Singleness in Britain, 1960-1990

Identity, Gender and Social Change

Emily Priscott

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Introduction

Like the historian Katherine Holden, I believe that singleness can be seen as an identity category rather than simply a part of the life-cycle.[1] Singleness is a slippery category. Whilst most obviously a demographic classification, peer beneath this surface and it reveals a complex tangle of different meanings. Throughout history, single people have been marginalised by what Holden has called the "dominant category of 'married,'" which has implicitly classified them as inferior and incomplete. Singleness itself is not an orientation but an absence; it is this absence that informs how single people are perceived and is also the reason why, historically, they have often been confined to the shadows.

Yet, singleness is not always so sharply delineated; because it is defined through not having a partner it can take on different meanings depending on a person's age, sex and class. A young woman, for instance, who has not yet married but intends to, is distinct from a middle-aged woman who has chosen to remain single. The former is defined through the life-cycle, a temporary stage that will end with marriage, whilst the latter may be seen as more of a distinct, even deviant, category.

This distinction is not simply to do with age and being "left on the shelf," but is more complex. This book historicises singleness, focusing on the period 1960-1990, to explore its implications for contemporary debates about gender identity and social change. Because, as we shall see, single men and women were often seen as distinct groups during this period, their singleness was assumed to be a significant part of their personalities. However, such categorisations also depended on a person's route into singleness, and during this period, as it became an increasingly diverse category, these distinctions sometimes broke down. Between 1960 and 1990, a combination of government legislation, sociological research and feminist activism transformed the social landscape, helping to open up the previously rigid distinction between those who were married and those who were not.

Divorce became more accessible following the Divorce Reform Act in 1969, which permitted divorce without fault, meaning that singleness after marriage became increasingly common. Likewise, separation, cohabitation and single

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[1] Holden, Katherine. *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-1960*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007, p6.

parenthood all lost some of their stigma, leading to a greater diversity of both household composition and types of singleness.

Overall, however, it remained a conspicuous social category, borne out by the status and experiences of individual groups. With lone fathers, for instance, the term was inexact, their existence itself having more significance than how they got there. Men were most likely to become single parents through widowhood, and sometimes divorce. In such cases, because it was still regarded as unusual for a man to have sole custody of his child or children, the difference was less significant than with single mothers. Never-married or putative fathers, however, also started to receive more attention from sociologists during the 1970s, and the distinction between the two categories will be made here where necessary.

Comprehensive histories of singleness are rare, with research often favouring courtship patterns, marriage and the family. Katherine Holden broke new ground in 2007 with *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-60,* which focused specifically on the distinctive nature of single life. Holden drew out the inequalities of patriarchal culture by comparing the experiences of men and women, observing that singleness denoted "autonomy and independence" in men whilst being seen as problematic, even "inherently contradictory" in women.[2] As women have historically been defined through their successes or failures in marriage far more than men, with marriage symbolising women's "dependence and containment,"[3] spinsters have been cast as intrinsically oppositional, whereas men, whether married or not, have in a sense been seen as "always single."[4]

Taking Holden's argument that gendered language has, historically, defined perceptions of singleness, I have focused specifically on how it has reinforced these perceptions at a fundamental level. The descriptive language often associated with spinsters or spinsterhood in the British press, adjectives such as "prim," "frigid" and "fussy" for instance, denoted deeply ingrained stereotypes that both reflected and reinforced single women's status within patriarchal culture. Their persistent use in both the press and popular culture between 1960 and 1990 sat uncomfortably with the overall improvement in women's social, legal and economic status and reveals a more complex picture than might at first be apparent.

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[2] Ibid, p6-7.
[3] Ibid, p9.
[4] Ibid, p7.

As Holden has noted, most historical research on singleness focuses on women, but like her, I have chosen to look at both single men and women together. Holden's methods, however, yielded significantly more material about women's lives than men's. As she points out in *The Shadow of Marriage*, because of the centrality of marriage to discourses about women's lives, even down to the changing of their names, bachelors can be harder to pinpoint in legal records. Likewise, in life-history sources such as autobiography and interviews, men were less likely than women to discuss their marital status.[5] Because my approach is based on other sources, however, I have been able to divide my chapters more equally, although Holden's observation confirms the fact that marriage was often far less central to men's social status than it was to women's.

