

Kutztown University

Single Mothers: Challenging the Patriarchy

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Preface

As I look back now, I can say that my mother was the biggest person to shape me in my life. She was a single mom at the age of twenty and because of my dad moving away when I was 7, she was left alone to take care of me. We lived with my grandparent in a small town and that is where my story officially begins. Working a job she hated she never once let me know she struggled and it wasn't until I was older that I could reflect on the struggles she had endured. Money was always tight in our family, but I always seemed to manage to have nice clothes and toys. Seeing as I was an only child, I was always playing by myself when my mother couldn't. This would lead me to constantly create new adventures.

As I got a little older my mom began introducing me to literature. We would stay up every night before I went to bed and read Harry Potter. Soon enough I was reading on my own. I was a fast reader and would get through many different books. I liked the idea that an author could make their own decisions in regards to telling a story. This fascination began to transition from reading to writing and I soon began to write my own stories. They were as good as any young person could write and I would write multiple stories at a time. The words seemed to flow easy for me at first my pencil never being quick enough for my thoughts. It wasn't until I would get to the ending that I would get stuck. It seemed that it was hard for me to finish the stories and this stuck with me all the way through high school. I continued writing and absolutely loved it, so much so that I took a Creative Writing and Advanced Creative Writing class in high school. It was

always easy for me to think of story ideas for the prompts the teacher gave us, but it wasn't until I got to the end that my ideas stopped flowing.

I remember my teacher giving us a prompt to write about a character in the 1800s. I remember finding topics talking about women dying during childbirth and also about a sickness women would get during pregnancy as well. Using that as my inspiration I wrote my first story about a woman who was going through this disease but wasn't yet married. It wasn't until I got to the ending that I became stuck with how to finish it. I prolonged finishing it until it was the last possible day that I had to hand it in. I will always remember my teacher praising my work and commenting on how she liked the idea. It wasn't until the ending that she had a negative comment. She expressed that she felt the ending was rushed and did not really go with the plot at all.

There is a lot of anxiety towards endings and maybe that is why I had such a problem with them. Even at a young age, I was always asked a lot about what I wanted to do. My father's side of the family all went to college for either teaching or science. On my mother's side I am the first person to go to college. This decision to even go to college was a tough one for me because I had no idea what I wanted to do. Besides liking my English classes and taking some creative writing courses, it seemed like I was just going through the motions in high school. It wasn't until my senior year that I had to ultimately make the choice of whether or not I should go to college. As time was quickly running out I decided to take my SATs and hope for the best. My score was average and it seemed that I was still undecided about my future. After pushing off this big event I finally decided to apply to Kutztown University. With my mom by my side I filled out the

application and chose to be a Communications major with a minor in Professional Writing. The decision to be a Communications major was a quick choice and I am not really sure why I decided to go that route. Even though it was a hasty one I had finally made the decision I felt like I could breathe again. The anticipation of what I was suppose to do with my future, for now, was decided.

American Literature was the first course that made an impact on my learning. Before taking this class I had taken mostly GenEd and just like high school it really felt like I was still going through the motions. My first class that I took at Kutztown University was a history course. The room was large with auditorium like seating and I was amazed at how big a classroom could be. I wasn't used to this type of environment considering my school was very small and my graduating class was 132 students. I had stepped into American Literature on whim because my friend was taking it as well. I didn't really know what to expect except that as I was looking through the syllabus I saw that it was a lot of reading. Reading was the type of homework I enjoyed and so right then and there I felt like I was in the right spot. After experiencing two classes I knew that I wanted to change my major. Figuring out and analyzing different types of literature was something I was very interested in. I did not really share my ideas a lot for fear of really speaking up in front of a class, but I liked listening to the discussion around me.

After these two classes and another meeting with my advisor I finally made the decision that I was going to change my major. My first year of college was almost done and it would be time to start taking more classes in my major. After looking at a lot of the course descriptions for the classes I realized, with much anxiety, that it wasn't what I

wanted to do. A lot of the courses seem to required some aspect of public speaking and I preferred sharing my thoughts through writing rather than speaking them. Soon enough, English was my new major while keeping my old minor.

