The very institutions that are directly responsible for much of the rigidity of our life—namely the Schedule and the Calendar—can also be seen as being among the foremost liberators of the modern individual. (Zerubavel 1985, 166)

In this quote, Zerubavel suggests that the calendar and the clock can also be among the “foremost liberators of the modern individual.” As social actors we have more autonomy than we think and this includes re-articulating conventional temporal schemas and resisting heteronormative imperatives. Earlier in the book I wrote about Emma Morano and Jessie Gallan from Italy and Scotland who attributed their well-being and longevity to staying single for many years. Their stories have attracted global media attention and the New York Times piece about Morano was translated into many languages. In their interviews, both of them have expressed their contentedness and how they value their freedom and autonomy.

These stories invite an inquiry into the ways in which women’s lives could exhibit and maintain an alternative temporality, one through which women can define their own past, present, and future and bestow it with their own rhythms and schedules. Morano’s and Gallan’s life stories present us with a way in which hegemonic social time can be destabilized and re-figured. Moreover, I suggest that their life-stories narrative subsumes a sense of controlling time, demonstrating their own life markers and temporal agency. Researching the web, one can find alternatives to the temporal regimes so rare within the conventional global romantic and familial cultural scripts. However, when one makes the effort to tap into different search categories, one can explore numerous internet sites, personal blogs, and local initiatives which seek to debunk common understandings and stereotypical attitudes towards single people. One example, an American website called Unmarried America, has earmarked a week in September as the “National Unmarried and Single Americans Week” in the US (Unmarried America 2015). Likewise, since around the early 2000s, self-help books have been available, such as The Single Girl’s Manifesta: Living in a Stupendously Superior Single State of Mind (Stewart 2005), Living Alone and Loving It (Feldon 2003), and Better Single than Sorry: A No Regrets Guide to Loving Yourself and Never Settling (Schefft 2007).
When singlehood is represented as offering an alternative present and future, carving one’s life on one’s own terms without regrets is an act which has the potential to challenge the dominant scripts of the life directions women are expected to follow. Another site that seeks to challenge common-sense scripts is Sasha Cagen’s website Quirkyalone. Cagen, the author of *Quirkyalone: A Manifesto for Uncompromising Romantics* (2004), coined the term Quirkyalone to present an alternative conceptualization to some of the prevalent stereotypes and images of single women. Quirkyalones, according to Cagen, are “People who enjoy being single (but are not opposed to being in a relationship) and generally prefer being single to dating for the sake of being in a couple” (Quirkyalone 2015).

These various articulations do not reiterate the pejorative images of long-term singlehood as a tragedy, nor do they subscribe to the still overwhelmingly heteronormative expectations directed at women. In opposition to the various statements and warnings analyzed over the course of this book (“You will die alone,” “You will miss the train and stay on your own” etc.), the narratives that emerge from these cultural websites do not necessarily convey the regret of time wasted, or of missing out on the basic and essential experiences of life.

It does appear, however, that this counter-culture is significantly more developed in the UK and the US than in Israel. In Israel, I was unable to locate analogous initiatives on a comparable scale; indeed, it seems that there are no alternative Israeli “single-by-choice” websites and active bloggers who convey these messages. However, there are a few signs that indicate the possibility of a slow parallel transformation in Israel. For example, Rotem Lior, writing on the Ynet portal, introduces herself in the following way:

Let me introduce myself: I am Rotem, a single woman not just by choice or a conscious decision but as a result of my very own will. Why? It’s just in my nature. I prefer question marks to exclamation marks, expectation over certainty, and lust over statistics … Do people believe me? When they get to know me, they do. The only place where people do not believe me is the Internet. When I’m asked, in panic or in expectation, if I’m looking for a groom, I immediately declare that I’m a single woman. Here are some of the nicknames I have received in response: “poor thing” … “lonely liar,” “lesbian,” “feminist with too much hair,” and “coward” … When they realize that you have passed the age of thirty, you can sense the rising suspicion. (Lior 2006)

