

***All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation***

Rebecca Triaster. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016. 317 Pages

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This book pays tribute to growing numbers of single and late-married women and embraces their freedom and their rights to enjoy parity with men. It engages modern lifestyles with examples from literary writings about characters such as Anne Elliot, Miss Havisham, and Jane Eyre, and the historically documented struggles of epic American women such as Susan B. Anthony, who preferred an unmarried identity and fought for the end of slavery and the subjugation of women. The author states that she conducted qualitative interviews with one hundred women across the United States. Although she discusses her data collection, she does not provide specific details about her research design. The approach is a mixture from contemporary journalism and social history. There are however fewer detailed stories derived from her 100 interviews. The author makes strong claims about the generalizability of these women's accounts, and goes back to historical trends in marriage and the current rising trends in singlehood. While the current and historical examples of single women certainly provide a strong basis for her arguments about marriage being a social tool of female subjugation for many women, not all women across the world may agree. Many women choose to marry, have children, and lead successful lives with or without jobs. Do they all consider the institution of marriage to be calamitous to their freedom of expression and lifestyle?

Triaster argues that in conventional settings, marriage is the aim for every woman in society, unless the woman decides to take an active role in resisting the institution and thereby patriarchy and suppression. She uses amongst other examples, stories from Shakespeare's plays where death is the end of a tragic tale, and marriage the outcome of a happy one. A woman does not have to be married in order to be considered worthy and complete by society. On the contrary, she says, marriage becomes synonymous to death for some, meaning it is the end of a woman's right to individuality.

Triaster talks about an important shift that took place in the early 1990s, when many women decided that marriage, sex, and reproduction did not necessarily have to coexist, and with it came the changing patterns of marriage and reproduction. She talks about how women are undermined in their strivings for real justice if they are single, and points to Anita Hill's testimony as an example. The author makes a strong case about women who have contributed significantly to the making of history because of their elite status. She says that it was harder for poorer women to stay single, because it was harder for single women to earn a living. Hence, she argues that marriage was a route to economic stability. As more and more women experience social mobility, marriage no longer offers economic security.

In the rest of the book, the author further elaborates the long held benefits of staying single, and uses many historical examples of women's struggles in a male dominated world to enforce the reasoning that women's suffrage cuts across race, time, social class, and sexual orientation. She deconstructs common and pervasive stereotypes that plague modern women at work, namely that family must come first for married women. She argues that even the justice system is biased towards the testimonies of single women such as Anita Hill. But contrarily she makes the argument that only unmarried and childless women can comfortably make the claim to power and ambition, citing the example of Oprah Winfrey amongst others. She also talks about the friendships and socialization arising from single women in big cities like New York and Atlanta. In other words, she is saying that being single is not an uncommon phenomenon any more.

Triaster concludes the book by supporting the decisions of women to stay single, and suggests that while single women do need help from the state in terms of policy considerations, the state should play a supportive role rather than an authoritative role. She suggests policy improvements in the areas of childcare, abortion, housing, stronger equal pay protection, a higher mandated minimum wage, insurance for IVF (In Vitro Fertilization), affordable day care programs, paid family leave, compensation for illness, better welfare, reproductive rights, alternate family structures, and flexible attitudes towards work. Many institutions have to come together to achieve this, including governments and companies. Men should support women, and women should support each other.

While the book provides rich and nuanced details, it could arguably cover more ground on the different kinds of feminisms that have arisen out

of the distinctive experiences and interpretations of women's struggles. Women across the nation and the world interpret the meaning of singlehood, motherhood, and marriage differently depending on their religious and political affiliations, level of education, and income. Men also might go through similar struggles depending on their social and economic positions. Single parenting, for example, presents challenges regardless of the gender of the parent, especially if no persons or institutions are available to share the financial and emotional responsibilities. In most parts of the world, both men and women coexist in a mixture of modernism and traditions. Therefore, it is hard to say that one size or type of identity fits all. The author could have cited more works by social scientists, in particular sociologists who have written extensively on gender, family, and marriage.

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