Even with the permanent decline of marriage rates from the mid-1970s onwards and the increasing acceptance of cohabitation and divorce, stereotypes about single women sometimes seemed trapped in a time-warp. A survey of the language used in both the press and popular culture over this period reflects this, raising the question of how far women's representation was still coloured by patriarchal presumptions. One might expect that anxieties about female independence of the kind that spinsters embodied would have declined as women advanced in the public sphere. The gains of both activism and government legislation during the 1960s and 1970s ensured that women had greater equality of opportunity than they had ever had. So why, by the 1980s, were images of single women often still so reductive?

It was not only representation; in her research into single women's lives in the late 1980s (later published as *Single Women: On the Margins?*) the sociologist Tuula Gordon found that many of her sample, across class, race, age and gender lines, enjoyed being single despite feeling marginalised. There was a prevalent sense amongst her respondents, however, that they should be actively looking for a husband or partner, even if they had no particular desire to settle down,[6] suggesting that social reality had failed to catch up with changing principles.

Social reality, then, composed of all the little, seemingly insignificant microaggressions produced by culture and society, continued to convey women's secondary status whilst also subtly reinforcing men's inbuilt privilege. Nevertheless, the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were crucial decades in the development of new ideas about masculinity. As Bill Osgerby has shown, the growth of consumer culture breathed new life into the bachelor playboy image,

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[5] Ibid, p5.
[6] Gordon, Tuula. *Single Women: On the Margins?* Macmillan, London, 1994, p93.

with magazines such as *Playboy*, films such as the *Bond* series and popular lifestyle literature selling an ideal of a masculinity that was cultivated, fashion-conscious and sexually aggressive.[7] Whilst feminist and gay rights campaigns became more mainstream, however, received ideas about masculinity began to change, with different strands of single masculinity, from the promiscuous single man-about-town to the lone father struggling to combine work with childcare, becoming rich signifiers of changing gender norms.

Between 1960 and 1990, radical social movements, political reforms and subsequent backlashes moved in a stop-start, back-and-forth dance. Despite complex, sometimes contradictory developments, however, there was a basic arc of progress. During the 1960s, for instance, second-wave feminism and the reformist gay rights movement could claim some victories, such as the Abortion and Sexual Offences Acts of 1967 (which partially decriminalised abortion and homosexuality respectively).

The 1970s continued this progressive trend, with the 1970 Equal Pay Act and several significant pieces of legislation to improve the position of single parents and destigmatise the concept of illegitimacy. In 1975, for instance, on the recommendations of the 1974 Finer Report into One-Parent Families, the government introduced the Child Benefit Act, which provided more generous allowances for subsequent children of lone parents, and the Employment Protection Act, which established statutory maternity pay. Such measures, in different ways, helped to normalise non-nuclear family households and challenge the cultural supremacy of marriage.

The 1980s, however, was an ideological battleground in which the progressive legislation of the previous two decades clashed with Thatcherism's authoritarian moralism. If a liberal consensus had been settling on the previous two Labour governments' social policy, then the decade's three consecutive Conservative administrations ripped it up as much as they dared. Yet, despite a reactionary approach to welfare (which often penalised single mothers), and sexual morality (reaching its apotheosis in 1988 with Section 28), other measures, such as 1989's Family Law Reform Act, which abolished the legal concept of illegitimacy, showed that some change had been permanent.

In this context, single people's status can signify broader attitudinal shifts, encompassing debates about illegitimacy, homosexuality and gender identity itself, something reflected in the sources used here. What seemed, at first, a

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[7] Osgerby, Bill. "The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption and Interior Design in American Men's Magazines, 1930–65," *Journal of Design History, Vol. 18,* No. 1, 2005, p101.

slightly eccentric jumble was, I realised, a vital part of my approach, the reason why, for instance, you see cookery books alongside sociology and feminist theory. Together, these sources provide a way of examining the social fabric of this period, in which ideas circulated like minute exchanges of power. Newspaper articles, housing reports, sociological research, films and television programmes, all play a part in weaving together the threads of the whole to get to the heart of social reality and identity.

This book explores the relationship between singleness and other social categories, primarily gender, age and social class. Although race is also a significant category, particularly considering Britain's recent imperial past and the increase in immigration during the second half of the 20th century, I have limited my analysis to three broad issues for the sake of clarity.