Rotem Lior introduces lifelong singlehood here as a legitimate lifestyle option. However, she also emphasizes that this position is still rarely accepted and that it stirs profound disbelief and suspicion. Apparently, a woman who is over thirty and is still single necessarily implies individual defects: something is wrong. Nor does Lior embrace the time panic mode attached to single women above a certain age, through which one has to find a groom before it becomes too late. Thus her statement, “I’m a single woman,” conveys a position in which she *lives in the present* and objects to the common perception of singlehood as a liminal, transitory position which is seen as betwixt and between. Thus, her simple declaration can be read as a way to reconstitute the present.
A similar stance is echoed in a column by Dvorit Shargal, a journalist and a documentary artist, whose words I choose to analyze here in detail:

It’s four o’clock in the morning. Five o’clock in the morning. Six, Seven, Eight, Nine. Everything around me is quiet. There is no one snoring on the pillow next to me, no kids to take to kindergarten, no husband to drink my coffee with. Just me and, no one else but me. There is no organization which requires me to be part of it; everything is dependent on me, on my daily schedule, on the work which I have to finish, or on my training hour at the gym. And this peacefulness, this quietness of my life is my biggest happiness. This is an existential chosen static state which I wouldn’t replace with any other noise. (Shargal 2006)

This portrayal of a typical morning also challenges the profound presupposition that singlehood is a temporary, non-chosen state. Dvorit stresses that her ever single status is an established and stable position that she has no intent of changing. Her position represents a personal and public identity of chosen singlehood which is based on volitional, autonomous decision-making. In this way, she opposes the widespread imagery that portrays single women as terrified by their imposed singlehood and expected loneliness. In other words, she dismantles the culturally constructed horror of sleeping alone, dining alone, or living alone, offering to replace them with images of contentedness and satisfaction. According to hegemonic hetero-temporalities, Shargal’s time could be seen as time on hold, meaningless and empty. Yet, the writer stresses that she enjoys her solitary silence. The emptiness and stasis commonly ascribed to single time is configured, in her words, into a desirable schedule that could pose an alternative to “domestic bliss.” Moreover, her status as an ever-single woman is not articulated in defensive and apologetic terms, and produces more channels for desires and longings.

In Chapter 5, I discussed how being single for “too long” can imply that one possesses an incompetent self. It might even label some as suffering from various deficiencies and pathologies. Drawing on Ahmed again, it can be deduced that norms of familial time are represented as a social good. Thus, the length and duration of family time is grasped as a positive accumulation of time to be praised and admired, while the accumulation of single time is configured as wasted time. If we also return to Thompson’s (1967) well-known contention that the transition from task time to clock time turns time into a currency ruled by clock time; the longer a single woman is single, the more her exchange value decreases.

Dvorit’s text echoes various accounts that have gained prominence across global media, and which convey a similar tone. These voices offer an alternative interpretation of being “off the market” altogether. Such a stance can be interpreted as refusing to conform to the ageist and sexist regulations of current dating practices. In chapter 5, I discussed how the temporal language of the “dating market place” is imbued with age-based schedules through which single women are objectified and evaluated. The “late single” or “ever single” option, when not engaged with a constant search for a partner, can pose an alternative to the oppressive discourses of heterosexuality and temporal market economy which so many daters accept as a given. Thus, by challenging or
refusing to comply with the temporal rules of supply and demand, long-term singlehood can represent a free space within which one’s value as a woman is not determined by one’s exchange value and the judgmental scrutiny of men. In other words, lifelong singlehood can represent an option to refuse the control of the temporal regimes of beauty and youth. Claiming one’s own temporal autonomy, rhythms, and schedules can pave a way towards defining women’s time as not merely attuned to patriarchal and heteronormative dictates.

Thinking beyond the conjugal and familial imaginary presents such an alternative. Shargal’s text continues to challenge the ways women are expected to use their time:

I’ve always been alone. I am not a mother, neither am I married. I live my life within this big silence, which others are so afraid of. And why am I this way? The fact is I have no need to share my allotted time with other people. At least not in a sequential manner. That is, every now and then, here and there, for a couple of hours, that’s fine. It is even desirable. But not more than that. (Shargal 2006)

Shargal claims her temporal ownership. She describes the benefits of being in charge of her schedules, which include being/not being with others. Silence is not perceived as empty or terrifying, but rather is desired and anticipated. Her domesticity is defined by different tempos and noises in which she prioritizes her temporal autonomy:

More than not wanting any one to touch my personal stuff, I don’t want anyone to interfere with my schedule. In fact, if I had to adapt myself to the schedules of others, I would not be able to do all the things that I can do today. If I had to raise children, I would not have time for myself. If I had to share my life with someone, I would wilt or wear away (ibid.)