I remember the countless texts we had to read American Lit, and one that really stuck out to me was *The Yellow Wall-Paper* By Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In class we discussed the difference between subjectivity and objectivity and how that played into Psychological Realism in the narrative. The narrator thought her house was haunted and that something was in the yellow wallpaper in her house. Throughout the story the reader can tell that there was never really anything in the wallpaper, just that the narrator was slowly reaching insanity. Gilman states, "The Yellow Wallpaper was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy..." (Gilman 204). Her honest portrayal of a woman possibly going through a mental illness is what drew me to the story, but what kept me was her reasoning behind writing it as well. She believed that institutions such a marriage and medicine are what truly drive a woman crazy because they seek to control women. I liked the idea that she could write a story that could have different interpretations. Another reason that I liked the story was that Gilman chose to write this to show how she was unhappy with the circumstances in which women were treated. Gilman also was able to create a complex female character and show that even in a time like 1892 that it was possible to do that.

Another story that featured complex female characters in American Literature was a narrative by Toni Morrison. *Recitatif* uses a story about the lives of two women and ultimately showed the idea that race was social construct. Throughout the narrative

Morrison assigns stereotypes back and forth to the two characters to make the reader see that it isn't in people but in our imagination instead. Therefore the reader never knew which character was black and which character was white. This story necessarily didn't have any similarities on the surface to *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, but instead shared the same aspects that I enjoyed about it. Morrison, like Gilman, used a story to express an idea that she felt was problematic. Her words said one thing, but her ideas said another and she once again used women to express her complex thoughts. These women were not one-sided characters like I had seen in other narratives. They had stories and backgrounds.

One class that I enjoyed but found that did not express a lot of representation was World Literature 1. The fact that a class could be called World Literature but not really focus any complex women characters or women authors in general baffled me. I remember the texts we read and majority of them were all the same: men were the protagonist and the female characters were unimportant. We analyzed *Genesis* and read about female characters that were seen as worthless because they were barren. *Ramayana* was another story that told the tale of a woman needing to be rescued. After she was rescued she was put on trial to prove that she remained faithful to the man that rescued her. I read so many narratives like those two and I was getting tired of the blatant misogyny that was portrayed.

Out of frustration with the portrayal of women I took Women and Violence in Contemporary World Texts. Too many classes literature classes that I took were too focused on authors that were men such as Hemingway and Homer. While they were

important writers to be exposed to, their portrayal of women in their narratives were disheartening. *Women and Violence* showed me how women can be analyzed to be these complex characters. During class we focused on many books and movies that featured violent women and how they are perceived. These women, despite being violent, broke the many stereotypes that I was seeing in so many of my other classes. One book that stood out to me was *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn. Having never read the book before I was excited to see how we would look at all the complex issues in it. One of the main ideas we discussed was this notion of tropes and how characters that are women are written into certain narratives. *Gone Girl* was different because the main protagonist Amy took these tropes and used them to her advantage to get what she wanted. Despite the fact that she wasn't some role model for women she still was a character that wasn't portrayed as helpless like I had seen in my other classes.

Having seen that women could be portrayed differently I started noticing a trend in the media I consumed. It wasn't until that next semester that I would finally find an outlet that would let me share the issues with the way women were portrayed in the media. Having to work part-time as a cashier at a grocery store I did not have much time to do anything else outside of school. It was important to me to be able to support myself and help my mother like she had done for so many years before. It was not until I heard about Her Campus in one of my classes that I decided I should join. I liked that the group was a place that passionate writers could have a voice. As I began my journey in Her Campus I found it very easy to find topics I could write about and that were important to me. I started writing about how women are represented through the

media. Topics included different tropes such as a television show that featured a Rape/Revenge Narrative and the way the media portrayed student/teacher relationships in movies and television. Other topics included the importance of The National Women's Hockey League and Ashley Nell Tipton who was the first ever plus sized designer to win Project Runway.

