

inform legal attitudes towards mothers and mothering in general. Chapter five, "The Legal Characterization of Motherwork," reveals how heterosexism, homophobia, class bias, racism, and a lack of understanding of the realities of poverty in the lives of mothers continue to influence the practice of law and the lives of mothers. Simply stated, the law is often blind to the realities of mothers. In chapter six, Turnbull discusses income-tax rules and their impact on mothers and on motherwork. By comparing the tax systems of Canada and the United States, she illustrates how mothers, depending on their social location and particular situation, may or may not benefit from these differing tax systems.

The final two chapters are the most exciting, as the author proposes how law and legislation can be used together as a strategy for social change. This approach, Turnbull stresses, must be part of an overall strategy that includes political lobbying, grassroots organizing, and other approaches to bring about social change. By explaining the incremental nature of legal change and how the traditional male model of litigation is hierarchical in its organization, Turnbull exposes the limitations as well as the potential benefits of litigation as a strategy for social change. In doing so, she shows that the law can be used to help transform rather than simply reform women's inequality.

Turnbull elucidates the many problems around motherwork in Canadian law and legislation. She successfully implements Charlotte Bunch's four elements of feminist theory. She describes the situation of mothers in relation to the law, provides textured analysis, and offers a vision and a strategy for changing that relationship. Other fine features of the book include a table of cases and a glossary of legal and feminist terms. This book will be useful to readers interested in taxation, income tax law and legislation, and to students and teachers of Women's Studies. A valuable resource, *Double Jeopardy* also will appeal to mothers, academics, and activists interested in mothering, motherwork, and their relationship to the law.

### ***Unbroken Homes: Single-Parent Mothers Tell Their Stories***

Paterson, Wendy A.  
Binghampton, NY: Haworth Press, 2000.

#### **Reviewed by Diana L. Gustafson**

When a marriage ends in divorce, the resulting family structure is often referred to as a broken home. This negative image seems to be supported by literature that associates single-parent families with a variety of social ills, such as delinquency and drug abuse, and that labels those emerging from such families as damaged or broken (4). As the title suggests, *Unbroken Homes* presents the

stories of five single mothers whose families are not broken but function successfully to meet the needs of parent and child.

The purpose of the book is to deconstruct the image of the broken home by using constructivist, feminist critical theory to interpret the social context in which single mothers restructure family life and offer “a new action theory of resistance and change” (6). Wendy Paterson uses a phenomenological case study approach to collect and interpret data about five financially secure, well-educated, professional women (four white women, one black woman). Although these narratives do not represent “every woman’s story” (17), they serve as a counterpoint to existing literature about single mothers who face the challenges of poverty, lack of education, and other social inequalities.

There are three reasons I believe this book is particularly suited to an undergraduate audience in sociology, psychology, and women’s studies. First, stories about more privileged women add complexity to the meta-narrative of single-mother families. Although Paterson uses the tired metaphor of the story quilt, the narratives are richly descriptive of the histories and experiences of parenting and family life before and after divorce. The voices of Judith, Kathleen, Shawna, Lyn, and Sarah are heard clearly in extensive quotes drawn from interviews. While this technique adds considerably to the length of the book (409 pages including references and index), the text is well organized and written in accessible language.

Second, I recommend this book for its literature review. Entitled “What is Family? Mothering, Fathering and Being Single,” the second chapter introduces the prevailing myths of family life. The survey continues with the main theories that have shaped Western thinking about families, with specific attention to the gendered division of family roles, parenting labour, family relationships, and divorce law in America.

Given the strengths and ambition of this book, I am disappointed that Paterson does not analyze her findings through the promised feminist critical lens. Feminist critical analysis assumes the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, and other systemic oppressions (Giroux, 1997). Instead, Paterson uses gender as a singular and uncomplicated category to explicate issues such as guilt and independence. A feminist critical analysis would have exposed the relative homogeneity of the participants and revealed more explicitly how they use their social location as a valuable resource (Harris, 1993) in negotiating their lives after divorce. Instead, Paterson claims “the only *common* denominator for these five families is *difference*” [emphasis in original], pointing to the differences in personality, individual motivation, and child-rearing practices (358). In these ways, Paterson’s approach is more typical of liberal feminism than critical feminism. I am not suggesting, however, that race and class go unmentioned. Paterson acknowledges the power of social location in shaping women’s experiences. This is the reason she studies “mainstream mothers whose priorities are not focused on fighting poverty to survive” (85). Yet, the analysis fails to examine in a sustained and comprehensive way how class privilege

modifies these women's experiences. The same may be said of Paterson's way of looking at race. When analyzing Shawna's story, Paterson draws on literature about black families to discuss the way race shapes the experiences of the only woman of colour in her study. By contrast, race is not used to explore the relative privilege enjoyed by white participants, as I would expect in feminist critical analysis.

While Paterson demonstrates reflexivity, another key element of feminist critical analysis, by acknowledging that her interpretation of the findings emerges from her own ideologies and values, she does not reflect critically on the ways that her location as a white, middle-class, professional woman shape her interpretation of the data. Paterson mobilizes a white, middle-class subjectivity that focuses on individual characteristics, decision-making, and interpersonal relations without examining how race and class privilege organize the qualitatively different experiences of women in her study group.

The challenge to the stereotypic image of the broken home lead by less privileged single mothers is made possible by holding out the image of the unbroken home lead by more privileged single mothers. While the intention is to erase the link between deviance and single-mothering, the outcome (whether intended or not) is to distance more privileged women from this negative association. This move entrenches rather than challenges the raced, classed, and gendered construction of motherhood and leaves single mothers to compete with each other on the "margins of 'respectable' motherhood" (Fumia, 1999: 90).

While I argue this book evades the feminist critical analysis that it intends, its conclusions and agenda for change may serve as valuable resources for an undergraduate audience. This brings me to the third reason I recommend this book. In keeping with Paterson's conclusions, the recommendations for change are broadly stated, liberal entreaties to recognize the diversity of families and the individuals that emerge from them. A professor with a firm grounding in critical feminist theory may revisit these data with students and help them examine the power of white, middle-class subjectivity to construct normalcy and deviance in knowledge about mothering. Students would learn from and build upon Paterson's quality data to develop a more complex understanding of how gender is articulated through race and class to shape the experiences of single mothers and their families.

### References

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