Notes on Single Character

Spinsters

As marriage and singleness are relational categories, one being defined through reference to the other, histories of marriage, courtship and the family are embedded in this research. My interest in women's relationship to domesticity during the 20th century is implicit throughout this research, providing a map for the social preoccupations of the post-war period. Claire Langhamer's work on the construction of romantic love and courtship, *The English in Love*, illustrates the other side to this story, the blushing bride to my twisted spinster. In laying down this history, with its rituals, hopes and dreams, Langhamer has revealed the workings of what could be called the ideology of romantic love.[8] It is this backdrop that my research draws on, the creed that cast single people as secondary characters in the drama of other people's romances.

As Rosalind Gill has written, "there is nothing 'mere' about ideology...nor can...a stark distinction between the real (material) and the discursive be maintained." Received ideas about gender take root at a fundamental level and influence our sense of self and of others, the social world around us and our place in its structure as a whole. Gender, according to Linda Alcoff, is continuously created and defined by both individuals and society, with both taking part in the process of duplicating or challenging received ideas.[9]

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[8] Langhamer, Claire. *The English in Love: The Intimate History of an Emotional Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013.

[9] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1988, pp. 405-436, p407.

Alison Oram's work on spinsterhood during the inter-war period has also provided important background to this research. The psychological categorisations of female sexuality during this period were important in legitimising existing spinster stereotypes that then continued into the later 20th century. Although the separate spheres ideology of the Victorian period had sanctified marriage and motherhood as expressions of feminine virtue,[10] psychological discourses from the 19th and early 20th centuries also validated women's sexuality within marriage.[11] The stigmatisation of spinsterhood found renewed life during the 1920s and 1930s, when reformist feminists campaigned for greater recognition of female sexuality.[12] This combination of psychology, that emphasised the centrality of marriage and motherhood to women's health and happiness, and liberal feminist critiques of the sexual double standard, created multiple prejudices against spinsters: deviant, unfulfilled half-women to psychologists and an embarrassment to feminists.

Oram's research with Annmarie Turnbull on lesbian identity during the 20th century has also provided source material for my interest in how spinsterhood can disrupt heteronormativity. Psychological classifications of lesbian identity shared many traits with spinsters, with both perceived as being less than wholly female.[13] Related to this is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* which, as a precursor to queer theory, also highlights the performative nature of gender identity. As with bachelorhood, the relationship between spinsterhood and homosexuality is implicit, and both Oram and Butler have provided a theoretical basis for this research.

As Katherine Snyder has shown, in discourses about the family spinsters were often the unnamed others, a tacit challenge to the apparent naturalness of the nuclear family, based on the negative value of not having a husband.[14] Related

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[10] Vickery, Amanda. "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronologies of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal,* Vol. 36, No. 2, 1993, pp. 383-414, p383.

[11] Oram, Alison. "Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-War Feminist Discourse," *Women's History Review,* Vol. 1, No. 3, 1992, pp 413-433, p414.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Oram, Alison and Turnbull, Annmarie. *The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and Sex Between Women in Britain,* 1780-1970, Routledge, London, 2001, p234. This point is implicit in much of the source material in this book, particularly in discussions of lesbians never marrying and supporting themselves financially.

[14] Snyder, Katherine. *Bachelors, Manhood and the Novel, 1850-1925,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p9.

to this are Shelly Budgeon's work on contemporary "couples culture" and its reproduction of "institutionalised norms" that can marginalise single women.[15]

Bachelors

In a 1990 retrospective on the 1966 film *Alfie*, starring Michael Caine, the *Daily Mail* reflected wistfully on the far-reaching social changes that had consigned this "archetypal bachelor boy of the Sixties" to history. "He called women Dollies or 'It', he bedded them and left them, he admitted that when it came to their pain, he didn't want to know."[16] This masculine type, the bachelor playboy, who, the *Mail* surmised, "had no place…in [the life of] the independent woman or the age of AIDS"[17] had been a cultural phenomenon in the decades following the Second World War. As Katherine Holden observes in *The Shadow of Marriage*, for men, "avoidance of marriage…[was] presented as both normal and forgivable. Indeed, [it was] often suggested that bachelorhood was a more desirable state for men than marriage,"[18] a sentiment that reached its peak during the 1960s and 1970s.

