

## ***Sing Your Own Song: A Guide for Single Moms***

Orange, Cynthia.  
Minnesota: Hazelden, 2001.

### **Reviewed by Susanna Jones**

The subtitle of this book, *A Guide for Single Mothers*, is a misnomer. It suggests the book is intended for single mothers, when in fact the book will appeal to a much wider audience. I applaud Cynthia Orange for her candid and complex description of life as a single mother. More importantly, her brilliant therapeutic insights and the plethora of resources she presents transcend the boundaries of single motherhood. Any wanna-be parent, soon-to-be parent, single parent post divorce, for that matter anyone seeking a thoughtful examination of parenting should pick up a copy of this book.

The book presents both a macro view and a micro view of the family. In the opening chapter “Redefining Family,” Orange provides a succinct analysis of family formation—rooted in an historical context—and dispels the pervasive myths and stereotypes of single mother-headed families. Given that today’s cultural wars continue to promote “traditional” family values—in fact we see a resurgence of this in marriage initiatives being promoted by the government—it becomes even more essential to normalize and legitimate single motherhood. Despite growing demographic trends, single mothers are continually placed at the margins of society. Single mothers need texts such as this that value their families and expose the joys and challenges of single motherhood.

The remaining chapters proactively address common concerns of single mothers: the need for community, providing male role models for children, ensuring self-care for mothers, strategies for “raising resilient children,” and the role of grandparenting and elder care in the lives of both the single mother as well as her child(ren). Each chapter is rich in information that strikes a beautiful balance between strategies for self-care and child-care. Each chapter also refers to seminal works and key resources, and includes anecdotes from single mothers themselves and concrete exercises (referred to in the text as “Take a Minute”).

In chapter six, “The World Out There,” Orange states, “According to the Children’s Defense Fund’s statistics for 2000, 50 percent of America’s poor children live in female-headed families. Poor children in any family situation—single-parent, two-parent, or no-parent—are at a higher risk when it comes to getting an education and a good-paying job. It’s poverty, not parenting that’s the culprit, and single mother households bear the brunt of the burden of poverty” (126). The book highlights the need for community as a material resource and an emotional sounding board to help single mother families grapple with difficult situations. This push towards community is also a

political gesture, one that fosters a new way of thinking and acting in the world that debunks the pervasive push to “do it alone.” This book will be an inspiration to readers.

## ***Mothers and Children***

Chase, Susan E., and Mary F. Rogers.  
New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

### **Reviewed by Erika Horwitz**

As a student and researcher, I always am searching for useful literature on the subject of mothers and mothering in Western society. *Mothers and Children* is an insightful book that reviews important topics about the social constructions of motherhood. Further, the authors seek to give voice to mothers themselves by including a series of narratives that illustrate their points.

In part one, “The Social Constructions of Motherhood,” Chase and Rogers suggest that ideologies and practices around mothering are historically and culturally specific. They point out that the current constructions of motherhood have a negative impact on mothers and their children. The authors examine feminist views about motherhood, the historical roots and impact of the social discourses of “good” versus “bad” mothers, and the subject of “father absence.” I was particularly impressed by their emphasis on the importance of fathers’ (or father figures’) loving participation in the lives of children and by their arguments against the notion that nuclear families are superior to other types of families. This section of the book offers an excellent summary of the dominant discourse on mothering and its impact on the lives of mothers and their children.

In part two, the authors explore the connection between women’s bodies and motherhood. They point out how social constructions of motherhood have led to a view of mothers as asexual and they emphasize the importance of reclaiming mothers as sexual and erotic beings. The authors also examine how mainstream medicine has shaped reproductive and birthing practices and they highlight the importance of choice. Part two concludes with an examination of the complexities of infertility and the medical technologies aimed at “helping” women to conceive.

Part three focuses on the topic of “Mothering in Everyday Life.” In discussing the actual experiences of mothers, the authors emphasize the importance of social change in supporting mothers and children. They discuss the relationships of mothers and children, “othermothering,” and mothering as political action. This last section in the book illustrates the struggles of contemporary mothers. It touches on the importance of involving others (“othermothering”) in raising children, not only for the benefit of mothers who