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# Singlehood in Europe: Understanding the Single Experience on Personal and Social Level

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## Abstract

The rise of singlehood is evident in the increasing number of single-person households globally, reflecting a significant societal shift. There are social, economic and psychological reasons dedicated to this rise. However, single population is still seen as a homogenous group where differences in individual experiences and values are overseen. This research aims to explore singlehood in detail and investigate on singles who are not seeking partners (SANS) as a distinct social category. Using intersectionality theory as theoretical framework, the research underscores the unique experiences of different single groups and reflects on how society views single population.

## 1. Introduction

The rise of singlehood is evident in the increasing number of single-person households globally, reflecting a significant societal shift. According to the studies, the number of single adult household grew by 29.6% between 2009 and 2022, and the growth is 30.7% for single adult households without children (Eurostat, 2023). This trend is characterized by a decline in married couple households and a growing number of individuals choosing to live alone or adopting unconventional living arrangements. It is particularly notable in Western countries, including the United States and Europe, where single adult households have become predominant. This shift towards singlehood suggests evolving social and cultural norms, emphasizing individualistic lifestyles, and has implications for housing, demographics, family structures, and public policies. Aside from the statistics about individuals who are not married or in a committed romantic relationship, and those who live on their own, divorce rates also provide important insights into the state of being single. According to the statistics, for example, decreasing divorce trends in the United States are related to the delayed age of marriage, increase in cohabitation and rising numbers of nonmarriage (US Census Bureau, 2015; Copen et al., 2012; US Census Bureau, 2016).

It is important to understand the reasons behind the rise of singlehood for gaining a comprehensive knowledge about singles and their experiences. Moreover, exploring the reasons contributing to the increase in the number of single individuals can provide insights into changing societal norms and values, relationship dynamics, psychological aspects and economic implications of singlehood. Major stream of research has already given focus to social, psychological, and economic factors behind the rise. Studies investigating social factors focuses on post-materialistic value change, individualism, gender equality, technological developments in family planning, impact of globalization and mobility and diverse relationship options. In the postmodern society, individual has become “the maker of the world we inhabit” and experienced a value change from traditional materialistic values to post-material concerns such as self-expression, creativity, personal growth, and autonomy (Heller & Wellberry, 1986; Inglehart, 1971; Duch and Taylor, 1993). Not only the individual, but specifically women in society also has a different position in the postmodern world, they are no longer seen as solely the homemaker wife anymore (Stacey, 1992). As women gained more economic independence and more equal opportunities starting with women’s liberation movement in 1960’s, and traditional gender roles were challenged. Women were encouraged to take education, and

pursue careers before getting married (Klinenberg, 2012). Therefore, this change had an impact on individual's decisions on abandoning the traditional mindsets and exploring singlehood as a lifestyle option where they can pursue their education and career goals, for example. The landscape of family planning has been also transforming in the last decades with the technological advancements such as vitro fertilization (IVF) and egg freezing. With these treatment options, there are possibilities for longer fertility and single parenthood, which allow individuals to prioritize educational and career aspirations instead of getting married with the pressure for fertility preservation. Another social factor that has implications for the rise of singlehood is globalization and mobility. When young adults are leaving their family houses, they also abandon traditional mindsets as they become equipped to build an independent life where they can pursue their personal goals (Liefbroer & Toulemon, 2010). Also, globalization fosters cultural interchange and introduces a variety of lifestyles and relationship models to individuals.

Despite these societal and value changes in the last decades, singles are still stereotyped, stigmatized, and ignored (DePaulo, 2016). The stigma is attributed to the perception that singlehood is an unfulfilled state caused by the lack of an intimate relationship or marriage, rather than a deliberate choice made by individuals. Moreover, this perception is reinforced by social norms that prioritize coupling and family over individuality. In many cultures, marriage is still seen as a necessary step towards adulthood and is often equated with social status and respectability (Cancian & Reed, 2009). As a result of these cultural beliefs and social norms, individuals who remain single by choice or circumstance often face stigmatization and discrimination. Moreover, research has shown that singles are often perceived as less competent, less happy, and less fulfilled than their married counterparts (DePaulo, 2006).

Single population is not only stigmatized and discriminated, but also often viewed as a homogenous group that lacks unique differences in their personal narratives (Kislev, 2023). However, this simplified perception of singlehood overlooks the complex and diverse experiences within the single population (DePaulo, 2006). Instead of approaching singlehood as the absence of a committed relationship or marriage, defining it as a distinct social category and identity with its variations can help understanding the dynamics within the group and is well needed considering the increasing amount of singlehood. According to Kislev (2023), studying singlehood as an identity can also help understanding new and emerging social categories among singles.

The sociological and psychological literature also often viewed singlehood as the absence of a marriage or a traditional household. As a result, much attention about the current state of singlehood was given to the deinstitutionalization of marriage and the move away from established social norms and traditions (Cherlin, 2004; Giddens, 1992). Eva Illouz, for example, argues that individualization in the consumerist society has led to the erosion of traditional forms of marriage and family life. She contends that individuals today are more likely to fulfil their personal desires and needs, rather than adhere to societal expectations or traditional gender roles (Illouz, 1997). Another reasoning in the literature gathers around reduced pressure on women to get married and have children, particularly in the Western culture, with modernization and economic development bringing more egalitarian gender attitudes to the society (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Even though there is existing research on singlehood, there is a constant need for more detailed research on the topic since it is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that is shaped by social norms, stigmatization, and diverse personal values and experiences. Further research can help to identify these intersections and how they shape the experiences of single individuals. Additionally, the single population is often viewed as a homogeneous group, lacking the ability to recognize or acknowledge the unique differences in their personal narratives. Kislev and Marsh (2023) argue that single population is often treated as a monolithic group by policymakers and society at large, leading to the marginalization of some single individuals who may not fit the dominant stereotypes or expectations. However, singles are a growing demographic group as the statistics show above, and it has implications for new public policies. By studying singlehood as a social category and recognizing being single as a choice and a deliberate act, we can advance the understanding of single status, develop single identity discourse, and address the needs of singles in society such as creating intentional communities, special housing arrangements, policy objectives, civil rights, and more.

### 1.1 Research Objective and Questions

The research objective of the present study will be to explore singlehood in more detail by contributing to the existing literature with fresh findings from the field and explore singles who are not seeking to partner (SANS) as a distinct social category. Studying singlehood outside of the frame of “lack of marriage” is relatively new, therefore the field needs constant exploration.

By utilizing an extensive array of questions, the study is aimed to reveal similarities and distinctions within the single population, demonstrating that singles cannot be viewed as a homogenous entity that lacks individual variations or preferences.

The first research question is focused on the lifestyle of singles, which is important to understand their social roles, interests, and their self-conceptions. There are existing studies on the social context of singles and how they interact with their social surroundings, how these interactions impact their choice on singlehood. For example, study shows that singles with low relationship desire have higher levels of social satisfaction (Kislev, 2020). However, even though existing research provides valuable insights on the lifestyle of singles, further and constant exploration is needed. Existing studies provide a view of how singles interact with their social environments, leaving room for a more comprehensive exploration of their lifestyles and self-perceptions that shape single individuals' lives. The study aims to gain further insights and understanding in additional lifestyle areas such as social life, work life, hobbies, intellectual values, vacations and more.

The second research question is to understand how singlehood interact with other social identities. It is crucial to consider multiple identities when studying singlehood (Kislev, 2023). By recognizing and examining these interactions between identities, it is possible to move beyond simplistic stereotypes and policies about single people. For this reason, intersectionality theory serves as a theoretical framework in the current research. Originally created by Kimberlé Crenshaw, this theory provides a solid framework to understand how social identities interdependent parts of individual identities are and how they interact with each other. Even though there are some examples where singlehood is studied with the intersectional identities, most of the research is done without drawing attention to any particular social category (Marsh, 2023; Klinenberg, 2012). Therefore, this research promotes inclusivity and highlights the need for more support and policies that diverse single identities may need.

The third question is to understand how single individuals view singlehood. Is it a lifestyle, a deliberate choice, an identity or just a circumstance? How do SANS perceive their singlehood? Is there any considerable difference between singles who are seeking to partner up and who are not in their perception on singlehood? Even though the reasons to be single vary among the single group, learning from single individuals will give valuable insights to understand the individual narratives and unique nuances.

Lastly, societal responses and stigmatization toward singlehood, public policies regarding single individuals, and ideal society for singles will be among the questions to understand singles' perceptions, values, and expectations better. How society responds to single individuals? How single individuals interact with these responses? In what ways they encounter stigmatization and who is the target? These questions will be answered through a detailed analysis of the interview transcripts.

The paper argues that studying singlehood requires acknowledging the distinctions in the single population without generalizing the group as a homogenous “unmarried” or “unpartnered” people. Considering the amount of single population everywhere supported by the statistics, we need to approach the topic by looking at its variations, as any other social category like gender or ethnicity is addressed. The qualitative study will help to reveal the unique differences among the population and will provide personal narratives on the topic. In the light of increasing number of single individuals all over the world, it cannot be stressed enough that studying singlehood with its variations is holding a remarkable significance for further research designs and policymaking such as housing and tax arrangements. For this reason, to understand and to address the needs of single individuals is crucial. Improving living conditions and right for singles would be a step towards a more egalitarian society. Additionally, the existing stigma towards singles as they are deficit can be erased as the further research illuminates the topic and make society more familiar with the dynamics of singlehood.

In this paper, the term single refers to individuals who are not in a romantic relationship or marriage of any kind; social identity is defined as an individual's sense of self as a member of a particular social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SANS is defined as individuals who are singles, self-identified as singles and not interested in a relationship.

## 1.2 Outline of the thesis

The rest of the thesis is structured as following: Chapter 2 will introduce the relevant literature in order to structure the forthcoming research within the existing theoretical paradigms and to underscore areas where further knowledge is needed. Next, Chapter 3 will provide information about the research design and methodology used in the research. Here, the methodology will be justified, data collection methods will be explained in detail. In Chapter 4, the results of the



qualitative study will be presented with participant quotations, followed by the discussion Chapter, 5. Here, research findings will be discussed thoroughly, and limitations of the study will be explained along with the avenues for future research. Lastly, Chapter 6 will conclude the research.

## 2. Literature Review

Over the last decades, with the increase in the number of single individuals everywhere, researchers dedicated efforts to understand the dynamics, reasons, and consequences of this change. In this section of the paper, the reader will be guided through statistics about the number of singles and single households, as they are a clear indicator for the rise in singlehood. In the second part, the reasons behind the rise of singlehood will be explained by using categorization. There have been different elements contributing to the increase in the number of single individuals, and they are clustered as social, economic, and psychological factors. Social factors have several branches that explains the increase in singlehood, therefore the most prominent elements were given place separately as distinct titles. These are post-materialistic values and individualism, gender equality, technological advancements and family planning, globalization, and mobility - abandoning family houses and traditional mindsets, and diverse relationship options. After explaining the factors contributing the rise of singlehood, state of the art on single identity and singlehood as a social category is explained.