Whilst it was clearly more of a cultural phenomenon than a lived reality for most British men (particularly considering the high rates of first marriage during the 1960s),[19] the playboy image played a crucial role in establishing new ideas about what it meant to be a single man. Numerous newspaper articles, British films and popular television series drew on this imagery, creating a lifestyle and fashion phenomenon if nothing else. If cultural images such as these are minute snapshots of contemporary social attitudes (often undermining or contradicting each other), then the bachelor playboy was an attempt by consumer culture to sell an ideal of manhood to the British people. At once modern, sophisticated and yet somehow distinctly old-fashioned, he was a Swinging Sixties update of the dashing Regency rake or the foppish Bertie Wooster man-about-town, with added sex and glamour.

In *Dismembering the Male*, Joanna Bourke's exploration of the effects of the Great War on the male body, she contends that the concept of patriarchy within feminist scholarship "ignores the ways in which power structures also

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[15] Budgeon, Shelly. "Couple Culture and the Production of Singleness," *Sexualities,* No. 11, No. 3, 2008, pp301—325, p302.
[16] *Daily Mail*, November 2nd, 1990.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Holden, Katherine. *The Shadow of Marriage,* p95.
[19] Ibid.

oppress men."[20] Whilst I do believe that patriarchy is a useful concept for examining power relations between men and women (and men and men), my own research into masculinity has been shaped by her observations. My approach to examining bachelor identity, in its distinctive, singular forms, treads a narrow tightrope, alternating between an assessment of patriarchal privilege and an exploration of the psychic confinement caused by rigid definitions of masculinity. The diverse types of single masculinity explored here, however, from the glittering images of glamorous playboys to the newly single fathers struggling to come to terms with their unfamiliar role, shows that within the broad definition of "masculinity" was a complex collection of identities and experiences.

In the context of literature on masculinity, work on bachelorhood and single masculinity is most widely represented in architectural studies, historical research on consumer culture and critical work on specific films and novels, such as the *James Bond* series. The wealth of literature on *James Bond* is itself a phenomenon, ranging from geopolitics and the Cold War,[21] 20th-century consumer culture[22] and the portrayal of women.[23]

In Chapter One, I look at how the films' immense popularity fed the cultural mythology surrounding bachelorhood, particularly during the 1960s, and what this tells us about contemporary ideas about masculinity. Although, as the geographer Andrew Gorman-Murray has shown, the promiscuous stereotype embodied by the bachelor playboy could sometimes upset social norms, this was only due to its potential for excess. As the pinnacle of heteronormative masculinity, the image of the bachelor playboy may have

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[20] Bourke, Joanna. *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War,* Reaktion Books Ltd, London, 1999, p14.

[21] See, for instance, Black, Jeremy. *The Politics of James Bond: From Fleming's Novels to the Big Screen,* University of Nebraska Press, London, 2005 and *Ian Fleming & James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007,* Comentale, Edward P., Watt, Stephen and Willman, Skip (eds), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005.

[22] Cooper, Holly, Miller, Dale and Schembri, Sharon. "Brand-Self Identity Narratives in the James Bond Movies," Psychology and Marketing, Vol. 27, No. 6, 2010, pp 557–567.

[23] For instance, Neuendor, Kimberly A., Gore, Tomas D., Dalessandro, Amy, Janstova, Patricie and Snyder-Suhy, Sharon. "Shaken and Stirred: A Content Analysis of Women's Portrayals in James Bond Films," *Sex Roles,* Vol. 62, No. 11-12, 2010, pp 747-761 and Racioppi, Linda and Tremonte, Colleen. "Geopolitics, Gender, and Genre: The Work of Pre-Title/Title Sequences in James Bond Films," *Journal of Film and Video,* Vol.66, No.2, 2014, pp15-25.

undermined family values through its strong current of anti-domesticity, but it also reinforced heterosexual gender norms.[24]

Bill Osgerby's work on the bachelor pad and the playboy image in post-war America identifies it as a new type of consumer-driven masculinity,[25] which crossed the Atlantic during the 1950s and became part of 1960s British culture. Films stars such as Sean Connery and Michael Caine embodied variations of this type of single masculinity, whilst *Playboy* magazine mythologised the bachelor lifestyle as the pinnacle of heterosexual wish-fulfilment.

