



## **Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century**

*Betsy Israel*

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## **Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century** Betsy Israel

In this lively and colorful book of popular history, journalist Betsy Israel shines a light on the old stereotypes that have stigmatized single women for years and celebrates their resourceful sense of spirit, enterprise, and unlimited success in a world where it is no longer unusual or unlikely to be unwed.

Drawing extensively on primary sources, including private journals, newspaper stories, magazine articles, advertisements, films, and other materials from popular media, Israel paints remarkably vivid portraits of single women -- and the way they were perceived -- throughout the decades. From the nineteenth-century spinsters, of New England to the Bowery girls of New York City, from the 1920s flappers to the 1940s working women of the war years and the career girls of the 1950s and 1960s, single women have fought to find and feel comfortable in that room of their own. One need only look at Bridget Jones and the *Sex and the City* gang to see that single women still maintain an uneasy relationship with the rest of society -- and yet they radiate an aura of glamour and mystery in popular culture.

As witty as it is well researched, as thoughtful as it is lively, *Bachelor Girl* is a must-read for women everywhere.

## **Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century Details**

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## **From Reader Review Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century for online ebook**

### **Christy Stewart says**

In 1862 W.R. Gregg suggested that to solve the problem of too many spinsters in England they should ship the excess women to settlements across the Atlantic. Replace 'Atlantic' with 'Space' and we have an amazing comic book on our hands.

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### **Emma Rose Ribbons says**

This is a 4.5 star-book. Sadly, Goodreads doesn't allow for half stars so I have to make do with an imperfect rating. Oh well.

Bachelor Girl is a riveting read. Its scope is both an asset and a fault - covering the representation of the single girl in all sorts of media and comparing it to the single girl's actual life, struggles and joys, and the author does so from the nineteenth century to basically Bridget Jones. It's interesting as an overview because it gives you so many starting points from which to research more should you wish to do so, but it's also disappointing in that it can only do so much by being so general.

That being said, her account is enormously interesting even though her conclusions, however horrible, are not terribly surprising. Betsy Israel writes with an honesty that's very refreshing for a history book and I greatly enjoyed every section.

Do read her introduction, she explains what she covered and what she didn't (this book is about the single white girl/woman, and while she branches out sometimes and features working class women, it's almost mostly about straight white middle-class single life in New York City). Another reviewer commented that she takes pains to really go into detail up till 1960 and then seems to lose interest, as if single women today weren't still considered a little different, if not downright peculiar.

Despite these limitations, this book is a must-read if you have an interest in history in general and woman history in particular. I'll be looking for more books on the subject that deal with the areas Israel didn't quite touch.

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### **Kristen Northrup says**

It's an interesting experience to read two consecutive books on the same basic topic, one written by an academic and the other by a magazine writer. This one is the latter. The pluses were a more accessible, breezy writing style and less thesis-proving repetition. However, a lot of details didn't quite hold up to further research, which is why I finally knocked it down from 4 stars to 3. More definitions would have also helped, especially in terms of pharmaceuticals. A remarkable number of context-vague references to drugs I'd never heard of. Finally, many quotes didn't show up in the (jumbled) bibliography, and many were interesting enough that I would have liked to have read more of the original. Which is how I ended up with this book in the first place. I just have to assume the part about how by the 1970s, 'being single, like being

'openly gay' was finally socially acceptable was a major typo.

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### **Karen says**

I had a hard time identifying the author's thesis. The collection of history and narrative was fascinating and constructed in an engaging way. I learned a lot about women's history, but a work like this really needed a little more psychology. If Israel's goal was to present the facts and let the reader decide the reason the history of single women has played out in the manner it has, she did a great job. But when it comes down to it, I know very, very few women who purposely choose to avoid getting married and having children. The history of the bachelor girl really is just the history of back-up dreams, lack of options and depression. Usually women have turned away from marriage because of personal and family experiences... bad ones. I wish Israel had really addressed the EFFECTS of women's rights movements, the evolution of the single man, the nature of men and the cultural pressures they did and didn't face that caused them to fail to make women want them/marriage. Israel does address the backlash of the feminist movements in the last chapter, reflected in today's western society. It's almost as though she just can't admit this movement helped women gain a voice but made true happiness (i.e. "safety" in marriage) all the more difficult to achieve.

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### **AennA says**

The title tells us what exactly this book is all about - Bachelor Girl.