### 2.1 Singlehood in Numbers

Singlehood, defined as the state of not being married or not being in a committed romantic relationship, has evolved in time (DePaulo, 2007). In traditional societies for example, single individuals were perceived as abnormal or suspicious since the marriage was considered as the norm (DePaulo, 2007; Klinenberg, 2012). However, over the past decades, there has been a considerable change in societal responses towards singlehood and also around the practices of singlehood. Historically, singlehood was seen as a symbol of economic independence for women (Klinenberg, 2012). As the traditional norms suggest, women would marry at younger ages and take their role as the homemaker and caregiver. For men, on the other hand, marriage was often interpreted as a sign of being an adult and even a social status (DePaulo, 2007). In the early 20th century, the perception surrounding singlehood has started to change with women's liberation movement in 1960's and traditional gender roles were challenged. Women

were encouraged to take education, and pursue careers before getting married (Klinenberg, 2012). Therefore, the number of women delaying marriage and remaining single as a deliberate act has increased remarkably (DePaulo, 2007). The increase in the number of single individuals continued in the 21st century with several factors contributing to the rise (Klinenberg, 2012).

According to recent statistics, the rise of singlehood was observable almost everywhere in the world. In the United States, for example, the percentage of single adults has increased from 37.4% in 1976 to 50.2% in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The number of single households can be considered as a significant implication of the rise in singlehood. As the amount of singlehood increases, it suggests a growing trend of individuals either choosing to live alone or forming an unconventional living arrangement. In the United States, households consisting of married couples were 55% of all households in 1990, whereas this percentage had decreased to 46% by 2020. In addition, the number of householders living alone from non-family households has increased 15.3% for male householders, 9.7% for female householders between the years 2010 and 2020 (Census, 2020).

The rising trends in single adult households are also remarkable in Europe. Findings show that single adult household grew by 29.6% between 2009 and 2022, and the growth is 30.7% for single adult households without children (Eurostat, 2023). According to the latest findings, the predominant household category within the European Union was single adult households. In the proportion of single person households, Scandinavian countries have the highest numbers that could be associated with individualistic and less family-oriented lifestyles (Berg & Verbakel, 2022). According to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, the proportion of single households in Germany has been increasing steadily over the past few decades. In 2020, almost 41% of households in Germany were single households, compared to just 27% in 1991 (Federal Statistical Office, 2021). This trend is especially observable in urban areas, where the proportion of single households is even higher. In Berlin, for example, almost 54% of households are single households (Statistisches Landesamt Berlin-Brandenburg, 2020). The rising trend is not limited with Western countries, it is observable worldwide. Official statistics in China show that one person households had increased 14.5% in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2013). There are also studies where the late marriage and nonmarriage has been the trend in the last decades in East and Southeast Asia (Jones, Yanxia & Zhi, 2012; Himawan, Bambling & Edirippulige, 2019).

In addition to the numbers of singles and single households, the divorce rates are presenting valuable numbers for understanding singlehood. One of the interpretations of the decreasing divorce numbers, according to Cherlin (2010), is that individuals are making more careful and deliberate decisions on getting married today, resulting in less divorce rates. Also, on the contrary to the traditional societies, people are getting married after they complete their education, start their careers, and have stable living conditions. Delayed marriage or not getting married allow individuals to focus on their needs and goals, resulting in more healthy romantic relationships and decreasing the number of divorces (Cherlin, 2010). According to the statistics, for example, the decreasing divorce trends in the United States are related to the delayed age of marriage, increase in cohabitation and rising number of nonmarriage (US Census Bureau, 2015; Copen et al., 2012; US Census Bureau, 2016).

## 2.2 Factors behind the rise of singlehood

Understanding the rise in singlehood is crucial for gaining a comprehensive knowledge for the dynamics of modern relationships and singlehood. Additionally, examining why people choose to be single is crucial to understand individual preferences that are driven by social, psychological, and economic factors. These insights can also help to challenge assumptions and stereotypes about single individuals, as well as developing policies and social services that meet the needs of singles.

### 2.2.1 Social Factors

A major stream of theories on the rise of singlehood investigates social forces. Many studies have primarily looked at the decrease in marriages and the trend of marrying later, rather than focusing directly on singlehood itself. This emphasis on understanding the decline in marriages and delayed marriages comes from the recognition that societal shifts, such as changing gender roles, new economic opportunities, and cultural attitudes, have collectively contributed to alter the traditional understanding of relationships and partnerships. As a result, researchers have often explored the factors that influence individuals' decisions to postpone marriage, which subsequently influences the rise in singlehood as an increasing life choice.

The majority of academic research which has concentrated on investigating social factors points out individualism, gender equality, technological advancements in family planning, the impacts of globalization and mobility, and diverse relationship options in relation to the process of deinstitutionalizing marriage and the concurrent increase in singlehood. The following

sections aim to give brief information on the major social factors that has an impact on the rise of singlehood.

### *Post-materialistic Values and Individualism*

One of the social factors is one the rise in individualism and post materialistic values with industrialism (Inglehart & Flanagan, 1987). These are seen as one of the most drastic changes that has happened to society in the postmodern age. Increasingly, individual is considered as “the maker of the world we inhabit” (Heller & Wellberry, 1986). Ronald Inglehart’s “Value Change” theory is related to singlehood in several ways. Inglehart’s theory of intergenerational value change suggests that as societies become more economically developed with industrialism, they experience a shift from traditional materialistic values to post-materialistic values. Materialistic values consist of economic security, safety, societal stability. In the post-materialistic society, individuals tend to change their priorities from material concerns to post-material concerns such as self-expression, creativity, quality of life, personal growth, autonomy (Inglehart, 1971; Duch and Taylor, 1993). This shift towards post-materialistic values has an influence on individuals’ decisions on getting married or not, their preferences on romantic relationships and singlehood since people might embrace being single as a way of pursuing their personal goals while creating personal autonomy (Inglehart, 1997). Emphasis on the quality of life, along with changing values and delayed marriage is considered to be one of the consequences of post-materialistic values and it has a relation to singlehood. In postmodern societies, people prioritize their well-being and personal happiness over the traditional values such as materialism and conformity (Inglehart, 1997). As a result, individuals are more likely to make life choices where they prioritize their own happiness and well-being. This might include being single as it allows individuals to focus on personal goals and interests.

Individualism, on the other hand, is closely linked to the post-materialistic values. With the value change, the traditional order gave its place to individual freedom and personal autonomy, the individual has become independent from the traditional and social institutions, resulting in the rise of individualism (Halman, 1996). As a result, the generation born after Second World War onwards quit traditional values including family values and chose freedom and personal autonomy by living in singlehood (Kislev, 2018; Klinenberg, 2012). Kislev (2018) argues that individualism and post-materialistic values is not only one reason behind the rise of singlehood, but also a source where singles get greater happiness from.

### *Gender Equality*

The ‘modern’ family of sociological theory and historical family form has undergone a transformation over the years. The traditional model that is composed of a male breadwinner, economically dependent homemaker wife and their dependent children no longer exists (Stacey, 1992). With gender equality and the empowerment of women significantly contributing to changes in family structures, individuals started to seek alternative paths to fulfil their goals in life. In recent decades, the participation to education was higher among women than men (Hek, Kraaykamp & Wolbers, 2016) and gender inequality in economic independence is in decline (Frejka et al., 2018). As women gained more economic independence and equal opportunities, their opportunity to shape their lives outside of the traditional family roles increased. As a result, this change influenced individuals' decisions to abandon the traditional family institution and explore singlehood as a lifestyle option. Van den Berg and Verbakel (2022) argues that being self-focused and economically independent during singlehood saved women from being “trapped in a marriage” (van den Berg & Verbakel, 2022). This independence has enabled women to pursue their own aspirations.

It is also important to consider transformative impact of gender equality on family structures and individual choices. With increased access to education and employment opportunities, women are no longer the actors who fulfil roles within traditional nuclear family setups. This empowerment led to a shift from traditional norms and expectations, encouraging women to seek opportunities beyond marriage and motherhood (Oppenheimer, 1997). Furthermore, the empowerment of women has shifted societal perceptions of marriage and singlehood. The idea of marriage as a primary goal has been replaced by a focus on personal development and achievement, which is closely tied to the principles of gender equality. As a result, more individuals, particularly women, are remaining single to explore their potential and realize their aspirations on their terms. In conclusion, gender equality and the empowerment of women has led to a reimagination of personal fulfilment and a broader acceptance of singlehood as a valid and empowered lifestyle choice (Oppenheimer, 1997).

### *Technological Advancements and Family Planning*

Postmodern societies also experience a transition from values to behaviour (van de Kaa, 2001). Religious or cultural beliefs about family have undergone a change and traditional norms like

having large families have given their places to new behaviours aligned with individual desires. In the postmodern societies, individuals prefer postponing family formation and parenthood, in order to focus on their personal lives (van de Kaa, 2001). Decline in the fertility preferences (decision to have child), for example, a good sign of broader societal changes, reflecting how post-materialist values overweight traditional norms.

The decrease of the biological pressure on young women to marry and to form family is closely linked to the changing perceptions of family planning and the role of women in society. With the advancements in technology, fertility treatments have become more effective and accessible. Therefore, women are increasingly empowered to make deliberate choices about when and how they wish to start families (Davis et al., 2018). This empowerment is aligned with the broader trend of women seeking greater control over their reproductive lives and challenging traditional timelines. Fertility treatments have played a crucial role in reshaping the narrative around family planning, enabling women to consider multiple life paths and prioritize personal development without compromising the option of future motherhood.

Greater accessibility to fertility treatments has also contributed to how parenthood is perceived and practiced. In the traditional societies, family was considered as an entity consisting of legally married heterosexual couple with their biological children. However, as the fertility treatments have advanced and become more accessible, the perception on parenthood has changed. With the new fertility treatments, a single individual can explore parenthood without needing a biological partner (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015). This way, conventional family structure is challenged and opportunities to become single parent has risen. Also, as new fertility treatments become more accessible, the stigma around single parenthood is in decrease. The growing acceptance on single parenthood is also contributing to expanding definitions of family (Wong et al., 2004). Family structures are becoming more diverse with alternative parenthood methods, co-parenting arrangements and chosen families. Therefore, individuals do not refrain from remaining single even though they want to experience parenthood.

#### *Globalization and Mobility - Abandoning Family Houses and Traditional Mindsets*

Globalization and increased mobility around the globe have significant implications for the rise of singlehood as they influence both physical and cultural aspects of individuals' lives. This phenomenon reshaped the concepts around family structures and singlehood. In terms of

physical mobility, globalization has led to shifts in geographical locations for education, work, and personal reasons. As young adults relocate for education or career opportunities, they often delay marriage and family formation or do not think about getting married and focus on their educational and career aspirations, therefore contributing to the rise in singlehood (van den Berg & Verbakel, 2022). In addition, global mobility results in changing places frequently and postponing settle down to start a family formation. The instability can also have an impact on maintaining long-term relationships, as geographic mobility can affect the continuity of the relationships, leading the individual to the single status (van den Berg & Verbakel, 2022).

The physical separation from family houses can also limit the influence of traditional family pressures, giving individuals more autonomy to make choices that align with their personal goals. The transition from living with family to abandoning the family house can empower individuals to build an independent life where they pursue their personal goals. When individuals abandon their family homes, they gain autonomy over their lives, and this can lead them to practice singlehood as a lifestyle (Klinenberg, 2012). Leaving the family home might also mean leaving the traditional mindsets, along with the family pressures and expectations about getting married and having children. Getting away from the family can grant the individual enough space to prioritize their personal wishes over family's expectations while exploring personal goals and interests.

In conclusion, globalization and mobility play a transformative role in the rise of singlehood by influencing individuals' physical relocations and cultural perspectives. These factors contribute to abandoning traditional family houses and shifting away from conventional mindsets, allowing individuals to navigate their own paths in the realm of relationships and family formation, leading to the rise of singlehood.

