

# A Study of Single Women's Emotional Adjustment from an Individualized Perspective

Yao Liu\*

School of University of Jinan, Jinan 250022, Shandong Province, China

\*Corresponding author: Yao Liu, 13686380813@163.com

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**Abstract:** This study takes single women as the research object and analyzes women's emotional lives by applying the theory of individualization. It is found that single women have constructed a "self-centered" emotional interaction principle in their emotional world after they are free from the constraints of the traditional system, and they show a negative emotional attitude towards love. To make up for the lack of emotion, single women choose to seek substitutes to obtain emotional satisfaction. Interpretation of women's lives from an emotional perspective can further explore the deep-rooted reasons for the increase in China's non-marriage rate.

**Keywords:** Individualization; Single society; Single women; Emotional adjustment

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## 1. Introduction

According to the seventh national census data in China, the average age of women at first marriage in 2020 was 27.95 years old. At the same time, the unmarried rate among women aged 25 to 29 was as high as 51.3%, meaning that more than half of women in this age group were not married. The unmarried rate for women aged 30 to 34 was 18.4%<sup>[1]</sup>. This indicates that late marriage has become a common phenomenon, with an increasing number of women choosing to remain single. Singleness is increasingly becoming a result of personal value choices<sup>[1]</sup>.

Throughout the previous studies, it is found that the current domestic research on single women mainly focuses on the investigation and analysis of their marital dilemmas, as well as the group characteristics of single women. Through this study, it is hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of the emotional attitudes and life patterns of single women, to provide new insights into the objective cognition of singleness, and to provide some reference for policy design on how to guide individuals in their pursuit of happiness without jeopardizing the interests of society as a whole.

## 2. Theoretical perspectives and research methods

### 2.1. Individualization theory

In Habermas's view, the life world has become many small worlds with their norms under the influence

of industrialization and the increasing refinement of the division of labor, in which individuals follow the norms and rules of the world and internalize them into their own code of conduct, achieving organizational development and forming a self-culture. According to Riedel and Coca, the mobility of modern society is an important factor leading to individualization, such as the phenomenon of rapid urbanization of farmers [2]. For Beck, individualization has three meanings: first, the liberation from historically prescribed social forms and social constraints from traditional relations of domination and situations of existence; second, the loss of traditional security in terms of beliefs, dominant norms, and knowledge guiding action; and third, the entry into a new kind of social constraint [3]. Therefore, individualization refers to the process of pursuing individuality and freedom by “living for oneself” as individuals are freed from traditional concepts and constraints with the gradual weakening of the binding force of the established social forms, and the collapse of the recognized standardized life and reference charts.

## **2.2. Individualization has given rise to the emergence of single women**

The increase in the number of single women as a result of individualization is accompanied by the mutual construction of women’s self-awareness and ability to break away from their dependence on men, the most fundamental aspect of which is their economic independence [4]. The rise of women is mainly manifested in the fields of education and work. With the transformation of the national system, the economic transformation, and the weakening of the patriarchal ideology, women and men enjoy the same right to education, coupled with the popularization of the ideology of equality between men and women, the society provides more and more platforms for women’s development, and women no longer regard marriage as the ultimate goal of their lives. The more educated a woman is, the more likely she is to be able to find a satisfying job and have enough income to satisfy her desires and needs. In the field of work, women have gradually made the transition from “confined to the family, to accessible to the labor market, to free to enter and exit the labor market.” Free from direct ties to the family, women’s life trajectory has undergone a “surge of individualization” and, in conjunction with it, what functionalism calls a shift from assigned roles to acquired roles. Women are no longer constrained by family activities, and they can realize their life values in the workplace and enjoy their lives better. The pursuit of sophistication drives them to want to have more time for themselves, and they must live as individuals, not only allowed to have their behaviors but also required to have their behaviors. The process of individualization has opened another window in women’s lives, broadened their field of action, and created a widespread phenomenon of female individualization.

## **2.3. Research methods**

Thirty single women were selected in a snowball sampling. On the premise of voluntary participation, in-depth interviews were conducted with them to obtain their lifestyles in single life, and to gain a deeper understanding of their emotional attitudes and patterns of emotional life.

## **3. Shifting emotional life**

Emotion is a social culture constructed by human beings to maintain their own needs, but after the creation of this culture, it not only controls people’s emotional life and changes their emotional actions, but also further intensifies the control over people, and people in modern society are in a state of emotional loss of control [5]. After experiencing the socialization of emotions in the post-emotional society, single women, under the guidance of the single subculture, withdraw themselves from the emotional field of love and enter into other emotional relationships to obtain their spiritual satisfaction and needs and gain emotional energy by

participating in different emotional lives.

### **3.1. Lateral transfer**

Lateral transfer refers to skipping love and extending the chain of emotional interaction to other emotional fields, such as family and friendship. Emotional relationships are manifested in different types according to the pattern of differential order pattern. What is missing in the emotional world of women's emotional relationships can be compensated by other emotions. In an individual's emotional exchange process, affection is considered to be the emotion type with the most stability, the least rationalization, and the least weighing of emotional stakes. When most unmarried women need to get emotional support, they will first choose to supplement their emotional energy through affection. In recent years, the proportion of unmarried mothers has gradually increased, and the phenomenon of "borrowing sperm to give birth to a child" and surrogacy has also occurred frequently [6]. The phenomenon of surrogacy is also occurring frequently. Even though unmarried women have lost their interest and confidence in love, they still want to have the right and opportunity to become mothers. In addition, unmarried women can also get emotional support from like-minded friends. When life is difficult or they feel lonely, they can get emotional satisfaction by communicating with their friends and participating in community organizations and political groups. By experiencing different emotional life contents, the single women choose the type of emotional exchange with less emotional risk, the purpose is to obtain the intrinsic emotional rewards, in the process of lateral transfer, the emotional investment and return compared with love, more can make their spiritual fulfillment and sense of security.