Shargal presents us with alternative codes and alternative practices of time. She insists on establishing her own temporal routine, one disconnected from the dominant models of female time. Along these lines, these rhythms present us with the possibility of challenging the dominant understanding of a woman’s home and her domestic gender roles. From this perspective, long-term singlehood can also be seen as an alternative to prevailing conceptions of domesticity, and of women as household-family orientated consumers. In her landmark work The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan (1963) persuasively contended that the feminine mystique held that women could find fulfillment “through sexual passivity, acceptance of male domination, and nurturing motherhood” (73) According to Friedan, a significant component of this ideal was the perception of women as active consumers of home products, which are constantly purchased for their families.

I would therefore suggest that in this instance, singlehood can provide a feminist reading of domesticity and time by opening new ways of experiencing time, not regulated by the task of taking care of/shopping for others. Yet as I have argued before, female singlehood is not classless. It is important to note that this form of temporal ownership is contingent upon one’s class location and material conditions. Acquiring temporal autonomy, and the ability to fulfill such a desire, is dependent on one’s fiscal capacity to live on one’s own. Being single can also be dependent upon one’s material
conditions. Thus, the ability of Shargal to have “no one interfere with her schedule” could be read as an outcome of the class privilege which grants her with such aptitude. It is beyond the scope of this study to develop this point further, but I hope that future studies of singlehood will address the multilayered intersections of class, time, and female singlehood.

This book raises the issue of the limited discursive resources available to long-term single living. I suggest that women like Shargal can offer alternative discursive resources and even claim their own symbolic capital by insisting on their own norms and set of priorities. Shargal’s text takes me back to the current modalities of female time. Feminist scholars interested in the gendered dimensions of time have argued that women’s time is perceived as relational. “Time is shared rather than personal and routinely experienced through the presence and expectations constituted in interpersonal relations (Odih 2007, xv). Because women’s time is conventionally understood in relation to their roles as wives and mothers, it is no wonder that it is rare to counter such oppositional voices.

In a more recent column, Elinor Ferrara argues that singlehood is a choice, not a problem requiring a solution:

One reason that I am a thirty-year-old single woman, God forbid, is free choice. Yes, yes, many women stay single for various reasons: this can be a desire to experience more relationships, meet more men instead of committing to one man and settling down. ... Who determines that we should all get married, have kids and buy a house with a crazy mortgage? Where does this obsessive desire emerge for manufacturing a uniform series of human beings who own a house and have a family? The sad part in all of this, is that many women (and people in general) do not know how to draw the line and tell the difference between what they really want and what their surroundings expect them to. (Ferrara 2013)

The notion of chosen singlehood, as we can see in Ferrara’s account, can be deployed as an alternative discursive resource, from which assumptions that are taken for granted can be contested and refuted. I have discussed this issue more extensively elsewhere. Here, I wish to outline again the limits of this discursive resource. Indeed, the right to choose stands at the heart of major contemporary feminist struggles. Choice can be practiced as justifying and encouraging resistance to hegemonic formations by seeking recognition for alternative ones. Identifying as a single by choice can pave the way for late singlehood or lifelong singlehood to be a legitimate and stable identity which offers counter-narratives to existing societal norms.

Yet the chosen singlehood discourse certifies binary modes of thinking, thereby establishing new hierarchies between those who can and cannot follow the dictates of the new regime of choice and self-monitoring. As these pronouncements suggest, choice should be seen as a discursive formula formed under socio-cultural conditions and contexts which limit and constrain these very choices. Moreover, and as I have clarified before, the new empowered images of liberated, freely choosing single women might essentialize women’s lives and constitute new hierarchies between those who can and cannot follow the dictates of the new regime of choice.
and self-monitoring. If we wish to enrich our understandings of feminine singlehood, one should bear in mind that women's identities are connected to class, age, religion and sexual orientation, which enable and narrow one's options for holding on to the position of chosen singlehood. All that said, these new discourses should be taken seriously as they broaden our discursive and material horizons and subvert existing gender ideologies.

