

between the rich detail of the reconstruction of Ceaușescu’s decisions and utterances, and the much more fleeting reconstruction of the local and international social, political and economic contexts—which are briefly brought into discussion only when Ceaușescu happened to talk about them.

In its epilogue, the book returns to the question of this mysterious charisma—“En quoi résidait cette popularité paradoxale?” this enduring power of an otherwise clearly flailing perspective of national redemption. “Sans doute,” answers Sandu, “dans le dépassement de la malediction détectée par Cioran des petites puissances et le défi fasciste lancé à leur destin mineur . . . La seule issue était celle de l’exceptionnalisme dont se réclament tous les nationalismes, fondés sur l’indépendance internationale et le génie autochtone” (pp. 454–455). But if the fate of Ceaușescu’s palingenesis and its charismatic hold was fatally inscribed into Romania’s frustrating condition of “petite puissance,” this final explanation leaves the reader with more questions than answers: why, then, if this palingenetic mobilization is the necessary delusion of small states, do we find it, for instance, in the patriotic frenzy of the MAGA campaign of the world’s superpower; and why instead, and more to the point, was it then not the default position of the other “petites puissances” from the socialist bloc, which also had to negotiate, like Romania, a “minor destiny” in the shadow of an overbearing neighbor.



ALEX CISTELECAN

BELLA DEPAULO

Single at Heart: The Power, Freedom, and Heart-Filling Joy of Single Life

N.p. [New York]: Apollo Publishers, 2023

I FOUND OUT about the book in the title from a post on LinkedIn, the only ‘social’ (professional, though) platform I have an account on. I do not use it too often either, but I do check in on the activities of those who make up my little network from time to time. I thought it was an interesting research topic, innovative in general and, as far as I knew at the time, not at all known in Romania,¹ so I sent the author an enthusiastic message. I am very grateful to her, who not only replied, but also provided me with the electronic version of her work, so that I could make it known to the Romanian reading public, which is increasingly eager to be informed about new research and approaches.

Bella DePaulo is a social psychologist, a graduate of Vassar College of Liberal Arts (New York) and a 1979 Ph.D. from Harvard University. She taught psychology for two decades at the University of Virginia, and is currently affiliated with the Department of Psychology and Brain Sciences at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She has been writing the *Living Single* blog for *Psychology Today* magazine since 2008, has had a monthly column at *Unmarried Equality* since 2015, and has published pieces on the topic in the *Washington Post*, *Time*, and the *New York Times*, becoming the undisputed expert in the field that has emerged thanks to her.

She knows exactly how long she has been studying people alone: since 17 December 1992, when she created a ‘secret’ folder on her computer. Secret from

whom, I immediately wondered. I would find out as I read on. She was 39 and living alone, by choice, but she had not bothered with it until then.

Her professional interests had been directed for many years towards research into the psychology of lying and lie detection, and the list of studies and books published in this field is very extensive. I mention here two titles that are very descriptive in terms of content: *Behind the Door of Deceit: Understanding the Biggest Liars in Our Lives* (Lexington: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009); *The Hows and Whys of Lies* (Lexington: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010).²

The transformation of personal lifestyle into a research topic was natural, and it materialized with the publication of *Singled Out: How Singles Are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), which debunked society's myths about single people and their lives.³ This was followed by *How We Live Now: Redefining Home and Family in the 21st Century* (New York etc.: Atria Books; Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words, 2015), which takes a survey of home life, from the 'normality' of the more-or-less large family to the 'revolutionary' solitary life.

At this point, I must share something I noticed throughout the reading: *single* and *alone* are two words with different meanings in English, but in Romanian they are one and the same: *singur*. This somehow limits the wide range of nuances and I wonder if this truth is directly related to the narrow Romanian perspective on the subject. I also think it would be a challenge for a future translator of the book into Romanian. The title itself is difficult

to translate. Translated back into English, the Romanian for *Single at Heart* would be *Alone Out of Conviction*.

As I read Bella's book I kept remembering how others have tried to explain to me, throughout my adult life, that I am living wrong. I never wanted to get married: immoral. I do not want children: my life has no purpose. I do not care what other people think: unacceptable. Anyway, the list could go on, but you get the idea. Unfortunately, prejudices of this kind also exist at a much broader level, at the level of populations, cultures, regions. They are perpetuated in space and time beyond the times when they made sense, because if they had not been useful to mankind, they would not have been invented. This happens because too many of us are still uneducated, taking everything for granted from our predecessors, because we do not know ourselves, we have no idea of what and who we are or who we want to become.

