

including Rosa Bonheur, Charlotte Cushman, and Kate Field, are fascinating, but Marcus embeds those stories in a discussion of the well-studied topic of Victorian debates about marriage, which seems less original and somewhat overstated. Women who lived with women did indeed play a significant role in advocating for marriage reform, and their own relationships may very well have been models for that reform, but those women and relationships were hardly the only, or even the dominant, force in the matter.

Between Women has other flaws. Marcus's previous book, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (1999), was, as its title suggests, comparative. In *Between Women* she explicitly claims to be making an argument about England, but examples from France (fashion illustrations) and America (where Cushman and Field were born and spent good portions of their lives) slip in, troubling the geographical purity of her discussion. Given her claim that relationships between women were more explicitly sexualized in nineteenth-century France, her sexual readings of fashion plates created by French women don't necessarily offer insight into Englishwomen, even if they were reprinted in English magazines. But these are quibbles about a book that, overall, lives up to the promise of its superlative blurbs (and I haven't even mentioned Marcus's superb reading of one of my favorite Victorian novels, Anthony Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?*).

Any Victorianist, literary critic, feminist, or queer theorist worth her salt will recognize *Between Women's* titular allusion to *Between Men* (1985), Eve Sedgwick's groundbreaking study of homosocial desire in British fiction. It is safe to say that *Between Men* was an—if not *the*—originary text of queer theory, and it is not going too far to say that the book played a small but vital role in the radical gay rights movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the heyday of such groups as ACT UP and Queer Nation.

It is too soon to say whether *Between Women* will become a classic like its namesake. But in this moment of activism for and antagonism to gay marriage, when *The L Word* is one of the most popular shows on cable television and Miss Nevada is stripped of her title for kissing other women, *Between Women* has important things to say, not just to Victorianists, literary critics, feminists, and queer theorists, but to all of us. ®

Rebecca Steinitz is a writer, editor, and education consultant in Arlington, Massachusetts. Once a Victorianist, she continues to be obsessed with Victorian stuff.





Elizabeth Blackburn and the Story of Telomeres
Deciphering the Ends of DNA
Catherine Bray
‘An inspiring account of a real-life heroine, and a lesson in how to conduct Nobel-quality research.’ — Nancy Hopkins, Amgen, Inc., Professor of Biology, MIT
424 pp., 25 illus. \$29.95 cloth

Looking Within
A Sociocultural Examination of Fertility
Deborah Blazzer
‘Will be a major contribution to feminist studies of reproduction, medical sociology, medical anthropology, bioethics, history of medicine, and STS.’ — Monica J. Casper, Vanderbilt University
Basic Bioethics series • 272 pp. \$32 cloth

ONLY IN PAPERBACK

Effective Philanthropy
Organizational Success through Deep Diversity and Gender Equality
Mary Ellen S. Capek and Molly Mead
‘This is the strongest and best-organized argument I have seen for placing gender front and center in all considerations of diversity, for including the female half of humanity in policy decisions, for removing gender from ‘special interest’ analysis, and for funding women and girls.’ — Mark Dowie, author of *American Foundation: An Investigative History*
Supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Women & Philanthropy • 424 pp. \$20 paper

New books from The MIT Press

To order call 800-4051619.
<http://mitpress.mit.edu>

Reluctant Revolutionaries

Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice: How Women are Choosing Parenthood without Marriage and Creating the New American Family

By Rosanna Hertz

New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 273 pp., \$26, hardcover

Naked on the Page: The Misadventures of My Unmarried Midlife

By Jane Ganahl

New York: Viking Press, 2007, 310 pp., \$24.95, hardcover

Single Mom Seeking: Playdates, Blind Dates, and Other Dispatches from the Dating World

By Rachel Sarah

Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006, 226 pp., \$14.95, paperback

Reviewed by E. Kay Trimberger

Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice is a paradigm-shifting book, based on sociologist Rosanna Hertz's empirical study of middle-class American women who decided to become parents even though they did not have partners. Hertz views these single mothers as an

avant garde, whose experience forces us to reframe our perceptions of families. For Hertz, the mother-child dyad is now central to family formation. The nuclear family, which united marriage, child-bearing, child-rearing, love, and sex, is splitting apart, its elements combining and recombining into a diversity



of family forms. These are bringing extended kin back into the center of family life and linking family ties more closely to other social bonds.