The various examples discussed here aim to debunk what are regarded as the defining aspects of femininity, and what is considered as worthy living. In this book I have tried to understand how these injunctions are conveyed through naturalized temporal norms and concepts. Single women like Shargal, Ferrara, Morano, Gallan, and many others bestow their time with meaning and a sense of direction, which do not necessarily cohere with familial narratives or lean upon the societal hierarchies distinguishing the coupled from the uncoupled. In that respect, they claim their own temporal agency by stressing their abilities to carve out their own schedules and timetables. Moreover, these timetables are not based entirely on hetero-patriarchal rhythms. Their time is not on hold, nor is it wasted or devalued. In this way, these accounts confuse dominant temporal perceptions and provide counter-perspectives, as well as offering new modalities of temporality, subjectivity, and social belonging.

**Alternative life paths**

Most of the texts analyzed in this book reflect the presumption that coupledom and family life promise enduring connectedness and meaningful sociability. However, recent studies conducted in the UK and the US amongst other countries show that in many cases, friends serve as a biographical anchor, and provide continuity and ontological security no less—and at times even more—than family life. In a fascinating study about friendship ties, Shelly Budgeon (2006) argues that friends and non-familial relationships, as relationships of care, provide an important normative reference point in late modernity. The care and support of friendships and elective communities presents the possibility of organizing one’s life trajectory outside, and not necessarily around, cohabiting couple relationships (Budgeon 2006; Roseneil 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). For many of the interviewees, friendships represent a significant source of continuity which provides on-going support (Budgeon 2006). Such an example can be found in Budgeon’s interview with Carol, one of the respondents in her study, who had been considering a break up with her partner:

> It sounds awful to say it but if I were to put it on a balance sheet for what I get out of the relationship, I pay a heavy price for it. Whereas the friends that I have, I don’t feel as though I pay a price there and so I would spend more time with people who give as much as I give them in a sense ... It’s not that I don’t want to be in a relationship but this particular one, like my marriage before, I know it’s run its course. It’s not I want to be alone. It’s just that neither of them were right for me and I think I’ve probably got a little bit cynical now and I think “well there isn’t anybody that’s right for you so you might as well just get on with your life and go out with friends and enjoy yourself and do what you want to do.” (ibid.)
Carol is aware that, like her previous marriage, her relationship with her partner will eventually run its course. Like many women who have experienced divorce, the “happily ever after” ending convention does not fit with her life trajectory. Women like Carol sense that friendship ties can be more rewarding than conjugal ones, and prefer to allocate their time accordingly. A similar theme from Budgeon’s study emerges from Jools’ account in which she declares: “I think a friendship is for life, but I don’t think a partner is ... I’d marry my friends. They’d last longer” (ibid.)

Thus, one of the key findings in Roseneil and Budgeon’s studies was the de-centering of couplehood in favor of friendship (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Friendship, according to Roseneil and Budgeon, emerges as a key relationship, offering the opportunity to disrupt heteronormative institutions and provide alternative life paths. These types of narratives, seldom heard in Israeli discourse, stand in contrast to what Roseneil rightly phrases as the “mythology of the singleton in desperate search for a marriage partner” (ibid., 413).

However the prevalence of warnings like “you will die alone,” along with images of the lonely solitary spinster, downplay the role of friendships in the lives of many. Neither is friendship present in the horizon of linear reproductive time. Friends are mostly absent from the diagrams and charts of the life course which privilege conjugal and familial trajectories. Budgeon refers to Pahl’s (2000) work on friendships, in which he claims that the only source of continuity is provided by friends, particularly when so many aspects of one’s life may be transitory (jobs, marriages). As Pahl claims, “men and women may come to rely on their friends to provide support and confirmation of their enduring identities” (quoted in Budgeon 2006). Thus, friendships for the interviewees in Budgeon’s study offer a greater degree of stability and continuity.