These topics felt important to me and I was glad I could finally share my opinions on ideas that I saw everyday in the media. Despite the fact that Her Campus is relatively new and I have not been in it that long I felt like I was so much closer to reaching a career goal than I ever have before. Sharing my point of view and having a voice is something very important to me. As my college career is coming to a close I look forward to looking for an internship and then searching for a potential career that has the same ideas of Her Campus. I would like to be able to write for an online blog and share my ideas on the representation in the media. This career will not only be important to me because I would be doing something I enjoy, but also because I could also support my mother like she has supported me all of my life. Besides finding a career being able to give back to her is most important to me at the end of college. Showing the problem that women face because of missed opportunities and representation is what I feel like I need to do and an online publication like Her Campus could give me that outlet. While Her Campus gives me an outlet to express my frustration for the lack of representation, I also wanted to express my frustration with the way single mothers are treated in society. I conclude that despite single mothers being strong women they still have

patriarchal views challenging their very being. My research intends to show why and how those patriarchal views are enforced toward single mothers.

Single Mothers: Challenging the Patriarchy

Throughout the course of United States history, it is evident that this country was not built for women to exist on their own. Many different types of women learned from a young age to stay silent and to always rely on others. It was not until women learned to fight through 3 waves of feminism that they would reach a certain equality. In present times it is made apparent that feminism has helped women move forward, but despite this progression, there is still a stigma towards different groups of women. One of those groups is single mothers. Believing this notion that single mothers are stigmatized, it is easy to ignore the fact that they have still moved forward in society. More modern women are encouraged to raise a child on their own while also working and being the sole provider of the household. It is accepted for women to have children out of wedlock. However, despite these nontraditional attitudes, single mothers are still accustomed to the double standards of having to raise a child while also living in a patriarchal society. The struggles of strong, self-sufficient mothers are explored in the contemporary novels *Between Heaven and Here* and *The Garden of Last Days*, while they overcome patriarchal attitudes that remains in and reflects American Society.

A continuous cycle of inequality was introduced through certain types of laws being passed throughout U.S. history that affected women and single mothers negatively. In 1978 the government introduced a new bill called The Pregnancy Discrimination Act. According to U.S. equal employment opportunity website The Pregnancy Discrimination Act states that,

“...women affected by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions shall be treated the same for all employment-related purposes, including receipt of benefits under fringe benefit programs, as other persons not so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work, and nothing in the section 703(h) of this title shall be interpreted or permit otherwise.”

This act was not created until 1978 which meant that previous women were potentially fired from their job for being pregnant. This law left single mothers without a job and made it hard for them to provide for their family in the future. Following the basis of a patriarchal society, women were left with no income and were almost expected to get support from men. This destroys the idea of being a single mother and not having to rely on a man to support the household.

Considering single mothers are just lone parents trying to support themselves and their child, a lot of social programs were made to help these women in need. Despite the Pregnancy Discrimination Act being approved in 1978 there was still discrimination afterwards against working women, specifically ones who could not support themselves on their own. New social programs, on the surface, looked like a good chance for women to start being able to get back into the workplace and help them move past the poverty line. In 1996 the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was created in order to help young mothers and families. According to Benefits.gov, this act “provides grant funds to states and territories to provide families with financial assistance and related support services. State-administered programs

may include childcare assistance, job preparation, and work assistance.” This meant that families in need would be able to receive money from the state.

However, the help it provided was not much at all. The negative side effect was that each state granted money for the program and controlled how much went to families in need. With strict working requirements and a lack of benefits from the state it was hard for people to support themselves. TANF also seemed to harm single mothers the most. Robert A. Moffitt, the Krieger-Eisenhower professor of economics at John Hopkins University, stated that 80 percent of the poorest income families were single mother households. Moffitt believes that he found a distinct difference in the way the government provides money to certain homes and stated that he found “ a trend of welfare benefits going to those who are regarded as ‘deserving’ of support. More directly put, the government and the voters prefer that aid goes to those who work, who are married and have kids.” With his findings, it can further prove that the government chooses to discriminate against single mothers and supports more traditional views about certain households.