#### *Diverse relationship options*

Alternative forms of companionship and non-traditional family arrangements also have an impact on the rise of singlehood. First of all, traditional notions of monogamy and marriage are being challenged by more fluid relationship options. Forms of non-monogamy like polyamory or open relationship have gained visibility and acceptance. This fluidity allows individuals to explore themselves, while contributing to a shift from exclusive long-term relationships to new forms of fluid relationships (Graham, 2020).

Secondly, cohabitation has become more common among couples who choose to live together without marriage. According to Pew Research Center analysis of the National Survey of Family Growth between 2013-2017, %59 of adults aging between 18 and 44 have lived a partner without marriage at some point in their lives and %50 have ever been married. In 2002, 54% of the adults in this age group had ever cohabited without marriage and 60% had ever married. These numbers also show that cohabitation is more common than to have married (Pew Research Center, 2019). Cohabitation provides companionship and emotional support without the legal and societal constraints of traditional marriage, where post materialistic values like personal freedom and autonomy is valued over institutionalized commitment (Johnson, 2017).

The rise of singlehood is a complex phenomenon influenced by the changing landscape of different social factors. As societies continue to evolve, the impacts of these changes on singlehood are likely to remain as the statistics indicate, and even intensify.

### 2.2.2 Economic factors

Economic forces also play a significant role in shaping individuals' decisions regarding singlehood. Economic factors like hardship on individual level, economic development and urbanization, and economic independence of women have effects on individuals' relationships and decisions regarding relationships. Economic hardship has been linked to the delay of marriage, by creating the fear of being unable to support a family financially (Stone et al., 2011). Young adults may postpone marriage until they get financially stable, or at a good position, which leads a prolongation of singlehood.

Economic development and urbanization are other factors that play role in remaining single. As individuals seek job opportunities and migrate to urban areas, they often move away from their families and traditional social networks. In the urban areas, people have more opportunities to explore different lifestyles and ideologies, leading some to prioritize their own goals over traditional values. As a result, individuals can delay marriage or decide to remain single, focusing on their career and other goals like self-discovery.

Women's economic independence also contributes to the rise of singlehood in different ways. Firstly, it challenges traditional family norms where the male is the breadwinner. As women gain their economic autonomy, there is less reliance on partners, the need for marriage as an



economic partnership can be reconsidered and this can lead to a decline in the urgency to enter marriage, resulting in the rise of singlehood (Sassler & Goldscheider, 2004). This way, women can prioritize emotional and intellectual compatibility in relationship or marriage over financial concerns. As the focus shifts from economic stability to emotional fulfilment, more individuals can choose singlehood over incompatible relationship or marriage (Bulcroft & O'Connor, 1986). Economic autonomy of women often leads to pursuing higher education and career goals. As they focus on personal and professional growth, marriage is being postponed.

### 2.2.3 Psychological factors

In the discourse around the rise of singlehood, researchers have also focused on the psychological factors that contribute to individuals' decisions to remain single. These factors consist of unrealistic marital expectations, desire for independence, disappointment in love, prioritizing other life goals over relationship, relationship difficulties and fear and attachment styles. Firstly, high marital expectations can lead to individuals remaining single. Romantic partnerships are usually depicted as fairy tales and individuals may hesitate to enter romantic relationships that do not meet these standards. The fear of unfulfilled expectations can lead to remain single (Finkel et al., 2014).

Desire for independence is also a significant force behind the decision to remain single. Some individuals, due to different reasons, prefer their personal freedom and self-discovery over committing to a romantic relationship or marriage (Probhakar, 2011). In addition to desire for independence, prioritizing other life goals including careers, education or personal goals is identified as a reason for staying single (Frazier et al., 1996).

Disappointment in love stands as a psychological barrier to future romantic involvements as well. Negative experiences in past relationships such as heartbreak or betrayal, can shape an individual's perspective on relationships and can play a role in choosing to remain single. Individuals who have encountered deep emotional pain may develop a defence mechanism as a means of self-protection. This mechanism can lead to hesitancy or reluctance to invest emotionally in new romantic involvements, out of fear of experiencing the pain of the past again (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Difficulties in establishing relationships and fear that relationships will not work can also influence the choice to remain single (Frazier et al., 1996). Some individuals may find the process of forming and maintaining relationships challenging, leading them to choose singlehood to avoid these difficulties.

Attachment theory has become a prominent framework for gaining insights about singlehood. This theory, initially developed by John Bowlby, focuses on how early emotional relationships with caregivers influence individuals' ability to form and maintain intimate relationships later in life. Applied to singlehood, attachment theory offers a lens through which to examine the ways individuals approach romantic connections, emotional intimacy, and their overall relationship patterns. Within attachment theory, one attachment style that holds significance in the context of singlehood is avoidant attachment. This attachment style is characterized by a discomfort with emotional intimacy, a tendency to downplay emotions, and a preference for self-sufficiency (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Individuals with an avoidant attachment style often have a remarkable need for independence and may be hesitant to fully engage in close emotional relationships.

### 2.3 Singlehood as a social category and identity

Singlehood has been frequently defined by researchers as the absence of a relationship or marriage and has not been seen as a distinct category or identity in itself until recent. However, approaching singleness as a deficit status results in ignoring the individual differences and characters within it (Kislev, 2023). Recently, there has been some typologies offering a categorization within singlehood by researchers. One of the most well-known is made by Stein (1978), suggesting a categorization for singlehood as voluntary and involuntary, which has been turned into voluntary temporary, voluntary stable, involuntary temporary and involuntary stable singlehood in the later studies (Stein, 1978). Even though the terms “single by choice” or “single by circumstance” are being used in the recent literature, these conceptualizations are only delivering information about the reasons of singlehood, not sufficient to understand how singles view themselves or lifestyles of single individuals (Kislev, 2023).

Kislev (2023) benefits from identity theory in order to define singlehood. The theory emphasises the way people view themselves and how this effects their lifestyle, roles in the society and personal values (Brewer, 2001; Erickson, 1995). According to Kislev (2023), this approach can be well applied to singlehood. In this way, understanding new and emerging social categories among singles can be studied as well.

*The impact of age and gender*

Age plays a significant role in shaping individual values, experiences, perspectives, priorities and life choices. Therefore, experiencing singlehood at different ages lead to different attitudes toward singlehood. Young adults, for example, might experience singlehood as a period of self discovery and autonomy where they focus on building their identities and pursuing their educational and career aspirations (De Paulo & Morris, 2005). However, societal pressures might get intensified for individuals at their late twenties and thirties (Simon & Barrett, 2010). In these ages, questions regarding marriage and family planning might arise, therefore a period of exploration can transform into to a period of potential concerns. During these ages, while some may enjoy single lifestyle with an extensive freedom, others may look for companionship (Sassler et al., 2013). In middle aged adults, singlehood might be experienced due to divorce or separation, increasing the number of singles in the society. There are studies investigating on the rising number of middle-aged singles or economic aspects of responsibilities of middle-aged adults such as raising children or caring for aging parents, resulting in reconsidering to enter new relationships or to marry again (Qian, 1997; Smock & Manning, 1997). These age-related factors lead to different ways of experiencing singlehood.

Gender, on the other side, is playing a similar role to age in relation to singlehood. Expectations and stereotypes from certain genders are studied and recognized. For example, there has been a societal expectation from single women to get married at early ages and form a family life in traditional terms. Therefore, single women face societal pressure to follow the traditional path and their single status can be stigmatized (DePaulo, 2006). DePaulo (2006) notes that these expectations and stereotypes can impact women's self-esteem and how they experience singlehood. However, the same pressure is not available for men, as their postponed marriage will be interpreted by the society as pursuing success in their careers or building financial stability, confirming the traditional expectation that men should be the provider at home (Kimmel, 2008). LGBTQ+ individuals can also face unique challenges with their singlehood. They can experience social isolation, particularly if they lack supportive social networks due to their single status (Meyer, 2003).

### *Social Life and well-being*

The experience of singlehood is influenced by various social factors, one being social life. Relationship scholars underscore the fact that romantic partners are important resources for

support and attachment (e.g., Kammrath et.al., 2020). This view, however, leads singlehood to be perceived as the opposite, as if single individuals are lacking support and attachment in their lives (Adamczyk, 2017; DePaulo, 2007). However, it is important to note that studies show that single individuals have a tendency to maintain more diverse social networks and participate in a large range of social activities, which can enhance their sense of fulfilment and independence (DePaulo, 2006; Diener et al., 2010). Study has shown that unmarried individuals, including divorced or widowed people, frequently participate to community and leisure activities, which can increase their overall well-being by providing opportunities for social interaction and personal growth (Cornwell and Waite, 2009). These findings highlight that singlehood can be associated with a diverse and active social life that brings a sense of autonomy and satisfaction.

Singlehood has impact on individuals' well-being and self-esteem as well. The relationship between being single and being happy is complicated since many different factors can affect how people view and feel about being single. According to research, various psychological and social elements, such as social connections, emotional support networks, and independence, influence well-being in singlehood (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007). Although being single has been linked to difficulties like loneliness and isolation, research also emphasizes the advantages of self-discovery and personal growth that can improve well-being. According to a study, German singles who are not interested in dating experience high levels of well-being (Kislev, 2019). Strong social networks, friendships, and meaningful connections can also decrease any negative effects on wellbeing and increase singles' feelings of self-worth (Pinquart, 2013).

Walsh et al. (2022) examines the well-being of singles by using latent profile analysis (LPA), focusing on friendship satisfaction, family satisfaction, self-esteem, neuroticism, and extraversion. Results suggest that most single people are fairly to very satisfied with their lives. Moreover, 10 single profiles within the experiment group have been detected, providing important insights into the well-being of single population and highlighting the heterogenous structure of singlehood. In summary, while the view on relationships might suggest that single individuals are lacking support and attachment due to the absence of romantic partners, research suggest opposite. Single individuals engage in social networks and maintain a wide range of activities. All of these contribute to the feeling of fulfilment, independence, and overall well-being.

### *Stigma towards singles*

Social stigma and discrimination against single individuals is a remarkable force in single people's lives (Grime et. al., 2023). The stigma can be visible in various aspects of life, including employment, social interactions, or access to resources. It is shown empirically by Morris et. al. (2007) that there exists an institutional bias favouring married couples over singles, including housing access and affordability, healthcare policies and benefits, taxation policies such as joint filing status and tax breaks, or some discount benefits offered by organizations.

Additionally, the single population is often viewed as a homogeneous group, lacking the ability to recognize or acknowledge the unique differences in their personal narratives (Kislev, 2023). Kislev argues that this view of policymakers and society at large, leads to the marginalization of some single individuals who may not fit into the dominant stereotypes or expectations. This perception of singleness as one category can oversimplify the complex and diverse experiences within the single population (DePaulo, 2006). It can also cause overlooking various factors, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, and socioeconomic status, that intersect to shape individual experiences of singlehood (Simon & Barrett, 2010). Ignoring these nuances can result in policies and societal attitudes that fail to address the specific needs and challenges faced by different segments of the single population (Harknett & Kuperberg, 2011). Thus, acknowledging the diversity within the single population is crucial for a better understanding of single identity and the formulation of inclusive policies that recognize and respect individual narratives.

