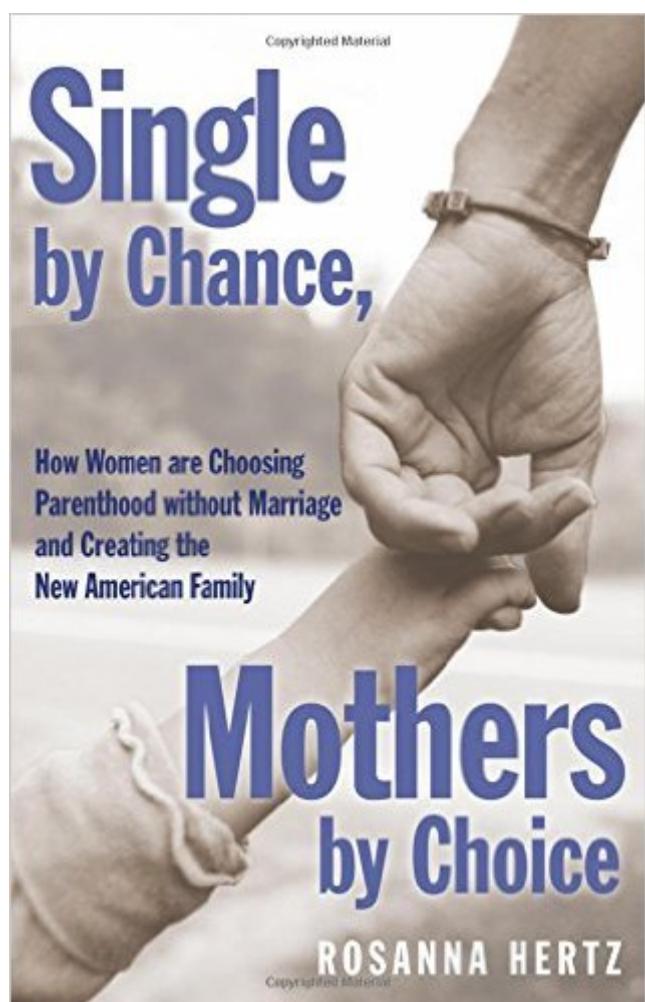


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Single By Chance, Mothers By Choice: How Women Are Choosing Parenthood Without Marriage And Creating The New American Family



Synopsis

A remarkable number of women today are taking the daunting step of having children outside of marriage. In *Single By Chance, Mothers By Choice*, Rosanna Hertz offers the first full-scale account of this fast-growing phenomenon, revealing why these middle class women took this unorthodox path and how they have managed to make single parenthood work for them. Hertz interviewed 65 women--ranging from physicians and financial analysts to social workers, teachers, and secretaries--women who speak candidly about how they manage their lives and families as single mothers. What Hertz discovers are not ideologues but reluctant revolutionaries, women who--whether straight or gay--struggle to conform to the conventional definitions of mother, child, and family. Having tossed out the rulebook in order to become mothers, they nonetheless adhere to time-honored rules about child-rearing. As they tell their stories, they shed light on their paths to motherhood, describing how they summoned up the courage to pursue their dream, how they broke the news to parents, siblings, friends, and co-workers, how they went about buying sperm from fertility banks or adopting children of different races. They recount how their personal and social histories intersected to enable them to pursue their dream of motherhood, and how they navigate daily life. What does it mean to be 'single' in terms of romance and parenting? How do women juggle earning a paycheck with parenting? What creative ways have women devised to shore up these families? How do they incorporate men into their child-centered families? This book provides concrete, informative answers to all these questions. A unique window on the future of the family, this book offers a gold mine of insight and reassurance for any woman contemplating this rewarding if unconventional step.

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Customer Reviews

There are many books on this subject I wanted to read, and I chose this one first because it seemed to be an objective, analytical sketch of a relatively new sociological phenomenon. But it turns out not to be the academic examination it purports to be. Hertz's "discoveries" are broad and simplistic; moreover, most of the dilemmas she reveals are the struggles not merely of single mothers by choice, but of all women who have to work to support their families, even 2-parent families. She does make a few insightful claims about these women and their choices, but then she repeats those claims over and over. The book should be half as long as it is. But perhaps the most unsettling thing about this read is that I was not expecting such subjectivity. Hertz makes assertions about the motives and ultimate effects of the choices these single women make, and her assertions clearly mark her moral and ethical stance, however much she tries to hide it. If you are expecting detached, academic insight, look elsewhere. The one very good thing the book does offer, though, is the vignettes themselves. The individual profiles from this diverse group of women are interesting.

