
Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice: How Women are Choosing Parenthood without Marriage and Creating the New American Family, by **Rosanna Hertz**. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006. 273 pp. \$26.00 cloth. ISBN: 0195179900.

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Here is a book equipped to rouse Daniel Patrick Moynihan from his casket. Rising rates of unwed motherhood among African-American women signaled their economic and racial marginality when Moynihan provocatively labeled them a "tangle of pathology" in 1965. However, by the time Vice-Presidential Nominee Dan Quayle railed against Murphy Brown during the 1992 electoral season, single motherhood had become a respectable family option for mainstream, white, middle-class women. *Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice* is a sympathetic, qualitative study of the pioneer generation of Murphy Brown's real-life sisters.

Between 1995 and 2004, Hertz and a research assistant conducted in-depth interviews with 65 Boston area members of the post-feminist generation of middle-class women who consciously, if inadvertently, emulated Murphy Brown. They represent the first cohort of women who were no longer willing to forego motherhood when their romantic careers proved less successful securing parenting partners than their occupational endeavors had been in supplying the material means to middle-class maternity. The

sample includes economically self-sufficient heterosexual women and lesbians who were at least twenty years old when they first became mothers. Most are white, but a substantial proportion formed trans-racial families through adoption. Hertz provides a sensitive analysis of how conventional family aspirations led these "reluctant revolutionaries" to craft unconventional families and kinship.

Choosing the unscripted career of conscious single motherhood compels women to confront a host of further choices. Hertz's subjects had to decide whether to pursue maternity through adoption, donor insemination, or by chancing pregnancy, and each of these choices unleashed another set of decisions: open adoptions or closed, domestic or foreign; fresh or frozen sperm, known or anonymous donors, arranged through informal networks or commercial providers; or attempting conception with informed or unwitting sexual partners. Women likewise negotiated a wide variety of kinship statuses for donors, lovers, birth mothers, and assorted others.

Hertz constructs a four-tab typology of her samples' romantic and parenting statuses, a device that effectively deconstructs the false homogeneity of the social categories of singleness and single motherhood. Some single mothers have lovers, some have co-parents, but these are not the same persons and do not arrive in the conventional sequence. Only the "consummate mother," the first of Hertz's four somewhat awkwardly termed categories, is both a single woman and a solo parent. Women in the other three categories have romantic partners with whom they do not parent and/or various kinds of parenting partners with whom they are not romantically involved. Moreover, singleness and solo parenthood are fluid rather than fixed statuses because women's relationships with lovers and co-parents evolve over time.

The book presents a thoughtful feminist analysis of how a shadowy "patriarchal puppeteer" continues to haunt the family lives of middle-class women who traded the feminine mystique for a feminist one. Entering adulthood with rising expectations for intimacy and careers, they sought to combine meaningful, remunerative employment with egalitarian, intimate, romantic, and co-parenting relationships, but failed to find eligible men (or women) who met these standards.

Meanwhile, sex, gender, and cultural revolutions and new reproductive technology made motherhood outside marriage newly thinkable for middle-class women, whether straight or not. Hertz argues provocatively that the cultural ideology of “compulsory motherhood” is proving more potent than what Adrienne Rich termed “compulsory heterosexuality.” Not all of these women felt compelled to practice heterosexuality, but they all felt compelled to mother. However, this may simply reflect the selection bias of Hertz’s sample, which excludes the rising numbers of women who feel free to decline maternity.

More persuasively, Hertz argues that women who mother without patriarchal co-parents do not do so without patriarchal influences or effects. She provocatively observes that for middle-class, single mothers “men and masculinity become a piece of cultural capital offered up to children” (p. 188), akin to music lessons added to their children’s cultural portfolios. Ironically, by recruiting men to serve as “role models” of masculinity, they essentialize the conventional gender norms that their androgynous parental practices directly challenge.

This book is certain also to raise the hackles of Moynihan’s many contemporary political heirs who combat what they claim to be the social dangers of fatherlessness. Presenting contemporary fathers as fungible, luxury family accoutrements, it urges society to face the reality that the mother-child dyad has replaced the heterosexual couple as the core of family life. “What men offer is obsolete,” Hertz concludes, “and I am hopeful that they will revise their offerings” (p. 196). While I share this assessment and hope, I worry that critics will find grounds to mistrust Hertz’s rosy portrait of successful single mothers, all of whom found “great joy” (p. 199) and managed to “settle comfortably into accomplished lives” (p. 200). Again, I suspect the effects of a selection bias operating here.

Hertz portrays Murphy Brown’s sisters as the vanguard of new family formations—forging transracial bonds, culling kin from donor registries for genetic half-siblings sired by shared anonymous donors. Sample features may lead her to overstate the significance of singleness and gender here. Gay men who choose parenthood craft even more transracial families and innovative pat-

terns of male maternity and kinship. Nonetheless, Hertz is right to stress the irreversible diversity and fluidity of contemporary intimacy, parenting, and family life. *Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice* contributes to growing scholarship on family diversity as an engaging, insightful exploration of one of the unanticipated and paradoxical family by-products of the decline of the feminine mystique.