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## Single moms are unsung heroes

By [David Beard](#) on Apr 29, 2016 at 3:04 p.m.

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I dated a single mom for a few months. It was an experience that made me rethink so much. Inside my head, on every date, I was with her and I was watching myself with her. I watched my every move from the imagined perspective of her two sons.

They were always there. "No romantic crap," the younger son would yell when I leaned in to kiss her. And if I would wrap my arm around her, he would exclaim that he needed snuggles from her. And if the 8-year-old received snuggles, the 10-year-old was not far behind. Snuggles were part of the sense of security she created for those boys.

Feeling secure is one of the challenges facing children of single moms. Emily Badger of the Washington Post wrote, "Children of unmarried moms face more obstacles in life. They're far more likely to live in poverty ... They experience more family instability, with new partners moving in and out ... These children have more problem behaviors and more trouble finishing school." Those snuggles were a cocoon against the struggles that children of every single mom face.



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I am the child of a single mom, so I believed that I understood those struggles. I don't think I did. Nor do I believe that in the 21st century U.S. we understand and value the place of single moms.

*Single moms are raising our children.* According to Badger, "Single motherhood has grown so common ... that demographers now believe half of all children will live with a single mom at some point before the age of 18." The experience that made me unique in grade school is common today.

*Single moms are raising our children under impossible stresses.* I was raised in the 1980s when divorces were considered moral failings of single mothers. My father abandoned us, but my mother grew weary of explaining that. It was just one more stressor on a woman who was stressed all the time.

My mother wasn't alone. According to J. Cairney, et al. in *Social Science and Medicine*, "Single mothers are more likely than married mothers to seek help for mental health concerns." They suffer stressors that mothers in two-parent homes do not.

*Single moms need our support and deserve our admiration.* I saw my mother's stress in the woman I dated and I fell into childhood habits. I cleared dishes after dinner. The boys dropped their jackets for mom to pick up; I snatched them first. I said please and thank you often, hoping the boys would, too. The net result was like holding a woman's hand while she gives birth: You feel like you are doing something, but she still does all the work.

But how do we, as a culture, honor and value the work of single mothers? How do we support them? Single mothers are unsupported by our policies for maternity leave, sick/personal time and living wages. Single mothers are invisible in our media. Their stories are not celebrated, nor are their struggles represented. Single mothers are, by and large, erased.

How we honor single mothers has significance for more than just the mothers. Single moms will continue to do the hard work of raising our children regardless of how we recognize them. But how we honor them has significance for the children of those single mothers. If they do not see and feel that their mothers are valued and treasured, they will grow up uncertain about their own value. And they will grow up uncertain about the value of other women in their lives.

In everything we do as a culture, we are being watched by those two beautiful boys and all the boys and girls like them. We must show we value them as well as their mothers.

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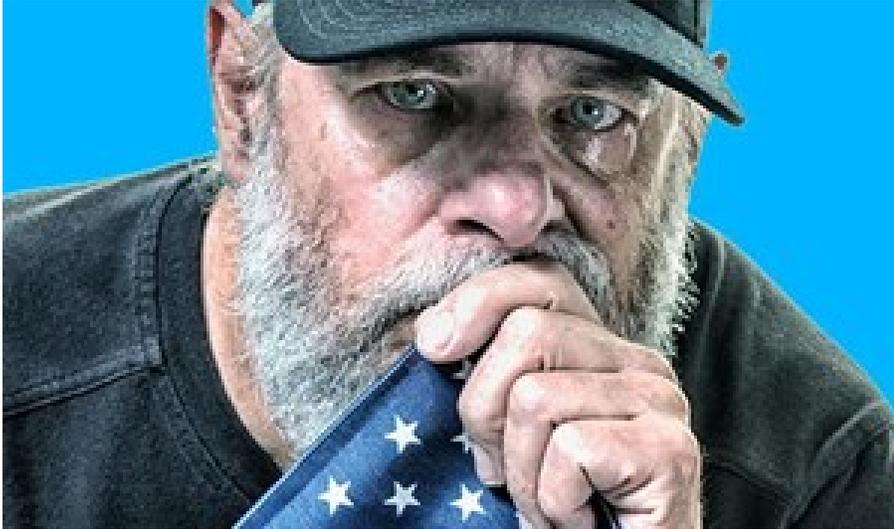


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