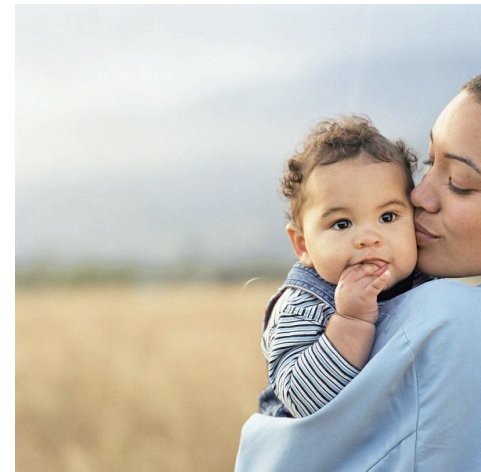


# Mothering

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## Chapter 10



*Photo courtesy of Photodisc.*

# IMAGES OF MOTHERS AND MOTHERHOOD

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- *motherhood mystique*—includes the following myths:
  - Motherhood is the ultimate fulfillment of a woman.
  - Women are instinctively good at care giving and should be responsible for infants, children, elderly parents, home, and husband.
  - A mother has infinite patience and the willingness to sacrifice herself for her children.
  - A woman's intense, full-time devotion to mothering is best for her children.



# THE DECISION TO HAVE A CHILD

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- The best predictor of smaller families is not modernization itself, but attitudes toward modern science and medicine.
- There are no inherent physiological benefits of motherhood for women, and there is no instinctive drive for pregnancy.
  - Virtually all studies of single fathers show that when men cannot depend on women for child care (because of death, desertion, or divorce), they develop skills and behaviors very much like those of women.



# *Motherhood mandate*

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**Social pressure on women to have  
children**

# THE DECISION TO HAVE A CHILD



*Photo courtesy of PhotoDisc/Getty Images.*

- Women chose not to have children for many reasons:
  - financial considerations
  - a desire to pursue their education or career
  - dangers of childbirth
  - possibility of bearing a defective child
  - concerns about overpopulation
  - belief that they are not personally suited to nurturing and caring for children (Landa, 1990).



# THE DECISION TO HAVE A CHILD

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- In a major study of American women at midlife, whether a woman had children had no relationship to her psychological well-being (Baruch et al., 1983).



# THE DECISION TO HAVE A CHILD

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- *Reproductive freedom*—includes a range of issues, such as the right to comprehensive and unbiased sex education, access to safe and reliable contraception, an end to forced sterilization and forced birth control for poor and minority women, and access to safe and legal abortion



# *Reproductive freedom*

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- *Pro-choice*—idea that all choices about reproduction should be made by the woman herself
- *Roe v. Wade* (1973)—affirmed that women have a right to decide whether to terminate their pregnancies on the basis of the constitutional right to privacy
- *Hyde Amendment* (1976)—prohibits the use of federal Medicaid money for abortions except when the mother's life is (medically) endangered
- *Mifepristone* (Mifeprex, RU-486)—drug that safely induces abortion early in pregnancy by causing the uterine lining to slough off





# THE DECISION TO HAVE A CHILD

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- *Post-abortion syndrome*—feelings of guilt, shame, and lasting psychological damage following an abortion
  - APA commissioned a study of all scientific research published in the U.S. since abortion was legalized. This review established that the legal termination of an unwanted pregnancy does not have major negative effects on most women. Measurements of psychological distress usually drop immediately following the abortion and remain low in follow-ups (Public Interest Directorate, 1987).



## *Post-abortion syndrome*

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- A woman is more likely to have psychological problems following an abortion if she has a history of emotional problems, received little support from family/friends, felt pressured into the abortion, has strong anti-abortion religious beliefs, or believed in advance she would have problems in coping (Public Interest Directorate, 1987).

# THE DECISION TO HAVE A CHILD

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- *In vitro fertilization (IVF)*  
—procedure in which a woman's ovaries are stimulated with fertility drugs so they produce multiple eggs, which are then surgically removed. Her partner's sperm is combined with the eggs. If fertilization occurs, embryos are inserted into the woman's uterus to develop



*Photo courtesy of Jack Hollingsworth/Getty Images.*



# THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD

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- More than twenty longitudinal studies have shown that the birth of a child can negatively affect family relationships, reducing psychological well-being and marital satisfaction (Walzer, 1998).
  - A major source of conflict is the discrepancy between women's expectations of their partners' involvement and men's actual behavior once the child is born.

# THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD

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- Becoming pregnant and giving birth highlight a woman's sexuality. At the same time, society may downplay the sexuality of the pregnant woman or the mother, creating a split between the woman's body and sense of self (Ussher, 1989).
- One of the ways cultural constructions of motherhood may oppress women is that they are not allowed to mourn or grieve the old, lost self (Nicolson, 1993).



# THE EVENT OF CHILDBIRTH

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- In some countries, birth is considered a natural phenomenon that needs no medical intervention in the majority of cases. In contrast, virtually all U.S. births take place in hospitals.
- The medical model of birth encourages physicians and pregnant women to focus on possible complications and emergencies and may cause them to react to even remote possibilities with drastic medical interventions, such as cesarean births.



# THE EVENT OF CHILDBIRTH

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- *Lamaze method*—Women who use this approach learn techniques of relaxation and controlled breathing. Relaxation helps to reduce tension and pain and conserves energy during labor.
  - Studies comparing women who used Lamaze and other methods with women who had no special preparation have shown benefits associated with prepared childbirth, including shorter labor, fewer complications, less use of anesthetics, less pain, and increased self-esteem and feelings of control (Hyde & DeLamater, 2003).

# EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING

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*Photo courtesy of Geoff Manasse/Getty Images.*

- Each year in the U.S. more than a million women under age 20 become pregnant, most of which are unmarried.
- The number of families headed by single women has increased dramatically over the past 25 years.
  - Minority children are more likely to grow up in single-parent families.
  - Families headed by women are more likely to be poor than other families.



# EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING

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- Minority children are more likely to grow up in single-parent families.
- Families headed by women are more likely to be poor than other families



# EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING

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- About one in six lesbians are mothers (Strommen, 1993).
- A British study of 78 children, half raised by lesbians and half by heterosexual single mothers, showed that children of lesbians were more positive about their family life and were no more likely to identify as homosexual, and there was no difference in psychological adjustment between the two groups (Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

# EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING

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- Commonalities among all women:
  - Becoming a mother results in large, significant, and permanent changes in identity and life circumstances.
  - Motherhood can involve feelings of intense love, competence, and achievement.
  - Motherhood is a constantly changing relationship.
  - Both child and mother must confront the limitations of love and care.
  - Mothers and children must adapt to a society structured as though children did not exist and does not provide necessary support for those who care for the young.