



Secondhand Children

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It's been weeks since the last one, so on Sunday, The New York *Times* Magazine featured yet another cheery, upbeat article on single mothers. As with all its other promotional pieces on single motherhood over the years, the *Times* followed a specific formula to make this social disaster sound normal, blameless and harmless -- even brave.

These single motherhood advertisements include lots of conclusory statements to the effect that this is simply the way things are -- so get used to it, bourgeois America! "(A)n increasing number of unmarried mothers," the article explained, "look a lot more like Fran McElhill and Nancy Clark -- they are college-educated, and they are in their 30s, 40s and 50s."

Why isn't the number of smokers treated as a fait accompli that the rest of us just have to accept? Smoking causes a lot less damage and the harm befalls the person who chooses to smoke, not innocent children.

The *Times'* single motherhood endorsements always describe single mothers as the very picture of middle-class normality: "She grew up in blue-collar Chester County, Pa., outside Philadelphia, and talks like a local girl (long O's). Her father was a World War II vet who worked for a union and took his kids to Mass most Sundays." Even as a girl she dreamed of raising a baby with a 50 percent greater chance of growing up in poverty.

How about some articles on all the nice middle-class smokers whose fathers served in World War II and took them to Mass? Only when describing aberrant social behavior do *Times* writers even recognize what normality is, much less speak of it admiringly.

According to hysterical anti-smoking zealots at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking costs the nation \$92 billion a year in "lost productivity." (Obviously these conclusions were produced by people who not only have never smoked, but also don't know any smokers, who could have told them smoking makes us 10 times more productive.)

Meanwhile, single motherhood costs taxpayers about \$112 billion every year, according to a 2008 study by Georgia State University economist Benjamin Scafidi.

Smoking has no causal relationship to crime, has little effect on others and -- let's be honest -- looks cool. Controlling for income, education and occupation, it causes about 200,000 deaths per year, mostly of people in their 70s.

Single motherhood, by contrast, directly harms children, occurs at a rate of about 1.5 million a year and has a causal relationship to criminal behavior, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, sexual victimization and almost every other social disorder.

If a pregnant woman smokes or drinks, we blame her. But if a woman decides to have a fatherless child, we praise her as brave -- even though the outcome for the child is much worse.

Thus, the *Times* writes warmly of single mothers, always including an innocent explanation: "Many of these women followed a similar and familiar pattern in having their first child: They planned to marry, found they hadn't by their 30s, looked some more and then decided to have a child without a husband." At which point, a stork showed up with their babies.

So apparently, single motherhood could happen to anyone!

How about: *These smokers followed a similar and familiar pattern, they planned never to start smoking, found themselves working long nights at the law firm and then decided to have a cigarette to stay alert.*

Then there is the *Times*' reversal of cause and effect, which manages to exonerate the single mother while turning her into a victim: "The biggest reason that children born to unmarried mothers tend to have problems -- they're more likely to drop out of school and commit crimes -- is that they tend to grow up poor."

First, the reason the children "tend to grow up poor" is that their mothers considered it unnecessary to have a primary bread-earner in the family.

Second, the *Times* simply made up the fact that poverty, rather than single motherhood, causes anti-social behavior in children. Poverty doesn't cause crime -- single mothers do. If poverty caused crime, how did we get Bernie Madoff?

Studies -- including one by the liberal Progressive Policy Institute -- have shown that controlling for factors such as poverty and socioeconomic status, single motherhood accounts for the entire difference in black and white crime rates.

The *Times*' claim that poverty is the "biggest reason" for the problems of illegitimate children is on the order of claiming that the biggest reason that smokers develop heart disease and lung cancer is not because they smoke, but because they tend to work so hard. It's a half-baked, wishful-thinking theory contradicted by all known evidence. Other than that, it holds up pretty well.

Finally, the *Times* produced an imaginary statistic that is valid only in the sense that no study has specifically disproved it yet. "No one has shown," the *Times* triumphantly announced, "that there are similar risks for the children of college-educated single mothers by choice."

No one has shown that there are similar risks for smokers who run marathons, either. There are probably about as many college graduate single mothers by choice (7 percent) as there are smokers who run marathons. And, unlike single mothers, smokers who run marathons look really cool.

If the establishment media wrote about smoking the way they write about unwed motherhood, I think people would notice that they seem oddly hellbent on destroying as many lives as possible.

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