This analysis is important for rethinking and reconstructing conventional representations of the life course in which family life takes center stage. Long-term singlehood and friendship ties have no place or function in conventional life course charts. They are absent from the “happily ever after” scripts, based as they are on the promise of the happy couple and happy families. As singlehood scholars demonstrate, many single women maintain rich networks of friends through their life course. These relationships provide them with security and continuity (Simpson 2006; Trimberger 2005). In these studies, marriage emerges as a temporary phase, while friendship ties are the ones which can provide continuity and security. From this perspective, singlehood cannot be perceived as a liminal and transitory position, because marriage does not hold the ultimate path for “moving forward in life” and does not provide the connection between the present and future.

Another area which refutes the stigma of solitary aging are studies which underscore the importance of friendships in the lives of older women (Aday et al. 2006; O’Connor 1993, 1998). For example, a study about single women in a senior citizens’ home stresses the lively network of social support that women develop and maintain. Indeed, it has been found that friendships increase one’s morale, and may increase morale more than contact with family members (O’Connor, quoted in Aday et al.
2006). These kinds of messages are rarely heard and do not cohere with warnings such as “you will die alone,” or with stereotypical images of the solitary and miserable old single woman, wandering alone, feeding cats etc.

A different way in which the supposedly tragic future of the single woman can be challenged is through the introduction of alternative models of single aging. In addition to the examples discussed at the beginning of this chapter, consider for example this short piece about Dallas star Linda Gray, published in an online preview to HELLO! magazine:

Once left a loveless marriage—and to this day, she’s perfectly content to live her life as a single woman. “A lot of women are content on their own and don’t want a partner. They want their freedom,” the actress, who has been largely single for the past 33 years, told Hello! “We all love to flirt. It doesn’t mean you’re going to bring the person home or have a sleepover” (HELLO! 2015)

This option of a seventy-five-year-old woman celebrity content to be “on her own” reveals a different social script to the hegemonic one. Gray’s statement corresponds with recent research which reveals that many older women declare a preference for living alone rather than sharing their lives with men (and taking care of them) (Klineberg 2012).

In August 2015, the publication of Kate Bolick’s (2015) Spinster: Making a Life of One’s Own garnered a lot of media attention. In her book, she writes about what she terms as her own spinster wish. Aware of the long legacy of spinsterhood as a derogatory term, she writes:

I grant that a wholesale reclamation of the word spinster is a tall order. My aim is more modest: to offer it up as shorthand for holding on to that in you which is independent and self-sufficient, whether you’re single or coupled.

If you’re single, whether never-married, divorced, or widowed, you can carry the word spinster like a talisman, a constant reminder that you’re in very good company—indeed, part of a long and noble tradition of women past and present living on their own terms.

If you find yourself unhappily coupled, you can use the word spinster to conjure a time when you weren’t, and to recall that being alone is often far preferable to being in a bad relationship. (ibid., 296)

In Chapter 4, I explored the demonized “old maid” prototype, and outlined the various ways in which this stigmatic character is associated with what are perceived as marginal and a-synchronized temporalities. The commonplace image in mainstream culture of the desperate bridesmaid-to-be hoping to be next, or of the old maid sitting alone in her empty house surrounded by cats, marks the limited extent of the symbolic resources currently available to women. To a large extent, narratives which express a wish for solitude and the possible contentment of living on one’s own are hardly ever presented. Reclaiming the pejorative term “spinster” represents in my view the next step that singlehood studies should take towards politicizing singlehood and challenging heteronormative time scales.
Politicizing singlehood

To a large extent, singlehood in Israel is a non-existent political category; it is neither identified nor included in the agendas of feminist, human rights, and social justice organizations. Furthermore, singlehood is very much underrepresented in critical studies curriculums at both the graduate and undergraduate level. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, challenging the discriminatory, patronizing attitudes towards late singlehood has been rarely on the agenda of any social or political organization. I therefore wish to ask why the discrimination and stigmatization against single persons has not translated to public and political initiatives. Based on this reality, I can point to some preliminary assumptions here, which explain why singlehood is yet to be politicized and become a target of feminist action.