Hertz's title for her book indicates that hers is not the usual take on the social and personal problems of single mothers. Instead, Hertz recognizes that the legitimation of a woman's ability to choose motherhood outside of marriage is a huge cultural shift, which has occurred gradually over the last forty years. She might have added that cultural acceptance of a woman's choice *not* to bear a child—even if she is

married or young—is another manifestation of this trend. However, choosing to be single is the last frontier. Even if accidental pregnancy is declining, unintentional singleness is still with us.

The 65 middle-class single mothers Hertz studies choose unconventional paths to motherhood. Some select artificial insemination with known or unknown donors. Others decide to adopt, including some who adopt in open arrangements, with the continued involvement of the birth mother. Still others become pregnant by not using birth control with sexual partners who have not agreed to parent. Finally, some keep the child when a relationship disintegrates before the birth.

Hertz finds that these mother-child dyads become ensconced in different types of families, all of which provide the mothers with networks of extended family and friends. A single mother may have a romantic/sexual partner who is not involved in parenting and with whom she doesn't live, or a nonromantic parenting partner—usually an extended family member or the genetic father—or a contractual agreement with a known donor. A mother with a parenting partner may have a romantic/sexual relationship with someone else. In all these cases, childrearing is separate from romantic and sexual relationships. The child can have a known or unknown biological father, who may or may not be his or her social dad. Some children have more than two parents.

However, Hertz's subjects don't celebrate—and sometimes don't even recognize—the structural innovations they've made in family life. Rather, most still hope to attain a heterosexual nuclear family with a man who will be both a romantic/sexual partner for them and a father for their child. These single mothers often try to hide their family's difference from their children, for example, by fudging the distinction between a genetic father and a participating dad to their small children. Mothers with unknown donors create

“Choosing to be single is the last frontier. Even if accidental pregnancy is declining, unintentional singleness is still with us.”

fantasy stories about the father for their children and initiate searches for half-siblings on Internet sites. Those who adopted internationally or in closed adoptions in the US later find themselves looking for scraps of information to give their children. Because these women accept the culture's assumption that the nuclear, biological family is the best, Hertz labels them “reluctant revolutionaries.”

Hertz respects these mothers' desire to help their children fit in, enable them to achieve successful middle-class lives, and provide extended families. She also recognizes the impact on single mothers of the cultural imperative to acknowledge biological and genetic inheritance. Middle-class single mothers, like others, are influenced by cultural warnings, constantly propagated through the media, about the dangers of growing up without a father.

I wish that Hertz had investigated the effect on single mothers and their children of internalizing cultural norms that denigrate them. I wish too that she had dealt more forthrightly with the unresolved questions of nature and nurture, male versus female role models, and children's identity formation. At the same time, I respect the neutral and expansive perspective Hertz, a married mother, brings to her research. I admire her feminist insistence that it is up to men, not single mothers, to figure out their future connection to family, since it is no longer automatic.

Despite Hertz's analytic insights, her single mothers never come alive on the page. In contrast, the vivid and well-written memoirs of two single mothers, Rachel Sarah (in her early thirties with a six-year-old daughter) and Jane Ganahl (age fifty with a 23-year-old daughter) are fun to read. These women's routes to single motherhood—abandonment, divorce—are more conventional than those of the women Hertz studied, but their single-parenting styles—especially their pursuit of “bad girl” sexuality while protecting their children—demonstrate innovations that illustrate and expand upon Hertz's observations.

Unlike the single mothers Hertz studied, neither Ganahl nor Sarah is much concerned with finding a father for her daughter. Certainly neither feels the need for a father equal to that of the single women who adopted or used artificial insemination—perhaps because both of their daughters already have known, though distant, fathers. Moreover, both live close to their own fathers, who are actively involved in caring for their granddaughters. (Actually, Ganahl and Sarah have much in common despite their age difference of more than fifteen years. Both are writers who recently started self-revealing columns about singles for San Francisco publications. Sarah wrote a singles and dating column for *J Magazine*, the *Jewish News Weekly of Northern California*, while Ganahl wrote a Sunday column, *Single-Minded*, for the *San Francisco*

Chronicle. The themes in their memoirs echo those in their columns, and both explore how the responses to their newspaper revelations shaped their lives.)

