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Of Basters And Bias

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As I read Louise Sloan's new book *Knock Yourself Up*, I couldn't help thinking about Bette Davis' famous line from *All About Eve*: "Buckle up. It's going to be a bumpy night."

Sure enough, her funny and personal argument that single women who want to have children should take things into their own hands drew quick fire from predictable quarters.

Although the media gravitated quickly and inevitably to images of turkey basters, critics from the right seized on the socially blasphemous cover line ... "No Man? No Problem."

While a few, of course, condemned the do-it-yourself aspect of the process, more were concerned with the result. She has been accused of "screeching about women's rights while violating the human rights of her own child" and "pursuing her pregnancy fantasies by making consummately selfish choices."

Such response doesn't really surprise me. I've been there myself.

When I wrote a book called *Raising Boys Without Men - How Maverick Moms are Creating the Next Generation of Exceptional Men* my assault on two parent heteronormality was to publish research findings that argued the sons of single mothers and lesbian couples turned out better than fine. My long-term study of these boys (compared to boys raised in traditional nuclear families) found young men who were not only masculine and well-adjusted, but tended to be kinder and more in touch with their feelings.

Balancing praise for the book from many quarters were invitations to "Go back to Russia where you belong, you commie bitch," and other responses that had me for a time considering hiring security.

I don't know whether anthropologist Margaret Mead drew that kind of heat when she said, "Fathers are a biological necessity, but a social accident. But the fact is, suggesting that fathers aren't necessary just seems to get people riled up.

The problem is simple enough. When you apply stringent limitations to the notion of family, then anything outside of those limitations quickly becomes an either-or proposition. To argue that fathers aren't compulsory in raising happy, healthy and productive children quickly translates to a statement that fathers are irrelevant.

A dependable masculine presence is a wonderful part of a family. I know that on a very personal level because a heart attack took mine away when I was three. Louise Sloan lost her father the same way at age two. But to assign any family a lesser value because a father - by circumstance or choice - isn't there is not only ludicrous, it's small and mean. It's an arbitrary and arrogant denial of all that families are and can be.

While the deniers of a broader definition of family cling to cherished stereotypes of the family unit, the world has a way of moving on. Nearly a third of American households are headed by women alone. The National Center for Human Statistics reports that, between 1999 and 2003, the number of children born to unmarried women between 15 and 24 declined 6 percent. For unmarried women between ages of 30 and 44, the figure increased 17 percent. Clearly choice is a big part of those figures.

If Mr. Right comes into the life of a woman via a sperm bank and an appliance, so be it. Like the results of a married hetero union, not every result of that conception will be a happy and successful child. But most of them will. Instead of labeling those families, instead of giving short odds on their success - why can't we simply wish them well?