They are less and less willing to get married at the beginning of their career, to have children early, to forego promotion prospects and to give up their independence, nor are there economic pressures to force them to do so. They are only willing to accept a marriage or partner rela-

tionship which allows them to keep relative independence and which offers them more than the traditional role of supporting and serving the man's career.

A further motive for the spreading of the new lifestyle is that as a result of civilisatory developments in Hungary, an increasing number of young people now move out of the parental home, as they (or their parents) are able to buy or rent an independent home. As a result of differentiation in economic potential and wealth which followed the collapse of communism, Hungary saw an expansion of that relatively affluent layer of society, members of which were able to buy their children an independent home. Furthermore owing to a powerful differentiation in wages, a number of young professionals with up-to-date specialist skills came to occupy such lucrative jobs that they were able to produce the money required for buying and/or maintaining their (first) independent home. As a result of this independence, which goes hand in hand with having an independent home, the relationship of the partners is now no longer shaped under the watchful supervision and control of the parents. Several new forms of partner relationships have emerged which are looser than the customary forms. The young people retain their independent homes, do not move in with each other in the long term, but live together for recurring longer or shorter periods, sometimes on set days of the week. In harmony with their needs they retain their relative autonomy and the independence that they consider necessary for career-building and for expressing their personality.

Thus, this lifestyle is not the same as living without partner relationships. The parties certainly devote some time to their relationship but this amount of time is reduced or regulated by mutual agreement. This gives them occasion for free-time activities independent of each other, as well as for spending time with colleagues in order to further career building. The household work entailed by marriage and particularly the tasks of bringing up and looking after children, would allow considerably less freedom than this.

Independence, freedom and a varied lifestyle can be very attractive, yet young people do not usually plan to maintain this form of life in the long term. They think that after a few years they will definitely find their real partner and accept a permanent partner relationship. However, chasing success at work and the habitualised need for the independence considered necessary for their career becomes a motive which grows to shape their everyday life. Thus, the increased costs which a permanent partner relationship and childbearing would necessarily entail are postponed from one year to the next and by the time the person is ready to restrict individual desires they find that after such a delay they have difficulty finding a suitable partner who might satisfy their needs.

## MOTIVATIONS AND TYPES OF SINGLE PEOPLE IN HUNGARY

We used case studies ( $N=45$ ) in an attempt to identify motivations, on the basis of which about one fifth of Hungarian young people in their thirties prefer a single lifestyle over a permanent partner relationship. We examined whether it was a result of conscious choice or a consequence of social conditions. We were aware of the fact that in the eyes of the majority of the Hungarian population the paramount value is having a family and bringing up children. On the basis of this we assumed that it is unlikely that the lifestyle of single people could be attributed to a conscious lifetime commitment or to an aversion toward families, even less to an open stance against the family as such. We presumed it to be more likely that a lack of permanent partner relationships was mainly a result of special hindering circumstances coming from the person's conditions of life and to a minor extent of a delay caused by the temporary dominance of the career in the person's life. However, it remains a fact that there has been an increase in the number of Hungarian young people who decide to put off choosing a 'final' partner and accepting the responsibility of having a family.

Our analysis was chiefly aimed at identifying the motivations for this specific lifestyle in the person's life conditions. We examined the motivations which encourage single people to preserve their independence. We assumed that in certain cases there was a correlation of factors and in others only one dominant cause why the person had not established a family tie based on a traditional relationship. As a result of this examination, we classified single people in their thirties in five types. Below we provide a brief description of these types.

*The career building single person*

The best known and most widespread type of the single person is a product of individualisation. Representatives of this type see their career and the pursuit of professional success as the essence of their lives. Among other motives what moves them is permanent competition entailed by a meritocratic order and an accelerated pace of life, the need to retain a job which is in some sense favourable. They ensure variety by having a succession of partner relationships in the form of loose cohabitation. However, these do not jeopardise their independence. If the partner decides to make the relationship permanent or even thinks of starting a family and having children, the single person usually ends the relationship and replaces it with a new one. In the long term they repeatedly subjugate their emotional life to professional success and they persuade them-

selves again and again that it is not yet time for the 'real' relationship, that it is a waste of time and too early to worry about it and that it will come by itself, some time near the peak of the expected professional success.