First, the widely held perception of late or lifelong singlehood as a liminal, transitional phase and as a disruption and unnatural social category is very much alive and well in many societies. This line of thinking poses substantial obstacles for envisioning singlehood in political terms. Second, contemporary mainstream discourse mostly relates to singlehood through personal narratives, single women’s life stories and advice columns. Thus, a complex web of discourses de-contextualizes singlehood from its wider social and cultural settings, leading to the widely held beliefs that attribute blame to single women themselves. Moreover, as I have shown, the widespread discourse not only puts the blame on single women, it emphasizes that their future will be nothing but a life of misery and loneliness. Paraphrasing Virginia Woolf’s well-known dictum: she can perhaps live in “a room of her own but not in a house of her own.” Simply put, the message single women hear again and again is that they cannot make it on their own.

This is why accentuating the social and political dimensions of singlehood is an important step in the right direction. I suggest that the re-constitution of singlehood into a social category that one may wish to identify with—and form a political community with—can positively yield material and discursive changes. Here, I join DePaulo (2006), Reynolds (2008), and Moran (2004) in their call for the politicization of singlehood and the need for a nuanced feminist engagement with the concept. This book is also a call for such needed intervention.

In this vein, some recent developments may inspire the hope of social change. At the time of writing, the 2016 American presidential election campaign was underway; media coverage of the campaign reflected what may lead to a significant change in the discourse about single women, and particularly the growing recognition of their voting power. Major newspapers such as the Economist, the Guardian, the New York Times, and the Washington Post have dedicated extensive space to what is perceived as the potential and rising salience of single women in local and global politics.

For example, a headline of New York magazine, from February 2016, declared that the single American woman had become “The most powerful voter this year, who in her rapidly increasing numbers has become an entirely new category of citizen” (Traister 2016b). Some of these discussions were triggered by the publication of a non-fiction book, already a best-seller, by Rebecca Traister (2016a), the writer of the NY article above. In the book, entitled All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the
Rise of an Independent Nation, Traister notes that for the first time in history, unmarried women outnumber their married counterparts. She also argues that this state of affairs enables more women to pursue high-powered careers, and to live sexually diverse lives (ibid.).

It might be that these developments taking place in the US, alongside the growing numbers of single women worldwide, could lead the way to what I consider the next and required step in singlehood scholarship and advocacy. Moving forward could pave the way for encouraging both researchers and activists to become more involved in singlehood politics, perceiving singlehood in political terms, and attending to the unique needs of single persons. Thus far, relatively few scholars (DePaulo 2006; Hacker 2001) have vocalized the need to catalyze policy change for the single population.

The most prominent among them is Bella DePaulo, who is both a researcher and an activist. For the last two decades she has written for many years about how single persons are socially and economically discriminated against and do not enjoy the various financial benefits granted to couples and parents. She is one of the prominent advocates for this required change. In her scholarly works and numerous online columns and media interviews she promotes a new outlook on singlehood which views singlehood as a political consistency.

For example, even in a 2004 letter to the editor published in the New York Times opinion section, DePaulo makes several offers to the to the candidates running for presidency at that time:

1. Hit the books. Learn about the real place of singles in contemporary American society. Singles account for more than 40 percent of the electorate and work force. Households consisting of two parents and their children are slightly outnumbered by households comprised of a single person living alone. And most singles do not live alone. About nine million households are single-parent homes. Singles are also homeowners. Last year, they accounted for 46.7 percent of house sales. Singles are not predominantly youthful; only a third are aged 18 to 29. Singlehood is no longer a way station on the road to marriage. Women on average now spend more years of their adult lives single than married, and men are not far behind.

2. Learn the actual voting patterns. Despite the hype, it was not single women who had the lowest rate of voting in 2000, but single men. In their candidate preferences, the men stood out in their support of Ralph Nader (7 percent, compared to 4 percent for single women, and 2 percent for married men and women).