Stigma and discrimination are not only towards single individuals in general, but also has direct targets. There is a traditional belief that one's life is incomplete without a romantic partner, particularly for women (Simon & Barrett, 2010). This way of thinking is based on the traditional family concept where the woman is financially dependent homemaker. Gender plays a critical role regarding the single status and societal response to it (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to have an understanding of the complexities of societal expectations and pressures while making a sense of personal identities of single individuals.

### 2.4 Intersectionality theory

It is important to consider multiple identities when studying singlehood in order to learn about unique experiences of single individuals and to understand singlehood as a social category that interacts with other social identities (Kislev, 2023). For this reason, intersectionality theory can serve as a solid ground for researchers investigating on singlehood by showing how intersecting identities influence singles' experiences. Researchers that use intersectionality theory in the studies of singlehood can reveal the resources of stereotypes and stigmas associated with certain types of single individuals. Additionally, the theory can help emphasizing the systematic inequalities that exist in the societies (Collins, 2015).

Originally created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the field of critical race theory, intersectionality theory provides a solid framework to understand social identities as interdependent parts of an individual identity instead of isolated categories. According to the theory, these parts have dynamic interactions with each other, and they shape individual's experiences and perceptions, creating unique and complex experiences of privilege and oppression. Crenshaw introduced the concept in her seminal work "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1990). In the article, Crenshaw discusses how traditional feminist and anti-racist movements failed to address the specific challenges experienced by women of color because they often positioned on single dimensions of identity. She argues that feminist and anti-racist movements need to recognize the intersecting dynamics of oppression experienced by women of color to develop more inclusive and effective ways to fight for social justice and address multiple forms of oppression. The theory has been adapted and applied across various subjects such as healthcare inequality, education, workplace discrimination, domestic violence, and immigration (Bowleg, 2012; Collins, 1990; Bauer et.al., 2012; Richie, 1996; Hondagneu, 1994). Researchers use intersectionality to examine how multiple social identities intersect and influence individual's experiences and opportunities.

In the context of singlehood, intersectionality theory can help to emphasize that being single is not only defining a marital or relationship status of individuals, but also an aspect of identity that interacts with other identities such as gender, age, ethnicity and more (Crenshaw, 1989). The theory allows the research to move beyond the simplistic understanding of singlehood and include the complex context of individual lives that are shaped by personal experiences, intersecting identities and social elements. The theory also prepares a solid ground for a deeper understanding of how society responds to singlehood and how stigma is created based on gender, age, ethnicity etc.

Intersectionality theory has been studied in relation to singlehood by a few researchers recently. Kris Marsh (2023) takes single Black middle class individuals and their lifestyles into account by underscoring the intersection of singlehood, race and class in her book “The Love Jones Cohort: Single and Living Alone in the Black Middle Class”. This book positions itself as the first example of the representation of single Black middle class cohort as a social category. Marsh in her book also addresses the lack of nuanced information about singles as a distinct social category in the existing research. For example, sociologist Eric Klinenberg, in his book “Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone”, does not draw much attention to any particular social category. Intersectionality was also proposed for studying and theorizing singlehood by Marsh and Kislev (2023). The seminal article underscores the importance of recognizing the diversity within the population and moving beyond viewing singles as a homogenous group. The researchers propose to study singlehood in its intersections with race and ethnicity, gender, income, age, religion and culture.

As singlehood is considered as a distinct social category in this paper, intersectionality theory becomes beneficial in order to study the interaction of singlehood with other social identities like age, gender, race etc. Here, employing intersectionality theory in studying singlehood as proposed by Marsh and Kislev (2023) will enable the narrative to provide more specific representations of how people position their singlehood and navigate their lives with their unique identities, also how their relation to societal expectations is built.

### 3. Research Design

In this section, following the state of art on the topic, the research design and data collection methods will be introduced. After giving a short overview of qualitative research and one-to-one interviews and why it is relevant to the current study, case selection and data collection for the study will be presented. Singlehood is a complicated topic with many branches and can be examined in different dimensions. In this study, however, a qualitative method will help reaching individual narratives and stories to learn deeper about singlehood and their relationship with the rest of the society.

A qualitative research approach is used in the study to dive into the complex realm of singlehood experiences of individuals. The choice of qualitative research methods, particularly individual interviews, for this study on singlehood is grounded in the complexity of the topic itself. Singlehood covers a wide range of experiences, emotions, and social dynamics, which demand an in-depth exploration to understand its nature. By choosing qualitative methods, the research acknowledges the subjective nature of these experiences and aim to capture the rich and diverse narratives of individuals. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the topic widely, enabling participants to share their personal stories and perspectives. Through this approach, it is possible reveal personal insights that would be challenging to capture through quantitative methods alone. Therefore, qualitative research methods, particularly in-depth interviews, are chosen for gaining a comprehensive understanding of singlehood.

### 3.1 Interviews

The qualitative research methodology involved in-depth interviews. The decision to conduct interviews with open-ended questions in this research on singlehood aligns with the goal of revealing in-depth, context-rich data (Patton, 2015). Open-ended questions are particularly chosen to explore the complex nature of the topic. By using this method, participants are encouraged to talk about their personal experiences and perceptions on the topic. The choice of 18 questions allowed for a comprehensive investigation, covering a wide range of dimensions associated with singlehood. By employing open-ended questions, providing participants the freedom to express their thoughts and experiences freely is aimed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Structured open-ended interviews are strictly standardized in terms of the wording of the questions. Participants are asked the same questions with same wording to ensure open-ended answers. Allowing the participant to give open-ended questions often result in receiving as much detailed information as the participant would like to give (Turner, 2010). Structured open-ended interviews are very popular way of interviewing in research studies as the participant is allowed to fully express their thoughts and to share their experiences on the topic. Even though the data provided by the participants will be rich with qualitative data, extracting similar themes and codes from the interview transcripts can be challenging for the researcher (Turner, 2010). Thus, the selection of 18 open-ended questions serves as a deliberate methodological choice, ensuring the exploration of the rich nature of singlehood while bringing a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences.



Preparation for the interview had taken place carefully. The research questions required a deeper understanding of the identities, perspectives, and experiences of single individuals. Therefore, gaining rich insights through interviews was aimed. Interviews have been conducted with 17 individuals, selected based on the criteria of being single, and living in Europe. The choice to include participants from Europe in this study was deliberate and rooted in the aim to capture a diverse range of cultural and contextual perspectives on singlehood. By interviewing individuals from various European countries, ensuring a broad representation of backgrounds and experiences within the study sample was aimed. This approach aligns with the principle of maximizing diversity in qualitative research and enabling a more comprehensive exploration (Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, the decision to interview people from Europe was strategic, intended to enhance the study's cultural and contextual diversity, and facilitate a holistic examination of singlehood.

The interview questions covered topic to explore participants' view on singlehood, single lifestyle, and societal responses towards singlehood. There were 18 open-ended questions for each participant. After finalizing the research design, the study was promoted on Whatsapp groups, alumni mailing list, and through personal networks by creating snowball technique. During the participant selection process, all candidate participants were informed about the nature of the interview, approximate duration, terms of confidentiality and the purpose of the study. Among the group of candidates, 17 of them agreed and participated to the study. All participants were provided an informational consent form, explaining the purpose and the format of the interview, addressing the terms for confidentiality, the signed consent forms are stored digitally. To ensure confidentiality, any identifying information, especially the names of the participants, is withheld.

In order to enrich the findings and find meaningful patterns among the participants, a demographic data including participants' gender and age is collected before each interview. Interviews consisted of face-to-face and online meetings, depending on the location of the interviewee. Face-to-face interviews are conducted in Berlin, on the agreed time and location. All interviews are held completely in English and no translation was needed. The interviews took place between June 2023 and August 2023. As another important element to test the duration and quality of the interviews, there has been a pilot interview conducted. This pilot interview assisted the research by indicating any potential problems with the questions, the way they are asked or the weaknesses of the research design. After completing the pilot interview,

necessary changes are made, however, the interview questions remained the same as they were proved to be implemented well. During the interviews, only one question was asked at a time and after ensuring the participant has given the full answer, the next question was asked. The researcher remained as neutral as possible, however, encouraging respondents to continue answering, approving gestures were used e.g., head nodding.

Interviews lasted 28 minutes on average. The shortest interview lasted 12 minutes while the longest interview lasted 68 minutes. Even though the interview technique as stated in the information and consent form that is sent before the interviews, the nature of interviews explained at the beginning of each interview and consent is taken for the audio recording. None of the interviews were aborted for any reason.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

The study aimed to gather meaningful insights from the collected qualitative data. The interview sessions were transcribed using the intelligent verbatim technique to ensure a comprehensive representation of participants' narratives. The analysis process is guided by the six-phase approach to thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2014). Thematic analysis is a popular method to analyse qualitative data. By using this analysis technique, the researcher closely examines the topics, ideas and patterns that came up in the interview transcripts. The six phases in this approach consists of familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing. In the current study, inductive approach is used to determine the themes, where there was not predetermined themes. In order to conduct the analysis process systematically, data analysis software MAXQDA is employed to facilitate the initial coding of content categories.

The first step was getting familiar with the data. Reading through interview transcripts and taking initial notes at this first phase. After getting familiarized with the data, first codes were created by highlighting sections from the transcripts and by describing the content of the text. Later, the codes were grouped into categories (selective coding). The patterns among the codes were analysed and themes were generated by adding the codes. After the generation of the themes, they were reviewed to ensure the data is presented in a useful and accurate way. With a careful review and revision of themes, last version of categories is generated, they were defined and named according to their broader meanings. The subsequent phase was a detailed

comparison of themes among the narratives of participants. By looking for similarities and differences, it became possible to uncover variations in experiences of singles.

### Challenges of the study

Finding potential participants was not a problem for the study, however, actualization of the interviews was the challenging part. Half of the potential participants either failed to confirm the meeting, or rescheduled for another date, or cancelled them outright. This prolonged the entire data collection process beyond the calculated timeframe. Another challenge was the low number of SANS participating the study. When announcing the study, “single participants” were called out, in order to have representations from SANS and not seeking, anticipating that the number of singles and not seeking will be almost equal. However, among the total of 17 participants of the study, only 6 of them were actually SANSes. Creating no inconvenience for the study, this experience can be used as an improvement point in the research design of further research.

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1 Single Lifestyle: Embracing More Time and Freedom

Participants were asked to describe their lifestyle including their work life, leisure activities, social life, hobbies, vacations, family relations, sex life, intellectual life and special values. While some of the fields were not mentioned by all the participants, they answered mostly about their work life and social life. One of the most outstanding themes was having more time for themselves and the subjects they care about as single individuals. It is underscored by the participants that being single shape their lifestyles differently compared to being in a relationship.

“When I'm single, there's a sense of spontaneity in how I structure my days, whether it's catching a movie, meeting friends, dining out, or staying in. Being single gives me a bit more time for myself, allowing me to prioritize tasks and activities that I enjoy without feeling pressured to meet certain grooming standards all the time.” (Participant 15)

Participant 12 reported on time management and the impact of being in a relationship on the hobbies and personal interests. According to her, in single lifestyle, time can be dedicated to self goals and self development activities, whereas in a relationship, there is a certain time dedicated to spend with partner.

“In the matter of hobbies, I have more free time, so there is also more time for me to explore, to take part of courses... and when I was in a relationship, this part of me faded a little bit away because you want to instead invest it in quality time with your partner.”  
(Participant 12)

Family life was another field that is asked to the participants in relation to their single lifestyle. There has been either no response by the participants to this question or few said it has not changed with singlehood. Participant 6 responded by claiming that more time in single lifestyle effected family life as well.