The regular pursuit of sport for improving physical condition also serves the basic aim in the lives of these people. Another factor pointing in the same direction is membership in various clubs which is meant to enhance professional contacts and strengthen their network capital. Their everyday life is not troubled by financial difficulty, they usually earn a higher income than the average of similarly qualified married persons but they also spend a lot on objects and activities which serve to raise their prestige, such as high quality cars, travel, expensive sports equipment and sports activities (tennis, sailing, skiing and squash). At exclusive parties they appear with their current partner. They choose their friends from among persons who pursue a similarly career and success orientated lifestyle. Thus the interests of these persons become progressively detached from those of their friends who got married at the traditional time of life – from former classmates or university fellow-students – until their earlier friendships become entirely broken.

Career-building is usually successful, these people manage to create life conditions which are above the average for their age group and to acquire valuable goods. In possession of some degree of wealth, a business or enterprise created by their own effort, however, they feel that a permanent or married partner would form an unfair claim to everything they had created. Thus they are terrified of calculating, interest-based relationships and they distrustfully suspect that a potential partner would choose them for their affluence and not for themselves.

A further deterrent factor may be that if these people sometimes experience the breakdown in the relationships of similarly success and career-oriented persons in their social environment: they witness divorces, conflicts and law suits about the distribution of assets. Amid the circumstances of a career-oriented, rushed lifestyle, partner relationships do indeed tend to get hallowed and exhausted, thus marriages made at the traditional time of life easily come to seem as mere formal cohabitation, a hollow economic unit. Such negative examples make the outside onlooker cautious, possibly going as far as giving rise to extreme distrust which makes it difficult or even impossible to choose a partner and start a family and thus leads to the conservation of the previously developed lifestyle.

#### *The effect of childhood patterns and upbringing*

Family models and upbringing influence choices made in adulthood. After experiencing the poor relationship of the parents and recurring quarrels be-

tween parents and grandparents, some people find it difficult to imagine harmonious relations. There are great numbers of people who, in the cases of their parents, neighbours, and relatives, have only seen examples of failed relationships laden with conflicts. Some of our interviewees believed that their lifestyle was a consequence of these negative patterns. At the same time, they are still aware of a desire for the perfect partner relationship and a family, but believe that no such thing exists and this deters them from choosing a partner and starting a family. They believe it might be possible to maintain harmonious relations for a limited period of time but also that in the later course of events harmony is necessarily replaced by arguments and hostility. Although they recognise the source of tensions experienced in childhood (e.g. poverty or alcohol dependence), they justify their lifestyle by claiming that successful partner relationships are impossible regardless of the circumstances.

Upbringing has also had its influence on those single young people who received a legacy of beliefs in their parental family, social environment or friends stating that they had to be careful with partners and must not rush the decision as it was for a lifetime and thus needed thorough consideration. A close partnership tie could only damage professional advancement, studying or career, it would stand in the way of free entertainment and would act to reduce freedom. These young people were warned that they should live a free and independent life as long as possible. They had also been taught to distrust members of the other sex. Warnings of this kind received in early youth had influenced many young people who prefer and retain their independence. Such an attitude of denial becomes confirmed over the years. The defence mechanisms 'programmed' by the social setting can even stifle sincere emotions. Time goes on and after a number of years the young people find that now, when it is certainly not too early any more, they would like to find a true partner and have children. At a time when they would gladly leave behind the delaying attitude, their habitual beliefs and fixed distrust for the other gender? make it far from easy or simple.

It is a well-known phenomenon that young people who are accustomed to comfort and affluence, instead of taking the initiative, wait around passively for 'someone' to come along and become their partner. They believe it is not necessary to look for their potential marital partner as 'true love' will come 'by itself'. It is also part of their conviction that if this does not happen, that is not a problem either, as single people can also live a fully valid life. Persons in their thirties have often passively allowed a whole decade or an even longer period to slip by. Members of this group do not actively enjoy their single lifestyle but they are not willing or able to build relationships. In retrospect many of them are aware that at some stage they had a chance for a permanent partner relationship but at that time they judged the 'candidate' as unsatisfactory in some respect and later on there were no other candidates. They carry on waiting and

nothing happens. This resigned state of existence is very different from the lifestyle of those modern single persons who make an active choice. The decisive difference is in the active and conscious nature of the decision as described above.