Through these honest and poignant, yet humorous, memoirs, we experience the joy that a child brings to a single mother, and the warmth, caring and priority that the mother gives her child. Because Ganahl's daughter Erin is an adult entering law school, we have a chance to see the positive effects of an ongoing, close bond between mother and child. (Too often, academic studies, including Hertz's, of single mothers and their children do not follow the children through to adulthood.) Erin hopes that later she can combine a career and marriage, but if this doesn't happen, she has an alternative: “I'll live my life like a fabulous single woman with a lot of friends and fun things to do and an important job,” she says. “Just like my mom! And that would be just fine.”

Ganahl and Sarah both write about their struggles with dating and having active sex lives as single mothers, and with their apparent inability to find one man who will be lover, husband, and dad rolled into one. Sarah, who says her daughter Mae is the love of her life, proclaims that any potential “soulmate” must love Mae too, and be willing to be a cohabiting parent. However, she, like Ganahl, also likes flirting, sex, and physical intimacy.

Ganahl and Sarah are both comfortable with their sexuality and with the knowledge that they seem to have more interest in sex than many of their girlfriends. Sarah calls herself “hardwired for sex.” Sarah dates and has casual sexual partners (whom she always hopes will turn into “the one”); family members and women friends (especially other single mothers) take care of Mae during her assignments. From Ganahl's allusions, we assume she used similar strategies when Erin was young. But the importance of sexuality in her life does not lead either woman to recognize the real advantages the single life offers her.

At a college reunion, Ganahl discovers that she has had from four to ten times more lovers than any of her friends. One of them reminds Ganahl that Ganahl had always said she would probably remain single, because she could never be monogamous—but she married right after college. Ganahl is astounded to be reminded of her insightfulness, and reflects:

Maybe I should stop thinking of permanence and try to be happy with a series of fascinating affairs since that is clearly my bent anyway. Maybe ... the perfect man for me is actually men. Maybe love should have been the goal all along. And not just love of men, but love of friends... We may be foolish when we're young, but we're also brilliantly in touch with who we are.

Given this self-realization, Ganahl grapples with the reality that men do not find her as sexually attractive as they once did. “I need a manual on aging gracefully,” she writes, “one that can tell me how to handle it when the men in my life fall like dominoes away from me and in the direction of young babes.” She doesn't find her manual, but she ends her memoir with an anecdote that signals her acceptance of single life: she has sex with her irresponsible rock-star boyfriend on her fiftieth birthday, but when he can't remember what party they are supposed to go to, she

WOMEN'S STUDIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

WSQ

THE SEXUAL BODY

WSQ

ACTIVISMS

WSQ

"WSQ moves to embrace a new generation of feminist scholarship... It compels us to subscribe, to teach the essays and to inform ourselves about its content."—Inderpal Grewal, University of California, Irvine

A vital resource for research, education, and activism, WSQ combines contemporary developments in feminist theory and scholarship with essays, reviews, poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and the visual arts.

JOURNAL EDITORS:

CINDI KATZ, GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

HANCY K. MILLER, ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, THE GRADUATE CENTER, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Now available: *Emp, The Sexual Body, and Activisms*

Coming soon: *With and Between*

TO SUBSCRIBE, ADVERTISE, OR LEARN MORE VISIT WWW.FEMINISTPRESS.ORG/WSQ

abandons the idea of taking him to the bash thrown by all her loving friends. She does, however, accept his gift of a round trip ticket to Paris—for one.

Single Mom Seeking ends differently. Sarah, at 33, is considering moving in with an Israeli-born contractor 11 years her senior—a man she thinks may be her “soulmate,” and whom Mae loves too. Yet, she fears that his urgent desire to have a child may be a “deal breaker.” (Her juxtaposition of idealistic language such as “soulmate” with the quite practical term of “deal breaker” is striking.) She says: “The thought of having another child terrifies me, ... maybe because I’m just beginning to discover who I really am, and I don’t want to give that up.” Although she implicitly recognizes that she may have more autonomy as a single woman to pursue self-development without compromise, she does not indicate what she will do or how she will weigh the costs and benefits.