This brings us to the social history of single women as early as 13th century. You will discover the different "types" of single women of different generations, yet they suffer the same social stigma. Women were trained to be domesticated to meet their future husband's needs. Everyone expect women to get married, and whoever remained to be single suffers in workplaces with harsh working conditions and labor benefits. Thus, giving the impression that a woman cannot survive without a husband to sustain her emotional and financial needs. Society mistreated single women, maltreating them in workplaces, making them victims of violent street attacks and consistent topics of social hysteria.

Israel also mentioned literary and film references that tell stories of characters of single women who are not well treated by the other story characters. Some characters even suffered until the end of the story. However, there were also prominent literary and social personalities who remained single, and somehow made it successfully, despite of the society's ire comment on their status.

Numbers of divorce cases were in constant increase but women would still choose to be married. Married women treated with disgrace the single women. Media creates pressure on women to get married. Spinsterhood is a state where as the women themselves would not choose to be part of.

The author's approach in telling the history is simple and easy to follow. However, it was not written in clear chronological order it would not turn off the reader. I guess, it is somewhat tongue-in-cheek presentation of the lengthy history made it easier to understand and appreciate the book. Clearly, this book is not meant to promote singlehood or a battle against single women, but this is more of a discussion on what single women experienced and are still experiencing.

Despite the turn of history, being single remains a struggle to fit in the society, as everyone still expect

women to get married. Single women are still pressured to conform to family and society's norm. I guess what's disheartening about the whole scenario is the fact that even your own family would pressure you to get married, like it's the only best thing you can do for your life. At this day and age, it is inevitable to be judged on your accomplishment and that clearly includes if you are already married. And if you're happy or not is out of the question.

Reading this book made me understand and realize clearly how much single women suffered through all these generations. Growing old alone is still despised, and eyebrow raising cannot be helped. Truly, single women still have a lot to work on especially in proving everyone that growing old single is not the worst thing you can do for your life, but instead it's getting married for the wrong, absurd reason. Though, I must admit that nowadays, single women are more accepted than the early years, but still one must be brave enough to face the other people's questioning gaze.

No, I am not about to promote singlehood here, but I hope that eventually single women will no longer be questioned with their status. I am not saying that it is better to be single, because I will honestly say that it's not. I don't think I am not that old yet, but I've been bombarded with questions on my status for how many times in a month, people will ask you about it 5 days after you just last met them, that I sometimes would rather not see old friends than answering the same old question. I mean, who wouldn't be glad to love, be loved and get married? I guess everyone wants that, but of course, marriage has to come with the right reason. It should not be a need, but a want. Something you will fight for, and stand up for. It will happen when it is meant to happen, and while we are on the waiting game, let me tell you, singlehood is bliss.

I suggest that women or men should try reading this kind of book, be it about singlehood or plain womanity. It would be helpful for everyone to understand the life of women, especially the single ones, so next time you wouldn't look at them with pity. We understand the questioning, and we would enjoy surprising you with answers, but the look of pity? Oh, please, spare us those!

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### **Eleanor says**

*Bachelor Girl* by Betsy Israel reads a bit like a research paper, and she certainly *has* done a lot of research. The author admits at the beginning of the book that the scope of her research is limited to white woman, mainly in NYC, and it is not as all-encompassing as the title may suggest. Given all of this, I still think this was an interesting read and finished the book in two days. Pulling from the media, personal accounts, and popular culture, Israel paints a robust picture of single white women living in the city, from the mid-19th century through today. I've learned a lot, and I've added some of her source materials to my own "to-read" list. This is a good book for anyone who wants to see how far the rights, and perceptions, of women have come in the last 150 years.

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### **Morgan Dhu says**

*Bachelor Girl*, by Betsy Israel, is rather awkwardly and grandiosely subtitled 100 Years of Breaking the Rules — A Social History of Living Single, particularly since the author herself acknowledges that her study focuses almost exclusively on unmarried primarily white and middle class heterosexual women living in the

United States in the period following the Industrial Revolution. While it sets to one side not only female bachelorhood in other cultures and in the working and underclasses, but the vast history of unmarried women from religious to working spinsters in the pre-industrial era, it does give insight into the icons that have formed the cultural perception of the single woman that still inform our understanding of the state of being unmarried.