“I have more time with family, more time to be emotionally involved with other people that don't necessarily need to be like romantic partners.” (Participant 6)

Freedom was also an outstanding theme associated with being single when talking about single lifestyle. On extracurricular activities, some participants expressed that they have more time for themselves and there is no need to align with someone else's schedule, which they find freeing.

“It (being single) also affects my sports life, if I can call it this way, positively. I don't have to be knowing the other person's schedule or trying to sync with their schedule or interests, so I can do my own thing.” (Participant 6)

“I can choose the activities that I do or the time that I have freely.” (Participant 13)

Travelling was a topic where some of the participants mentioned that is playing a factor in single lifestyle. Participant 2 (SANS) highlighted his travelling frequency as a reason to remain single. He emphasizes the importance of not burdening a potential partner with emotional investment when he is travelling frequently. Participant 16, on the other hand, embraces the

freedom that singlehood offers, particularly due to the ability to make spontaneous decisions without the need for considering another person's preferences. Participant 4 is also mentioning the practical advantages of singlehood, especially in lifestyles that require long periods away from home.

“Especially for the last few years, I've been consciously staying single because I do prefer the freedom and my lifestyle with all the travelling and getting around much. I feel it's not fair for the other person to only see me every three months but get emotionally too invested if that makes sense. I think it's not fair to the other person, so I choose to stay away from that.” (Participant 2 - SANS)

“Being single grants me the freedom to make spontaneous decisions without having to consult or consider anyone else's preferences. For instance, if I decide to book a last-minute trip to South East Asia, I can just go ahead and do it without needing to seek approval or coordinate with a partner. This sense of independence and the ability to act on my own terms is one of the significant aspects of being single, in my opinion.” (Participant 16)

“You spend sometimes weeks or months away from home. You don't have to worry about the effects it might have on your partnership. So it's just been easier in the end.” (Participant 4)

On the intellectual life, three of the participants mentioned about the activities they enjoy doing as a single. Participant 9 and 17 expressed a positive impact of not being in a relationship on their intellectual capacity.

“When I'm in a relationship, we're just like, let's just watch Netflix, or we just cook, and we just cuddle, and whatever. When I'm on my own, I'm able to watch festival movies, I'm able to make time for it, or I love just going to the park and reading. I love just going to an exhibition on my own sometimes.” (Participant 17)

On the sexual life, there were 7 participants responding to the question of sexual life in singlehood. Here, participants can be divided into two distinct groups where one performs casual sexual activities without looking for a long term partner, and the other one's sexual life

was in decline since they are looking for a romantic connection to have a physical activity together. 3 out of 7 participants had more “casual” perspective on sexual activities, showing willingness to engage in non-committed relationships. These 3 participants were identified as SANS. On the other hand, the other group of 4 expressed challenges in finding sexual partners. They emphasized the importance of emotional intimacy in their sexual encounters. Therefore, some of the participants expressed an irregularity and negative effect of being single on sexual field. Participant 17 summarizes the latter as following:

“I am a person, I think for me sex gets much better with time and getting to know the person and being also like emotionally attracted to the person. So knowing that I don't really enjoy one night stands much, also physically and emotionally, I'm mostly avoiding them now.” (Participant 17)

In general, participants stated that they have more time for their social surroundings and have more freedom to make plans with their friends without the necessity of considering a romantic partner. Expressing happiness stemming from not having ‘distractions’ is observed. Beside having friend groups, some of the participants were active member of some social or political communities such as artist collectives, single mothers’ community, queer community, fellowships, work team or women’s community. When ‘go-to person’ was asked for personal matters, all participants named one or more than one person without hesitation, mostly being their best friends or family members.

“It's been a lot more social ever since I started going out by myself. People include you more because they're not expecting you to spend your evenings, your weekends, your holidays with your partner, opening up a lot of space.” (Participant 4)

Some respondents reflected on their work life in relation to it's impact on having or not having a romantic relationship. Participant 12 explicitly told that there is no correlation between these two subjects. Participant 15, adding on the code created by Participant 12, expressed that dedication on work remains consistent whether she is in a relationship or single. However, even though there was no clear evidence that singlehood has an impact on work life, work life indicates an impact on being single. There were three participants mentioning how their work related mobility effects their romantic life and causing them to remain single voluntarily or

involuntarily. Participant 9, for example, had a job where relocation was required, and this employment type created structural barriers to maintain stable relationships.

“I have this job which actually makes having a relationship very complicated, because I work in international development corporations. Somehow, you regularly change the country where you live. After my study, I went to country A, then I went to country B, then I went to country C, and then I came to Germany. So, all of these decisions when you have a relationship are so much harder to make. Let's say that my longest lasting relationship ended because of this, because my partner was also working in development cooperation and we didn't get a job in the same country... let's say three relationships I lost more or less due to the fact that I work in this field.” (Participant 9)

The experience of mobility due to work as a single individual of Participant 1 was similar to the experience of Participant 9. He highlights the trade-offs and challenges faced by academics, particularly in terms of finding a balance between career and personal life. Therefore, the participants' decision to pursue careers in such structures have a direct impact on their relationship decisions and status. The participants' answers also reflect on the globalization of workforce, creating some challenges on personal and professional level.

“The instability of academic positions often led to frequent changes in contracts and living arrangements. This constant moving around made it difficult to maintain a stable relationship. There were instances when I felt a genuine connection with someone, but my dedication to my career and academic pursuits took precedence. Consequently, this focus on my work made it difficult for me to sustain long-term partnerships.” (Participant 1)

Participant 2 (SANS), on the other hand, explained that he voluntarily chooses to remain single due to his work-related mobility. His lifestyle where he needs to travel frequently leaves no room for a romantic partnership.

“I've been consciously staying single because I do prefer the freedom and my lifestyle with all the travelling and getting around much. I feel it's not fair for the other person to only see me every three months but get emotionally too invested, if that makes sense.

I think it's not fair to the other person so I choose to stay away from that.” (Participant 2 - SANS)

Single status in the office life is mentioned by one respondent. Participant 14 shared her experience in the working environment where the routines of colleagues with partners and herself seemed noticeably different than each other. This contrast comes from the shared responsibilities of romantic partnerships, such as childcare or household work. She highlights the way she navigates the work-life balance. While singlehood can offer flexibility in many ways, it can also create challenges such as having less justification for prioritizing personal time.

“In the office jobs I've had, my single status was quite noticeable. There was this contrast between how I managed my time and how colleagues with partners did. Their routines seemed more structured and balanced due to shared responsibilities like picking up kids or coordinating with their partners. Being single did affect me in those environments. I didn't have the same kind of obligations or commitments that they did. I had no partner to rush home to or share responsibilities with, which sometimes made me feel like I had no legitimate reason to leave the office on time or not engage in social activities after work.” (Participant 14)

Participants 6, 12 and 15 expressed that their working life or concentration on their professional responsibilities does not change with their relationships status, whereas the rest briefly explained their current job situation or stayed remained silent about their work-singlehood paradigm.

#### 4.2 Definition of Singlehood

Single participants were asked about their perception on singlehood, whether they would define it as a lifestyle, as a deliberate choice, as circumstance or as an identity. Some of the participants gave straightforward answers, while others struggled to define singlehood in these terms and mentioned more than one definition. Most answers were pointing that singlehood is a circumstance, followed by the idea that it is a lifestyle. In the table below, the numbers of answers gathered for each category is shown, identifying SANS and total number of singles separately.



*Table 1: Distribution of Definitions of Singlehood by Category for SANS and Total Number of Singles*

CHOICE	CIRCUMSTANCE	IDENTITY	LIFESTYLE
2 SANS	3 SANS	2 SANS	1 SANS
4 in total	8 in total	3 in total	6 in total

Even though there are 2 SANSes defining singlehood as an identity, their answers on the subject were not sharp. Participant 4 sees singlehood as an identity former in the long run, but not for the beginning of being single.

“I think it probably forms your identity to some extent because it forms your life choices and your life abilities. I suppose if you are single for a long time it probably will become part of your identity. But at this early stage, I wouldn't say that it is identity forming.  
(Participant 4 - SANS)

Participant 8, who partially sees singlehood as an identity, claimed that singlehood can be seen as a social category and identity for long-term singles, while it might change from person to person, suggesting that singlehood is not a one-size-fits-all concept but rather a diverse phenomenon.

“I would say it's both an identity and also a category. Because I feel like it's something that people live it very differently. I think it's like a spectrum from people who make a very conscious choice of being single and also don't want to be in any kind of relationship ever, to those who are constantly dating and constantly seeking out the next relationship. So it varies and also for some people it's really a temporal thing whereas for some it's more like an identity and a social category they put themselves into very consciously. I feel personally I'm kind of in the middle of the spectrum. If I need to describe my identity, it definitely would not come up as one of the first things I would name. (Participant 8 - SANS)

Participant 14 views singlehood as a blend of various aspects, representing the majority of participants very well. She highlights the potential for singlehood to be transformative in time. This view suggests that singlehood is not a monolithic experience but a status that can vary based on individual choices and circumstances.

“It's a blend of all those aspects, I think. At least from my perspective here. However, I don't think it's universally the same everywhere. For me, it's a combination of adopting a certain lifestyle while also being a personal journey in how much I can handle and resolve on my own. Sometimes it's incredibly enjoyable, to the point where you don't even want to take a break from it. So, while it can initially start as a lifestyle, it might evolve into something more profound as time goes on. It varies depending on how you observe others around you who are also single but have different ways of approaching it. Take for instance the elderly residents in my building; they live alone and are technically single, but not necessarily by choice. Their situations resulted from various circumstances like the loss of a partner. In my case, I consciously choose this way of life.” (Participant 14)

On the potential differences of personal narratives, Participant 15 shares similar thoughts with Participant 14, stressing that it is hard to define singlehood with one of the categories that are mentioned above.

“Singlehood can encompass different aspects, and I think it can be seen as a lifestyle, an identity, and a choice, depending on the individual. For some, being single is a conscious decision, a choice that suits their preferences and goals. It can also be a lifestyle that allows for certain freedoms, independence, and opportunities to focus on personal growth. On the other hand, for some people, singlehood might be more of a temporary status, a choice for a specific period of time while they explore their own needs and desires. It can also be a part of someone's identity, especially if they are comfortable and content with being single and view it as an integral part of who they are. So, overall, I believe singlehood can manifest in various ways and hold different meanings for different individuals, ranging from a chosen lifestyle to a temporary phase or even a core aspect of one's identity.” (Participant 15)

One of the SANS, Participant 16, also mentioned about the individual differences. For him, these categories depend on the personal perspectives. However, he believes being single is more of a circumstance rather than a fixed identity. He added that experiencing being single and being in a relationship is cyclical.

