

**Sapiro, Chapter 12**  
**Reproduction, Parenthood, and Child Care**

- 1. Several factors that are unique to our century about this topic (these are pointed out in the first two pages of the chapter):**
  - a. childhood is a modern invention
  - b. Industrialization separated production from the home
  - c. Motherhood has been transformed into an activity with social importance
  - d. We have the choice to reproduce or not
  - e. Feminism has critiqued motherhood and the domestic sphere
  
- 2. The choice not to parent: avoiding childbearing/pregnancy**
  - a. Late 20<sup>th</sup> century trends (varies with race/cultural background) show different/changing attitudes towards children and childbearing: people, for the first time in history, can reliably choose whether or not to have children**
    - i. Delaying childbearing until the mother is over
    - ii. Having fewer children
    - iii. Having children outside marriage/single parenthood
  - b. Contraception has often been ineffective and difficult to obtain**
    - i. only recently legalized (1965-1972); *Griswold v. Connecticut* proclaimed that it was unconstitutional for the government to forbid contraceptive use by married people, and *Eisenstadt v. Baird* declared that it was unconstitutional for the government to “punish single people for fornicating” by denying them birth control use
    - ii. in many religions, rules forbid contraception
    - iii. Birth-control pill made it easy to prevent pregnancy (compare RU486)
    - iv. Contraception, like pregnancy and childrearing, is still considered women’s responsibility
    - v. Contraceptives can be ineffective and also harmful to a woman’s health; often, in the rush to market, health concerns are minimized
  - c. Abortion (legalized in US in *Roe v. Wade*, 1973)**
    - i. Not new historically, but recently legal in the US (legal in most other industrialized countries, including Catholic-majority countries like France and Italy)
      - (1) Teenage girls are most likely to abort, followed by women over 40
      - (2) Single women are 6x more likely than married women to seek abortion
      - (3) abortion is legal in the first trimester; becomes increasingly problematic and often illegal later in pregnancy, when the fetus is more developed
    - ii. Legal restrictions (consent, circumstances of pregnancy) are increasingly hindering women’s right to abortion
    - iii. Restrictions on public funding can make abortion unavailable for many women
    - iv. Anti-abortion terrorism has reduced number of abortion providers by making abortion a dangerous operation for a doctor to perform. Terrorism has dramatically reduced women’s access to abortion; in some states, there are no abortion providers.

### **3. Why do people become parents?**

- a. Sapiro points out that people are more likely to have children for emotional than rational reasons - because
  - i. childrearing is traditional and socially expected
  - ii. childrearing is “what adults do”
  - iii. they fail to prevent pregnancy (if they don’t want it)
  - iv. they plan to enjoy their children
  - v. they expect children to provide support in old age
- b. Parenthood causes people to refocus their primary relationship with a partner, where , if that partner is around
- c. Motherhood an extremely demanding role, but is still not perceived as “work”
  - i. a woman’s perception of motherhood is most affected by the degree to which mothering becomes her sole occupation
  - ii. most women cannot afford - or do not desire - to mother full-time
  - iii. people’s view of motherhood (Chodorow and Contratto) is strongly influenced by our own narcissistic perceptions of our mothers - they should exist for us, not as independent people
- d. Divorce affects children, often negatively;
  - i. government regulations penalize unwed parents (though not their children)
  - ii. legal precedents generally favor women as custodial parents because they are usually the primary caregiver
  - iii. however, women have legally been declared “unfit” over issues like lesbianism, nontraditional lifestyles, divorced or unwed status, etc.
- e. “Empty nest syndrome” when children leave mother

### **4. Case study: African-American matriarchal families**

- a. Single parent, multigenerational families headed by women
- b. African-American women as both mothers and primary wage-earners
  - i. history, dating from slavery, of women who are strong and capable
  - ii. history of split/divided/sold away families
  - iii. history of African-American women caring for white children
- c. Many arguments against the matriarchal family are arguments in favor of patriarchy
  - i. Moynihan Report (1965) argues that black motherhood “emasculates” black men

### **5. Who else cares for children?**

- a. The semantic difference between the words “mothering” and “fathering” encodes the inequality in childrearing practices
  - i. women have traditionally done almost all of the childrearing (yet children are named for the father!)
- b. To what extent should women - and the nuclear family - be responsible for all child care?
- c. The androcentric work force doesn’t consider children’s needs
- d. The wealthy have always had “child care” and the poor have always provided it
- e. Child-care expensive, unreliable, not funded by government as in other industrialized countries