Israel does take a brief look at the pre-industrial image of the single, hard-working, industrious spinster, gainfully employed in her own right, functioning in business as what came to be categorised as ‘femmes soles’, women who did not require the legal authorisation of a husband to conduct business or enter into contracts. However, she begins her cultural study of the ways society has looked at and categorised the single woman with those images common in nineteenth century urban America, and particularly the east coast. Rural and western American women at this time were predominantly married and working on farm, ranch or other home enterprise. Those who were unmarried were usually teachers, or unmarried relatives living in the home and contributing to the household economy.

It took the more varied economy of a mid-sized town or city to produce the cultural phenomenon of the single woman. The emergence of the idea of the “old maid” as a social category, of unmarried woman was based on the concept of the unfortunate daughter of the bourgeois or gentry who, trained for nothing much beyond becoming a wife and mother, has failed to achieve that status, becoming instead the dowdy, often impoverished maiden aunt who has an odd personality and is frequently dependent on the kindness of more fortunate relatives. Israel writes of such women: “This first public etiquette for American spinsters called for a muted surrender, as if a spiritual hysterectomy had been performed, leaving behind as scars an insecurity and chronic melancholia. Typically spinsters helped with the chores at home and moved between the homes of married siblings who needed help. And ... they hired themselves out as paid companions, tutors, schoolteachers or assistants, and seamstresses. Within the household, even if this was her original family household, she was made to seem unimportant and childlike—for a woman’s adult life began at marriage—and she was expected to keep herself well occupied and out of the way. “

However, Israel notes, there were some women from the middle and upper classes in this era who did not accept this image of the single woman as a woman left behind and shut out from the fullness of life: “She who ‘preferred to live her single life’ lived it most often in New England, from the 1830s through the mid-1870s. This was the era of ‘single blessedness,’ an almost devotional phrase used by a fairly elite and intellectual band of single women to describe a state of unmarried bliss. To sketch a quick composite of this early rebel, we can say that she grew up amid intellectuals, preachers or writers, with left-leaning principles and a love of oration. Household conversation ranged from abolitionism, transcendentalism, or trade unionism to any other radical topic then debated at public meetings and in Unitarian church sermons. She may not have received an education like her brother’s, but on her own she had trained her mind the way others had worked to play delightfully upon the pianoforte, or to sing lieder (not that she lacked these more delicate talents).“

Among these single women - some of whom we know today as activists in the abolitionist and feminist movements - were many who formed deep emotional relationships with other women, which may have also been sexual in nature. Certainly some unmarried women wrote to each other in highly passionate terms, and lived together in what came to be termed ‘Boston marriages.’ It is difficult to determine how many of these women were what we would now consider lesbians or bisexuals in intimate relationships - such things were rarely spoken of - but certainly some were.

Other single educated women joined the settlement house movement. A settlement house - perhaps the best known was Hull House in Chicago, founded by Jane Addams - was “a social-work institute set down in the

worst parts of major cities and, in America, run by corps of women, often college friends who then lived there together for the rest of their lives.”

Less fortunate were the “factory girls” - young working class women, often from immigrant families, who were employed in factories or did piecework from their homes - ‘ship girls’ and domestic servants. These working girls were often the subjects of stories in sensationalist newspapers, rife with suggestions that their poverty led to sexual vice. This was not true of all working girls - certainly some were carefully watched by families, employers and landladies for any sign of sexual impropriety, and their prime interest, beyond economic survival, was learning to assimilate. But their reputation for sexual adventurousness was in part merited - working girls earned very little compared to men, and often handed all of their earning over to their families. This meant that if they wanted to go out, enjoy themselves, have fun, they needed a boy to ‘treat’ them - and the boys expected to be recompensed in some fashion. In New York, the more socially and sexually active working girls became known as ‘Bowery girls’ - young women who dressed boldly, and ‘walked out’ with the boys of the Irish gangs who controlled the Bowery night life - “a daring all-night party. Couples crowded for miles beneath the elevated train, or El, whose tracks cast slatted lantern strips across the gaudy attractions—the famed Bowery Theater, freak shows, oyster houses, hundreds of eateries and food carts, some selling the first mass-produced ice cream....” Many of these girls engaged in casual prostitution to augment their meagre incomes. Some of these girls eventually married; others continued in the shops and factories; older women who remained single might move into teaching if they had a high school diploma, or into ‘business’ as office and clerical workers.