However, like singleness itself, the term "bachelor" was unstable and shifting, containing a multiplicity of meanings that signified diverse masculine types. These sometimes-contradictory character traits undermined the received wisdom that masculinity was solid, stable and universal. Lesley Hall's work on masculinity, *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900-1950*, explores this complexity, arguing that, in exchange for men's privileged status, patriarchal culture has demanded certain emotional sacrifices.[26] Indeed, in the 1998 anthology *Men Doing Feminism*, Sandra Harding argues that "men can be feminist subjects as well as objects,"[27] an approach that has informed this research.

In its consideration of men's lives and the complex forces that shaped them, this book offers a feminist take on masculinity that highlights the pressures of conforming to strict standards whilst also critiquing patriarchal privilege. Both Hall and Harding were writing during the 1990s when academic interest in masculinity was increasing, but their work provides a useful approach to the previous three decades.

Since, as Holden asserts, men have historically been defined through tropes of freedom, individuality and power, single men were less inherently problematic than single women. However, the multiplicity of bachelor identities, their meanings often dependent upon social context, meant that there were other possibilities that were less visible and more transgressive. The secondary bachelor stereotype, the secluded celibate who lived alone or with his mother, began to receive attention from researchers during the 1960s

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[24] Gorman-Murray, Andrew. "This is Disco Wonderland!' Gender, Sexuality and the Limits of Gay Domesticity on The Block," *Social and Cultural Geography,* Vol.12, No.5, 2011, pp 435-453, p435.

[25] Osgerby, Bill. "The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon," p101.

[26] Hall, Lesley A. *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900-1950*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, p1.

[27] Harding, Sarah. "Can Men Be Subjects of Feminist Thought?" *Men Doing Feminism*, Digby, Tom (ed), Routledge, London, 1998, p174.

and 1970s, who challenged received wisdom about the desirability of independence. Related to this was the so-called confirmed bachelor, who represented a point of convergence with queer identity. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, the confirmed bachelor, as Katherine Snyder's research shows, challenged heteronormative masculinity through his apparent ambivalence.

In queer history, bachelorhood works as an implicit demographic and identity category. With male homosexuality entirely illegal until 1967, and remaining subject to social and legal prescriptions for decades afterwards, bachelorhood was more than merely a legal status for men who were denied the right to marry. It was a form of closeting that worked two ways. On one hand, it acted as a protective veil for cohabiting couples who could present themselves as bachelor roommates (what Sally Munt has called "active closetry"[28]); on the other, it provided heterosexual society with a convenient way of categorising them. At its heart, however, it was an oppressive label which was emblematic of a deeply homophobic society. As gay rights advanced and homosexuality became more visible, the term "confirmed bachelor" became both a derisive euphemism for closeted men and a potentially homophobic term that seemed to question a single man's masculinity.

Despite the potentially deviant implications of homosexuality or heterosexual promiscuity however, bachelorhood had far more social legitimacy than spinsterhood, meaning that it was often more readily embraced as an identity. Media discussions around bachelorhood, whether through single celebrities or popular fictional characters, formed part of a wider discussion about single masculinity, and give us a glimpse of how contemporary attitudes were changing. As Lucy Robinson has argued, public figures, whilst not necessarily representative of the norm, are "emblematic figures" who, "represent thematic attempts to consolidate…identity."[29]

Approaches and sources

This research takes a thematic approach, with a basic chronology that aims, broadly speaking, to illustrate the tension between progress and continuity over time. The multiple layers of social reality, it contends, move at different paces, creating a complex system in which received ideas and norms are challenged, reinforced and negotiated. During the 1970s, for instance, sociologists and anti-poverty campaigners increasingly focused on the

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[28] Munt, Sally R. "A Queer Undertaking," *Feminist Media Studies,* Vol. 6, No. 3, 2006, pp 263-279, p270.
[29] Ibid, p26.

structural inequalities that excluded and marginalised single mothers, and yet different stands of both culture and society continued to take a moralistic attitude towards them. By the 1980s, this had become a moral panic about teenage mothers using their status to claim welfare support. These diverse approaches to the same issue demonstrate the complexity of the phrase "social attitudes" and the multiple layers that make up social reality, which the range of sources used here is designed to reflect.

Chapters

Chapter One

This chapter establishes the dominant myths associated with singleness in the popular consciousness. These perceived character traits were clearly demarcated by sex and received ideas about gender, with spinsters and bachelors embodying different, often opposing, traits in the public imagination.

