



Single Moms

Redefining parenthood in the 21st century

By [Carla Iacovetti](#) 08/07/2014



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Twenty years ago, single moms did not share their situation openly. In fact, the stigma that went along with single motherhood kept most young moms in that predicament silent. That is not the case today, however. In fact, with the rising popularity of single celebrities who have chosen either to adopt or to go through the process of in vitro fertilization (IVF), single motherhood is no longer taboo, but in vogue. Stars like Rosie O' Donnell, Madonna, Sandra Bullock, Halle Berry, Kate Hudson, Sheryl Crow, Jenny McCarthy, Minnie Driver and Sharon Stone, to name a few, are all single mothers.

In 2010, CBS Films released the romantic comedy, *The Backup Plan*, which grossed \$90 million in the box office, and it glorifies somewhat the idea of single motherhood. When Zoe (Jennifer Lopez) cannot

seem to find Mr. Right, she takes matters into her own hands and comes up with a logical alternative — artificial insemination. Even though Zoe meets the man of her dreams (Stan) the very day she is inseminated, there is still a subtle message sent to every single female alive: Women no longer need a male partner to conceive and/or mother a child. In the film, actress Melissa McCarthy, the head of *Single Mothers and Proud*, refers to the male counterpart as a “penis partner.”



Mikki Morrisette, a single mother by choice, founded Choicemoms.org and is the author of *Choosing Single Motherhood*.

While oftentimes single motherhood is not a planned adventure, it is not only becoming more common, but many are choosing this path from the very start. “We don’t necessarily choose to be single, but we do choose to be moms,” said Mikki Morrisette, founder of ChoiceMoms.org and author of the award-winning book *Choosing Single Motherhood*. Morrisette is also a single mother by choice.

It was after watching the movie *The Backup Plan* that Katie G., a longtime Ventura County resident, decided to look to IVF as an option if she has not married by the time she is 36. “I always thought I’d be married by the time I was 30, but that hasn’t happened, and I’m nearly 31. I was inspired by the movie *The Backup Plan*, and I now have a backup plan: If I haven’t married and conceived in the next few years, I’ll look to artificial insemination. If that doesn’t work, then I’ll adopt. I just want to be a mom, and I don’t need a man to do that.”

“Women are delaying their options and choosing motherhood later in life for various reasons. Oftentimes, they’ve chosen to pursue a career, and they end up single. However, being single isn’t really an issue in today’s world. Singlehood is much more accepted today,” said Dr. Richard Buyalos, the co-director at Ventura’s Fertility and Surgical Associates of California.

Buyalos said that there has been a noticeable increase in the single women who come into their offices choosing in vitro Fertilization (IVF) and/or cryopreservation, more commonly known as egg freezing.



Photo by: Scott Alan Mount

Angela Phillips, a hair dresser in Thousand Oaks, is raising her son on her own as the father has chosen not to be in their lives.

Building a professional career takes time and dedication, and many women who have chosen that path put marriage and family on hold, but by the time a woman reaches 35, her chances of conceiving lesson dramatically. For women who want children, the pressure can be overwhelming and exhausting, especially if they haven't found suitable life partners.

Since fertility is age-dependent, and the eggs of a 30- to 35-year-old-woman are far more likely to lead to successful conception than those of a 40-year-old woman, egg freezing can be empowering and buy more time. This technology allows women to freeze and store their eggs without the need of sperm. Once a pregnancy is desired, the eggs are thawed, fertilized and inserted into the uterus to begin a pregnancy. This process is a way to delay the ticking biological clock.

“A healthy woman in her early 40s should have no problem carrying a child, and egg freezing allows a woman to choose the right time to embrace motherhood,” said Buyalos. In addition to suspending the clock, freezing eggs at an earlier age can reduce the risk of birth defects such as Down syndrome, a risk that increases as a woman ages.

Sarah Elizabeth Richards, author of the book *Motherhood Rescheduled*, tells her story in a recently published article in the New York Times. By 36 years of age, she hadn't married and really wanted children. So, she “stashed away some good eggs,” which gave her some relief. Her relief, however, was short-lived. When she decided to freeze nine eggs, she soon realized that her odds would not be that great. Every egg has a 30 percent to 50 percent chance of resulting in a pregnancy. Richards wanted to increase her odds, so she went on a freezing “frenzy,” and blew through \$50,000, storing away 70 eggs.

The prices for egg freezing can vary, ranging between \$9,000 and \$13,000, which includes office visits, extraction surgery and egg freezing. In most cases, this does not involve egg storage or medications. Bottom line — egg freezing is pricey. According to a recent article published in the Wall Street Journal, many women are setting up separate savings accounts or dipping into their savings, just for egg freezing. Since insurance companies do not cover egg freezing or any type of fertilization, the financial burden for these kinds of treatments is large.

When Morrissette, a former editor and writer with Time Inc. and The New York Times, chose to become a single parent, she had no idea where her journey would take her, but she did see a need for help for women who were “choosing” single parenting. In fact, she coined the phrase “choice moms,” which became ChoiceMoms.org, an organization created to assist single moms worldwide with resource information and community support during all stages of the journey.

“Many choice moms see parenting as an opportunity to create a village of love and support and community — for ourselves and our child — and bringing a variety of role models, elders, close friends, neighbors into the fold as part of our support network is a lovely way to grow up, too,” said Morrissette, a dedicated and happy mother of two adorable children.