2 participants deliberately expressed that singlehood cannot be an identity trait because it does not define the personality or it's not a core part of the identity. Participant 1 expressed his thoughts as following:

“I don't perceive being single as an inherent part of my identity. It's not something I feel defines my personality or character. Rather, it's a state that results from other aspects of my life and current preferences. I don't derive any specific sense of satisfaction or identity from it. It's more of a consequence of my life circumstances at this point in time. I don't actively label myself as "single" or dwell on that aspect. For instance, I was residing in Berlin until recently, and during that time, I had a brief dating experience that eventually concluded. Now, I'm involved with someone else and enjoying spending time with them. So, while you could technically categorize me as "single," my time is not exclusively spent in solitude. I don't find any significant defining qualities in the term "single" when it comes to my personal identity.”  
(Participant 1)

Participants were also asked open-ended question about their feelings around their single status. Freedom, happiness and loneliness were the feelings that were repeated by most of the participants. Freedom was seen as a space to grow and be yourself, where there are no obligations and responsibilities towards someone else. Some of the participants mentioned that they are feeling happy to be able to spend more time with their friends and to focus on their social activities. Loneliness was mentioned only by the singles who are looking to partner up, not by SANSes. The following quote draws a summary for the romantic connection some singles might be seeking:

“There are moments when I feel intensely lonely, particularly during tough days or moments of stress. The absence of someone to offer a simple hug or physical comfort can be difficult to deal with. While friends are supportive and can uplift my spirits, the emotional intimacy and connection with a partner are something else entirely.

Moreover, I find myself yearning for shared dreams and experiences with a partner. There are aspirations I have that I'd love to pursue together with someone special, rather than solely on my own. Not being in a relationship means I'm missing out on working towards those dreams with a significant other. It's a complex blend of feeling free and independent while also experiencing moments of loneliness and longing for a deeper connection.” (Participant 15)

The feelings that are mentioned and can be categorized as negative were stress, worry, insecurity and boredom. There were no SANS sharing any of these feelings. On the other hand, lightness, centered, clarity, pride, freedom, fun, relaxed, happiness, confidence and familiarity were expressed as positive feelings by the participants.

#### 4.3 Societal Responses towards Singlehood

In the later parts of the interview, there were questions to understand societal responses to singlehood on individual level. During this part, participants shared their experiences of criticism due to their single status, the types of attitudes they receive, whether there exists a social stigma towards singlehood and what form it takes. Most of the answers agreed the fact that there is a stigma towards single individuals either by the society in general or from family members/relatives.

“Yes, I think there can be a certain stigma associated with being single. The perception might be that if you haven't had a long-term partner by a certain point, there is something wrong or unusual about you. This feeling of being "different" or "unusual" might intensify as time goes on without a committed partner. Sometimes, this perception could make you wonder if you're somehow not mentally healthy or if there's something about you that doesn't align with societal norms... People might wonder why someone hasn't found a partner yet or assume that they're too complicated to be in a relationship. There could also be an assumption that single individuals are choosing to be alone because they're either too self-sufficient or not interested in sharing their life with someone else. This perception might come across as arrogant to others. In summary, the stigma against being single could manifest as a perception that something is wrong, unusual, or different about individuals who haven't entered into long-term relationships. While it might affect different groups in various ways, the underlying

theme is often a questioning of why someone is single and whether they're meeting societal expectations. (Participant 14)

“There's an expectation in society just in general that being single is something you need to move away from. And I don't think that's healthy. I think that we create expectations for people that just aren't realistic in the 21st century, and we hurt people with that. (Participant 2 - SANS)

#### 4.3.1 Being Woman and Single

When talking about societal expectations and pressures, the participants were asked if there is a any specific group where the stigma is harsher against. Among the answers, ‘women’ was repeated by each respondent. Participants stated that traditional expectations from women to partner up and to have children at a certain age are still the expectation of today, and these pressures only apply to women.

“I think it's very different whether you're male or female. Because it's felt in Germany that if you as a woman, if you're single, childless, you are kind of failing your responsibility to society. I think there's an element of fear about unmarried, single, childless women, I think they're considered a threat, an oddity. As if we lack something.” (Participant 4 - SANS)

“It is harsher for anyone who's not a white male. I think if you're a white male, middle class, ideally you'll have the easiest ride... whereas if you are from any kind of other group, you will be definitely stigmatized because there will be something wrong with you.” (Participant 4 - SANS)

“I feel pity. And I don't appreciate that. There's a difference between empathy and sympathy. And what I get is sympathy, but I don't get empathy. People don't ask you how you feel as a single. They assume that you're sad or that you're looking for someone, you know. And then, I am dating, so also the image I give is that I'm looking for someone. And probably that's also one of the reasons why I like Berlin and why I live here. But when you also work in a context where you don't surround yourself with people you know. I very much do feel like the expectation that you should not be single

at my age as a woman. I think it's different for men. And I don't know how it is for non-binary persons. (Participant 9)

Criticising women due to single status while approving men for being single grows the gender equality. While some of the participants mentioned the stigma towards women, some of them also highlighted the absence of stigma towards men.

“There seems to be more societal pressure and judgment directed towards women when it comes to being single. There's a certain age-related stereotype that women often face, where if they're single at a certain point in their lives, there can be assumptions made about them being "problematic" or having issues that are keeping them from being in a relationship. This stereotype doesn't seem to apply as strongly to men. (Participant 17)

“Probably as a single man, it is the easiest single existence.” (Participant 10)

Another topic mentioned around gender was biological clock. The term is often used to refer when a woman should have a child as their fertility declines by age and there might be some limitations to give birth at later ages. Therefore, women tend to think about whether to have children or not as they get older. Two of the participants (at the age of 37 and 33) mentioned about their biological clock and the pressure it creates on the decision of being partnered up to have a child.

“Sometimes my inner clock says okay, since I also want to have children at some point, I feel that the pressure is becoming a bit higher than it was five years ago.” (Participant 13)

As women get older, Participant 9 argues, society looks down at them and expect them to have a family and children. This pressure is already visible at their 30's. In other terms, society puts more pressure on single woman as they are older.

“I'm 37 and I actually would like to have children, but somehow I have the feeling that maybe this is already too late or maybe I should just have it in a co-parenting situation. So there's a lot of pressure from this aspect. The other thing is that somehow society looks upon you. When you're single in your 20s, no one cares, but when you're single

in your 30s, especially if you don't have children and you're my age, you get a lot of pity. I'm so sorry for all these women who don't have children. You also understand the norm that still exists in society... I really feel this expectation that as a woman your primary goal in life really should be having a family and having children. I find what I'm struggling more with is this expectation than the actual fact. Because it always feels like you're not enough, you have to fight for something.” (Participant 9)

Three participants mentioned that they have criticism particularly from their grandparents who are generationally different than the respondents. When talking about cultural aspect of singlehood, Participant 11 mentioned that millennials and Gen-Z do not hold the traditional values like having a family and children anymore. Participant 13, later, has shared her experience with her grandparents on the issue of singlehood.

“I think as a woman, you can feel a little bit of push like society intended as my grandfather. He pushes me a lot, he wants grandchildren and he cannot understand why at my age I'm still single... My grandmother thinks that I should have someone or I cannot be a normal person or I cannot have a normal life without someone. (Participant 13)

#### 4.3.2. Location Based Stigma

Participants from different cultures expressed that there is a stigma in their home countries, and participants who moved from their home country did not mention a stigma in the country they moved to. Participant 9 said “When you live abroad, the norms of the society where you're in don't affect you so much.” and this line applies some of the other participants. For example, Participant 6, who is originally from Bulgaria and living in Germany at the moment, sees no stigma towards single individuals in Germany but in Bulgaria.

“It depends on the cultural context. In Germany, I don't see any such thing. But in my home country, Bulgaria, there is a stigma around singlehood where people would just label you as selfish or egoistic if you're single, and just not even consider any of the aspects around this or the reasons. They would consider nothing around this but just a singlehood as if some people are choosing it absolutely deliberately and criticise even

though it's not their place to do that. I guess it depends on societies. So back home, I've seen that being exercised as a criticism, but in Germany not.” (Participant 6)

Similar to the experience of Participant 6, German participants who moved to Berlin from different locations expressed similar thoughts. Berlin is a city known with its openness to diverse identities, cultures and ideas. The answers gathered during the interviews showed that the city is also open to single status.

“I would say there's also a huge difference between being in Berlin compared to other cities, to other German cities. If I go back to my hometown, which is quite a small village, everybody in my age is already married or has a family or bought a house. In Berlin, it makes it pretty easy to be single or to have a single life. (Participant 10)

“In a city like Berlin, where diverse models of living are accepted, it's manageable to navigate being single. The range of options goes beyond just the traditional family structure. However, I can imagine that in other places, societal pressure might be more pronounced, making it less enjoyable. (Participant 14)

“If I think about Berlin, I think that's a pretty good example of a society where if you're single, you're in good company and no one judges you. But as a person who knows something in Italy, the cultural situation is different and being single there might expose you to stigmatization.” (Participant 1)

#### 4.4. Policies around Singlehood

Participants were asked if they encounter any issues regarding their single status in policies, institutions, or civil service. 9 out of 17 participants mentioned about tax benefits for married couples. Participant 17 summarizes the general thought in his answer. He expresses a dissatisfaction with the tax structure in Germany, particularly the situation with single status. He highlights the fact that living alone as a single individual creates higher living expenses including rent, kitchen supplies, bills, and other living costs, compared to couples living together. Therefore, single individuals already pay more for their expenses, and he raises the question of whether the tax system equally considers living arrangements and financial benefits regardless of the marital status.



“The way taxes work in Germany. It seems that being a single person comes with higher taxes in various aspects, and this really bothers me. It doesn't make sense to me because, in reality, living alone tends to have higher expenses compared to a couple with similar circumstances – similar age, no kids, similar work fields, and earning around the same income. For example, my expenses for rent, kitchen supplies, electricity bills, and other living costs would be much lower if I were sharing an apartment with someone. The difference in rent between a one-room and a two-room apartment can be substantial. So, it feels quite discriminatory when taxes are increased specifically for single individuals.” (Participant 17)

Participant 3 is a single mother living with her child and mentioned about the benefits of being married. She expresses a sense of discrimination by tax laws in Germany. The “Ehegattensplitting” law which provides significant tax benefits to couples with a high income earner and a non working spouse. Here, she raises a concern about the fairness of the law, as she also financially supports someone who is not working in the household, her child, but the law does not cover children. Therefore, she proposes a shift in the law from spousal benefits to a more inclusive family oriented approach. The question here is why individuals who the only income earner in a household are cannot receive equal tax cuts regardless of their marital status.

“I feel discriminated by tax laws in Germany. Because there is this law called Ehegattensplitting, where basically if you have a high income and your spouse makes no money, you have incredible tax cuts. So you pay a lot less taxes. And that makes me wonder, I also have a person that doesn't work. That is like taking away from my income. Why do I not get some tax cuts? Because that person is not married to me. They are still a person. So if you are the only income earner in the household, you get tax benefits. I agree with that, but it should be a family thing and not a spouse thing. And the more kids you have and that you take of by yourself because guess what I am not receiving any government money, I am actually working to make the needs met and I shouldn't be punished for that by the government. They should give me tax breaks because I have to make a living for other human that does not contribute. I totally feel like singlehood is an issue. And I think it is outdated to have financial or any benefits, or give any benefits to people for getting married. People are not more or less human

because they marry somebody. That seems extremely wrong. Quite primitive, maybe.”  
(Participant 3)

#### 4.5 Reforming the Society

Participants were asked to depict an ideal society for single individuals as the last question of the interview. Some of the answers were gathered around material values, whereas some were describing new family formations. Most of the participants mentioned an ideal society where the policies applied to partned/married individuals also apply to single individuals. For example, married couples have remarkable tax advantages in Germany and in many countries, and single individuals do not share these benefits. In addition, some participants depicted an ideal society where there is more community building for singles.

