

what we do about it. At present, without a broad vision and a social program, we are rooted in the status quo.

Other countries have chosen different directions, and those countries provide far more support to parents and children. What we need, Garey charges, are “the kinds of changes that socialize responsibility for the care of children and that build employees’ family responsibilities and relationships into the organization of the workplace. As a society, we should expect work and family life to be compatible.” However, those of us who are parents living and working in the U.S., know all too well that we are still a long way from this ideal. Garey’s book helps clarify the dilemmas of the working mother and outlines possible reforms.

## **In Defense of Single-Parent Families**

Nancy E. Dowd  
New York: New York University Press, 1997

### **Reviewed by Robin Edward Gearing**

Slowly, painfully, many of the stigmas of yesterday are exposed and deposed. Nancy Dowd’s *In Defense of Single-Parent Families* systematically examines the layers of overt and covert stigmatization faced by single parents. I was anxious to read this book as it openly and candidly analyzes the single parent role, both that of mother and father, in relation to economic status, race, age, law, tradition, and modern convention. Finally, this work opens each barrier to single parenting and boldly offers alternatives to the “normative” family form.

Nancy Dowd, a legal professor and lawyer, introduces her book with simple and powerful words: “I am a single parent.” Through her compelling analytical style supported with legal research and personalized with experience, Dowd outlines the realities and perceptions that affect single parents in our society. The “normative” two-parent family structure and the less conventional single-parent family are introduced and analyzed. After all, as Dowd states, “Dysfunctional families come in all shapes and sizes; so do healthy families”.

The text is well organized into three main segments: Myths and Realities; Law and Single Parents; and Law Reform. Section one examines the stigmas and quietly entrenched beliefs that negatively impact on the single-parent family. Methodically and with legal precision, the author describes and lists a wide range of stereotypes: that the single family is a problem family, that single mothers are to blame for their questionable mores, that children of single-parents are to be ostracized. Dowd uses research, knowledge, and literature to question the commonly held assumptions that single parents are immoral and cause poverty.

Section two, “Law and Single Parents” considers the legal framework that hinders single parents, notably mothers, from overcoming obstacles that negatively impact on their lives and opportunities for their children. Here, Dowd presents a balanced view of the strengths of the single parent family and the unique resources that single parents can offer to all parents. The laws of the United States (and through inference, other industrialized Western countries) foster the negative stigmatization of all single parent families. Dowd, however, recognizes that single parents can be positive role models for children and society. Utilizing the historical, cultural, and situational realities of black single mothers, she describes alternative family structures, not as deviant but as valuable.

In the section on “Law Reform,” Dowd offers alternative policies for single-parent families and legal strategies to challenge the limitations imposed on single-parent families. Here she writes, “Although we have shifted away from this [traditional] model, we have not yet articulated an alternative model. Our notions of equality no longer allow for presumed gender-based assignment of family roles, nor for the limitation of workplace opportunities.”

As a family therapist and researcher who examines parental roles, I was hopeful but wary when reading this book. Dowd writes, however, with remarkable precision as she details the realities of the single parent experience. This she does without glamorizing, demonizing, martyring, or vilifying single parents or traditional families. She recognizes that the traditional two-parent family, like society, has changed – it is time we looked at our structures, laws, and attitudes that, through omission or commission, have ignored these changes. *In Defense of Single-Parent Families* is a thoroughly researched work that defends single-parent families. I strongly recommend it.

## **Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection**

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy  
New York: Pantheon Books, 1999.

### **Reviewed by Anna Beauchamp**

The past few decades have witnessed a long, pointless, and ill-informed debate over whether or not women have “maternal instincts.” Given the historical context, the battle lines were understandable. The early literature on the biology of motherhood was built on patriarchal assumptions introduced by earlier generations of moralists. What was essentially wishful thinking on their part was substituted for objective observation. It has taken a long time to correct these errors and revise old biases, to “raise Darwin’s consciousness” and widen the evolutionary paradigm to include both sexes. (Blaffer Hrdy, 535)