Another way TANF affected single mothers was the fact that the state was given permission to decide when a mother had to go back to work based on how old her child was. In a study done by Heather Hill on welfare and maternity leave, she found that most states required the mother to return to work when the child was only between 3-12 months (38). This would cause mothers to have to pay for child care services in order for them to go back to work and meet the state’s demand. The other option would be for the single mother to quit her job, which would also result in her losing the assistance

because of the strict job requirements. Hill also found that, even though some states lengthened the amount of time a single mother could remain on maternity leave, there was no job protection offered (38). This meant that, despite being able to be on maternity leave for a certain amount of time, her employment could still be terminated by her employers.

Considering everything that single mothers have to go through for TANF's help while enduring the state dictating when they can return to work, it proves they are in this continuous cycle. A single mother has to work hard to support herself and her children, by providing childcare and additionally, trying to follow the strict guidelines. If she does not go back to work she will lose her job. However, if she goes back to work she will have to pay for services to help take care of her child. While TANF and other programs are made for single mothers' lives to be easier to manage, it actually seems that these women are face more challenges based off this act.

The idea that these social programs were specifically created just to cause issues for women can be seen as a stretch, but the notion of the patriarchy causing these issues isn't a stretch. The systematic oppression of women is not some new concept; it's been happening through most of history. The patriarchy refers to a male dominated society. In this society, men are seen as more superior to women, and that women are lesser beings. They are incapable of living without men providing for them and often are treated as if they are supposed to be controlled.

Single mothers challenge this notion of the patriarchy based off the idea that they are capable of taking care of themselves. The modern women does not conform to the

traditional idea of marriage before having a child and, in the end, are trying to make it into the workforce as well to provide for their own family. They do not need a man to take care of them or their family. Ultimately, dependent mothers challenge the patriarchal vision of what women should be.

A patriarchal society isn't always an obvious concept; and not everyone is pushing this idea on purpose. The patriarchy can be subconscious or engrained in a person's brain because of the culture in which someone lives. In a study done on the patriarchal beliefs system in the U.S., this way of thinking is described as being, "so deeply engrained in daily lives and social systems that it is often difficult to tease them apart from are consciousness" (Yoon 264). This shows that society as a whole is built on this concept of male dominance, and, due to this, it becomes a learned behavior not just by men but from women too.

Patriarchal beliefs stem from the types of roles a woman should have in the family and, then, branch out into the workforce. Yoon describes these different roles as being patriarchal beliefs that are, "interwoven throughout our societal functioning from the largest level (e.g. institutional power) down to the smallest level (e.g. family roles)" (264). This notion that these views are found within the home further proves that women, since their childhood, suffer from the subconscious belief that men are more superior. This also explains why single mothers are not seen as fit to care for their families. If there is already a belief that women cannot take care of themselves, it can initially harm womens' chances at being independent. Not only are they not getting support from social programs because of patriarchal beliefs, but they are also having

trouble in the job force. These two aspects are important for a woman's financial stability and her ability to provide for her family.

Throughout history, women have not had the right to be able to provide for themselves or even be present in the workforce. In an article titled "Patriarchy, Power, and Pay: The Transformation of American Families, 1800-2015," Steven Ruggles introduces the idea of the male breadwinner family. He defines it as "those in which the husband works for wages or salary and the wife has no occupation listed in the census" (1800). This traditional idea of a family can be shown to explain why patriarchal concepts are seen as the norm. It was common for women to not participate in providing for the family, and this is why single mothers are also seen negatively. Ruggles also mentions the fact that women could not be independent in the mid-twentieth century. He points out that a woman could not "get a bank account or loan without their husband's signature, husbands had the right to determine where the family lived, and patriarchal authority was still enforced through violence" (1803). Even if women did want to be independent, they did not have that right. Women had to live through men in order to do anything in society. These patriarchal ideas made being a single mother an unheard of concept. It would not have even been possible for a woman to be a single mother with their rights being restricted to what men can do for them.