As the nineteenth century came to an end, another category of single woman came into the public consciousness - the ‘bohemian girl’ and her slightly tamer cousin, the ‘bachelor girl,’ collectively known as ‘B-girls.’

“Typically our bohemian was a high school or college dropout who had tried but could not live within the strictures of the bourgeois society she had only narrowly escaped. She often told reporters, whether she’d been asked or not, that she possessed a “real” self, a poetic artistic self that had been stifled in her previous existence. But now, surrounded by other like souls, in a unique and freeing place, she, or this self, or something new and amazing would emerge. Generally speaking, she was hoping for signs of artistic talent or the ability to attract a monied husband who would elicit and encourage her inchoate artistry.” The bachelor girl was more interested in making money, but was also drawn to the artistic life; these girls tended to cluster around urban communities like Greenwich Village in New York, or at least spend their leisure time in such venues.

While all these culturally defined varieties of single women were sometimes lumped together under the umbrella term of the “new woman,” this term more specifically applied to a new icon, often distinguished by their “refusal or, rather, polite disinclination, to marry. (And when new women did marry, the unions were almost always unconventional. Margaret Sanger, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, Edna St. Vincent Millay—all had marriages that involved living apart, sometimes continents apart, “with an understanding.” There were public and tolerated affairs; in some cases they divorced and husbands took custody of the children.)” New women were educated, middle-class, politically left-wing, engaged in the suffragist movement, early feminism, and social reform. They had careers rather than jobs. These were the spiritual daughters of the previous century’s devotees of ‘single blessedness.’

The next major shift in the image of the single girl appeared after the end of WWI, when the post-war social upheaval led to the emergence of the ‘flapper.’ As Israel notes, “The flappers were singular democrats. Anyone could join. Whether she worked, studied, taught, performed, or played around, all a woman needed “to flap” was a youthful appearance and attitude—a sassy vocabulary, a cool way with men, a bit of daring,

humor, and some professional smarts. Lacking these latter qualities, one could easily just dress the part.” The flapper was the first ‘single girl’ to be a large enough demographic group to be attractive to advertisers, and was a significant segment of the single female population for much of the 1920s. Social critics bemoaned her freedom and tendency to place herself as the equal of men, and feared a plunge into sexual immorality and an end to marriage, but flappers were not more sexually active than previous generations of young single women. Many of the eventually married. But those who did not, but sought instead to build independent careers, fell afoul of two crushing social expectations. First, the single working woman was still seen as a part of her family and expected to turn her earning over to the family. And second, the new, Freudian-influenced approach to sexology, held that only in a marriage could a woman find true sexual maturity and fulfilment, and the new spinster risked being labeled frigid or, worse, a lesbian.

Despite this many young women remained unmarried and career-oriented throughout the 1920s, only to find all their ambitions dashed in the stock market crash and subsequent depression years, when any available middle-class jobs were for men who had families to support. There was little place for the working girl. While some women held onto jobs that men, even desperate men, would not take - filing, cleaning - most women were driven into dependency, on families or husbands. In many states, married women were denied the right to work at all so men could have their jobs. The Depression saw a vast increase in homelessness and migratory labour, and though it is rarely talked about, many of the hobos riding the rails, living rough and seeking casual work, were women. Boxcar Bertha, as she was known, was a member of a network of migratory women who looked out for each other, protecting their sisters against both the world, and male migratory workers.

And then, as the idea of the single woman had been just about subsumed into the image of the wife and mother, came the war. “The entire female population was for an odd slip of time effectively single. No one knew if their fiancés, boyfriends, lovers would ever return.” Working women became essential to the continuation of the economy’s smooth functioning: “female workers took over male positions such as cabdriver, elevator operator, bus driver, and security guard. In one year, the number of female defense-factory workers increased by 460 percent, a figure that translated into 2.5 million women assigned to the unlikeliest tasks. Instead of making carbon copies or assigning homework, many women now manufactured tank parts, plane frames, engine propellers, parachutes, ships, gas masks, life rafts, ammunition, and artillery. Another two million women continued in or picked up clerical work; the number of newly indoctrinated typists would double before the end of the war. And for the more serious, educated woman, the absence of men presented a guilty holiday. For the first time, many women found positions in symphonies, as chemists, and in some states, as lawyers. Harvard University accepted its first small number of female medical students in 1944.”

