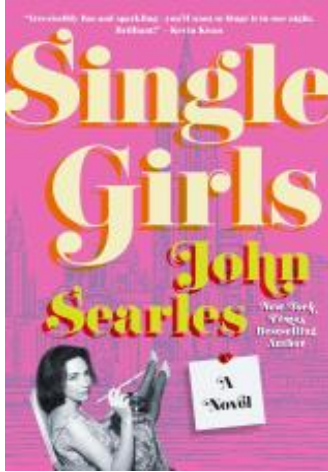


Single Girls

by John Searles



About the Book

An infectious and utterly charming fictionalization of the iconic Helen Gurley Brown's early years at the helm of *Cosmopolitan* and the intrepid group of women she took under her wing to create one of the most talked-about magazines of all time.

In 1965, Helen Gurley Brown, a soft spoken, self-professed "mouseburger," is fresh off the runaway success of her book, *SEX AND THE SINGLE GIRL*, a revolutionary call to single women urging them not to rush into marriage on anyone's timeline but their own, and, even more radically, to enjoy their sex lives, gloriously free of shame. Upon the book's publication, half the country is outraged (her mother, for one, hates the book), and the other half will follow her anywhere. Moved by the thousands of letters arriving at her doorstep from readers desperate for advice, she marches from one Manhattan magazine conglomerate to another, looking for a perch from which to dispense her unconventional wisdom. At her last stop, she finally gets her shot: just three issues to turn around the flailing magazine *Cosmopolitan*.

Helen quickly assembles a team of smart, savvy single girls up to the task. Soon, their lives become the stuff of magazine cover lines: the gorgeous Book Editor's doomed romance with a man she didn't know was married --- and her bold idea for revenge. The (unofficial!) Sex Editor's trip to soak in the world's first champagne glass hot tub, which takes a very wrong turn. The Entertainment Editor's clash with Joan Crawford and interview with a Park Avenue call girl that leads to unexpected revelations.

SINGLE GIRLS begins at the dawn of Helen's legendary tenure and journeys back to her youth, envisioning the devastations and people who forged her into a controversial legend. It imagines the way one unsinkable group of women navigated gender roles and workplace power dynamics long before these issues entered the headlines. With dazzling, high-energy prose, it recreates not just a movement, but a mood: one of ambition, reinvention, and the intoxicating thrill of being young when a new world was possible for a single girl if only she was fearless enough to reach out and grab it.

Discussion Guide

1. Which of the 'Single Girls' did you most identify with, and why?
2. The novel explores what it meant to be a 'single girl' in a changing America. How did each woman define, discover or pursue freedom differently?
3. Did the book change your perception of the 1960s as a glamorous decade? Why or why not?
4. Which moments best illustrated the subtle ways women were underestimated or controlled? And were there scenes that made you reconsider how far women have or haven't come since then?
5. The novel often shows women doing the work while men receive the recognition. Do you think that dynamic has changed today?
6. Did the romantic relationships in the book feel empowering, limiting, transactional or something more complicated?
7. The author has described the setup of the novel as 'Helen being like the sun and the other single girls like planets revolving around her.' How did you interpret Helen's influence on the characters?
8. The novel also introduces a series of 'single girls' who briefly intersect with the main story, including Nikki, the Park Avenue Girl; Nadine, the actress who unexpectedly appears at David's home; and Ursula, who is making a quiet but radical choice for her life. What do these characters add to the narrative, and why do you think the author included them?
9. Why do you think the 'Cosmo girl' became such a powerful cultural archetype?
10. How does the novel compare with stories like 'Mad Men,' *The Devil Wears Prada* or *Valley of the Dolls*?
11. Do you think we leave Helen in a place where she is truly 'liberated' from her past, or will it continue to hold the same power over her?
12. Finally, what do you think the candy symbolized? And why do you think the author chose to focus on the famous Delacroix painting, *Liberty Leading the People*?

And just for fun?

1. Are you a mouseburger? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever soaked in a champagne-glass hot tub? If not, would you want to?
3. Which character do you think would have the strongest social media presence today --- and what would her Instagram or TikTok look like?

4. If the novel were adapted into a television series, who would you cast?
5. Did you take the *Cosmo* coverline quiz? Results?
6. What moment most surprised you, made you laugh, or stayed with you emotionally?
7. If you could ask John Searles one question about the book, what would it be?

Author Bio

John Searles is a *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author of four novels. His books have been published in over a dozen languages and have been voted "Best of the Year" or top picks by *Boston Globe*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Salon* and the American Library Association. A frequent contributor to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, John was a top editor at *Cosmopolitan* for two decades, first hired by Helen Gurley Brown.

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