

SPARK 88

Distinction: Trying to be a single mom in modern Western civilization is impossible.

Notes: Naming something as impossible is not my normal line of business. But somebody has to say it. Someone has to publicly announce our cultural error so that we can have permission or a reason to experiment with intelligent alternatives. Someone has to say that single-momming in modern Western civilization is insane, so that if you are trying to be a single mom (or a single dad) and if you feel psychotic, neurotic, depressive, aggressive, suicidal or homicidal you can give yourself some slack. Your feelings are appropriate – you can trust those feelings. And if you know people who are trying to be single parents you could risk reaching out and connecting with them in ways that are far beyond reasonable or ordinary.

Single-momming is a side effect of the nuclear family. It is easy to forget that the nuclear family is historically a new idea, gaining popularity in Western civilization only 150 years ago with the rise of mass production, big cities and the industrial revolution. Justifying the nuclear family is easy from a marketing perspective: If every couple lives in their own private house then companies can sell a lot more refrigerators.

Extending the Western nuclear family ideal to all of the inhabitants of planet earth today would instantly bankrupt available resources. The Western nuclear-family consumer economy has an expiration date. The date is approaching quickly enough that it may be time to consider the possibility that the nuclear family does not actually work. The nuclear family actually never worked. It has just taken us awhile to figure that out.

The nuclear family cannot succeed as a basis for cultural design because men and women are not inanimate objects. You cannot just put a man and woman together in an apartment and expect that things will work out happily ever after. Men and women use thoughtware that determines how archetypal forces do their work in the world through them. Men and women are naturally evolving. Every individual is in flux. What this means in practical terms is that we are not designed to live well without ongoing support, coaching and archetypal camaraderie found in our respective gender cultures. The growth of children requires not only loving and supportive parents but also access to numerous other responsible adult role-models to question, imitate, object to, and study, and also numerous ages of children to care for and be cared for by.

Except for the last century and a half, human beings have lived in villages, tribes, and multigenerational extended families for the past 100,000 years. This is in no way a call to return to the pre-technology bad old days. This is a call to wake up and get responsible for trying next things when the present things are so obviously not working even if you have no clear idea what the next things should be.

To have gone through a divorce or separation of a nuclear family and to be abandoned as a single mom alone with the kids or, more often, working and alone with the kids is a public sacrilege. That society permits children to be raised by lone
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struggling parents is an outrage against the future of humanity and a mistake with potentially long-range aftereffects if it is allowed to continue. The solution to single parent families is not more social welfare programs. Avoiding responsibility and hoping the problem will go away is part of the old strategy. Responsibility for making changes can only be taken by single individuals such as yourself. The question at hand is: what are you willing to do about it?

Experiment: Try this. Banish the concept of the nuclear family in your mind. Start over as if you had never heard of it. Take that sacrosanct model of an isolated mom and dad, two point three kids and a dog and flush it down the toilet. Erase the smiley-faced marketing images – let them dry up and blow away in the wind like a sun-faded catalog. Stop hiding out in the concept of a nuclear family and instead consider yourself massively interconnected with everybody. The details of your new images are yours to create. At the same time, look around and consider using information that you have now that people did not have twenty-five or fifty years ago when the nuclear family looked like the perfect ideal. For example, there are over seven billion human beings on earth now, a number that is increasingly increasing. We are a whirlwind. Buy a plane ticket and in a few hours you can be anywhere on earth. A plague in Africa or Asia soon spreads around the globe. A breakthrough in technology one year is in everybody's hand the next year. Pollutants from anonymous corporate profiteering contaminate your air, your groundwater and your future. When the oil runs out not even the rich people will have any. No one can hide from the consequences of global warming. We are not isolated little tribes and villages anymore. Actions in one nation have become everybody's business. Even the concept of a "nation" is an antiquated relic of a time when there was enough room for people to play territorial "king of the dunghill" power games. That time is over. The illusion of separation is smashed with bumping elbows. The result is that the kids next door are *your* kids. (The kids in Ethiopia and Bhutan too!) The single mom with the headstrong teenager is *your* sister. Her needs are your needs. Is there some new way you can relate to her and her teenager? If that single mom is you then in the new picture you are no longer alone. The whole neighborhood is your family. The community is your resource and you are their treasure. Can you stop trying to tough it out as the single fighter, enduring your circumstances as hell's righteous retribution for your errors, and instead connect in with your human family again? You are not separated from humanity because you left your partner. The drastic rise in divorce rates may not be a sign of degenerating social morality but instead may be a sign of cultural evolution. We are all in this together. The experiment is to dare to speak openly about these things with your friends and neighbors. Ask how it is going for them, truly? Then listen. Then without knowing any answers consider together what could possibly be happening differently? How can boys connect with nature and adult men and girls connect with nature and adult women in a productive way so they grow into people of care and respect? Simply bringing up these topics of conversation opens up new channels.

Best wishes,
Clinton