These restrictions, especially in the workforce, left women no choice but to rely on what men could provide for them. It wasn't until women were starting to be able to get more jobs that society saw more women become independent. These new jobs let

women try and take down the hierarchal structure of society that puts men at the top. Ruggles makes a connection between jobs being available to women and the rise in divorce and separation from 1880 to 1990 (1804). Without women being able to support themselves, they had no other option, but to rely on their husbands for support. Now that there are more job opportunities, they are able to be financially independent. A rise in divorce also meant a rise in single mothers as well, and being able to support themselves, along with their child, is important. The rise of new jobs empowered women.

One empowered single mother Jane Juffer introduced this idea of single mothers being financially independent in her book, *Single Mothers: The Emergence of the Domestic Individual*. As a professor of English at Cornell University and the director of the Program for Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, she educates and encourages future generations about the opportunities available for modern women. In her book, she states that more employers being open to women in the workforce are causing women to become more ready to accept being a single mother (13). Through her ideas of single mothers entering the workforce, she introduces this concept of the *domestic individual*. For a single mother to be a domestic individual, she must not “transcend the domestic, defined as a realm of giving and bodily interdependence, but to connect that realm to other sites” (8). The domestic individual resists the pressure from the patriarchal society to participate in the idea of a nuclear family (9).

The idea that the nuclear family is the most common image of what a family should be in America is outdated. Single mothers, now, make up a big part of that

equation according to the 2000 U.S. Census which states that one third of all babies are born to single mothers (4). Despite this spike in single motherhood, they are still stigmatized. This could be because of the patriarchal idea of what a family should be. The man is seen as the head of the household. He provides for the family and the rest is left for the mother to do.

In most cases people look for children to be raised in happy households. What is defined as a happy household depends on the person. Often, the answer to this question stems from the patriarchal views of what the definition of a family is; a family consists of a marriage between a man and a woman for it to be happy. With that aspect in mind, single mothers begin to challenge that notion. Single mothers do not follow this traditional viewpoint, and in the end, bring questions to what the proper way to raise children is. It questions the social norms of a nuclear family.

Juffer also expresses how society thinks single mothers can be defined as lazy or promiscuous. Even though all mothers are different in the ways that they parent their child, Juffer explains, "There is no typical single mom. Yet, at the same time, single mothers in United States at the turn of the century all live in with the imperative to demonstrate self-sufficiency" (3). Single mothers being self sufficient relates back to the idea of women being more comfortable in the workforce.

Once the idea of single motherhood is more acceptable, there will be a negative aspect that follows. Single mothers that are more financially independent are seen as more acceptable than those that need help. Juffer explains that single mothers who are dependent are demonized (14). The definition of a single mother, who is financially

independent, can differ between views. A single mother that is fiscally self-sufficient can typically be seen as someone that does not need help from the government. Based on these views, it seems that, as long as single mothers are not in the way or causing added trouble, they can be deemed as acceptable.

Without the government on their side, single mothers become more acquainted with the topic of surviving. The question of how single mothers are supposed to survive in a world created for men to excel, unlike women begins. Juffer asks the question of how single mothers are expected to survive when they only get respect when they are independent (28). In the novel, *The Garden of Last Days*, the main character, April is a single mother working as a stripper. Her daughter, Franny, is three years old, and April is the sole provider for her. She is financially independent and can support herself and her daughter, but under the negative stereotypes that also comes with stripping. One study conducted by Kim Price based on the gendered stereotypes of stripping found that people, mostly men, had a negative outlook on women who strip as a profession. She found this especially when addressing if mothers were in the profession; “many men coworkers stigmatize stripping because it contradicts the values they associate with motherhood” (380). Price continues to explain that many men did not feel it was right for children to have to grow up and know that their mother was a stripper.

