

PIP Title: Single and under construction

PIP Research Question/Statement: An investigation into the socio-cultural construction of singleness. To what extent are singles constructed as figures of empowerment or the subject of exclusion?

Extract Section: Central Material - Chapter 3

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Additionally, gender norms remain central to shaping how individuals are constructed and perceived across all levels of society. As such, the traditional archetype for males has been enduringly determined by their micro-level function as the head of the family and its breadwinner, and meso and macro-level role as powerful leaders as inherent in patriarchal structures.¹⁰⁸ Arguably, these persistent constructions of masculinity tend to centralise highly around heterosexuality and the institution of marriage, and thus, according to this approach to masculinity, being single should be considered as “*unmanly*” or “*unproductive members of our prescribed social order*”.¹⁰⁹ However, it is evident that the sociocultural construction of masculine expectations has not played as extensive a role in determining the micro-level rejection and a negative status of single men, hence not significantly “*detering the prospect of single life as undesirable*,”¹¹⁰ particularly when compared to the expectations attached to women. While enduring cultural expectations of femininity and partnership stigmatise single women as a ‘problem’ to be solved, such cultural images have generally typified single men as autonomous,

¹⁰⁵ Content Analysis, Coming of Age and Romance Television Shows and Films of the 1970s - 2020s (April 2022)

¹⁰⁶ Male and Female Respondents, Questionnaire, Question 6, (March 2022)

¹⁰⁷ Hertel, J., Schütz, A., Depaulo, B.M., Morris, W.L., & Stucke, T.S. (2007). She’s single, so what? How are singles perceived compared with people who are married? *Zeitschrift Fur Familienforschung*, 19, p.141.

¹⁰⁸ Paprzycka, E. (2012) “Single Men - Typological Approach From The Perspective Of Sociocultural Gender,” *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis Folia Sociologica* 43, p. 11

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Ms Finola Laughren (The University of Sydney, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) April 2022

¹¹⁰ Male Respondent, Focus Group (April 2022)

powerful, controlling, assertive, and self-determined.¹¹¹ This was validated by the conducted content analysis which illustrated that popular culture via romance and coming of age films presented single men positively as *independent* and *confident* 72% of the time.¹¹² Despite this, if the filtering of macro-level beliefs through micro and meso-levels of societies is effectively sustained, it is assumed that the socio-culturally constructed gender roles associated with males included the “*family head*” and the family’s “*financial supporter*”,¹¹³ resulting from achievements, the informal power held, and the expected success of their professional endeavours.¹¹⁴ Hence, this construction of the patriarchal family structure and inherent masculine responsibilities within partnership effectively accentuates that being a single man, according to micro-level beliefs and values, is contradictory to the overarching patriarchal concept of masculinity, thus validating the alternative macro-level representation of the single man as *immature* or ‘*needing work*’ 64% of the time as evident in film and TV including Duckie Dale from *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and Nick Miller from *New Girl* (2011).¹¹⁵ Furthermore, coinciding with attempts to enhance female autonomy and independence, it is inherent that feminism has facilitated significant change in western dating culture and, ultimately, partnership since the 1970s. As such, despite the increased freedom and independence of individuals within relationships during the 1980s and 1990s, men were still expected to play principal roles in such relationships.¹¹⁶ Consequently, due to changing nature of partnership and prominent feminist agendas in the 1970s to 1990’s other models began to emerge in regards to the social construction of male singledom, to divert and justify the increased presence of the single man in conjunction with the declining marriage rates in this period.¹¹⁷ As such, representations strayed from the ‘*young bachelor*’, to a man who, simply, does not want to get married,¹¹⁸ Hence men who did not want to enter into a relationship with a woman and start a family were temporarily justified, and generally accepted, by the expectation that they had “*something more interesting to do*”¹¹⁹ whether it was in regards to career pursuits, an exploration of interests or “*sowing their ‘wild oats’ before finding a partner*”.¹²⁰ The accepted nature of these justifications, and the continued positive inclusion of the single man in public discourse is arguably reflective of the substantial extent to which single stigma was gendered during this period.

¹¹¹ Kim, A. (2021) The Traditional View of Gender, *The Burning of Rome*,

<https://www.theburningofrome.com/helpful-tips/what-is-the-traditional-view-of-gender/>

¹¹² Content Analysis, Coming of Age and Romance Films of the 1970s - 2020s (April 2022)

¹¹³ Interview, Ms Finola Laughren (The University of Sydney, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) April 2022

¹¹⁴ Wilcox, W. (2015) ‘Don’t be a bachelor: Why married men work harder, smarter and make more money’, *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/married-men-work-harder-and-smarter/>

¹¹⁵ Content Analysis, Coming of Age and Romance Television Shows and Films of the 1970s - 2020s (April 2022)

¹¹⁶ Klonkowska, A (2018) “Masculinity Assigned-Reassigned-Socially Constructed” *Men and Masculinities* 21, p. 215

¹¹⁷ Hayes, A., Weston, R., Qu, L., & Gray, M. (2010). *Families then and now: 1980-2010* (Facts Sheet). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

¹¹⁸ Klonkowska, A. M. (2018). “Masculinity: Assigned–Reassigned–Socially Constructed: The Social Reception of Trans Masculinity in Poland.” *Men and Masculinities*, 21, p. 219

¹¹⁹ Female Respondent, Questionnaire, Question 15 b), (March 2022)

¹²⁰ Female Respondent, Questionnaire, Question 15 b), (March 2022)