All three books demonstrate how hard it is to forge a life as a single mother in a culture that tells us the nuclear family is the only good way to raise a child and a woman’s only route to happiness and security. But without cultural support, the women portrayed in these books are creating satisfying lives for themselves and their children with a diversity of social bonds in and outside of their blood families. Their willingness (and that of others) to share their experiences with us will lead eventually to recognizing new ways to form families and to structure personal lives. Both groundbreaking academic studies and well-written memoirs of singleness and single motherhood push forward this cultural transformation. ®

Sociologist **E. Kay Trimberger** is the author of *The New Single Woman* (2006). She is professor emerita of Women’s and Gender Studies at Sonoma State University and a visiting scholar at the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of California, Berkeley. You can contact her through her website, www.kaytrimberger.com.

Additional Reading

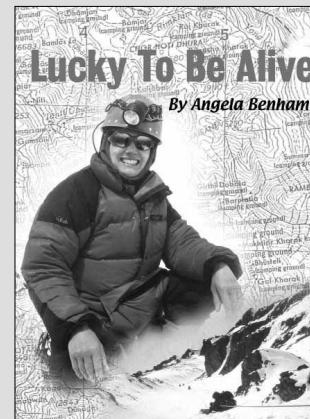
I find that combining academic studies and personal accounts is a good way to teach controversial subject matter. In addition to the books reviewed, I recommend the following:

For an overview of cultural and social bias against singles see Bella DePaul, *Singled Out: How Singles Are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After* (2006).

For other studies of single women and single mothers see: E. Kay Trimberger, *The New Single Woman* (2006), Jane Juffer, *Single Mother: The Emergence of the Domestic Intellectual* (2006) and Margaret Nelson, *The Social Economy of Single Motherhood: Raising Children in Rural America* (2005).

For short personal essays see Diane Mapes, editor, *Single State of the Union: Single Women Speak Out on Life, Love, and the Pursuit of Happiness* (2007) and Jane Ganahl, editor, *Single Woman of a Certain Age: 29 Women Writers on the Unmarried Midlife—Romantic Escapades, Empty Nests, Shifting Shapes, and Serene Independence* (2005).

LUCKY TO BE ALIVE



By Angela Benham

ISBN 0-9704143-6-6

236 pages • Paper

Northern Liberties Press

www.oldcitypublishing.com

ESSAY

Memoirs in Words and Pictures

By Karen Karin Rosenberg

We Are On Our Own

By Miriam Katin

Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2006, 136 pp., \$24.95, hardcover

Escape from “Special”

By Miss Lasko-Gross

Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2006, 176 pp., \$16.95, paperback

Jobnik, Issues 1-6

By Miriam Libicki

Vancouver: real gone girl studios, 2003-2007, \$3 each Issues 1-5; \$3.50 Issue 6.

Bernie! The Wackiest Jewlipino on Earth!

By Cheryl Gladstone

New York: Stinkyadoo, 2006

Not all graphic novels are novels. Some are collections of short stories or memoirs—and I expect we’ll see the full range of genres soon, because there’s a boom in this branch of the book industry. Increasingly, graphic novels are being reviewed in the major media. Many teachers and librarians have made room for them. You no longer need to go to specialty comics shops to find them. Barnes and Noble, which already has a display area for adult graphic novels, is reportedly considering creating another for children. That way, the chain can lure boys away from comic book stores and attract girls who have been shy to enter them. No wonder all the major publishers are said to have a graphic project in the works. They see a golden chance to reach the tweens, the 20-somethings, the not-so-young, and the not-so-literate.

At comic fairs, such as the Art Festival sponsored by the Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art each June in lower Manhattan, men still outnumber women not only as consumers but as writers and artists. And that’s true up and down the hierarchy, from Pantheon and other big-time players with a commitment to graphic novels, to smaller houses like Fantagraphics in Seattle and Drawn & Quarterly in Montreal, which specialize in comics and longer graphic forms, to self-publishers. So I appreciate that there is an organization called Friends of Lulu that promotes women in the



From *Escape from “Special,”* by Miss Lasko-Gross.

Copyright of *Women's Review of Books* is the property of Old City Publishing, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.