...and so much for "Leave it to Beaver". The traditional family structure of the days of Eisenhower are officially over. Hertz makes it very clear that Mothers by choice who are single can do a fine job of child rearing. That furthermore, not only are these Mothers not anti male, they often go to extraordinary lengths to make sure that there are male figures in the lives of their children. For anyone who wants to understand this phenomenon in further detail, this is a fascinating book. I would recommend it to James Dobson, but I don't think he would be open to its thesis. It is not a "How to Do it Book," it is a quality sociological analysis using extended interviews to tease out many stories that outline the diverse patterns of single Motherhood that can produce a happy family and well adjusted child. One caveat that Hertz makes clear from the beginning. This is an analysis of women who fall in the broadly defined middle class. The story of young urban teenagers, often minorities who become single Mothers by some mixture of choice and neglect would almost surely produce a very different set of stories. It would be interesting if Hertz might do a study in the future that compares social class as it intersects with "Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice."

Once in a while you read a book that opens your eyes. This is one of those books: a compelling account of how women from virtually every class and race surmount convention to have children,

provide them with richly supportive -- if often improvised -- home and family, and fill in the gaps they feel separate them from the "normal" family. Hertz has a gift for selecting the right stories to tell. She also produces a clear sociological analysis of those stories without being overbearing or jargonistic. This is a must for policymakers anxious to "save the American family."

I am a 37 year old widow with one child and am considering the possibility of adopting an older child and having a baby, either with a known or anonymous donor. I liked that the author raised issues pertinent to conceiving or adopting a child on your own, but I felt alienated by this book. It was directed toward aging single women who were considering conceiving on their own *for the first time.* I am a single woman who wants more family. I want my son to have siblings and want him to have the type of support system that comes as a result of being raised in a nuclear family.

Considering that half of all marriages end in divorce, and that many young women become widowed and choose to not remarry, I think it was somewhat short sighted of the author to focus solely on women who had never married or had other children. I'm reasonably sure I'm not the only single mom out there who would like to have a family for her child or children. Should women like me have to find some man to provide for us and our kids? I don't think so. Also, the author seems to have a bias against women accepting any sort of government assistance. Because I am widowed my child and I receive Social Security benefits. I took offense when she made a point of writing in the follow-up section of the book that the women in her study were not financially ruined and receiving government assistance as a result of their choice to have children without a partner, then turned around and praised the women for being resourceful and securing Pell grants for their college aged kids. That said, it was a really good book. I liked it a lot. It was well written, easy to read, provided A LOT of information (though most of it was very general), and provided me with ideas for utilizing resources I'd not previously considered and a glimpse of what may lie ahead for my family.

This book focuses on the lives of women who chose to have children while single, but should be read by anyone interested in today's debates on marriage, motherhood, or family. Without intending a revolution, Hertz says, the women in her study are transforming what it means to be a family. At the same time, Hertz places these transformations in context as part of a long line of changes affecting the traditional definition of family, including greater access to birth control, no-fault divorce, and civil-rights movements. Hertz looks at the women's personal paths as well as the broader social implications of their choices. She uses long vignettes as well as shorter quotes to let the women speak for themselves, while supporting her judicious interpretations. When race or sexual

orientation make a difference, she notes this, but does not deny the commonalities that connect all these women as single mothers. She also looks to the future and discusses what further changes are likely in reproductive technologies, in men's and women's family roles, and in the support available for working parents. Read this book for nuanced insight into how the concept of family is changing across our country. Read it if you are a single mom or considering single motherhood. Read it for the stories of the courageous women who took their desire for children into their own hands. They are creating new forms of kinship and support networks that will have echoes beyond the realm of single-mom families. *Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice* is well researched and well written, and surely to be much discussed.

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