But even as the work of women became temporarily essential, government and the media were building the groundwork for forcing women out of the workforce once the boys came home. For every story praising a Rosie the riveter was a story about how men and women could not work together without sex destabilising the workplace, or the inefficiency of working women with their monthly ‘women’s problems.’

There were two big problems with women once the war was over - the first, how to get them, not just back into the home, but change them back to women who had learned to be self-sufficient, to manage jobs and households, to be, if married, the head of the family, and if single, that they didn’t need men. The second problem was what to do with the excess women. Many men didn’t come home, and a significant number of those who did, brought foreign brides. Suddenly there were vast numbers of women who could not be shuffled off into marriage. The answer was to increase the pressure to compete for what men there were. The old psychological stories about the immaturity and neuroticism of the single woman, the necessity of marriage and children to the formation of a healthy female psyche, were dragged out with a vengeance. The

single woman - never married or increasingly common divorcee - was a threat, a locus of social instability.

Yet even at the peak of the 'back to the home' movement, some women insisted on living, at least for a time, a single life.

And one of the questions that came to obsess those observing the single working woman was, what was she doing about sex? Through the 50s and much of the 60s, there was an ambivalence about the single girl - sometimes threat, sometimes frigid and neurotic, sometimes sad and damaged, sometimes a plucky girl in search of a man and supporting herself along the way, but never as fulfilled as the wife and mother.

Then women's liberation arrived on the scene, and it became harder to persuade women that their only path to happiness was through marriage. The single woman could have a career, independence, and a satisfying sexual relationship without a permanent attachment to a man. Marriage became something a woman might do because she wanted to, not because she had to. And it became something a woman might leave if it was no longer fulfilling. Even motherhood was no longer out of the question for the single woman, whether through pregnancy or adoption. Indeed, there was no longer such a thing as 'the single girl' just a large number of women who had decided to forgo marriage, temporarily or permanently.

Israel ends on a somewhat ambivalent note, listing modern 'single icons' like Ally McBeal and Bridget Jones who, despite financial independence, are profoundly unhappy with being single. She quotes single women who bemoan the lack of interesting, worthwhile men. She suggests that there is still something not quite right in the lonely life of women who work, and date, but remain unmarried. Yet at the same time, she acknowledges that, by objective measures, single women are not unhappy as a rule, and that many feel strangely trapped if they do marry.

In short, in the end of this long examination of single women, Israel has discovered that they are people, with all the joys and discontents of other people.

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### **Caroline says**

The title of this book really ought to read 'The Secret History of Single [American] Women in the [Late Nineteenth and] Twentieth Century[s]', since that's actually what it's about - because I can forgive the author the omission in the interests of brevity.

It's a very good read, incredibly comprehensive, although the author does seem to spend much more time on the early part of the 20th century, from the turn of the century up to the 50s and then somewhat skims over (comparatively) the years between 1960 and the present. Indeed, there's hardly any focus on the present at all, which I found a shame. This book was crying out for some kind of comparison of present-day singletons with those of earlier eras - how single women today differ from their earlier sisters, where they are similar, what kind of struggles and attitudes and dilemmas do they share?

From the vantage of a (relatively) progressive era, it's fascinating to see how far attitudes have come, from the days when single women were considered abnormal, subversive, a threat. These days I don't think anyone considers single women to be 'diseased' or a corrupting influence, but I do still think there is a stigma attached to being a single woman that is not attached to single men. In fact, one of the common threads that runs through this book, to me at least, is the sheer amount of vitriol and anger directed at women daring to take control of their own lives, to choose their own path, whether sexually, professionally, financially. The fact that, even today, single women can be viewed as a threat, condemned as sluts or frigid or man-haters,

says something about how far we still have to go in search of equality.

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### **Cari says**

An interesting read, but *Bachelor Girl* suffered from two major issues that kept popping up in the back of my brain while I read. First, it had a tendency to feel like propaganda, and this was in no way lessened by the author's "disclaimer" at the beginning that it's impossible to deal with the subject matter without sounding a bit feminist. Second, 99% of the book felt like a warning against being single for too long. There was a heavy emphasis on the negative viewpoints and very little presented to show the other side, the pros that kept drawing women into this lifestyle beyond the simple "know and keep my own mind" mantra. When the positives were addressed, they were a quick one or two sentences tossed off and left on their own, dismissed with little analysis. And at the end, when Israel struggles to end this on a positive note (don't worry, you'll still put it down feeling like this married woman just spent 264 pages telling you to enjoy being single when you're young, but it's really just better to get married once you're not), she gives us the example of Ally McBeal as a healthy single woman to aspire to.