Part one of this chapter explores the social construction of the spinster character, which already had a long history of deviance. This was cemented over time by medical and psychological categorisations that emphasised the importance of marriage and motherhood for women's health and fulfilment, a legacy that left its mark well into the late 20th century. It assesses the complex relationship between received ideas about single women and women's changing status in society as a whole, whilst also examining the tension between women's social progress (through feminist activism and government reforms) and the continuation of reductive images of spinsterhood in the press and popular culture. It also looks at the growing trend for a progressive form of celibacy during the late 1970s and 1980s as a backlash against permissive culture, and considers this re-emergence in the context of efforts to reclaim traditional spinsterhood.

Part two sets up the counterpoint to this by examining the dominant mythology of the bachelor playboy, embodied by James Bond and Michael Caine's performance in the 1966 film *Alfie*. It looks at two contrasting responses to the changing gender norms of the day: the popular bachelor lifestyle literature that used humour to reassert male privilege and the underground men's liberation movement that challenged received ideas about masculinity and allied itself to feminism.

Following on from this, this chapter looks at emerging research in the 1960s and 1970s that demolished the myth that men were happier alone, showing that many single men suffered from isolation and poor health. It also considers the relationship between homosexuality and bachelorhood in

tropes about the confirmed bachelor, which was is examined through figures such as Cliff Richard, Dirk Bogarde and Morrissey.

Chapter Two

Having established the powerful myths and stereotypes associated with singleness, chapter 2 uses the home to examine them more closely. The Victorian ideology of separate spheres and the rise of the nuclear family cemented the cultural dominance of marriage and the family, of which the privatised family home was a crucial part. In her work on Elizabeth Gaskell, Anna Lepine has explored the marginalisation of single women during the Victorian period from the central discourses about the home, which tacitly undermined their legitimacy as women. A continuity of this idea can be seen in the post-war period, when companionate marriage became allied to discourses of national reconstruction and ideal womanhood.

Part one of this chapter examines the tension between this continuity and the increasing appeal of living alone during the 1960s. It explores the relationship between the home and female identity, looking at the cultural symbolism of single women's homes during the 1960s, poverty, generational differences and housing for single mothers.

Part two of this chapter begins with the bachelor pad, which had become an iconic emblem of youthful single masculinity during the post-war period. It took on an almost mythic status during the 1960s and 1970s, with bachelor identity delineated and idealised through open-plan modernist architecture. In contrast, this chapter also explores contemporary research into single men and loneliness, ending with a consideration of queer bachelor domesticity and the celebrity bachelor home.

Unlike the other chapters, this has a third part, which examines the relationship between singleness and homelessness through a case study of government legislation and NGOs. For this reason, it is not divided by gender, although individual differences are explored throughout. It focuses particularly on the effects of the 1977 Housing Act (which established the concept of "priority need" and heavily prioritised families) and Conservative party policy during the 1980s, which led to a dramatic increase in single homelessness.

Chapter Three

Lone motherhood is a rich field of research, and the work of historians such as Jane Lewis, Pat Thane and Katherine Holden has provided the social context to this chapter. The stigmatisation of unmarried mothers has a long history, with the trope of the "fallen woman" gaining particular currency during the Victorian

period. Holden and Finch point out that this archetype, so deeply associated with Victorian morality, actually increased in popular representations of single motherhood during the 1960s. During the 1970s, however, this stigma began to decline, only to experience a resurgence during the 1980s.

This complex trajectory mirrored the changing fortunes of other types of single women, addressed in the discussion on spinsterhood in Chapter One. Despite the significant increase in never-married mothers over this period as a whole, as an identity it remained problematic. Taking this complexity as its underlying principle, part one of this chapter explores the relationship between single motherhood and received ideas about female identity. It examines the influence of what Adrienne Rich called the "institution of motherhood," which delegitimised unmarried motherhood and privileged the nuclear family.

Part two of this chapter addresses the relationship between masculinity and lone fatherhood. Interest in lone fatherhood began to increase during the 1970s and 1980s, with sociological research, press debates and cultural representations of lone fathers responding to feminist critiques of traditional gender roles. Using the sociologist Richard Barker's definitions of "gender pioneering" and "traditional patriarch" single fathers, it situates these debates in the context of changing ideas about masculinity, considering the transition from putative status during the 1960s and 1970s to the granting of parental responsibility by the end of the 1980s.

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