“It's always a personal choice and we need to uplift those personal choices. We need to find ways to build communities that let people experience and live relationships the way they want to. (Participant 2 - SANS)

Accommodation for singles was another topic mentioned by two participants. In the current housing arrangements, there are places for single individuals, families, and communities. However, it is possible to improving these arrangements and encouraging efficient use of living spaces can create better living conditions for all. Participant 14 expresses her thought on the topic as following:

“In an ideal society for singles, there could be some practical adjustments. For instance, smaller cars designed for fewer passengers, as there might not be a need for the standard five-seat configuration. Additionally, housing structures could be reconsidered. I'm intrigued by the concept of compact living spaces, somewhat similar to the Japanese model, where you have efficient yet comfortable accommodations that encourage a more communal lifestyle. While many aspects of daily life like the nine-to-five work schedule would likely remain unchanged, the way spaces are organized could be adapted to accommodate more single individuals. Collective housing models, where each person has their own room but shares common areas like kitchens, could become more prevalent. There could even be some incentives or social pressure to encourage efficient use of living space. In essence, an ideal society for singles could revolve

around optimizing space and resources while promoting a sense of community and shared living arrangements. This could help combat feelings of isolation or excess space that can sometimes be associated with single living.” (Participant 14)

Family and family forming was questioned by some participants. Family is, in its traditional definition, fundamental social unit that consists of heterosexual couple with children where the husband as breadwinner provides economic support while the wife takes care for both husband, children and home. (Segal, 1983). However, in 21st Century’s Europe, there are different expectations from the term. Some of the participants expressed their thoughts on alternative family formations. Participant 2 (SANS) reflects on the traditional family unit, highlighting that even though there has been changes in societal norms, there is still a dominating expectation around the traditional family structure.

“As a society, we still have this dogma of mother-father-children. That is something that for some reason still plays quite a big role these days, even though we moved away from traditional parenthood models, at least in my circles we did that. And I think that is something that will change in the next 10-20 years as well. We will reach a point where really different relationship models and also singlehood models will be accepted and also politically seen. But it's a long way to get there.” (Participant 2 - SANS)

Participant 14 shares her experience of not choosing to have a family as a 33 year old female, and how this choice has led to different treatment by society. She notes that not forming a family can be interpreted as being lazy or avoiding responsibilities towards the society. She also reports that her social circle has mixed feelings about singlehood. While some of them desire family path, others find it challenging to start and maintain a family.

“In my case, as I have chosen not to have a family and that's clear by now, there are instances where I feel treated differently. It is as if there is a presumption that if you are not on the family path, you lack long-term goals or ambitions. Family is often seen as the ultimate life project, absorbing all your time and demanding lifelong commitment. If you do not commit to this 'job' indefinitely, you might be perceived as somewhat 'lazy,' having chosen a route where you continue to enjoy yourself without responsibilities. Observing my friends, there is a mix of emotions at play. Some envy the family path, others realizes how demanding it can be. It is evident when comparing

them to others who are dealing with the challenges of starting a new family and trying to hold things together. In a way, it might seem like a more cautious choice, not daring to venture into the complexities of family life. This decision, while it offers a sense of safety, does not always feel fulfilling because there's a sense of missing out on something. There is potential for personal growth, cultivating emotional stability, and perhaps developing a stronger personality by embracing more challenges.” (Participant 14)

Participant 12 addresses the concept of chosen family. She mentions the evolution of the family due to factors like globalization and mobility, challenges the conventional definition of family that is only biological or legally bound and highlights emerging forms of families based on living arrangements and support.

“This is a big topic because the family unit now doesn't exist anymore. Before, people were staying in the same village and getting a unity by creating the family. But now people travel. For example in Covid, I have lived with two people for three years. I consider them a family. We live together, we support, we know each other. But the state doesn't provide us external support as we are a family. (Participant 12)

## 5. Discussion

The primary aim of the present study was to explore singlehood in more detail and to investigate individuals who are not seeking to partner, referred as SANS. By using a set of comprehensive interview questions, the study is aimed to uncover similarities and distinctions within the single population, demonstrating that singles cannot be viewed as a homogenous entity that lacks individual variations or preferences. From the answers of participants, their willingness to partner up was observed, and 6 of 17 were named as SANS. These individuals exclusively show low levels of relationship desire in their responses. From the rest 11 participants, some of them specifically mentioned that they would like to have a relationship, some of them told that they are just looking for right person to come out. The relationship history of the respondents was analysed, however, there has been no correlation between durations or numbers of past relationships and being a SANS.

First research question was focused on the discovery of single lifestyle with different areas including work life, social life, hobbies, vacations, personal values, family relations, sexual life, and intellectual values. The repeating theme from the answers was embracing more time and freedom coming from singlehood. Participants find more ease to structure their days, more freedom to choose activities without the pressure of aligning with someone else. More time and freedom repeated itself in all areas of lifestyle including sports, travelling, social life, work life, and intellectual life. The relationship between an individual's sense of freedom and their singlehood status can change according to personal values, individual expectations, or societal factors. Freedom came out as a result of being single in the current study, demonstrating that single individuals have more freedom for their personal goals or interests. However, freedom can also serve as a reason to remain single instead of committing to a romantic relationship or marriage (Probhakar, 2011). This analysis supports Inglehart's (1997) value change theory where Individual freedom and personal autonomy is valued over conventional ways of thinking. Some individuals can actively choose to be single if they value their independence over mutual commitment with a partner. In the current study, the category of SANS fully fit into this frame, as they prioritize self interests over relationships, and they are actively remaining single. Therefore, understanding how singles position their freedom in regard to their singlehood and to what extent they prefer freedom over a relationship can be given place in further research.

The stress on "more time" in the answers of participants builds on the existing research on how singlehood has various impacts on the lifestyle of an individual. First of all, in the absence of a partner, a single person can have more time to focus on their leisure activities, social circles, personal hobbies or self-care (Bianchi et. al., 2003). Work life, however, was not mentioned as a field where the participants feel more time and flexibility coming with singlehood. As mentioned in the results section, two participants explicitly expressed that they do not experience any particular difference in their work life whether they are single or in a partnership. On the other hand, even though singlehood has no significant impact on work life, the findings suggest that work life has influence on the single status. Three participants (1, 2, 9) were frequently mobile due to their working conditions. The lifestyle in which they need to change the country they live in due to work or travelling often for work reasons results in remaining single voluntarily or involuntarily. According to the statements of Participant 1 and 9, they were single because of their working conditions. Participant 9 mentioned that three relationships she had has ended more or less due to her working conditions, she added that she

was not willing to compromise for the relationships. This line supports the existing knowledge on the value change and individualism. As traditional values are changed with post-materialistic values, individual freedom and personal autonomy gain importance, the individual has become independent from the traditional and social institutions (Halman, 1996). Therefore, instead of settling down and forming a family, individuals are pursuing their career goals even though it requires constant mobility. Supporting the literature, the results report that globalization and mobility challenges traditional mindsets that prioritize early marriage and traditional family establishment. Individuals exposed to globalized perspectives may perceive singlehood as a charming option for self-discovery and personal growth, rather than viewing marriage as the only path. Participant 2 (SANS) stated that remaining single due to work is a choice for him. This finding goes parallel to the previous research on the topic, confirming that desire for independence is also a significant force behind the decision to remain single and exploring singlehood as a lifestyle option where the individual can prioritize their career goals over committing to a partnership (Probhakar, 2011).

It is observed that the respondents choose activities in their single lifestyle where they can gain new skills, improve their physical strength and mental health, improve their intellectuality; these findings support the existing knowledge on the post-materialistic values such as personal development. Participant 17's statement on the topic indicates that single lifestyle allows a more satisfying and intense intellectual life whereas the same activities are repeated during a relationship, leaving no room for personal development. On social life, driving an expectation from the existing literature on the topic, meeting friends more often and sharing more activities like holidays with them was a repeated theme. Participants stated their sexual lives were irregular, however, there was no statement where this causes a problem. The answers of SANS respondents suggests that there is no negative implication of singlehood on sexual life. They can enjoy casual sexual activities and do not have any problem engaging in these activities. On the other side, other single respondents expressed that they might look for romantic connection to enjoy any sexual activity, or singlehood affected this area of life negatively. Therefore, SANS individuals differ from the rest of the single population in this regard. These findings reflect a diversity of experiences among single individuals and suggests further investigation on the sexual lives of singles, since there is limited research on the topic.

Defining singlehood was a challenging question for all the respondents. Singlehood is a complex and multifaceted concept and how it is perceived by single individuals can vary to a

large extent. The question in the study offered the interviewees four options to define singlehood: choice, circumstance, identity or lifestyle. Many of them mentioned that they never thought about singlehood as a part of their core identity, or never questioned how they perceive their singlehood. Identity is composed of individual's self concept, their social roles, relationships to others and personal attributes. For some, single status can reflect a significant part of their identity, or just "a phase in between relationships". However, among the three participants who claimed that singlehood can be seen as an identity, 2 were SANS participants. Therefore, the view on singlehood as a distinct identity and not looking for a romantic partner can be related; however, further research is needed to claim that SANS individuals perceive single status as a part of their identity. Most of the interviewees ( $N:8$ ) view singlehood as a circumstance, a consequence of some actions; lifestyle ( $N:6$ ) and choice ( $N:4$ ). These results support the argument of the current study that singlehood is a concept that can be understood, experienced, and defined differently by single individuals.

In the later parts of the interviews, participants have shared their experiences about societal responses towards singlehood and how they interact with society as single individuals. When the participants were asked whether there is a stigma towards singles from society, majority agreed and claimed that the stigma also has a target. Regardless of the gender of the respondent, it was argued that single woman is seen "problematic" or as if they "fail" their responsibility to the society as a home-maker in the traditional sense. This result supports the theory of DePaulo (2006) on how single women is facing societal pressure to follow the traditional path, and despite the increased acknowledgement of women's autonomy, women's choice of single status is being interpreted as a problem (Budgeon, 2016). Findings on the societal response indicate that gender, in particular, is intersecting with the single status. Therefore, the theoretical framework of the study can shed a light on the topic. Intersectionality theory suggests that identities do not exist in isolation, they are in interaction with each other, and they shape individuals' experiences. Intersection of identities may create unique forms of privilege, disadvantage, or discrimination. Through the intersectionality lens, societal norms, expectations, and stigmatizations can be explored. The observations made by some of the interviewees suggest that white male single individuals do not face any social pressures or stigmatization regarding their single status. Therefore, being white (race) and being male (gender) intersects with single status and creates a distinct social identity in which individuals experience certain privileges. Participant 10, who identifies as male, states the following: "Probably as a single man, it's the easiest single existence.". This observation also indicates

that gender identity has a direct impact on one's experience on singlehood. Moreover, the answer to the question "Is there any specific group where the stigmatization is harsher against?" was "women" by each participant. Therefore, it is notable that women's disadvantageous position in singlehood was acknowledged to a large extent. However, there were no statements addressing the intersectionality of other social identities, such as race or sexual orientation. This point underscores a gap in the understanding of the complex structure of intersectional identities that shape individual experiences of singlehood.