Really? A neurotic anorexic who spent more time chasing men than doing her actual job? That's the best the author could come up with? Very disappointing.

A third point: this is horribly documented. Quotes are cut all to hell (I counted nearly a dozen ellipses in the space of a three line quote at one point), and supporting sources are limited in the text. The source lists at the back are little better.

This could have been so good, too. Israel writing style is light and flows easily, and if she had put in some more effort, this had the potential to be a great study. But it felt like laziness, a general skimming of the most shallow stereotypes in history that ignored whole swathes of the reality. Interesting, but very far from an in-depth study, and as a "history," it's greatly lacking.

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### **Cathleen says**

In *Bachelor Girl*, Betsy Israel reconstructs the single American girl in all her manifestations -- suspicious early factory worker, bohemian, rule smashing flapper, 1970s mace toting single woman afraid of being raped or killed on her way home each night, 1980s ice queen -- using popular legend, newspaper clippings written by hysterical men afraid of new female independence, copious novels both well known and obscure, and occasionally, though sadly few remain from the earliest days of female singleness, firsthand accounts from single women themselves. Primarily about single women in NYC with a sprinkling of singles from Chicago, she's largely talking about urban women's lives; her focus is also largely middle class, white, and heterosexual.

For me, the mark of good nonfiction is that it sparks a desire to read other books. *Bachelor Girl* certainly does that. It took a great deal of willpower not to stop every couple of minutes and log into Goodreads, adding three or four books at a time to my to-read shelf. The only thing that helped was knowing that a lot of the materials she mentions are primary source materials -- likely available, if at all, only through extensive library searches. Many (actually, it would probably be more accurate to say most) of the secondary sources she refers to are novels and movies. This, too, made me happy. She does a really good job of demonstrating

how popular books and films constructed ideas of single women throughout the decades right up to Bridget Jones and Ally McBeal, and to her credit (or maybe detriment depending on your point of view), she made those two particular characters sound interesting to me for the very first time. Maybe I'll even watch those Bridget Jones movies, or maybe this will all blow over in a day, and I'll go back to not caring at all. Regardless, her analysis is interesting.

I really appreciate her ability to analyze journalistic decisions rather than taking news reports at their word. She is keenly aware of the anti single woman tone of most articles -- even those that purported to be on the single girl's side. She also provides a really interesting, albeit brief, history of women in print journalism and the struggle to break out of "the 4F cookie/sweater slum" with 4F referring to food, furnishings, fashion, and family stories -- the only ones available to female reporters for a long while.

I recently got to hear composition scholar Lynn Bloom speak at a conference about writing. She said that clear, approachable writing shows profound respect for one's reader. I totally dig that, and Israel respects her reader. Her tone is casual and conversational. She doesn't get bogged down by academese. I'll admit, though, that I prefer a more rigorously academic citation style over the loosey goosey one that journalists tend to favor. She has an impressive list of resources at the end of the book, but it is often unclear which source goes with which quotation while reading. Also, I enjoyed her writing style, but she has a penchant for sloppy transitions -- "Getting to the point," "But enough of that." Her transitions remind me of an awkward party guest, stumbling from one topic of conversation to the next at break neck speed in a desperate attempt to connect with one of the strangers in the room.

My biggest criticism is that Israel's work fails to adequately address the lives of single women of color, lesbians, and working class women. Of the three she probably does the best job with the latter, as she does briefly examine what it was like for very low paid factory workers around the turn of the nineteenth century. She then largely abandons further discussion of poor women, however. Her discussion of women of color and lesbians amounts to no more than a dozen or so sentences in her 200+ pages. I was really disappointed by this. I would have been more forgiving if she had at least included race and sexuality analysis in her discussion of the last half century. After all, that doesn't seem too difficult to research (though SOMEONE needs to be doing the harder early research because WOC and women-loving-women did not miraculously come into existence without a history). Much of her last chapter was devoted to personal interviews, yet she never once indicated that she thought about race or sexuality while talking to her many interviewees. I don't mind reading about marriage for page after page after page as long as I get to hear what lesbian and bisexual women have to say about their concerns. I don't mind endless input from white women as long as that is balanced by representing the myriad experiences of Women of Color. Unfortunately, I got mostly marriage and white women. I guess if I get all bright and shiny, silver liningish I could say that at least this leaves room for someone else to write a more encompassing book. The thing is, I'm tired of waiting for it.