### **3.2. Vertical transfer**

Vertical transfer refers to the transfer of emotions to other areas that are on a different level from love, such as work, pets, hobbies, and so on. Most single women will put more energy into their work to satisfy their self-spiritual needs by making achievements and honors in their work. On the other hand, by communicating and interacting with others at work, they transfer their emotional interactions to their coworkers. Secondly, many women choose to keep their favorite pets and plants to fill their emotional lives and call their pets "son" or "mom" in their daily lives, which to a certain extent makes up for the difficulties of women who are not married. This way of calling makes up, to a certain extent, for the difficulties that unmarried women have in establishing and obtaining emotions through human interactions. Scientific studies have also shown that the companionship of pets and daily communication with pets can bring them emotional support, and people who own pets have higher levels of mental health. Through different ways and means of obtaining emotions, single women not only enjoy personal independence, realize their value of life, and improve their quality of life, but also obtain a different kind of emotional life, and this way of life has been advocated by more and more single women.

## **4. Obtaining emotional compensation**

The content of emotional life depends on one's emotional value. For the rationalized self in the individualized society, the root of self-satisfaction lies in freedom, whether it is material freedom or spiritual freedom, which can bring happiness and satisfaction to one's life. In modern society, women have gradually become the dominant consumers, through which they can realize themselves, show their value, and pursue self-development. In the social structure of emotional indifference and emotional emptiness, the individual's unrestricted consumption can help to make up for the lack of emotion, and then obtain emotional compensation.

## 4.1. Material compensation

For single women, the satisfaction of material life is mainly reflected in the state of residence and the way of consumption. They directly express their pursuit and desire for material life, and even if some of them have financial constraints, they will ensure their quality of life and make themselves comfortable.

In the process of China's modernization, development, and individualization, women have the economic and institutional basis to get rid of their attachment to marriage and family of origin, and more and more single professional women have purchased their own houses. Their self-reliance expectation has gradually changed from an "assigned role" with various traditional obligations and responsibilities to an "acquired role" with more self-choice. Living for oneself has become the credo of single women <sup>[6]</sup>. Independent women are unwilling to settle for less and need an exquisite life. If they rent a house, they are prone to involuntary evictions, which changes their living environment and reduces their comfort, so buying a house becomes a prerequisite for them to live comfortably.

In addition, another pursuit of quality of life is reflected in the purchase of a car. As a consumable product, the car is more of a manifestation of active single women's enjoyment of life. Due to the fast-paced, high-pressure workload they face every day, they are reluctant to settle for less when it comes to daily transportation, so they tend to choose a convenient and high-quality commuting method. Purchasing a car for them undoubtedly gives them an additional exclusive private space, which not only improves their sense of well-being and shapes a high quality of life, but also strengthens their confidence in living alone. The study found that women who buy a house and a car independently have a natural or even unconcerned attitude towards marriage and that a house and a car are not an element that they use to enhance their competitiveness in the marriage market, but rather an important aspect of enjoying their self-esteem and independence. Single women are more willing to spend time and money on upgrading their quality of life, investing in the quality of life and personal experience of self-consumption, to obtain the emotional energy they need.

## 4.2. Spiritual solace

Emotional consumption, as a new type of consumption embedded in the social structure, provides a more convenient and effective way for single women to obtain spiritual compensation.

The popularization of artificial intelligence products and the development of Internet games have all become ways to attract women's emotional consumption. When the object of emotional communication changes from people to objects, the way of emotional interaction is simplified <sup>[7]</sup>. Single women can also obtain the emotional energy they need through emotional arousal and emotional communication in games. Secondly, according to the report, the proportion of urban women's travel investment in personal consumption has been growing. Travel as a form of leisure has become an important part of women's emotional consumption, most women believe that their single life status allows them to go as they please, and the fun they get from traveling is no less than that they get from love, and traveling on their own also avoids conflicts caused by inconsistent views <sup>[8]</sup>. Single women are eager to travel thousands of miles to enrich themselves, and travel activities can make new friends, achieving a different kind of friendship. Third, there is a saying that states "For the disorders of the seven emotions, looking at flowers to relieve boredom and listening to music to relieve sorrow are better than taking medicine." Participating in more recreational activities in free time will not only make one's body and mind happy but also make their emotional life more fulfilling and meaningful. In the individualized society, the satisfaction of emotional life is gradually shifted from the private life sphere to the public sphere, the kind of unique and irreplaceable intimate relationship is eroded by marketization, and individuals experience life with a kind of pleasure-based principle. The self-emotions are also satisfied in the public sphere, and the consumption

of emotions, as a kind of important way of emotional compensation, is crucial to the satisfaction of single women's spiritual life.

## 5. Summary

The growing phenomenon of women's singleness in today's society is, to a considerable extent, the result of the joint intertwining of women's awakening of self-consciousness and the realization of self-competence<sup>[9]</sup>. In the author's opinion, singleness is not an original sin, nor is it a pathology. The initiative to choose to be single is the independent choice made by women based on their situation. It is also the result of social civilization, so society should hold a tolerant and understanding attitude. In the long run, the increase in the number of single women will lead to the disintegration of traditional families, which will fragment society and affect social stability. How to establish a new model of emotional life, change the emotional attitude of single women, and restore the positive function of emotion has become a social problem that needs to be thought about urgently.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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