Findings support the existing knowledge that even though there has been changes in the values of society and steps towards gender equality, there are still traditional expectations from individuals based on the gender. The age of the critics was not asked, however, there has been some answers as "I do feel criticism, maybe from my grandma and my mother." (Participant 2 - SANS) which gives an idea of the age group where the criticism might be coming from. Another topic around gender and singlehood was biological clock. The term biological clock is often used to refer to the decreasing fertility of individuals, especially of women, as they age. Many women are aware of this age-related fertility decrease and they might feel the urge to form a family and have children before it's getting hard to have. The stress of not being able to have children later in life can create remarkable pressure to partner up. Two participants at the age of 33 and 37 stated that they feel the biological pressure and it might influence their decisions to partner up. Not only the biological pressure, but societal pressure is also increasing as women get older, according to Participant 9. Even though there are technological advancements in fertility, such as egg freezing, these options were not mentioned about the single women interviewees when talking about biological clock. The reason for this can be the financial and medical difficulties these methods might create.

The concern about the biological clock is a complicated issue influenced by the intersection of age and gender, since it is primarily associated with women at certain ages. This pressure can affect women's life in various ways including their mating choices, career decisions and overall well being. It is crucial to acknowledge this intersectional aspect of singlehood that may not be experienced in the same way by men, as societal expectations around age differ between genders.

From the answers about societal responses to singlehood, location was mentioned frequently by the interviewees, even though there was no clear indication in the questions for it. It is



observed that participants view their hometowns or home countries as places where the stigma against singles is more severe, in contrast to more accepting places such as Berlin, Germany. This observation highlights an interesting aspect of how cultural norms and regional differences can influence the experience of singlehood. In the rural areas, for example, cultural values and traditional family structures can create a conservative view on singlehood. Participant 10 makes the following statement about his hometown in a rural area: “If I go back to my hometown, which is quite a small village, everybody in my age is already married or has a family or bought a house.”. On the contrary, in the urban areas like Berlin, society tends to embrace diversity and progressive values. Participant 14 expresses her thoughts on the topic as following: “In a city like Berlin, where diverse models of living are accepted, it's manageable to navigate being single. The range of options goes beyond just the traditional family structure.”.

When the open-ended question about the feelings regarding their single status was asked, there were three repeating answers: freedom, happiness, and loneliness. As discussed above, freedom is emphasizing values like having autonomy and independence. Happiness was another prominent feeling among participants, reflecting satisfaction with their single status. The reason for their happiness were expressed as having more time and freedom, especially for their social life, and not having any pressure or responsibility for a romantic commitment. This observation supports and adds to the existing knowledge on single's social life and satisfaction. However, an interesting distinction emerged when observing the feeling of loneliness. None of the SANSes mentioned this particular feeling, in fact not any negative feeling, suggesting that their satisfaction level with their single status can be higher. This distinction underscores the unique experiences within the single population and the role of the desire for a partnership in shaping feelings around singlehood.

### *Limitations*

The demographics of the participants were not aligned with the initial expectations as the desired diversity in terms of age and gender was not reached. The average age of the participants was 32, the youngest being 24, and the oldest being 43. Therefore, the data represents a certain age group for single population. Different age groups may have different perspective on singlehood due to their generational values, societal expectations, or personal development. Younger individuals can be more focused on self discovery and career building,

while older individuals might have different concerns such as aging parents or raising children. Acknowledging this limitation is important for the study, therefore, the findings reflect the experiences and perceptions of a certain age group. Additionally, 12 of the 17 participants were female, the rest consisted of 4 male and 1 nonbinary individual. The majority of the studies on singlehood investigate only binary male and female singles, leaving a gap for more diverse and inclusive research on the topic. As discussed above, gender intersects with the single status and plays a significant role in shaping individual experiences as well as societal expectations and cultural norms. Studying only binary genders might result in overlooking the experiences of other gender identities and not presenting an inclusive portrait of singlehood.

Moreover, even though qualitative study with open-ended questions allowed revealing rich personal narratives of single individuals, it's important to note that some responses showed noticeable confusion. As a results, some of the participants failed to provide clear answer to certain questions. For instance, when they were asked to articulate their perceptions on singlehood and whether they see it as a lifestyle, choice, circumstance or identity, respondents often struggled to come up with precise definitions. This suggests that conducting a questionnaire or a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research might have created more well defined responses, increasing the clarity of the findings.

### Future Research

Given the limitations outlined above, the present study was not able to gain comprehensive understanding on the singlehood of marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals and singles from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Understanding the nuances coming from the intersectionality of identities is crucial as it reveal distinct experiences of individuals. Therefore, the current research highlights the need for further research that explores the intersectionality of various social identities. Such research can contribute to more equal support systems and policies for individuals from different backgrounds.

The study also shed light on the impact of working conditions on the single status of participants. This subject provides valuable insights for further investigation, as it suggests that the working conditions and mobility of the individual plays a crucial role in shaping singlehood experiences. Also, there were critical areas where SANS and the rest of the single participants indicate notable distinctions. The first area centers on the perception on singlehood and how

they define this status, suggesting further exploration to understand diverse perceptions of singles. Secondly, it is worth considering additional research focused on singles' sexual lives and their associated needs. Notably, the current study revealed distinctions between SANS and the rest of the single group.

Additionally, it's important to note that the research was conducted exclusively in Europe with European participants. Conducting studies in various locations and cultures can offer opportunities to establish comparative frameworks. Such cross-cultural investigations are highly valuable in enhancing the understanding of the variations within the single population.

## 6. Conclusion

Despite the societal and value changes happened in the last decades, singles are still stereotyped, stigmatized and their unique differences are ignored (DePaulo, 2016; Tsutsui & Jiang, 2017). In this study, exploring singlehood in more detail and revealing a potential distinction within the group was aimed. In order to achieve this, a distinct social category is created. Singles who do not seek to partner (SANS) is a group in which individuals show low desire to partner up and are satisfied with their single status. By studying this group, the study aimed to show that singlehood is not just the absence of a relationship or marriage but can also be a conscious choice. To enrich the findings and have a deeper understanding of single population, singles and SANSes were included in the study. This method allowed the research to compare the dynamics of two groups.

The first research question focused on the lifestyle of singles, which is important to understand their social roles, interests, and professional lives. By utilizing an extensive array of questions including work life, hobbies, vacations, family life, intellectual life, personal values and social life, the study gathered insights into the lifestyle of singles on personal and social level. Second research question was designed to understand how singlehood interact with other social identities. By recognizing and examining these interactions between identities, it is possible to move beyond simplistic stereotypes and better policies can be implemented for single people. The third research question was to understand the perception of single individuals on singlehood, whether they perceive it as a lifestyle, as an identity, a choice or circumstance. Lastly, societal responses towards single individuals were investigated.

Singlehood covers a range of experiences, emotions, and social dynamics. Therefore, qualitative research methods were used in the study to dive into the complex realm of singlehood experiences and reveal individual narratives. In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were carefully prepared and interview had been conducted with 6 SANS and 17 single individuals in total, selected based on the criteria of being identified as single and living in Europe.

The results of the study indicate that single individuals experience singlehood differently, their self-perception and personal narratives vary among the population. While more time and freedom underscored by most of the participants; age, gender, and location are the categories where the experiences remarkably differ from each other. The comparison between singles who are seeking to partner up and not seeking in this study provides valuable insights into the emotional landscape of singlehood as well as their definition of singlehood and sexual life. While seeking singles reported both positive and negative feelings by highlighting the complexity of emotional state of singlehood, SANS participants only expressed positive feelings about their single status, demonstrating high levels of satisfaction. Also, SANS participants reported that there is no negative implication of singlehood on their sexual lives, whereas other single participants mentioned irregularity and negative impact of singlehood. These distinctions are worth emphasizing the importance of conducting further research on SANS as a distinct category within single population.

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## Appendix

### Participant Information and Consent form

According to recent statistics, the percentage of single individuals has been increasing in many countries over the past few decades. The trend towards an increasing number of single households is also evident in Germany. According to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, the proportion of single households in Germany has been increasing steadily over the past few decades. In 2020, almost 41% of households in Germany were single households, compared to just 27% in 1991 (Federal Statistical Office, 2021). This trend is especially observable in urban areas, where the proportion of single households is even higher. In Berlin, for example, almost 54% of households are single households (Statistisches Landesamt Berlin-Brandenburg, 2020).

Even though there is existing research on singlehood as stated above, there is a constant need for more detailed research on the single identity for several reasons. By studying singlehood as a social identity and recognizing being single as a choice and a deliberate act, we can advance the understanding of single status, develop single identity discourse, and address the needs of singles in society such as creating intentional communities, special housing arrangements, policy objectives, civil rights, and more.

The research objective of the present study will be to explore singlehood in more detail and singles who do not seek to partner (SANS) as a distinct social identity. The study consists of two parts: an online survey and an interview.

I ..... agree to participate in the research project titled Exploring Singlehood – A Qualitative Study In Germany, conducted by Sengul Ipek Aydin.

I consent to participate in the research project, and I am aware of the following:

- My participation is completely voluntary
- I hold the right to withdraw from the study at any time
- Confidentiality of my personal information

In addition, I consent to:

- audio recording of the interview that will be used only for transcription purposes

- publication of results from this study on the condition that my identify will not be revealed.

Date and signature:

## Interview Questions

Q1: Can you tell me your relationship history, even from early childhood?

Q2: Did you ever had a decision to be single? If yes, can you tell be about it? When, in what context, for how long, etc.

Q3: What do you feel when you are in a relationship?

Q4: Can you tell me about your experience of being single now?

Q5: Is being single a choice for you?

Q6: Can you describe your lifestyle as a single?

Work

Leisure

Friends

Hobbies

Vacations

Family and relatives

Sex life

Intellectual life

Special values

Q7: What are the feelings that arise from your experience of being single?

Q8: Are you feeling lonely, happy, relaxed, bored, etc? If so, in what situations or events do you feel triggered?

Q9: Are you a part of a community? Can you tell me about it?

Q10: How would you define singlehood? do you see it as a lifestyle/identity/choice for good/choice for now/something

Q12: Who is your go-to person when you want to talk on personal things?

Q13: Is being single a daily issue for you? In what way?

Q14: Is being single an issue for others in your life? In what way?

Q15: Are you encountering the issue of singlehood in policy/institutions/civil service?

Q16: What is the societal response to singlehood? Do you feel criticism from society at large?

Q17: In your opinion, is there a stigma against singles and what does it look like? Can you think of a specific group it's more harsh against (men, women, gay, trans, ect.).

Q18: What would be an ideal society for singles in your opinion?

## Declaration in lieu of oath

FB Politik- und Sozialwissenschaften  
Prüfungsbüro

Department of Politics & Social Sciences  
Examination Office

**MA Soziologie – europäische Gesellschaften****MA Sociology – European Societies**

*For English text, see below!*

**Eidesstattliche Erklärung zur Masterarbeit**

von

AYDIN, SENGUL IPEK, 5292380

(Name, Vorname(n), Matrikelnr.)

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die Masterarbeit selbständig und lediglich unter Benutzung der angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel verfasst habe.

Ich erkläre weiterhin, dass die vorliegende Arbeit noch nicht im Rahmen eines anderen Prüfungsverfahrens eingereicht wurde.

Berlin, den 10.10.2023



(Unterschrift)

**Declaration in lieu of oath re. Master's thesis**

by

AYDIN, SENGUL IPEK, 5292380

(Surname, first name(s), student ID No.)

This is to confirm that my Master's thesis was composed/authored independently by myself, using solely the referenced sources and support.

I additionally assert that this thesis has not been part of any another examination process.

10.10.2023

(Date)



(Signature)