Many of these views can stem back from the patriarchal views that a lot of people share about single mothers. Despite the fact these women are working with men, they are still stereotyped into not being good mothers. They are doing this job to provide for their children and, yet, are still not getting the respect a parent would get if they were in

a marriage. This continuous cycle can revert back to the idea of single mothers being survivors. In the novel, April and Franny are described by Jean, Franny's babysitter, as "her survivors" (Dubus 31). April continues to work for Franny and support herself but, at the end of the day as a stripper with the negative implications that follow.

In *The Garden of Last Days*, there are seldom mentions of Franny's father or what he is doing to help support her. At one point, April feels a lot of guilt when she realizes that she was not the one who potty trained Franny, but it was her babysitter instead. She expresses this guilt by saying, "It was Jean who'd potty trained her. Not her mother, but Jean" (47). Instead of having that shared responsibility that should come with having a child, she is left to her own devices with the guilt that follows. While looking at the portrayal of a single mother in this novel and also in reality, there seems to be a double standard. Despite that a male is biologically needed to have a baby, it seems that all the responsibility still falls on the mother. This can be seen especially when single mothers are expected to be able to support themselves and a child alone. Doing this alone leads single mothers to do whatever it takes to become financially independent in order to gain the respect society requires them to have. While all strippers are not single mothers it seems that the one thing that they have in common is the negative double standards that stem from traditional patriarchal beliefs.

Many other concerns that April has toward Franny can be seen as coming from some patriarchal guilt. When Jean cannot watch Franny for the evening because of some health concerns, April is forced to take her to the club and ask other employees to watch her while she strips. Franny watches movies to distract herself, and at one point

April overhears that she is watching *The Lion King*. She describes hearing Mufasa and the way he talks to his son in a sweet way and feels the need to “go get dressed quickly and go see Franny” (33). While already feeling guilty for having to keep Franny there, she then feels even more guilt after listening to the way a father was talking to his child. The guilt could possibly be from judgement that April has seen from other men because of where she is employed. The readers are presented with this idea that April believes she is not good enough to take care of her own child and, ultimately, feels even more guilty when she sees a good relationship between the father and his child. She has to be independent in order to take care of Franny, but she might feel the need to have a second parent for Franny’s own benefit.

As April is getting ready for her next show, she can hear Franny start to get upset; instead of going to comfort her, she knows she has to protect her money because she explains that “once cash started to go into the purple bag, you could never leave your locker unlocked” (37). Even though on the surface it appears that April is neglecting to take care of Franny, in reality she is protecting her money because she needs it for Franny. In order for April to be financially independent, she has to make these sacrifices in order to support Franny in the first place. These sacrifices may affect Franny negatively in some aspects, but—looking at the bigger picture—April is always thinking about what is better for Franny.

Another contemporary novel that features a single mother who is financially independent and also a domestic intellectual is *Between Heaven and Here* by Susan Straight. In the story, Clarette works double shifts at a youth correctional facility to make

sure her children have a good life. She funds their piano lessons and makes sure they can get a good education. The novel starts with an introduction of the character, Glorette Picard, a friend who Clarette once had. She is, then, found dead because of a heroin overdose. Clarette expresses that she does not want to be one of those people that die and then let their kids see their body (179). Her concern for her children and wanting to have a good life stems from not having one herself. When she was younger it is revealed that she has never known her father and that her mother died when she was four years old (179). Her upbringing has caused her to fight to not let her children live the life or the life that she has seen others unsuccessfully live. Even though the cause of death of her own mother is not revealed, Clarette is still concerned with herself dying and leaving her children behind like she was left behind.