#### *Social differences – the influence of status, migration and difference in age*

The marriage of people of similar status (*status homogamy*) is one of the general characteristics of permanent relationships. It is a condition which helps retain the relationship, makes its operations easier, supports the exchange and mutual circulation of sources of solidarity. The status homogamy of married partners is one of the decisive requirements of Weber's stratification according to social status groups (in German *stand – the editor*). Its effect of strengthening human relationships is well known and accepted in all stratified societies.

One frequent reason why people fail to find a partner is because they are unwilling or unable to live in a relationship which is asymmetric in terms of status. If such a relationship emerges despite the odds, it is almost necessarily only temporary in character. The asymmetric status of the (potential) partner is frequently a cause for graduate women to choose a single lifestyle. The more highly positioned of the two parties believes that s/he can 'survive alone' and will not accept a person who would cause a drop in the standard of life. The relationship of partners of asymmetric status eventually breaks up and the end result is once more a single lifestyle.

Young people change their place of residence quite frequently. The most common cause for this is the intention to earn a degree in higher education or to take a job. In the case of most students migration encourages choosing a partner as they come into the milieu of persons of similar status. In some other cases, however, where the migration leads to a mobility of status, starting a relationship is made more difficult. Friendships, family ties and acquaintances at the original place of residence become broken. Beyond the psychological difficulties of having to cope with this kind of change owing to a loss of contact resources, these migrants have to invest more energy and money in being able to survive in the new setting and to create a home and a background for themselves.

The same is true of young people who come from ethnic Hungarian regions of the neighbouring countries and re-settle in Hungary, unless they arrive in this country already allied with a partner. By engaging in studies or work in Hungary they become isolated from their earlier sphere of contacts and without the support of this sphere they have to spend multiple amounts of energy on ensuring basic requirements of life compared to persons surrounding them who were born and brought up here. This stands in the way of settling with a part-

ner, forces the person to delay the final decision and thus in the later course of events it becomes difficult to find 'the real one.'

The numbers of single persons are further increased by those who have spent several years or even decades studying or working abroad. After returning, they find that they are behind their coevals in trying to find a partner. Their earlier group of friends has become dispersed and eliminated, their contacts have broken, most of their earlier friends have become married. Living abroad has usually provided them with much higher financial standards than those who stayed at home but they find that this is a disadvantage rather than a source of help as it has increased their expectations but also their distrust, while their circle of acquaintances has become narrowed.

A similar problem faces those who live their life travelling regularly between two places. This usually characterises people who had come from the country to a big city. They regularly visit home or live in 'dormant' villages retaining their strict, traditional value system. In their new urban environment they fail to create a permanent relationship but their ties are also becoming loose at their place of origin, providing them with ever fewer occasions for possibly finding a partner. Eventually, they remain without suitable social networks at either of the two places, nor have they enough free time to find a partner who would satisfy their needs. Consequently, they are often left alone or have to content themselves with 'half-relationships', having to share with somebody else. After a while they give up hope of finding a partner suitable for starting a family, and toward the end of their thirties they accept the status quo with resignation.

Traditional communities have differentiated views on the question of the age gap between partners. They accept the relationship of men of more advanced age with considerably younger women as quite natural, but usually stamp the relationship of older women with younger men as unacceptable. In the latter type of case the age gap prevents the relationship from becoming permanent. On occasion, however, women in their late thirties live in a loose cohabitation with a partner who is 10–12 years their junior. The relationship is usually based on the 'rational' agreement that it is not meant for the long term. 'According to plan' if the relationship becomes hollow they would step out of each other's lives. This loose cohabitation seems to presage a single lifestyle only for the woman, but in fact, under the influence of a 'comfortable' relationship which allows relative freedom, the man also finds himself putting off the final choice and possibly only makes an effort to find the conventionally accepted partner after a number of years. By this time in his thirties, the man often comes face to face with the difficulties described above.

*Cohabiting partners*

The increasing popularity of quasi-married cohabitation is one of the general motives behind persons remaining single. This is a form of relationship which offers most of the advantages of marriages while in the case of a change of emotions it enables the parties to avoid the legal difficulties of a divorce procedure. A permanent cohabitation is able to fulfil the expectations that the parties have towards a marriage. In most cases the partners actually have plans to formalise the relationship at some later stage but they feel comfortable in a partnership which simultaneously ensures the sense of independence and a close emotional tie. They suspect a risk in formalising the affair and therefore continue to put it off. People in this kind of partnership also valorise the element of voluntary participation in the relationship and the lack of outside pressure.