In her introduction, Israel admits that because WOC "make few primary appearances in the public record until occasional stories on the 'sad,' 'dreary,' or 'dead-end' world of the 'Negro single,' circa 1966" they make an insignificant appearance in her text. She pleads, "it would be impossible, anyway, to do justice to the complexities of the black single experience in this volume. It deserves its own study." Yes, we've heard it all before: it isn't possible to include black women because it wouldn't be fair to them. Their experiences are too varied, complicated, fill-in-the-blank to be included (by the way, Israel doesn't mention whether it would be unfair to other WoC) in this book. The thing is, you can't title a book *Bachelor Girl: 100 Years of Breaking the Rules -- A Social History of Living Single* and then use your introduction to explain that large parts of the population just didn't fit neatly into your design. Perhaps she should have subtitled it *A Social History of Living Single, White, Straight and Mostly Monied*. That's a more accurate description.

And for freak's sake, how do you talk about spinsters without talking about lezzies? If we didn't invent spinsterdom then we at least perfected its practice! She gives an even shorter excuse for that exclusion.

I'm practical enough to know that a book can't be everything for everyone, but apologizing upfront for everything that a book is not does not let you off the hook for what I consider to be egregious omissions.

Overall, I really liked the book for what it was; I just thought it could have been a lot more.

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### **Catelyn May says**

*Bachelor Girl* is a heavily anecdotal history of single women in the twentieth century, and unlike other books which might focus on only one or two decades the progress of women from the Victorian era to the present is clear. The path from spinster to independent woman was long and fraught with, to me, a quite horrifying amount of sexism and misogyny.

This book has many first hand accounts by women who were young and single throughout the 1900s, and I think I gained a better understanding of feminism and why some now older women feel the way they do about women's rights and feminism in general. It's hard to imagine a time in which it was illegal for women to rent apartments in their own name, or when the classified pages were labeled "jobs for men" and "jobs for women," or when it seemed the only real jobs for women were typing, teaching, or working as a stewardess.

The bibliography at the end of this book is quite good, and I also enjoyed how the author used anecdotes from literature and television to illustrate the attitudes toward single women. I was aware of most everything in this book before I read it, but something about it being so heavily anecdotal and all the pieces pulled from newspaper stories of the time really made me think. I'm glad I read it, and I'd definitely recommend it.

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### **James says**

This book covers the crap that society has dished out to single women over the years, though some of this turd fest applied to all women. Sources include movies and radio as well as the usual written materials. I got a bit angry thinking about what my mom went through and how she would have been much happier as a 21st century woman. Sadly this garbage still exists, though the areas and people who push it seem to be shrinking.

This book also covers the late 19th century, and includes an extensive and well sorted bibliography.

This would make a great book club gender read.

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### **Missjgray says**

This book was a very readable history of single women. It's hard to say much more than you can infer from the back cover or the Amazon review.

I liked it most because of the new face this book, and the story it chronicles, showed me of feminism. The options are not either "bitchy-whore" or "conservative-babyfactory." Betsy Israel is clearly sympathetic to

the concerns of the closer-to-hard-core type feminists. But, still not in a militant sense, at all. At least in this book, she keeps that off the radar and focuses on telling a story. The places where she uses/shows a bias it's pretty easy see it and move past it.

This was a really interesting read that has begun to shape many things about the way I see history and current events. Not that I'm now looking for ways that women get short-changed. I've just been given another lens to look through when I'm evaluating a situation, reference, news, history, etc. Just a perspective that I find helpful to remember, instead of always shush myself.

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### **Karie says**

Its not just shriveled old ladies in houses filled with cats. Sisters are doin' it for themselves and have been for centuries. So step off. Some of us are allergic to cats.

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### **Michele Bolay says**

Rats! There were reserves on this one, so I had to bring it back to the library. Will get it again and finish it later. Loved what I had read so far.

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