3. Master the issues of concern to singles. You will find, for example, that singles would like to make a decent living, have affordable health care and enjoy retirement. Their values are not antifamily—they are human values. The language of singles is the language of inclusiveness. Here is an example: “If you are willing to work hard and play by the rules, you are part of our family, and we’re proud to be with you.” It is from Bill Clinton’s 1996 speech accepting the Democratic nomination for president. (DePaulo 2004)

I regard this letter as reflecting a new kind of politics that offers tangible possibilities for changing the public discourse and looks at singlehood as a visible community.
which political candidates have to take seriously. It also views single persons as political and citizen subjects with obligations and rights.

This also poses an alternative to the “family values” political discourse often conveyed by liberal, conservative, and even progressive parties. The rhetoric of “family values” or “ensuring our children’s future” has come to stand for the public good, and of doing the right thing. Promoting issues and speaking on behalf of and for single persons is uncommon, if not inconceivable.

Another exception to this state of affairs was articulated by Raija Eeva, a Finnish politician and founder of the Finnish Association for Singles, quoted in one of DePaulo’s online columns:

An employer may purchase insurance for his or her employee. If the employee dies a claim will be paid out to a widow, widower or the employee’s children. In the case of a single, the insurance company gets to pocket the claim. (DePaulo 2015)

In another article Eeva further argues:

If I were to say that a social democrat or a Swedish-speaking person or an immigrant couldn’t get the same tax rebate as someone else, there’d be a hue and cry. But apparently you can suffer injustice based on your legal or family status. (Yle 2014)

Such views express a confident call to end the discrimination against singles and the high price singles pay for their single status. That is, these voices do not accept and endorse hegemonic heteronormative practices of public acceptance. These suggested transformations are dependent upon changes in the public discourse of singlehood together with structural and institutional change.

It would be interesting to analyze the 2016 presidential campaign in the US, and to analyze its results taking into consideration the votes of single women and whether personal status affected their voting patterns. These new developments could lead to broad-based social and economic reforms, and the development of the material and discursive conditions that would encourage women to realize their agency.

In this context it is important to stress that one should take care not to relate to singlehood as one unitary category, and should distinguish between different types of representations of singles. This demands the consideration of, amongst other things, exogenous factors such as class, gender, religion, and race. Hopefully, this study can contribute to future research and thinking about ways to re-appropriate singlehood from its derogatory position and to remove its fixed connotations. As such, this book can be complemented by studies of the nuances and variances in the experiences and social contexts of women’s singlehood.

Thus, my hope here is to re-conceptualise singlehood as a social and political category, which may in turn open more avenues for moving beyond the dichotomous and essentialist thinking of misery/happiness, togetherness/loneliness, and success/failure. Institutional policy-oriented reforms such as those proposed by Bella DePaulo (2006) and Daphna Hacker (2001) (building apartments designed for single households, or changing the tax structure for example) are important. Yet they alone cannot create the new language and the discursive spaces necessary to rethink the conceptions
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of singlehood and familism so prominent in our widespread conventions of the worthy and good life.

Hopefully, this study can contribute to such an endeavor, by constructing and deconstructing some of the familiar and taken-for-granted meanings associated with singlehood. A different form of thinking on singlehood and time, one which explores and can envision alternative networks of support and solidarity while questioning the central place the family and couplehood occupy, might be a crucial first step in this direction.

Notes

1 I have written more about this topic in articles about the single woman’s choice as a zero sum game. See Lahad (2014) and also in my analysis of singlehood and selectiveness, Lahad (2013). See also Dales (2005, 2014) for an interesting discussion of single women and agency in Japan.

2 See Budgeon 2006; Roseneil 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Spencer and Pahl 2006; Trimmerger 2005; Weston 1991.

3 For a fascinating analysis of South Korean single women’s quest to acquire a room of their own, see Song (2010). For more discussions on the living arrangements of single women, see Dales (2013); Nakano (2011), Wilkinson (2014).

4 In her study How Second Wave Feminism Forgot the Single Woman, Moran (2004) claims that feminists have mostly (and successfully) lobbied for changes in education, employment, and reproductive rights. Thus, liberal feminism has mainly focused on reconciling work and family responsibilities, while the single woman remains neglected by the movement’s agenda.