Naturally, experience shows that the longer or shorter cohabitation is usually followed by a change of partner. The majority of our sample had at some stage lived in a permanent cohabiting relationship. The length of these relationships varied, some were extremely loose and short-lived but there were also some which existed for several months or even years. In most cases, however, the partners get used to the practice of changing partners as soon as the relationship becomes displeasing, even on a permanent basis. This practice is incompatible with stability. Nonetheless, there are a number of persons who would like to have a permanent relationship and start a family but they cannot easily find a suitable partner who answers their expectations. If they do enter a relationship, they start off with an informal cohabitation, following their earlier routine and postponing decision and responsibility. They believe 'it is best to wait and see what comes of it'. The essential feature of the strategy is postponement.

*'Bachelors' and 'spinsters'*

Every age group includes self-contained people who withdraw from the community and from relationships. These people live alone either because they are unable, or they refuse to adapt to other people. The first case betrays psychological problems, the latter bespeaks egoism. This form of life becomes ever more ossified as the years go on and if people of this tendency do not find a partner early on, in the course of their twenties, their chances decrease rapidly in the later course of their life. They give up on having successors in their children, as living with a person and adapting to others is a necessary requirement. These self-contained interviewees usually do not feel lonely, they are not bored,

they find themselves always able to organise some pastime for themselves and are able to make their life pleasurable or at least tolerable without a partner.

#### THE PANIC OF THE SINGLE PERSON TO FIND A PARTNER

Single persons in their thirties usually consider the family as the natural form for human beings to live together with each other, even though some of them have given up hope of a family in their own respect. This is one of the motives for their preference. On the other hand, they are uncertain concerning their own future and this is an equally powerful motive. They believe that the best way to organise life these days is to ensure independence as early as possible. They think people ought to be their own masters and create the conditions for their independent life. To this end it is necessary to rate jobs and tasks into a strict chronological order and in this unique hierarchy finding a partner and starting a family are moved back along the scale while creating a stable financial background becomes foregrounded. A relatively loose partnership is a more suitable framework for this activity as it seems both to contain and not contain a commitment and it can be broken at any time if other tasks presented by life should so demand. This form of life is extremely convenient until people reach their mid-thirties. After this point, however, witness our interviewees, everyone is overcome by the desire to start a family.

Finding a suitable partner, however, requires time and the given conditions and expectations do not make the job of the single person easy in the marriage market. This is the point at which single people begin to panic about finding a partner. They experience a strengthening of feelings and thoughts about the transience of life. They feel it is definitely time to create a family of their own and to give birth to children who would replace them – at the same time they are short of an appropriate candidate. Thus they find themselves unable to accomplish the task of finding a partner, which had been precisely scheduled earlier and has now become overdue. They feel lonely and they believe that this is now going to remain a permanent state. Most of them give up the conviction that an independent form of life is the ideal lifestyle. It becomes clear to them that people need partners, a family and children.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Relatively well-positioned, affluent persons in their thirties and forties who do not have a permanent partner relationship are what we consider a single person. Approximately one fifth of the thirties-forties age group can be included in this category.

Researching the motivations and types of the phenomenon we found two major characteristics. First in the case of a certain affluent, highly qualified, mainly unmarried group of young people we are talking of a consciously chosen lifestyle which is constructed around a preference for career-building and/or free time activities. Second for the majority of singletons, however, living alone is a *form of life* defined by social conditions.

It is important to note that single lifestyle is most likely to occur after a divorce or the break-up of a long-term partnership, often in the case of relationships created despite major social distance between the parties. In terms of the structural composition of the population of single men and single women is different. Two thirds of the latter are single mothers while two thirds of the former are unmarried, putting off marriage. Approximately half of unmarried men live in villages, are in a lower social position, and poorly qualified, while the greater portion of single women are urban and highly qualified.

Traditional family values and the expectations radiated by the social environment influence the timing of long-term relationships differently for men and for women. Women are more likely to submit themselves to traditional expectations, thus they marry 'in good time' but by the time they are in their thirties they are divorced, often bringing up children. Men, on the contrary, have shown an increasing tendency in the past few decades to put off getting married, instead remaining single for a long time. In the final balance, single women in their thirties without a permanent relationship carry a considerably heavier burden and do more to fulfil the job of social reproduction than men of the same age.

*Translated by Orsolya Frank*

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