Bella de Paulo elegantly makes it clear that the rejection or non-acceptance of the viability of living happily alone is directly related to politics, be it local or state. Let us not forget that unmarried people, especially but not only women, in most parts of the world, have no legal and/or social protection. And the author also gracefully reviews (by shaking her head!) the politically established rules, supported in journalism and extolled in literature. Because, she tells us, she does not want to make waves, but to "create a tsunami." She aims, in fact, to revolutionize the way people think about being single. Great, just in time!

Because my text is intended to be printed in a humanities research journal, I will confine myself to scholarly consid-

erations. However, I cannot avoid mentioning prejudice, because that is what the book and contemporary society are mainly about: wanting to remain alone is not natural or normal. This somehow comes with another prejudice: it is natural (therefore obligatory) for women to want children! Is it? Says who? Being happy is a choice. And, let's be honest: if we measure the time we invest in those we live with, we realize that it takes up most of our lives. If we directed our "time, money, emotional resources" towards ourselves, we might even be able to see ourselves and, with a little goodwill and patience, get to know ourselves. But let us not digress!

There are many lessons from this book that should be learned by as many as possible. A global lesson (sadly already forgotten by most) gave us the pandemic that started in 2020. We are not debating the subject, of course, but Bella DePaulo tells us that this was the moment when people in general, alone or not, facing their natural fears, also faced themselves. Statistics tell us that a good proportion of the couples existing at the beginning of 2020 broke up within two years. The main reason: they no longer had the freedom to do what they wanted when they wanted and how they wanted, let alone where they wanted. There were also couples who became stronger, who took full advantage of this unexpected opportunity to spend time together and learned about each other, or saw, perhaps for the first time, each other as they never had before. But it was those who chose to live alone as an assumed way of life who fared best. For the first time, no friend, colleague or family member tried to 'fix' them (and by this term, of course, I mean the silly attempts to set them up with somebody else, often equally "flawed").

Most often one enters life with information gleaned from the experience of others: family, friends, books. Many make rash decisions, often final or difficult to undo, without having enough information about themselves to be able to make an informed choice about how to live. The important thing is to be authentic, whether you choose to be part of a couple or a partnership. But not many understand what it means to be authentic.

The book is a plea for a way of life that is extremely hard to accept by others, who are very quick to judge, without understanding that people are not, that the world is not, like them. But the lesson that most people never learn is that in life nothing should be marked "must"; we lie to ourselves both when we do "what the world does" and when we deny ourselves something. These problems arise in those who do not know what they want because they do not know who they are, in the weak who feel safer imitating the mob, and in those with limited resources, perhaps financially, but mostly from an emotional perspective.

If you are not like them, the many, you are not defective, though the desire to fix you appears in them. Bella manages to describe many inventive variations and many types of tools used by the "do-gooders," managing the feat of not writing a single word about selfishness. Her text is a continuous and assiduous encouragement to those too embarrassed to accept who they are.

I could comment chapter by chapter on the entire work, but the last thing I want to do is deprive any potential reader of the pleasure of discovering the experiences and truths within its pages. Suffice it to say that it has 306 pages organized into an Introduction, nine chapters⁴ (structured into

many thematic sub-chapters), Notes, and a Word of Thanks.

This book has given me the opportunity to contemplate my whole life and thus understand decisions I once made intuitively. I will save the personal confessions, but I must mention that I, in a (stable but non-legalized) couple relationship of 20 years, am *single* only *at heart*! Thank you, Bella, that I learned this from your book, which confirmed many of my suspicions and revealed a lot about myself.



ANDA-LUCIA SPÂNU

Notes

1. In the meantime, researching the author of the book presented here, I learned from her blog about the studies of Adriana Savu, who even wrote a Ph.D. thesis titled “Adults Unrepeated: A Study of Urban Life Without a Partner and Children,” defended in 2023 at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest. Bella DePaulo, “Single and Ignored in Romania: Guest Post by Romanian Scholar Adriana Savu,” 11 august 2019, <https://belladepaulo.com/2019/08/single-and-ignored-in-romania-guest-post-by-romanian-scholar-adriana-savu/> and <http://doctorat.snsparo/sustinerea-tezei-de-doctorat-adulti-nepereche-studiu-asupra-vietii-urbane-fara-partener-si-fara-copii-de-catre-candidata-savu-n-adriana-emilia/> (accessed 1 July 2024).
2. Full list and further details at <https://belladepaulo.com/books/#books-about-deception-and-dexter> (accessed 1 July 2024).
3. List of texts dedicated to the life fulfilled alone, at <https://belladepaulo.com/books/#single-people--single-life> (accessed 1 July 2024).
4. These are: 1. “Are You Single at Heart”; 2. “The Pressure to Live a Coupled Life and How We Conquered Them”; 3. “Freedom”; 4. “Solitude”; 5. “The Ones”; 6. “Our Kids, Other Kids, No Kids”; 7. “Intimacy”; 8. “How Life Turns Out”; 9. “The Resistance.”