“There are tens of thousands of women embracing this choice each year. I was 37 when my daughter was born, and then had my son at 41. In both cases, I chose motherhood, using the same donor for each child,” said Morrissette.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “Of all single-parent families in the U.S., single mothers make up the majority.” In 2013, out of 12 million single parent families, single mothers headed more than 80 percent. “Today, a total of 15 million (one in three children) are being raised without a father, and nearly half live below the poverty line.”

For the woman who cannot afford in vitro or egg freezing, adoption is another option. While the process remains much the same, the rules over the years have definitely changed. Years ago, a single person could not adopt a child of any age. Most all adoption agencies listed marriage as a requirement. The following stipulations are currently listed on the County of Ventura's website: “Applicants may be single, married,

partnered, divorced, widowed or legally separated, and home ownership is not necessary. There are no set income requirements — adoptive applicants need to show they can meet their new family's basic needs.”

The married stipulation has gone out the door. Single parents can adopt as well as gay and lesbian couples. The bar has been removed. According to David Kerrigan, PhD, LCSW, a Ventura-based clinical therapist/social worker, and supervisor with Aspiranet, one of the largest foster care and adoption agencies in Ventura County, “There are also a growing percentage of people adopting special-needs kids, and this includes single mothers.”

With adoption, there is a long process. You have to prove that you can be a responsible parent. With infertility, you can just make a decision and do it. A woman considering either option should really research and find out her resources.

With the high-cost of fertilization, it is certain that most women choosing these kinds of alternate measures are financially able to do so. But what about the girl who just finds herself in a predicament and ends up pregnant?

No matter *how* it happens, whether a woman becomes a mother via artificial insemination, by adoption or because she finds herself pregnant and decides to keep the child, she is choosing motherhood.

Single motherhood is up. Abortion is down, and more girls are choosing single motherhood. “Most all of the girls that come to our center are not married, and most all of them are choose single motherhood over abortion or giving their child up to adoption,” said MaryAnn Ambroselli, executive director of Ventura County Pregnancy Center, a non-profit Christian-based organization.

“We present adoption as a viable option, but once they see that little baby on the ultrasound, they bond with it and usually never give the baby up. We have a lot of very motivated girls that are excited about motherhood. They come to classes, and are taking advantage of all of the resources we have to offer.”

When Angela Phillips, a native Ventura County resident, found out she was pregnant, she was surprised. She was single and was not eligible for insurance with her job. “My pregnancy wasn't easy. The father did not want to be involved at all, which was OK. I chose motherhood over abortion or giving my child up for adoption. It was a jolt to find out that I was pregnant, because at 20 I was told by my doctor that I might never be able to conceive. It's funny. My mother reminded me that I used to always say, ‘If I had to choose between having a kid and a husband, I'd choose having a kid.’ I've always wanted to be a mother.”

Working through the dynamics of single parenting has been an amazing experience, according to Phillips, who works full time as a hairdresser at Texture Salon in Thousand Oaks. “I appreciate the flexibility my career offers, and count my blessings everyday — I am so fortunate. I have a wonderfully supportive family.”

According to Phillips, being the “only” parent is both rewarding and challenging. “You'll never have

quite the same support as when you're married, because when you're married you have another person carrying some of the load. Sometimes that is a challenge, but having a child completely changes your heart. As soon as you give life to something your entire perspective on life changes, and no one can possibly understand that until you've walked that road," she said.

"My advice to single moms or women contemplating single motherhood: Get all the sleep you can, because you'll never sleep in again as a single mom. Have some sort of single parenting support group to help guide you through pregnancy and for parenting advice. Don't shut yourself out to the world just because you've chosen to be a single mom and do this on your own. You'll find great encouragement in a community — it will make all the difference in the world," said Phillips.

There is no doubt that being a single parent will have a greater impact on some aspects of a person's life. "Dating and having the time to meet people is not always the easiest, and I think women should realize this before making the choose to be a single parent," she said. "My life is 100 percent dedicated to my son, and finding a guy that understands that dynamic is not always easy."

Elizabeth Hollon had a booming career in New York City for 15 years and admits that being a single mom is harder. "I have so much more respect for single moms, now that I've become one. You don't really realize what motherhood entails. It's hard work," said Hollon.

Hollon, who is a licensed marriage and family counselor in Ventura, admits that there is far more pressure on a single mother. "Unlike those who are financially well-off, single motherhood when you're poor vs. single motherhood when you have financial stability is vastly different. Make no mistake about it — financially stability plays an enormous factor in the development of the child," said Hollon.

The sexual revolution has changed a lot of things. What we once deemed normal has shifted, and a part of that shift is family dynamics. Twenty years ago, working mothers were the hot topic of the hour, but single motherhood and gay and lesbian parenting have moved into the focus forefront. We now have two presidents that were raised by single mothers — President Barack Obama and former President Bill Clinton — and the list of well-adjusted, accomplished people who were raised by single moms is extensive.

"The way you parent is the main issue, not so much having two parents. Having two parents seems ideal, but if you have two parents who are fighting all the time, and not providing a nurturing, stable environment for a child, is going to have a much more negative impact on a child than being raised by a single parent. There are a myriad of dynamics with a partnered relationship that can either be amazing or challenging for a child. Interaction problems between two people can cause a lot of distress," said Hollon.

While there are some potential issues that can go along with single parenting, the thing that matters most is the parent's love and emotional availability. Ideally, two heads might work better than one, but if for whatever reason, the couple is not emotionally mature enough to give a child that kind of stability, then single parenting might be a better option.

"You're creating a mirror in what you do. You are the model, and you send a message to your children,

and that can be positive or negative,” said Hollon.

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