Clarette tells the reader about the inmates while she is working a shift. One inmate is her nephew Alfonso. She explains that he is 17 years old and has two twin girls (155). Between Clarette and Alfonso, there is an aspect of power shown to the reader. Clarette, outside of the prison, has to deal with patriarchal attitudes toward her. However, while she is in the prison working, she is in charge of men. Alfonso, being a father as well and having to serve time in prison away from his children, shows a contrast between what type of parent Clarette and Alfonso are. While in the prison, she can escape from the patriarchy.

Clarette's attitude and behavior changes from the prison to her home. She explains that when she gets home she has to "stand at the sink and wash [her] hands and change [her] mouth. [Her] spit, everything" (157). She expresses that she does not

want to cuss in front of her children while they are doing their homework. Her trying to stop the way she acts at the prison shows that she wants her children to lead a better life. She does not want to treat them the way she does the inmates. In the prison, she sometimes describes herself as acting like a man (155). She lifts her chin when she talks to inmates and says that she feels like a man when she does it (155). When she goes back to her home, though, it has to stop. This possibly could show how she identifies gender with how someone acts. Personally, she identifies as a mother to her kids and everything she does is so her kids have a better life. In order to be good at her job, she wants to be taken seriously, and the only way she feels like it can be accomplished is by acting like a man. Despite that she is self-sufficient, she still feels a need to conform to patriarchal views.

Rey, Clarette's ex husband and the father of her children, is described as never having a job. Once he found out that Clarette got a job to support herself and the children at a prison, he tells her that she cannot have that job because it is "a man's job" (158). Even though Rey is not looking for a profession to help support his children, he gets angry when Clarette gets one in order to help. Clarette, being a single mother who challenges this idea of the male being the provider of the family, hurts Rey, and he seems to feel insulted over it. Despite having a job like she is supposed to, she still gets criticized over it because of the social concept that has been ingrained in society for the male to be the provider.

Despite the negativity shown to her after getting employed, she still feels that it is important to have a job because of the benefits. Clarette gets health care through her

job, and she points out that Rey never had health care (158). One of her kids has asthma, and it is important for her to be able to provide care for him. She also explains that she has to pay the bills, put gas in the van, and buy groceries (158). She explains that she is always thinking of the big stuff she has to do and that need comes from wanting to be self sufficient and not be seen as a lazy, single mom. She is showing the world that, despite popular belief, she can support herself and her children.

Clarette tells the story of when Alfonso first went to jail, and his father, who is also her brother, asked if she could take care of him. He tells her, "It's on you" (160). This frustrates Clarette and she explains that she used to shout back at him, "No. You had seventeen years to take care of him, Why I gotta do your job?" (160). On the surface, it looks like her brother is asking her because she works there, but the way she reacts seems like it is expected of her because she is a women. Women are expected to be mothers and nothing else. Despite Alfonso having a father Clarette is suddenly responsible for his child. Her anger towards this feeling shows her frustration with this patriarchal expectation. She had children of her own to take care of and does not need to be the provider of another because her brother could not be bothered to take care of him.

Between these two contemporary novels, many of Juffer's concepts about single mothers are expressed. April and Clarette are both self sufficient and do what they can to support their children. Despite April supporting her children by any means necessary, she is still judged based on aforementioned, patriarchal views. She is self sufficient and everything a father would be defined as in a traditional family while also being a mother

as well. These double standards come from what society deems as the proper way a woman should provide for her family. Clarette can be seen as a domestic intellectual by showing how she is domestic while also working a full time job to support her family. In a day, she completes the laundry in the early morning and makes breakfast for her children before school. She goes to work and then makes sure she gets home in time to help them with their homework and read to them. Later, she finishes the laundry and prepares for the next day where she restarts this cycle.

Both women can be fair representations of a single mother in today's society. They are left to support their children alone while also taking care of themselves. Even though these women are self-sufficient, there are still patriarchal views that remain. These patriarchal views the idea of the patriarchy being ingrained into society throughout history. Many women were not allowed to be independent people and this shows how single mothers are stigmatized. Despite these views, single mothers can be seen as resisting the patriarchy by challenging these traditional ideas.

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